

strategies to capture the uncertainty, indeterminacy and fragmentation that characterised Moleko's brief and unhappy life as policeman in the turbulent 1980s.

While *Deafening Silence* tends to blur the boundaries between history and fiction, it also alerts us to the inescapable ethical basis of both discourses. Narrativisation tends to have the effect of attenuating the shock of 'brutal' historical facts which may be too hideous to contemplate in their raw state. John Miles has again reminded us that literature does have a social function, after all.



This Day and Age

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By M. Nicol

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Where yesterday, that is the happy days of Enlightenment, only the despotic power of the monarch had seemed to stand between man and his freedom to act (Nicol 1992:2).

Mike Nicol's *This Day And Age* can be characterised in Barthesian terms as a 'text of bliss', a text whose meaning is never-ending but constantly offering meanings that are different and yet related; a text that tends to defamiliarise our habitual responses to the reading process through the use of paradoxical elements and strange juxtapositions on the one hand, and an infusion of the ordinary with a sense of mystery that conveys a feeling of unreality on the other. This novel confronts a reader with irreducible and inexplicable elements that disrupt the ordinary logic of cause and effect:

First the lightning slashed at the earth when she ran until it struck her and she changed into a frog. Then the wind came in a rush and caught up the frog blousing it higher and higher until it turned to dust (Nicol 1992:130).

Given these characteristics, Nicol's novel can also be categorised as a magic realist text—a text that uses myth and legend in its construction to challenge earlier modes of realism. Problems of categorisation multiply when we consider that magic realism may denote a particular strain of the contemporary movement covered by

postmodernism:

... what is post-modern in the rest of the world use to be called magic realist in South America and still goes by that name in Canada (Lernout in Zamora 1995:194)?.

This Day And Age exhibits characteristics associated with post-modernist writing, particularly the way the text draws attention to its own structure. Nicol's novel succeeds in demonstrating the writing process as a constant and parasitic reference to other texts shaped by socio-historical process. The notion of the 'ex-centric', in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place 'other', is an essential feature of that strain of postmodernism called magic realism. Nicol questions the traditional boundaries between genres, while revealing the dynamics around the process of writing to point out that there are no privileged centres of culture, race, or politics.

The novel starts by appropriating the techniques of historical and documentary realism and uses them to create an alternative world to existing reality. The 'Prologue' is simply a quotation from other texts that anticipates for the reader what is to follow. By choosing to introduce his text in this fashion, Nicol explicitly shows the reader that writing involves a constant reference to the already existing texts. This tends to 'deconstruct' the notion of an author as an originator, an inventor with imaginative genius, which makes him/ her unique. The process of self-reflexiveness continues in the following section of the novel entitled 'Afterwards'. In this section the reader is given the whole plot of the novel and the circumstances that surround its theme:

Between the time that was before and the time that came afterwards there hung a brutal moment (Nicol 1992:3).

Brutal moments characterise this novel. The reader witnesses characters with a variety (and sometimes contradictory) of world-views, and this disjunctive narrative strategy is made clear from the onset:

An ear for this. An ear for that. Who to believe? Who to trust? On the one hand. On the other hand. My story. History. The struggle for truth continues afterwards (Nicol 1992:3).

But is this really a narrative strategy, or does this novel move towards rejecting narrativity altogether? Is it even (im)possible to narrate the end of narration? One consequence of defamiliarising narrativity is the problematisation of the notion of history as a 'true' reflection of reality. Instead, history is viewed as a fabrication and as a manipulative discourse that, as exemplified by Enoch Mistas in the novel, may be

² Zamora, LP & WB Faris (eds) 1995. *Theory, History, Community*. London: Duke University Press.

useful for political agendas.

Besides the manipulation of history, the blurring of fiction and reality, Nicol, utilises oral tradition in the 'Fairy Tales' section of the novel. Here the reader witnesses an interaction between the strange, invisible voices and Enoch Mistas—the figure of the Messiah in the novel:

... now obviously that's not right. We are talking about gross iniquities here, stressed number two. Especially when there is such abundance. Enough land for food for every belly It just needs redistribution (Nicol 1992:92).

Nicol takes a character from the fairy tale—Tasmaine, and places her in the characters within the novelist genre (from oral tradition to writing tradition). Besides breaking the generic boundaries, Nicol presents an auto-generative nature of fiction, whereby fictional genres mix and differentiate to produce a refracted narration. Enoch Mistas, a character from the novelistic genre, finally finds out that Tasmaine, a character from the fairy tale, does not have a female sexual organ. This episode occurs at the time when Enoch wants to make love with her, and evokes a range of interpretations; on the one hand, perhaps Enoch cannot have sexual intercourse with Tasmaine because he is a Messiah—an anointed one. This 'divine role' would not allow him to commit such a deed. On the other hand, there is the possibility that they cannot make love because they are from different worlds—fairy tale and novel. The issue is undecidable and this reader at least waits for some sort of revelation.

