Adalbert Stifter and the “Biedermeier” Imagination

F. Roger Devlin

An historian once suggested that the continued availability of classic works of literature in the Soviet Union helped victims of the communist “experiment” retain their grip on sanity by reminding them what normal human life and society were like. With the progress of social engineering in the West, we may be approaching the point where imaginative literature is called upon to perform a similar service for us.

Not all literature is equally suitable for such a purpose, however. Many of the “classics” of modernism are marked, like the modern era itself, by a tendency to sacrifice the normal to the abnormal and by a morbid fascination with the violent and grotesque. What our age most needs is precisely what it characteristically rejects: an imaginative literature informed by a grasp of the normal and normative in human experience, or, in Chesterton’s overfamiliar formulation, by a centricity rather than eccentricity of genius. Such a countercurrent certainly exists within modern literature, but often finds it difficult to get a hearing. This is in part because literary appreciation has in recent decades been monopolized by a kind of guild bound by a shared set of assumptions hostile to the main tradition of Western humanism.

Some national literary traditions have suffered at the hands of this gatekeepers’ guild more than others, and German literature has fared worse than most. In the first place, Germany is a self-consciously “late born” nation: an accepted canon of classic English, French, Italian, and Spanish literature already existed at a time when Germany was still recovering from its confessional wars and producing little serious literature in its own language at all. Goethe came to maturity at the high tide of the Enlightenment, on the eve of the French Revolution. So there was no great period of the national literature unmarked by the political preoccupations of modernity.

Furthermore, literary studies in Germany have been marked to a greater extent and for a longer period than in Britain or America by political partisanship centered upon the conflicts of the Revolutionary era: the left/right and progressive/reactionary distinctions, “democracy,” the “emancipation” of women, and so forth. The specialist who immerses himself in dusty nineteenth-century German literary controversies is liable to experience an eerie sense of familiarity in the overriding concern he finds for the political tendencies of works under consideration. In a word, Political Correctness had about a


Spring 2008
century’s head start in the German speaking world. Not all such political distortions of literature, be it noted, were of a strict Jacobin character: there was also a trend, more pronounced toward the end of the century, toward germanomania or hypernationalism, which was quite as willing as any politics of liberation and leveling to sacrifice literary to political concerns.

Perhaps the best example of the German triumph of politics over literature is the success of the term *Biedermeier*. Standard histories of the literature (those in German itself more than those in English) work with a periodization in which the age between Romanticism and late nineteenth-century Realism is designated *Biedermeier-Vormärz*. This literary epoch is said to coincide, ideally, with Metternich’s regime in Austria between the fall of Napoleon and 1848. Viennese society during this time was extensively penetrated by a network of police informers; the government feared that any lowering of its guard would clear the path to power for some new Robespierre. A similar situation existed in many of the other German States. Writers of this period are accordingly treated either as part of the *Vormärz*, the “progressive” movement in society leading toward the Revolutions of 1848, or as part of the “reactionary” *Biedermeier* tendency. To mainstream German critics, in other words, the central fact about authors designated *Biedermeier* is not anything actually found in their writings, but the lack of progressive or revolutionary political concerns there.

The term *Biedermeier* derives from *bieder*, which originally meant morally upright, but later developed negative connotations: unsophisticated, naïve, stolid, “square.” A *Biedermann* was a philistine, a narrow-minded conformist, a man of conventional beliefs and attitudes who never questioned authority. There was actually a popular fictional character named Gottlob Biedermann under whose name execrable verses were published in a Munich newspaper, meant to satirize the bieder outlook of the German middle class. It was this character’s name which evolved into the term German literary historians use to describe some of the greatest writers in their national literature. None of the authors so designated have achieved the recognition in the English speaking world of their more “progressive” contemporaries such as Heinrich Heine or Georg Büchner.

Leaving aside some secondary figures, four writers of lasting importance are commonly considered part of the *Biedermeier* tendency: Franz Grillparzer, Eduard Mörike, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, and, most importantly, Adalbert Stifter. These authors never constituted a school or self-conscious movement, but they undoubtedly shared a tendency to turn away from Zeitfragen, the political questions of the day, toward timeless human concerns.

