Afrikaans Literature in / and the World Republic of Letters: The Case of Koos Prinsloo and S.J. Naudé

Louise Viljoen

Summary

This article deals with the position of Afrikaans literature as a small literature in the world, with specific reference to some of Pascale Casanova's most provocative statements on the position of small literatures in her book *La République Mondiale des Lettres* (1999), translated into English as *The World Republic of Letters* (2004). The article first looks at the different meanings of the term "world literature" and the notion of a "world republic of letters" from the perspective of the small literature Afrikaans. The article then engages with Casanova's discussion of the way in which writers in small literatures position themselves in literary space through strategies of *assimilation* (integration through the dilution of original differences), *différentiation* (the insertion of difference), the *(de)politicization* of literature and translation. The article also devotes attention to the ideas of the most important critics of her work such as Prendergast and Ganguly. The article then proceeds to discuss the way in which works by the Afrikaans authors Koos Prinsloo and S.J. Naudé, who both question patriarchal and heteronormative conventions of their time, reveal the limitations of Casanova's description of small literatures. Prinsloo's short stories, published in the 1980s and 1990s, do not fit into a national tradition; they are experimental, aesthetically refined and transgressive, even though they did not circulate beyond Afrikaans. In his turn S.J. Naudé, who started publishing in Afrikaans almost thirty years after Prinsloo's debut, develops a radical, anti-nostalgic queer aesthetic which questions both the national and the global as legitimate frameworks for writing. Both these writers problematise Casanova's description of small literatures in the larger world context.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel fokus op die posisie van die Afrikaanse letterkunde as 'n klein letterkunde in die wêreld, met spesifieke verwysing na sommige van Pascale Casanova se mees provokatiewe stellings oor die posisie van klein letterkundes in haar boek *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999), in Engels vertaal as *The World Republic of Letters.* Die artikel kyk eers na die verskillende betekenisse van die term "wêreldletterkunde" en die nosie van 'n "wêreldrepubliek van die lettere" vanuit die perspektief van die klein letterkundes geskryf in Afrikaans. Die artikel tree in gesprek met Casanova se bespreking van die manier waarop skrywers in klein letterkundes hulleself in die literêre ruimte posisioneer deur strategieë van *assimilasie* (integrasie

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deur die verwatering van verskille), *differensiasie* (die ponering van verskil), die *depolitisering* van letterkunde en vertaling. Daar word ook aandag gegee aan die menings van die belangrikste kritici van haar werk soos Prendergast en Ganguly. Die artikel bespreek voorts die manier waarop die werk van die Afrikaanse skrywers Koos Prinsloo en S.J. Naudé, wat beide bevraagtekenend staan teen die patriargale en heteronormatiewe konvensies van hulle onderskeie tye, die beperkinge en tekortkominge van Casanova se beskrywing van klein letterkundes uitwys. Prinsloo se kortverhale, gepubliseer in die 1980's en 1990's, pas nie binne die raamwerk van 'n nasionale letterkunde nie; ten spyte van die feit dat hulle nie buite die grense van Afrikaans beweeg het nie, is hulle eksperimenteel, esteties verfynd en transgressief. Op sy beurt ontwikkel S.J. Naudé wat, byna dertig jaar na Koos Prinsloo se debuut, in Afrikaans begin publiseer, 'n radikale, anti-nostalgiese, queer estetika wat beide die nasionale en globale bevraagteken as legitieme raamwerke as vertrekpunt vir sy skryfwerk. Beide hierdie skrywers problematiseer dus Casanova se beskrywing van klein letterkundes binne die groter wêreldkonteks.

World Literature, the World Republic of Letters and Small Literatures

When thinking about the place that small literatures such as the literature written in Afrikaans occupy in the larger context of the world it is difficult not to be daunted by the smallness and marginality of this literature against the vast backdrop of the world. Writing literary texts in Afrikaans has been described as a "marginal activity" in a "marginal language" in a "marginal country" by S.J. Naudé (Naudé & Rautenbach 2011), one of the two writers whose work I will discuss in this article. One may thus ask why would one even consider discussing a small literature such as Afrikaans against the background of world literature. Is it not futile and foolhardy to attempt to bring a small literature written in a young language with a complicated, even compromised history into the ambit of world literature? Does one not add to the "world literature fatigue" (Jackson & De Kock 2015) which has come to beset contemporary literary studies? One possible answer would be that it has become increasingly impossible and undesirable to isolate the study of even a small literature such as that written in Afrikaans from the larger world in which it exists.

There have been many suggestions as to how one should understand or define the concept of *world literature*. Although the term is usually traced back to Goethe's reference to *Weltliteratur* in his conversations with Eckerman as well as subsequent remarks by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto,* D'Haen (2012: 1) argues that the true rise of world literature as a concept, a paradigm and a pedagogical strategy only came in the 1990s and early 2000s. As a concept it has taken on a variety of meanings and nuances. On the one end of the scale it is regarded as a collection of "classical" or canonical texts of "world standard" that circulate beyond their culture of origin and on the other end of the scale it is simply seen as the sum total of all works of literature in the world. The question of world literature as

a paradigm was raised by Franco Moretti in his "Conjectures on world literature" (2000) when he writes that it "is not an object, it's a problem, and a problem that asks for a new critical method" (Moretti 2000: 55). In a similar vein David Damrosch defines world literature not as "a set canon of texts, but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (Damrosch 2003: 281). He also makes provision for the "double refraction" texts undergo when they move from a source culture into a host or target culture (2003: 283); thus he keeps in view both the context from which the work originates and the new context into which it is inserted through translation and circulation. Damrosch is also associated with the success of world literature as a pedagogical strategy in the United States where courses in World Literature taught in translation are highly successful, sometimes to the detriment of courses in Comparative Literature which require students to read texts in their original languages.[1]

