

Koos Prinsloo and Discourses of Power

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Summary

In this article, I argue that we find in Koos Prinsloo's oeuvre a perennial resistance to the discourses of power vested in specific figures, be it the father figure, the State, God, the publisher, other gay men or specific authors. His texts depict a militarised society where certain notions of masculinity are propagated; a time of censorship, conscription and the omnipresence of despair. His texts comment on the early days of AIDS, a pathological view on the diseased body and, in Lacanian terms, a constant battle with the father/Father, the Law of the Father and the impositions of the Symbolic Order regulated by the language and law of the patriarchy.

Opsomming

Die uitgangspunt met hierdie ondersoek van Koos Prinsloo se werk is dat daar 'n volgehoue weerstand by hom is teen die magsdiskoerse wat gekoppel word aan sekere figure in die samelewing, byvoorbeeld die vaderfiguur, die staat, God, die uitgewer, ander gay mans en spesifieke outeurs. Sy tekste verbeeld 'n vermilitariseerde samelewing waar sekere beskouinge oor mankheid gepropageer word; 'n tyd van sensuur, diensplig en die alomteenwoordigheid van mismoedigheid. Sy tekste lewer ook kommentaar op die vroeëre dae van Vigs, 'n patologiese perspektief op die siek liggaam en, in Lacaniaanse terme, is daar 'n konstante stryd tussen die vader/Vader, die Wet van die Vader en die afdwing van regulering deur die Simboliese Orde van taal en die wet van die patriargie.

Introduction

Existing readings of Koos Prinsloo's four collections of short stories focus predominantly on the postmodernist techniques used by the author, the relation between fact and fiction and the ongoing battle with paternal figures. Two book-length studies on his work by Riana Scheepers (1998) and Gerrit Oliver (2008) deal, respectively, with similar issues, but, while Olivier provides a more sustained, close reading of the stories, Scheepers' approach is to focus primarily on the autobiographical nature of his fiction and the way in which certain individuals, such as the pop star Johannes Kerckorrel, could be identified in the texts.

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To Scheepers (1998: 1) Koos Prinsloo is one of the major exponents of postmodernist writing in South Africa in the 1980s. Not only does he explore gay sexuality in his work, he also addresses issues such as postcolonialism and the ongoing war on the country's borders from the perspective of a conscript. It is specifically his use of documentation (his mother's ID photo, cartoon strips, letters from his grandfather, photos, etc.), as well as the fictionalising of his own family history that characterise the postmodernist nature of his work. She also reiterates the controversial nature of the author's work, as well as the technical and thematic renewal associated with his small oeuvre.

In his introduction, Olivier (2008: 1-3) delineates several aspects of Prinsloo's work that he uses as departure points for his reading of Prinsloo's oeuvre: he reiterates the transgressive and often contentious nature of his work; the unique interplay between fiction and reality; the resistance to conventions; the narrative use of an autobiographical speaker and Prinsloo's constant battle with the machinations of power in society. Olivier ties the latter to Prinsloo's almost obsessive disdain for any paternal figures, often resulting in a rejection of conventional masculinity.

In writing about Prinsloo's last collection *Weifeling*¹ (Hesitance) Peter John Massyn (1995: 3) comments on the "revelatory urge" of Prinsloo to transgress the boundary between the public and the private. Massyn (1995: 3) is of the opinion that a constant theme in Prinsloo's work is the urge to reveal, to come out of the closet and show his disdain for a suppressive discourse that does not allow such revelation. Massyn believes that Prinsloo's "savage honesty":

... echoes the often bleak revelatory practices of such predecessors as Jean Genet, Hervé Guibert and a host of contemporary North Americans (the most recent sensation seems to be that surrounding David Leavitt's "rewriting" of Sir Stephen Spender's autobiography).