Franz Grillparzer was a prolific dramatist influenced by the Spanish theatre of the *siglo de oro* as well as by classical drama. This speech from his play *Der Traum ein Leben* is often cited as typifying the Biedermeier mentality: “There is only one happiness here below: peace of mind and a heart free of guilt. Greatness is dangerous and glory an empty game. It gives only empty shadows; it takes so much away!” Critics are quick to point out that this is more or less what the Metternich regime would have liked its subjects to believe. Yet the sentiment hardly depends on the specific political situation of its time and place: even in antiquity, writers had expressed the view that the happiest human condition is “the middle state” between anonymous destitution and royal magnificence.

Eduard Mörike reluctantly earned his bread as a provincial pastor. As a lyricist, he may be seen as Goethe’s successor; beginning
as a romantic author of delicate lyrics evoking moods and impressions, he was increasingly influenced by classical models as time went on. Common themes in his work include the transience of life and the need to accept the inherent limitations of the human condition. His acknowledged masterpiece, the delightful novella Mozart on the Journey to Prague is an evocation of the world lost through the French Revolution.

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff was a Catholic author chiefly of religious poetry, and an embarrassment to “progressive” literary historians in somewhat the same way Jane Austen is in the English-speaking world: while universally recognized as the greatest woman writer in her language, she does not offer feminists a straw to clutch at. Her poetry is not easy to enjoy in translation, but the novella The Jew’s Beech, a kind of murder mystery, is available in English.

Adalbert Stifter was a poor country boy who rose through natural talent and education to serve as private tutor to the children of the Viennese aristocracy before going on to produce thirty novellas and two full-length novels.

Little or nothing in this literature is counterrevolutionary in the sense of being directly concerned with the suppression of revolution or “progress.” It does not polemicize against Vormärz writers or satirize socialist agitators; it includes no lionizing portraits of authoritarian restorationists of the Metternich type. It is not, in other words, a mirror image of progressivism, but merely represents a conscious turning away from it in favor of the timeless aspects of the human condition. In a letter to his publisher, for example, Stifter protested that he had devoted considerable study to economic and political questions, but did not see why he should share with readers of his stories his thoughts on the German Customs Union.

Like virtually all Germans, these authors revered Goethe, but they distinguished themselves from most others by what they revered in him. Goethe’s popular reputation has always been due to his less mature works. To the very end of his life, he was best known to the general public as the author of the sentimental novel The Sufferings of Young Werther, completed when he was twenty-four. Even when Faust came to be considered his central achievement, the passages which especially penetrated public consciousness and continue to form the popular image of the poet today are mainly those already found in the Urfaust, a draft which already existed when the poet was twenty-six years old, rather than the other six-sevenths of the work composed over the following half-century. The Biedermeier authors were more likely to focus on the works of Goethe’s maturity, or even Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe during the Last Seven Years of His Life. Stifter, for example, wrote dismissively of Werther, but admired Hermann and Dorothea, Iphigenia, Wilhelm Meister and The Italian Journey.

Stifter is the writer with whom we shall be principally concerned. Because he is largely unknown to the English speaking world, it is worth emphasizing to readers that he is a recognized classic of German literature. Secondary works on him appear regularly; schools and streets are named after him; public monuments and plaques commemorate places associated with his life and fiction. His stories are also assigned reading in German Oberschulen—not necessarily a good thing, perhaps, for his works are most likely to appeal to mature readers; they largely lack the dramatic action and surprising twists which appeal to the young.

Adalbert Stifter was born in 1805 in the small village of Oberplan in the Bohemian Forest, at that period a remote corner of the Austrian Empire. A couple circumstances of his childhood may be reasonably inferred from the
Modern Age 113

autobiographical motifs in his mature works: first, he spent a fair amount of time roaming and observing the natural world around him, the countryside and woods of the upper Moldau valley; and second, his youthful imagination was fired by his grandparents’ tales of “the old times,” relating mainly to places and sights with which he was familiar. His father, a textile merchant, died when the boy was eleven. The family, at some sacrifice, sent him to the Benedictine abbey school at Kremsmünster in the Austrian mountains south of Linz; he later described his time there as the happiest of his life.

He went on to study at the University of Vienna—first law, later physics, mathematics, and astronomy—supporting himself by tutoring others. These years were also marked by a love affair which ended unhappily. He married a capable housewife who lacked the ability to appreciate her husband’s intellectual or artistic interests. The couple struggled financially, but Stifter’s intelligence and learning permitted him a modest living as tutor to the children of prominent Viennese families, eventually including Metternich’s son.

Stifter did not publish his first story until he was thirty-five years old, although he may have been writing significantly earlier. A famous, perhaps apocryphal story relates that his hand was forced by one of his students. She saw a wad of manuscript sticking out of her tutor’s pocket, grabbed it out, began reading, and exclaimed “Mama, Mr. Stifter is secretly a writer—here’s a girl flying in the air!”

