

Crafting popular imaginaries: Stella Blakemore and Afrikaner nationalism

by

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between literature and society in the context of the emergence in South Africa in the 1930s of Afrikaner nationalism spearheaded by Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia and aimed at crafting an 'Afrikaner nation'. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson's analysis demonstrates the interrelatedness of print-capitalism, language – specifically the vernacular and the national print-language – and the interests of the intelligentsia in the development of texts, and thus opens up creative possibilities for linking the study of nationalism with the study of literature.

The micro level study foregrounds the life history of Stella Blakemore, an author of popular fiction for children. Children's literature is literature written for and circulated among children that is, for that reason, imbued with particular social significance, and therefore scrutinised, censored and controlled in particular ways. Popular children's literature has not received much scholarly attention in relation to the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism. Whilst Blakemore's series books, the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan*, have achieved iconic status, surprisingly little is known about this author and about the production of these texts. The study offers a glimpse of the life history of a complex and perplexing figure in the Afrikaans literary scene in relation to her writing, her interaction with members and sectors of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, her relationship with her country of birth, and her multiple identities as woman, Afrikaner, exile, South African, and world traveller.

Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, the study poses a question about whether Blakemore can be regarded as an organic intellectual. Following from Bourdieu, it is argued that an author's *habitus* is instrumental in the production of fictional texts. In turn, as Charles Taylor illuminates, such texts have the ability to create a shared social imaginary, a way in which ordinary people interpret their social surroundings.

Whilst Blakemore shared a class position with the Afrikaner intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie mobilising around Afrikaner nationalism, she was never part of the inner circle. J.L. van Schaik publishers were explicitly committed to the cause of Afrikaner nationalism, and at times subsidised texts in Afrikaans, but popular

children's fiction does not seem to have been part of their core project. As a result, Blakemore retained virtually full control over the contents, bar one requirement: that her books had to be written in Afrikaans and could not be translated into English. Blakemore spent most of her life away from South Africa, and writing in Afrikaans was a way in which to retain links to her country of birth. At the same time, Blakemore's writings were also a very important source of income. It is therefore difficult to describe Blakemore as an organic intellectual, since she did not seem to have been self-consciously committed to fostering the Afrikaner nation. Yet, it can be argued that she fulfilled the role of organic intellectual for the petty bourgeoisie. Hence, popular children's literature may have been one of the avenues through which the ideas and ideology of Afrikaner nationalism were disseminated to a wider audience across class fractures to turn it into a kind of mass consciousness. However, by illuminating the complex and sometimes fraught relationship between Stella Blakemore and the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, it was shown that this kind of dissemination was not only the prerogative of self-conscious community creators.

Key words: Popular fiction, Stella Blakemore, Afrikaner nationalism, J.L. van Schaik publishers, apartheid, class, petty bourgeoisie, children's literature, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor, organic intellectual, Maasdorp series, Keurboslaan series.

Samevatting

Hierdie studie ondersoek die verhouding tussen literatuur en samelewing teen die agtergrond van die opkoms van Afrikaner-nasionalisme in die 1930s. Hierdie nasionalisme is aangevoer deur die Afrikaner intelligentsia en *petit bourgeoisie* met die doel om 'n 'Afrikaner-nasie' te skep. In sy boek, *Imagined Communities*, wys Benedict Anderson op die onderlinge verbandhouding tussen publikasietaal – spesifiek die streekstaal en die nasionale publikasietaal – en die belange van die intelligentsia in die ontwikkeling van tekste. Hierdeur skep hy die geleentheid om die studie van nasionalisme te koppel aan 'n studie van literatuur.

Hierdie mikro-vlak studie fokus op die lewensgeskiedenis van Stella Blakemore, 'n bekende outeur van populêre lektuur vir kinders. Kinderliteratuur is literatuur wat geskryf word vir kinders en tussen kinders sirkuleer. Om dié rede word kinderliteratuur beskou as draer van besondere sosiale betekenis and word dit op spesifieke maniere ondersoek, gesensor en beheer. Die verhouding tussen populêre kinderlektuur en Afrikaner-nasionalisme het nog min akademiese aandag geniet. Blakemore se *Maasdorp-* en *Keurboslaan-*reeks het ikoonstatus in Afrikaanse kinderlektuur, en tog is baie min bekend oor hierdie outeur en die produksie van die tekste. Hierdie studie verskaf 'n blik op die lewensgeskiedenis van hierdie komplekse persoonlikheid in die Afrikaanse letterkundige wêreld. Die studie fokus op haar skrywerskap, haar interaksie met lede van die Afrikaner intelligentsia en *petit bourgeoisie*, haar verhoudings met haar geboorteland, en haar veelvuldige identiteite as vrou, Afrikaner, uitgewekene, Suid-Afrikaner en wêreldreisiger.

Gebaseer op die werk van Antonio Gramsci, stel die studie die vraag of Blakemore as organiese intellektueel beskou kan word. Dit word geargumenteer dat 'n outeur se habitus instrumenteel is in die produksie van fiksionele tekste. Sulke tekste het dan weer, aldus Charles Taylor, die vermoë om 'n gedeelde sosiale *imaginaire* te skep, 'n wyse waarop gewone mense hulle sosiale omgewings interpreteer.

Hoewel Blakemore 'n klasposisie met lede van die Afrikaner intelligentsia en *petit bourgeoisie* wat hul vir Afrikaner-nasionalisme beywer het gedeel het, was sy nooit deel van hulle binnekring nie. Nieteenstaande die feit dat J.L. van Schaik-uitgewers betrokke was by die uitbouing van Afrikaner-nasionalisme en soms selfs tekste

gesubsidieer het, wys hierdie stude daarop dat populêre kinderlektuur nie deel van hierdie kernprojek was nie. Om dié rede het Blakemore omtrent totale beheer oor die inhoud van haar boeke uitgeoefen, met slegs een voorbehoud: haar boeke moes in Afrikaans geskryf word en kon nie in Engels vertaal word nie.

Blakemore het die grootste deel van haar lewe buite Suid-Afrika spandeer. Haar Afrikaanse skryfwerk was dus vir haar 'n manier om kontak met haar geboorteland te behou. Terselfdertyd was die opbrengs uit haar boeke vir haar 'n belangrike bron van inkomste. Dit is daarom moeilik om Blakemore as organiese intellektueel voor te hou, daar dit nie lyk asof sy doelbewus die 'Afrikaner-nasie' wou uitbou nie. Tog kan dit geargumenteer word dat sy die rol van organiese intellektueel vir die *petit bourgeoisie* vervul het. Dus kan populêre kinderlektuur beskou word as een van die wyses waardeur die idees en ideologie van Afrikaner-nasionalisme aan 'n wyer gehoor wat oor klasgrense strek bekendgestel is en sodoende deel van 'n massa-bewustheid geword het. Deur die komplekse en soms moeilike verhouding tussen Blakemore en die Afrikaanse *petit bourgeoisie* te belig, het hierdie studie daarop gewys dat so 'n verspreiding van idees nie slegs die prerogatief van bewuste gemeenskapskeppers was nie.

Sleuteltermes: Populêre literatuur, Stella Blakemore, J.L. van Schaik-uitgewers, apartheid, klas, *petit bourgeoisie*, kinderlektuur, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor, organiese intellektueel, Maasdorpreeks, Keurboslaanreeks.

Haar vader, kaptein in die Britse leer, die gehate vyand. Haar moeder Emma, uit die blouste Boerebloed as 'n mens ooit van 'n 'Boere-adel' kan praat. Uit dié teenoorgestelde pole, die twee wêreld, is 'n meisie gebore wie se skryfnaam, Theunis Krogh, 'n huishoudelike naam sou word, soos die tafels en stoele in die huise waar Afrikaanse boeke gelees word. Sy is in baie opsigte 'n lewende ironie van die geskiedenis: Half Brits, half Afrikaans, bereis en belese met 'n wye blik op die wêreld, onbekrompe en tog nog in murg en been een van ons.

André du Toit, *Die Vaderland*, 28 July 1972

[Her father, captain in the British army, the hated enemy. Her mother Emma, of the bluest Boer blood – if one can ever talk of Boer royalty. Of these two opposite poles, these two worlds, a girl was born, whose nom de plume, Theunis Krogh, would become a household name, like the tables and chairs in the homes where Afrikaans books are read. She is, in many respects, a living irony of history. Half British, half Afrikaans, who has travelled much and is well read with a open view on the world, broadminded yet still inherently one of us.]

Introduction

Saartjie Bauman pushing away an unruly black curl from her forehead whilst playing hop-scotch in the tree-lined streets of Linden; Roelof Serfontein sitting behind his imposing writing table, his gaze dark and piercing; Kobie Malan coming down the staircase in her strict mom's house, her blonde curls bouncing as she hops and skips down the stairs, a twinkle in her velvety brown eyes... For the uninitiated these descriptions are empty, but for readers of popular fiction for children in Afrikaans this imagery has the ability to unlock their childhood.

There exists a specific category of literature (or fiction) that is not in the first instance organised and classified in terms of genre - as other literatures are - but rather on the basis of an attribute of its *readers* - namely their age (Hunt 1990:1). Whilst the field of children's literature is marked by this anomaly, it should be noted from the outset that both the distinction between adult and non-adult fiction (or adult fiction and fiction for children) and the various categories within the latter - which includes categories such as young adult fiction, youth or juvenile fiction, children's fiction, young teens, and even categories based on age, such as 'seven to ten year olds' (Nikolajeva 1996:7) - are, if not completely arbitrary, often overlapping, blurred and contested. Nonetheless, the distinction between children's literature - as a broad rubric including its many cross-cutting categories and sub-categories - and literature for adults remains analytically useful, if only because the notion of children's literature is saturated with particular social meaning and is therefore inscribed in the social in ways that is different from literature targeted at adult readers. This aspect is outlined further below.

Given that its categories are seldom discreet and frequently cut across each other, defining the realm of children's literature and classifying the texts in this field are no easy tasks. Hunt (1994:5) states that '[c]oncepts of childhood differ not only culturally but in units as small as the family, and they differ, often inscrutably, over time'. Hunt therefore suggests that an understanding of childhood and the social meanings attached to this concept need to be embedded in a definition of children's literature. According to Hunt, the concept 'childhood' refers to that part of the cycle of life in which the 'immediate culture' regards the

individual to be free from responsibilities and receptive to socialisation and moulding through the process of education. It is this understanding of childhood as *the formative years* of a person's life that explains the anomaly that children's literature is defined in terms of its readers.

It is therefore argued here that children's literature can be defined tentatively as literature written for and circulated among children that is, for that reason, imbued with particular social significance and therefore scrutinised, censored and controlled in particular ways. The basis on which this scrutiny takes place is far ranging – from assessments about character development and richness of language to the extent to which the narrative corresponds to reality and the aesthetic quality of the writing. Yet, this definition fails to fully encapsulate a category of literature that is very fluid and that is challenged in a number of ways. First, there are many examples of texts that belong to more than one category or that defy the very notion of genre and category altogether. Examples are Sue Townsend's *The secret diary of Adrian Mole aged 9 ½* or comic books. Second, some texts are appropriated by specific audiences even though they had clearly not been written in the first instance with that audience in mind. Take here, for example, the recent phenomenon of the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, which is widely read by adults. Other examples are *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carol, which is read and loved by children and adults alike, and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which was not written as a children's book in the first place, but was claimed as such by scores of young readers (Dixon 1978a:75). Third, some children's books are not only written *for* children but also *by* children. Finally, readers themselves resist and challenge the categories that comprise children's literature. It is the notion of childhood and scholarship on the phases of childhood that have led to the fragmentation of children's literature into various categories, each purporting to cater for the intellectual, psychological and emotional needs corresponding with that particular phase of childhood, such as puberty and adolescence. Yet, individual readers show different reading preferences, habits and abilities, which are reflected in the way in which they choose what to read and at what point in their development cycle they access particular works.

Despite this fragmentation and the internal contradictions that make it difficult to provide an accurate definition of children's literature, the link between children's literature and the important social notion of childhood has meant that debates about children's literature, its domain and its meanings have centred in the main

on an underlying question about the normative framework that these texts embody and propagate. It is because of this underlying similarity in debates about different kinds of non-adult literature and an attempt to withstand fragmentation in the academic field of study, that the title of this study explicitly situates the research in the broader domain of children's literature, rather than juvenile fiction or youth literature – two categories that perhaps describe more accurately the kind of fiction produced by Stella Blakemore.

Whilst children's literature is in the first instance classified on the basis of its *readership* and subdivided based on the *development stage* of the intended reader, these texts are classified further in terms of genre. Genres distinguished in children's literature include, among others, school stories, family stories, fantasy, mystery and adventure stories (Butts 1992:xiii). There is, however, another distinction that is often made with regard to children's books: that is between 'children's "Literature"' and 'children's fiction'. In the academic study of children's literature, this form of classification – which is similar to the distinction between popular fiction and 'high literature' – is sometimes phrased as the difference between the 'good book' or the prize-winning book and the popular and, by implication, non-prize winning book. This distinction has had important ramifications for the development of scholarship on children's literature, but the origins of this distinction can be traced back to the historical development of the children's book.

Literature for children as cultural products inserted into a market economy emerged much later than general literature, and when it did in the eighteenth to mid-eighteenth century¹, it was closely linked to pedagogical theory and emerging forms of education. Butts (1992:x) and Richard (1992:2) argue that the genesis of the children's book in the West² was linked to at least three developments. First, ideas on the nature and importance of childhood as espoused by philosophers and scholars such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the subsequent emergence of scholarly work on the different development phases in the life of the child, such as adolescence and puberty, provided a theoretical framework for thinking about interventions in the development of the child.

¹ In the Anglophone world, the children's book was first produced in the mid-eighteenth century (Hunt 1990:1)

² The focus here falls on the development of the children's book in the West and more specifically in the Anglophone world, since the development of children's literature in South Africa is rooted in the English and Dutch traditions.

Second, the spread of education from the eighteenth century through the Sunday School Movement and the subsequent development of formal education systems driven by the state, through mechanisms such as legislation³ stimulated the development of books for children. Third, technological innovations in the printing and publishing industry (underpinned by the spread of capitalism), enabled the print production of children's books. Hence, discourse on literature for children was from the outset influenced by concerns relating to pedagogy, such as the educational benefits of reading and the role of reading in identity formation and socialisation. Influenced by intellectuals of the day and the drive towards general schooling, the production of children's literature was grounded in an understanding that this kind of text had profound abilities to mould children in particular ways and to produce a certain kind of subject. It would therefore not be incorrect to suggest that the production of literature for children originated as a class project, which was launched by the intelligentsia and aimed at educating the children of the lower classes.

The development of print technology profoundly influenced the way in which literary markets – including markets for children's books – developed and continue to develop. In her study of the American and Canadian mass-produced paperback fiction market, Janice Radway (1991) traces historical developments in the printing and publishing industry. She argues that specific advancements in technology had influenced the way in which both the book as a 'product' and the market for this product have evolved. For example, she demonstrates that it was common practice for owners of printing presses (who were often publishers too) in the colonies to ask authors to pay a flat fee for the production of a book. The author was still entitled to royalty payments based on the sales of the publication, but the initial fee was a way for printer-publishers to hedge themselves against the risk of poor sales. The implication of this print practice was that authorship was limited to those who could raise the capital to pay the flat fee, which included members of the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie but also societies and organisations, such as religious and women's groups, and the state. The system of initial payment meant that control over the published work resided to a large extent in the hands of the author or relevant society or institution that sponsored the publication. It was therefore possible for individual authors and organisations to produce children's texts with particular formative qualities. Radway argues that

³ An example of such legislation is the British Forster Act of 1870, which established free elementary schools.

subsequent developments in print technology (such as the development of new machinery, perfect binding, synthetic glues) as well as other technological advancements that supported the marketing and distribution of books gradually caused a shift from author risk and control to a situation where greater risk was being taken by publishing companies, but with a subsequent loss of control for the author. Print technology made it possible for print companies and publishing houses to play an active role in the business of commissioning and controlling the production of books, and the increased sophistication of marketing and distribution channels opened up the opportunity for these professionals to actively create the markets for their books. The rise of print capitalism made possible the development of a type of literature that catered for the desires of readers and which, for its success, depended on individuals' willingness to purchase a text, rather than on the distribution channels of the state or institutions. This development had a profound influence on the historical development of children's books, since it spawned the birth of popular fiction for children.

In line with its historical roots, the academic study of children's literature has traditionally been closely associated with understandings of children's literature as pivotal to the socialization and education of children. Corresponding to this understanding, a substantial component of scholarly work on children's literature is located within the disciplines of educational studies and library and information sciences. The primary concern of most debates on children's literature in these disciplines is not the literariness of these works, but rather the values that the texts are believed to transpose; the extent to which reading a particular text enables or disables younger readers to progress to works of high literary quality; the role of reading in the acquisition and mastering of language structures; and the ways in which the habit of reading can be fostered in children.

The study of fiction for children has always been regarded as an interdisciplinary undertaking that is not located in a particular discipline. As such it has remained a rich but fairly disparate and incoherent body of literature. A prominent scholar in the area of children's literature, Peter Hunt, argues that the fragmentation of the field is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it makes the question of publication and sharing of research difficult. Second, there is a dispute about control or primary affiliation in terms of the disciplines. Various disciplines, including psychology, information and library sciences, education, political science, sociology, and language and literary studies lay claim to the field of

study. Third, it has left scholars with an area of study that is 'rich but unstructured' (Hunt 1990:7) and very broad. At its best, Hunt argues, '[c]ontemporary criticism of children's literature... is eclectic, using new techniques, rereading and remapping old territories, and exploring new ones' (Hunt 1992:11).

Until recently, the product of the short history of academic work in the field of children's literature in South Africa, in particular on children's literature in Afrikaans, has been fairly modest. The field is dominated by a small number of academics from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, most prominent among these library and information sciences and education. Local debates have focused in the main on discussions about the 'good book' or 'appropriate' books for children and ways in which to encourage children to read (Van der Westhuizen 1999, De Beer 1991, De Villiers & Bester 1992, Steenberg 1982); the role of fiction in the process of socialisation (Machet & Bester 1990, Van Niekerk 1992, Stiebel 1992, Mitchell & Smith 1996); the reading preferences of children (Van Zyl 1990, Snyman 1994, Verwey 1999); the field of children's literature and the debate on children's literature as popular fiction or 'Literature' (Van Zyl 1988, Wybenga 1985, Wiehahn 1991, Gouws 1995); and the appraisal of individual texts (Mitchell & Smith 1996). A fair amount of postgraduate study has been undertaken in this area on a wide range of topics, but not much of this has filtered through to academic journals.

In the last decade, though, it seems that the importance of children's literature as an area of study, in particular the socio-historical dimension of this field in literary studies, is being asserted (see, for example Jenkins, 1994) and that new avenues are being explored. There is evidence of serious academic engagement with questions around popular fiction for children and the ideological and socio-historical legacies of children's literature in South Africa, specifically in Afrikaans. Following South Africa's democratisation in 1994, there appears to be a new interest in children's literature and more studies are emerging that focus on the social-historical aspects of children's literature. Often these studies centre on issues of representation, specifically race.⁴ Whilst this development is to be welcomed, such approaches tend to render fairly 'narrow' readings of racism (and

⁴ See for example a study by Greyling (1999), entitled *Die uitbeelding van apartheid in Engelse Suid-Afrikaanse jeugliteratuur*, and Miemie du Plessis' *Rasseverhoudings in Suid-Afrikaanse jeuglektuur sedert 1990* (1999). Gender representation is another angle from which children's books are scrutinized (see, for example De Villiers & Bester 1992).

sexism) in texts. Attempts have been made to produce a more comprehensive overview of the system of children's literature production and dissemination (see Van Vuuren 1994). More recently, Thomas van der Walt moved into the historical study of children's fiction, an area that seems to display many gaps (Van der Walt 2000 and Fairer-Wessels & Van der Walt 1999), and so has Maritha Snyman, who looks specifically at children's series books in Afrikaans (Snyman 2001). However, many of these studies are exploratory (see for example Fairer-Wessels & Van der Walt 1999, Snyman 1999, Snyman 1994, Snyman 2001, Verwey 1999) and there is vast scope for more descriptive and explanatory academic work in this area.

An article by Maritha Snyman, published in 1994 in the Afrikaans literary journal *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, introduced series books for children in Afrikaans as a terrain for scholarly inquiry. In the article, entitled 'Afrikaanse jeuglektuur: 'n herbesinning' she argues – against the orthodoxy of the time – that formulaic literature for children, such as popular series books, play a valuable role in children's development and that the practice of reading these texts do not discourage young readers from 'graduating' to more serious literature later on in their lives. In addition, she advocates the importance of further academic study of popular youth fiction in Afrikaans. In her article, she makes reference to a range of well-known Afrikaans series books, including *Maasdorp*, *Keurboslaan*, *Die Uile*, *Trompie*, *Saartjie*, *Soekie*, *Bienkie*, *Fritz Deelman*, and *Jasper*, arguing that these books remain the most popular texts for Afrikaans-speaking young readers. In particular, she contends that these series books should be reprinted for a new generation of young readers.

Virtually all the series books singled out for their popularity in Snyman's article were produced in the period between 1930 and 1970. Ostensibly missing from Snyman's argument, therefore, is any reference to the social-historical context in which these texts were originally produced and a consideration of the ways in which children's literature is inscribed in society, especially at the crucial moment of the historical formation of Afrikaner nationalism. In short, Snyman fails to engage with questions about the ways in which texts *work* and about their *performativity*, and chooses instead to focus exclusively on the ability of children's series books to stimulate the habit of reading and cultivate a love for reading.

This research is intended to take Snyman's project further and to push the boundaries of the research field in order to raise questions about the broader social meanings of popular children's literature. This is to be achieved through relating the production of children's literature to the project of nation-building and by using the study of popular literature as a mechanism for answering questions about the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism. The link between nationalism, vernacular language and literature is not new in Afrikaans. A number of prominent studies have been undertaken in this regard, two of which are worth mentioning here. The first is a study by Isabel Hofmeyr, entitled 'Building a nation from words, which is a comprehensive account of the relationship between nation-building and the production of literature in Afrikaans in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The second is a study by Lou-Marie Kruger on the author of the popular Afrikaans women's publication, *Die Boervrou*, Mabel Malherbe. This study draws on the work of both these authors and, in doing so, explores the role of the Afrikaans language, and, more specifically, print productions in Afrikaans, in the mobilisations around Afrikaner nationalism. The study focuses on the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and popular fiction for children in Afrikaans, a terrain that has not received scholarly attention before.

The study aims to address issues relating to class formation and the role of the petty bourgeoisie by foregrounding and examining the class position of the author, Stella Blakemore, and documenting her complex relationship with other members of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. It is this group that is generally thought of as self-conscious community creators or actors in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism. Yet, the petty bourgeoisie was not a homogenous group and their efforts to capture a new power base for themselves culminated in the establishment of a wide and disparate range of movements and interventions. Moreover, it is recognised that community creators do not operate in an unlimited field and that identity is fragmented and fractured along many other lines, including class, ethnicity, geography, and so forth. The broader question is therefore one about the strategies these self-conscious community-creators employ in order to craft myths and symbols that transcend, for example, class fractures.

Blakemore was one of the first writers of popular children's fiction in Afrikaans. She was also a very prolific writer and published more than 60 popular children's

books in Afrikaans.⁵ Blakemore is also the undisputed doyenne of the series book in Afrikaans. In addition to the immensely popular *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series, she also wrote the *Blourand*, *Die Rissies*, *Janse Cloete*, and *Delarey series*. *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* are among the books Snyman (1994) considers as some of the most popular children's texts in Afrikaans. Yet, surprisingly little is known about this author and about the production of these texts. Two central questions animate this study. These are 1) how did the Afrikaner intelligentsia manage to disseminate its ideas and ideology of Afrikaner nationalism to a wider audience across class fractures and turn it into a kind of mass consciousness and 2) what was the composition of the petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, what evidence is available about upward and downward mobility between this class and other classes, and what kinds of contestation and resistance took place within this class? This study of Stella Blakemore and her world constitutes an attempt to answer these questions, albeit in a limited sense.

The study draws upon a range of resources. In the J.L. van Schaik Collection housed at the National Afrikaans Literature Museum and Research Unit (NALN), a very valuable collection of correspondence between Blakemore and her South African publisher, J.L. van Schaik, and later his son, Jan van Schaik, is stored. The letters are not representative of the total period over which her relationship with the Van Schaiks stretched. In the collection there are letters from the 1930s, when her business relationship with J.L. van Schaik commenced, another selection from the late 1940s, and a comprehensive set of letters covering the 1950s up to the end of the 1960s. In the period that Blakemore lived in Pretoria, between 1935 and approximately 1947 she was able to meet with her publishers personally, and there are therefore only records of contractual agreements for that period and no letters.⁶ Unfortunately, there are no records of her exchanges with her publishers during the crucial 1970s or later. However, when she returned to South Africa in 1973 after an absence of more than eighteen years, her visit received extensive media coverage.

Through the letters and interviews she granted to the South African media during her visit, this study aims to provide a glimpse of the life and thoughts of a complex

⁵ A full list of titles is provided in Chapter Two.

⁶ In the NALN collection, the first letter sent by Blakemore to her publishers from Kumasi, in the Gold Coast, is dated 11 September 1947. Blakemore and her husband may have left South Africa already a few years earlier in 1945, as there is a gap in the correspondence and conclusive evidence is lacking, but based on the available evidence it seems likely that they did only leave sometime in 1947.

and perplexing figure in the Afrikaans literary scene at particular periods of her life in relation to her writing, her relationship with her country of birth, and her multiple identities as woman, Afrikaner, exile, South African, and world traveller. In addition, an interview with Mr Jan van Schaik assisted in illuminating the complex relationship between Blakemore and the publishing house, and the links between the publishing house and the Afrikaner establishment.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One outlines the theoretical lenses through which the research questions are filtered. In particular, selected concepts from the work of Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, Benedict Anderson and Charles Taylor, are introduced. Chapter Two traces Blakemore's personal and intellectual biography and provides an overview of her publications. Chapter Three provides an account of Blakemore's own understanding of her role as an author. In Chapter Four, the complex relationship between Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik publishers is examined. Questions about Blakemore's multi-faceted relationship with her country of birth and its policies of apartheid are addressed in Chapter Five.

Chapter One

Notes on theory

Afrikaner nationalism and the construction of Afrikaner identity

In *Imagined Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson is concerned with the way in which the concept of the nation and nationality can be understood from the perspective of culture. In this influential study on nationalism, Anderson argues that '[n]ationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind' (Anderson 1991:4). Anderson's analysis demonstrates the interrelatedness of print-capitalism, language – specifically the vernacular and the national print-language – and the interests of the intelligentsia in the development of texts, and thus opens up creative possibilities for linking the study of nationalism with the study of literature. In part, this is achieved by his use of the concept *imagination* – a construct that is closely linked to the production of fiction. Other elements of Anderson's analysis, though, such as the way in which he employs imagery of the structure of the novel, the role he allocates to print texts, and the emphasis he places on language invite a link with studies on the production, dissemination and reception of literary texts. Anderson's analysis of nationalism points to the importance of a study of print texts, particularly in the vernacular or national language, in examining specific forms of nationalism. Proceeding from Anderson's premise about the relationship between texts and the invention of the nation, the present study on the work of Stella Blakemore seems to speak to three areas of inquiry in studies on Afrikaner nationalism. These are (1) gaps in theoretical accounts of Afrikaner nationalism; (2) the problem of level of explanation in accounts of Afrikaner nationalism; and (3) paucity of accounts to explain the processes through which a particular kind of subjectivity was developed to give rise to a self-referential Afrikaner world. These are discussed in more detail below.