Writing specifically about Prinsloo's stories dealing with the biographical experiences of his grandfather's family in Kenya, Cloete (2017: 32) argues that:

Prinsloo asks readers, most of whom would be familiar with life-writing from Kenya (such as Blixen's *Out of Africa*), to rethink the romance of the "first man" and the great white hunter on safari. All three generations – that of his grandfather, his parents and himself – go on safari. Koos Prinsloo (Senior) goes on safaris of conquest, ill-discipline and death, his parents hanker back to those days where their safaris or journeys signified better days, while Koos Prinsloo, the author, goes on journeys into his and his family's past in order to question the long term usefulness of his family's nostalgia and in so doing write the end of a settler colonial linear narrative.

1. When quoting from the stories, I use the collection called *Verhale*, which contains all of Prinsloo's published short stories. The translations are mine.

Noteworthy is the fact that no critic has analysed Prinsloo's candid exploration of queer sexuality. In the 1980s, when he wrote, critics were probably hesitant to do so because of the author's refusal not to be labelled as a queer author and his refusal to be included in a collection of gay short stories in Afrikaans. Prinsloo's decision not to participate in this project is explained in a letter written to Aucamp (quoted in Olivier 2008: 216). According to him such a collection of gay stories would obfuscate the realities of the time, namely that there was a law against sex between men. Also negated is the fact that there were homosexual relations in the mine hostels. He, instead, wanted literature to reflect reality; thus certain topics that were à la mode at the time, for example AIDS, he viewed as a reality and not as something to use as material for a story. Of particular interest to Prinsloo was the tension between the universal and the engaged text. To prove his point, he refers to the Afrikaans poet Johann De Lange's use of Thom Gunn's *Night Sweat* as the title for his own collection of poems *Nagsweet*: a strategy which Koos Prinsloo found "immoreel en aanstootlik" (immoral and offensive).

In this analysis, I argue that we find in Koos Prinsloo's oeuvre a perennial resistance to the discourses of power vested in specific figures, be it the father figure, the State, God, the publisher, other gay men, or specific authors. His texts depict a militarised society where certain notions of masculinity are propagated; a time of censorship, conscription and the omnipresence of despair. His texts comment on the early days of AIDS, a pathological view on the diseased body and, in Lacanian terms, a constant battle with the father/Father, the Law of the Father and the impositions of the Symbolic Order regulated by the language and law of the patriarchy. Prinsloo challenged assumptions about sex, sexuality, morality and ethical behaviour. Prinsloo was an erudite author, but balances his intertextual references with banal and often scathing, albeit sacrilegious references to the state, to the father and to God.

Prinsloo's texts were published in turbulent times, when there was a predominant preoccupation with ideological and structuralist approaches to literature and critics had to find a new critical approach / apparatus with which to analyse his work. It was a period of censorial power at work on all levels of society – ranging from the Dutch Reformed Church to the army to PW Botha to the Publications Board. It was also a time where the embattled white minority within the Afrikaans literary circle closed rank in a way one would again encounter in 1994 when Stephen Spender sued David Leavitt and demanded that certain portions of *While England Sleeps* be removed – as alluded to by Massyn.

2 Utterances

2.1 The State

To argue my point, I use several discursive utterances from the Prinsloo discourse as signposts, the most notorious being “Hierie kamp is P.W. se skuld, die meidenaaiër” (*Verhale*, 133). [This camp is P.W.’s fault, the maid fucker.] This expletive, with its derogatory reference to black women is used to describe the then State President P.W. Botha. It is an utterance loaded with significance because it comments on the militarised society, associates Botha directly with military power and oppression, and depicts him as someone contravening the so-called Immorality Act. By calling him a “meidenaaiër”, the façade of Nationalist morality is also under attack. Inscribing into his text the idea that a Christian Nationalist pillar of white supremacy could be linked to acts of sex, not to mention the sex with a black women, is indeed an illustration of what Prinsloo himself later called “a political act in itself”.

This utterance by the disgruntled soldier echoes the criticism expressed against the militarised South African society of the time. The emphasis is on the futility of the military exercise and suggests that the camp is a whim of the person in power. The marginal figure of the pimply soldier is here the metonymic agent instrumental in undermining language and exposing instituted and institutionalised censorship.