A provocative contribution to the discourse on world literature has been Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* in 1999, translated from the French and published in the US in 2004. Her work is of special interest to researchers in small literatures because she paints the world republic of letters as a competitive marketplace marked by inequality and rivalry rather than unified by the civilized exchange of cultural differences that Goethe proposed, and devotes considerable attention to the small literatures which she situates on the outer edges of her "world republic". She states unequivocally that she uses the adjective "small" in "a specific sense to mean literarily deprived" (Casanova 2004: 181). The structure of the World Republic of Letters that she describes is largely oppositional: it sets the powerful literary centres of the world (mostly in Europe and aligned with erstwhile imperial and colonial powers) which have the power to consecrate literary activity and bestow the prestige which counts as capital in world literature against the small literatures written in small(er) languages, marked by destitution and doomed to invisibility in the margins. The powerful literary spaces are those that have managed to achieve depoliticisation and are free to allow literary space to independently "determine its own laws of operation" (Casanova 2004: 37). They have freed themselves from national or nationalist concerns and enjoy the "privileges of formalism", indulging only in literary principles and values. Small literatures, on the other hand, are marked by political dependence and the reliance on national themes. They are marked by the "hegemony of realism", "a functionalist aesthetic" and "the most conservative narrative, novelistic, and poetical forms" (Casanova 2004: 194-199). A strange irony that Casanova's narrative of the "autonomy through depolicization' does not account for, is the fact that several South African writers, including some writing in Afrikaans (such as André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach and Antjie

1. See Kadir (2010: 6) on the sometimes "adversarial relationship" between comparative literature and world literature (also Figueira 2010).

Krog), gained visibility and consecration in the arena of world literature by virtue of their engagement with political themes, such as the resistance against apartheid.

In her discussion of the predicament of writers in small languages, Casanova distinguishes between two kinds of strategies they can follow, *assimilation* (integration within a dominant literary space through the "dilution or erasing of original differences") and *differentiation* ("the assertion of difference, typically on the basis of a claim to national identity"). *Assimilation* is, according to Casanova, "the lowest level of literary revolt, the obligatory itinerary of every apprentice writer from an impoverished region having no literary resources of its own" (Casanova 2004: 207); whereas the strategy of *differentiation* makes use of "decisive rupture", the exaggeration of the writer's "own differences" and "placing just the right distance between himself and a recalcitrant capital that cannot be ignored" (Casanova 2004: 219). In this category belongs what Casanova calls the "rebels" who prefer to remain in the national space or return to it after gaining fame outside that domain (the famous example being Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o), and the "revolutionaries" who manage to gain autonomy for themselves as well as the institution of literature by subverting the norm (here she mentions Beckett and Joyce).

Many of the writers from small literatures suffer the "tragedy of translated men", to use Casanova's parlance (2004: 254). For such a writer translation into a powerful language is the foremost means of literary recognition and consecration, she argues (Casanova 2004: 133). The translation of important literary texts from dominant languages is a means of accumulating literary capital for small languages, whereas the translation of a text from a small language into one of the dominant languages is a means of achieving literary existence, of acquiring a certificate of literariness (Casanova 2010: 296). She refers to this as *"littérisation"*, a process which includes "any operation – translation, self-translation, transcription, direct composition in the dominant language – by means of which a text from a literarily deprived country becomes regarded as literary by the legitimate authorities" (Casanova 2004: 136). This seems like an overstatement based on Eurocentric bias: translation into a powerful language may be the route to greater visibility and acknowledgement for a literary text in the larger world, but it is only from the perspective of the "consecrating authority" that it will be seen as a means to guarantee its literariness. A peculiarity of the Afrikaans writer's situation is that translation into English or another European language (often Dutch) and visibility in the larger world, is sometimes the means by which they become known outside the Afrikaans-speaking community in South Africa (see Van Heerden 2007).[2]

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2. The Afrikaans author Etienne van Heerden (2007) said in an interview: "[…] die Afrikaanse skrywer moet by wyse van vertaling na Engels en inter-

Another much discussed feature of Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* is her notion of the Greenwich Meridian of literature which not only "makes it possible to estimate the relative aesthetic distance from the center of the world of letters of all those who belong to it", but also constitutes "the present of literary creation, which is to say modernity" (Casanova 2004: 88). In a later essay she describes the Greenwich Meridian of literature as "the place where the measurement of literary time – that is, the assessment of aesthetic modernity – is crystallised, contested, elaborated. What is considered modern here, at any given moment, will be declared to be the 'present': texts that will make their mark', capable of modifying the current aesthetic norms. These works will serve, for a time at least, as the units of measurement within a specific chronology, models of comparison for subsequent productions" (Casanova 2005: 75). Paris, inevitably, is where the Greenwich Meridian of literature was located until at least the 1960s – to quote Prendergast's somewhat cynical rendering of Casanova's view: the French capital was the "de-nationalized locus of the Universal, home to the Classic, guardian of Taste, resolver of Quarrels, arbiter of the New, host to the Avant-Garde" (Prendergast 2004: 9). Despite its complex history of taste and prejudice, Casanova also enlists the Nobel Prize for literature to demonstrate the centrality of Paris as consecrator of literary value, referring to the "structural complementarity obtaining between the Nobel Prize and the power of consecration enjoyed by Paris" and claiming that the Swedish Academy "endorsed, ratified, and made public the judgments of Paris, consecrating those writers who had been discovered and promoted by its publishers and critics" (Casanova 2004: 153). In an article on "Literature as a world" published in 2005 she identifies the "(almost) unanimous belief in the universality of the Nobel Prize for literature" as one of the objective indicators that a world literary space does indeed exist and describes the prize as "one of the few truly international literary consecrations, a unique laboratory for the designation and definition of what is universal in literature" (Casanova 2005: 74). As South Africa's history of Nobel Prize winners for literature (Nadine Gordimer in 1991, J.M. Coetzee in 2003) shows, it is only the select few who are consecrated in this way.