First, most theoretical accounts of Afrikaner nationalism fails to adequately explain the mechanisms through which the ideas and ideologies of the Afrikaner intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie successfully permeated the consciousness of Afrikaners of all classes. Dan O'Meara articulates this problem as follows:

'Christian-nationalism' or 'Afrikaner nationalism' was more than a complex intellectual-ideological framework representing certain views of the world. The terms also encompass the mass social and political movement which emerged, comprised of widely disparate groups, mobilised through this ideology. It is not enough simply to trace the

literary forms of development of the ideational structure and simply assume its inherent appeal to all Afrikaans-speakers. The actual translation of such literary forms of ideology from intellectual journals and the debates of elite groups into a form of mass consciousness – the process by which the new subject was successfully interpellated – has to be investigated (O'Meara 1983:74).

In their work on Afrikaner nationalism, scholars such as Bozzoli (1981, 1987), Hyslop (1996) and Hofmeyr (1987) place a strong emphasis on the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie who are fashioned as self-conscious creators of the myths around which communities and ethnicities are shaped. Consequently, these theorists are interested in the way in which Afrikaner identity has been constructed and invented. In exploring this issue, they focus on the creators of those myths and symbols that make it possible to 'invent a nation' and on the artefacts or products that these 'actors' produced to speak to those that they wanted to endow with a particular identity.

O'Meara argues that during the 1930s, through the Afrikaner Broederbond, Afrikaner intellectuals were successful in crafting the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism on the literary level, that is, as a form of discourse shared among intellectuals, but that this had not yet penetrated to the majority of Afrikaners:

In effect, then, the intellectual ideological debates in the Bond succeeded in the elaboration and development of the concept of a new historical subject – an organically united Afrikaner volk... Yet the ideologues' concept of an organically-united Afrikaner volk was confronted with the reality of intense cultural, class, and political divisions among Afrikaans-speakers (O'Meara 1983:73).

The existence of class divisions among the ranks of 'Afrikanerdom', given the elite's project to construct a unified Afrikaner identity, raises three questions. First, how did the ideologies of Afrikaner nationalism espoused by the Afrikaner intelligentsia seep into or find their way into forms of discourse and representation that spoke to or was accessed by Afrikaners (or then potential 'Afrikaners') from other classes and class fractions? Second, how does exposure to this discourse or participation in such cultural and symbolic representations explain the emergence of an Afrikaner subjectivity, or, phrased differently, what are the theoretical and empirical explanations of the way in the process of subjectivity formation works? Third, how were the discourses of the elite modified, adapted

and interpreted by Afrikaners from different classes who had different interests and concerns? Important research in this regard have been undertaken by Isabel Hofmeyr (1987), with a focus on the development of literary production in Afrikaans, and Lou-Marie Kruger (1991), who explores the role of a popular magazine, *De Boervrouw*, but the area of children's literature is still largely untilled land.

In 'Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902-1924', Isabel Hofmeyr (1987) traces the links between nationalism, class, language, the spread of capitalism and the formation of Afrikaner identity in a study of the Afrikaans language movement and Afrikaans literary production in the period 1902-1924. She argues that there exists a general paucity of knowledge on the process of construction of Afrikaner identity, particularly around the production of cultural artefacts. Hofmeyr rejects the view of a monolithic, organic Afrikaner identity, claiming that the process around the construction of Afrikaner nationalism was fractured, contested and uneven. She focuses on the important role of class interests and the strategies employed by the lower middle-class intelligentsia – associated with the First Language Movement – and the petty bourgeoisie – associated with the Second Language Movement – respectively to get working class Afrikaners to buy into the idea of the Afrikaner nation, against the background of social and economic developments in the early part of the twentieth century. Hofmeyr attributes particular importance to the production of written texts as a strategy for the construction and consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism and highlights the difficulties associated with the process of manufacturing a literary culture among Afrikaners.

The second area for inquiry is linked to the level of explanation, choice of research site, and theoretical approach in studies of Afrikaner nationalism. This issue is raised by Jonathan Hyslop in an article outlining some of the problems of explanation in the study of Afrikaner nationalism. Hyslop (1996) argues that most studies of Afrikaner nationalism try to explain the phenomenon on a national level rather than on a local level. To this one can add tendencies of research on Afrikaner nationalism to focus on symbolic representations, large-scale events and discourse produced by and circulated among the intelligentsia, rather than on everyday practice and local discourses. This leaves a particular gap as it fails to theorise the way in which subjectivity is developed through such symbolic representations and fails to explain subjectivity formation with reference to the

experiences of everyday life. Given that much of the existing scholarship on Afrikaner nationalism focuses on the state and its relationship with capital and that far less research has been devoted to the study of ideology and culture, it would seem that Bozzoli (1987) is correct in asserting that there exists gaps in the way in which the relationship and interrelationships between class formation and community formation is theorised, in particular in the realm of everyday life, which include family life and leisure:

Men and women are not shaped by their work experiences alone, but by the ways in which they survive and interact at home in the family, or during leisure hours. Economic class position may determine whether or not you are a worker or a peasant, but how you behave as a worker or peasant is not explicable only by reference to the type of labour you undertake (Bozzoli 1987:8).

Third, an emphasis on cultural production of texts through which various regimes of discourse were circulated raises questions about the nature of particular kinds of subjectivities that developed and about the processes through which these were produced. Bozzoli (1987:7-8) argues that regardless of the processes and actors orchestrating and sitting behind community creation, at some point in history communities do become 'manifest social entities, with important effects on class and ideological responses'. Hyslop (2000) asserts that the National Party, between 1948 and 1970, had as its project the construction of a stable social order around a racist modern state. He argues that for the project to be successful, 'a specific kind of subjectivity was required amongst whites, comprising a non-reflexive submission to authority' (Hyslop 2000:37). He continues by arguing that the National Party had largely achieved this aim in the 1960s:

Afrikaners of all social classes benefited immensely from the material improvements in their position which government policies brought about. They were encapsulated in a network of schools, social clubs, churches, cultural and business organizations, which created a self-referential Afrikaner world (Hyslop 2000:37).

Framing these three areas of inquiry within the broader structure of Anderson's notion of the nation as an imagined community and the research questions posed in this study invites a closer examination of the relationship between the production of popular fiction and class relations. Locating Stella Blakemore and

her world in the context of the project to mobilise around Afrikaner nationalism from the early 1930s requires a link between the biography of the author, her class position, and the world of the imagination. Theoretically, this study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, Antonio Gramsci's notion of the *organic intellectual*, and Charles Taylor's idea about the *social imaginary*.

Antonio Gramsci, hegemony and the organic intellectual

Arguably, Antonio Gramsci is one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century. At the core of his political project is the question of power and how it operates in advanced capitalist societies. A strong belief in agency underpins his writings in which he endeavours to develop a revolutionary working class consciousness. Gramsci rejects economic determinism in Marxist theory, arguing instead that the economic infrastructure of society is the backdrop against which events in society take place. As such, the economic backdrop may therefore influence events, but does not determine outcomes. Gramsci defines the state not in terms of institutions, but in terms of the activities of the dominant class. He does not relegate ideology to the super structure but regard it as part of the material conditions of everyday life. Gramsci's cultural materialism, and in particular his notion of hegemony, took classical Marxism with its overemphasis on economic factors, which renders the domain of the culture an ideology as inferior, in a completely new direction. Gramsci provided a far more nuanced and layered understanding of ideology and culture and his notion of hegemony opened up the way to analyse the relationship between culture and politics.

Gramsci argues that the ruling group in society exercises hegemony throughout society. Hegemony is described by Adamson as having two separate but associated definitions in Gramsci's writings, although he concedes that the two understandings of hegemony are used with great independence from each other (Adamson 1980:173). In the first instance, hegemony is understood as the 'consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society'. Gramsci argues that through civil society the ruling class persuades the population to share their beliefs. In order to retain a hegemonic position, the ruling class incorporates alternative or oppositional beliefs, in doing so subverting or co-opting possibilities for radical social change. Yet, Gramsci maintains that ruling class hegemony can never be complete as a result of historical blocs – the alliances that the ruling class enter into as concessions to retain hegemony – and

individuals' dual consciousness. Gramsci places a strong emphasis on the role of what he terms *organic intellectuals* and the way in which organic intellectuals can assist to develop an alternative hegemony that includes an awareness of class consciousness among workers and peasants. In the second instance, hegemony is described as the way in which class consciousness among the proletariat needs to be developed in order to overcome 'the "economic-corporative"... [at] a particular historical stage within the political moment' (Adamson 1980:171). Defining hegemony in this way means that the development of an alternative hegemony implies developing class consciousness 'where class is understood not only economically but also in terms of a common intellectual and moral awareness, a *common culture*' [my emphasis] (Adamson 1980:171). In this endeavour organic intellectuals have a key role to play. Gramsci thought of hegemony as a 'mode of rule' – that is, as the opposite of violent coercion – that may be used by both the bourgeoisie and the makers of a proletarian potential state (Adamson 1980:171). Moreover, accepting the notion of hegemony as a form of rule draws attention to its *cultural form* or orientation.

Pierre Bourdieu and the habitus

In his work, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu scrutinizes 'the relationship between systems of thought, social institutions and different forms of material and symbolic power' (Bourdieu 1993:1). He asks questions about the way in which specific works (or texts) link with others and does not limit his scope of enquiry to canonized works of arts, but deliberately extends it to include all cultural productions. Bourdieu's work on literature is perhaps most closely situated to the literary tradition of new historicism. His analyses are powerful for two reasons. First, he succeeds in working across academic disciplines to create new avenues and methods for analysing the relationship between literature and society. Second, his method is analytically rigorous and comprehensive.

Bourdieu's approach to the study of cultural productions, like all his work, derives from a concern with being thorough in analysing the social. In terms of what he calls the literary field, Bourdieu stands critical of both internal, discourse analysis approaches and more sociological studies on the production, consumption, and dissemination of texts. Bourdieu's work is particularly interesting because of the innovative way in which he makes it possible again to introduce questions about the author, without lapsing back into a Romantic tradition. Bourdieu emphasises

the necessity of looking at the text, as well as its conditions of production and consumption when analysing a text:

It can be only an unjustifiable abstraction (which could fairly be called reductive) to seek the source of the understanding of cultural productions in these productions themselves, taken in isolation and divorced from the conditions of their production and utilization, as would be the wish of discourse analysis, which, situated on the border between sociology and linguistics, has nowadays relapsed into indefensible forms of internal analysis (1989a:xvii).

While Bourdieu's broader project speaks to the objectives of this study on numerous levels, his theoretical contribution is used to a very limited extent in this study and is primarily confined to his notion of *habitus* and the way in which this concept is linked to his desire to restore agency to the subject:

I wanted, so to speak, to reintroduce agents that Lévi-Strauss and the structuralists, among them Althusser, tended to abolish, making them into simple epiphenomena of structure. And I mean agents, not subjects. Action is not the mere carrying out of a rule, or obedience to a rule. Social agents, in archaic societies as well as in ours, are not automata regulated like clocks, in accordance with laws they do not understand (quoted in Bourdieu 1993:269, original quotation from Bourdieu's work, *In other words.*)

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* has become central in the study of cultural production, dissemination and consumption. He defines the *habitus* as systems of 'durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them' (Bourdieu 1990:53) and as 'a system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment... as well as being the organising principles of action' (Bourdieu 1993). This notion can therefore be understood as a kind of cultural habitat, the existence of which the subject is not conscious of – that the subject internalises in the form of dispositions to feel, respond and act in specific ways. It therefore constitutes a field of possibilities from which and within which the individual can act. A person's *habitus* is derived from acculturation, which

includes upbringing and education. *Habitus* is however a much broader concept: various social groups are each associated with a *habitus*. These include groups such as social classes, but can also include other groups such as gender groups, the family, and groups defined by nationality, race, and so forth. Whilst an individual's *habitus* consists partly of the various group *habitus* inculcated in the individual, he or she also has personal qualities that are not derived from socialisation or acculturation. These personal qualities together with the various group *habitus* comprise a personal habitus. It is important to note that the *habitus* cannot be described as a set of beliefs or ideas. The *habitus* functions on the unconscious level and it has no representative content. For these reasons, it can only produce practices and actions:

An acquired system of generative schemes, the *habitus* makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only those. Through the *habitus*, the structure of which it is the product governs practice, not only along the paths of mechanical determinism, but within the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions. This infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity is difficult to understand only so long as one remains locked in the usual antinomies – which the concept of the *habitus* aims to transcend – of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconsciousness, or the individual and society. Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning (Bourdieu 1990:55)

The *habitus* thus remains an elusive concept for anyone approaching it from either a subjectivist or an objectivist paradigm. Objectivists err because they assume that since they are able to abstract from individual behaviours a set of patterns that can be linked back to a set of beliefs and ideas, those very ideas and beliefs exist in that form in the minds of individuals. Subjectivists, on the other hand, are tied up in the individual experience, which is per definition subjective and therefore cannot illuminate the objective structures that shape individual behaviours and ways of being in the world.

Charles Taylor and the social imaginary

In an essay entitled 'Modern Social Imaginaries', the philosopher Charles Taylor argues that:

The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society (Taylor 2002:91)

Taylor is concerned with the development of modernity. Following Dilip Gaonkar, Taylor concedes that modernity did not develop in the same way in the West as elsewhere. Hence, he argues that it is therefore more appropriate to talk of multiple modernities rather than modernity in the singular. Similarly, there is not such thing as the *social imaginary* but a number of *social imaginaries*. Taylor's development of the notion of the *social imaginary* seems to be derived from an earlier intellectual endeavour of his, entitled 'Two Theories of Modernity' in which he already signals that in terms of social understanding there exists something between the personalised Bourdieuan notion of *habitus* and the level of explicit doctrine. In the earlier essay, he refers to this intermediate level of understanding as the symbolic, 'an understanding that is expressed in ritual, in symbols (in the everyday sense), and in works of art' (Taylor 1999:167). According to Taylor, what distinguishes the symbolic level of understanding from Bourdieu's *habitus* is that it is a shared understanding that is at the same time an 'unselfconscious' understanding, and therefore different from the level of understanding of doctrine. He articulates this idea as follows:

Because below the doctrinal level are at least two others: that of embodied background understanding and that which while nourished in embodied habitus is given expression on the symbolic level. As well as the doctrinal understanding of society, there is one incorporated in habitus, and a level of images as yet unformulated in doctrine, for which we may borrow a term frequently used by contemporary French writers: *l'imaginaire social* – what we can call the social imaginary (Taylor 1999:167-168).

When he writes on 'Modern Social Imaginaries' three years later, he is able to extend his understanding of this notion:

What I'm calling the social imaginary extends beyond the immediate background understanding that makes sense of our particular practices.

This is not an arbitrary extension of the concept, because just as the practice without the understanding wouldn't make sense for us and thus wouldn't be possible, so this understanding necessarily supposes a wider grasp of our whole predicament, how we stand in relationship to one another, how we got where we are, how we relate to other groups (Taylor 2002:107).

Whilst it is therefore difficult to define the notion of the *social imaginary* or its limits, Taylor argues that the social imaginary contains our historical awareness, and our sense of our present space and time. For Taylor, a central aspect of the *social imaginary* is the way in which it includes an understanding of moral order. But it is at the same time a form of self-understanding through which modernity is constituted. In keeping with his earlier writings on the subject, Taylor maintains his position that the *social imaginary* cannot be articulated and that it remains unstructured, a background so to speak. Taylor distinguishes three differences between social theory and the *social imaginary*. First, he emphasises the importance of coupling the notion of the *social imaginary* with that of everyday life, since the *social imaginary* is the way in which 'ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings' which is 'often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in *images, stories and legends*' [my emphasis] (Taylor 1999:106). Second, he explains that social theory is generally held by a small group of people, whereas the *social imaginary* is shared by large groups of people, even entire societies. Third, he argues that 'the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy' (Taylor 1999:106).

Conclusion

Returning to the field of literature, it is evident that Benedict Anderson sets the stage for a closer examination of the relationship between print capitalism, language and nationalism. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* opens up a way in which to think of the author and his or her *habitus* as separate but related to the space of the text, and that it becomes necessary to explore the relationship between the two domains:

Scientific analysis must work to relate to each other two sets of relations, the space of works or discourses as differential stances, and the space of the positions held by those who produce them (1993:11).

Bourdieu and Gramsci complement each other and address some of the concerns emanating from using the social concept of class. Gramsci's notion of hegemony shifts the analysis to the cultural domain. His notion of organic intellectual offers a lens through which to 'read' the actions of the petty bourgeoisie. Bourdieu, whilst too concerned with restoring agency, provides the sophisticated and complex notion of *habitus*, explained as a field of possibilities, which illuminates the space in which the author and the reader operate and construct meaning. Through the notion of the *habitus* it becomes possible to introduce questions about the personal biography of the author, in addition to his or her class position, but without running the risk of understating class. Charles Taylor's notion of the social imaginary draws attention to the idea that fictional texts contribute to the creation of a shared understanding in a community of their social surroundings. Through the notions of the imagined community, *habitus*, organic intellectual and the social imaginary, it is possible to explore the relationship between Stella Blakemore as a producer of popular fiction and the project of Afrikaner nationalism.

Chapter Two

Locating Stella Blakemore and her works

Stella Blakemore: A brief biography

When André du Toit from *Die Vaderland* interviewed Stella Blakemore in London in 1972, he summarised Blakemore's heritage as follows:

Haar vader, kaptein in die Britse leer, die gehate vyand. Haar moeder Emma, uit die blouste Boerebloed as 'n mens ooit van 'n 'Boere-adel' kan praat. Uit dié teenoorgestelde pole, die twee wêrelde, is 'n meisie gebore wie se skryfnaam, Theunis Krogh, 'n huishoudelike naam sou word, soos die tafels en stoele in die huise waar Afrikaanse boeke gelees word. Sy is in baie opsigte 'n lewende ironie van die geskiedenis: Half Brits, half Afrikaans, bereise en belese met 'n wye blik op die wêreld, onbekrompe en tog nog in murg en been een van ons (Du Toit 1972).

[Her father, captain in the British army, the hated enemy. Her mother Emma, of the bluest Boer blood – if one can ever talk of Boer royalty. Of these two opposite poles, these two worlds, a girl was born, whose nom de plume, Theunis Krogh, would become a household name, like the tables and chairs in the homes where Afrikaans books are read. She is, in many respects, a living irony of history. Half British, half Afrikaans, who has travelled much and is well read with a open view on the world, broadminded yet still inherently one of us.]

It is remarkable that someone with such a complex heritage became so influential in the nation-building project of Afrikaner-nationalism. Stella Blakemore, the daughter of Emma Krogh and Captain Percy Blakemore, was born on 13 April 1906 in the Heilbron-Lindley district of the Orange River Colony. Her maternal grandfather, Theunis Johannes Krogh, a very influential man and a former Under State Secretary for Home Affairs of Paul Kruger's Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), died in Ladysmith of typhoid fever during the war.¹ Her father was a British soldier who had stayed behind after the Anglo-Boer war to become a farmer

¹ In Memoriam: Theunis John. Krogh. Extract from *The Standard and Diggers' News*, Johannesburg, S.A.R. 6 February 1900.

(Hazelhurst 1978:6). Percy Blakemore had married her mother, a music teacher, during the war years (*Hoofstad*, 14 June 1974:29).² Blakemore was born in the Lindley-Heilbron district of the Orange River Colony in 1906, four years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War. She described the district where she had been born as enormously sad, for it was one of the areas that was almost completely destroyed by the war. Homesteads were burnt down and farmlands were non-existent. In this area, a group of what she described as unhappy people lived together in an agricultural settlement. Given her background, it is the nature of this group of people that is remarkable. Du Toit describes the set-up at the Lindley establishment as follows:

hensoppers, hanskaki's voormalige lede van die National Scouts, wat as beloning hier by Lindley 'n nuwe tuiste gegun is...drenkelinge van die EB en die vloed van ons geskiedenis (Du Toit 1972).

[hands-uppers, hand-fed pommies former members of the National Scouts, who have been granted a new home here at Lindley as reward ... the drowned of the EB³ and the flood of our history.]

No information was available about exactly when her mother had married Percy Blakemore, except that it had been during the course of the Anglo-Boer war, nor on how it came about that the daughter of Theunis Krogh ended up in the midst of the 'Boere-verraaiers' (Boer traitors). It can only be assumed that it was through her association with Percy Blakemore. As a result of the destruction of farmsteads, many of those returning home or being resettled after the war, including the so-called hensoppers and boere-verraaiers – had no shelter to live in. Hence, they had to use the tents that they occupied in the camps. That is why Blakemore was born in a 'hensoppertentjie'⁴ on 13 April 1906. In the interview with Du Toit, she explained that her father had been a compulsive gambler, a fact illustrated by the anecdote she recounted about her birth. When her mother went into labour, her father had to go to fetch the doctor. Unfortunately, he ended up

² The correctness of this fact could not be established. Whilst it would have been very difficult for Emma Krogh and Percy Blakemore to obtain permission for their marriage during the war years, evidence in support of this statement is the fact that Stella's maiden name was Blakemore and that her mother, Emma, continued to use the surname Blakemore until her death. More research is required to clarify this issue.

³ EB most probably stands for English-Boer War.

⁴ A tent that was originally issued to so-called 'hands-uppers' – those South Africans that surrendered and gave up their right to fight the British – during the Anglo-Boer War. For their own protection, these people often had to go and live in the concentration camps that were set up for Afrikaner women as part of the scorched earth policy. Here they lived in tented communities, separate from the Afrikaner women and children and Boer prisoners of war.

playing a game of cards and by the time he arrived back at her mother's side, Stella had already been born. Her father left them and returned to England, purportedly to become a professional card player, when Stella was still a young child (Dick et. al. 2001). About her father Blakemore said:

Hy het ons net so gelos... maar baie mense dink hy moes 'n aangename, lekker ou gewees het (Du Toit 1972).

[He left us just like that ... but many people believe he must have been a pleasant, nice bloke.]

As a young child, she grew up in the Transvaal. She never thought of her childhood as a happy time:

I always like writing about nice childhoods, probably because I had such a dreary one myself, in some ways. My mother did everything on earth for me, except establish a home. She had a 'thing' about boarding houses, and a more frightful existence for a child, there is not.⁵

Blakemore was sent to an English boarding school in Natal to complete her school studies. (Van Rensburg 1975:8). She did not enjoy the boarding school experience and also did not like Natal, which she felt was too English:

I was at boarding school in Natal, and I loathed the place. Salene, too, finds it 'terribly, terribly English!'⁶

After matriculating, she studied further in Durban, Pretoria and Johannesburg.⁷ On completion of her studies, she travelled through Germany and the Netherlands, before going on to London where she stayed for eight months and obtained her piano and song licentiate from the London Royal Academy of Music as well as an ARCM in song.⁸ She then left for Germany, where she studied opera at the Dresden Opera School under the guidance of Felis Petreng⁹ and at

⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 May 1959.

⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 February 1968.

⁷ Handwritten photocopied document entitled 'Suid-Afrikaanse sangeres – Mej. Stella Blakemore', 1930, with words 'E. Lindberg' and 'afgeskryf' (copied) on cover page. 10 January 1930. Reference number B.15 (4474): 8, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

⁸ Handwritten photocopied document entitled 'Suid-Afrikaanse sangeres – Mej. Stella Blakemore', 1930, with words 'E. Lindberg' and 'afgeskryf' (copied) on cover page. 10 January 1930. Reference number B.15 (4474): 8, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

⁹ Handwriting of the surname illegible, could also be Petreng, Petieng, etc.

the Conservatorie für Lieder under Professor Klüge. According to a friend, Anneke Reitz, Stella had 'a very beautiful soprano voice' (*Pretoria News*, 5 June 1991:7). In Dresden she played the leading part in a number of operas, including 'Faust', 'Fra Diavolo', and 'Die Zauberflöte'.¹⁰ She wrote her first book, *Die Goue Sleutel*, a drama in Afrikaans, whilst she was studying opera in Germany, and it was published by J.L. van Schaik in 1931 (*Die Volksblad*, 5 June 1991:2).¹¹

In January 1930 she returned to South Africa for a series of concerts. It was reported that she planned to stay in South Africa for six months before returning to Germany to further advance her career.¹² She married a Welshman and civil engineer, David Owen, in 1933 in London¹³, where she was teaching and singing professionally.¹⁴ In 1934 she suffered a miscarriage and was ill for a long time. In May 1935, after recovering her health, she returned to South Africa where she planned to settle in Pretoria and take over some of her mother's singing and music pupils. Blakemore lived in Pretoria where she owned a house in Muckleneuk and worked with her mother in the Blakemore Studios for music, singing and drama students, which she had opened (*Die Volksblad*, 5 June 1991:2). Her return to South Africa was made possible through the fact that her husband had accepted a position in Swaziland, and Blakemore travelled to and fro between Pretoria and Swaziland. In Pretoria, where she spent most of her time, she was actively involved in the social activities of the town. This was in part because her involvement in music and drama took her to each and every eisteddfod, 'kunstwedstrijd' and music festival. Blakemore suffered another miscarriage (Dick et al 2001:62) and in 1945 she adopted a baby girl from the Armstrong-Benin Tehuis in Bloed Street in Pretoria and in 1946 a baby boy from the same home. Both children were given up for adoption by Afrikaans-speaking families. She had started her career as a writer of Afrikaans fiction for children in 1931 and by the time she left the Union in 1947 she was already well established in this field.

¹⁰ Handwritten photocopied document entitled 'Suid-Afrikaanse sangeres – Mej. Stella Blakemore', 1930, with words 'E. Lindberg' and 'afgeskryf' (copied) on cover page. 10 January 1930. Reference number B.15 (4474): 8, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

¹¹ See also photocopied document, no date, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

¹² Handwritten photocopied document entitled 'Suid-Afrikaanse sangeres – Mej. Stella Blakemore', 1930, with words 'E. Lindberg' and 'afgeskryf' (copied) on cover page. 10 January 1930. Reference number B.15 (4474): 8, NALN collection, Bloemfontein.

¹³ Photocopied document, no date, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

¹⁴ Photocopied document, no date, reference number 785/78/20, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

Given that David Owen worked for the British colonial service, he was deployed to a number of African countries. It could not be established exactly when Blakemore and her husband left South Africa for Kumasi in the Gold Coast (after independence renamed Ghana), but from the correspondence in the NALN Collection in Bloemfontein, it would seem that it was sometime in 1947.¹⁵ Blakemore later followed her husband to Nigeria. They also lived for periods in London and often travelled to Italy for holidays. When she and her husband left South Africa for Kumasi in the Gold Coast, the children were sent to school in Wales where they lived with Blakemore's mother, Emma. Blakemore tried to spend time with her mother and children in Wales whenever she was not with her husband in Africa.

In 1954, Blakemore and her husband bought a four hundred year old land cottage in an apple orchard in the scenic coastal town Warrenpoint, which is situated in County Down, Northern Ireland. Warren Point is in close proximity of the town Newry and the Mourne Mountains (Van Rensburg 1975:8, Hazelhurst 1978:6). They restored the house and used it as a holiday home (Van Rensburg 1975:8). Later, Emma Blakemore and the children moved to Northern Ireland where they lived in the cottage and where the children went to school.

In addition to writing books, Blakemore was involved in many other creative activities. She taught music all her life and was involved in broadcasting. Blakemore also actively participated in community activities and was a member of the Royal Commonwealth Society (*Die Vaderland*, 28 July 1978) and of the Women's Institute in Ireland, an organisation of both Catholic and Protestant women (Louw 1974:13). She was also involved in religious activities.