The story, eventually published as The Condor, deals with a young woman’s determination to prove herself just as good as the boys by taking part in a hot-air balloon ascent. To her profound embarrassment, she becomes ill from the altitude; the flight is aborted amid ill-tempered remarks from the men. Her fiancé, put off by this competitive stance toward men, breaks off his engagement to her and, in the first version of the story, his parting words are “become a woman!”

Stifter’s early stories, published in Viennese magazines and almanacs, are written in the romantic style of Jean Paul and E. T. A. Hoffmann, but the natural bent of his genius developed quickly in another direction. In his third published story, The Village on the Heath, he begins to come into his own with a tale about a young man who spent years wandering the world before deciding that happiness was most to be found in the rooted agricultural community of his ancestral village. The hero pays a price for his return, however: the rejection of his marriage proposal by a lady whose family cannot comprehend his lack of “ambition.”

The romantic poet Eichendorff, in a contemporary review, remarked that Stifter’s work contained “not a trace of modern Zerissenheit (turmoil; literally torn-ness).” Indeed, his mature work is alien to the whole central aesthetic current of romantic and postromantic literature. By the same token, it can be difficult for modern audiences to approach him in the correct spirit. To many readers today, the very definition of a good story is a “page turner,” a book that one “can’t put down.” To appreciate Stifter, on the other hand, one must above all learn to slow down. The reader who becomes impatient for him to get to the point is probably missing his point.

Stifter bears constantly in mind that men live in a cosmos whose order they can never understand more than in part. Their limited understanding, moreover, must grow slowly and gradually; there is no way the process can be forced. Wisdom consists partly in an acceptance of this state of affairs.

Moreover, men must act without ever having all the relevant information concerning others and their motivations. In Stifter’s narratives, characters are revealed gradually,
both to other characters and to the reader. He would undoubtedly have approved of the young George Washington’s sixtieth rule of conduct: “Be not immodest in urging your friends to discover a secret”; a number of Stifter’s characters in fact show particular delicacy on this score. Human intimacy is something we all long for, but which is inherently difficult and problematic. Put differently, Stifter is at the farthest possible remove from the “tell all” biography or confessional autobiography in the manner of Rousseau, where sincerity and “honesty” (understood in a peculiar sense) are the highest virtues.

One of his finest stories, *The Recluse*, begins by describing a lively boy who spends his days wandering the gorgeous Austrian countryside with his friends, returning to plentiful suppers with his devoted family. Comically, the boy strikes a pose of romantic Weltschmerz, insisting he is deeply unhappy and shall never marry. He is then sent to visit his uncle, whom he has never met before. He is to inherit the uncle’s property, and comes at the old man’s request.

The uncle lives in almost complete isolation on an island in a lake, amid the ruins of a disused monastery. The boy is bewildered by these new surroundings and by the old man’s taciturnity and standoffishness. The central section of the story is a leisurely account of the manner in which he gradually adapts himself to his new circumstances. He explores his physical surroundings and has some tense interactions with his uncle. He writes to his family but mysteriously gets no response. His stay is unexpectedly prolonged, again at the uncle’s request, and we begin to suspect that the old man cares about the boy more than he is able to express.

Shortly before the boy absolutely must go, he discovers that his uncle had intervened with the family to prevent their writing to him during his long, lonely stay on the island. The boy is understandably upset, and, in the climactic moment of the story angrily expresses to his uncle the confusion and frustration he has long been feeling. The uncle responds unperturbed: “You are judging it all according to your lights; you may well find many things strange when they have a point and purpose which you do not know”—a statement which might serve as a motto for much of Stifter’s fiction.

The uncle’s explanation of his unexpected conduct involves once more the theme of sexual complementarity, but the treatment is incomparably subtler than in the author’s first story:

> By constantly writing you letters they would have kept you in the same sickly-sweet state of dependence as you have grown up in. I had to snatch you out into the sun and air, to prevent you from becoming a soft creature like your father, an irresolute creature who betrayed the person he thought he loved. You ought not to squander your strength on trembling women, but use it against rocks—and in me you would find more rock than anything else. No one can give real help, profound help, unless from time to time he can do a deed of force. You occasionally show your teeth, and yet you have a kind heart. That is as it should be.