In the same article, "Literature as a world", Casanova gives further definition to the concept of a "world literary space". This space mediates between

nasionale blootstelling 'n posisie binne die Suid-Afrikaanse kultuurlewe bekom. Almal is dit nie beskore nie. Soos met baie literature word net 'n hand vol skrywers na Engels vertaal. Wanneer jy vertaal is, is dit dikwels 'n moeilike reis van ontheemding na 'n soort ongemaklike stieftuiste." ["[…] the Afrikaans author has to obtain a place in South African cultural life by means of translation into English and international exposure. It is not destined for everyone. As is the case in many literatures only a small number of writers are translated into English. When you have been translated it is often a difficult journey of estrangement to a kind of uncomfortable step-home."]

"internal criticism" which posits the autonomy of the text and "external criticism" which reduces the literary to the political and passes over the aesthetic, formal or stylistic characteristics of literature (Casanova 2005: 72). Engaging with this mediating space will set literary studies "on a course that would be both internal and external; in other words, a criticism that could give a unified account of, say, the evolution of poetic forms, or the aesthetic of the novel, and their connection to the political, economic and social world – including telling us how, by a very long (indeed historical) process, the link gets broken in the most autonomous regions of the world" (Casanova 2005: 72). Interestingly enough she does not define "world literary space" as a space into which only the most successful authors are admitted, but rather as one formed by "all the inhabitants of the Republic of Letters, each of them differentially situated within their own national literary space" (Casanova 2005: 81). Each writer's position is necessarily "a double one, twice defined", in the sense that "each writer is situated once according to the position he or she occupies in a national space, and then once again according to the space that this occupies within the world space" (Casanova 2005: 81). If the national space is of no significance in the larger and more prestigious literary world, she implies, the writer in a small literature is doomed to remain invisible in the larger world.

It is not unexpected that Casanova's views have attracted criticism from various perspectives. Critics have, amongst others, taken issues with her focus on the model of competition between national literatures ("there are variables other than nation and relations other than competition", wrote Prendergast 2004: 12), her narrow definition of the term "literature" which excludes oral literatures as well as other conceptions of literature that one finds for example in India and China (Prendergast 2004: 22), her failure to acknowledge the assimilation of translations from Persian, Arabic and Indian literatures into the Western tradition from the 1770s onwards (Mufti 2010: 459) and the assumption that literatures in the periphery of the world are "primarily constituted in relation to dominant European literary centers or generic forms, [rather than] in specific historical struggles with other discourses of the nation, other emergent and residual formations such as those of oral traditions, popular culture, and more recently the culture industry" (López 2011: 80).

Especially pertinent to my reading of Prinsloo and Naudé's work is Debjani Ganguly's critique. She argues that Casanova's account of world literary space is outdated and does not sufficiently take into account the changes in the world order brought about by the fall of the Soviet regime and the Berlin Wall that signalled the end of the Cold War era. She proposes that one should read the literature of the post-Cold War era through a different optic, namely one that "traces difference and connectivity – between genres, themes, styles, chronologies – across discrete translocal sites" (2012: 250). She finds Casanova's view of world literature does not reflect current trends and criticises her for basing her view of world literature on a model that dates from

the 19th century in which languages are matched to nations (and their empires), with England and France acting as the undisputed centres in an "imperial-national model where emerging literatures from newly liberated nations continue to clamour for space and recognition amidst the post-imperial dominance of established English and French literary traditions" (Ganguly 2012: 254). The post-1989 period, she writes, "has been labelled the era of intense globalisation via a technologically advanced capitalist and information expansion and the age of unprecedented transnational networks of migrancy, violence and terrorism" (Ganguly 2012: 252). This world, she contends with reference to the work of Hardt and Negri, can no longer be understood in terms of the imperial centres that extended their power and influence over foreign territory, but should rather be seen in terms of the emergence of a "network power" which includes "dominant nations along with supranational institutions, major capitalist corporations and related powers" (Hardt & Negri, in Ganguly 2012: 252). Literarily speaking, this period has also witnessed "unprecedented forms of literary exchange through mass scale translational activities in the major world languages – exchanges that herald new transcultural literary spaces and that counter misguided globalism heralding visions of a monochromatic, unified, homogeneous world" (Ganguly 2012: 253). The post-Cold War era has also witnessed the production of literary works that are "immanently global" in the sense that they are "generated and informed by political, cultural and linguistic forces not limited to any single nation or region" (Ganguly 2012: 253). At the same time a large proportion of what is termed *world writing* is produced in the migratory and diasporic spaces in the world. She concludes that "Casanova is unable to theorise a global-local dynamic in terms of a metaphoric of transmission, exchange and collaboration, in terms of unforeseen matings, crossbreeding and cross-braiding where Europe is one important node among others and not the final destination" (Ganguly 2012: 257).

Casanova and Ganguly's opposing views will help me structure my comparison between Koos Prinsloo and S.J. Naudé, both Afrikaans writers who explore gay sexuality and its relation to patriarchy in their work. Prinsloo wrote and published his work in the era before the end of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of apartheid. Even though his final two volumes of stories were published in the early 1990s, they represent an intensification of his earlier preoccupations rather than a radical change or new departure. His texts were firmly located in the national space and remained there because they were not widely translated. Naudé writes in a different world and time. He published his first text in 2011, more than twenty years into the post-Cold War era, against the background of a world marked by transnational movements, intercultural exchange and a rampant consumerism driven by capitalism. By virtue of translation into English, Dutch and French his work has also begun to circulate in the larger world.