Despite Blakemore's dream of returning to South Africa to settle permanently, this never materialised, partly because of her husband's work commitments and in part due to her poor health. She did return to South Africa for a visit in 1974, after an absence of eighteen years, and visited the country a number of times thereafter. However, the cottage in Northern Ireland was to be the place where Blakemore finally settled. She lived there for thirty years until her death in 1991. Blakemore died at the age of 85 and was buried on 26 May 1991 (*Die Burger*, 5

¹⁵ The first letter in the collection that was written by Blakemore from Kumasi, in the Gold Coast, to her publishers is dated 11 September 1947. It could be that they had left a few years earlier in 1945 as there is a gap in the correspondence, but it seems more likely that they only left in 1947.

June 1991:3), after having been bed-ridden for a long time following a stroke (*Die Transvaler*, 5 June 1991:4).

Publications by Stella Blakemore

All Blakemore's published books that could be traced are in Afrikaans, except for the translation of one of her *Maasdorp* books in Dutch and her adult novel, *Katrientjie*, in Zulu. She wrote two plays in English for a South African audience, but these were never published. From correspondence between Blakemore and her South African publisher, it is clear that she had written works in English for an Irish public. It is, however, unclear if these were ever published. For political reasons, which are explained in more detail further on in the chapter, Blakemore felt that she was not in a position to disclose her other interests – which included her writings in English – to the South African public. This could be the reason why she said in an interview in 1978, that all her published works were in Afrikaans (Hazelhurst 1978:6). However, based on her correspondence with the Van Schaiks it seems fairly likely that this statement was indeed true, and that – with the exception of a couple of short stories, contributions to magazines and single poems – she never published in English.

In addition to her own name, Stella Blakemore, she wrote under a number of pseudonyms. These included her married name, Stella Owen, as well as Theunis Krogh, Annelise Bierman and Dien Grimbeek.¹⁶ It could not be established exactly how many books she wrote in her lifetime. Estimates range between 50 and 70. In an interview with Mary-Ann van Rensburg in 1975 – when she was nearly seventy years old – Blakemore stated that she had already written more books than the number of years she had lived (Van Rensburg 1975:8) and in a later interview she estimated that she had written between 60 and 70 books, 'including two plays with music and some poems' (Hazelhurst 1978:6). It is possible that a number of these manuscripts may never have been published.

Blakemore specialised in popular literature for children. She wrote only one novel, *Katrientjie* that was aimed at an adult audience.¹⁷ Her most successful books

¹⁶ Photocopied document, no date, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

¹⁷ No information could be obtained about her book, *Verpleegsters is altyd die ergstes*, which was published under her married name, Stella Owen. It may be that this was also targeting an adult audience.

were the *Keurboslaan* books, a series for boys about a boarding school for boys, and the *Maasdorp* series, books for girls about a boarding school for girls. Blakemore wrote the *Keurboslaan* series under the pseudonym Theunis Krogh – her grandfather’s name – whilst she published the *Maasdorp* series as Stella Blakemore.

Blakemore published twenty books in the first *Keurboslaan* series. For a number of reasons, primarily her need to get as many of her books as possible in print so that she could get an advance or earn royalties on them, but also a disagreement between her and the publisher of the series, J.L. van Schaik, a small number of *Keurboslaan* books were originally published by Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel under a slightly different name. The majority of the original *Keurboslaan* texts were, however, published by J.L. Van Schaik publishers. Initially it was not really the intention of J.L. van Schaik Publishers or Blakemore to produce a youth series for boys. This was most probably in part because series books in Afrikaans were still a novelty. The claim that the books were not initially conceptualised as a series is supported by the facts that the *Keurboslaan* series was not written chronologically and that the titles were distributed amongst two publishers. Only in the 1950s, when J.L. van Schaik publishers reprinted and revised the series, did the cover jacket of each book indicate the correct chronological order of the books in the series. The titles in the first series are as follows:

Table 1: Publication date, chronological order, publisher details and print run information on titles in the *Keurboslaan* series

Title	Chronological Order	Publisher	First publication date	Print runs
1. Die hoof van Keurboslaan	4	J.L. van Schaik	1941	2 nd print (1944) 3 rd print (1946) 4 th print (1957) 5 th print (1962)
2. Keurboslaan se peetvaders	5	J.L. van Schaik	1942	2 nd print (1946) 3 rd print (1957)
3. Avonture op Keurboslaan	6	J.L. van Schaik	1942	2 nd print (year unknown) 3 rd print (1957)
4. Die kroon van die skool, (Die Lente Serie)	8	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	–	2 nd edition (1944)
Die kroon van Keurboslaan		J.L. van Schaik	1959	

Title	Chronological Order	Publisher	First publication date	Print runs
5. Twee nuwe seuns op Keurboslaan	7	J.L. van Schaik	1944	
6. Jong doktor Serfontein	1	J.L. van Schaik	1945	2 nd print (1946) 3 rd print (1955) 4 th print (1960)
7. Die Serfontein-kindere	13	J.L. van Schaik	1946	2 nd print (1957)
8. Raaisels op Keurboslaan	10	J.L. van Schaik	1947	2 nd print (1958)
9. Spanning op Keurboslaan	9	J.L. van Schaik	1947	2 nd print (1959)
10. Keurboslaan se eerste Kaptein	2	J.L. van Schaik	1948	2 nd print (1958)
11. Moleste op Keurboslaan	11	J.L. van Schaik	1949	2 nd print (1959)
12. Die skool se struikrower	3	J.L. van Schaik	1949	2 nd print (1958)*
13. Die skool stuur speuders (Die Lente Serie) Die skool stuur speuders	12	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel J.L. van Schaik	— —	2 nd print (1949) 2 nd print (1958) 3 rd edition (1958)**
14. Kaptein Richard	14	J.L. van Schaik	1956	
15. Rugby op Keurboslaan	16	J.L. van Schaik	1956	
16. Gevare op Keurboslaan	17	J.L. van Schaik	1957	
17. Misverstand op Keurboslaan	19	J.L. van Schaik	1959	
18. 'n Sukkelaar op Keurboslaan	15	J.L. van Schaik	1959	
19. Kultuur op Keurboslaan	20	J.L. van Schaik	1961	
20. Oorwinning vir Keurboslaan	18	J.L. van Schaik	1961	

* Now published under title *Keurboslaan se struikrower*

** Now published under title *Keurboslaan stuur speuders* by J.L. van Schaik

In the 1970s, the series was revised with the assistance of Blakemore and published as the *Nuwe Keurboslaan* series. The original twenty titles were condensed into nine titles and two new books were specially written. In the table

below, the titles of the eleven books in the new series are given with the original titles that were subsumed into the new books in brackets.

Table 2: Titles in the *Nuwe Keurboslaan* series

Title	Publisher	First pub. date	Print runs
1. Jong doktor Serfontein <i>(Jong doktor Serfontein, Keurboslaan se eerste Kaptein)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	2 nd print (1980)
2. Die hoof van Keurboslaan <i>(Keurboslaan se struikrower, Die hoof van Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	2 nd print (1980)
3. Nuweling op Keurboslaan <i>(Keurboslaan se peetvaders, Avonture op Keurboslaan, Twee nuwe seuns op Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	2 nd print (1980)
4. Die kroon van Keurboslaan <i>(Die kroon van Keurboslaan, Spanning op Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	2 nd print (1982)
5. Raaisels op Keurboslaan <i>(Raaisels op Keurboslaan, Moleste op Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	
6. Die Serfontein-kindere <i>(Die Serfontein-kindere)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	
7. Kaptein Richard <i>(Kaptein Richard, Rugby op Keurboslaan, 'n Sukkelaar op Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1973	2 nd print (1982)
8. Geheime op Keurboslaan <i>(Gevare op Keurboslaan, Oorwinning vir Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1974	2 nd print (1984)
9. Misverstand op Keurboslaan <i>(Misverstand op Keurboslaan, Kultuur op Keurboslaan)</i>	J.L. van Schaik	1974	2 nd print (1988)
10. Krisis op Keurboslaan	J.L. van Schaik	1974	2 nd print (1980)

Title	Publisher	First pub. date	Print runs
11. Ongenooid gaste op Keurboslaan	J.L. van Schaik	1974	2 nd print (1982)

In the 1990s the *Keurboslaan* series was yet again reprinted, this time in omnibus form. The series was substantially modernized and updated, replacing, for example, the word Transvaal with Gauteng, and so forth.

Table 3: Titles in the *Keurboslaan Omnibus* series

Title	Publisher	First publication date
1. Keurboslaan Omnibus I (including <i>Jong doktor Serfontein</i> , <i>Die hoof van Keurboslaan</i> , <i>Nuwelinge op Keurboslaan</i>)	J.L. van Schaik	1996
2. Keurboslaan Omnibus II (including <i>Die kroon van Keurboslaan</i> , <i>Raaisels op Keurboslaan</i> , <i>Die Serfontein kinders</i>)	J.L. van Schaik	1997

Blakemore's *Maasdorp* series was enormously popular amongst girls. The original *Maasdorp* series consisted of sixteen titles. In the 1970s this series was also revised and condensed by Blakemore and published in ten parts. To this she added two new titles, *Ontgroening op Maasdorp* and *Lalage op Maasdorp*, which brought the revised series to twelve books. The full list of books in the *Maasdorp* series is provided in the table below.

Table 4: Titles in the *Maasdorp* series

Title	Author	Publisher	First publication date
Maasdorp			
1. Allegra op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1942
2. Jongste meisie in Maasdorp Skool, Die	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1933

3. Meisies van Maasdorp, Die – 'n Verhaal vir meisies	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1932
4. Hoofmeisie Kobie	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1947
5. Kobie en die Wonderkind	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1939
6. Kobie gaan verder	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1951
7. Kobie regeer: 'n storie van Maasdorp se skool	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1935
8. Niggies op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1956
9. Maltrappe op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1961
10. Juffrou Kobie	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1953
11. Maasdorp se drie Musketiers	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1943
12. Maasdorp se nuwe onderwyseres	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1946
13. Maasdorp se redaktrises	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1957
14. Maters op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1961
15. Nukke op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1965
16. Jongspan op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1955
17. Ontgroening of Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1972
18. Lalage op Maasdorp	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1974

The *Maasdorp* series was reproduced in the 1990s in omnibus form:

Table 5: Titles in the *Maasdorp Omnibus* series

Title	Author	Publisher	First publication date
<i>Maasdorp Omnibus</i>			
1. Maasdorp Omnibus 1	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1995
2. Maasdorp Omnibus 2	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1996
3. Maasdorp Omnibus 3	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1997

In Afrikaans juvenile fiction, Blakemore reigns supreme as the queen of series books. She produced no less than six book series, including *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* books. A comprehensive list of Blakemore's other publications is provided in the table below.

Table 6: Other titles by Stella Blakemore (excluding titles in the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series)

Title	Author	Publisher	First publication date
Janse Cloete Series			
1. Die kuns van Janse Cloete, Die Lente Serie Die kuns van Janse Cloete	Theunis Krogh Theunis Krogh	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel J.L. van Schaik	unknown
2. Die erfposie van Janse Cloete	Theunis Krogh	J.L. van Schaik	1949
Delarey Series			
3. Vorm II op Delarey	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1948
4. Stryd oor Peta Stryd oor Peta	Stella Blakemore	Unie Boekhandel Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	1946
Blourand Series			
5. Ses kamermaats op Blourand – Die Lente Serie no. 1	Stella Blakemore	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	1944
6. Judith op Blourand – Die Lente Serie no. 9	Stella Blakemore	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	1945
7. Drie klontjies op Blourand – Die Lente Serie no. 34/39	Stella Blakemore	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	1950
8. Elfie, Apie en Carolus – Die Lente Serie no. 23	Stella Blakemore	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	1946
Die Rissies Series			
9. Die Rissies en die Masels	Dien Grimbeek	J.L. van Schaik	1960
10. Die Rissies in die Stad	Dien Grimbeek	J.L. van Schaik	1960
11. Die Rissies en die Kersboom	Dien Grimbeek	J.L. van Schaik	1960
12. Die Rissies en die Bure	Dien Grimbeek	J.L. van Schaik	1960

Title	Author	Publisher	First publication date
Plays and Operettas			
13. 'n Wedstryd in Droomland	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1934
14. Eerste April – toneelstukkie in een bedryf	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1934
15. Die Goue sleutel – 'n blyspel vir kinders in een bedryf	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1931
16. Die Toweruur – operette in een bedryf vir kinders	Stella Blakemore	J.L. van Schaik	1932
Other Books			
17. Die Familie Karelse	Stella Blakemore	Nasionale Pers Beperk	1938
18. Die swaard	Annalize Bierman	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	unknown
19. Katrientjie, 'n grappige roman	Stella Owen	Nasionale Pers	1939
20. Die Wilde Raubenheimers	Theunis Krogh	J.L. van Schaik	1948
21. Verpleegsters is altyd die ergstes	Stella Owen	Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel	unknown

The initial *Keurboslaan* series comprised of twenty titles and when the books were condensed in the 1970s, two new titles were added. The full *Maasdorp* list includes the original sixteen titles and the two new books that were released in the 1970s. Together with her other books, it brings the total number of original books written by Blakemore, excluding the revised, abridged and amalgamated versions of earlier books, to sixty-one titles. To this list can be added the five *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* books that were published in omnibus form, the ten titles that were published in the revised *Maasdorp* series, which were abridged and merged from the sixteen titles in the first series, the nine titles in the *Nuwe Keurboslaan* series, which were abridged and merged from the twenty books in the first *Keurboslaan* series, the translation of her novel *Katrientjie* in Zulu¹⁸ and of one of the *Maasdorp* books, *Juffrou Kobie*, in Dutch, as well as the words for a

¹⁸ Published in 1966 by Via Afrika in Cape Town with title *U-Phum 'phele:inja yezidumo* and translated by W.M.B. (Wiseman Bishop Maqhawe de Kelsy) M'Khize. It was reprinted in 1966 by Juta in Cape Town.

score of music published by Unie Publications.¹⁹ This brings the total list of books by Blakemore to eighty-eight, excluding reprints, revised editions, and single titles published by more than one publisher – which is the case with some of the *Keurboslaan* books, as well as the *Janse Cloete* and other books.

A concise history of J.L. van Schaik Publishers²⁰

In a letter from Blakemore (signed as Theunis Krogh) to one of her fans, a school teacher who wanted to put together a creative writing course, Blakemore wrote that she came in contact with J.L. van Schaik publishers when one of the first plays she had ever written was performed and Mr van Schaik was in the audience.²¹ After the performance, Mr van Schaik made contact with Blakemore and suggested that she submits the play in for publication, as he felt that there were very few plays in Afrikaans at the time. It is likely that she referred here to her play, *Die Goue Sleutel*, which was published by J.L. van Schaik in 1931. *Die Meisies van Maasdorp*, the first title in the *Maasdorp* series was submitted to the firm by Stella Blakemore in 1932 (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:482), and the first *Keurboslaan* title in 1941.

J.L. van Schaik publishers published almost all Blakemore's Afrikaans books, including the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series. In an article in *Boekewêreld* (1992), a collection on the history of Nasionale Pers, Jan van Schaik and Heinrich Raubenheimer provide an historical overview of J.L. van Schaik publishers, which is summarised below.

Johannes Lambertus van Schaik came to South Africa from the Netherlands and established two associated ventures in the book industry. Van Schaik was born in Weesp, which lies close to Amsterdam, on 2 April 1888. He came to South Africa in 1911 as manager of the Johannesburg branch of J.H. de Bussy's bookstores. Van Schaik and Raubenheimer state that J.L. van Schaik's decision to come to South Africa was based on his interest in and support for 'die Boeresak'

¹⁹ Lentelied no. 1 in A. Music by Sydney Richfield, words by Stella Blakemore. Published by Unie Publikasies c1946, Pretoria. Consists of 1 score (11p.).

²⁰ This section is largely based on the chapter 'Van Schaik' in *Boekewêreld*, a social history of Nasionale Pers, published in 1992 and edited by W.D. Beukes. Heinrich Raubenheimer and Jan van Schaik are the authors of this chapter. In addition, I conducted an interview with Mr Jan van Schaik to clarify some of the issues in the chapter and to obtain more information.

²¹ The letter is undated, but is likely to have been written in the 1950s. Extracts from the letter were later used as text for the cover jacket of the revised *Keurboslaan* series.

(1992:476). In 1914, he took over the Pretoria branch of the bookshop of the well-known Dutch firm Höveker & Wormser. Here he first opened a bookstore, which he called Van Schaik Boekhandel and later established a publishing house with the same name. In 1938 the bookstore and the publishing business were split into two companies. The first kept the name Van Schaik-Boekhandel, while the publishing company became known as J.L. van Schaik. The Van Schaik bookstore became so successful that he later opened three more bookstores with the same name in Pretoria.²² In the early years his clientele comprised largely of well to do business people and civil servants who spoke English, but there was also a Dutch contingent and a smaller Afrikaans-speaking group that regularly visited his store. According to Van Schaik and Raubenheimer (1992:478), Van Schaik felt very sympathetic towards the Afrikaners and realised that there was a gap in the market for literature in Afrikaans. Van Schaik and his brother-in-law, A.K. Bot, discussed the possibilities of producing books in Afrikaans with a particular focus on the school book market and in 1915 he started publishing his first titles in Afrikaans. In 1917, Jochem van Bruggen's novel *Teleurgesteld – a Van Schaik publication –* was awarded the Hertzog Prize for Afrikaans prose.

Van Schaik and Nasionale Pers were the most important publishers of Afrikaans literary works from the 1920s onwards. In addition to Afrikaans prose works and dramas, van Schaik also published a significant body of poetry in Afrikaans.²³

The first children's book to be produced by this publisher was *Die kaskenades van Klein Duimpie* (in English generally known as 'The antics of Tom Thumb') in 1917. Van Schaik also secured the translation rights to good European children's books to counter the dearth of good illustrators in South Africa at the time. In 1918 Van Schaik published its first textbooks for schools in Afrikaans and in Dutch, and in 1921 produced its first Afrikaans/English dictionary. One of the most successful children's books ever to be published in Afrikaans, *Patrys-hulle* by E.B. Grosskopf, was published by Van Schaik in 1926.

The firm was, however, never exclusively dedicated to publishing books in Afrikaans. It published numerous books in English and continued to publish books

²² These stores were situated close to universities. Stores were opened in Hatfield and Sunnyside in 1959 and one in Lynnwood Rd in 1964.

²³ Van Schaik published, among others, the majority of the works by the acclaimed author Eugène Marais, Uys Krige's debut volume of poetry, entitled *Kentering, Die Stil Avontuur*, by Elisabeth Eybers, and *Deining and Aardse vlam* by C.M. van den Heever.

in Dutch, in particular for the university market. From 1942, J.L. van Schaik also published books in other South African languages for the schoolbook market.

The Van Schaik bookstore in Church Street, Pretoria, was situated in close proximity to the offices of *De Volkstem*, a daily newspaper that was edited by Dr F.V. Engelenburg. Engelenburg attracted around himself a large group of young and enthusiastic Afrikaans writers, who would write pieces for his newspaper. Because of the proximity of the two sets of offices, these young writers would always drop in at the Van Schaik store. Through that, J.L. van Schaik got to know many of these young voices personally, and they served as a pool from which he could draw new talent for writing manuscripts.²⁴ Among these young writers were Gustav Preller, C. Louis Leipoldt, Eugène Marais, and Jan. F. E. Cilliers (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:482).

As was the case with Nasionale Pers, the decision to publish new manuscripts did not always hinge on sound business principles, as Mr van Schaik's commitment to the development of the Afrikaans culture influenced his decisions:

Winsbejag of die begeerte om 'n treffer of goeie verkoper uit te gee, het nie altyd die uitgewer se besluit om te publiseer beïnvloed nie. Dit was dikwels eerder 'n opregte begeerte om deur publikasie die Afrikaanse kultuur te bevorder en om boeke die lig te laat sien wat weens hul gehalte, maar veral ook in daardie dae 'as eerste in sy soort', uitgegee móés word (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:482).

[The strife for profit or the desire to publish a best seller did not always influence the publisher's decision to publish. It was often rather a deep-seated desire to promote the Afrikaans culture through the publication of books that simply *had* to be published, either because of their high quality, or because they were 'the first of its sort' (in Afrikaans).]

J.L. van Schaik's commitment to the cause of Afrikaner nationalism became more evident when, during the centenary of the Great Trek, the firm published a series of popular scientific booklets on 'aspects of the Afrikaner's cultural life (history, religion, literature, pedagogics, and art)' (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:484). The series was published in 31 titles and was written by a wide range of authors including H.A. Mulder, Sangiro, G. Dekker, Abel Coetzee, E.P.

²⁴ Interview with J.J. (Jan) van Schaik on 26 October 2001

Groenewald, J.C. Coetzee, N.P. van Wyk Louw, P.J. Nienaber and P.C. Schoonees (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:484). The series was called *Die Monument-reeks* and was very similar to the *Tweede Trek* series published by Nasionale Pers to commemorate the same event.

Mr Jan van Schaik, J.L. van Schaik's son, describes the 1930s as a difficult time for booksellers as there did not exist a good infrastructure for the distribution of Afrikaans books and sellers therefore had to rely on distribution through the CNA. Bookshops and publishers also placed advertisements in magazines, such as *Die Huisgenoot*, and local newspapers. In addition, the bookstore was well placed and well-known and there was a strong passing trade at the shop, comprising not only of Pretorians but also of out of town visitors for whom a visit to van Schaik's was standard practice when they were in town, as the following quote suggests:

As hier 'n sinode was in Pretoria, of 'n TO [Transvaalse Onderwysers] vergadering dan het die mense gewoonlik tuisgegaan in die Residensie Hotel. Dan het hulle altyd na die boekwinkel toe gekom om te kyk wat is nuut op die rakke. Daar was 'n 'passing trade' by die winkel.²⁵

[When there was a meeting of the synod in Pretoria or a meeting of the Transvaal Teachers' Association, people usually stayed at the Residensie Hotel. Then they always went to the bookshop to see what is new on the shelves. There existed a passing trade' at the store.]

J.L. van Schaik formed part of a network of booksellers and publishers, including Juta, Maskew-Miller en Adams in Durban, who assisted each other in the distribution of books. Since the formal structures for book dissemination were limited, J.L. van Schaik regularly produced a catalogue of its publications, which it distributed to bring in mail orders.

Mr Jan van Schaik recounted that there was a strong revival of Afrikaans and a significant increase in Afrikaans books during the Second World War, particularly given the strong Anti-War feelings held by the majority of Afrikaners in the North. In particular, there was an increased demand for Afrikaans books for schools and libraries. In the early 1950s, criticism was voiced in Afrikaans circles, more specifically intellectual circles including the Afrikaans literary establishment, that too many of the existing publications in Afrikaans were of poor quality and

²⁵ Interview with J.J. (Jan) van Schaik on 26 October 2001

included exaggerated representations of violence. J.L. van Schaik tried to foster close ties with some of the librarians at the Transvaal Education library services, among them Mrs Fuchs, Mrs Groenewald and Mrs Hoekstra, and used these contacts to promote the firm's publications and solicit information about current demands for books. As a result of complaints about the poor quality of children's literature, the firm translated a selection of children's literature from all over the world into Afrikaans and to publish these titles as the *Libri Series*.

It is perhaps true that J.L. van Schaik's understanding of the close ties between the publishing industry and the birth of nations and nationalism enabled the firm to capture a significant portion of the market for indigenous South African languages. J.L. van Schaik's role in the publishing industry highlights the relationship between the publishing industry and capitalism. Whilst it is true that the founder of Van Schaiks, J.L van Schaik, felt himself close to the cause of the 'Boere' and therefore produced many publications for the sake of promoting Afrikaans culture and language, the publication of key texts in Afrikaans (including dictionaries and literary works) in the long run turned into a profitable industry, once the firm had managed to grow a readership for its products. The principles of this undertaking could in turn be generically applied to the development of other languages:

Die uitgewery se uitgebreide produksielys word veral gekenmerk deur die steeds toenemende aantal titels in die Afrikatale. Behalwe letterkundige werk is grammatikas, leerboeke, en woordeboeke uitgegee. Waar die verkoop van hierdie publikasies in die jare veertig en vyftig skaars in die omset gereflekteer is, neem dit in die jare sewentig en tagtig sodanig toe dat dit al byna die helfte van die omset verteenwoordig. In die veranderende Suid-Afrika geld die slagspreuk wat vyftig jaar gelede op een van die uitgewery se embleme verskyn het, naamlik: "Jong Lewe Vol Strewe" (JLVS) (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:487).

[The publisher's extensive production list is characterised by the increasing number of titles in African languages. In addition to literary works, the firm publishes grammars, readers, and dictionaries. Whilst the sales of these publications were hardly reflected in the firm's turnover in the 1940s and 1950s, it has increased to such an extent in the 1970s and 1980s that it currently represents almost half of the turnover. In a changing South Africa the motto that appeared on the

firm's logo fifty years ago, namely 'Young Life Full of Strive' still holds true.]

Once again, the firm's efforts in this field were rewarded. In the late 1980s, books produced by J.L. van Schaik publishers had been awarded with, among others, 'the E.M. Ramaila prize (Northern Sotho), the B.W. Vilikazi prize (Zulu) and the Venda literary prize' (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:489). Up until 1989, Van Schaik had produced fifteen of the sixteen publications awarded with the E.M. Ramaila prize, and the firm produced a Sotho collection of poetry in 1989 (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:489).

Already in 1947, the firm was approached with a proposal to be bought out and incorporated into Nasionale Pers. Though Mr van Schaik initially declined, this proposal was finally accepted in 1986 when Van Schaik and Nasionale Boekhandel merged. The names of the Nasboek branches of Nasionale Boekhandel's bookstores were subsequently changed to Van Schaik, at the request of Mr Jan van Schaik that the name of the family business started by his father would in this way continue to exist (Van Schaik and Raubenheimer 1992:476).

A brief overview of the critical reception of Blakemore's books

The first reviews of Blakemore's work appeared in the early 1930s in publications such as *Die Huisgenoot*, *De Volkstem*, the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Die Vaderland*. On the whole, reviewers tended to be enthusiastic and positive about her work. In particular, Blakemore was praised for the fact that her books filled an important gap in Afrikaans literature, namely that of popular fiction for the youth. Reviewers made it clear, however, that whilst her books could be regarded as good popular fiction, they did not meet the criteria set for literary works and could also not be regarded among the best books for children produced in Afrikaans such as *Patrys-hulle* by Grosskopf (*Die Vaderland*, 13 November 1939).²⁶ The positive reception of her work despite, Blakemore was criticised for the poor quality of the language, the number of spelling and typing errors in many of the books, the non-idiomatic Afrikaans she used, and for too many 'Anglisismes' (words borrowed

²⁶ Also see 'Avontuur-verhaal', newspaper clipping, no date, no publication mentioned, no author, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

and directly translated from English, in cases where there do exist Afrikaans words with a similar meaning) (see, for example, *Die Burger*, 15 April 1935).²⁷

The majority of reviewers chose to focus on the strong educational component of the *Keurboslaan* books and the way in which the books provided answers to some of the problems experienced in the education system at the time. It should be noted here that the *Keurboslaan* books were published under the name of Theunis Krogh, and that reviewers were not aware that the author was a woman, a piece of information that only became public knowledge much later. The books were therefore generally deemed as very appropriate for 'school libraries, the classroom or individual reading' (see, for example, *Sunday Times*, 15 February 1942 and *Die Burger*, 15 April 1935).