From a narratological point of view, the author voices his criticism of the apartheid state through the medium of the young conscript. The young conscript as Other expresses the disgruntled author Prinsloo’s disdain with the state. Significantly, the soldier, who is ostensibly in the service of God and country, subverts the state from within by desecrating the state president’s image as the exemplary, moral guardian and leader of society. Similarly, Prinsloo continues in this vein when he inscribed classified material from army training manuals into his fictional discourse. The use of the phrase was also a litmus test for the reception of Prinsloo’s work.

Olivier (2008: 52) quotes a letter from Prinsloo’s publisher and one of the key sentences from this letter reads: “Ons voel net baie sterk dat die P.W.-verwysing moet wegval.” [We feel strongly that the P.W. reference should be omitted.] The Afrikaans author, and one of Prinsloo’s earliest mentors, Hennie Aucamp feared legal consequences. Prinsloo’s mentor Abraham de Vries cautioned him not to sacrifice a well-written story with that one expression (Olivier 2008: 52), while Prinsloo’s publisher feared the wrath of the state apparatus. Some critics, although against any form of censorship, advised him to do some pre-censoring before final publication.

Ultimately Prinsloo’s publisher gave him an ultimatum: either he removed the phrase or they would not publish the work. Prinsloo refused and the book

was subsequently published by the young, independent Taurus.² Danie van Niekerk was quoted in a Sunday newspaper as saying that pre-censorship played no role in the decision not to publish the work (Olivier 2008: 52). These events form the gist of Prinsloo's creative revenge on the publisher in *Weifeling*. The literary merits of the collection of short stories led to the announcement in 1988 that Prinsloo was to receive the *Rapport* Prize. The editor of *Rapport* then announced on 20 April 1988 that the prize would no longer be awarded. According to Olivier (2008: 53) this incident illustrates how the different reviewers anticipated censorship and acted without considering the merits of the text under discussion.

2.2 The Publisher, the Mentor, the Critic

In an audacious attempt at literary revenge, Prinsloo uses the events surrounding the utterance and the prize in his later collection *Weifeling*, avenging himself against the publisher, Danie van Niekerk, who did not want to publish *Die hemel help ons*. Prinsloo's wrath even resulted in him going so far as to out Van Niekerk as a closeted homosexual in public. The disgruntled author is merciless and meticulous in his revenge on the publisher and exemplifies the remark made by Prinsloo in an interview with Jansen (quoted in Olivier 2008: 74, n43): "Ja, voor mij is het schrijven rechtstreeks gekoppeld aan wraak." [Yes, to me, writing is directly linked to revenge.]

This outing incident brings us to another discursive utterance in the text, when the publisher writes to the author (both in real life and in the story) and requests a personal favour, namely that his son's name be removed from the text: "Ek vra 'n persoonlike gunsie – dat jy my seun se naam uithaal uit jou verhaal oor Boston. Samblief." (*Verhale* 352). [I am asking you a small personal favour – please remove my son's name from your story on Boston. Pretty please.] The avenging author shows no mercy towards the real people who are written into his text. Yet, as Olivier indicates, he did later omit the proper noun from the published version of the story.

To readers of Prinsloo's last collection, it is common cause to believe that he derided both the publisher's closeted gayness and the camp concealed decadence of the older author figure in "A Portrait of the Artist". Prinsloo's depiction of gay sexuality is not relegated to the secretive and closeted world of "playing gay", but is the world of steam baths, threesomes, raw painful fucking and anonymous sexual encounters. His outing of the publisher associates the closeted married man with orgies in the 1950s, getting beaten

2. A similar incident happened in the case of the poet Breyten Breytenbach. Coetzee (1996: 215-232) shows how a poem by Breytenbach comparing the then prime minister B.J. Vorster to a "butcher/obstetrician" resulted in his book being censored. Equally so, when Breytenbach subsequently wanted to publish his *'n Seisoen in die paradys* (*A Season in Paradise*) he "had to accept the excision of passages that alarmed or offended his South African publisher."

up in Central Park, and being forced to marry the daughter of the Head of the Gebroedsels (“the brood”, his name for the Broederbond), because it opened the doors to financial and social security.

