

INTEGRATION AND INTEGRITY:
THE BOHEMIAN LANDS AND THE "IMPERIAL" IDEA
IN ADALBERT STIFTER'S *WITIKO*

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This new reading of Adalbert Stifter's novel *Witiko* (originally published in three volumes between 1865 and 1867) reveals an interpretation of topical significance. In the context of central Europe integration and integrity become the decisive polar opposite concepts which determine the relationship between the medieval Bohemian Kingdom and the universalism of the German Empire. The events narrated in Stifter's *Witiko* provide a foil for those problems which arose in the nineteenth century: the contradiction between national emancipation and the universalism of the (Habsburg) Empire. Stifter's position, which occludes the problems of linguistic difference, is ironically conciliatory. His novel presents the attempt to integrate the Other into the collective memory of the German-speaking peoples, while he – conversely – recognizing the Bohemian desire for their own integrity – makes a plea for integration in the name of equal rights. Just as Stifter treated the problems of his time in the guise of medieval events (including the problem of rights, justice and democracy), so can his novel be understood today as a historical model for topical issues which in the consciousness of a long European line of continuity are still pressing – especially after 1989.