Reviewers frequently made mention of the quality of the production and print work and the general attractiveness of the books (see, for example, *Onderwysblad*, 1 January 1948, *Cape Times*, 11 January 1934, and *De Volkstem*, 9 September 1933). This was characteristic of the publications produced by J.L. van Schaik. For that reason, their publications were often more expensive than those of their main competitors, Afrikaanse Boekhandel.

Three characteristics became the trademark of all of her work and were emphasised by reviewers. The first was her ability to create warm, true-to-life, and distinctive characters – each with his or her own idiolect and mannerisms. Arguably, this was Blakemore's greatest strength as a writer, and she relied heavily on the use of dialogue to bring her characters to life. The second trademark of her work was the important role that the lives, thoughts and emotions of adults play in her children's books. This trademark did not go unnoticed among reviewers and the fact that it was slightly odd that so much was written about intrigues and love affairs in the lives of adults in books for the youth was remarked upon more than once (*Die Burger*, 5 January 1933). In the last instance, reviewers commented on Blakemore's peculiar understanding of narrative. Her books generally comprised of a number of episodes or incidents

²⁷ Also see *Die jongste meisie in Maasdorp-skool. Die Huisgenoot*, no date, author's initials given as E.B., reference number 2000/88/3805.1, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein and 'Skoolkaskenades', no date, no author, no publication. Press clipping. Reference number 2000/88/3805.4, NALN Collection, Bloemfontein.

that together do not really add up to a tight plot as is the convention for formulaic series books (*Die Burger*, 5 January 1933).

Unfortunately most of the reviews that could be located were from the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s. No reviews of any of Blakemore's books dating from the late 1950s and 1960s could be found. These were important years as Blakemore was still churning out more volumes in the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series. Moreover, in the 1950s all her titles were revised and reprinted and were therefore freshly produced for a whole new generation of readers.

In the late 1960s, Enid Blyton's works were banned from libraries in England. This was part of broader criticism emerging against formulaic literature and series books, both of which were hallmarks of Blyton's oeuvre. From correspondence between Blakemore and her publishers, it is clear that these events also had an effect on the assessment of her work in South Africa. The fact that no book reviews could be located to confirm this trend is disappointing, but may perhaps be indicative of the fact that her books were no longer regarded as 'good literature' and were therefore not discussed in book reviews. The correspondence between Blakemore and Jan van Schaik definitely confirms that her books were severely criticised in the period and that this criticism mainly stemmed from educational and library circles. By the 1960s an extensive system of public libraries for white South Africans had been established. The purchasers for libraries in the four provinces therefore yielded enormous influence and power. A number of incidents involving the Cape Town Library described in Chapter Four, show Blakemore's books were no longer in good standing. However, this did not affect the popularity of the books among children, and both series were substantially revised, shortened and modernized for a new generation of readers in the 1970s.

There is, however, one other form of critical reception that provides some insight into the way in which her work was received by the establishment. J.L. van Schaik contracted professional reviewers to approve and edit manuscripts submitted by Blakemore. In Chapter Four, the feuds between Blakemore and these reviewers are discussed in more depth. However, based on review reports, there can be no doubt that Blakemore's Afrikaans writing was rather poor. This was also clear from some of the original manuscripts that I surveyed in the NALN Collection in

Bloemfontein. The manuscripts were clearly very heavily edited, and the pages literally drowned in the red ink.

In 1973, Blakemore visited South Africa after an absence of eighteen years. During this time, many articles appeared in the press that gave an overview of her work and the contribution she had made to Afrikaans children's literature. Her visit coincided with the launch of the revised editions of the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series. Her work was also celebrated in reviews that appeared after her death. Numerous obituaries were published in the Afrikaans media. An example is an article by Marina le Roux (Le Roux 1991:6) in which she reviewed Blakemore's life and made an assessment of the impact her work has had in the Afrikaner community. Once again it was emphasised that the books were equally popular amongst girls and boys. But Le Roux commented on the important and exaggerated role hero-worshipping play in Blakemore's books and the explicitly sexist-patriotic tone of the *Keurboslaan* series. However, an assessment of her work leads the author of the article to conclude that it was Stella Blakemore and her *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* books that got the Afrikaans child reading and kept them reading.

In a commemorative article on Blakemore, published in *Insig* in 2001, the fact that the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series had incited their love for reading is confirmed by a number of prominent Afrikaans-speakers (Dick et. al. 2001:61-63). Among these are many prominent academics, writers and journalists including Chris Louw, Eleanor Baker, Erika Murray-Theron, Martie Meiring, Madeleine van Biljon and Franci Greyling. Chris Louw, for example, remarks in the article that Blakemore's books 'have spoiled him for ever with an irrevocable nostalgia for Afrikaans'²⁸ (Dick et. al. 2001:62). Dick et. al. find it significant that someone who has had 'such an impact on the Afrikaans readers spent the majority of her life overseas' (Dick et. al. 2001:62). They conclude their assessment of her work by stating that even though it was difficult to estimate the impact of the two series, it had to have been substantial (Dick et. al. 2001:63). To substantiate this point they publish the following quotes from two prominent Afrikaans journalists:

As ek soms wonder wie of wat ek nou eintlik wou word toe ek jonger was, dan keer ek altyd terug na *Maasdorp* en *Keurboslaan*, en dan

²⁸ Original Afrikaans: 'hom vir ewig met 'n onhaalbare nostalgie vir Afrikaans besmet [het]'

verskyn my groot lewensideale en drome glashelder voor my – en skielik weet ek weer waarheen (Dick et al 2001:63).

[When I sometimes wonder who or what I wanted to be when I was younger, I always return to *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan*, and then my great goals in life and dreams appear before me clear as daylight – and once again I suddenly know whereto.]

and

Dit was die enigste *aspirational* lektuur, buiten die Bybel, wat ons jeugdige Afrikaners gehad het (Martie Meiring in Dick et al 2001:63).

[Besides the Bible, it was the only aspirational literature our young Afrikaners had.]

The article notes that the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* works are currently regarded by many to be a celebration of patriarchy, in addition to being sexist, racist and patriotic with an unnecessary focus on outdated middle class values. Nonetheless, the writers concur that 'Blakemore is known as *the* author of juvenile fiction that got Afrikaans children reading by providing them with escapist fiction of the highest quality (Dick et. al. 2001:63). Many other Afrikaans academics, reviewers and critics have in the past confessed their 'addiction' to Blakemore's novels (Van der Merwe, *Sarie*, 5 July 1995).

Chapter Three

Stella Blakemore on the practice of writing popular fiction and her fictional characters

I never can thank Providence enough for the Maasdorp and Kbl. characters, who found me rather than I found them. With all my faults as a writer, the characters live for us all.¹

Introduction

When Enid Blyton wrote a foreword to a complete list of books she had published up until the end of 1950, she used the opportunity to explain why she wrote. Whilst she claimed that she wrote to entertain, her introductory notes point to the importance she allotted to the *power* of her stories to influence, form and mould the minds of young people:

I do not write merely to entertain, as most writers for adults can legitimately claim to do. My public do not possess matured minds – what is said to them in books they are apt to believe and follow, for they are credulous and immature. Naturally, the morals or ethics are *intrinsic* to the story – and therein lies their true power (Blyton, quoted in Dixon 1978:57).

Reading this foreword, one is left with the impression that Blyton felt a pressing need to educate the youth and to make her ideas, attitudes and beliefs theirs. It appears that she got great personal satisfaction from the fact that she was in a position where she exerted so much influence over a group of persons whom she saw as 'credulous and immature':

All the Christian teaching I had, in church or Sunday-school or in my reading has coloured every book I have written for you... Most of you could write down perfectly correctly all the things I believe in and stand for – you have found them in my books, and a writer's books are *always a faithful reflection of himself* [my emphasis] (Enid Blyton in an extract from an undated and untitled biography quoted in Dixon 1978:57).

¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 7 February 1959.

Stella Blakemore, a South African writer of popular, formulaic series fiction for children, expressed her motivation for writing in quite opposite terms from Blyton. In all her exchanges with her publisher, J.L. van Schaik, it is evident that she had a lot of respect for her readers and that she took her craft as writer seriously. Yet, she had a profound respect for the notion of a market, not least because of the fact that her fiction secured for her a much needed income stream. This chapter explores Blakemore's thoughts on being a writer, her relationship with her characters and the contradictions and contestations present in the creative enterprises of a writer of popular fiction.

Blakemore took her writing very seriously. Doing that, for her, meant at least three things: (1) being loyal to and respecting her readers; (2) treating her characters with respect and being true to them; and (3) producing books in a fashion that was respectful of both the readers and the characters. The examples below illustrate this point.

Blakemore and her readers

Blakemore faithfully replied to letters she received from fans and she took their suggestions seriously. For example, she asked one of her fans to proofread a manuscript before she sent it to the publishers, and – on another occasion – at the suggestion of this same fan, Karin Krimberg, she had one of her characters in the Maasdorp series get married, even though she did not feel that this was necessary.² Yet another fan, Renske Koen, was asked to choose the title for a manuscript that was eventually published as *Nukke op Maasdorp* – one of Koen's suggestions.³ Blakemore expressed disregard for the British youth, but felt that the Afrikaans young people she has always written for were far more mature:

² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 29 January 1967 and letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 February 1968.

³ See letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 23 October 1964; letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 28 November 1964; letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 1 February 1965.

On the other hand, our Afrikaans children are very mature. I have written for them all these years as one could never write for English children, who seem to me never to grow up at all, even after they have been to Eton and Oxford. I have always been able to write for our own children *as if they were adults* [my emphasis], as long as there was nothing in a book that could not be read aloud in class. We have handled birth, death, marriage, crime, and even murder, without any trouble⁴

The way in which Blakemore expresses her relationship with her readers, which is, in her terms, an equal relationship, explains perhaps the success and popularity of her books, and also firmly sets apart her approach from that of Blyton.

Blakemore was fully aware of the extent to which the schools portrayed in the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series were idyllic, imaginary places. In 1955, Jan van Schaik wrote to Blakemore advising her that she should not continue with the *Delarey* series or the *Janse Cloete* or *Wilde Raubenheimers*.⁵ In her reply, Blakemore shows that she knew that one of the reasons why the books mentioned by her publisher did not sell so well was that the kind of school life sketched in those books simply could not compare with the wonderful schools *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* were portrayed to be:

I note what you say about the other series. The truth is, readers want only Maasdorp books from Stella Blakemore and Keurboslaan from our friend T. Krogh! I must say I quite understand this. From my own favourite authors, I want only what I am accustomed to from them! Apart from anything else, Maasdorp and Keurboslaan are such pleasant places, that any other schools seem to fall flat in comparison.⁶

She also seemed to have been aware of the fact that the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books were likely to appeal to a particular kind of audience and that this audience was defined along particular class and geographical location cleavages. On sending a new *Keurboslaan* manuscript, *Rugby op Keurboslaan*, to J.L. van Schaik in 1955 she wrote that she would have liked to write more books for readers who do not enjoy accounts of the elite *Keurboslaan* school:

⁴ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 14 November 1963.

⁵ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 9 February 1955.

⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 February 1955.

About the Janse Cloete books... I should rather like to do about three more Janse Cloete books, because they were definitely intended for boys at the 'plattelandse' who get rather bothered at the idea of the privileged life at Keurboslaan.⁷

It is difficult to gauge precisely what Blakemore meant when she said in a letter to Jan van Schaik that the *Keurboslaan* books were written with people like him in mind:

I can say, honestly, that the book is as good as I have been able to make it, and I am very sure you will like it, because the Keurboslaan books are written for people like you.⁸

A possible interpretation would be that she meant that she had written the books for people with his kind of interests, standing and profession, i.e. the children of the professional classes or those who aspired to become part of the professional classes. There is yet another person that Blakemore deemed to have been the Keurboslaan type – this time not the target reader though, but a typical product of Keurboslaan. Writing about meeting Mr (Koos) Human from Nasionale Boekhandel in 1958, Blakemore states that she found him 'a very good type indeed – good enough to have come out of Keurboslaan'.⁹

On writing popular fiction and the question of 'the market'

Blakemore's letters demonstrate that she took her craft as a writer seriously and that she wrote with integrity:

Ek skaam my nie om my werk van die ernstige kant te beskou nie. Vir my is dit nie 'slegs' jeuglektuur nie; dit is, nieteenstaande my swakhede en tekortkominge, die beste waartoe ek, persoonlik, in staat is.¹⁰

[I'm not ashamed to view my work in a serious light. For me it is not "just" youth literature, it is, in spite of my weaknesses and shortcomings, the best that I am, personally, capable of.]

She did, however, acknowledge her shortcomings as a writer:

⁷ Letter to J.L. Mr van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 11 September 1947.

⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 16 May 1955.

⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 14 November 1958.

¹⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik in Afrikaans from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958.

The new Maasdorp is turning out very well. I am enjoying it. When I say this sort of thing, please don't imagine I think my work is marvellous. I only mean it is the best I can do!¹¹

These shortcomings despite, for her taking her craft as a writer seriously meant that she could not simply write anything merely to have it published. She once remarked that if she was not enjoying writing a book it never turned out well anyway.¹² In a letter to Jan van Schaik in which she asks him to send her copies of the most successful books in Afrikaans for children or juveniles, she makes a light reference to the fact that she was not prepared to write a particular kind of literature, saying that he could send anything, as long as it was not 'infantile ones about Baby Rabbits!'.¹³ Nonetheless, given that her writing was her income, Blakemore was always interested in what the market wanted and therefore not unwilling to try new things:

I think Enid Blyton's books are puerile in the extreme, but my own children love them, and so do all others! The great thing is to give your readers what they want, I suppose, but this will be a new technique for me. I have always written the Maasdorp and Keurboslaan books to please myself!¹⁴

Since she was so closely in touch with the notion of a market, i.e. with the idea of what will sell, she was not unaware of the impact that politics in the broader sense could have on the sales of her books. As will be shown in Chapter Four, she was therefore prepared to make changes to her books to appease the market and her books did not necessarily reflect her own views, as Blyton claimed hers had done. Yet, there were a number of things on which Blakemore was never prepared to compromise. These included the integrity of her creative work and the quality of the print production. Since she wrote with her readers foremost in her mind, her approach was that reading was a total experience, and she held firmly that author and publisher should work together to enhance the reading experience.

By the mid-fifties there was a need for Blakemore to start writing new books. The *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series were both almost finished and Jan van Schaik

¹¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 3 June 1955.

¹² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 7 February 1959.

¹³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 February 1955.

¹⁴ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 2 March 1955.

wanted her to attempt to write shorter and lighter books. As examples of this type of fiction, he subsequently sent her copies of the *Saartjie* and *Trompie* series, which were also written by a single author, Topsy Smith. The girls' stories were published under the pseudonym Bettie Naudé.¹⁵ About the *Trompie*, *Saartjie* and *Soekie* books she received, she writes

I was interested to get them, and read them all through at once. I enjoyed them too. The writers seem to enjoy writing, and they pass this on to the reader. But though you tell me the *Soekie* books do not sell quite as well as the *Saartjie* and *Trompie*, I seem to prefer them. Perhaps this is because of the frightfully cheap, ugly productions that the Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel seems to think good enough for its readers. The *Soekie* books are beautifully produced and printed, and a joy to handle.¹⁶

The quality of the production was not the only thing Blakemore felt strongly about. When Jan van Schaik wrote to her about a manuscript for the *Maasdorp* series, provisionally titled *Reina keer voor*, he stated that he felt that she had written the book in a hurry. To prove his point, he asked her about the meaning of an encounter described in the manuscript where one of the characters, Elsabé, is described as feeling very sad at a big party, particularly because Claudia [Sic] was there. Van Schaik wants to know why Elsabé would feel so sad.¹⁷ From her response it is clear that Blakemore felt very upset about Van Schaik's comments. In her reply, she points out that, in the first place, Van Schaik was referring to a character with the name Claudia, whereas the name of the character was in fact Claudius. Moreover, she felt that her publisher was not treating her stories or readers with respect. She explained to him what had happened in an earlier book and how that linked up to present events. Moreover, she emphasized that her loyal readers would definitely had known exactly why Elsabé had felt so sad. Regarding this exchange, she writes:¹⁸

You know, I have my weaknesses as a writer, but I never leave loose ends if the reader really looks for the connecting links.¹⁹

¹⁵ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan an Schaik dated 24 February 1955.

¹⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 16 May 1955.

¹⁷ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 28 July 1955.

¹⁸ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 28 July 1955.

¹⁹ Letter from Stella Owen to Jan van Schaik dated 2 August 1955.

Blakemore and her characters

Blakemore regarded characterisation to be the true test of good fiction for children. She did not approve of the British tradition – in which Blyton very much set the tone – of creating one-dimensional characters and shifting the focus of the narrative to the series of events:

As so often, I am trying to start a new series for you. I find it very hard to shape my characters in the space of a short book, and the English technique of making the character just a named peg to hang a few incidents on, in Juvenile fiction, I cannot bear. I got one of Eric Leyland's books and found it readable except for the lack of true characterisation. I don't blame the writer for this. It is what English publishers of children's books demand.²⁰

It is precisely for this reason, that she became so aggrieved when language editors and revisers tampered with her characters' dialogue:

In both the Maasdorp and Keurboslaan series' I have tried to create people – more often than not they create themselves – each of whom speaks and acts in a purely personal way. In the MSS. of *'n Sukkelaar op Keurboslaan*, Ruysenaer has picked up the expression 'Oi, Ghewault!' from a trader, and uses it on all occasions, as boys will. I do not want this to be changed to 'Ag nee' or 'My maskas!' This is true for every other word that I have written, except for actual Grammatical or Spelling errors.²¹

It could be said that, to a large extent, Blakemore felt that her characters were flesh and blood people:

If only revisers would leave doctor Serfontein alone, that would be the prime blessing of my life. I often 'sukkel' a whole day to bring out a sentence exactly the way I want him to speak it. Then the reviser gets ideas and brings my hero up, speaking in a way completely foreign to himself and to me.²²

and

²⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 1 July 1957.

²¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958.

²² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958.

I never can thank Providence enough for the Maasdorp and Kbl. characters, who found me rather than I found them. With all my faults as a writer, the characters live for us all.²³

In 1959 Jan van Schaik wrote to Blakemore, suggesting that she moulded a new series on something such as Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* books. In the same letter, he informed her that the sales for the *Trompie* and *Saartjie* series were declining and that it seemed that Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel was not going to reprint the titles.²⁴ To this, she replied as follows:

I am interested in what you say about the *Trompie* and *Saartjie* books. Interested but not pleased. The more good books there are, the more the reading public is stimulated and the better it is for all writers. But I thought all along that that type of book, which could never be read more than once, and in which the characters are only pegs on which to hang a very slight story, were not going to live. They stopped just short of the charm of the William books by Richmal Crompton, which they were obviously intended to follow in pattern.²⁵

The pragmatic person that she was, and given her financial commitments, she nevertheless decided to take up the challenge to write a series in the tradition of the *Famous Five*. Her first attempt was a series about a family of children with the family name Rissik, who, since they all have red hair, become known as 'Die Rissies'. About the project Blakemore had said that 'it [was] no use my reading an Enid Blyton book to get the idea, because I never got beyond the first page in any of her books yet'. She further stated that in writing these stories she would be 'keeping well away from schools' and from parents too, as her children has explained to her that these were two of Blyton's principles.²⁶ The series comprised of four books, published in 1960 under the pseudonym Dien Grimbeek. Whilst the books did fairly well, they were not nearly as popular as her *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books.

The *Keurboslaan* series always held a very special place in Blakemore's heart. In 1958, she writes a very long letter to Jan van Schaik, having just received a copy of the print version of her *Keurboslaan* book, *Gevare op Keurboslaan*. In the

²³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 7 February 1959.

²⁴ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 28 January 1959.

²⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 7 February 1959.

²⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 21 February 1959.

letter, she explains that she was very distressed upon reading the book, as the revisers had made many changes to the text including to the way in which some of the characters speak.²⁷ As a result of the reviser's efforts – which she did not approve of in the first place – many mistakes had slipped into the text. In the letter, she tries to explain to Jan why she felt so angry and upset about this by recounting to him how it came about that she wrote the first *Keurboslaan* book:

When I spent that very pleasant evening with you and Herma at your home, you told me that your father had felt very bad when I gave some of the Keurboslaan books to Sarel [Sarel Marais from Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel] and that you could not help agreeing with him. I told you then that I had felt obliged to spread the books out between several publishers, because at the time, during the War, each firm was allowed to publish only a certain fixed number of books a year, while I desperately needed the advances for as many books as I could write. This was perfectly true, but if I had not been very tired that night, and furthermore unwilling to embarrass Herma by a Business-argument, I should have added another truth, which is that during all the years I wrote for van Schaik's I never had a word of approval of anything I had written. I do not blame your father for this. Experience has taught me that publishers consider it a duty to take a writer down several pegs at every interview. One's greeting is usually: 'Your last book is not selling at all well. We are going to loose money on it.' Or 'So-and-so has written a much better children's book than yours' I should not complain of the latter remark, because it was one such from your father about 'Jong van der Byls' that made me turn stubborn and start the Keurboslaan series. It is grim to have to admit that the series that gives me so much personal joy should have started from such an unworthy motive!²⁸

This then is how Blakemore came to write *Die Hoof van Keurboslaan*. At the time, however, she had no intention of writing a series. The idea to write more *Keurboslaan* books was only born after she had seen the illustration of Roelof Serfontein on the cover jacket of the first edition of *Die hoof van Keurboslaan*, which was drawn by a certain Montgomery:

²⁷ Letter to Jan van Schaik in English from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958. For example, revisers changed the way in which characters speak. For example, in the original, one of the characters, Loggenberg, had said 'Komaan, brak!' ('C'mon you mongrel!'). In the print version, this was changed to 'Kom, Wotan, my goeie hond!' ('Come, Wotan, my good dog!').

²⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik in English from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958.

You speak of a new dust jacket for *Die Kroon*. If you have not got it done yet, I suggest that you don't have a picture of Doktor Serfontein. No one has ever drawn him properly, except Montgomery on the cover of *Die Hoof van Kbl*. Even he never got it right again. It was that face that inspired all the following books. Until I saw it, I had no intention of writing the series, but that face triggered it all off.²⁹

It was clear that she really felt attached to her characters, and in particular to Dr Serfontein:

If you are reissuing the *Keurboslaan* books, for goodness' sake get someone equally good to do the illustrations. If they can't get Dr. Serfontein exactly right, they had better leave him alone. Some of the old illustrations were terrible, especially the cover of *Jong Dr. Serfontein*. The only person who ever got him the way I want him was Montgomery, on the cover of *Die hoof van Keurboslaan*. That face was perfect.³⁰

This point is reiterated in many letters.³¹ An illustration of Dr Serfontein on the cover of the 1950s edition of *Jong Dr. Serfontein* is described by Blakemore as being 'pudding-faced',³² a problem that Blakemore regards to have derived from that fact that some illustrators do not read the books they illustrate. On receiving a batch of four *Keurboslaan* reprints in 1957, she writes:

The books are lovely, but I think we ought to be 'lugtig' of drawing pictures of Doktor Serfontein. No one can really draw anyone so beautiful!³³

Upon hearing of the possibility that a *Keurboslaan* story may be adapted into a radio play, she is very anxious about which actor they will get to play the role of Dr Serfontein:

I was always scared of this, as if one didn't get exactly the right person for 'die hoof' it would be a disaster. If they gave the part to someone with a high, scratchy voice, I could open my main artery in the middle of Church Square! The only person I should ever consider for the part is

²⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 18 October 1958.

³⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 3 February 1955.

³¹ See letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 February 1955.

³² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 February 1955.

³³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 4 November 1957.

Gideon [Roos] himself, who has just the right voice with a ripple of humour underneath!³⁴

Blakemore's sentimental feelings about the *Keurboslaan* series and her *Keurboslaan* characters are evident from her request to Jan van Schaik to have a portrait made of Dr Serfontein's face as it was depicted on the cover jacket of the first edition of *Die hoof van Keurboslaan*:

Listen! You know that photographer you wanted me to go to? He does crayon portraits from the photos he takes. Couldn't he possibly take Montgomery's first face of Dr. Serfontein, on the first edition of Die Hoof van Kbl., photograph it and then do me a biggish crayon drawing of it – or whichever way he processes it to look like a drawing. I only want the face. The rest of the illustration is awful. But I have wanted that face to hang up for years, because all the other Kbl. books came from it. Please let me know about this. I wouldn't care what he charged.³⁵

Blakemore said in a number of interviews, and others have often reiterated this, that her *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* characters were based on real people.³⁶ On the cover jacket of the revised edition of the *Keurboslaan* series published in the late 1950s, an extract from a letter Blakemore wrote to one of her fans was reproduced. The extract affirmed the notion that many of the characters were based on real people:

Presies hoe die Keurboslaanreeks ontstaan het, sal ek nie kan sê nie. Dis miskien aan die karakters self te danke. Dr. Serfontein het in werklikheid bestaan, ofskoon hy nie presies daardie soort skool bestuur het nie. Hy was in elke opsig die karakter wat in die boeke verskyn – miskien minder kortgebonde! Maar toe ek jonk was, het sy persoonlikheid op my 'n besonder sterk invloed uitgeoefen, en daar ek tog 'n skrywer is, moes dit eendag uitborrel. Hy was goed bekend, beide as professor en as advokaat, maar ek kan ongelukkig nie sy naam noem nie. Krynauw ook, is die werklikheid self. Ek het veel van hom geleer, selfs toe hy my leerling was. Ek het hom onlangs in Londen gesien, waar hy 'n paar jaar vertoef om verder te studeer. Hy is vandag nog, soos altyd, 'n uitstekende mens. So lewe ook al die ander

³⁴ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 20 December 1956.

³⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 7 November 1958.

³⁶ See, for example, her publisher, Jan van Schaik's comments in Malan, R. 1991. Skrywer van jeugreekse op 85 dood. *Beeld*, 5 June 1991, p. 5.

Keurboslaan-karakters in my, en ek geniet dit om hulleself (sic) hul eie probleme te laat uitwerk.³⁷

[Precisely how the Keurboslaan series originated, I will be unable to explain. The birth of the series is perhaps to be ascribed to the characters themselves. Dr Serfontein existed in real life, although he did not manage exactly that kind of school. He was in all respects the character that appeared in the books, though he may have been a little less short-tempered! But when I was young, his personality exercised upon me a particularly strong influence, and given that I am a writer, this had to surface at some point. He was well known, both as professor and advocate, but unfortunately I cannot divulge his name. Krynauw, too is a person in real life. I learnt a lot from him, even when he was still my student. I recently met up with him in London, where he is spending a few years to further his studies. In the same way, all the other Keurboslaan characters live within me and I enjoy allowing them to sort out their own problems.]

Whereas there might have been some truth in this statement, the reality seems to have been slightly more complex. A number of Blakemore's characters were indeed based on acquaintances of hers. So, for example, the inspiration for at least two of the Maasdorp characters appeared to have been people Blakemore knew. When she wrote to Jan van Schaik in 1966 to ask him to investigate the possibilities of finding a teaching job for her daughter in South Africa, she disclosed that Mev Renton in the *Maasdorp* series, a character loathed by the readers, was based on someone she had known in Pretoria:

As Juff. Steyn is my deadly enemy (I don't really blame her, because my juff. Muller, later mev. Renton in Maasdorp is taken straight from her, and she couldn't miss it! I only made the Renton fair-haired to avoid trouble) you had better not mention that the person on behalf of whom you are enquiring is my daughter. I heard from Willem that the lady is now high up in the Department! Mind you, I didn't attack her until she had tried, with no success, to break up my music school. She made a very good fictional character in any case!³⁸

She also admitted that yet another *Maasdorp* character may have been moulded on another acquaintance from her Pretoria years, Mrs Gey van Pittius, even if she did it 'unconsciously':

³⁷ Cover jacket of Krogh, T. 1958. *Keurboslaan se Struikrower*. Second Print. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik.

³⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 8 December 1966.

[O]ne's children take advice from anyone else in the world, except One. Dis jammer hulle kon nie almal ou mev. Malan as 'n ma hē nie. There was one like her in Pretoria – Mrs. Gey van Pittius – not the Judge's wife, but mother of Johann who use to play the violin. Anneke Reitz, has always accused me of copying her for mev. Malan's character. Perhaps I did unconsciously...³⁹

Yet it would seem that her more complex characters and lead characters, such as Eugene Krynauw and Roelof Serfontein, were entirely fictional characters, taking on some attributes from people she had known and respected. Blakemore did indicate that the character of Dr Serfontein was to some extent inspired by her feelings for someone she had once known:

Perhaps I did unconsciously, just as, in a way, I took something from Paul Zorn for Doktor Serfontein. Only in a way. Paul was always gentle. A darling, he was. He taught me English for Matric, and I use to stare at him open-mouthed, and blush and drop dead when he looked at me. Thank God I am not young anymore! But Paul would have been gently amused at the thought that he gave me so many books and that I myself get such a kick out of them.⁴⁰

Paul Zorn may have influenced the outline of the character of Dr Serfontein, but it is also clear that she used the characteristics of others to fill out the personality of Dr Serfontein. So for example, she once wrote that the only person who could do Roelof Serfontein's voice was Gideon Roos from the SABC.⁴¹

In October 1960, Jan van Schaik sent her a newspaper clipping about 'the well known Dr Krynauw who made quite a name for himself as a brain specialist'.⁴² She replied by stating that she was sure that no-one would ever believe her when she says that when 'her' Krynauw was 'born, I had never heard of the flesh-and-blood one!'.⁴³ Of course, the person on whom she moulded this character did not need to have had the same surname to exist! Yet, it is strange that she did not tell Jan van Schaik in this letter anything more about from where she got the inspiration for the character of Krynauw. Based on her letters, and taking at least

³⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 October 1967.

⁴⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 October 1967.

⁴¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 20 December 1956.

⁴² Letter to Stella Blakemore from Jan van Schaik dated 24 October 1960.

⁴³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 2 November 1960.

part of the cover jacket text seriously, it is possible that Krynauw was loosely modelled on the person of a family friend of the Blakemore's, Jacob van Wyk de Vries, who later lived in London to further his career in music.

Thus, it is clear that the person who inspired the character of Roelof Serfontein was not – as she claimed on the cover jacket of *Gevare op Keurboslaan* – 'a well-known professor and advocate', nor was Jacob van Wyk de Vries, who probably served as inspiration for the character Krynauw, a medical doctor or a brain surgeon.

Based on the above, it is argued that some of Blakemore's larger than life characters were indeed inspired by people she had known and admired. Nonetheless, these characters were not true renditions of the persons that inspired them as she had sometimes claimed. Rather, in characters such as Dr Serfontein and Eugene Krynauw, she tried to capture the kernel or essence of the real life person that provided the inspiration, but added to that many characteristics from other people as well as a great deal of purely fictional elements through embroidering on her characters' backgrounds, appearances and personal qualities. At the same time, the majority of her other characters were purely fictitious.

Blakemore planned to write a great number more *Keurboslaan* books than she actually did. Originally, she wanted the series to finish with a final book in which Dr Serfontein's son – presumably Richard – would take over the school.⁴⁴ From what she wrote about the *Keurboslaan* series it is clear that she derived much pleasure from writing these books and that both the characters and the setting gave her joy. This is at least one of the reasons why she often tried to persuade her publishers to allow her to write more *Keurboslaan* books or to expand the series into another one:

The new Kbl. title, *Kaptein Richard*, will be posted on Monday next. You might like to call it 'Die eerste Richard Serfontein' book. There will be about five in that series. I like this one very much, but then I am always happy in the *Keurboslaan* air.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 11 September 1947.

⁴⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 23 November 1954.

On top of that, though, in what is quintessential Blakemore, her motives for keeping the *Keurboslaan* series and the Serfontein family alive was closely linked to the way in which producing more books could improve her financial situation:

The kbl. book is being sent off by registered letter post tomorrow... It is called *Kaptein Richard* and is either to be regarded as another Kbl book, or the first of five 'Richard Serfontein' books I am going to write. In fact, I have them all roughly drafted, but of course the market cannot take them as fast as that! I am also doing a series of Berrie Serfontein books, but these will be adventure books – not school-stories exactly. I think of calling it 'Die Berrie Serfontein Avontuur-reeks'. I have struck a patch of writing, perhaps because of the quantities of letters I have been getting lately. In any case, I must admit to be doing it with some thought of getting money for a venture – as well as for pleasure, of course.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Blakemore's reflections on her writing indicates that the relationship between popular fiction writing and the market economy is more complex and less singular than it is often rendered in scholarship on the subject. The research demonstrate that Blakemore took her craft as a writer serious, and whilst she was acutely aware of market desires and the fact that her writing was not regarded as 'literary', she brought to her craft a certain amount of dignity and integrity. This is most evident in her relationship with her characters. In some ways, this finding challenges the binary opposition between popular fiction and high literature. Blakemore's novels display most of the characteristics of formulaic school stories. Yet, she produces rounded characters with a great amount of depth.

⁴⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 29 November 1954.

Chapter Four:

A relationship over many years: Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik Publishers

Introduction

Stella Blakemore was a prolific writer. Her letters to her publishers are generally written in a conversational style and sometimes contain fairly personal information. The tone of the letters she received from various persons at J.L. van Schaik, however, is far more guarded, restrained and formal. Countless of the publisher's letters include a paragraph or sentence to explain an unnecessary delay in responding to a letter or request from Blakemore, contributing to an impression that they were continuously falling behind in replying to the sometimes unstoppable flow of letters from their author.

Records show that Blakemore had corresponded with at least three persons in the Van Schaik firm. For many years, she corresponded solely with the head of the firm, J.L. van Schaik. He was also the person she liased with when she was living in Pretoria from 1935 to 1947. During that time, she got to know the Van Schaik family, including J.L. van Schaik's wife and his sons, fairly well. On financial matters, she sometimes corresponded with Mr Bosman, the firm's accountant, but these letters were very formal and official. From the early 1950s, when she and her husband already lived in Kumasi, she intermittently corresponded with J.L. van Schaik and his son, Jan van Schaik, but from 1954 she writes exclusively to Jan. The first recorded transaction between Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik is confirmed in a letter, dated 19 January 1931, from J.L. van Schaik to Mrs Emma Blakemore, in which Van Schaik accepts for publication Blakemore's play, *Die Goue Sleutel*, for which she was to receive a cash payment of £12.10.0.

On the surface, it seems peculiar that her correspondence with the firm was conducted solely in English, given that Blakemore was an author of fiction in

Afrikaans and that the firm specialised in the production of Afrikaans literature.¹ However, Blakemore's first encounter with the firm was with its founder, J.L. van Schaik, 1931. J.L. van Schaik was a Dutch speaker. Blakemore could speak and write Afrikaans, but not Dutch, since she completed her schooling in Natal. Afrikaans became an official language only in 1927. Before that, English, but also Dutch, were the two languages used in the ZAR for business and professional purposes. Blakemore's mother, Emma, too corresponded with J.L. van Schaik in English, and indication that, as the child of a very prominent member of the ZAR society, she too had her schooling in English. These reasons may explain why J.L. van Schaik and Blakemore would have corresponded in English. When Jan van Schaik took over from his father, he may for professional reasons have decided to continue communicating in the language in which she always communicated with his father. But, by that time Blakemore had been away from South Africa for many years, and from the exchanges in letters, particularly on the quality of her written Afrikaans, it would seem that to Jan van Schaik, Blakemore was an English speaker who wrote fiction in Afrikaans.

It is clear from the outset that the firm maintained a very professional relationship with their author. For example, in a letter dated 20th September 1932, she is informed by Mr Bosman from J.L. van Schaik that a play she had entered for the Krugersdorp Dramatic and Operetic (sic) Society, entitled *Blind Birds*, had won a prize. He also forwarded to her copies of positive reviews her plays *Die Goue Sleutel* and *Die Toweruur* received in the *Kristelike Skoolblad*.

In some ways, the Van Schaik's firm represented far more to Blakemore than her publishing house and became a link with her country of birth. As a result, the way in which she related to the firm and maintained relationships with its employees resembled a family relation. For many years thereafter, the firm would diligently and professionally fulfil the many requests they received from Blakemore, always faithfully reporting on the successful accomplishment of the task and the date on

¹ Once, on 17 August 1958, Blakemore wrote a letter to Jan van Schaik in Afrikaans. However, the Afrikaans letter was accompanied by one in English, and was clearly marked: 'Lees eers die ander brief asseblief [please read the other letter first]. Both letters were about the poor editing of a Keurboslaan manuscript, *Gevare op Keurboslaan*. Blakemore was distraught about the incorrect changes and errors that slipped into the print version. Since Keurboslaan was written under the pseudonym Theunis Krogh, Blakemore seem to have written the Afrikaans letter with the idea that Jan van Schaik will be able to show it to his reviser, since she didn't want the Afrikaans reading public to know that the author of the *Keurboslaan* books was Stella Blakemore. In the first letter she writes: 'I am enclosing a letter in Afrikaans, which you may think fit to put before your reviser. I beg of you to read that letter yourself, and to look up the indicated passages.'

which it had been completed. Requests included sending presents on her behalf to relatives and friends, tracking down the whereabouts and address details of someone who used to live in Pretoria, finding out information from various South African government departments, ordering and posting books, obtaining specific official forms from educational institutions or government departments in South Africa and sending those to Blakemore, and so forth.

Yet, not all her manuscripts were accepted by J.L. van Schaik. Her manuscript, *Die Hoek by die Skoorsteen* was turned down in a letter in 1931, with no reason being offered for this decision, besides stating that 'we could not decide to publish [the manuscript]'.² A year later, in a letter dated 1st November 1932, Blakemore wrote that she was submitting *Die jongste meisie in Maasdorp-skool* and enquired about a play that she had earlier sent to J.L. van Schaik for publication, *Wedstryd in Droomland*. She receives a reply from J.L. van Schaik in January 1932 that confirms the firm's acceptance of the second *Maasdorp* manuscript and also informs her that neither the play nor the selection of poetry that had been submitted on her behalf by Miss Kriegler could be accepted for publication as 'the demand for both is so very little indeed, that we feel not justified to publish them... especially not at the present difficult times, in which people do not seem to spend too much on books'.³ In 1939, Nasionale Pers published *Katrientjie*, a humorous adult novel first submitted to J.L. van Schaik in March 1935. So it would seem that J.L. van Schaik had also turned down this novel, though there is no correspondence to confirm this. In 1948, she is requested by J.L. van Schaik to start a new series of 'avontuurverhale' with the Gold Coast as backdrop.⁴ The request to write an adventure series set somewhere in Africa was repeated in 1949 by Jan van Schaik. He suggests that she 'could introduce ivory smuggling or something similar' and that the series be published under a new *nom de plume*.⁵ The result of both these interventions is that she starts work on *Uiltjie*, an adventure book set in the Gold Coast, but when she submitted the manuscript, it was rejected.⁶

² Letter to Stella Blakemore from J.L. van Schaik dated 26 November 1931.

³ Letter to Stella Blakemore from J.L. van Schaik dated 4 January 1932. He further adds that of the 780 copies printed of *Die Toweruur*, 730 were still left; and of *Die Goue Sleutel* they had sold 135 out of 1000. At that time, they still had 1878 copies out of 2000 of the first book in the *Maasdorp* series available, but as this was intended as a series, they indicated that J.L. van Schaik would accept the risk and publish the next book. For that manuscript, *Die jongste meisie in Maasdorp-skool*, she received a £20 cash payment.

⁴ Letter to Stella Owen-Blakemore from J.L. van Schaik dated 30 January 1948.

⁵ Letter to Stella (no surname) from Jan van Schaik dated 6 May 1949.

⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 16 June 1949.

In many of her letters written after she had left South Africa in 1947, Blakemore refers to the sometimes strained relationship that had always existed between her and Mr J.L. van Schaik. Though she was of the opinion that she and Jan van Schaik, J.L. van Schaik's son who took over her affairs in the 1950s, had become friends over the years, her relationship with the publishing firm never ran smoothly. From the correspondence it seems apparent that the root of the difficult relationship between her and Mr van Schaik was the way he treated her as an author and the apparent disrespect he showed for her work. However, there were three further reasons that can be advanced to help explain the complicated relationship between the author and the publishing house. These are 1) Blakemore's financial situation and commitments, 2) criticism from the Afrikaner establishment about her Afrikaans writing skills, and 3) aspects of Blakemore's personality, in particular her self-admitted distrustfulness. Compounded, these reasons resulted in a permanent power play between her and the publishing house. These four issues are discussed in more detail below.

Blakemore's financial affairs

The state of Blakemore's financial affairs was always of grave concern to her and at times when she was experiencing financial difficulties she sometimes tended to be unreasonable, anxious, and quick to make decisions. In much of the correspondence between Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik publishers – and sometimes between her mother, Emma Blakemore, and the publishers – a tone of anxiety about the acceptance of manuscripts and the speediness of decision-making and payment is notable. Some of this may be ascribed to the difficulties of communication, as Blakemore was on the move all the time and it was therefore easy for her to lose track of what has been happening with a particular manuscript, but this does not explain entirely the amount of space devoted to discussions about money in her correspondence with her publishers. Money matters feature prominently in many of her letters and this is, as least in part, the motivation behind the close tracking and many follow-ups regarding the whereabouts of a particular manuscript, which the following extracts from letters show:

Will you be able to let me have the cheque for Stella for *Eerste April* to be able to send by this mail? 'Alle bietjies help!'⁷

and

We are anxious to know whether you have accepted for publication *Die Wedstryd in Droomland* and the sequel to *Die Meisies van Maasdorp*.⁸

When she adopted two South African children after having had miscarriages previously, Blakemore's financial situation further deteriorated. From her letters it would seem that she and her husband had come to some kind of agreement that they could adopt the children on condition that Blakemore herself would take full responsibility for all the children's financial needs:

After all these years of doing business together, it is unnecessary to tell you that I am anxious to have the advance! I have just had to pay terminal school fees for two children, a quarter's electricity bill, two tons of coal, and my annual rates! It all adds up, as you can imagine. I leave my husband free of all these things to make up for foisting two adopted children on him! It was our agreement at the time. But I must say he is a very good father, very interested in all their doings, kind and humorous, and wonderful at Arithmetic, which is a great blessing!⁹

She adopted the children in the 1940s, when she was still living in Pretoria. This was a period during which book sales in Afrikaans boomed, and for this reason Blakemore felt that she was in a position to accept such an agreement.

In addition to the responsibilities she had towards the children, Blakemore was also the sole provider for her mother and supported a couple of poor elderly Afrikaans-speaking relatives in South Africa.¹⁰ An anxiety about the graveness of her responsibilities and an urgency to settle her financial affairs sneaks into many of her and her mother's letters to her publisher:

⁷ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 26 June 1934.

⁸ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore, no date but ostensibly written towards the end of 1932.

⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 1 November 1957.

¹⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 3 June 1955. She writes: 'I am a person of many obligations, not only toward the two children I have adopted and regard as quite my own. Before I took either of them, I assumed some charitable obligations towards one or two families of old Afrikaans people, and these are proving surprisingly long-lived. One, who had cancer of the face, has lasted over ten years since I first found her, with the disease, though not cured, being kept at bay! Naturally, I am delighted about thus, but 'darem'!.'

I feel like a murderess asking for advances on so many [three books], but unless the December royalties are better than they usually are, I shall have to, in order to carry out my plans next year. I am responsible for my own support from the moment I leave here [Gold Coast] until I join my husband – also, all the time, for the support of my mother and the two children, in addition to degree fees, coaching, etc.¹¹

and

I sincerely hope the royalties will be good in June. Heaven knows, I am going to need it.¹²

The tone Blakemore (and sometimes her mother) used in letters to J.L. van Schaik Publishers alternated from expressing their gratitude towards the publishers for all that they had done for her to making thinly veiled threats to take her manuscripts elsewhere or appealing to the deep and long-lasting friendship and association between Stella and the Van Schaiks to persuade them to accept a particular manuscript. For the publisher, it was a delicate situation too. On the one hand it was clear that they did not want to lose Blakemore as an author, but at the same time both J.L. van Schaik and Jan van Schaik wanted to retain a position of power. Moreover, there were restrictions in place during the Second World War on the number of manuscripts a firm could print. In the last instance, not all of Blakemore's work sold equally well, so there was a strong element of calculation of financial risk on the firm's side. The following three extracts are examples of the different strategies the Blakemores employed in their letters.

In 1933, on receiving news that Stella's works were not selling especially well, Emma Blakemore responded by warmly thanking the firm for its support of her daughter:

You have been very kind to us and given Stella a chance with her Afrikaans writing, and I hope, for your sake too, that she will make good here, so that her work will sell better.¹³

¹¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 11 November 1947.

¹² Letter to J.L. van Schaik by Stella Blakemore dated 28 March 1948.

¹³ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 24 January 1933.

When her mother fell ill in 1950, Blakemore wrote to J.L. van Schaik about her financial woes, calling him an old friend, despite the fact that the relationship between them had always been strained:

Now, however, the state of affairs is much more urgent than it was when I wrote. My mother has become seriously ill and had to undergo an abdominal operation... As she is not a contributor to the national Health Scheme, nor a true visitor, everything has to be paid for. There is no one to do it but myself. I cannot let her want for anything now. I do not enlarge on my own feelings at this time, but you, who are an old friend, and who knows what my mother and I have meant to each other, will understand.¹⁴

One last example of this phenomenon is that when Blakemore receives some criticism about the manuscript of *Niggies op Maasdorp*, she responds immediately, as she often did, with a veiled threat:

Please can you let me know about the *Maasdorp* book now, as soon as possible? I have to get my writing arrangements sorted out quickly, since I just had an extraordinarily encouraging and quite unexpected account from one of the old publishers whom I had given up for dead. So, if you can't use *Niggies op Maasdorp*, I can put it to another use, and write a fresh one for you.¹⁵

It was not so much that Blakemore was entirely unwilling to accept criticism of her work, but rather that she always had a need to get and keep her books in circulation, as she was relying on the income derived from that to cover her expenses. So, when a manuscript was rejected, she had to act swiftly – either to persuade J.L. van Schaik to reconsider the manuscript, or to get it to another publisher – so that it could be published as quickly as possible.

At times it is clear that her financial needs lead to an incredibly high level of creative output. In 1933, her mother wrote the following in a letter:

The TOV wrote us last year to send contributions for a new series of 'leesboek' they are contemplating. Stella sent the poems and play you have had for consideration, and historical plays on 'Adam Tas' and 'Die

¹⁴ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 6 June 1950.

¹⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 7 September 1955.

Trekkers in die Skemering'. Also a sketch of 'Mussolini', and two small plays'...¹⁶

From the above extract it can be seen that Emma Blakemore was also using the opportunity to let Van Schaik know that if they were not interested in her daughter's work, there were other firms and institutions that were keen to take it. This is a strategy that Blakemore was to take over from her mother and use on numerous occasions. At times, the Blakemores would put direct pressure on the firm to accept a particular manuscript. In the same letter to J.L. van Schaik, Emma Blakemore again requests the publisher to accept the play, *Die Wedstryd in Droomland*, even though it had been rejected earlier, pleading with him that she believes that something good will come of it.

There is another peculiar element to the correspondence between the Blakemores and the firm. Besides putting pressure on the firm to accept manuscripts from Blakemore, her financial difficulties ensure that Blakemore and her mother become involved in actively trying to create a market for her books.¹⁷ To this end, it is clear that both Stella and her mother tried to keep their fingers on the pulse, by regularly checking up on what is happening to their interests while they are away from South Africa. For instance, Emma Blakemore informed the publisher that South African friends were not able to obtain some of Blakemore's books when they went to town for some Christmas shopping in 1932, and she reminded the publisher that having Blakemore's books on the shelves was 'to your advantage'.¹⁸

There can be no doubt that financial problems were often uppermost in Blakemore's mind. At times, she tended to get very depressed about the state of her financial affairs. However, her letters often reflected her excellent sense of humour, even in difficult times. For example, in 1959 she writes that:

¹⁶ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 9 March 1933.

¹⁷ In a letter to J.L. van Schaik dated 24 January 1933, Emma Blakemore suggests that specimen copies of Stella's books be sent to schools, that the books be published in a cheaper way, and that the possibilities be explored to publish Stella's (rejected play) and organise that it is used for the Junior Certificate Examination. To this end, she asks him to send a copy of *Die Toweruur* to the secretary of the 'Kunstwedstryd' in Cape Town.

¹⁸ Undated letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore, written towards the end of 1932.

[i]f I have not been able to send my poor little bank manger some comfort for him to put before his directors on July 1st, I shall have to enter Ulster disguised by a false beard and wig.¹⁹

In 1956, when she requested that her half-year royalties be deposited into her Volkskas account, she comments as follows:

The family in Ireland are full of demands at the moment, and the bank there is tending to write sad, head-shaking letters.²⁰

Blakemore took her responsibilities towards the children very seriously. In this regard, the agreement that she made with her husband seems to have been uppermost in her mind many times. She often writes about the possibility of her dying. If this should happen, she urged Van Schaik's to keep the fact a secret so that it would not affect the sales of her books, since she believed that the royalty money would cover the children's education costs.²¹

Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik: A strained relationship

Her dire financial position was not the only reason why Blakemore often responded poorly to criticism and rejection notes. From the correspondence it is evident that Blakemore was sensitive about her writing and felt a bit insecure in her relationship with J.L. van Schaik. The origin of this insecurity is explained in a letter to Jan van Schaik, after he had criticised her latest *Maasdorp* manuscript, provisionally titled *Reina keer voor*:

Your father, who has always been my very good friend although we do not always agree, tends to think that writers need to be slammed down and slightly discouraged to keep them humble and prevent them from asking for too much. This is a theory shared by most publishers – but as a matter of fact writers are sensitive folk, who will do better work for you and themselves if in a state of encouragement. Sometimes it takes months to throw off a mood of depression caused by a single destructive remark.²²

¹⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 June 1959.

²⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 8 July 1956.

²¹ See for example the letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 12 June 1959.

²² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 13 August 1955. The manuscript, *Reina keer voor*, was later published with the title *Niggies op Maasdorp*.

It was this attitude of J.L. van Schaik's coupled with her need to get as many of her manuscripts as possible in print that persuaded Blakemore to offer some of her *Keurboslaan* manuscripts to J.L. van Schaik's rival, Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel (APB). This soured the relationship between herself and the firm. In the extract below Blakemore explains why she decided to take this step:

When I spent that very pleasant evening with you and Herma at your home, you told me that your father had felt very bad when I gave some of the *Keurboslaan* books to Sarel [Sarel Marais from Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel] and that you could not help agreeing with him. I told you then that I had felt obliged to spread the books out between several publishers, because at the time, during the War, each firm was allowed to publish only a certain fixed number of books a year, while I desperately needed the advances for as many books as I could write. This was perfectly true, but if I had not been very tired that night, and furthermore unwilling to embarrass Herma by a Business-argument, I should have added another truth, which is that during all the years I wrote for van Schaik's I never had a word of approval of anything I had written. I do not blame your father for this. Experience has taught me that publishers consider it a duty to take a writer down several pegs at every interview. One's greeting is usually: 'Your last book is not selling at all well. We are going to loose money on it.' Or 'So-and-so has written a much better children's book than yours' I should not complain of the latter remark, because it was one such from your father about 'Jong van der Byls' that made me turn stubborn and start the *Keurboslaan* series. It is grim to have to admit that the series that gives me so much personal joy, should have started from such an unworthy motive!²³

Blakemore and the firm eventually came to an agreement that the firm would take over from Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel the *Keurboslaan* books and some other books written by Blakemore.²⁴

In South Africa, Blakemore also had relations with another publisher. She dealt with a Mr Hutton at Unie Boekhandel and gave him the manuscript of the first title in a new series for boys. However, Blakemore always indicated that she much preferred her relationship with J.L. van Schaik, since she felt that the professional conduct of the firm and the high quality print work they produced could not be compared with the cheap and shoddy productions of Afrikaanse Pers

²³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958.

²⁴ Letter to Stella Owen-Blakemore from J.L. van Schaik dated 30 January 1948.

Boekhandel.²⁵ When Mr Hutton too displayed what she regarded to be unprofessional conduct, delaying in letting her know whether he was accepting the manuscript for the series for boys, Blakemore was quick to sever ties with this firm too and gave J.L. van Schaik authority to take over manuscript.²⁶

Nonetheless, as part of the ongoing play of power that took place between the two parties, when a manuscript was rejected both Stella and her mother were usually at pains to explain in what way they would use the rejected manuscript, so that it would never appear that she was crushed about the rejection or that the piece of writing was not good enough to do something with. Informed about the rejection of the poetry and play submitted to J.L. van Schaik by Miss Kriegler, Emma Blakemore writes that '[t]he poems will be taken by periodicals singly and the play will always come in useful for our own pupils'.²⁷ At times when Blakemore feels that the balance of power is more on her side, she sometimes tries to call the publishing house's bluff. This was, for example, the case when she wanted J.L. van Schaik to pay her a bigger advance than usual on her next *Maasdorp* manuscript:

I have drafted a new *Maasdorp* book – one of the last two. Before I commence with the finishing off, I should like to know whether you will give me £100 advance on it. The *Maasdorp* series has done well for you and me and merits a little more than the ordinary book. If you cannot do this, don't worry, as then I shall use it for a serial in a *Hollandse youth magazine*, since it has a big musical and overseas interest, and I'll complete some of the other serials first for the ordinary £50 advances.²⁸

When the unthinkable happened in 1968 and a *Maasdorp* manuscript – *Ontgroening op Maasdorp* – was rejected²⁹, Blakemore once again resorted to the tried and tested strategy of threatening to move her work to another publisher. Part of the way in which she usually phrased these threats was to explain that she had 'suddenly' received a request from someone to publish her work. In reply to the letter informing her that the *Maasdorp* manuscript had been rejected, Blakemore writes that '[t]he news that a *Maasdorp* MS has been rejected, seems

²⁵ See for example letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 21 January 1961, letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 2 January 1961, and letter to Jan van Schaik dated 6 September 1961.

²⁶ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 11 September 1947.

²⁷ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 24 January 1933.

²⁸ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 20 January 1949.

²⁹ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 23 July 1968.

to have got nicely round, because, also by yesterday's post, I received a suggestion that I might, in the circumstances, like to place my work elsewhere'.³⁰ She asked that the manuscript be returned to her.³¹

The stand-offs and difficult times despite, it is clear that there was some affinity between her and the senior Mr van Schaik. At times she shares very personal information with him. With reference to the manuscript for the next book in the Maasdorp series, *Kobie regeer*, Blakemore writes: 'I hope you will be able to accept it. On practically the same day as you get it, I expect a very important event, and your taking the book will be a good omen!³² However, in a follow-up letter, after being congratulated on the upcoming event by Mr van Schaik, she reports that 'unfortunately, the event which I was anticipating so happily has ended in disaster, for my baby was still-born, and came very near to costing me my life'.³³ She further writes:

Your letter was the first bright spot in weeks of unhappiness, for it reminded me that whatever happens, I have my work. I had almost forgotten that... I shall use the money [for the manuscript of *Kobie Regeer*, which was accepted by the publisher] if I am strong enough by February, to give a recital of German Lieder in London, so you see you are helping to further my career.