One of the real people fictionalised in the story “Die jas” is the eminent Afrikaans critic A.P. Grové, who incidentally was also one of Prinsloo’s lecturers at the University of Pretoria. He becomes a character in the avenging tale:

En hy sluit (net om die jonger skrywer nog verder te beledig) ’n keurverslag in van die aangesig akademikus (en natuurlik ’n lid van die gebroedsel) wat by die verwysing na ou P.W. in potlood uitroep: “Nee, dit kan absoluut nie.” (*Verhale* 349). [And he includes (just to humiliate the younger author even more) his review report by an ape-faced academic (and obviously a member of the brood) who wrote next to the reference to old P.W. in pencil: “No, it cannot; absolutely not!”]

Evidently he was a member of the Broederbond (“gebroedsel” [“the brood”]) and he is described as having the face of an ape – perhaps to show his ignorance and lack of intellect. This passage also illustrates the mechanisms of power relations within the white literary establishment. The professor as critic colludes with the publisher to prevent the young author from offending the State. The use of *absoluut* is significant because it mimics the authoritarian pose and language of the late P.W. Botha, as if the professor is merely mimicking the Great Leader. Perhaps that explains why he has an ape’s face. Botha used to be called the Groot Krokodil [The Great Crocodile] and in “Die jas” he is called president/general/keiser/koning/god [president/general/emperor/king/god] to denote his omnipotence as dictator.

An example to the publishing house’s reliance on a network of power and the intellectual justification of such a network is evident from the publisher’s suggestion that the company get a legal opinion on the matter. In contrast to the coercive acceptance of the workings of such a power regime, Prinsloo’s subversive writing is an attempt to write against such an imposition.

The conduct of the publisher echoes the following remark by Foucault (1980: 98):

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads: they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power ... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

2.3. The Father Figures – From Publisher to Bugger

It is not only the President, the professor or the publisher who are the father figures in Prinsloo’s writing – there is a constant exploration of the relationship between father and son in his oeuvre. Joan Hambidge (2008) is

of the opinion that the hatred of the father and the projection of such hatred onto other father figures are central to Prinsloo's work. This is evident from one of the stories in *Weifeling*, aptly called "Die storie van my pa" ["The story of my dad"] when the narrator describes his father as "tot die dood toe bedroef, en bedonderde, arme stokoue, fokken ou pa" (*Verhale* 371). [sad to death, and angry, my poor old fucking old father.] Following this outburst, the father character addresses the child and tells him of a dream in which the father tells the son not to fear him: "Moenie vir my bang wees nie ... Moet asseblief nie bang wees vir my nie. Ek het dit alles uit liefde gedoen." (*Verhale* 372). [Do not fear me ... Don't be scared of me. I did it all out of love.]

Throughout Prinsloo's oeuvre the father figure epitomises heterosexist masculinity: he is a body builder, he has manly and virile pursuits, has affairs and is unable to communicate properly with his son, particularly about the latter's sexuality. In "And our fathers that begat us" (*Verhale* 108-123), he includes a letter written by the father to the young conscript in 1981, containing the following passage: "Broer ja, ek is bly dat die strydbyl begrawe is. Dit was vir my 'n bitter pil, maar ek is so dankbaar dat jy niks vir my weg steek nie. Ek dink party keer daar aan hoe ek sou voel as jy dalk blind of doof was. Ek aanvaar dit, maar praat dit nie goed nie." (*Verhale* 123) [Brother, yes, I am glad that we have buried the hatchet. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but I am thankful that you did not hide anything from me. I accept it, but I do not approve of it.]