2 Koos Prinsloo in the World Republic of Letters

Koos Prinsloo was born in Kenya in 1957, but his family returned to South Africa in 1962 shortly before Kenya's independence in 1963. After finishing school he was conscripted to do military service in 1976 before going on to do a BA degree at the University of Pretoria and becoming a journalist. These are just some of the biographical facts that would impact his work and feature in several of his short stories. He published his first two volumes of short stories, *Jonkmanskas [Young man's cupboard]* (1982) and *Die hemel help ons [Heaven help us]* (1987), against the backdrop of the political violence and paranoia accompanying the two States of Emergency, the first declared in July 1985 and the second in June 1986. The two volumes published in the early 1990s, *Slagplaas [Abbatoir]* (1992) and *Weifeling [Wavering]* (1993), reflected in their turn the violence and chaos that dragged on in the interim period between 1990 and the first democratic election in 1994.

The persistent concern of his work was the abuse of power perpetrated by a sexist, racist and heteronormative patriarchy as manifested in the structures of the family, the state and literary life. The impact of his work on Afrikaans literary life was explosive: his work broke new ground with its uncompromising portrayal of gay sexuality, its vicious attack on all forms of power abuse and its brutal merging of fact with fiction. On the other hand his work had little impact outside the Afrikaans literary system, even though Shaun de Waal (2008) referred to him as "one of the most powerful writers South Africa has ever produced" in a review of the recent re-publication of all his stories in one volume. Despite this view his work was only selectively reviewed in the English language press and not widely translated (only one or two stories translated into English made it into anthologies of South African short stories). *Die hemel help ons* and *Slagplaas* were translated into Dutch, but the extent of its influence in the Netherlands is unclear. Even though Prinsloo's work is mentioned in queer studies that focus on Southern Africa (see Heyns 1998, Spurlin 2001, Munro 2013), the books (Scheepers 1998, Olivier 2008a) and academic articles on his work were mostly written in Afrikaans. Prinsloo can thus not be regarded as one of Casanova's "assimilated" or "translated" men who manage to attain visibility and validity in the word republic of letters.

As an Afrikaans writer Prinsloo is thus firmly located in one of the remote margins of world literary space. He left behind a small oeuvre, written in a small language; he also published his work during a time that South Africa and Afrikaans was isolated from the world by a cultural boycott. His work was also isolated *within* South Africa and the Afrikaans literary system. One of his first stories in a student magazine in 1979 fell victim to a ban by the student authorities as well as the Publications Board. The spectre of censorship, especially pre-censorship by publishers, haunted him for the rest of his writing career (see Olivier 2008b). The publisher of his first volume

Jonkmanskas was not prepared to publish his second volume *Die hemel help ons* because it included a crude statement directed by a soldier character at the then prime minister P.W. Botha. This was also the reason why the *Rapport* literary prize that was awarded to the volume, was retracted by this newspaper's board of directors. The manuscript of his third volume *Slagplaas* was rejected by two publishers because of its explicit sexual content before it was taken on by a third. His fourth and final volume *Weifeling* was published by the small independent publisher Hond and featured two stories in which Prinsloo exposed two "agents" of the literary system involved in his literary career: his mentor Hennie Aucamp in the story "A portrait of the artist" and the publisher Danie van Niekerk in the story "Die jas" ["The coat"]. His isolation within the Afrikaans-speaking world can perhaps also be attributed to the fact that many readers were not literarily equipped to deal with the transgressive nature of his work. Prinsloo himself acknowledged that his work was meant for a sophisticated and educated reader: "Ja, maar die gevaar is dan altyd dat die boek in mense se hande beland op wie die boek nie gemik is nie. Dit is 'n gesofistikeerde letterkundige werk. Dit kan baie maklik verkeerd gelees word. En daai voortvarende lesers loop hulself lelik vas, omdat hulle nie oor die equipment beskik om die werk na behore te lees nie. Ek is nié 'n middelmootskrywer nie." ["Yes, but there is always the danger that the book will land in the hands of people for which it was not meant. It is a sophisticated literary work. It can very easily be read in the wrong way. And those impetuous readers will face difficulties because they do not have the equipment to read the book as it should be. I am not a middlebrow writer."] (Prinsloo & Hattingh 1993).[3] Another external factor that could have contributed to Prinsloo's limited exposure is his early death of an AIDS-related illness at the age of 36 in 1994 which terminated a literary career that might perhaps have gained visibility in a larger world.

As mentioned earlier, Casanova argues that writers in a small literature tend to take "recourse to a functionalist aesthetic" and "conservative narrative, novelistic and poetic forms" because they have not achieved autonomy from the political sphere. This is both true and untrue of Prinsloo's work. Even though Afrikaans as a small literature could be characterised as a nationalist (not a national) literature in its early years, it became a largely counter-hegemonic literature from the sixties onwards with most of its prominent writers turning against the apartheid state, even though many of its literary institutions (publishers, prize committees, academic departments and the like) remained politically cautious. Prinsloo's work was openly opposed to the patriarchal order that found its pinnacle in the apartheid state, but also manifested in the nuclear family, the military order, the literary system and heteronormative society. Olivier (2008a: 209) writes: "Die emosioneel inadekwate geweldenaar wat as biologiese vader in Prinsloo se tekste verskyn,

3. All translations in square brackets were done by the author of the article.

is emblematies van 'n reeks ander vaderfigure, in 'n samelewing wat in *Slagplaas* uitgebeeld word as 'n plek van voortgesette manlike geweld en futiele hunkering." ["The emotionally inadequate tyrant who appears as the biological father in Prinsloo's texts, is emblematic of a series of other father figures, in a society that is depicted in *Slagplaas* as a space of continued male violence and futile longing."] Especially in the stories depicting the experience of conscripted soldiers ("Fighting for peace" in *Jonkmanskas*, "'Grensverhaal'" in *Die hemel help ons*), the State of Emergency ("Die hemel help ons" in *Die hemel help ons*), police brutality ("Die wond" in *Slagplaas*), political oppression ("Sy het nie 'n geluid gemaak nie" in *Slagplaas*) and homophobic violence ("Haasjag" in *Weifeling*), it is clear that Prinsloo's writing is by no means depoliticised.