Having assured himself of his nephew’s independence of his overly feminine family milieu, he startles the perhaps fourteen-year-old boy with this stern injunction: “At present, the most important thing for you to do is to get married.” We are provided an indirect glimpse into the uncle’s own character and motives: the longing for offspring, grown acute in the childless old man, expresses itself in his emphasis to the nephew on the importance of founding a family in a timely—indeed, a comically over-timely—manner. (The story’s German title might be better translated *The Old Bachelor*.)

Many of Stifter’s stories improve on re-reading, because the significance that is
gradually revealed casts back light on earlier episodes, and especially on those which the impatient modern reader will be most likely to dismiss as “boring.” Stifter’s manner of composition accorded well with this view of the world. He did not invent a cast of characters and then set them in motion; he did not begin stories without knowing how they were to end. Most of his novellas exist in two versions—the first published in a magazine or almanac, and another, longer, studiously rewritten version in book form. He drove his publisher to distraction by a refusal to hand anything over which had not been repeatedly revised. A common pattern is that the later versions are noticeably more subtle and understated; one critic refers to his “mania for moderation.”

Another stumbling block for many readers of Stifter today is the frequency of leisurely natural description in his pages. He is, by common consent of the critics, the great master of descriptive prose in German literature. Eric Blackall notes that his descriptions benefit from not being “static”; he draws the reader in by evoking the fluid impressions made upon characters by natural objects as they wander through a landscape. This dynamic mode of description does not, however, imply a nebulous romantic subjectivism. For the romantics nature was a realm of escape, an object of reverie as much as reverence, an undifferentiated notion as much as an observed reality. For Stifter, a child of the countryside, nature was an object of conscientious study. Qualified specialists have remarked upon the scientific accuracy of Stifter’s descriptions; the plant species he had in mind, for example, often admit of precise identification. His preferred subjects for description are the forests and mountains he knew from Oberplan and Kremsmünster, but as he gained artistic confidence he went on to transport his readers to areas of which he had no personal experience, including the Hungarian Puszta and even North Africa.

The eminent Swiss critic Emil Staiger, in an essay perceptively entitled *Adalbert Stifter, Poet of Reverence*, notes that nature is no mere picturesque ornament in Stifter’s work, but a means of conveying to readers his essentially religious view of the world: “the landscape is, again and again, the image of God, the unchanging space which, like a ring of eternity, frames changeable human existence.” This does not mean, however, that Stifter’s interest is limited to “unspoiled” nature, as is the case with many romantic primitivists and most of today’s environmentalists; on the contrary, the human activity he frames within the unchanging natural landscape is very often agriculture, a pursuit he held in particularly high regard.

These observations may be illustrated with reference to *Brigitta*, one of the author’s most characteristic works and that rare thing—a genuinely great love story. The narrator of *Brigitta* is a man who has devoted his youth to travel, “hoping to experience and to investigate God knows what.” He describes his journey to visit “the Major,” a man he first met in Italy, who by this time was managing an ancestral estate in Eastern Hungary. The Major has invited him for an extended visit, writing that “he was now finally of a mind to stick to one tiny point on this earth and to let his foot touch no soil other than that of his homeland, in which he had found a goal that he had looked for elsewhere on the globe in vain.” The younger and more restless man accepts the Major’s invitation because he has not yet seen Hungary, and also because he is curious what momentous thing the Major could possibly have found there.

The German narrator, a native of the Alps, describes the profound impression made upon him by the endless desolate plain of Hungary, where he could see “nothing for whole days but the distant reddish-blue glow of the steppe and the thousand little white
dots on it which were cattle,” and where every object was twice as distant as it appeared. After casually wandering for weeks among shepherds and mounted herdsmen, he finally decides to make straight for his friend’s estate. In the vicinity, he comes upon a “woman about forty years old wearing, strangely enough, the wide trousers of that country and sitting on horseback like a man.” We later learn that this is Brigitta. He borrows a horse and guide from her and arrives at his destination late at night, where a servant leads him to well-appointed quarters to await the Major’s return the next morning.

After a happy reunion with his old friend, the narrator spends several days making the rounds of his estate and observing its activity. He keeps meaning to ask the Major about the goal which had attracted him so strongly to such a place, but repeatedly forgets. In the meantime, he visits gardens, vineyards, fruit plantations, wheat fields, breeding stations, and stables. Observing the Major’s glass-houses, he remarks that he understood “as much and as little as a ceaseless traveler who has visited countless glasshouses can understand.” His friend tells him “if one really wants to get results from these charming pursuits one has to study them from scratch.”

