

If all novels contain “unresolvable heterogeneity,” why write criticism at all? Listen to Miller speak of *Tess* and *The Well-Beloved*: “The power of readings to go on multiplying means that Tess’s wish to be ‘forgotten quite’ cannot be fulfilled. The chain of interpretation will continue to add new links.” “In the case of such a text, any new reading, like each of the *Avices*, is no more than an additional link midway in an endless chain stretching before and behind.” Perhaps we can no longer delude ourselves and think of criticism as cumulative, as gradually creating a consensus about some “truth”; but if criticism is nothing more than an endless repetition of various competing possibilities, if it is nothing “more than an additional link midway in an endless chain”—*cui bono?* Kafka and Dante come to mind, particularly the Infernoites who engage in ceaseless and meaningless activity.

There is much in Miller’s book—standard literary criticism, at times brilliant; brief excursions into theory (for instance, see comments on Iser and Kermode, pp. 214-16); and perhaps glimpses of a dark abyss some readers will wish to deny.

Daniel P. Deneau

HEINRICH BÖLL
Fürsorgliche Belagerung
 Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch,
 1979, Pp. 415.

In contrast with his compatriot, Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll reveals himself in his novels as overtly softhearted, even sentimental at times. Grass reminds one rather of a sinister magician with a glittering bag of narrative tricks: he rarely ceases to astound and confound with his weird fantasies and his grotesque smoke screens. Heinrich Böll’s fiction, on the other hand, does not show enough sleight of hand to deceive a sideshow audience for five seconds. In fact, Böll’s artistic forte is not narrative techniques at all, but rather straightforward sincerity and fatherly concern. His recent novel, *Fürsorgliche Belagerung*, seems to have been written by an eccentric but very humane old priest who has lost his dogma and is unsure about his faith but who is filled with a troubled love

for all human beings. Now nostalgically and now indignantly Böll mourns in this novel for the irretrievably lost spirit of a loving Christian community. It is not for nothing that his protagonist, Fritz Tolm, is a sad, old man who shows himself to be well meaning and kind, but quite impotent against the evil monster that is tearing Western society apart. Heinrich Böll is convinced that this monster is the juggernaut capitalism. It is the capitalist mode of production in an anonymous mass society, he feels, which is encouraging the perverted and unstable few to pursue their lust for power over the plodding many. Not, as Böll makes clear in *Fürsorgliche Belagerung*, that the worst exploited are the young leftist socialists of West Germany who lost their professional employment owing to the *Radikalerlaß* (Radicals’ Ordinance) and the neo-McCarthy witch hunt for communist spies and sputniks in the 70’s. No, the worst exploited are the refugee-employees in Third-World countries who labor for a starving pittance to produce the fripperies and gadgeteries of our department stores.

Böll longs to replace his disillusioned dream of Christian brotherhood with a liberal, humanitarian socialism. His heroes of the future are the young middle-class intellectuals whose economic studies at Western universities have given them a moral epiphany and a socialist mission. They are convinced that capitalist society is in the death throes of suffocating in the futility of affluence and sexual self-indulgence, the pollution of their living environment, and the guilty anxiety of the haves that they may soon be guillotined by the have-nots. *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* reveals a ruling elite which is rotten throughout with fear or perversity and is constantly engaged in compulsive manipulations to increase its power and prestige. The leaders of this group have devised an intricate machine of secret security policemen to protect themselves from ultra left-wing terrorists. But they do not die at the hands of idealistic assassins. Trapped in the publicity glare of the media providing ersatz titillation for the unadventurous masses, these men of the elite jerk like marionettes on center stage through their scandals, their miseries, their emotional self-mutilations, and often ultimately their suicides. Böll seems sure that a socialist government would lift mankind from this sump of futility.

Fürsorgliche Belagerung is the novel of an unabashed moralist whose aim is to persuade the reader that at least a provisional refuge from the perversions of affluence

can be found by withdrawing into private family life and caring for children. One way of caring for children is apparently to play Monopoly with them so that they will be prepared for the inhuman evils of capitalism as adults. The socialist demonstrator Rolf Tolm, now deprived by the *Radikalenerlaß* of his work function as a bank director (sic!), retreats with his second attempt at a family to a semirural idyll chopping wood, repairing furniture and farm machinery, and fetching fresh milk direct from the cow. With his stoic calm and quiet dignity, Rolf Tolm even overcomes the suspicious conservatism of the local farmers. This is Böll's hero of the present. He lives in a no-man's-land, half way between mad terrorists trying to assassinate the elite with bombs ingeniously hidden in cakes and bicycles, and cynical conservatives on the other side who are struggling to direct their international capitalist juggernaut.

Paradoxically, what *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* really demonstrates, is that historical fact is far more grisly than Böll's fiction. The terrorist acts in Europe, in England, and in the Middle East are all incomparably more horrifying and depressing than the bicycle-odyssey of the befuddled pseudoterrorist Veronika.

There is also an unfortunate tendency for the social documentary aspect of *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* to peter out in an unintended parody of a TV soapie's plethora of gossip, scandal, and triviality. Sabine Fischer's predominant memory of her passionate union in the broom cupboard with security policeman Herbert Hendler is that it only took her a few moments afterwards to tidy up her "Derangement" and her bikini (p. 94). Lonely wife Helga sacrifices herself and bravely sends hubby Herbert off to a six-month adulterous trial marriage with his mistress Sabine. And so on.

But *Fürsorgliche Belagerung* has many saving graces. One thinks of the bitter passion with which the father of the terrorist Veronika fights against his ostracism from village communal life (p. 236) and of the honesty with which Pfarrer Roickler defrocks himself and goes off to marry his mistress. Above all, one remembers the unflinching courage with which the aged Fritz Tolm admits his failure in life and the sadness with which he studies the disintegration of his children's families as symptomatic for the decline and downfall of traditional socio-moral values in Western civilization.

David Myers

BRIAN T. FITCH

The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus' Fiction

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982 Pp. xvii + 128.

Much of the analysis in this latest book from Professor Fitch, who is undoubtedly the foremost contemporary anglophone critic of Albert Camus, has already appeared in separately published papers. In making a longer study from these diverse essays, however, Fitch has not only extended the scope of his "reading," but has also made its method and purpose more polemical and hence of greater interest to students of Camus and modern French literature. In his introduction, Fitch correctly observes that until the present the criticism of Camus's fiction has been dominated by a concern for its "thematics" not its "stylization." In part, though Fitch does not stop to make this point, the explanation for this is that Camus, like the other novelists belonging to what R.W.B. Lewis terms the "second generation" of this century, has traditionally been opposed to the art novelists of the "first." Also, if thematics has dominated the debate over Camus's fiction, Camus himself must bear part of the responsibility; his journalistic vocation and philosophical speculation make it difficult for the reader to approach the novels and stories the same way he would approach those of Balzac or Robbe-Grillet. Fitch argues, and quite plausibly, that the traditional analysis of the fiction slights its status as narrative and tends to reduce it to something like a rhetoric in the service of ideas like rebellion or the absurd. The result is that Camus has become a "classic" writer whose connections with the modern novelists interested in stylistic experimentation have been ignored.

As a remedy, Fitch proposes an analysis of the major fiction (the three novels and one short story, "Jonas") that leaves aside the question of theme and takes advantage instead of two contemporary critical methodologies, the formalism of Roland Barthes and Jean Ricardou as well as the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. Fitch argues that Camus's technique demands this kind of analysis, since "through its high degree of stylization," the language of each text draws attention away from the fictional world it evokes and toward itself. The text, in short, displays a "certain narcissism."