At the same time it is not true that Prinsloo made use of a "functionalist aesthetic" and "conservative novelistic forms". One could even argue that his work came close to Casanova's Greenwich Meridian of literature, that is the standard which helps us determine a work's aesthetic modernity or proximity to what is deemed modern, avant-garde and not outmoded (Casanova 2004: 88). Whether Leon de Kock's (see Jackson & De Kock 2015) statement that Koos Prinsloo is "the inaugurator of postmodern fiction in any language in South Africa (even before Ivan Vladislavic)" is true or not, one can say that Prinsloo's transgressive use of the techniques associated with postmodern fiction positions him close to what counted as "aesthetic modernity" in the larger world in the 1980s and 1990s. I refer here to the forms of writing influenced by poststructuralist thought, especially the ideas of thinkers like Derrida, Barthes, Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard, and characterised by the writerly techniques associated with postmodernism, for example the questioning of master narratives, the emphasis on the textual nature of reality and the text as language construct, the use of metafictional strategies and the erasure of the borders between fact and fiction. His thematic focus on patriarchal oppression and the abuse of power was similarly common in the realm of world literature. Also in line with international trends were his stories about HIV/AIDS: the first AIDS novel in the US was published in 1983 (see Reed 1993); Prinsloo's first AIDS story, "Die dood van Karel Viviers" appeared in 1987. Prinsloo's contemporaneity is furthermore demonstrated by his range of intertextual references and allusions to global occurrences (the destruction of Dresden and Hamburg in World War II, the Stonewall riots and the Tianaenmen protests).

An especially distinctive feature of Prinsloo's work was the tendency towards writing self-reflexive metafiction. His oeuvre includes stories embedded in other stories (the most prominent examples being "In die kake van die dood" ["In the jaws of death"], "Die jonkmanskas" ["The young man's cupboard"], "And our fathers that begat us" and "A Portrait of the Artist"); stories which demonstrate the author's inability to proceed with or complete the story as planned ("Die eende" ["The ducks"]); a story in which the text is

interrupted and overwritten by (real) news reports about the State of Emergency generated by his computer ("Die hemel help ons" ["Heaven Help Us"]); stories in which he questions himself ("Klaarpraat" ["Done With"]); and stories in which he taunts and offends the reader ("Die poort van hemelse vrede" ["The Gate of Heavenly Peace"]). The multiple framings that one finds in his stories clearly mark the different points at which one fictional construct is replaced by another. Even though only detailed analyses of these stories can show the multiple and varied effects they have, it is clear that the disruptive metafictional strategies formed part of his struggle to overcome the ontological barriers between fact and fiction in order to serve a context-specific political agenda.

This was also achieved by inserting factual elements into the fictional world of his stories. Prinsloo uses textual fragments from outside the domain of fiction such as handwritten letters ("By die skryf van aantekeninge oor 'n reis" ["On the Writing of Notes About a Journey"]), newspaper articles ("In die kake van die dood" ["In the Jaws of Death"]), photographs of family members ("And our Fathers that Begat us"), letters written by family, friends and his mentor ("And our Fathers that Begat us", "Die wond" ["The Wound"] and "A Portrait of the Artist"), the obituary of the author's grandfather ("And our Fathers that Begat us"), passages from South African Military Law ("'Grensverhaal'" ["Border Story"]) and a passport photo of his mother ("Die affair" ["The Affair"]). Especially controversial was the inclusion of references to recognisable people and the insertion of (auto)biographical detail in his stories. He was also not averse to write himself into his stories (the character is often named Koos and characterised by verifiable auto-biographical detail) and to include intimate and revealing details about himself (including his HIV status in "Die storie van my pa" ["The story of my father"]). Particularly contentious was his inclusion of family members (his father and mother) and certain well-known South African figures under names such as the Pop Star (Ralph Rabie/Johannes Kerkorrel), the Older Writer (Hennie Aucamp) and the Publisher (Tafelberg Publishers' Danie van Niekerk). The inclusion of these people were not only controversial because of the perceived intrusion of their privacy and the lack of discretion about their sexuality, but also because these stories painted them as representative of power structures in South African society that the author fell victim to.

Massyn (1995: 3-4) writes that the "ethical thrust of Prinsloo's subversive practice may […] be described as the consequence of a will to reveal – a coming out of the closet – that extends far beyond the mere assertion of 'deviant' sexuality. Henceforth, nothing will thwart the writer's need to confess and display the 'truth' of homosexual experience, hypocrisy will no longer hood (or deflect) the observing eye". Massyn links this to the "bleak revelatory practices" of predecessors such as Jean Genet, Hervé Guibert and North American writers such as David Leavitt. He also points to what he calls a complicating factor in the "demystificatory practice" of Prinsloo's work:

"The emotional force of the oedipal rebellion depicted in many of these stories flows partly from the ambivalence of their critique. […] the fractious son in his various guises is never simply at a comfortable distance from the world he criticizes. He is both inside and outside it; despite his fervour, he is deeply invested in the objects of his anger" (Massyn 1995: 5). He is thus of the opinion that Prinsloo's work typifies the "complicitous critique" identified by Hutcheon as characteristic of the postmodernist work of art (Massyn 1995: 5). Olivier (2008a: 1), instead, argues that it is an oversimplification to read Prinsloo's work as postmodernist. He maintains that techniques such as the thematisation of representation and the erosion of the border between fact and fiction are driven by a deeply personal and distinctive logic: "Die logika, wat herlei kan word na sy vroegste gepubliseerde tekste, is gewortel in die ontdekking van die skryfdaad as 'n vorm van selfverkenning en selfopenbaring, en in die groeiende oortuiging dat die verswyging, onderdrukking of selfs fiksionalisering van die werklikheid 'n vorm van magsbruik is" ["This logic, which can be taken back to his earliest published texts, is lodged in the discovery of writing as an exploration and discovery of the self, and in the growing conviction that the concealment, repression or even fictionalisation of reality is an abuse of power"] (Olivier 2008a: 2). This suggests that the postmodernist writerly techniques, which I read as an indication of Prinsloo's proximity to "aesthetic modernity", were fundamental to Prinsloo's writerly project and should not be seen as an aesthetic experiment with no political traction. This is borne out by Prinsloo's remark that "[p]ost-modern techniques can become a game if they are not employed to overcome the barriers between fact and fiction" (quoted in Olivier 2008a: 2).