However, the father pleads that the son keep quiet about what he has just revealed to his father regarding his homosexuality and his mother was also instructed not to tell any of the family or neighbours. Being gay carries the same status as blindness or deafness – it is associated with shame and secrecy. The father even goes as far as asking God to intervene and cure the son of his diseased sexuality.

In "PCP" (*Verhale* 249-262), constant references are made to a female God with a vagina dentata (258) with which she devours everything. Ostensibly to undermine the father figure's belief, it is alleged that only through anal sex could God be reached (*Verhale* 259). Here Prinsloo echoes the enigmatic sexual religious beliefs of the queer Dutch author Gerard Reve, who was persecuted for blasphemy in the liberal Netherlands when in *Nader tot U* (Nearer to Thee, 1966) he compares God to a donkey that he wants to sodomise. Both authors transgress the fashionable norms of society: Reve reduces God to a passive beast – a victim of bestiality, whereas Prinsloo refers to God in the feminine form prone to enjoy anal sex.

Compare also in this regard, Prinsloo's sacrilegious rewriting of the familiar hymn: "Wat 'n vriend het ons in Jesus / Sy wat in ons pad wil staan / Watter voorreg om gedurig / deur sy hol tot God te gaan." [What a friend we have in Jesus / She who is standing in our way / What a privilege / to go to God through his arse.] The inference is that through anal sex with a man ("his arse") one is able to reach God. From Prinsloo's rewritten hymn we also

deduce that Jesus is female and she is standing in his way and preventing him from getting to the Divine. Is the narrating subject a misogynist who associates religion with femininity that can only be transcended by male-male sex?

The communication between father and son lacks any depth and compassion and although the father tries to share his intimate dream with his estranged son, the son is already plotting his revenge. Significant is the remark made by the son, "Dit, liewe Pappa, hou ek vir later." (*Verhale* 373). [That, Daddy dearest, I am keeping for later.] What he is referring to, is the fact that he has symptoms of AIDS and in telling the father, he will not only avenge himself, but he will also prove to the religious father that God did not "cure" him as his father wanted. From the interaction between father and son it is evident that the narrator and his siblings were all in fear of the father.

The final part of "Drome is ook wonde" (*Verhale* 236) is presented as one of the most evocative dream scenes in Prinsloo's oeuvre. The dream depicts an intimate scene between father and son. The father attempts to penetrate the son anally, but it is only once the father touches his cheek and his tense pectorals that he is able to surrender to the father's penis. The father's inability to show affection is here projected onto a dream image of the father as a substitute lover. The unconscious desire of the son is to be loved by the father. Significant is also the fact that the father is not the Oedipal castrator in this scene, but he acts as the penetrator, as Freud believes is typical of women who wants to have sex with their fathers and bear his child. The intrusion of the son's body is only possible when the son lives up to the role of the submissive feminised bottom who offers his anus to his father to be penetrated. It is rape and not castration that inhibits the subject from breaking his bonds with the Oedipal father. This mirrors the depiction of the rough penetrative sex in the oeuvre as a whole – even when describing sex between two lovers. The unconscious expression of desire in a dream image mimics what Hocquenghem (1993: 128) sees as the link between masochism and homosexuality:

The active-passive categories generally associated with the homo-sexual, the bugger and the buggered are correlated with the analytical categories of sadism and masochism If masochistic pleasure, experimented through the partner's aggression or at the partner's pleasure is inevitably a guilty pleasure ... anality, because of the original passive role assigned to it, follows the same destiny as masochism: everything related to the anal is guilty.

The anal penetration of the son exemplifies the "desiring use of the anus" (Hocquenghem 1993: 98), the libidinal zone associated with homosexuality, in contrast to the moralist view of sodomy as a vice punishable by death.

