



Adalbert Stifter's Late Prose: The Mania for Moderation (Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture)

Helena Ragg-Kirby

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Adalbert Stifter has always been viewed as a natural heir to the Great Classical tradition, even by those critics who detect disturbing subtexts in his fiction. But he should be viewed quite differently: however well disguised, he is in truth a closet modernist, and a major trailblazer for Kafka and the Absurd. This is most evident in his late fiction, which has been almost universally ignored, dismissed or disparaged by his critics. His last novel *Witiko* in particular has been conspicuously neglected by both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics. Ragg-Kirby demonstrates -- largely by way of close reading -- that this is Stifter's extreme masterpiece. Beneath the surface of Biedermeier stuffiness is a vision of fracture, emptiness, meaninglessness, and mania not only more radical than that of any other 19th-century author, but arguably more radical than that of any 20th-century author, precisely because there is such a disjuncture between text and sub-text. In his final novel, Stifter simply leaves the future behind. Helena Ragg-Kirby is a lecturer in German at the University of Sheffield.

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