Gradually he gets to know the men who work the estate. The life he observes is patriarchal: the people of the country are intensely devoted to their paterfamilias the Major, and he reciprocates with a deep concern for their well-being. Meals are large, communal affairs. Everywhere he observes order, harmony, and purposeful activity. Eventually it occurs to the narrator that he need no longer ask what goal the Major has discovered. He begins to feel dubious about his own wandering life, and even interrupts the narrative to reveal: “I have the Major to thank that I now have a dear wife and household for whom to work.”

The Major always speaks of his neighbor Brigitta in terms of the highest praise, but the narrator only begins to piece together her story when he starts visiting other nearby estates. She had come to the area fifteen years previously and “worked miracles on the stony ground,” inspiring others in the area to imitation, including the Major himself.

Brigitta had been a homely child who grew up in the shadow of her more beautiful sisters. Stifter limns with great empathy the heightened sensitivity this produced in her. Brigitta rarely came into company, and compensated for the lack of human attachments with a rich, solitary life of the imagination. Mysteriously, one day her quiet demeanor attracts the notice of a particularly handsome young officer desired by many other girls. She vaguely anticipates trouble from such an unusual match and attempts to dissuade him from courting her, telling him she would demand greater love than the most beautiful girl in the world, and that he would regret his decision. Unsurprisingly, this interests the young man even more. Eventually they are married and she bears him a son.

Shortly thereafter, the young husband goes on a hunting trip. He innocently makes, and then incautiously continues, the acquaintance of an exceptionally beautiful girl. One day in a moment of high spirits “he pulled her suddenly to him, pressed her to his heart, and before he could see whether she was angry or joyful, leapt onto his horse and fled.”

They do not meet on purpose after that day, but both are visibly embarrassed by an accidental social encounter, and Brigitta guesses the truth. Several days later she quietly asks her husband for a divorce. Shocked, he entreats her repeatedly, but she only answers “I told you you would regret it.” Finally he cries “woman, I hate you inexpressibly!” and rides off. Six months later papers arrive granting her a divorce, custody of their son, and generous financial condi-
tions. Nothing further is heard from him.

Brigitta responds to this personal sorrow by moving with her small son to a family estate in a remote corner of the Puszta where she is entirely unknown. As the boy grows, she begins exploring the surroundings with him, and soon she finds new purpose in working from dawn to dusk on the estate with him. By the time the Major arrives on his own neighboring estate, she is leading an agricultural revival of the entire area.

The novella culminates in a moment of unbought grace which ranks among the finest scenes from Stifter’s pen and reveals the essentially Christian cast of his imagination.

Stifter’s novellas did find an appreciative audience among his contemporaries, but contrary as they were to modern tastes, dissenting voices were heard as well. One of the latter was Friedrich Hebbel, a dramatist engaged with a preference for extravagant characters and situations. He ridiculed Stifter publicly in a somewhat clumsy epigram for his focus on (as Hebbel saw it) ordinary things and insignificant events. Stifter resisted the urging of friends to respond directly and in kind; instead, Hebbel’s challenge provided the occasion for him to explain his artistic credo in the preface to his next collection of stories:

As in external nature, so in the human race: an entire life full of just dealing, simplicity, self-mastery, reasonableness, effective activity within an allotted sphere, admiration for the beautiful, combined with a cheerful, serene death I consider great; terrible outbursts of anger, the lust for vengeance, the inflamed spirit that tears down, changes, destroys, and in its passion often throws away its own life, I consider not greater but smaller.

Stifter’s own aim, he says, is “to try to observe the gentle law that guides the human race.” Or, in our own terms, to grasp the normal and normative in human experience.

The story Limestone is perhaps the best example of the undramatic and unprepossessing sort of life Stifter considered great. Originally entitled The Poor Benefactor, it was probably inspired to some extent by his fellow “Biedermeier” author Grillparzer’s novella The Poor Musician, in which a narrator discovers moral greatness in a humble social outcast.