The tone in her letters was often dark and gloomy, signalling that Blakemore herself went through many difficult periods. However, her mood could change rapidly from one letter to the next, and sometimes her letters were very cheerful indeed:

Please, when you write, give me some news of your family, in whom I am always very interested. My daughter is going to be four in May and my son will be three in September. I should like to adopt three more, but my husband feels that we have enough responsibilities.³⁴

Blakemore felt insecure in her relationship with J.L. van Schaik and angry about the way he had treated her and her work in the past. Nonetheless, she always

³⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 28 July 1968.

³¹ The rejected manuscript, *Ontgroening op Maasdorp*, was eventually published in 1972, but there is no correspondence or records explaining how this came about.

³² Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 28 June 1934

³³ Letter to J.L. van Schaik signed Stella Blakemore (Owen) dated 21 August 1934

³⁴ Letter from Stella Blakemore to J.L. van Schaik dated 21 March 1949.

took a sincere interest in his family and was very fond of his wife and his son, Jan. Blakemore was therefore rather delighted when Jan van Schaik took over responsibility for her affairs in 1954, as she felt that they had a better relationship:

Dear Jan

Thank you for your letter and cheque, and all the explanations. It was a very nice, pleasant letter, such as a writer likes to receive from a publisher! I have often wondered whether there is a special handbook of instructions to publishers, advising them, among other points, never on any account to encourage their writers, and never, ever, to write a letter without a sting in it somewhere!³⁵

Even though Blakemore was of the opinion that she and Jan van Schaik were friends, Jan van Schaik's letters to Stella were mostly rather stiff and formal, much like his father's. Ever so often, though, a tiny personal tit-bit would slip into one of his letters, signalling that there may have been at least a little warmth in his feelings towards Blakemore. For example, in a cheerful note on 11 April 1962, Jan van Schaik writes to Stella to wish her well on her birthday. He stipulates that it is the first time that he does so. He also wrote extensively about his father's illness.

In the 1950s, Blakemore's spirits were high and this was reflected in her correspondence. Even when she wrote about money, she did not seem to be depressed. The relationship between her and Jan van Schaik seemed to be steadfast and relaxed:

Please will you send the most luxurious-looking children's book... to Mariette Eitner, Alphen Huis, Malmesbury, C.T. and put in it a card With love from Auntie Stella. This young creature is turning six, and is very near to my heart at the moment, as her father has just died. The fact that he should not have been her father does not affect the issue, I feel. He worshipped her, and she is going to miss him terribly. Anyway, blameless though my own life is, I have gone far beyond judging other people. I think we all are just a lot of 'Sukkelaars' doing the best we can against the odds.³⁶

By the late 1960s, Stella was heading for difficult times again. By this time, she had already written twenty volumes in the *Keurboslaan* series and fourteen in the

³⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 23 November 1954.

³⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 24 August 1958.

Maasdorp series. She wanted to continue writing books in both series, but from the correspondence it seems that the quality of her work was wavering a bit and there was concern within the firm about the sale possibilities of more books in the series. This period thus signals a definite shift in the power balance between the firm and the author in favour of the firm. During this period, she wrote a letter to Jan van Schaik in which she stated that she would love to write more (*Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp*) books but that she has not done so because 'I feel I embarrass you by doing so'.³⁷ She sometimes hinted that the relationship between herself and Jan van Schaik was so special to her because he had defended her interests when there was tension in the firm.³⁸ However, as always, her letter is packed with the same punch – a threat to move her work elsewhere. By this time, though, her threat must have sounded hollow to Jan van Schaik:

You have always, so often, operated under great tension in the firm in standing true to my interests. I know that, and I don't want to torment you with further negative [word illegible] so that if you said that you could not publish for me any more, I should accept and understand it. You know that I should find another publisher without much trouble. However, I am not too proud to say that I should hate to see my books produced as some of the others produce their works.³⁹

Her personal interests aside, Blakemore deeply appreciated her relationship with the younger Van Schaik:

I want you to know how much I have appreciated your friendship and help through the years, ever since you father, God rest his soul, wrote to me in Kumasi: 'You and Jan seem to like each other, so I am handing all your business over to him!'⁴⁰

Although J.L. van Schaik had criticised her work on many occasions, this did not mean that he never paid her a complement. When writing to her about J.L. van Schaik's plans to take over some of the books she has published with Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, he writes:

This is a big programme and some of your other publications will have to be delayed. But I take personal pride in your books and will be very

³⁷ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 24 February 1964.

³⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 21 January 1961.

³⁹ Letter to Jan Van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 21 January 1962.

⁴⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 1 February 1967.

bucked to have our names on all of them. I know of your great financial responsibilities and can therefore understand that clause in your letter where you would never like to have a book out of print for longer than two years. I hope this will never happen, although it may at times mean considerable pressure on the printers from our part.⁴¹

Also, when Blakemore's financial matters were really pressing, such as was the case in 1950, J.L. van Schaik did try to meet Blakemore halfway, for example by proposing an advance on all royalties that became due later that year.⁴² Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik did eventually, in the former's opinion, become reconciled. In a letter to Jan van Schaik she describes the last meeting between her and his father:

I am always very glad I had that one last meeting with your father. He did not live so long afterwards. We were able to clear up several things that had been hurting him for a long time, principally the fact that I had given some *Keurboslaan* books to Afrikaanse Pers. I pointed out that never once, in all the years of our association, had I entered his office without being told that my books were frightfully bad and that he could with difficulty present them to the public, and that in a sense he published them as a charity to me. He admitted that this was true, but said that it was common practice with publishers not to let their writers think they were any good. I said I had not known this, but had taken him on his word, and when Sarel Marais told me his firm really wanted the books, I thought your dad would only be too pleased to get rid of them. I told him with perfect honesty that the last thing I had wanted was to hurt him. So we gave each other a hug, and that was all right! Your dear mother looked on with great delight. Then there was the fact that for years I had written only to you and never to him. I had been prepared for that, so I hauled out of my bag his own letter, written to me in Kumasie (sic), in which he said 'You and Jan seem to get on so well, I am handing all your business over to him!' He got quite a shock at this, but couldn't refuse to recognise it... He and I could chew chunks out of each other without harm, neither, thank the Lord, being sensitive.⁴³

Blakemore's Afrikaans writing skills and the 'experts'

Yet another issue sometimes produced sparks between Stella and her publishers. As remarked upon previously, money and securing a constant income stream had

⁴¹ Letter to Stella Blakemore from JL van Schaik dated 20 March 1948.

⁴² Letter to Stella Blakemore-Owen from Mr van Schaik dated 11 July 1950.

⁴³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 28 July 1968.

always been very important to Blakemore. In the early years of her relationship with J.L. van Schaik publishers, she mostly opted to receive an upfront cash payment for manuscripts, thereby forgoing royalty payments. One of the strategies undertaken by J.L. van Schaik was to ask her to be willing to 'pay' for proofreading and editing her manuscripts.⁴⁴ For example, J.L. van Schaik writes in 1955 that it costs the firm about £15 to have Blakemore's manuscripts proofread by a qualified person.⁴⁵ The question of Blakemore's ability to write in Afrikaans became a constant theme in many of the letters she received from the publishers, and at times, the tone of the exchanges was fairly nasty.⁴⁶

However, about your ms. *Kobie gaan verder* which we received some months ago, we sent it for corrections to Prof. Kritzinger and he returned it to us the day before Christmas. He kept it a very long time, but he said that it is a difficult and tedious job and took him many hours in between his other work.⁴⁷

In her replies to statements like these, Blakemore usually countered the accusation by arguing that the problem stemmed from the fact that the Afrikaans language had not yet been standardised and that the people from the 'Akademie' were changing the rules ever so often. This did not mean that Blakemore was unaware of her shortcomings as an Afrikaans writer:

By this mail I am sending you the manuscript of *Die jongste meisie in Maasdorp-skool*, another story for girls. I hope you will like it, and you will let me know about it as soon as you can. I think it is better than the other. Anyway, the Afrikaans is.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ "In regard to the play *Eerste April* [capitalised in original], we are prepared to publish this, but it will be absolutely necessary that an expert should correct the language, as it has in many places to be revised. As it is written now, one can feel that the author thinks in English and therefore we would ask you whether you are prepared to pay the expenses to have the play made ready for the press." Letter by J.L. van Schaik to Stella Blakemore dated 6 April 1934.

⁴⁵ Letter from J.L. van Schaik to Stella Owen dated 23 June 1955. In her reply to this letter, dated 2 July 1955, Stella addresses her letter to Jan van Schaik as if he had been the author of the letter of 23 June and not his father. It may be that the markings on the envelope indicated that the letter was sent by Jan van Schaik.

⁴⁶ In a letter to Emma Blakemore, dated 26 November 1931, with reference to the manuscript of *Die Meisies of Maasdorp*, J.L. van Schaik writes 'We have only now received the MSS. back from our reader, as there were a good many points about the spelling of Afrikaans, etc. which had to be corrected'.

⁴⁷ Letter to Stella Owen from J.L. van Schaik dated 18th January 1951.

⁴⁸ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 1 November 1932.

The issue of her poor Afrikaans writing skills and the costly revisions the publisher had to make became loaded, though, when revisers started tampering with what Blakemore regarded as her style and characters. This state of affairs made Blakemore utterly furious:

Dear Jan

You are my favourite sort of person, as I think you know, and the last thing I want is to add to your troubles. But I really feel very bad about the method used in revising my books.

I know Afrikaans is still a young language, and needs continual doctoring, even in the case of better writers than I am. Although I have made it a rule for many years not to read critiques, either favourable or the reverse, I have always known and admitted that I can be corrected on many questions of language. I have indeed learned a good deal from the changes made by revisers through the years, and have often asked your father to pass my thanks on to them. Perhaps if I had been less humble in this respect, revisers would not be taking such liberties with my work now.⁴⁹

To this Jan van Schaik replies:

It is a difficult task [to revise your books] because they must not change your style, but at same time [they have to] correct the edium (sic) where 'anglismes' are used. You do not realise it but the many years that you have been away from the Union have influenced your writing and to this we must add the fact that the Afrikaans reader today is more conscious of incorrect spelling and style than ever before.⁵⁰

Blakemore became especially upset when revisers changed the way in which her characters express themselves:

It... showed me how far, during the past few years, I have allowed my style to be distorted by adopting the implied suggestions of experts who persist in making many schoolboys talk like university professors, and in using expressions I should never use myself. For instance, 'korswel' is a word I dislike and have never used. It is totally unmusical, and I cannot

⁴⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 August 1958.

⁵⁰ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 27 September 1958.

see why it is superior to 'die gek skeer' or 'spot'. But it is continually substituted.⁵¹

and

It is often repeated to me that experts say they practically have to re-write my books. I have no objection to their continuing to say this, if only they will stop doing it! If I were going to die of malicious remarks, I should have been dead years ago. If I may be allowed a gentle criticism of my own, it is perfectly obvious to me that the experts engaged on revision at the moment, have no talent for creative writing. If they are dying to express themselves, but lack ideas, I am quite willing to supply them with plots, free of charge, if only they will earn what you pay them without feeling themselves obliged to mutilate my work. I can think of dozens of plots a day, and often do! As a matter of fact, I supply them at five guineas a time to a School of Authorship in England.⁵²

The issue of creative integrity and the fact that control of the manuscripts and final proofs ought to reside with the author was something Blakemore felt very strongly about. Nonetheless, she generally displayed a sense of humour about these affairs and she perhaps understood better than her publishers may have thought that she found herself in a position where neither her Afrikaans nor her English was regarded as 'good enough' or on standard.⁵³

Blakemore's personal circumstances and characteristics

Blakemore was a complex personality. In her letters and interviews with the media she certainly comes across as an enormously warm person with a lovely sense of humour and as a close observer of humankind. There was a part of her personality, though, that tended to be on the darker side.

In her letters, she at times appears to be severely depressed. Linked to this, she displays a general distrustfulness in her relations with others, which surfaces in the correspondence. She often describes herself as being pursued by others who have harmful intentions and on many occasions explains specific events by

⁵¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 30 September 1958.

⁵² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 30 September 1958.

⁵³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 October 1958. After a discussion about her poor Afrikaans, she writes in a footnote to Jan van Schaik: 'One of my English contacts has just written to say that, gifted though I certainly am, there is no doubt that my English is influenced towards a certain thickness by the fact that I think in Afrikaans! Where do I go from there?'

stating that someone was out to 'get' her or that a particular action or situation had been caused by someone who wanted to harm her personally. She may have had that part of her personality in common with her mother, because this is something that also crops up in Emma Blakemore's letters. See for example the following extracts:

Stella was unfortunate in that the Rand Daily Mail sent to criticize her play, *Blind Birds* the man who had come second in the competition, and he took advantage of his position to give voice to his... But a very great manager in London is at present considering the same play.⁵⁴

and

It is very difficult for Stella to live so far from all her interests. Everybody is doing her down, even her home has been sold through mismanagement of the agent she has employed.⁵⁵

Blakemore's distrustfulness of others and their motives also applied to her writing, and it further complicated her relationship with her publisher:

Some time ago your office sent me a radio critique of one of my books, no doubt to be helpful to me. Actually, the critique was too malicious to be of use. It was obviously personal. Anyway, I am never interested in critique, good or bad.⁵⁶

and

You will have heard that for financial reasons I have lost my house in Pretoria. At one time this would have seemed a tragedy, but unhappily for the section of the community who thought it would be a very good thing for me to have a setback, it is no longer of any importance.⁵⁷

Blakemore's sense of being persecuted deepened during the difficult period of the 1960s when J.L. Van Schaik had indicated to her that she should not write any more *Keurboslaan* books. The extract from the letter below is about a new *Maasdorp* book, which she felt she had to finish in the light of the quality of

⁵⁴ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 24 January 1933.

⁵⁵ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 11 January 1951 – it relates to a parcel that went missing.

⁵⁶ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 20 January 1949

⁵⁷ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 18 December 1950

children's literature in South Africa. She wrote this letter in reply to a letter from Jan van Schaik, dated 1 February 1962, in which he enclosed a reply he had received to a letter he had written to Julie te Groen, an influential person at the Cape Town Provincial Library. The reply he received most likely contained negative references to Blakemore's *Die Rissies* series, and he forwarded that to Blakemore:

Far from being put off, I was rather surprised at the concentrated bitterness of the attack, which would surely have been excessive if I had tried to blow up the Union Buildings, or shaken hands with an African. In point of fact, I am quite prepared for any and all public buildings to be blown up, especially ones wherein men make laws, and I have occasionally shaken hands with Africans, so I probably deserve it all! Actually, I had already heard from my Cape Town bookseller friend that I have a bitter enemy on the Cape Town Library Board, and that the person responsible for the big order last year almost had their ears cut off. I have never met this person, so I have no clue as to the reason.⁵⁸

Blakemore had a way of going back to things that had happened in the past, good or bad. It seemed that she never forgot events and instants that gave her great joy or caused her great sorrow. So, for example, she recounts the story of how it came that J.L. van Schaik wrote to her that he was handing over her business to his son many times in their correspondence over the year. So too did she tend to rehash the disagreements that she and J.L. van Schaik had had. Where it came to criticism of her work, she never forgot it and always brought it up again. The letter about the library purchaser from the Cape Town Library is a case in point:

[O]ne and all report that the level of Afrikaans children's books is poor beyond all, despite Julie te Groen's statement that there are now such wonderful books being written in the Union. She said, in her letter to you, 'soos u weet', but if you do know, you are the only one that does! Those I have seen are dreary in the extreme. God forgive my wickedness.⁵⁹

and

I do not want to say anything about Capetown (sic) Library Board and the people whose children were beaten at Competition in the old days

⁵⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 6 February 1961.

⁵⁹ Unsigned letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 January 1963.

by my pupils. But I can say that I write for the young people who love my books, and that while I still receive such letters as I do receive, I still feel I am right.⁶⁰

and

Like all people who figure in any part of public life, I have enemies, often for no better reason than that I have had some success. This is one of the things one has to expect from life. Naturally, such people use whatever means may be to their hands, on Library Boards, etc., to do one the maximum possible injury. When that happens, there is nothing for it but to lie low for a while, as you and I have done.⁶¹

In reply to a letter by Jan van Schaik on 21 November 1961⁶² to inform her of changes in the provisions relating to Blakemore's income tax requirements, she writes:

By the way, talking of tax, I am quite sure it is all wrong that thirty percent should be taken from what I earn in the Union, because I am not living there. Someone I know over here, whose name I shall not mention because I certainly do not want to do him harm, earns a respectable number of hundreds a year recording talks for S.A.B.C. and no deduction is made from the cheques at all. However, it gave someone great pleasure to write in to the Tax Authorities and put a spoke in my wheel, and who am I to interfere with my fellow-creatures' innocent amusements? As long as I don't turn mean and malicious myself, that is all that concerns me!⁶³

Blakemore's distrustfulness of others perhaps stemmed partly from her very pragmatic nature. She found juggling her various responsibilities difficult and demanding and often had to devise and implement schemes to get and keep her out of trouble. These included schemes to avoid income tax, to get manuscripts in print so as to get an advance, and even, at times, schemes to keep her mother and husband – both of whom she was very loyal towards – in the dark about her financial affairs. For example:

Please, should you see my mother, would you be so kind as not to mention to her that I have sent the book? I hope you will not

⁶⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 24 February 1964.

⁶¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 5 December 1965.

⁶² Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 21 November 1961.

⁶³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 8 December 1962.

misunderstand this. It is just that I think she would want to discuss terms with you, or something of that sort, and I think it better that you and I should arrange these matters between ourselves. I have always been very satisfied with what you have offered.⁶⁴

About her husband she writes:

Please don't think I have taken leave of my senses, but in future, when you are communicating with me on business, would you mind using an envelope which does not give the name of yourself or of the firm? I have a perfectly sane reason for asking this.⁶⁵

Many of her schemes were launched with full support from her mother:

Stella bought this cottage, a rather large-sized garden and orchard. But so much work had to be done, because of the water pipe, etc. that she got into debt and had to get an overdraft from the Ulster bank in... [handwriting not legible] the Bank wants her to pay up, and she is depending on you for royalties to help her. Her husband could but she does not dare to let him know... [handwriting not legible] what more should be coming in because he takes it and put it in his own bank – accordingly. So be careful to send all you can afford here and it will be better to put in a closed envelope addressed to me.⁶⁶

and

We have had a wonderful home here, run by Stella's husband, but he does not allow her any assistance whatever when she is not in his home, and he feels now we have cost him more than he bargained for. So she is quite on her own, with the children she has adopted.⁶⁷

Blakemore was not unaware of this peculiar part of her personality; rather, she embraced her distrustfulness as a life philosophy:

I have always tried to influence both children to get on well with everyone, but not to rely on anyone, but I am afraid the lesson has not sunk in. Personally, I have no illusions about myself or anyone else, but then I have lived quite a while. To put it shortly, I like everyone, love a

⁶⁴ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 28 June 1934.

⁶⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 5 January 1955.

⁶⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 14 July 1955.

⁶⁷ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 13 November 1947.

few people, and trust no one completely, including myself! There is my philosophy, and you can use it for my obituary one day!⁶⁸

Conclusion

The pressures of juggling her financial responsibilities, coping with criticism of her Afrikaans writing – for which she had a passion – managing a difficult relationship with J.L. van Schaik, and maintaining predisposition towards wariness of others and their motifs meant that Blakemore sometimes came across as despondent in her letters to her publisher. However, already by the early 1960s it seemed from her correspondence that things were looking brighter and towards the end of the 1960s Blakemore seemed to have been more at ease with herself and had regained much of her good humour. It was by this time clear that J.L. van Schaik was to remain her one and only publisher. Her letters from the late 1960s speaks more about religion and acceptance and she seemed to have found a place for herself:

For the rest I am doing a fair bit of – I suppose it could be called preaching, for a religious denomination I have been interested in for some years. They don't like me very much at present, because I have been doing some straight talking. I thought a lot about your brother Theo, and couldn't see why any God should let such a thing happen, and other things like it. Then suddenly I got a sort of idea that unity with the Power doesn't necessarily mean that it will hand us out benefits, and that the Unity should be all we ask for. I need hardly say that this pleases no one, since what most people want from religion is boxes of chocolates! Still, this speaking is something I feel I must do, so I do it, in spite of the weather!⁶⁹

and

The religion I have been actively preaching for years has convinced me, at last, and I don't worry about anything. It is a great thing to talk yourself into a way of thought. So I trust to whatever Power mistakenly put me here, and I try to love, or at least like, everyone.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 28 June 1966.

⁶⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 12 December 1963.

⁷⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 24 February 1964.

Chapter Five

Community and Identity: Blakemore's relationship with South Africa

Introduction

This chapter examines Blakemore's relationship with Afrikaans, her country of birth and the South African community in the context of her life history, which included a prolonged absence from South Africa. In particular, questions are posed about her attitude towards issues relating to race, class and gender against the background of Afrikaner nationalism and the emergence of apartheid policies.

Writing in Afrikaans

A question that needs to be posed is why Blakemore opted from the start to write in Afrikaans. From the correspondence between herself and her publisher it is clear that her decision to write books was definitely influenced by the possibilities this craft offered for her to supplement her income. The decision to write in Afrikaans is therefore odd, since the Afrikaans reading class was very small at the beginning of the thirties. On the other hand, South Africa did not have a market for locally produced books in English, since English texts were imported from the United Kingdom. Blakemore could not have been unaware of this state of affairs. Already in 1933, her mother wrote to J.L. van Schaik about possible ways in which to expand the market for Afrikaans books:

If Stella's works do not sell now, they will as soon as she makes her name as a singer. Could you not sell them in a cheaper edition? I know from experience that Africandres (sic) do not like spending much money on books.¹

In August the same year, J.L. van Schaik wrote a letter to Blakemore about the poor prospects for Afrikaans books and the difficulty of getting Afrikaners to appreciate books:

¹ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Emma Blakemore dated 24 January 1933.

I know the two books are very well written, but it is so discouraging here in South Africa that even interesting books like yours have such a very small sale. Out of 2000 copies of *Die Meisies van Maasdorp* there are still 1680 left and of *Die jongste meisie*, of 1500 there are about 1100 left. Our people must still learn to appreciate the value of books.²

The extent to which the choices she made about what she wrote and for which audience were influenced by the necessity of earning a livelihood through her writing is very evident in the following exchange between Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik. Van Schaik wrote to her about her royalty statement, signalling that there had been a drop in the sale of Afrikaans books.³ For a number of reasons, the Afrikaans book market boomed during the Second World War. It slumped again right after the war, and only regained its momentum in the mid-1950s. In August 1948, J.L. van Schaik thus writes:

We have now published 9 [*Keurboslaan* books] altogether, and hope the sale of the various volumes will keep selling, although there is a drop in the sale of Afrikaans books.⁴

In her reply, Blakemore does not hesitate to raise the possibility of writing for other markets, such as the Dutch. Notably, though, she indicates that she plans to continue to write in Afrikaans and have her work translated:

I did receive the statement, but did not reply, because there seemed to be nothing to say about the present disastrous state of affairs. I undertook grave responsibilities because I considered myself entitled to do so a few years ago. If, indeed, people have ceased overnight to read Afrikaans books, I must seek other markets. It has been proposed to me to write in Afrikaans for translation in Hollands. Anyway, except for a book which is half-finished now, it is unlikely that I shall be writing for the African market for some time. As my financial affairs are in an unsatisfactory state and I do not want to let anyone down, I may have to hand all my business affairs to someone who will understand how to straighten them out I tell you this so that you will understand if an accountant visits you. It will be at the instigation of my creditors, not myself⁵

² Letter to Stella Owen from J.L. van Schaik dated 1 August 1934.

³ Letter to Stella Blakemore from J.L. van Schaik

⁴ Letter to Stella Owen-Blakemore from J.L. van Schaik dated 19 August 1948.

⁵ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 24 August 1948.

J.L. van Schaik responds to her letter and encourages her to continue to write in Afrikaans. However, he indicates to her that major changes in the market for Afrikaans books have occurred, as the market was expanding and that this has had an effect on her status as an Afrikaans writer:

You must have been in a very bad mood! It is not so bad as you think in regard to the sale of Afrikaans books. There is nothing of the kind that people have 'ceased overnight to read Afrikaans books'. Not at all! But I have repeatedly tried to explain to you that, as you write so many books you cannot expect a continuous demand in large quantities of all the old titles... Besides, there are many books now published in Afrikaans. This is quite a different matter to 10 or 15 years ago when there were only a few Afrikaans books and a new book was an event... Anyhow, do not be too downhearted in regard to the sale of Afrikaans books, as the position is not at all so bad as you have pictured it.⁶

In 1950, she writes far more openly about her plans to start writing in English. Whereas previously she was only willing to indicate that she was no longer prepared to write for the 'African' market, she now explains that even though she is reluctant to do so, she will have to start writing in English (and implicitly for a market abroad, not South African) in order to meet her financial commitments:

You will remember I told you a year or so ago that I should have to begin writing in English one of these days. I have never been anxious to do so, and I do feel that once it is begun, my days of writing Afrikaans are pretty well over. I have a very strong attachment to the Afrikaans people, and a good deal of sentiment about the years spent in writing for Afrikaans young people, and it is not easy for me to make a decision that means cutting off that part of my life. On the other hand, when my affairs were in a much more flourishing state than they are now, I adopted two young Afrikaners to give them a chance in life. They are now four and five, and, unfortunately for my bank balance, both have turned out to be brilliantly clever! This was pure chance, but so it is, and they must be given the necessary opportunities. My husband does all he can, but he can do no more, and their education is definitely my concern. So I cannot afford sentiment anymore.⁷

It is interesting to note the way in which she juxtaposes her interests: precisely because she had taken on the responsibility of raising two 'Afrikaners', she feels

⁶ Unsigned letter to Stella Owen from J.L. van Schaik dated 1 September 1948.

⁷ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 18 December 1950.

that she cannot afford to continue writing for an Afrikaner market for sentimental reasons. There is evidence though, that if it were no longer financially viable for her to write in Afrikaans, she would have much preferred to write in English for a South African market rather than a British one. She at times expressed resentment about the fact that her publisher had apparently placed some restriction on her that prohibited her from translating her works in English, as they felt that this would upset the Afrikaans book buying public. In her own spirited style, she explained that she had other markets to turn to and that she had always undermined the system and the restrictions placed on her, in this case by writing about Roman Catholics, which would be even more unacceptable to her Afrikaans readers:

I have to agree with you that I seem to have come to the end of a chapter. I am sorry to part with my characters, but not heartbroken. I shall now be forced to turn to other departments of my modest writer's craft, which will be a good thing. At least it will be a relief not to have to watch every word I write in English because 'it would not do' for S. Blakemore or T. Krogh to be discovered to have written this or that! I do all sorts of odd writing about frightfully unacceptable people like, for instance, Roman Catholics, and I not always represent them as devils in human flesh! You are much younger than I, so take a bit of wisdom from me – 'when a blow falls, it can set you free'. You might need that comfort some day.⁸

Her protestations about her readers despite, Blakemore often shows a deep affinity for her Afrikaans readers and she spurns the English youth. In a letter about a new *Maasdorp* manuscript that she had prepared, she writes the following:

On the other hand, our Afrikaans children are very mature. I have written for them all these years as one could never write for English children, who seem to me never to grow up at all, even after they have been to Eton and Oxford. I have always been able to write for our own children as if they were adults, as long as there was nothing in a book that could not be read aloud in class. We have handled birth, death, marriage, crime, and even murder, without any trouble⁹

⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 2 January 1961.

⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 14 November 1963.

For in her heart, Blakemore remained an Afrikaans-speaker, even though she had been away from the country for so many years. In an interview in 1978, she said that she had 'no trouble at all projecting myself mentally into the South African scene' as she mostly thinks in Afrikaans (Hazelhurst 1978:6).

As always, the pragmatic Blakemore prevailed, and she continued pushing her publisher to allow her to translate her work in English. In 1964, J.L. van Schaik Publishers gave permission to the SABC to translate one of the novels in the *Keurboslaan* into English as *The Headmaster of Keurboslaan* and to broadcast it on the radio in twenty episodes of fourteen minutes each.¹⁰ Based on this, Blakemore decided to reopen the issue of translation with her publishers. The extract from her letter below makes it clear that it had always been her publisher that had been concerned about the Afrikaans reading public and that she would not have minded to write for an English South African audience as well:

Years ago, and through the years, many people asked me to translate the books into English for the benefit of English-speaking S' Africans. I discussed the matter with your father, more than once, and he always said that he did not like the idea because the Afrikaans readers would lose the feeling that the Kbl. books were for them.¹¹

Hoofmeisie Kobie was translated into Dutch in 1948.¹² Another novel of hers, *Katrientjie* was translated into Zulu in 1963, even though she did not give permission for this to be done.¹³ She later tried to sell a translation of the manuscript about the Gold Coast, *Uiltjie*, which was rejected by J.L. van Schaik, to an English publisher. In many ways, though she at times felt that it was necessary to explore other markets after she had left South Africa in 1947, her Afrikaans writing was for her a link to what she thought of as home, even though she had been away from the country for so long:

The children's expenses are so high, and so constantly recurring that I have been forced to do a lot of English writing for magazines, papers, radio scripts, etc. to get quick money. However, I have just had a little luck with the sale of some plots in South Africa, so money-needs are not

¹⁰ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 2 June 1964.

¹¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 June 1964.

¹² Letter to Stella Blakemore-Owen from J.L. van Schaik dated 21 September 1948.

¹³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 January 1963.

so immediately pressing, and as I have been very homesick for my Afrikaans writing, I am devoting this whole year to it – 1953, I mean.¹⁴

Blakemore and South Africa

Blakemore felt a very strong emotional bond with her country of birth and the years spent away from South Africa deepened her longing to return. Her letters to the Van Schaik's over many years bear testimony to the constant hopes, plans and schemes Blakemore had for returning home. Already in 1947, when she and her husband were still in Kumasi in the Gold Coast, her mother writes that Blakemore planned to return to South Africa by the end of 1948.¹⁵ Her plans were frequently derailed by other events:

I wish I could look forward to seeing him [Jan van Schaik's baby] soon, but the prospects are poor. I had to leave my mother in Wales last year, and as it is impossible for her, even after months, to get a passage to South Africa, I have no choice but to go back to her when my husband's leave falls due. As a matter of fact, I am going a long way ahead of him – in October. We hate being separated, but at my mother's age I dare not leave her alone longer. My husband is resentful, but resigned!¹⁶

and

At present, our plan is to visit the Union the year after next, and I greatly hope that nothing will happen to prevent this.¹⁷

Her homesickness is clear when she writes from Kumasi:

We often go to the Airport on a Sunday evening and watch the plane come in from South Africa in the hope that there may be friends on it, but except for Jacob's arrival, we have been unlucky so far.¹⁸

She did not get discouraged when her plans for returning did not work out immediately, and continued to envisage a future for herself in South Africa. Just after she had bought the cottage in Northern Ireland in 1954, she writes:

¹⁴ Letter to J.L. van Schaik from Stella Owen (Blakemore) dated 2 November 1952.

¹⁵ Letter from Emma Blakemore to J.L. van Schaik dated 13 November 1947.

¹⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 16 June 1949.

¹⁷ Letter to Mr van Schaik by Stella Owen dated 16 February 1953.

¹⁸ Letter by Stella Owen addressed to Mr van Schaik dated 18 December 1950.

Yes, I had to let the Muckleneuk house go. I may decide to build on my own plots just outside Johannesburg quite soon.¹⁹

and

There is a prospect of our settling in the Union in the next year or two. In the meantime, there is just a chance that I might visit during this year.²⁰

Given Blakemore's British and Afrikaner heritage, and the political sentiments attached to that position, it is not clear whether she thought of herself as a South African, an Afrikaner or as both. Whilst Blakemore was the granddaughter of a very prominent Boer statesman, her mother's relationship with Percy Blakemore, the fact that she spent her school years in boarding schools in Natal where she mixed almost exclusively with English and Rhodesian girls, and the fact that she grew up in a single parent household made her different from other children of the Afrikaner elite and must have contributed to some degree of marginalisation from Afrikaner life. The issue of her identity is also difficult to gauge from her letters. The long time she spent away from South Africa, may have influenced the way in which she thought about South Africa and her relationship with the country and may have led to a propensity to talk about being South African when she meant being an Afrikaner. Certainly, she made it clear that when she talked about South Africa, she had the Transvaal (and perhaps the Free State) in mind, and not Cape Town or Natal, which she found too English.²¹ Her decision to adopt two children from Afrikaans-speaking homes is in this context not insignificant. And she always referred to her children as either South Africans or Afrikaners, even though they did not grow up in the country at all. The fact that she easily substituted South African for Afrikaner and the other way round is perhaps an indication of how close these two concepts had become to her in opposition to her notion of the 'English' from England and the English-dominated colonies of the Cape and Natal. When her children had left after a vacation with her in the Gold Coast to go back to school in Northern Ireland, she writes:

¹⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 23 November 1954.

²⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 5 May 1956.

²¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 February 1968.

Now that they have been in school for a week or two, I miss them terribly, but this is no climate for children, and apart from that, the Gold Coast is no place for South African children to grow up!²²

On closer analysis, it would seem that a consideration of the significant others in Blakemore's life, shows that apart from her husband, these all tended to be 'Afrikaners'. Blakemore spent much of her life trying to provide financial security for her mother, her two Afrikaner children, and two impoverished Afrikaans elderly relatives in South Africa.

At times, Blakemore seemed to be anxious about the fact that she was writing about a country that she had been away from for so long, and, in particular, as always, she felt worried about the effect that this state of affairs might have on the sale of her books:

Do you think it will be worthwhile to show my face in the Union, just to prove to the public that I still exist? I feel it would be a mistake to arrive back with a great flourish of trumpets as one who has been away for years from the scenes she writes about, but perhaps if I just unobtrusively appeared in Pretoria as if I had been around for some time, it would be a good thing. What do you think of this? Then if anyone said to you: "Maar wat bly sy dan gedurig in die buiteland?" you could reply 'My maskas! Sy was dan net verlede week hier by my in die kantoor!' ("Can someone please tell me what is she constantly doing overseas?" you could reply. "Good gracious! It was only last week that she was here with me in the office!")²³

In 1956 she has new hopes of returning to South Africa. She writes that they are planning to settle in the Union when her husband leaves the Gold Coast on retirement as 'you will have read in the papers that things out here are in a confused state, and most Europeans are deciding to leave'.²⁴ She does visit South Africa in December 1956,²⁵ but her planned return to South Africa does not materialise because they could not get her husband's pension from the state of Ghana:

²² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 February 1955.

²³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 5 May 1956.

²⁴ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 17 May 1956.

²⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 20 December 1956.

My husband is still battling with the State of Ghana, who also proceed about their business in a series of mild shocks.²⁶

As a result, her husband had to accept a position in Port Harcourt in Eastern Nigeria.²⁷ She writes again in 1959 about the possibility of her husband going back to Kumasi, which would mean that she would be able to come down to South Africa for a visit, as she was 'homesick beyond all'.²⁸ In particular, she states that she would love to be away from Kumasi when the Queen of England was due to visit:

I should definitely want to be out of Kumasi while the queen is there in November. The Council specially want David there for all the municipal kerfuffle (sic) connected with the visit and I should love to sit comfortably in Pretoria and think of him striding round showing the Duke of Edinburgh round housing estates and being asked the intelligent questions for which his Royal Highness is famous, and which drive people mad.²⁹

In the early 1960s she and her husband settled in London, which for her was a difficult period. During this time the realisation that she was not going to return to South Africa after all was sinking in. In 1961 she writes to Jan van Schaik:

London is all right. I'd rather be in Pretoria.³⁰

and later

Jan, I detest England and the English. Isn't that an awful and unadult admission? Don't tell anyone.³¹

It is while she is in London, that she starts referring to herself in letters as an exile:

No one will ever know how much I suffer from homesickness, as I suppose all exiles do. I know now that one should not marry outside

²⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 29 May 1957.

²⁷ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 5 June 1958.

²⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 May 1959.

²⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 May 1959.

³⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 6 September 1961.

³¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 30 October 1963.

your own nation, just because it almost always means either one or the other being exiled from his or her own country sooner or later.³²

Her health proved to be the final obstacle that prevented her return to her country of birth:

You know that I have dangerously high blood pressure. This is why I am not allowed to fly at all... Also, if I got out to the republic by boat, I am warned that I should not attempt to go up to the Transvaal, or anywhere higher than sea-level. I tell you all this, so that you understand why I am not trying to get home, even for a visit. So this is why I am an exile! If I can't live in Pretoria, it is no use. I should be just as much of an exile in Natal or the Cape. I was at boarding school in Natal, and I loathed the place. Salene, too, finds it 'terribly, terribly English!'³³

From London, Blakemore and David Owen left to settle permanently in the cottage in Northern Ireland that she and David had bought earlier and used as a holiday home all those years.

When Chris Louw referred to Blakemore in a newspaper article in 1974 as an Irish woman, she took deep offence. In reply, she said that she was a South African of birth with strong links to this country (South Africa), despite the fact that she had lived in many African states and at the time in Ireland (*Hoofstad*, 14 June 1974). Interviewed in 1978, she said that her husband and she had planned to return to South Africa in 1975 to settle there permanently (Hazelhurst 1978:6). However, the political turmoil in Northern Ireland had made it impossible for them to sell their cottage and they had had to stay there. She did state that she visited South Africa every year to see her son and two granddaughters living in Johannesburg (Hazelhurst 1978:6). From this it would seem then that her health did improve and that by the late 1970s she had to a large extent re-established contact with the country. However, by this time all her novels had been revised and re-written and no new ones were published. She never permanently settled in South Africa and died in Northern Ireland in 1991.

³² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 12 December 1963.

³³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 February 1968. Salene is Blakemore's daughter, who spent a few years teaching in Natal.

Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid: Race, class and gender in Blakemore's work

Blakemore's *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books were published during very important years in the history of South Africa. Whereas the first volumes of the *Maasdorp* series were published in the turbulent 1930s, against the background of programmes to eradicate the so called 'poor white problem', the 1940s – the period in which the first eleven *Keurboslaan* books were published – marked the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism that led to the National Party victory in 1948, paving the way for the formalisation of the discriminatory policy of Apartheid that would shape South African politics for the next forty years and beyond. As indicated earlier, Blakemore's books are currently assessed by many to be a celebration of patriarchy and are frequently described as deeply sexist. Her books have also been criticised for the racist undertones that are evident in many and for their promotion of particular middle class values.

The first six titles in the *Keurboslaan* series were published before 1947 while Blakemore was still living in Pretoria. During this period she did not correspond with her publishers as she was able to meet with them in person regularly. In order to answer questions about Blakemore's political awareness and beliefs at the time, it is therefore necessary to read her correspondence from a later period and attempt to infer from that what her position had been earlier. One of the questions that is of interest to this study is the extent to which Blakemore's publishing firm had played a role in directing the content of Blakemore's books or doing 'political editing' of her manuscripts. From scrutinising original manuscripts held by the National Afrikaans Literary Museum and Research Unit (NALN) it is clear that the firm virtually never intervened in the narrative line of any of Blakemore's manuscripts. Editors and revisers focused on the language and style components of the books.

Race

As in many aspects of Blakemore's work, the key to understanding the way in which, for example, race relations are depicted in her books lies in Blakemore's pragmatic approach to selling books. Exchanges that bear directly upon the situation in South Africa, including Apartheid race relations, only appear in correspondence between Blakemore and Jan van Schaik from the late 1950s and

early 1960s. In the first titles of the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series, the word 'kaffir' was generally used to refer to any African. In later books, Blakemore started using the word 'native'. But by 1958, she had already been away from South Africa for more than a decade and it is clear that she felt that she was no longer in touch with the way in which South African politics shaped the way in which the everyday life is enacted. Writing about the revision of *Die Kroon van Keurboslaan* in 1958, Blakemore demonstrates her increased isolation from South Africa by asking Jan van Schaik to affirm a particular political change she had made in the revised manuscript of an earlier book: 'By the way, I have cut out the word 'kaffer' wherever it occurred. Right?'³⁴ In a later letter, she again asks about a specific form of address, showing that she was more than willing to adapt her manuscripts to present political concerns, should Jan van Schaik advise her to do so. From her letter, it is clear that she relied in some of these matters solely on guidance from Jan van Schaik:

Please will you tell me, by return, as I want the information for *Kultuur op Kbl.* what is the position these days when African teachers or other professional men address a similarly-placed white man? I mean, in *Misverstand* (which I hope to see turning up one of these day) I have Daniel Motaung calling doktor Serfontein 'Baas' and it occurs to me that this may be wrong these days, as the good Daniel is a teacher in the local Native school. He crops up again in *Kultuur*... Would such a native call Die Hoof 'Doktor Serfontein' or would he get shot if he did? Of course, Daniel is the son of Danster who works for Die Hoof, and so presumably called him 'Baas' when he was small, and may have continued to do so, more or less as a title of affection. I don't know how these things work nowadays and I'll be grateful for a hint.³⁵

In reply, Jan van Schaik wrote:

The educated native today addresses the European as 'meneer' and [not] as 'baas' anymore.³⁶ In the Cape and also amongst natives who speak English they rather use 'master' than 'baas' and it is today only the uneducated native who is still an ordinary labourer that uses 'baas'.³⁷

³⁴ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 18 October 1958.

³⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 5 November 1958.

³⁶ The last part of the sentence should probably read and 'no longer as 'baas' anymore'.

³⁷ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 12 November 1958.

At times Blakemore does show her frustration about writing for a South African, and in particular Afrikaans, market and the limitations that imposes on her. With reference to the fact that her publishing firm did not want her books to be translated into English, she wrote in a letter to Jan van Schaik that she had written books in English that would not be approved of by her readers in South Africa:

I also write English books, which, for private reasons, are published under a name no one in South Africa will ever know is mine. They are perfectly respectable, but are written for a firm catering for a religious denomination highly unpopular in the Union. They net me a modest income – too modest.³⁸

This then provides some evidence for a claim that Blakemore at times felt irritated, if not uncomfortable, about the extent to which the parameters within which she was allowed to operate was set by a South African market and that the thought that she was defying these, even if only she knew about it, by writing about events and people – in this case Roman Catholics – that would shock her South African audience provided her some secret joy. Nonetheless, in the main Blakemore was always willing to heed to advice and built it into her manuscripts. In a letter to Jan van Schaik about her planned series, *Die Rissies*, she indicated that she had listened to his advice about events in Africa and incorporated that into the way in which she developed her black characters:

In view of the changing pattern of life everywhere on the African Continent, mentioned in your letter, I have made the couple of Natives in the book excellent characters who get bopped in the course of their duty!³⁹

Having said that J.L. van Schaik Publishers and the language experts they appointed to revise Blakemore's manuscripts never tampered with the story line or did 'political' edits of texts, it is true that they sometimes made changes to the dialogue and that this may have had a political colour to it. Blakemore seemed to have been upset that in the process of revising one of the *Die Rissies* manuscripts the editors had changed the way in which the African characters speak. In this regard, she wrote: 'I also think it will be a mistake to let the Bantus

³⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 30 September 1958.

³⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 March 1959.

talk like university professors, but I don't insist on that point'.⁴⁰ In this case, though, the point that she raised seems to be connected to her insistence on being true to her characters and the fact that she felt strongly that in everyday life these characters would not have spoken standard Afrikaans rather than to an objection to a political edit as such.

There is only once an incident where the firm made a substantial political edit to a manuscript, but again this happened at Blakemore's instigation. The exchange that took place between Jan van Schaik and Stella Blakemore on a matter pertaining to an incident in a new *Keurboslaan* manuscript is printed here in full. In a letter to Jan van Schaik in 1960, Blakemore writes the following:

I have Dr. Serfontein at one point lifting a six-year old African child on his horse in front of him and riding home with him, and I think at another dramatic point he lets the child, who has been through the mill rather, hold his hand. It has suddenly occurred to me that these small incidents may be *steens des aanstoots*... I do not entertain Africans in my home, but I have been teaching them music for so many years, from the ages of six to sixty, that the thought of that amount of contact between a European of somewhere in the late fifties and a child of six does not *stuit my teen die bors* as perhaps it should. If it worries you, who are on the spot and understand these things, let Die Hoof get off his horse and walk alongside the child, and later don't let him reach his hand out to the babe. After all, people are always altering things in my books, so they may as well do a bit of work on it for once! But I have written the parts of the story that affect the family of Die Hoof's old servant very carefully, and I don't seriously think they can give offence.⁴¹

Of interest is the way in which Blakemore uses the word 'should' – writing that contact between a young African boy and a white man in his fifties does not offend her to the extent that it perhaps ought to. It is difficult to get a clear idea of the layered meanings in Blakemore's letter. From the fact that she uses a number of Afrikaans phrases, it can be surmised that she either uses it as a mechanism of distancing herself, thereby using the word 'should' to indicate that she is not taking this issue seriously enough given the conservative views of her Afrikaans readership. At the same time though, it could also signal that she felt that she had been away from South Africa for too long and that her experience in colonial

⁴⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 12 June 1959.

⁴¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 3 February 1959.

Africa had made her forget about South Africa and its particular problems. Blakemore does not neglect to make the point to Van Schaik that she does concur with Apartheid segregation by saying that she does not entertain Africans in her home. The ambiguity in this letter, which is difficult to resolve, forms part of a broader ambiguity that Blakemore displayed in her views on South Africa. From other letters it is evident that though she was clearly far more liberal than her readership, and in general approved of 'equality for all'⁴² as she sometimes phrased it, and disapproved of outright racism, she still felt that South Africa's situation was unique and that no outsiders could understand it.⁴³

Jan van Schaik wrote a very long and considered reply to Blakemore's letter. In his response one senses the carefulness with which he composed this letter, as if he were at pains not to upset Blakemore about his suggestion and as if he thought she might be upset about what he had to say, even though she did ask him to look into the matter. Also, he seemed to want to make sure that he does not come across as racist himself. For these two reasons, the carefully phrased letter at times has a distinctly patronising tone:

Another and more important alteration: after very serious consideration I decided rather to leave out that part where Dr. Serfontein rides the native child home on horseback after he has found Jonas under a bush, too frightened to go home.

The reason for this was firstly that it seemed rather unnecessary for him to do. Your MS [manuscript] reads at this point that they were 'naby die draai voor die groot skoolhek'.

Of course, this means that Robert cannot now accuse the Doctor of showing more consideration towards his 'volk' than to poor whites. What is left, however, does not in any way diminish the impression that this boy is a rather miserable character and thoroughly disagreeable in contrast to the 'Keurboslaners'.

Furthermore I had to keep in mind that an act like Dr. Serfontein's would certainly annoy a considerable section of your readers. (Judging from your letter of February 3, 1959, it would seem that you are not quite unaware of this fact!) Yet, this fact, important as it is, would not have

⁴² Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 18 August 1960.

⁴³ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 March 1959.

decided the case for us because you certainly handled the situation with great care.

I think I know what you had in mind in describing that little incident – to show the total lack of snobbery in Dr. Serfontein as well as his acceptance of every individual, regardless of the colour of his skin, as a person in his own right. In this context, however, this incident does not quite serve the purpose for which it was intended. Indeed, as I have mentioned already, it might only trigger off the resentment of a certain type of reader.

This part of the Ms. has been carefully revised so as to make sure that it reads smoothly. Something else: Dr. Serfontein manages to convey the meaning of human tolerance in a much more moving way by his attitude towards the natives during the terrible ordeal of the dangerous operation on Mias.⁴⁴

It is the pragmatic Blakemore that replies to his letter, as usual punching a sting about Jan van Schaik's own political views. In the letter, she argues that the incident involving the headmaster and Jonas was included in the manuscripts because it had a narrative purpose and not because she was trying to make a political point:

As for the incident of Jonas being 'lifted' by Dr. Serfontein, I was not REALLY trying to make the 'human equality' point, because to me it is so natural that I always forget that others don't. The point of the incident was to call out Robert's animosity against Jonas' family, so that he might later have been suspected of deliberately injuring the other child. However, you are the person who takes the risks in publishing and you know the conditions better than anyone.⁴⁵

Yet, Blakemore was a complex personality, full of contradictions. Her extensive experience of living in colonial and postcolonial Africa and her thoughts on that seeped into many of her letters and stereotypes often prevailed:

Parcels always take longer in these parts, because they require more handling than letters, and the Nigerians are even slower than the Gold Coasters, or, as they now call themselves, the Ghanaians.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 9 August 1960.

⁴⁵ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 18 August 1960.

⁴⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 14 November 1958.

and

I lost no time getting it into my possession – at least not more time that one always loses when dealing with the Nigerians.⁴⁷

At other times, she made strong statements about the possibilities of a non-racist South Africa at a time when this certainly was not an accepted view among the section of the population she was addressing. For example, in an interview with a journalist of the newspaper *Hoofstad*, published on 14 June 1974, Blakemore said:

As swart en wit moet saamwoon, kom hulle gewoonlik goed klaar. Ek het in Ghana (toe nog die Ivoorkus) onder 'n swart skoolhoof gewerk. Hy was baie goed vir my as personeellid. In Swaziland en Nigerië het ek presies dieselfde ondervinding gehad.

[When black and white have to live side by side, they usually get along well. In Ghana (then the Ivory Coast) I worked under a black school principal. He was very good to me as a staff member. In Swaziland and Nigeria I had exactly the same experience.]

In instances when she tries to link her experiences in colonial and postcolonial Africa to the situation in South Africa, the contradictions and ambiguities in her approach are most evident. In one such example, she manages to combine a disparaging tone about the possibilities of Africans governing themselves and heeding to a democratic project with a statement that is broadly in favour of lifting the colour-bar, whilst she remains cautious about whether this is desirable in South Africa:

Things do, as you say, seem to be in a state of flux on our continent. But I saw Ghana from the start of the anti-white riots until the achievement of Independence, and I observed, as I expected, that the moment they had what they said they wanted, and at the moment when the millennium was supposed to dawn, they set to hating each other far more bitterly than they had ever hated us. Now they are offering Europeans all sorts of inducements to go and work there, far beyond anything that was offered before, and I believe there are now about double the White people in Ghana that were there before Independence. I expect to see this happen everywhere. The Nigerians

⁴⁷ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 15 November 1958.

don't bother anyone. They have Independence, but it doesn't seem to have sunk in. Total lack of colour-bar is no drawback, because here, as elsewhere, you choose your friends, and no one can force you to have a man of any colour at all in your home if you don't want him. I adjudicated at a music festival the other day, and the African teachers I had to do with there, differed not at all in their manners from teachers I used to meet at the Bantu Festival in Pretoria. Of course, South Africa's problems are quite different from anyone else's, and I am very glad it does not fall to me to solve them. I can only go on as I have always done, trying to be courteous to people of every race, colour and creed, because I think it right. It comes fairly naturally to me – except now and then!⁴⁸

From the late 1950s to the early 1960s Blakemore and Jan van Schaik often write to each other about the political situation in South Africa: In 1960, Jan van Schaik writes:

We are well in Pretoria – only worried what the future will hold for us. Events have been very disturbing lately, but I think they were exaggerated in the overseas press. Things have calmed down again although everyone is upset about the attempt on the life of our Prime Minister. These things have never before happened in our country, and one usually associates this type of thing with countries in the Middle East and Southern America. Personally I hope that the latest events will perhaps bring a better understanding in South Africa and especially amongst the two main sections of our white population.⁴⁹

Blakemore's reply captured her homesickness, her belief that Africans in South Africa had not yet reached a point where they could be regarded as equal to the other populations and her disrespect for the Anti-Apartheid movement. Yet, her letter also reflects her opinion that the international press was not really concerned about what happened to Africans at all and that the whole anti-Apartheid movement was but a part of a general political game, an activity which she detested:

As I type, I am looking out on the lawn and the flower borders. It all looks lovely, I must admit. It has been a wonderful spring and I have the most gorgeous tulips this year. Even so, I'd rather see some Karoo or a bit of Namakwaland out there. My homesickness is ever-present,

⁴⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen, signed as 'Esso' – a pun on the speediness with which she writes novels and replies to letters – dated 19 March 1959.

⁴⁹ Letter to Stella Owen from Jan van Schaik dated 19 April 1960.

especially at this time when the whole world seems to be combining against South Africa, always without the slightest knowledge of the problems involved. Personally, I stand for kindness and humanitarian treatment towards everyone everywhere, but it is only the utterly uninformed who suppose that all people [are], as yet, equal. Still, I need not tell you that most of the criticism is only in the press. It is quite insincere. No one really cares what becomes of Africans. It is just a stunt. If you saw a march-past of protesters against Apartheid, as I did in Liverpool, you would be quite relieved to see how little weight such a movement can carry. The crowds are made up of all sorts of misfits, and are generally ridiculed by those on the pavements. But of course the papers give the impression that it is a mighty movement, destined to sweep all before it! Every now and then I feel impelled to write or broadcast about these things, but then I remember my grandfather, Theunis Krogh's advice to his children: "Hou julle uit Politiek uit. Dis 'n groot gesmeer!"⁵⁰ I have always held aloof from it and I always shall.⁵¹

Class

The issue of class is conspicuous in its absence in the correspondence between Blakemore and her publishers. This, however, did not mean that Blakemore was ignorant of issues of class and the way in which class cleavages impacted on her market. She motivated her argument for writing more books in the *Janse Cloete* series by stating that she knew that there was a group of readers in the rural areas that would not find the *Keurboslaan* books appealing and who needed texts that were more closely linked to their life world:

About the Janse Cloete books... I should rather like to do about three more Janse Cloete books, because they were definitely intended for boys at the 'plattelandse' (sic) who get rather bothered at the idea of the privileged life at Keurboslaan.⁵²

Yet, by 1959 the sales of her books had brought home a message to her that she wanted to share with her publisher. In May 1959 she writes to Jan van Schaik about criticism she had come in for because the setting for her books is generally a boarding school background as opposed to a domestic, family background. Her critics have argued that boarding school is not a shared experience for her target readers and that most of her readers attend day schools. She writes that she had

⁵⁰ The English translation reads "Keep yourselves out of Politics. It's a messy business!"

⁵¹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 9 May 1960.

