

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.

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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:

doubts have been cast on the authorship of his magnum opus, the epic novel *The Quiet Don*; he has been rejected by politically inclined readers and critics not for his literature but for his political views; and he has at times been accused of ambivalence in his positions. Despite his unmistakable artistic prowess, he is commented upon most often—and most heatedly—for nonliterary reasons. In the winter of his life and career, he will most likely be treated that way the rest of his life, which is indeed a pity for him as well as for the Soviet and world literature.

Although the book under review follows the familiar path, there is enough variety in the approach to make this book decidedly different. First of all, the author treats his subject with remarkable objectivity. A native of Russia and a reader of Sholokhov in high school when *The Quiet Don* was still being published, he is amply qualified to write this book. He discusses with confidence the language aspect of Sholokhov's works—a task that is as significant as it is difficult. He is eminently familiar with the historical events depicted by Sholokhov. And as a professor of Russian literature for years, he has devoted most of his academic life to Sholokhov and other Soviet writers. As a result, we have an extremely informative and insightful book. In addition to a biographical sketch, Ermolaev deals with Sholokhov's life philosophy and ideology, without which his works could not be understood properly. He examines closely Sholokhov's style and structure and the historical sources of *The Quiet Don*. He completes his study by discussing the question of plagiarism concerning *The Quiet Don*, which was raised at the beginning of the publication of the novel in the late twenties and which never seems to be fully resolved or to die down. Copious notes and a useful selected bibliography add the academic stamp to the study.

Ermolaev is a very astute, practical, and patient scholar. Instead of generalizations and abstract suppositions, he goes straight to the heart of the matter, citing examples, using numerous details, and employing facts rather than guesses. Understandably, he directs most of his attention to *The Quiet Don*, shedding light on the problematic features of this novel, brought on by the overzealous censors and unbelieving critics as well as by the reticence of the author himself. The discussion of *The Quiet Don*, the best part of the study, includes the thorny question of plagiarism, which Ermolaev rightfully resolves in Sholokhov's favor. One could quib-

ble with the author's contention that Grigorii Melekhov would be shot by the Reds at the end of the novel. One could regret the somewhat scant treatment of the short stories as well as of the most important aspect of *The Quiet Don*, the love triangle. But one cannot but praise the wealth of historical data illuminating the background of all of Sholokhov's works or the discussion of the matters of style and structure, especially of similes, metaphors, and colors. Painstaking and overdone they may seem to some, they are invaluable for our full understanding of Sholokhov.

There are bits of information that may surprise a general reader, such as the fact that Sholokhov has no Cossack blood in him; that he did not become a member of the communist party until 1932 (although he has always been a staunch supporter); that he had to struggle on numerous occasions with the authorities to have his works published; and that the main reason for his celebrated objectivity is to be found in his reliance on the first-hand witnesses among the Whites as well as historical sources provided by the Whites. All this information helps place Sholokhov in a proper perspective. Perhaps the strongest impression this study makes is the picture of the chaos surrounding the greatest work in Soviet literature, *The Quiet Don*. Due to many changes from edition to edition imposed by censors, and some by the author as well, and to the fact that the original manuscript has been for the most part lost, we shall probably never know the true version of the novel. This constitutes an irreparable loss to both Soviet and world literature, not to speak of the author himself.

Next to D. H. Stewart's *Mikhail Sholokhov: A Critical Introduction*, Ermolaev's book is the best study of Sholokhov in any language. The freedom of approach (unlike in the case of Soviet critics), the scrupulous analysis of minute but important details, and the illumination of the historical background of Sholokhov's works make this study superior to all others.

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