Writing about the marginality of Afrikaans literature in general and citing Prinsloo's work, Philip John (1998: 204) concludes that it is possible to classify Afrikaans literature as a marginal or minor literature while at the same time acknowledging its "modernity", to see it as "simultaneously affiliated to 'universal', 'elite' or 'modern' aesthetic expression and to a particularistic, 'marginal' expressive base". The insistence on its "particularity" as a minor literature can help it to "perform a valuable anti-totalisting function, problematising the elaboration of all-inclusive frameworks", John (1998: 204) writes. Commenting on Afrikaans literature's place in the world, Leon de Kock states that certain writers in Afrikaans such as Eben Venter, S.J. Naudé, Etienne van Heerden and Marlene van Niekerk are "queering" Afrikaans by producing a counter-discourse within the larger context of Afrikaans literature (see Jackson and De Kock 2015). Koos Prinsloo's small and disruptive oeuvre can certainly be added to the list of writings that "queer" Afrikaans literature. The specificity of its combination of aesthetic refinement (reminiscent of large, well-endowed literary spaces), the inward focus on the political particularities of South Africa and the experience of being "quarantined" within a marginal language and literature, can perhaps be seen as a way of queering the notion of world literature as a hegemonic construct rooted in political, economic and

cultural power. It is an unfortunate paradox that his disruptive work remained out of sight of the larger world because it has not yet been widely translated.

3 S.J. Naudé and the Post-Cold War era

In contrast with Koos Prinsloo the writer S.J. Naudé's literary career unfolded in the post-Cold War era. Naudé grew up in Pretoria in the 1970s and 1980s; after graduating from the University of Pretoria, he also studied Law at Cambridge and Columbia University before pursuing a career as lawyer in New York and London. He returned to South Africa in 2009 to do a masters degree in Creative Writing. He published his first volume of short stories *Alfabet van die voëls* in 2011 and its English version *The Alphabet of Birds* in 2014. His novel *Die derde spoel* and its English version *The Third Reel* appeared simultaneously in 2017. Naudé translates his own work from Afrikaans into English, but also admits to writing "near-simultaneously in both languages" (Naudé 2015: 4). He is fully conscious of the complexities associated with writing in a small language, saying: "There is, of course, something perverse and exhilarating about refusing to be understood, about seeking out the margins. About turning one's back on the rules governing the accumulation of capital (whether symbolic, intellectual, or monetary). Writing in Afrikaans is in that sense perhaps perverse. A kind of refusal. A bid for disappearance, even" (Naudé 2015: 3). He goes on, however, to say that "the bid for disappearance is ultimately eclipsed by the conflicting urge to engage with the world beyond the relatively isolated Afrikaans one, which necessarily requires translation" (Naudé 2015: 4). His position thus differs from Prinsloo's. Prinsloo wrote in a time when South Africa was culturally isolated and gays had to fight for their rights. Naude writes in a radically different world: it is a post-apartheid world in which gay rights are entrenched in the South African constitution; it is also a post-national world in which transnational movement has increased substantially.

Naudé's work thus reflects the transnational shifts, flows and movements distinctive of the post-Cold War era. It is a world of "collaboration and connectivity" (Ganguly 2012: 255) in which literary texts are often "born translated" (Walkowitz 2015). The stories in his first volume *The Alphabet of Birds* are set in locations as diverse as London, Milan, Berlin, Vietnam, Japan, Italy, Dubai and Phoenix as well as Pretoria, Cape Town, the rural North Eastern Cape and Lesotho. The characters move to and fro between South Africa and the larger world; many of them in a diasporic movement that leave them either troubled and unhappy or exhilarated and bemused by the freedom of having left South Africa behind. The stories also deal with the problem of forging a new aesthetic that would be appropriate for the new era: in the stories "VNLS" and "Mother's Quartet", for instance, the character Ondien tries in vain to produce a kind of music that would reflect the dissonances of

the new global order. In the conversation about Afrikaans literature as a world literature with Leon de Kock, Jeanne Marie Jackson writes: "In a writer like Eben Venter or S.J. Naudé you see someone who is acutely aware of their own cultural moribundity *even* as they're swept up in what on the surface is a very 'global' life: they are moving forward and looking backward at the same time. This makes me think, that counter-intuitively, the best-poised traditions to be 'world literature' are *not* the ones that seem to be most global. It's actually the opposite: no one is quite sure where they stand, these days, in a world of gridlocked hyper-mediation. The sense of mundane dislocation that many Afrikaans writers feel is thus pointedly contemporary. The smallest claims become, at their best, the most revealing of broader conditions" (Jackson & De Kock 2015).

I will focus here on Naudé's novel *The Third Reel* in which the protagonist is a young Afrikaner, Etienne Nieuwenhuis, who is 22 years old when he flees South Africa to escape military conscription in April 1986. The world Etienne escapes from resonates strongly with the one Prinsloo describes in his first two volumes *Jonkmanskas* and *Die hemel help ons*. Etienne's father is an Afrikaner nationalist, a member of the Broederbond, a businessman, hunter and by implication a militarist (the same images of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity that Prinsloo also invokes), who renounces him after he flees the country to escape the draft as well as the future his father has laid out for him.