The narrator of this tale is a surveyor, employed by the state in mapping an unfrequented, hilly karst region whose few inhabitants eke out a living extracting lime from the otherwise useless soil. Some years previously he had been present at the consecration of a new church, and had noticed a shabby-looking priest who compulsively pushed his shirtcuffs back beneath his worn out tunic as if ashamed of them. The man ate and spoke as little as possible, and was the first to leave. Now the surveyor stumbles upon this man again sitting in quiet meditation on a hillock in this desolate region, and discovers that he is the local priest. After introducing himself, the surveyor comments: “and so we have met again in this dreadful part of the country!” The priest responds: “It is as God made it… Sometimes it is more beautiful than anywhere else in the world.” The priest has served this parish twenty-seven years, and is the first it has ever had who did not request a transfer to a more desirable location.
One day the surveyor is forced to seek shelter from an approaching storm at the priest’s miserable presbytery, where he shares the man’s supper of black bread, wild straw-berries, and milk, and learns that the man sleeps on a bare wooden plank with a Bible for a pillow. In sharp contrast to the rest of these surroundings, the priest is supplied with the finest linen money can buy. It turns out that his nervous pushing back of his shirtcuffs is due to embarrassment at an inability to overcome an attachment to this one worldly luxury.

The following morning the meadow in front of the presbytery is flooded as the narrator takes his leave. Schoolchildren are wading through the muddy water on their way to school. The surveyor spots his host standing in the water up to his armpits guiding the children across.

Later, when the priest falls ill, the surveyor helps tend him and learns about his past. He was from a well-to-do family, but lacked his brother’s practical bent for managing the family business. He became a priest after this business was suddenly and unexpectedly ruined. His taste for fine linen turns out to be the souvenir of an early, innocent but thwarted love. The priest asks the surveyor to guard a copy of his last will and testament, and the man agrees.

Many years later, when the will is opened, it turns out that the priest’s extreme poverty was due to his putting aside any money he acquired for the purpose of building a school on the other side of the river, so the children would no longer be endangered when the river flooded. The priest’s parishioners had always assumed he was merely a miser, and he had even been robbed three times on the assumption that he must be hiding his wealth.

The sum the priest had been able to put aside was pitifully inadequate for building a school, but when the story gets around, wealthier people are so struck by the man’s unselfishness that a collection is taken up and a new school is in fact built. “On the grave of the school’s founder stands the one and only cross that has been erected for a priest of that parish. I daresay many who visit it are filled with an emotion which the priest did not inspire in them during his lifetime.”

For all his unpopularity with “progressive” critics, Stifter held, as they did, that literature is vitally linked to the larger life of the society in which it is produced. To those who accused him of ignoring the “great” political issues of his time, he responded with words his critics have not always pondered carefully enough:

Declining peoples first lose their moderation. They go after the particular, they throw themselves shortsightedly upon what is insignificant, they set the contingent above the general, then they seek pleasure and the sensual, they seek satisfaction of their hatred and envy, their art depicts what is one-sided, then the distracted, the untrue, the adventurous, eventually the sensuous, the exciting, and ultimately immorality and vice. The distinction between good and evil is lost, the individual scorns the whole and pursues his pleasure or his destruction, and thus the nation falls prey to its inner confusion or to an external, more savage but more powerful enemy.

Further Reading

The best anthology of Biedermeier prose in English is *Novellas of Realism I*, (vol. 37 of The Continuum Publishing Company’s *German Library*), Jeffrey Sammons ed., 1989; it includes works by Droste-Hülshoff, the Swiss Jeremias Gotthelf (another “reactionary” storyteller), Grillparzer, Mörike, and by Stifter *Granite, Limestone*, and the important *Preface to Colored Stones*. Mention should be made of David Luke’s edition of Mörike: *Mozart’s Journey to Prague and a Selection of Poems*, available from Penguin, short and carefully chosen, with a fine introductory essay.

David Luke also produced the first En-
English volume of Stifter in 1968: *Limestone and other Stories*, the “other stories” being *Tourmaline* and *The Recluse*, and his introduction is again especially good. Another collection of Stifter’s novellas is *Brigitta: with Abdias, Limestone and The Forest Path*, edited by Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly, published in the United States by Dufour Editions, 1990; reprinted by Penguin as *Brigitta and Other Tales*. Dufour makes a ludicrous attempt to gain an entrée for Stifter with contemporary audiences by describing him in their blurb as “far ahead of his time in portraying the diseased subconscious” and making reference to sexual repression, childhood alienation, and Kafka; ignore these inanities in favor of the unpretentious translations themselves. *Rock Crystal*, one of Stifter’s most popular tales, can be found in Harry Steinhauer’s *German Stories/Deutsche Erzählungen: a Bilingual Anthology* from The University of California Press, 1984. Stifter’s masterpiece is the “novel of education” *Indian Summer*, published by Peter Lang in a translation by Wendell Frye, 1985. Several important novellas remain untranslated.