Introduction:

Koos Prinsloo: A Tribute

Chantelle Gray and Wemar Strydom

Koos Prinsloo was born on 15 April 1957 in Kenya, and immigrated with his family to South Africa in 1962 due to political instability in the region. After matriculating at the Newcastle High School in 1979, he completed two years of the then compulsory military training and stayed on in Pretoria to study. In 1979, he completed his BA degree in Afrikaans and Dutch at the University of Pretoria, by which time he was writing for the student magazine *Vlieg*, although he had already published poems in local Afrikaans magazines during his high school years. Probably best known for his transgressive homosexual and anti-nationalist leitmotifs, it is not difficult to see why he has had a longlasting impact on especially the Afrikaans literary scene. It is fair, then, to argue that Prinsloo had a singular voice, although we do not use the term here to designate "unique". This is not to say that Prinsloo's oeuvre is not unique in the sense of it being exceptional – it certainly is in many ways – but we mean it more in the sense that Derek Attridge uses the concept when he notes that:

> .. singularity, like alterity and inventiveness, is not a property but an event, the event of singularizing which takes place in reception: it does not occur outside the responses of those who encounter and thereby constitute it. It is produced, not given in advance; and its emergence is also the beginning of its erosion, as it brings about the cultural changes necessary to accommodate it.
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> (Atteridge 2004: 64)

Attridge goes on to argue that a work may be unique but *not* singular if it is "wholly comprehended within the norms of the culture: indeed, it is the process of comprehension – the registering of its particular configuration of familiar laws – that discloses its uniqueness" (64). Singularity, from this point of view, is thus about writing *against* the grain, into the margins of a language, moving counter to the tides of the social megamachine responsible for capitalist production and reproduction. Such deviation from literary norms and acceptable cultural content disrupts both the hierarchy of texts and salient novelistic structures. Importantly, as noted in the quote above, singularity in

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literature "is not a property but an event", one which takes place in literature itself but, at the same time, "does not occur outside the responses of those who encounter and thereby constitute it" (Attridge 2004: 64). Thus, "contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world", as philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue (1987: 11). Rather, "the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can)" (11). This renders the author's "voice" *minor* rather than *minoritarian* – an important distinction we wish to make here. To understand what we mean, it helps to remember that Afrikaans has occupied a position/ality of "majority" and "minority" language in South Africa. As Fanie Jansen van Rensburg notes:

> Whereas most of the evolution and history of "Afrikaans" started from its proponents' opposition of English and its imperialist backing, the current debate is about Afrikaans being displaced and neglected to a lowly position by an English speaking black-majority government.
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> (Jansen van Rensburg 2003: 192)

To put it differently, there is a continued exploration of the fate of the Afrikaans language and the inherent question of language death or longevity, almost as a measurement of Afrikaner culture. Yet despite the historically dialogic relationship between Afrikaans and English, as well as debates centred on its current status as a minority language alongside that of other indigenous languages, Afrikaans still enjoys the privileges of a major language. That is, regardless of the fact that it is spoken by a minority group and mainly within the borders of South Africa, Afrikaans has been – and continues to be – developed in the way a major language would be. For example, "important" works from many canons have been translated into Afrikaans; the language has an extensive vocabulary which continues to grow and includes technological and scientific jargon; many educators are (still) fully proficient in Afrikaans; and so on. Within this context of majority and minority languages, Prinsloo's oeuvre may be viewed as doing something *more* than merely re/claiming "literary territory" for Afrikaans – it is *becoming-minor* within its major milieu in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari think about being "minor". They write: "A minor literature doesn't [necessarily] come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 16-18), and it is recognised by three distinctive characteristics. These are: 1) that it has a high degree of deterritorialisation or bifurcation from cultural norms, as Attridge also argues; 2) that it is politically engaged; and 3) that it marks a degree of "collective enunciation"; i.e. a sense that something about the norms of the collective socius is being demonstrated and contested. What we see here, then, is an emphasis on the tensions in the intersections between position/ality, politics, collectivity, ethics, language and writing, and how

these materially affect one another. Manual DeLanda elucidates these entanglements when he writes:

> The concept of social obligation is crucial to an understanding of not only naming but language itself. If sounds, words, and constructions are indeed replicators, and if, unlike memes, they do not replicate through imitation but through enforced repetition, then the key question becomes, *How exactly are linguistic norms enforced?* In what sense are they socially obligatory?
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> (DeLanda 1997: 191; emphasis added)

In terms of Afrikaans, we know that enforcement mechanisms, such as Apartheid and legislation promoting the widespread use of Afrikaans, historically ensured that linguistic norms spread throughout the country. This use applied also to literature and it may be for this reason that Prinsloo's short stories are often framed around concerns such as war, nationalism, heteronormativity, and so own. At the same time, Prinsloo's oeuvre had its own limitations, as some of the articles in this special issue show. Despite this, we hold that Prinsloo is a minor author – a foreigner in his "own tongue" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 105). As Deleuze and Guattari argue, minor authors "are bastards" who, through their language use and style, create "stutterings", the frayings of a language, allowing the language to "grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes it a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibriums" (Deleuze 1997: 111). It is these "disequilibriums" in Prinsloo's oeuvre that point to a disruptive potentiality while, concurrently, being immanent to that potentiality – the *event*. Of course this does not mean that Prinsloo was not blind to his own position/ality or even complicit in Apartheid as all whites – at least structurally – were at that time, albeit to different degrees. Rather, there is an emergent quality in Prinsloo's work that allows for an ongoing interrogation of the structures informing our conditions of living and livability, a quality that allows also for interrogation of what he may not have seen. Michel Foucault perhaps puts it best when he asks:

