

„Sammeln und Hegen“. Über Sammeln, Bildung und das Problem des Biedermeier bei Adalbert Stifter

“Collecting and Tending”.
Collecting, “Bildung”, and the problem of the Biedermeier in Adalbert Stifter

PhD Thesis
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Abstract

1. „Biedermeier” as a term for a historical period has been invented by literary critics, practitioners of *Geisteswissenschaft*. This school of literary criticism used the same concepts and metaphors to define itself as a period of scholarship and the period of literary history it posited.
2. The term Biedermeier has been taken over by literary criticism from the study of art. In this process, the interpretation of Biedermeier as a specific interplay of everyday cultural practices has been replaced by another interpretation, namely, that Biedermeier literature is the literary articulation of an antiquarian interest defined simply as aiming at nothing more than accumulation. „Collecting and tending” may be understood as a summary of this interpretation.
3. In „collecting and tending” as used by practitioners of *Geistesgeschichte*, „tending” specifies „collecting” as an act of „encircling”, „conserving”, or „mummifying” (Nietzsche). This use of the word obscures the meanings „attending” and „keeping alive”, both inherent in „tending”, which represent it as an act aiming not at identical preserving of a past state, but at continuously making present something belonging to the past, keeping it as part of the present, and adjusting it to fit that present.
4. The above interpretation of „tending” also obscures the inherent performativity of the act of collecting. This performativity may be grasped by looking at the exhibitory nature of both collecting as an act and collection as its result. Collecting and collection understood broadly are both made up by acts of storing, processing, and transmitting. It is in this way that we may understand collecting also as a model for writing, and collection as a model for the written work. Finally, if collecting is a model for writing, then the medium we use during writing may be viewed as an „exhibition space” for the written work as collection.
5. The specific performativity of the collection is its ability to present the object on exhibition and, together with that object, to also present itself as a technical frame or apparatus for this presentation. Usually, this allows reflections on the medium-bound nature of (self-)presenting.

6. In Stifter, collecting is not just a recurring topic, but also a poetological principle. When he returns to the technique of the „framing gaze” in his descriptions of nature, he does so in order to recover the ability of making medial reflections, inherent in collecting, in such descriptions of nature as well. In this way he shows that the „panoramic”, frameless perception of nature is based on how the technology of panorama achieves an illusion of nature by completely hiding itself.
7. In Stifter, „natural nature” and „natural appearance” are revealed as ideologies which arise from technology hiding itself. For Stifter, nature is natural precisely in that nature constantly reminds us that its perception is pre-coded through technical means.
8. In Stifter, this „naturalness” of nature is exemplified by the arbour in the garden. The very structure of this building represents that technology (the grid) and nature (the plants) are inseparably tied to each other, and it also generates a space in which human beings may also experience themselves as composite of both technology and nature.