The novel's first part, "Revolution of the Children", is set in London and dated April to December 1986. After arriving in London, Etienne does everything in his power to disengage himself from any claims that South Africa may have on him. He avoids the letters his father and mother send him: "It is troubling to him, these cracks through which South Africa remains visible. He stops opening them" (61).[4] In one of his only responses to his mother he writes that he is relieved that he managed to escape South Africa: "*I am renouncing it, that Republic of Dust. I'm glad I'm now a criminal there. Never again do I have to set foot there.* He is rewiring himself, he continues. He doesn't need help, whether from her or his father. And he doubts whether he will ever write again" (48). He also resists attempts by the political activist Brent who wants to engage him in the freedom struggle in South Africa, telling him: "'South Africa washes over me like a cold river on a strange continent.' […] 'I'm a stranger to that country. That place and her brutality have nothing to do with me. To give it up, to disown it – that is also something. It is also a 'no'." (104).

His arrival in London coincides with his sexual liberation: the first pages of the novel describe what is presumably his first sexual encounter with a man (cf. "It didn't surprise Etienne, the insistence of a man's lips against his own for the first time", 13). It is an experience that prepares him for what lies

4. All page references in this third part of the article are to: Naudé, S.J. 2017. *The Third Reel.* Cape Town: Umuzi.

ahead: "His old flesh has had to yield to something harder, bronzelike. Something that can be polished to a cold sheen. He is ready for the New City. His body is a radar, his skin a new country, his heart a shiny machine" (15). This reference to his skin as a new country suggests that he will renounce all national affiliations and take the body as his new fatherland (and perhaps also mother tongue). In London Etienne becomes part of a subculture that opposes the materialist values of the Thatcher era: he experiences their bacchantic experiments with drugs, the music and art they produce, the communes in which they live, the gardens they plant and the (vegetarian) food they eat. As a drummer Etienne relates to the music of gay musicians like Bronski Beat's Jimmy Sommerville, thinking back with disdain on the music of the *Voëlvry* musicians that he left behind in South Africa. After several fleeting affairs he falls in love with the German installation artist Axel, a love affair that will become central to his life. Their relationship takes him even further away from his past: "They don't talk about parents, family or places of birth. About schools, homes or childhood friends. They are comets in deep space, falling smoothly. They grant each other the oxygen-free universe. And all the light of its suns" (58).

Etienne enrols for a film course and after a seminar on lost or "ghost" films he becomes involved in a quest to find the three lost reels of a film called *Berliner Chronik,* made in the early 1930s by a Jewish filmmaker and based on Walter Benjamin's memories of his childhood in Berlin. It is Axel who alerts him to the existence of this film because his blind grandmother was involved in its production and still possesses one of the reels. He finds the first reel of the film in England, but at the end of the first part of the novel Axel has to leave for Germany after which he disappears without a trace. At this point Etienne feels as if he too has disappeared: "A needle in all the world's haystacks. That is Axel, now. And he, Etienne, too. They have both disappeared" (135).

The second part of the novel, "Deep Archive", is dated October 1987 to May 1988 and set in East Berlin where Etienne goes to study at a film school although his real aim is to search for the second and third reels of the film and to find Axel. Etienne eventually escapes to West Berlin where he becomes a member of an industrial rock band. This part of the novel catalogues the punk and industrial rock scene of the late 1980s as well as the band's attempts to develop queer forms of music that will question and radicalise stale existing forms. Their band is called *Stunde Null* (zero hour) and their music comes down to "a blunt scream" (241) with which Etienne attempts to obliterate his South African past. In the band's most intense moments he feels that he comes close "(t)o letting his father's face dissolve into the noise, and his mother's. To diminishing the sun of his continent of origin. In these moments he sometimes also sees a vision: of an angel dragging its wings backwards through a city, and the rubble that remains – shattered gargoyles, the marble limbs of statues, the shards of fountains" (241). The latter is a reference to

Benjamin's Angel of History which resonates with the Benjamin motto of the novel: "*There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism"* (7). Etienne eventually finds Axel, living in abject conditions with two drug addicts, literally and figuratively scarred by a year spent in prison after he tried to kill his abusive father, shortly after finding out that his mother committed suicide.

The third part of the novel is dated April to October 1990, thus after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall. It is titled "Laboratory", perhaps to indicate that Etienne is experimenting with a new way of life and a new identity. Etienne and Axel travel to South Africa to see Etienne's mother who is terminally ill with brain cancer; they fly into Pretoria and then take her on a nostalgic trip to the place in Natal where she grew up. The fact that his mother lost her ability to use language and that her speech is garbled, is indicative of Etienne's severance from his past; like his family and fatherland, his mother tongue Afrikaans (which comes to him only now and then during his time in Europe) is losing its hold on him. (It is not for nothing that his surname is Nieuwenhuis which literally means "new house".) When Etienne receives the news that his mother has died shortly after he and Axel have returned to Germany, he breaks all ties with South Africa: "There was nothing left for him in South Africa now; he would not travel there again" (316).

Even though Etienne cuts himself off from his country of birth, it is while they are in South Africa that he and Axel share the stories of their respective lives with each other for the first time. It is only after these revelations that the silences, which plagued their faltering attempt to rekindle their relationship in Berlin (301), come to an end. Axel admits to being the steering hand behind Etienne's search for the lost reels of the *Berliner Chronik* because he knew "how urgent [Etienne's] need was to exchange [his] childhood for something else" (314). After this Etienne and Axel lead a life of serene contentment in Berlin, even though it has become clear that Axel is terminally ill and that he will not recover. They practice their art again and become "guerilla gardeners", who are eventually taken up in "a new community" (324), free from their respective pasts and engaged in building new lives for themselves. After it emerges that Axel's grandmother is still alive, Etienne travels to see her in Buenos Aires to find the third reel of the film but it turns out that she does not have it. She too has lost the power of coherent speech and is in a state of dementia. While in Buenos Aires, Etienne receives the news that Axel has died and realises that Axel has planned his absence. In the novel's final scene, Etienne "sees" Axel in a vision of light which leads one to conclude that the novel can – to a certain extent – be read as a hommage to Etienne's love for Axel.

In response to the question why an author writing in the expanding world of 2017 would set his novel in the 1980s and early 1990s, one can venture several answers. One response could be that it provides an opportunity to give a perspective on the oppressive regimes of the 1980s: apartheid South Africa,

Thatcherite Britain and the Soviet regime in East Germany. Another could be that the 1980s were precisely the time in which one could disengage oneself radically from the (national) framework in which you were born to experiment with other paradigms and new identities. It was also a period in which the "future" still lay ahead, a period in which one could still fight for freedom from fascist regimes, a period in which the hope for a new start had not yet been contaminated by the events that followed the euphoria of the early 1990s. In a review of Hennie Aucamp's anthology of gay writing, *Lendetaal [Loin Language],* Naudé (2012) wrote about the "more complex and radical strategies of the queer project" which are "about resistance against assimilation, about the rounding out of queer identity into an ideology of resistance that goes further than sexual orientation", in which "assimilation into an existing social and political order is refused" and "traditional views of the body and sexuality are undermined". In the same piece he writes: "Queering undermines the hegemony of the market system and the illusion of demcracy. The methodologies of subversion involve a radical aesthetic and a refusal of control, a self-immunisation against consumer culture" (Naudé 2012).[5]

To my mind Naudé's novel is the fulfilling of just such a project. Its protagonist Etienne refuses to be assimilated by existing social and political systems: neither Pretoria nor London or Berlin succeed in conquering or nationalising him. His "homeland" is not a country or a language, but the body and his love for Axel which ironically ends in the latter's death (one is reminded of the words in the novel's first chapter: "His body is a radar, his skin a new country"). This involves a radical and counter-nostalgic queer aesthetic that refuses to be assimilated (to use one of Casanova's words) in either the national framework or the world republic of letters to stand defiantly on its own. In a speech preceding the publication of the *The Third Reel* Naudé said the following about his own writing: "En iewers tussen voorwaardelike nostalgie en radikale antinostalgie kom jy te lande. Dit gaan, vermoed jy terwyl jy die pen volg, oor hoe jy aan die beklemming en brutaliteit van hierdie plek, hierdie land met sy gapings en diskontinuïteite, kan ontsnap, maar juis in en déúr Afrikaans […] En dan, nog verder anderkant die horison, wink plekloosheid, en iets soos tááloosheid." ["And you arrive somewhere between conditional nostalgia and radical antinostalgia. It is, you suspect as you follow your pen, about how you can escape the strangulation and brutality of this place, this country with its gaps and discontinuities, but especially in and through Afrikaans […] And then, even further away behind the horizon, placelessness beckons, and something like languagelessness"] (Naudé 2016). It is my contention that *The Third Reel* is even more radical in its anti-nostalgic sentiments and desire to go beyond place and language, than Naudé proposes in his speech.

5. The review of Aucamp's *Lendetaal* was written in Afrikaans. The quoted passages were translated into English by the author of the article.

Even though he depicts a pre-Cold War world (to use Ganguly's point of reference) in his novel, he writes in a post-Cold War era which he seems to think no longer holds the hope that the wild, murky and precarious 1980s held. Naudé says the following about the 1980s in an interview after the publication of his novel: "utopian expectations were then still possible: one could still imagine other kinds of societies in which radical freedom would be the order of the day. Early in the 21st century one is less optimistic. And not only because authoritarian politics is again emerging in the era of Trump and Brexit, but especially because we are anaesthetised by an all-coopting consumer culture and an increasingly radical form of capitalism (in spite of all predictions about its demise)" (Naudé & Meyer 2017).[6] This novel, written in Afrikaans but set in Europe, radically dismissive of national affiliation and intent on queering a global consumer culture, does not fit into Casanova's template with its "conceptual dependence on a market and nation metaphor" (Ganguly 2012: 252). It does everything in its power to fashion an aesthetic that will "queer" the notion that literature or art should be beholden to either the space of the nation or that of a world republic of letters that was built on the political and economic power of empire.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to track the way in which the work by two Afrikaans authors can be read against the backdrop of world literature, and what a view from a marginal outpost and a marginal language can contribute to the discussion of constructs such as Casanova's World Republic of Letters. It was an attempt to think about the way in which writers from a small literature might try to "queer" world literature, even though the realities of being a writer in a small literature may prove daunting in many different ways. Both writers challenge dominant heteronormative and patriarchal conventions, but also reveal the limitations of Casanova's categories and generalisations. Prinsloo's work does not fall back on the traditional national forms of writing but rather displays strongly experimental and transgressive features. Casanova's model does not seem to provide for a writer, who remained resolutely "local" as Prinsloo did, pursuing a sophisticated aesthetic that emerges precisely in response to what she would call "deprived" literary circumstances. Naudé's work, especially his novel *The Third Reel,* deconstructs the validity of both the national and the global as frameworks for a writer by proposing an aesthetic that questions the logic of both the nation and the world system in which literature becomes commodified.

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6. The interview was published in Afrikaans. The quoted passages were translated into English by the author of the article.

Writing about the position of minor literatures within the larger world from the perspective of small European literatures such as Dutch, Theo D'Haen (2013: 7) sounds a more skeptical note when he comes to the conclusion that there is little chance that writers from these literatures will be able to enter the world market and be included in the anthologies used to teach World Literature: "The truth simply seems to be that in any 'major' history of the world's literatures there is no room for 'minor' literatures unless they serve 'major' interests." Contrary to Casanova who attributes an important place to European literature in her world republic, D'Haen sees a "predominantly Anglo and US-American centered world literature" appearing, with less and less attention given to European literature and more to new "major players on the world's stage demographically, economically, politically, culturally, militarily even and […] among which the United States positions itself at least in ambition as arbiter and leader if not power broker". His conclusion that "in this case too, culture follows trade and money", suggests that it is all but impossible for writers from a small literature such as the one written in Afrikaans to enter into the realm of world literature.

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Louise Viljoen
Universiteit van Stellenbosch
lv@sun.ac.za