> What event, what law do they obey, these mutations that suddenly decide that things are no longer perceived, described, expressed, characterized, classified and known in the same way, and that it is no longer wealth, living beings, and discourse that are presented to knowledge in the interstices of words or through their transparency, but beings radically different from them? For an archaeology of knowledge, this profound breach in the expanse of continuities, though it must be analysed, and minutely so, cannot be "explained" or even summed up in a single word. It is a radical event that is distributed across the entire visible surface of knowledge, and whose signs, shocks, and effects it is only possible to follow step by step. Only thought apprehending itself at the root of its own history could provide a foundation, entirely free of doubt, for what the solitary truth of this event was.
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> (Foucault 2001: 235-236)

This "ordering of empiricity" (Foucault 2001: 238) and the mutations or bifurcations away from the centre can be traced in Prinloo's writings though his idiosyncratic use of language; his disruption of normative novelistic structures; the creative blending of autobiographical (i.e. "real") and creative "history"; and his contentious content and subtext that serve as political commentary on homosexuality and Apartheid conservativism, even though it occludes patriarchy and racial patriarchy within the regime. Despite the latter, we believe Prinsloo would welcome the kind of engagement we have in the collection of articles here: articles that do not only revere his work, but also interrogate it, push it beyond its own boundaries, deterritorialising it even as it is reterritorialised. It is in this spirit that we mark with this special issue a quarter century since the death of a beloved author on 6 March 1994 in Johannesburg. Prinsloo died of AIDS-related complications and, even in terms of this, he demonstrated tenacity and defiance. In his own words:

> Weer lees die skrywer die laaste paragraaf deur. Steeds is hy nie tevrede met die einde nie. Maar hy lig nie een van sy twee moeë wysvingers nie, staar net na die amber letters wat soos uitgebrande sterre ligjare hiervandaan in the donker voor hom gloei.[1]

Having traced Prinsloo's influences for a long time, Gerrit Olivier opens the special issue with an article that looks at the ways in which Prinsloo creates new worlds by weaving together the fictional and the non-fictional as an attempt to disclose the subjective nature of writing – whether 'historical' or imaginative. This is followed by Marius Crous's investigation into how Prinsloo's oeuvre offers perennial, if not all-inclusive, resistance to discourses of power, especially those vested in the figures of the father, the State, God, and so on. Following Lacan, Crous argues that Prinsloo's texts comment on the impositions of the Symbolic Order which take place because it is regulated by the language and law of heteropatriarchy. Louise Viljoen then takes us into the "World Republic of Letters" by drawing on the book by the same name by Pascale Casanova (2004). Viljoen looks at different meanings of the term "world literature" and the notion of a "world republic of letters" from the perspective of Afrikaans as a "small literature". Having sketched out her main argument, she discusses the work of Afrikaans authors Koos Prinsloo and S.J.

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1. Quoted from *Verhale* (Prinsloo 2008: 306, emphasis added). We have chosen not to translate this passage in favour of what Carli Coetzee (2013) terms "accentedness". This "refusal to translate" is not about the manipulation of linguistic conventions or semantic content, nor is it about excluding certain readers. Rather, it is an *orientation* "in defence of difficulty, of failure and of misunderstanding" (Coetzee 2013: 167). It is thus a choice for resingularisation and a refusal to be subsumed into the colonial structures of English, similar to what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o sought to do by freeing theatrical experiences from the colonial system by encouraging the audience to participate spontaneously in productions (wa Thiong'o 1986).

Naudé, contending that they reveal the limitations of Casanova's description of small literatures. The fourth and centred article is by Siseko Khumalo. This seemed fitting to us as Khumalo points out a central flaw in Prinsloo's work – also largely in its reception – namely that it is single-issued rather than intersectional in its politics. Looking specifically at Prinsloo's use of race in the story "Promise you'll tell no-one", Khumalo suggest an uncritical position on Prinsloo's part in terms of the question of an *authentic* 'queer voice' in his attempts to step outside the strictures of Afrikaner identity. In the penultimate article, Bibi Burger reads S.J. Naudé's *The Third Reel*, as well as a number of Koos Prinsloo's short stories, through Mark Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life*. Using Walter Benjamin's approach to history that tears historical aspects from their typical linear-causal structures, she shows the limits of historical representations and investigates, instead, the utopian potential of fragmented histories. Chantelle Gray concludes the special issue with a detour into death, but death as "event", by reading Koos Prinsloo through Deleuze's three syntheses of time – Habit, Mnemosyne and Thanatos. She argues that Prinsloo's oeuvre provides a critical and clinical function that can offer methods for releasing *jouissance*. Thus, whereas the critical function engages literary figures, styles and ways of being, as well as Kant's understanding of critique, the clinical provides a symptomatology of life potentiality in a given work. Together, these function to identify the genesis of life as a creative force that holds the potential to restore healthy living.

In closing, we hope readers discover, or rediscover, in Prinsloo's work, and in the articles presented here, a "politically-informed account" of power "both as entrapment (*potestas*) and as empowerment (*potentia*)" (Braidotti 2018: 3) in the undoing of old epistemologies and the construction of new worlds of knowing and being.

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