3 Negative and Positive Power

The concept of power is central to Foucault's thinking, and as Paul Oliver (2010: 44) observes, it is closely related to "concepts of freedom, authority, subjection and resistance". Power can either be a negative and repressive force, or it can be a necessary, productive and positive force, e.g. when the body is subjected to negative displays of power. One such an example occurs in "Die storie van my neef" (*Verhale* 365) where the dying Bennie's HIV status is revealed when the male nurse Willem gossips about it at the doctor's practice. The subtle workings of power are exacerbated by the fact that Bennie's lover Philip has revealed it to Willem whilst they were having sex. Revealing the patient's HIV status through gossip depicts what Foucault (2000: 125-126) examines as the exercising of power below the level of the state.

From a metafictional point of view, Prinsloo's engagement through writing exemplifies a more productive and positive display of power. His intellectually challenging writing required a new approach; a different type of reader and reading process. His fragmented, intertextual, albeit confusing and disjointed narratives, caused unease and unsettled the secure boundaries of literary criticism. One could even ponder the question: would his writing be equally effective and evocative if his texts were written in a more realist mode? The New Journalist fiction written by him is as Ina Gräbe (1988: 364) points out, symptomatic of a political situation "in which the grimness of a South Africa tormented by unrest is reported in documents rather than stories." His writing reflects the fractured society in which he was living at the time. Prinsloo's writing style interweaves story and documented reality – often material that would have been censored during the State of Emergency. Inherent to Prinsloo's writing project is the urge to expose what is fed to the susceptible populace as so-called truths

Derrida's view that the creative act is "an incoming of the other" (Derrida 1989: 55) is applicable to Prinsloo's intertextual and postmodernist writing. The suffering black South Africans under apartheid are written into Prinsloo's texts and for them to be truly other, their stories "cannot be predetermined, conditioned, or calculated" (Derrida 1989: 41). Their narratives enter the texts written against the backdrop of a white middle class urban existence, characterised by libidinous excess to repress an awareness of the suffering of the other.

Finally, Koos Prinsloo's writing is a discourse of the sexed body; of the queer body taking care of the self, exploring sexuality and the subsequent diseased body marked by the signs of AIDS. On the one hand there is the closeted narrative in the presence of the family and on the other is the celebration of his sexual otherness.

In his writing there is no attempt to fetishize the virus as is often the case in contemporary writing. In this regard Tim Dean (2009: 10) writes as follows:

“Sexual risk is no longer what it was in the mid-90s.” There is according to him, “a deliberate, organized risk” and depathologising of so-called unsafe sex. The destigmatisation of seropositivity is a contemporary phenomenon and although Prinsloo celebrates a hedonistic enjoyment of gay sex (anal sex in particular) in his work, his views on AIDS are more in line with the discourse on disease analysed in Susan Sontag’s seminal studies *Illness as metaphor* (1978) and *AIDS and its metaphors* (1989). According to Sontag, a disease such as AIDS “arouses thoroughly old-fashioned kinds of dread”, whereas contact with someone who has the disease is regarded as “a mysterious malevolency [that] inevitably feels like a trespass; worse, like the violation of a taboo” (Sontag 1978: 6). Similarly, AIDS is described in a language of “political paranoia” (Sontag 1989: 18).

At the end of “Die storie van my neef” (*Verhale* 364), the narrator tries to explain a reason for the cousin’s illness and ascribes it to a blood transfusion. The transfusion of tainted blood was often blamed to deny the presence of the virus and the disease. It prevented the cousin from telling his parents the truth about his sexuality and his sexual experiences. The heterosexist association of anal sex with death prompted Bersani’s famous question: “Is the rectum a grave?” (2010: 29).³

Throughout his stories, Prinsloo prefers to use the crude Afrikaans word “naai” (fucking) and “mans naai” (to fuck men) when referring to gay sex. It is transgressive not only because the word is derided but also because it connotes gay sex as something derisive, vile and abhorrent – probably to violate several taboos in the Victorian sense of the word. One could assert that it refers to a powerful sense of self-loathing: a sense of homophobia directed at the self as written into the text. I am not saying that Koos Prinsloo was a self-loathing homophobe, but the queer subjects in most of the narratives are very critical of other queers and mostly pathologise queer sexuality.

Prinsloo identifies with the abject and the shameful about queerness and queer sexuality. On the one hand the narrative subject expresses his desire for other men but on the other he pokes fun at male-male relationships. A good case in point is the narrative about his friend, the So-Called Friend the Pop Star and the North American. The reader gets the impression that salacious, intimate details are revealed so as to mask his rejection by the North American (*Verhale* 199). The ensuing spectacle that followed the publication of *Slagplaas* when the Afrikaans singer Johannes Kerkerrel attacked the author and claimed to be the model for the So-Called Friend the Pop Star, underpins the blurry boundaries between fact and fiction but also sustains my argument that the self-shaming queer subject does not handle rejection, in whatever

3. Discussing bareback culture Dean (2009: 78-81) rephrases this to: Is the rectum a womb? The chasing of the virus, the seroconversion and the notion of breeding someone with the virus result in making “spermatic transactions the basis for a distinctive gift economy”. Noteworthy is the altered interpretations of the notion of death and birth.

form, well. It urges him to avenge himself in order to overcome his internalised sense of victimhood.

It is ironic that Koos Prinsloo, who has this constant hatred of powerful figures and the machinations of power, wields his own form of power over his “geskryfdes” (to use Riana Scheepers’s term), i.e. the people whom he has written into his text. Both Scheepers and Olivier identify the main figures whose lives have been fictionalised. The pen is wielded as the powerful instrument with which to avenge him against other, which is, in itself, not a new metafictional strategy. In this regard, Scheepers refers to Louise DeSalvo’s *Conceived with Malice: Literature as Revenge* (1994), wherein she analyses how authors like D.H. Lawrence or Virginia Woolf took revenge on people in their immediate circle to ridicule them in their works. Prinsloo, however, exonerated himself by reiterating that his work was merely fictional. The following remark by Foucault (2000: 327) regarding the subject and power is echoed here:

It soon appeared to me that, while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations that are very complex.

In a time when we speak of the death of the author, it is difficult to read Prinsloo’s work as “text without an authorial function” because of the omnipresence of the autobiographical. As manipulating metafictional author, he has, in the words of Foucault, “powers which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life” (1980: 129); he is definitely “the strategist of life and death”.

Conclusion

I have argued that throughout the trajectory of Prinsloo’s work there is a constant resistance to power discourses imposed upon the subject (be it the autobiographical narrating subject, or the fictionalised character called Koos) by a heterosexist patriarchal society.

Throughout his oeuvre one finds a tussle between a representative of power, be it the father or the president or the publisher, and a queer oppressed subject who suffers under the imposition of power. Keeping the argument by Mary Douglas (quoted in Bersani 1995: 46) in mind, namely that “the body is a model that can stand for any bounded system”, as well as that “its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious”, a reading of Prinsloo’s work comments cogently on the oppression of the queer body in the militarised eighties in South Africa. The body is subjected to the power machinations of the heteronormative society and this imposition of power already starts in the smallest unit of power in the state, namely the family.

The so-called “always already shattered queer subject” (Muñoz 2009: 91) experiences a sense of alienation at all levels of society, resulting in self-hatred and self-destruction. The diseased queer body slowly dying of AIDS is metonymic of this.⁴

The queer subject is disempowered by the Symbolic Order, the realm of the fathers, where he does not fit in because of his sexuality and his disdain for imposed order. But because he does not fit in, he also lashes out at himself, his family and in particular at other gay men with whom he interacts both as sexual partners and as acquaintances. He not only subverted power and challenged the institutional forms thereof, at both micro and macro level, but through his unique metafictional use of “reality” and “real people”, Prinsloo also exercised a form of authorial power.

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4. Sontag (1989: 109) is of the opinion that AIDS, like cancer, “does not allow romanticizing or sentimentalizing, perhaps because its association with death is too powerful”. From a heteronormative view, AIDS is seen as “a disease not only of sexual excess but of perversity”.

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