⁵² Letter to J.L. Mr van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 11 September 1947.

always thought that her *Blourand*-series, in particular *Judith op Blourand* and *Elfie, Apie en Carolus*, were among the best books she had ever written.⁵³ These books are all set in a family environment in the Transvaal. Nevertheless, in the letter Blakemore complains that she had never received a single fan letter about any of these books. Moreover, she argues that the criticism about the fact that her books portray schools that are very different from those her readers attend also seem to be off the mark, as the sales of her books have proved that her readers prefer to read books about Blakemore's type of schools:

[A] very experienced teacher whom I knew, complained that my schools were not like the ordinary schools as our children know them. I could still have holes talked in my head at that stage, so I meekly wrote the *Janse Cloete* books about the ordinary type of school. Of the result, I need not remind you. It almost looks as yet another teacher was wrong, and children preferred my schools, while attending the other kind. As a matter of fact, there are masses of schools like mine, in Natal and the Cape.⁵⁴

Class does play an important part in her books and many of the narratives are strongly loaded with references to economic mobility, social stratification and the problem of 'poor whites'. In fact, the one case where Jan van Schaik did intervene in a *Keurboslaan* narrative by cutting the section where Dr Serfontein gives a young African boy a ride home, which was discussed previously, a direct class confrontation was posed in the story: Based on the incident, the antagonist, Robert, accused Dr Serfontein of caring more for his 'volk'⁵⁵ than for 'poor whites'.

Gender

Blakemore wrote a fair bit about her relationship with her husband, David Owen. Despite claiming that married life was indeed the best option for a woman, she did often complain about the restrictions married life placed on her and the extent to

⁵³ *Judith op Blourand* is the story of a spoiled, independent and affluent teenager, Judith Villiers, who has been orphaned and lives with her aunt in a posh suburb of Cape Town. Through a business venture gone wrong, she loses her fortune and has no other choice but to go and live with her cousins in the town of Blourand in the Transvaal. Her cousins themselves had lost their parents, and Dawid and Petronella, who are much older than their siblings, have taken it upon themselves to take care of the family, so that the children do not need to go into foster homes. The family is enormously poor, but happy. The book tells the story of how Judith has to learn to make personal sacrifices in order to be accepted as part of this poor, but warm and loving family.

⁵⁴ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen, signed 'Esso', dated 8 May 1959.

⁵⁵ in this instance, the word 'volk' denotes black workers or staff, and was common in a farming context.

which it was required of her to turn herself into a different persona to appease men:

Actually, the 'Owen' part of me is quite unlike the part of 'me' you know. I more or less have to be helpless and rather dull-witted in order to satisfy the male need to protect, cherish and control! I have observed your adorable mother tackling her problem in the same way. Our affections and the hidden maternal pity we feel for our men-folk enables us to persevere until death! Herma will be very cross with me for betraying the basic secret of womanhood!⁵⁶

Despite generally complying with the wishes of her husband, her attitude towards men, as indeed she herself remarked in one of her letters, tended to be maternal and patronising, casting them as fairly narrow-minded persons of habit that needed constant encouragement and admiration from women.

I am not starving yet. That's one thing about having a husband. He has to support you! Mine does so very willingly, as long as I hold aloof from the rest of the world and pay attention to no one except him. If I have to pay attention elsewhere, he would rather be on the other side of the world than watch me doing it!⁵⁷

Not often, but on a few occasions a tone of resentment slips in about the position of power that men occupy in society:

In point of fact, I am quite prepared for any and all public buildings to be blown up, especially ones wherein men make laws...⁵⁸

With regard to her writing and gender relations, she seems to have followed the pragmatic route once again. In her books that were aimed at girl readers, the vast majority of characters tended to be female, while in her books for boys, the opposite was the case. When she writes to her publisher about the design of a cover for the *Die Rissies* series, which targeted both boy and girl readers, she shows that she knows the reading habits of children well:

I have kept the children between the ages of eight and thirteen, two boys and two girls. I have let them share in the cleverness, but with the

⁵⁶ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 March 1960.

⁵⁷ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 19 January 1959.

⁵⁸ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Owen dated 6 February 1961.

bias slightly on the side of the boys. I suggest that the cover picture is such as will appeal to boys rather than girls. Girls always like boys' books, whereas the reverse is seldom the case.⁵⁹

Because she knew that girls were likely to read books for boys, whilst boys would never consider reading books intended for girls, her boys' books usually included elements that catered a little bit for a female readership, including a hint of romance. She was able to create strong and emancipated women characters and felt a little bit despondent when a very dedicated reader begged her to ensure that one of the favourite *Maasdorp* characters, Elsabé, a woman focused on her career and became the principal of the Maasdorpse Meisieskool, got married. Blakemore conceded and Elsabé did indeed get married in the subsequent book in the series, but about this Blakemore wrote:

Why a handsome women with a fine career should be regarded as 'poor' because no wretched man has regarded her as desirable, I never can understand, but that remains the general view, in spite of votes for women and what not!⁶⁰

Conclusion

Blakemore's relationship with South Africa was complex and layered. Whilst her letters indicate that she saw a strong association between herself and her country of birth, the fact was that she spent most of her life away from South Africa. Blakemore's position on politics provides evidence for a statement that she did not, generally, support the cause of Afrikaner nationalism or that, at the very least, she would not have liked to become involved in such a movement herself. Yet, her activities as an Afrikaans writer and music and drama teacher (when she lived in Pretoria) cast her in the role of community creator. Here, her decision to write in Afrikaans cannot be regarded as neutral. It may be that her writing skills in English were underdeveloped and that this contributed to her decision to write in Afrikaans. However, on balance it would seem that her early success in terms of publishing in Afrikaans, coupled with her deep longing for her country of birth and an idealistic expectation of the growth possibilities of the Afrikaans book market were the main reasons for continuing to write in Afrikaans. Whilst Blakemore clearly distances herself from what she regards as crude forms of

⁵⁹ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 19 March 1959.

⁶⁰ Letter to Jan van Schaik from Stella Blakemore dated 9 February 1968.

racism in South Africa, hers is generally a colonial mindset underpinned with a good dose of racist ideas. Her responsiveness towards the market or the book buying public therefore also influenced the way in which she wrote her books. Nonetheless, J.L. van Schaik publishers provided Blakemore the freedom to publish texts without interference in the content, except for the one incident discussed in this chapter. In the last instance, Blakemore therefore retained the final say on the contents of her books.

Conclusion

Introduction

This study constitutes an attempt to link the study of popular fiction for children with the study of Afrikaner nationalism. Despite, the level at which the questions are posed, the argument that was presented here is fairly limited. It was argued that writing, reading and publishing can be construed as political acts in Benedict Anderson's terms. Two central questions animated this study. These are 1) how did the Afrikaner intelligentsia manage to disseminate its ideas and ideology of Afrikaner nationalism to a wider audience across class fractures and turn it into a kind of mass consciousness and 2) what was the composition of the petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, what evidence is available about upward and downward mobility between this class and other classes, and what kinds of contestation and resistance took place within this class? It was indicated that one of the problems of explanation in studies on Afrikaner nationalism is the level on which accounts are provided. Studies on Afrikaner nationalism tend to focus on national, macro level events and representations, which undermines the ability of such accounts to adequately explain the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism on the level of everyday life. In this case, it is hoped that this local, micro level study of the life of a popular fiction author will augment other theoretical accounts of Afrikaner nationalism. Against this background, this study attempted to illuminate linkages between language, community and history, by foregrounding the life history of Stella Blakemore, an author of popular fiction for children.

The argument presented here is that the realm of popular fiction for children is important study in relation to nationalism for three reasons. First, literature for children is imbued with specific social significance because of the link between the notion of childhood and development. Second, the sales of popular fiction for children, in the same way as mass-produced romance readers for women, are market-driven as opposed to support for canonised texts from the state. Sales figures for popular fiction therefore tell us something about readers and their reading preferences. Third, popular fiction, because of its popularity and associated high sales figures, permeate society in ways that literary works cannot. It was

argued further that the study of popular fiction for children in Afrikaans has not received much scholarly attention, and while the relationship between nationalism and Afrikaans literature has been explored by others such as Hofmeyr (1987) and Kruger (1991), the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and popular children's books is an untilled land.

The main research findings are reported in three sections: (1) Blakemore and the publishing industry; (2) The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and Stella Blakemore; and (3) Blakemore, the project of Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner subjectivity. Finally, the argument is drawn together in the concluding section, entitled 'Rethinking the imagined community through the notions of habitus, the organic intellectual and the social imaginary'.

Blakemore and the publishing industry

In terms of the relationship between the publishing industry and Blakemore, the research demonstrated that Blakemore's books were never conceived of as a nationalist project by its publishers or its author. Given that her books were regarded as popular fiction for children, these texts were not explicitly tied in with any of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie's literary projects aimed at promoting the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. These arguments are supported by the overview of the founding history of J.L. van Schaik publishers and the firm's motivation for producing the *Keurboslaan* series sketched in the Chapter Two as well as Blakemore's reflections on her own reasons for writing the series presented in this Chapter Three. J.L. van Schaik's involvement in producing the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series seems to have been motivated by a combination of the drive for profit and commitment to the cause of Afrikaner nationalism and thus the promotion of Afrikaans. However, from the discussion in Chapter Two, it is clear that in the case of popular fiction for children, the profitability of ventures was a key concern. It was shown that J.L. van Schaik felt sympathetic towards the cause of Afrikaner nationalism and that the firm did indeed publish a number of books that served the interests of this cause despite the fact that these books were unlikely to be profitable. Yet, it appears from the correspondence between Blakemore and her publishers as well as from the interview with Jan van Schaik that the main motivation for publishing the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books was simply profit. There was virtually no intervention from the publishers in the narrative of her books or attempts to give the books a particular political slant. On one issue the publishers

stood firm, though, and that was that Blakemore could not translate the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* books into English. While the motivation informing this directive may in part have been sentiment towards the Afrikaans language, the evidence seems to suggest that it is more likely that the publishers were concerned about the reaction of a conservative Afrikaans book buying public on finding out that these series books have also been published in English and the implications that would have for sales.

The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and Blakemore

Whilst Blakemore's class position was that of the petty bourgeoisie, Blakemore's relationship with the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie seems to have been ambiguous. Based on her letters to her publisher it can be argued that Blakemore did not embark on writing books to promote the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. In truth, she distanced herself on many occasions from the terrain of politics in general. Besides the overarching objective of writing to obtain an income stream, her main motivation for writing in Afrikaans seems to have been sentimental and a marker of her South African identity. Not only did she often claim that she thought in Afrikaans, but after having left South Africa writing in Afrikaans provided Blakemore with a connection to the country to which she planned to return. For these reasons, she was prepared to write for an Afrikaans market and, in order to promote her sales, she was willing to make some changes to her manuscripts and to write her stories in a way that would be acceptable to her audience, even if she did not always agree with their sentiments. Yet, she made it clear on a number of occasions that she would have been more than prepared to have her works translated into English for a broader South African audience. Actually, in quite a few of her letters she requested her publisher to review this restriction. While she suggested more than once that she was not fond of 'the English', it does seem to be plausible to suggest that her problem with the English was largely with the British. Phrased alternatively, Blakemore seems to have had some dislike for both the British and South African English speakers who embraced a British identity rather than a South African identity. In terms of her own identity, it appears that she saw herself primarily as a South African, rather than an Afrikaner. In one letter, she states that one shouldn't marry outside one's race as she had done by marrying a Welshman, as such a union of necessity implied that one of the partners needed to leave their country behind. This implies that Blakemore understood a close relationship to exist between nation and country. The Transvaal was her heartland and she did not feel

at home in Natal, where she went to boarding school and which she felt was too English for her liking, or in the Cape Province. It could therefore be argued that rather than Afrikaner nationalism, Blakemore herself was embracing a kind of South African nationalism that was rooted in her experience of living in Transvaal but moulded by her experience of living away from South Africa, where her South Africanness came to dominate over her Afrikanerness and where distinctions between white Afrikaans and English speaking South Africans became more vague. In a sense, this sentiment therefore encapsulated a world where Afrikaners outweighed English speakers in numbers but where there was not a clear distinction between white Afrikaans speakers and white English speakers and where the boundaries between the groups were fairly fluid.

Blakemore did not form part of the inner circle of the Afrikaner intelligentsia that mobilised around the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. This could be explained by a number of factors but conclusive evidence is lacking. First, Blakemore's family history would have made it very difficult for her to be included in this circle. Whilst she was described as Afrikaner royalty, she wore the taint of the enemy given that her father was an officer of the British army. This would have been exacerbated by the attempts of the Afrikaner intelligentsia in the decades following the Anglo-Boer war to revive the atrocities of the Anglo-Boer War as a strategy for advancing the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. Second, Blakemore married a Welshman, which meant that her home language was English. Third, Blakemore was not an author of literary works in Afrikaans, but produced popular fiction for the youth, which was a marginal literature. Fourth, Blakemore's acceptance into this circle would have been hindered by her identity as a woman. While women did play a prominent role in advancing Afrikaner nationalism, Blakemore's identity as the wife of a foreigner must have made it very difficult to gain credibility. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that Blakemore herself wanted to be part of this circle. In many ways, her extensive travels and the long period she spent in various parts of Europe in her early twenties had turned her into a European cosmopolitan.

While she therefore clearly belonged to the stratum of the petty bourgeoisie, Blakemore was never a full member of the Afrikaner intelligentsia and there is evidence that many Afrikaners saw her as a foreigner. In terms of the broader white Afrikaans speaking population, Blakemore was not a very well known public figure. This was the result of the fact that she lived away from South Africa for so many years of her productive writing life, but also because her publishers were concerned

about the fact that boys would not be keen to read the *Keurboslaan* books if they knew the books were written by a woman. Moreover, after she had left South Africa, J.L. van Schaik was concerned that the reading public would find out that Blakemore did not live in South Africa and was indeed 'English-speaking'. As a result, Blakemore was in a way shielded from her reading public. Hence, the impact she could make as a public figure on events in South Africa was very low.

Not only did Blakemore not belong to the inner circle of the Afrikaner intelligentsia in Pretoria, but she clashed with members of the stratum on a number of occasions. Her outspoken, sometimes brash, manner landed her in trouble with many prominent Afrikaners in the Transvaal, an issue she comments on in her letters to J.L. van Schaik. Her disagreements with the Afrikaans language purists and the editors of her manuscripts have been well documented. Her relationship with her publishers is yet another example of an interaction with the Afrikaner establishment that did not always run smoothly. J.L. van Schaik's relationship with their author can be summarised as cautious. Whilst the relationship between Blakemore and the senior Mr van Schaik had always been strained, she developed a much closer relationship with his son, Jan. Yet, even Jan's relationship with Blakemore can be described as guarded and from the correspondence one senses that Jan saw his role principally as mediator, having to keep Blakemore away from and guarding her against the Afrikaner establishment. Finally, already in the early years, but particularly from the 1960s onwards her work was scorned by decision-makers in academic and government circles who described it as poor quality fiction. It is therefore very difficult to cast Blakemore in the role of prophet of Afrikaner nationalism and as spokesperson for the Afrikaner intelligentsia set on promoting Afrikaner nationalism. Not only did Blakemore not belong to that circle, but also there were some enemies of hers among their ranks.

Blakemore, the project of Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner subjectivity

Despite the fact that her books were not conceived as a nationalist project and that its author, Blakemore, was not a popular or well known member of the Afrikaner establishment, the combination of a private sector initiative, based on the expansion of the market of the Afrikaans book, and a well-travelled and at times voluntarily exiled South African writer homesick for her country of birth proved to be a powerful combination that played into the agenda of Afrikaner nationalism. It is argued here

that Blakemore's *books* contributed to the project of 'inventing' an Afrikaner nation and thus to the development of Afrikaner nationalism in at least six ways.

First, Blakemore's decision to write popular fiction for children in Afrikaans, whilst apparently born out of two competing motivations – the fact that entry into the Afrikaans market seemed to be fairly easy given Blakemore's need to earn extra income through writing and her sentiment towards the language and country of her birth – was deeply political, at least in terms of its implications. At a time when there were dismally few examples of children's literature in Afrikaans, she started writing popular fiction. When she started the *Maasdorp* series for girls in the early 1930s and the *Keurboslaan* series in the early 1940s the market for Afrikaans books was still very small. It can be argued that Blakemore did not only fill a gap in the market, but, instead, contributed to creating a market for popular fiction in Afrikaans. In this respect, her books have contributed to the expansion of the Afrikaans book market.

Second, the popularity of the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series enticed children to read Afrikaans books. On the event of Langenhoven's death on 15 July 1932, *Die Burger* wrote in its editorial that it was Langenhoven who had taught the Afrikaner people to read through his column in *Die Burger*, 'Aan Stille Waters', his books and his literature for children (Steyn 1992:39). After his death, though, it was Stella Blakemore – together with perhaps Mikro, though his children's books targeted much younger readers – who was to become the first author of Afrikaans children's literature that understood the charm of the formulaic series books and the popularity of series novels in English and who was able to produce an Afrikaans equivalent. After Langenhoven's death and the popularity of his *Brolloks en Bittergal* and *Die Krismiskinders*, and later E.B. Grosskopf's successful children's book *Patrys-hulle*, it was Blakemore who introduced the idea of the series book to a wide range of young Afrikaans readers, and, in doing so, expanded the market for Afrikaans books and created a captive audience lured by the attractiveness of the series book. For this reason, Blakemore's biggest contribution is often said to be the fact that she got Afrikaans children reading.

Third, through her books, Blakemore created a community of Afrikaans readers. The *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series functioned to create new kinds of communities. People who had never met each other before shared the experience of having read the *Keurboslaan* series and that became a way in which connections were made. While readers of *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* may not have known each

other, they were connected through the fact that they all felt that they knew Roelof Serfontein intimately. These connections should not only be seen as transgressing space and geography, but became inter-generational connections as successive generations of Afrikaans readers came to know the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* characters. As these books were not translated from or into English, they became part of a uniquely Afrikaans imaginary world. This is a practical example of how what Isabel Hofmeyr (1987) refers to as 'a sediment of Afrikanerness' began to settle in amongst Afrikaans speakers.

Fourth, while Blakemore was not an influential public figure in South Africa and among Afrikaners it was precisely because details about the author were not widely known in South Africa that she was able to make such a considerable impact through her fiction. For example, it was indicated that reviewers of the *Keurboslaan* books were of the opinion that the author, Theunis Krogh, was trying through his books to establish an indigenous educational system. Reviewers therefore actively and strongly encouraged parents and teachers to read the books themselves as an educational experience. From the correspondence between J.L. van Schaik and Blakemore, it is clear that, for a long time it was not known that she was the real author of the *Keurboslaan* books. The fictitious author therefore was received as a flesh and blood male Afrikaner who used the medium of children's literature to promote and develop his views on what an authentic Afrikaner educational system and establishment should look like. As a result, the obvious links between this genre of fiction in Afrikaans and the school story tradition in Britain was either overlooked or not regarded as important. As a result, the *Keurboslaan* series was imbued with a status well beyond that of popular children's fiction.

Fifth, the desire of both the author and the publisher to increase sales on the her books to the Afrikaans reading public saw both parties placing a strong focus on making the books appear as 'authentic' Afrikaans texts. Blakemore, for example, attempted to create an identity of a man and an Afrikaner in her many letters to fans. One of these letters was used on the cover jacket of the *Keurboslaan* series. It was therefore read by the many *Keurboslaan* readers. In this letter, she explained that the *Keurboslaan* characters were based on people she knew. For a range of reasons, the firm J.L. van Schaik too was trying to pass Blakemore off as Theunis Krogh. They therefore tried to keep Blakemore away from the South African public and were in fact quite upset when it was leaked that Blakemore had been the author of both the *Maasdorp* and the *Keurboslaan* series. These combined efforts

succeeded in obscuring the relationship between fiction and reality. This contributed to a dominant view that the series was written by an Afrikaner about Afrikaners and that even though the stories were fictitious they had a factual base in reality and that characters such as Eugene Krynauw and Roelof Serfontein were modelled on prominent 'real life' Afrikaners.

Sixth, returning to Taylor's notion of the social imaginary as the background against which social practices are performed and at the same time constitutive of the performance of such practices, it can be argued that Blakemore's books, in particular the *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series, in some ways produced the Afrikaner social imaginary at the eve of Apartheid and the seizure of state power by Afrikaners. The *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series reflect and represent a kind of moral order. Phrased differently, it can be argued that these series produce answers to questions about the way in which one ought to live one's life and the relationship between members of the South African political society. Given that the social imaginary is not a set of doctrines, rules of values, but rather is captured or represented by images, myths and stories of which these texts, which were widely read in the white Afrikaans-speaking community, form part. Given that this study did not focus on the content of these two series, further research on this topic needs to be undertaken.

Conclusion: Rethinking the imagined community through the notions of habitus, the organic intellectual and the social imaginary

In terms of analysing power, Gramsci demonstrates the importance of taking into account notions of culture. This study embarked with a question about the way in which the ruling class exercises hegemony. Through his notion of the organic intellectual, Gramsci explains the way in which such intellectuals can persuade the population to share their beliefs. As part of his revolutionary politics, Gramsci therefore argues that organic intellectuals can assist to develop an alternative hegemony. This is achieved through the creation of a common culture. Faced with the erosion of their power base after the Anglo-Boer War, members of the Afrikaans-speaking intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie was faced with the double challenge of producing a counter-culture against the existing hegemony of British imperialism and acting against other organic intellectuals who attempted to foster a new hegemony on the basis of class.

The claim that Blakemore furthered the cause of Afrikaner nationalism through her writings therefore begs the question as to whether she can be regarded as an organic intellectual in Gramscian terms. In order to answer this question, we need to return to Gramsci and the evidence presented in this study.

In Chapter One, Gramsci's notion of hegemony was outlined. Focusing on cultural aspects of hegemony, Gramsci argues that political power cannot only be seized but that an alternative hegemony needs to be created in order to secure a complete revolution. Such a revolution is explained as a revolution that 'brings to power a coherent class formation united behind a single economic, political and cultural conception of the world' (Adamson 1980:171). This description seems to apply well to the phenomenon of Afrikaner nationalism, which did succeed – albeit temporarily – not in creating a coherent class formation but in bridging class divides and in uniting white Afrikaans speakers behind a single economic, political and cultural conception of the world. The question then is in what way Gramsci thought that an existing hegemony can be replaced with an alternative one. Adamson argues that Gramsci saw political change as possible through a dialectic interaction between what he termed 'organic intellectuals' and ordinary people (Adamson 1980:169). Gramsci argues that organic intellectuals emerge from the subject classes themselves and that they are successful precisely because they have themselves lived and grown up in the same environment as ordinary people:

New ideas would not be introduced or 'propagandized' as extraneous inputs into mass politics but would be integrated into the very fabric of proletarian culture, life-styles, language, traditions, etc. by revolutionaries who themselves worked and lived within the same environment. Only this could ensure the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, the intellectual and the spontaneous, the political and the social, which could lay down the foundations of an authentic *Marxist* subjectivity in popular consciousness itself (Boggs 1976:77-78).

Gramsci explains the reason why organic intellectuals have a better chance in appealing to the masses than intellectuals as follows:

The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion on the other... The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without

understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned: in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual if distinct and separate from the people-nation, i.e. without feeling the elementary passions of the people... One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation (Gramsci 1971:418).

Boggs explains that it is necessary for organic intellectuals to work from 'within' and embed their projects within the very fabric of culture, life-style and traditions. If this is the case, then the domain of popular fiction for children provides fertile ground indeed for the operations of organic intellectuals. Returning to Blakemore, it is clear that she cannot be described in any terms as a Marxist organic intellectual. However, Gramsci did not see this as a unique future of the Marxist project. Rather, he argues that any political movement that wishes to succeed needs to have its own organic intellectuals. The question therefore is to what extent Blakemore can be described as an organic intellectual promoting the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. To answer this question, we have to turn to Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*.

If we take the *habitus* as a person's cultural habitat, an internalised and non-self-conscious set of dispositions acquired from both acculturation and personal characteristics, then the evidence offered in study may be used in order to draw some tentative conclusions about Blakemore's position as organic intellectual.

There is no evidence to suggest that Blakemore consciously set out to create or foster through her writings an Afrikaner community in Afrikaner nationalist terms. On the contrary, Blakemore distanced herself from what she regarded to be politics. Yet, she explicitly commented on the fact that it pleased her deeply to write for 'her own people' in Afrikaans. She articulated a close link between her understanding of nation and country, and she did indeed promote a kind of South Africanism. However, finally, if one takes into account her motivation for writing and producing texts at such frantic speed, it would seem that her notion of community was closely linked to her language: her children, mother and the elderly Afrikaans-speaking relatives are the ones on whose behalfs she felt she had to built up her financial resources. And in some way she thought of all three these groups as 'Afrikaners'.

There are many contradictions in the way in which Blakemore describes her project of writing fiction in Afrikaans. It is, however, clear that she did not use the blueprint of Afrikaner nationalism to guide her writings. The political and cultural content of

her writings in Afrikaans are perhaps best explained with the help of Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus*, or the field of possibilities within which an author operates, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is not unproblematic in this context as he clearly distinguishes between works of literature and mass-market fiction. However, whilst it is clear that Blakemore made a conscious effort in her writings to keep in mind the preferences of her target market she also stated that the kind of writing she undertook was the best she could possibly produce and that she derived great joy from her writings. Moreover, whilst it is true that she did try to shape her writings for a specific audience, she did so based on her own interpretation of that community, filtered and understood through her *habitus*. Blakemore used a medium – that of popular fiction – that crossed class divides and spoke to ordinary people. While it is therefore difficult to describe her as an organic intellectual, since she did not seem to be self-consciously committed to fostering the Afrikaner nation, it can be argued that she fulfilled the role of the organic intellectual for the petty bourgeoisie, based on the reasons provided in the preceding section.

It is therefore argued that – in some respects – Blakemore was more successful in fashioning an Afrikaner community through her children's literature than members of the Afrikaner establishment were in their endeavours to foster Afrikaner nationalism. Indeed, Blakemore succeeded in areas where the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie had failed. From her letters it is evident that a great deal of creativity and spontaneity went into writing her books. Yet, that her books were not part of the 'authorised'; canon of Afrikaner nationalist texts, but were read by ordinary readers who had to purchase the texts or obtain them from local libraries.

In summary, the author's *habitus* is instrumental in the production of fictional texts. In turn, as Taylor illuminates, these texts have the ability to create shared social imaginaries, which is the way in which ordinary people interpret their social surroundings. As such, the notion of the social imaginary is immensely powerful. This begs questions about the ways in which ordinary readers of the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series 'read' these texts and the way in which these texts embroidered the social imaginary of white Afrikaans speakers. Further research is required about the contents of these series. In particular, interesting questions remain about the processes through which subjectivity is developed and the role of texts and reading in this process. The extent to which the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* series contributed to the creation of a self-referential Afrikaner world

needs to be explored. In this regard, following from Taylor, four question needs to be posed about the *Keurboslaan* and *Maasdorp* texts: (1) What sense of moral order prevail?; (2) What historical sense is portrayed?; (3) How do these texts explain or represent the way in which members of society relate to each other?; and (4) How do these texts legitimise the project of Afrikaner nationalism?

In addition, Blakemore's reflections on her writing indicates that the relationship between popular fiction writing and the market economy is more complex and less singular than it is often rendered in scholarship on the subject. The research demonstrate that Blakemore took her craft as a writer serious, and whilst she was acutely aware of market desires and the fact that her writing was not regarded as 'literary', she brought to her craft a certain amount of dignity and integrity. In some ways, this finding challenges the binary opposition between popular fiction and high literature and invites further research.

Finally, it was argued that popular children's literature may have been one of the avenues through which the ideas and ideology of Afrikaner nationalism were disseminated to a wider audience across class fractures to turn it into a kind of mass consciousness. However, by illuminating the complex and sometimes fraught relationship between Stella Blakemore and the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, it was shown that this kind of dissemination was not only the prerogative of self-conscious community creators.

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