

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."

After a brief first chapter in which Fitch presents images of this linguistic opacity and preoccupation with self drawn from the short stories and *The Plague*, the argument proper begins with a reading of that novel. The analysis of *enchâssement* therein presented is both intriguing and convincing, if, in the manner of Todorov et al., perhaps oversubtle. Fitch concludes that "the story of Rieux and his fellow citizens is contained within Tarrou's narrative which is contained within 'the narrator's narrative for which Rieux is responsible'" (p. 33). Chapter two turns to the story "Jonas," generally considered one of the lesser works in the canon, and discovers that the "textual narcissism" of *The Plague* here becomes linguistic. In other words, the story's final ambiguity—Jonas's last word to his public, which can be read either as *solitaire* or *solidaire*—serves as a "pretext" for whole series of "autogenerated" plays on words. Here, I think, Fitch's analysis certainly crosses over the line into oversubtlety; the kind of linguistic narcissism he discovers seems more a property of language itself than "stylization."

The chapter on *The Stranger* that follows is on much firmer ground. Fitch's thesis that "this text constitutes a critical conundrum precisely because its real concern is the whole activity of interpretation and the problems it poses" (p. 67) makes great sense, especially considering the novel's critical reception and continuing appeal, and the argument he presents is tight and persuasive. Much the same can be said of the next chapter on *The Fall*, which stays within the limits of the novel's rhetoric, its "defective" dialogue. Here Fitch discovers that language becomes "alienated discourse," the novel's theme of judgment a commentary on the hermeneutic process it itself engenders. The book closes with some brief remarks about "intra-intertextuality," the connections established by Camus among his various works.

*The Narcissistic Text*, unlike much literary criticism that makes use of formalistic and hermeneutics methodologies, is well organized, concise, and clearly written. (Only occasionally does Fitch fall into the excessive subordination of the following sentence: "the more readily recognized tendency of the language from which it is woven to be lost sight of because of that transparent quality that enables the non-linguistic world to rise up in an unobstructed vision and realize what Jean Ricardou has named the 'referential illusion' has receded into the background as language has taken back to itself

and reclaimed the material opacity that it shares with other objects"; p. 11.)

The polemical nature of the book, however, does disturb me, for it seems to be quite deliberately ushering in a new age of Camus criticism, one in which Camus himself, I fear, will not fare well. Throughout the book Fitch adheres strictly to his determination to ignore the "thematics" of Camus's fiction. For example, the rhetoric of *The Plague*, as Fitch recognizes, seems a reflection of the theme of abstraction with which the novel is concerned, but Fitch resists the temptation to connect the work's formal structure with its intellectual preoccupations. His purpose, of course, is to present us with a Camus whose formal subtleties are of sufficient interest unto themselves. Earlier, in an almost ironic way, Fitch dismisses previous criticism of *The Plague* because, by concentrating on ideas instead of style, it gives us "a kind of latter-day rewrite of *La Condition humaine*" (p. xv). Instead of his kinship with Malraux, Fitch would argue for Camus's role as a precursor of the new novelists. As the analysis of *The Plague* makes clear, however, the process of *enchâssement* in that novel is rudimentary compared with the same technique in *La Jalousie*. Despite the ingenuity of the kind of analysis contained in *The Narcissistic Text*, the "new" Camus we are made to see is merely a second-rate Robbe-Grillet. Personally I prefer the Camus of the "thematic" critics—the writer whose spirit and ideas engage us more than his experiments with language.

R. Barton Palmer

HERMAN ERMOLAEV  
*Mikhail Sholokhov and His Art*  
 Princeton: Princeton University  
 Press, 1982. Pp. 375.

There are few writers in Soviet literature who have been praised or maligned—depending on the point of view—as much as the novelist and short-story teller Mikhail Sholokhov. Even before his Nobel Prize in 1965 he was often the center of attention. But, as everything else in the Soviet Union, his literary achievements have been overshadowed by nonliterary considerations: