

PART I:

Preface

Introduction and research design

In April 2001, reports surfaced in South African newspapers that the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) had made public a list of authors and titles that it deemed unsuitable as prescribed works for schools in the province. Among the texts listed were Nadine Gordimer's acclaimed *July's People*, as well as works by Alan Paton, Njabule Ndebele, William Shakespeare, Peter Wilhelm and Olive Schreiner (Nieuwoudt 2001).

Newspapers reported that the GDE found Gordimer's novel to be unacceptable on the grounds that it was 'deeply racist, superior and patronising' (Isaacson 2001) and projected a vision of a future South Africa that never materialised (SAPA 2001). The media reports caused a huge outcry from the public, literary figures and politicians, locally as well as abroad (Rademeyer 2001). Since the first reports were very unclear about the specifics of the case, the popular impression was that the GDE debacle was part of a decision of the ANC government to ban particular texts from set reading lists for schools (Matshikiza 2001). It soon became evident, though, that some facts were overlooked in the way in which events were reported in the media. It emerged that the recommendation to exclude certain books from the set work list was made by a selection committee in the Gauteng Department of Education, comprising of experienced (and mostly white) language and literature teachers, and had not yet been ratified by the Department.

The national government was quick to point out that the report's status was unconfirmed and that the recommendations contained in the report had not been endorsed by the Minister of Education. Gauteng MEC responsible for education, Ignatius Jacobs, distanced himself from the events, stating that 'learners should be subjected to a broad variety of literary styles and traditions and [that it was] important to ensure that learners develop the ability to critically understand and evaluate what they are reading' (SAPA 2001).

The debate carried on further on radio and television talk shows and in contributions to newspaper letter pages. International newspapers, including *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, too carried stories about the incident on their cover pages or in editorials (Coetzee 2001). Some commentators raised ghosts from the pasts by

equating the recommendations of the GDE report with the kind of censorship prevalent under National Party rule (see Van Vuuren 2001) and others hinted to continuities between the present dispensation and apartheid, pointing out that three of Gordimer's books were banned by the previous government.

The kind of debate that ensued and the terms in which it was articulated are fairly familiar in the South African context, since it is symptomatic of so many debates currently taking place. While it is true that reports on the GDE set works debacle were somewhat sensationalist, it could also be argued that is characteristic of a style of journalism that is becoming the norm in South African media reporting. Debates about media ownership and questions about whose interests the media actually represent are ongoing and legitimate. Considering the report and recommendations of the GDE committee, it should be noted that this incident is inscribed in a larger social framework. South Africa's history of discrimination, oppressions and violence justified on the grounds of race and the need to remedy this legacy has marked current society with a preoccupation with issues of race and a fear of and disdain for anything that smacks of racism. It is therefore quite conceivable, though highly disturbing, that a committee comprising of experienced (and predominantly white) teachers could reach the aforementioned conclusions about the works of some respected authors. While therefore offering us an interesting snapshot of contesting and unintended consequences of public debates in the current historical moment, this is not the focus of this study, but a lens through which to examine some of the questions raised in this thesis.

Underlying arguments in the set work debate, was a central belief in what is articulated here as the power yielded by the text. In particular, then, two seemingly opposing viewpoints underpinned this debate. The first of these, exemplified by the committee's findings, is the belief that literature is somehow dangerous or corruptive; that texts displaying particular characteristics can be detrimental to a particular project (such as non-racialism or, for that matter, nationalism). The second viewpoint, voiced by most of the opponents of the GDE report, is that there exists something like good literature and that good literary texts have some formative properties that can instil in its readers particular skills or qualities (such as the ability to think critically) and values (such as human rights). Thus, the question raised in this debate is not whether or not particular texts can produce certain 'effects' on the reader, but, rather, a disagreement about what – in the context of post-apartheid South Africa – the desired effects of texts ought to be and which texts will best achieve these effects.

The furore that ensued when a committee of the GDE attempted to purge from a set list for schools 'undesirable' titles invoked South Africa's recent past. The repressive Apartheid state too subscribed to the belief in the power of the text and used extensive mechanisms to control and limit the circulation of books. Yet, the incident as well as questions arising from it are not peculiar to South Africa and have been a central feature of modern societies both past and present. Debates on the relationship between literature and society form the basis of an extensive scholarship, which takes many different forms depending on the discipline from which it is studied and includes questions on the qualities of the 'good' book; the way in which reading can develop socialisation skills; the extent to which literature mirrors society or is a mechanism of social control; the values texts display and the ways in which texts support or undermine racism, sexism and class bias; and so forth. This study speaks to this body of scholarship and attempts to explore relations between popular fiction and the peculiar form of nationalism that led to the taking of power by the National Party in 1948 and the formation of the apartheid state. The study focuses on the *Keurboslaan* series, a series of twenty titles written by Stella Blakemore under the nom de plume Theunis Krogh.

There are important differences between the present study and the debates sparked by the GDE recommendations with regard to set works. First, this is a study on popular fiction and the formula book and not of 'high' literature by acclaimed authors. Second, this study is located in a different historical period, namely the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s and the seizure of political power by the National Party government in 1948. However, the GDE debate raises two sets of questions that underpin the research reported on here.

The first of these questions pertains to a broader inquiry into the relationship between literature and society, or, phrased differently, the practice of reading and the shaping of individual subjectivities. The widely held belief in the power of the text to mould is examined and the way in which this belief can be theorised and understood in terms of a theory of reading, writing, meaning-making and identity formation is explored. It can therefore be described as a study into the 'potentialities of texts as social actors', a phrase borrowed from Isabel Hofmeyr, and the way in which the practice of reading can contribute to the creation of particular kinds of subjectivity.

There is a second set of questions raised by the GDE incident that are too pertinent to this study. These are questions about nationalism and the way in which nations are made or come into being. Evidently, for some actors in the set book debacle the important questions were which books South African children ought to read in order to turn them into good South Africans, what values define the South African nation, and, finally, which authors would best convey these values in their texts? For others, the debate was more about fears of a perceived *nationalist* cleansing of the curriculum of white authors. Both of these approaches direct us back to the question of the 'nation' and nationalism. In particular, the present study looks at the birth and development of Afrikaner nationalism and the various mechanisms through which the 'idea' of Afrikaner nationalism found popular support. Nationalism is described as 'one of the most powerful forces in the modern world' by a key text (Hutchinson & Smith 1994:3), but is a phenomenon that defies an easy definition, since the phenomenon seems to be manifested in what can be described as nationalisms rather than a single form:

The field of nationalist phenomena, which includes the growth of nations and the national state, as well as ethnic identity and community, is vast and ramified. It spills over in any number of cognate subjects: race and racism, fascism, language development, political religion, communalism, ethnic conflict, international law, protectionism, minorities, gender, immigration, genocide. The forms that nationalism takes have been kaleidoscopic: religious, conservative, liberal, fascist, communist, cultural, political, protectionist, integrationist, separatist, irredentist, diaspora, pan, etc. (Hutchinson & Smith 1994: 3).

In relation to Afrikaner nationalism, this study argues that various regimes of discourse were circulated that articulated or promoted a specific representation of the Afrikaner and that imagined the Afrikaner 'nation' in a particular way. Such regimes of discourse included the discourse of science, the discourse of the Volksmoeder (i.e. a discourse of gender), and a discourse of religion. This study asks questions about the strategies through which the nation was imagined in the discourse of fiction. Its focus is therefore not on the formation of the apartheid state, but rather on the construction of a particular subjectivity, i.e. an Afrikaner subjectivity. This study is therefore situated in the broader inquiry into the 'questions of the cultural and structural matrix in which the consciousness of ordinary South Africans are forged' (Bozzoli 1987:1) and is closely linked to the issue of Afrikaner nationalism. In particular, it explores the shaping of the consciousness of an upwardly mobile strata of white Afrikaans-speakers and the broadening and expansion of the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie during the 1940s. It

does so by looking at the connections between 'class formation and community formation' (Bozzoli 1987:8). Bozzoli argues that

[u]nderstanding community-formation in the city is thus a matter of understanding the middle class as much as the 'lower' classes; of perceiving the operation of ideology as much as of economics. What the intelligentsia has to offer depends on what is available to them – whether, for example, they are themselves immigrants, with a range of imported ideas, or whether they too have experienced local conditions, have been long urbanised, have a 'feel' for the locality' (Bozzoli 1987:33)

The study, then, intends to speak to questions about the relationship between literature and society and fiction and nationalism. Beyond that, however, three other features focus and situate the research more specifically. First, the research focus explicitly on reading popular fiction as a practice of the everyday life within the realm of leisure activities associated with the pleasure or joy of reading. Second, the study follows an interdisciplinary approach. Third, it explores the characteristics of popular fiction for children.

Many theorists have shown that the formation of Afrikaner identity was contested and fragmented (see O'Meara 1983, Posel 1991, and Alexander 2000). The processes through which the formation of an Afrikaner identity was fashioned have been well documented (see, for example, Moodie 1975, O'Meara 1983, Kruger 1991, and Hofmeyr 1987). A number of these studies highlight the role played by particular symbolic events, representations and institutions, for example religion and the institution of the church, or the centenary of the Great Trek celebration with the 1938 symbolic ox wagon trek (Moodie 1975, McClintock 1993). Diverting from this tradition, the focus of this study is on more micro-level events, the everyday and routine. Thus, the present study follows in the tradition of studies on Afrikaner nationalism with a particular focus on everyday life, such as the work of Kruger (1991) and Brink (1986, 1987).

The research topic raises particular methodological and theoretical questions, which include: How does fiction (or text in general) as a type of discourse work? What is the link between reading a text and the formation of a particular kind of subjectivity? How does one theorise social agency and the extent to which subjects are able to and do resist power relations? How is the notion of social agency linked to understandings of reading and writing? How does one measure the social impact of a text? What is the relationship between popular fiction and Afrikaner nationalism? To answer these

questions the study undertaken here speaks to and cuts across vast bodies of literature, notably that of sociology of literature, historiography, cultural studies, library and information sciences, psychology and political studies. As such, it engages debates on the tenability of distinctions between 'high' literature and popular fiction and between literature and children's literature as well as issues related to identity formation and the construction of subjectivities; educational approaches to literature; the notion of the 'good' book; the making of Afrikaner identity; accounts of the development of Afrikaner nationalism and, ultimately, literatures on the origin and nature of the apartheid state and nationalism in general, to name but a few. Hence, the scope of the study necessitates an interdisciplinary approach.

The present study explores the field of popular fiction for children, specifically the formula book aimed at the juvenile reader. It is argued that popular fiction for children share most of the characteristics of popular fiction for adults, such as the detective novel and romance. Nonetheless, children's literature as a field of study has developed a scholarship in its own right, and the study draws on these resources in addition to classical works on popular fiction.

Theoretically and methodologically this study is indebted to scholars from different intellectual traditions. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* frame this study, which investigates the way in which discourses of the nation and modernity are inscribed and circulated in the *Keurboslaan* series of Stella Blakemore. In addition, the study draws on aspects of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci and Michel de Certeau. Central to this study is the importance of following a methodological and theoretical approach that goes beyond an internal reading of the text. Thus, the focus is on a theoretical framework that bridges the gap between Romantic studies of the author and his or her world, the text-centred (discourse) analysis approach so ubiquitous in cultural studies, and the more sociological inquiries into the production, distribution and consumption of texts, which is prominent in communication studies and sociology. It is here that Pierre Bourdieu's work is useful, as it departs from the idea that discourse analysis in itself can cast light on how texts work – that is on the way in which texts produce meaning and social effects - and instead places emphasis on studying the conditions of production and utilisation of texts in addition to the text itself. Linked to this, Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* provides us with a way in which to pose questions about the author Stella Blakemore and her world. This study is also indebted to a structuralist legacy. The work of Louis Althusser is of relevance in two ways. First, his method of symptomatic reading is the approach

used here to analyse the texts. Second, whilst acknowledging theoretical shortcomings, this study argues for a more sympathetic reading of Althusser's notion of the interpellation of the subject through discourse, which – when read together with the work of Michel de Certeau – does provide us with a fairly nuanced description of the way in which discourse (in this case, texts) work through a process of hailing *and* recognition. Bourdieu (through the notion of *habitus*) and De Certeau (through the tactics of 'making do') reclaim space for agency, but in both cases, the type of agency that they articulate is (deliberately) limited. Bourdieu's *habitus* provides for the author a field of possibilities, whilst De Certeau gives us a novel way to think about the reader, and reminds us that people are not fools. Central themes addressed by these scholars are the issue of power (Foucault, Althusser, De Certeau, Bourdieu), culture (Bourdieu and Anderson), social agency (Bourdieu, De Certeau, Gramsci), and class analysis (Bourdieu, Anderson and Althusser).

The primary research question addressed in this study is: what is the relationship between popular fiction and Afrikaner nationalism with specific reference to the *Keurboslaan* series. Secondary research questions are: How is the Afrikaner nation imagined in and through the *Keurboslaan* series? How can an analysis of the *Keurboslaan* series in relation to Afrikaner nationalism enrich present understandings of Afrikaner nationalism and existing scholarship on popular fiction in Afrikaans?

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Situate an analysis of the relationship between the *Keurboslaan* series and Afrikaner nationalism within debates on Afrikaner nationalism and the Apartheid state and to examine the way in which debates on Afrikaner nationalism and the apartheid state have evolved in disciplines other than the literary to highlight the gaps and to show ways in which current debates can be augmented by findings from literary studies.
- Explore the relationship between nationalism in fiction through Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an imagined community through an analysis of the strategies through which the texts in the *Keurboslaan* series imagine the nation and by comparing those strategies with ones employed in other regimes of discourse.

- Follow in a particular tradition of studying the cultural domain in terms of the everyday and the ordinary, and to highlight the way in which this kind of approach can provide a different take on existing theory.
- Theorise the relationship between literature and society through making use of specific notions of social agency, power, and ideology.
- Examine popular children's fiction as an area of academic study.
- Link analyses of the production and dissemination of texts to textual analysis as part of a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature.

The study comprises of five parts. The structure of each of these parts is briefly outlined below.

Part I: Preface

Part I comprises of the Introduction and Chapter One. The Introduction outlines the aims and objectives of the study, whilst *Chapter One* introduces the *Keurboslaan* series and its fictional setting, provides a brief summary of some of the story lines in selected titles and presents the main characters.

Part II: Theoretical Reflections

Part II grounds the study theoretically and includes three components, on Afrikaner nationalism, popular fiction and children's literature respectively. *Chapter Two* provides an overview of debates on the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism and the apartheid state and includes a section on the work of Benedict Anderson, which traces the relationship between nationalism and texts. *Chapter Three* focuses on popular fiction and the methodological problems encountered in this field. *Chapter Four* offers a brief overview of the academic field of study of children's literature and its history. In addition, an overview is provided of the formula series, the school story and the way in which children's literature has been studied in South Africa.

Part III: The making of the Keurboslaan series

Part III is dedicated to issues around the production of the *Keurboslaan* series, and includes an overview of the Afrikaans publishing industry and reading public, a discussion on the reception of the *Keurboslaan* series by critics, and an overview of the life and thoughts of the series' author Stella Blakemore. *Chapter Five* traces the social history of the period in which the *Keurboslaan* series is published. Among the developments discussed are those in the field of Afrikaans literary production, the development of the Afrikaans publishing industry, and the political climate following the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902 as well as the social phenomenon that became known as the 'poor white' problem. *Chapter Six* centres on the way in which the *Keurboslaan* series was produced, disseminated and received by critics and the public. *Chapter Seven* examines the biography of Stella Blakemore, the author of *Keurboslaan* who wrote under the *nom de plume* Theunis Krogh, and her motivations for writing the series.

Part IV: Discourse in Keurboslaan

Chapter Eight explores the different ways in which the *Keurboslaan* series played a role in imagining the nation and focuses on the way in which the self is presented as a danger to the self in the discourse of *Keurboslaan*. *Chapter Nine* comprises of a comparison between the *Keurboslaan* series (an example of a discourse of fiction) and selected volumes from the *Tweede Trek* series (an example of a discourse of science) in order to show how these discourses employed different strategies for articulating a largely similar discourse. Particular attention is paid to the discourse of sex, sexuality and the body.

Part V: Synopsis

The concluding section of the study summarises the main findings, allude to the limitations of the study, and indicate fruitful avenues for further research.

The decision to focus on the *Keurboslaan* series was motivated by a number of factors, including its popularity. Written by Stella Blakemore, who also authored the *Maasdorp* series for girls, these were the first formula books for children in Afrikaans and found wide popular acclaim. Though both series remained popular throughout the rest of the century, by the 1950s they had been overtaken in popularity by Topsy Smith's *Trompie*

and *Saartjie* series. The *Maasdorp* and *Keurboslaan* series were published in a very interesting period in terms of South African history and were among some of the first children's books to be written in Afrikaans. Whereas it is true that *Maasdorp* was more popular than *Keurboslaan*, at least in terms of sales figures, the decision to focus on the series for boys was based on the fact that both boys and girls read the latter while only girls read the former. The high sales figures for the *Maasdorp*-series can, in part, be ascribed to the fact that one of the titles in the series, *Allegra op Maasdorp*, was prescribed for schools for a number of years. Finally, the persona of the author, Stella Blakemore, and her complex relationship with South Africa proved to be intriguing and worthy of a dedicated study in itself.

Two more caveats are required to ensure conceptual clarity before the argument is presented in the remainder of the chapters. The first is that the term nation as employed in this study, unless otherwise stated, generally refers to the notion of a political community, rather than to the specific form of nation linked to the process of industrialisation and the emergence of the nation-state. The second is that the terms 'youth literature', 'juvenile fiction' and any others terms used to refer to the target readership of the *Keurboslaan* series are understood to be part of and subsumed within the broader rubric 'children's literature', which is more frequently used in this study.

Chapter One:

Stepping into *Keurboslaan's* world

Introduction

This chapter offers an introductory overview of the book series that is the topic of this study. In particular, the chapter reviews the publication history of the series, introduces the setting and founding history of the Keurboslaan College for Boys as portrayed in the narrative, and present central characters in the series. In addition, summaries of the narrative plots of a selection of titles in the series are included to demonstrate the narrative structure and general thematic of the series in order to provide readers of this study access to the world of *Keurboslaan*.

Characteristic of the *Keurboslaan* series is the way in which the different volumes in the series together form a self-enclosed and self-referential world held together through the passing of time, linkages and connections between family relations across generations, and a set of chore characters.

Setting and founding history of the Keurboslaan College for Boys

This study concerns itself with the *Keurboslaan* series, a collection of children's books published between 1941 and 1971 in Afrikaans by J.L. van Schaik publishers in Pretoria. The *Keurboslaan* series is one of very few examples of the boarding school story genre in popular fiction for children written in Afrikaans. The author of the series was Stella Blakemore, who published the novels under the *nom de plume* Theunis Krogh. *Keurboslaan* books proved to be so popular that the series was reprinted several times over a number of decades and as recently as 1996 and 1997 six of the titles in the series were published in omnibus form in two volumes. Blakemore was also the author of a series of children's books about a boarding school for girls called the *Maasdorp* series. The *Maasdorp* series was perhaps even more popular than the *Keurboslaan* books and was published under her own name.

Keurboslaan College for Boys, described in the novels as the first and only Afrikaans private school for boys, is a fictitious institution situated on the outskirts of an equally fictitious small town called Keurboslaan. The town is said to lie on the highveld in the

mountainous area that used to be called the Eastern Transvaal in close proximity to both the South Africa-Swaziland border and the Komati valley. According to the novels, the little town is renowned for its beauty, peacefulness and fresh, humid air (Krogh 1945:25). The school's students are mainly drawn from Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand. As *Keurboslaan* tradition dictates, all pupils meet in Johannesburg at the start of each term from where they travel by train to the town of Breyten and from there another few hours by bus before they reach the school.

The *Keurboslaan* series has as its central character the enigmatic doctor Roelof Serfontein, the school principal, who is not only extremely attractive and from one of the most distinguished Afrikaans families in Johannesburg, but also widely respected for his remarkable achievements. These include matriculating at the age of thirteen, obtaining two PhDs simultaneously from Cambridge University in the United Kingdom, representing his country on national level in sport, and being a world-acclaimed and many times translated novelist who publishes concurrently in Afrikaans and English.

The school's founding history plays an important role in the narrative and is often referred to in the texts. The College was originally established by the eccentric Mister Schoonbee, an intellectual and a dreamer who understood very little about the demands of school management but felt that he had to create an opportunity for Afrikaans speaking boys to attend a good school in which teaching takes place through the medium of Afrikaans. Under Mister Schoonbee's management, the school was poorly resourced, struggled to survive and produced exceptionally poor results. Yet, despite these failings, parents were reluctant to move their children out of the school, because of their commitment to the cause of a private school for Afrikaners and a concern that the school should not be forced to close:

Die seuns wat by hom op skool is, is almal die kinders van professionele mans of ryk boere wat werklik verlang om te sien dat hierdie een Afrikaanse privaat-skool nie ten gronde sal gaan nie, en dus maar die hoë skoolgeld betaal en hul seuns jaar-in en jaar-uit daar hou, ofskoon die jaarlikse uitslag by die Junior-sertifikaat en Matriek alles behalwe bevredigend is. Dit het inderdaad byna nooit gebeur dat iemand in Matriek slaag nie (Krogh 1945:26).

[The boys who are with him at school are all children of professional men or rich farmers sincerely wishing to see that this one Afrikaans private school does not go down, and who are prepared to pay the high school fees and

keep their sons in the school, year in and year out, even if their junior certificates and matric leave much to be desired. In fact, hardly anyone has ever passed matric.]

In *Jong Dr. Serfontein*, Oscar Wienand, a senior student at the school, explains that the parents of Keurboslaan pupils felt that they had to support the school despite the many problems simply because it was the only Afrikaans private school in the country (Krogh 1945:11). In the revised edition of this title, the reluctance of parents to move their children to better schools is explicitly tied to the fact that the school was established as a project to provide quality schooling in Afrikaans to children of 'volksleiers'.⁵ Moving one's children to another school was seen to be an acknowledgement that the project had failed, which would expose Afrikaners to mockery from English speaking South Africans. Wienand articulates this concern as follows:

Dit [die skool] bestaan al 'n tiental jaar en dit gaan net agteruit. Daar was altyd 'n soort privaatskool hier vir plaaslike mense se paar kinders, maar met die pad na Mosambiek het meer mense gekom, en toe die provinsiale skool hier op die dorp ontstaan het, het meneer Schoonbee opgedaag en dié plek gekoop om dit 'n kosskool vir 'seuns van die volksleiers' te maak. Maar hy's 'n ou dromer, ou Skootjie, en my pa sê hy't dit aangepak sonder die geringste benul van wat dit kos om so iets aan die gang te hou... Ons ouers meen hulle moet volhou omdat die doel so goed was en hulle wil nie hê die Engelse moet ons spot nie (Krogh 1980:11).

[The school has been in existence for a few decades but it is deteriorating. There has always been a sort of private school here for the locals' kids, but with the road to Mozambique more people came, and when the provincial school was established in town, Mr. Schoonbee came and bought this place to turn it into a hostel catering for the sons of the leaders of the nation. But he's an old dreamer, old Skootjie, and my dad says he tackled it without having the faintest idea how to sustain something like this... Our parents feel they should persevere because of the good for which it was intended and because they don't want the English to make a mockery of us.]

Given that that the school's historical trajectory frames many of the narratives, the founding history of the school is summarised in brief below.

⁵ 'Volksleiers' can be translated as 'leaders of the people', in this case it is meant to refer to 'leaders of the Afrikaner people'

In *Jong Dr. Serfontein*, chronologically the first novel in the series though it was only the sixth book to be published, the principal of Keurboslaan College for Boys, which has sixty boys enrolled, is Mr Schoonbee. The state of affairs seems to be dismal, with the boys being described as unkempt and dirty and examination results as disastrous. Reasons given for the school's poor academic record are poor discipline and incompetent teachers, both consequences of a lack of funds. Since Keurboslaan is a private school, it cannot afford to pay teachers more than half of what they are generally paid in government schools. Moreover, the school does not have a pension fund. As a result, the school does not attract the best of the teaching corps and the staff comprises of teachers that are either under-qualified or unqualified or have health problems of some sort or are unable to secure employment in a government school. Mister Schoonbee, the principal, is not a practical man, and therefore not in a position to resolve any of the school's problems. When readers are first introduced to him, he is a seventy-five year old man dedicated to completing his life work, which is a book based on his own research about the myths, legends and fairytales of the nations of the world and the remarkable similarities between stories told in different countries and by different peoples. Given that Mr Schoonbee is no longer able to implement the necessary changes at the school - and perhaps never has been able to do so - and with facilities rapidly falling into disrepair, it is evident from the first few pages of *Jong Dr Serfontein* that some kind of intervention is urgently needed. The person who unexpectedly arrives to step and carry the load is a young man named Roelof Serfontein.

In *Jong Dr Serfontein*, readers are introduced to Roelof Serfontein who has just returned from Europe. In all the books in the series space is devoted to a description of his appearance. He is always portrayed as tall and very attractive with narrow hips, broad shoulders, dark eyes and dark hair:

Hy is nog langer as Martin – ses voet twee duim. Hy het die breë skouers en smal heupe van 'n atleet, en dis verstaanbaar, want hy wy daaglik minstens drie uur aan swaar liggaamsoefeninge en enige soort sport waarvoor daar geleentheid is. Volgens sy aanbiddende susters het hy, om Leonie se eenvoudige uitdrukking te gebruik, 'die pragtigste gesig in die wêreld!' Mens moet hom liefhê om so 'n woord as 'pragtig' in verband met daardie fyn, ernstige gesig, met die besliste mond en swart oë wat sy medemens half-reguit en -vorsend, en half-afgetrokke aankyk, te kan gebruik. Dis die gesig van iemand wat nooit enige menslike swakheid sal verrai nie. As daar so 'n swak is, sal hy dit verborge hou – minder deur

persoonlike hoogmoed as deur 'n eerlike oortuiging dat niemand hul oor sy privaatsake hoef te interesseer nie (Krogh 1945:7-8).

[He is even taller than Martin - six foot two. He has the broad shoulders and narrow hips of an athlete, which is not surprising given the fact that he spends at least three hours each day working out and doing any kind of sport that comes his way. According to his doting sisters, he has, to use Leonie's simple expression, 'the most beautiful face in the world!' One has to love him in order to use a word such as 'beautiful' to describe his delicate, serious features, with the firm mouth and the black eyes that look at you half directly and piercingly, half detachedly. It's the face of someone who will never give away any sign of human weakness. If there were such a weakness, he would conceal it - not so much through personal pride, but through an honest conviction that no one has to take an interest in his private affairs.]

Yet, despite this attractive exterior, there is something about the expression on his face that hints to the fact that he is an intensely private person with a quick temper. His expression is described repeatedly as strict with lips pressed closely on each other, and danger lurking in his eyes:

Sy swart oë is lui en versluier, maar weerlig skuil skuil agter die luiheid en nie veel is nodig om daardie weerlig te laat blits nie (Krogh 1958:6).

[His black eyes are sluggish and veiled, but lightning lurks behind the sluggishness and it doesn't take much to make that lightning flash.]

His achievements are remarkable, to say the least. The eldest son of a university professor, he grew up in Johannesburg where he matriculated at the incredible age of thirteen and went on to study at the University of the Witwatersrand before going to the United Kingdom to complete two PhDs, simultaneously, in law and philology from Cambridge University. In his youth he played for both the rugby and cricket national teams. Moreover, he is a world acclaimed and many times translated novelist and writes educational texts in his spare time (Krogh 1961:5). He speaks more than twelve languages, excluding dialects (Krogh 1947b:27), among them English, Afrikaans, Russian, Portuguese, Swazi and German, and worked as a journalist in Europe before circumstances led him to take up the position as headmaster at the Keurboslaan College for Boys. His American godfather, P.F. Maxim, a friend of Professor Serfontein, Roelof's father, met the young Roelof only once when he was eighteen years old and was so impressed by his friend's talented

son that he bequeathed him the Maxim fortunes. After Maxim's death, Roelof Serfontein became a multimillionaire philanthropist. Through wise investment strategies he has multiplied the Maxim fortune a number of times and uses it exclusively for worthy causes. He is a lover of classical music and opera, and is very knowledgeable in this field. At Keurboslaan, he teaches Latin, Greek, Afrikaans and English to the senior classes in addition to his duties as principal (Krogh 1947:81, Krogh 1949:26).

Despite these achievements, though, Roelof Serfontein is portrayed as a troubled individual. His relationship with his father had always been strained for his father tended to mistake his son's severe shyness for pride. Though he had always been a quiet and enormously disciplined individual, a serious love affair with a world-renowned Russian opera singer, Wanda Svoboda, who left him to get married to his best friend, the pianist Arthur Spaulding left some scars and led him to withdraw into himself even more. Serfontein, a teetotaler, is portrayed as a highly-strung individual who finds it difficult to eat almost anything and struggles to sleep at night. He is a chain smoker who mainly survives on a diet of strong coffee and strenuous exercise and is troubled by severe headaches from time to time. When he is stressed or overworked he tends to be enormously ill tempered.

One of eight children, Roelof Serfontein comes from a prominent and influential, though not entirely affluent, Johannesburg family. His seven siblings are all talented, although none of them can measure up to the incredible Roelof. His brother Adolf is a teacher and has completed a number of higher degrees, while his younger brothers, Edward and Martin, are both medical specialists. Martin, a brain surgeon, is the head of a clinic and hospital in the city and Edward, an orthopaedic surgeon, is his partner. Roelof's twin brothers, Frans and Emil, have completed their MSc degrees in botany and are lecturers at the university. Evelyn, his elder sister and the eldest of the Serfontein children, worked as a paediatrician before she got married and his youngest sister, Leonie, studied art in Europe and then took up a position as art teacher at a prestigious school for girls in Cape Town.

The question then is how and why a talented man such as Roelof Serfontein would be persuaded to take up the position of principal at a struggling Afrikaans private school for boys? The explanation is offered in the chronologically first book in the series, *Jong Dr. Serfontein*. Arriving back from Europe after completing his studies and selflessly working as a journalist for a few years to financially support his friend

Arthur Spaulding and his wife (Wanda Svoboda, Roelof's former fiancé) and the two Spaulding children, Roelof Serfontein receives the shocking news that Wanda had died. The news throws him off balance completely, so that he forgets to attend a meeting at the University that his father had set up for him to explore opportunities of securing a position at the University. His father sees his son's failure to honour the appointment as yet another demonstration of his arrogance and the two Serfonteins have a terrible row. In a state of shock, Roelof Serfontein flees from his parental home to the mountains of Keurboslaan, a place where he had once as a young boy spent a couple of days camping with his father and brothers. The trip made an important impression on him. That is partly because he felt very attracted to the kind of natural beauty and climate of the area, but also because this trip marked one of the very few occasions where he and his father managed to get on somewhat better. Thus, disorientated, confused and close to a nervous breakdown, he makes his way to this place of his youth. It is on one of Keurboslaan's mountain slopes that same evening during a rainstorm that Mister Schoonbee and Roelof Serfontein first meet. Mister Schoonbee had just returned from a visit to the solitary hut on top of the mountain where an old Swazi man lives. He had hoped that this man would tell him a number of original Swazi fairytales for his book, but this did not happen. On his way down, his torchlight falls upon the silhouette of a drenched stranger. The first encounter between the two men cements both an intellectual and emotional bond that develops into a unique friendship:

[Mr Schoonbee] 'Het jy ooit die verhaal van Marda, die dogter van die bergkoning, en Lodi, die gees, gehoor? Hierdie nag en die reën, en alles saam en jy daar onder die boom, kon 'n voorstelling daarvan wees!'

[Roelof Serfontein] 'Dis die Sweedse verhaal', antwoord 'n diep stem asof die eienaar ook niks vreemds in die hele affêre vind nie. 'Daar is 'n ander een, byna dieselfde, in Bulgaars.'

[Mr Schoonbee] 'Ja, en soiets kom ook in Indië voor. Mërkwaardig hoe al die volke wat eers nooit met mekaar in aanraking gekom het nie, hul emosionele ondervindings in byna dieselfde woorde uit. Dis waarop ek in my boek probeer wys. Die moeilikheid is, hoe verder 'n mens op die saak ingaan, hoe verder *wil* jy ingaan, sodat die werk nooit 'n end kry nie' (Krogh 1945:27).

['Have you ever heard the story of Marda, the daughter of the mountain king, and Lodi, the spirit? Tonight and the rain, and everything and you there underneath the tree could have been a presentation thereof!'

'It's the Swedish tale', a deep voice says, as if its owner doesn't find anything peculiar about the whole scenario either. 'There's another, almost similar, Bulgarian tale.'

'Yes, and there's something like it in India. Remarkable how nations that have never had any contact with each other express their emotional experiences in almost the same words. That is what I try to illustrate in my book. The trouble is, the further you delve, the more you want to, which means there is no end to the work.']

Mister Schoonbee takes Serfontein down to the school where he nurses him back to health after Serfontein suffers a complete nervous breakdown. In these hours, a deep friendship develops between the two men. When Roelof had sufficiently recovered to be able to talk about his future, Mister Schoonbee invites him to come to Keurboslaan as a schoolteacher for a couple of months until he has regained his strength and decides what to do about his future. Roelof Serfontein accepts the offer to the total dismay of his family, in particular his father. At this point he had not yet inherited the Maxim millions nor published his first novel (it had been completed but had not yet been sent it to the publishers). Serfontein comes to Keurboslaan, where Mister Schoonbee places him in charge of the school while he himself withdraws from all school affairs. The following couple of months see significant but positive changes for the school that lead to its complete transformation. Dr Serfontein instils a strict regime of discipline, starts fixing up and rebuilding some of the facilities, sacks a number of incompetent teachers and make improvements to the curricula. Yet, his work is hampered by a continuous shortage of funds.

A few months later his godfather dies and he unexpectedly inherits the Maxim fortune, turning him into an instant millionaire. He is also informed that his first novel has been accepted for publication. Since Mister Schoonbee was a very old man, Roelof decides that he want to spend part of the money on taking Mister Schoonbee on an extensive trip to Europe in search of fairytales, which had been Mister Schoonbee's lifelong dream. Given that money problems were something of the past, Dr Serfontein felt that he had put the basic structures in place at the school so that he could now invest money into upgrading the facilities and appointing competent staff and then hand over the school to someone else to manage. Serfontein thus started making arrangements to appoint a new headmaster for the school. However, just before finalising this process, Mister Schoonbee suffers a massive stroke. Though he

regains full consciousness, it becomes clear that the state of his health is too delicate for him to travel and the planned trip to Europe is cancelled. It is at this point that the young Doctor Serfontein has to make an important decision. Mister Schoonbee warns him that should he decide to stay on at Keurboslaan until the time of Mister Schoonbee's death, he would never be able to leave the school, as that is the kind of hold the school and the Keurboslaan environment tend to have on one. Roelof Serfontein's decision to stay on permanently as headmaster of the College forms the foundation of the twenty novels in the series. Mr Schoonbee's book, *Feëverhale van alle Nasies*⁶ is published posthumously (Krogh 1947b:158).

Character development and human relations as central problematics in the *Keurboslaan* series

Even though the *Keurboslaan* stories are formulaic and therefore predictable, as a writer of popular fiction Blakemore's strongest asset is her ability to create endearing, true-to-life, unique and utterly believable characters. Much of the narrative is told through dialogue and Blakemore generally succeeds very well in providing each of her characters with a distinct appearance, a unique way of expressing themselves, adequate depth, and a few quirks and idiosyncrasies. Whereas the story line in each of the books is important and the plots - though often implausible and exaggerated - are fairly tight and exhilarating, these are not the most important elements in each of the books. In this respect, Blakemore certainly deviates from the formula of modern day mass-produced popular fiction series for children. All the *Keurboslaan* books have at the core a concern with human emotions and relationships and the ways in which emotional bonds between people are forged and challenged. Given that the central character in this series is Dr Roelof Serfontein, the stories therefore revolve around his relationship with others. These relationships form the backbone of all of the narratives and can be categorised into seven groups.

First of these is the unique friendship that developed between the inscrutable Dr Serfontein and Mr Schoonbee, founder of Keurboslaan College for Boys, before his death. Mr Schoonbee came close to playing the role of a father in Roelof Serfontein's life, and, perhaps with the exception of his relationship with his wife, Helen, this is the only one of his relationships where the power balance does not hinge to Roelof's side. Unlike the relationship between Roelof Serfontein and his wife, which is marked

⁶ Fables of all Nations

by a fairly equal distribution of power, in the case of the relationship between Mr Schoonbee and Roelof Serfontein, Roelof is always the one who has to seek Mr Schoonbee's company and time.

The second set of relationships that runs like a golden thread through the *Keurboslaan* stories is the friendship between Dr. Serfontein and two of his pupils. Oscar Wienand – who later becomes Dr Serfontein's financial manager based in the United States and marries his youngest sister, Leonie – was already a senior pupil at Keurboslaan College for Boys when Roelof Serfontein first arrived and took over the school. As a consequence, Wienand was not susceptible to the type of disciplined behaviour that Roelof tried to instil in the school. Nonetheless, he succeeded in striking up a very unusual friendship with Roelof Serfontein, characterised by playful interactions, much like that between two brothers. Eugene Krynauw was sent to Keurboslaan as a young boy of ten, after his mother had died during the birth of his youngest sister. Krynauw's father was so deeply hurt by his wife's death that he became wary of intimate personal relations with his children. Through a sequence of events the traumatised boy is helped by Dr. Serfontein to deal with his grief about his mother's death and his father's rejection. Despite the age difference, a special sympathy developed between the headmaster and his pupil. The friendship survived during Eugene's difficult years as an adolescent and young man struggling to get to terms with the sacrifices he had to make in order to retain the friendship of a complex personality such as Dr Serfontein, and he became one of the Serfontein's family's most loyal and closest friends.

A third relationship, perhaps the most important relationship portrayed in the series, is that between Roelof Serfontein and his wife. Helen Bielefeld came to Keurboslaan as a young woman of twenty to fill in for the headmaster's secretary who had to undergo an operation. Her youth despite, Helen had suffered a great loss. She had married young and she and her husband worked as journalists in Europe. She returned to South Africa after her husband and her baby died from illness in Switzerland. Having gone through this traumatic experience, Helen decided never to stay in one place for an extended period of time and to avoid developing close emotional bonds with any persons for fear that she may lose them once more. Despite this undertaking, she is not an embittered or cold person and quickly establishes warm relationships with all the Keurboslaan staff and pupils. Helen is one of very few people, if not the first, not to be intimidated by Dr Serfontein's temper or by his genius. When he asks her to marry him, she initially refuses and Roelof has

difficulty persuading her to accept the risk that close relationships entail. They get married when Helen is in her early twenties and Roelof thirty-eight (Krogh, date unknown, page 30).

A fourth set of personal relationships dealt with in the *Keurboslaan* series are interactions between Roelof Serfontein and his family. His relationship with his father had always been difficult and strained. His father strongly disapproved of his talented son's decision to become the headmaster of Keurboslaan, and as a result he vowed never to visit the school. This decision had an effect on the whole family and even though Roelof's relations with his siblings were much warmer, they avoided his school for many years. The relationship between Roelof and his father thawed a bit as they both grew older and though it could never be described as close or intimate, some understanding did develop between them. Of all his siblings, Roelof felt closest to his younger brother Martin, the brain surgeon. Yet another family relationship that features prominently in the series is Dr Serfontein's relationship with his niece, Tessa. Tessa is the daughter of Roelof Serfontein's elder brother Adolf and his English-speaking wife Coralie. When Coralie's baby son died she suffered such emotional trauma that she began rejecting her young daughter, Tessa, for the fact that she was a girl and not a boy. Coralie became intensely jealous when she felt that her husband was paying too much attention to Tessa. Tessa ran away from home to her uncle Roelof and he subsequently adopted her. Of course, all the various Serfontein siblings send their children to Roelof's school, with the result that many of the boys in the school are Serfontein relatives.

The fifth category of relationships that characterise the *Keurboslaan* series is linked to the nuclear family. Relationships between Dr Serfontein and his six children – Josef, Richard, Berrie, Dian, Laetitia and Lavrans, are well covered in the texts. These relationships feature very prominently in the last seven books in the series. In particular, the relationship between Roelof Serfontein and his three eldest sons receives much attention. Josef, the eldest, though good-natured, is impulsive and often rebellious, which leads to serious conflict between himself and his father. Berrie, the third son, is a very expressive and demonstrative child and the only one of the children to expressly demand of his father to tell him how much he loves him. Though Berrie is perhaps not as brilliant as his older siblings, he is very popular in his family and at school. The most interesting and difficult relationship, however, is the one between the principal and his son Richard, who is so similar to him that their relationship is fraught with misunderstandings.

In the sixth place are relationships between Dr Serfontein and his students and staff, many of whom are also former pupils, and between staff and pupils among themselves. Among the most prominent of these relationships is that between the headmaster and young Flip Venter and Flip's friends Bertrand Spaulding – son of the headmaster's old friend Arthur Spaulding and former fiancé Wanda Svoboda - and Geer. All three of them later return to Keurboslaan as teachers, where their hero-worshipping of Dr Serfontein continues. Other prominent characters are Tonie Wilke, Mr Burgers, the young and inexperienced mister Dempers, Mr Papenfus, Mr Gerritson and the school matron, Mrs Mostert.

Finally, the series is marked by some very interesting relationships between Roelof Serfontein and a range of characters with emotional and psychological problems, many of them criminals of some sort. Among these characters are the four boys that he admits into his school from children's reformatories, Verryne, Logan, Loggerenberg and Alberts. Also included is Wentzel Elsenach, a boy who grew up in the bush with virtually no contact with human beings because his father kept him isolated. Then there are the young Lourens Joubert, who suffers from megalomania, the kleptomaniac Karl Goosen, and the troubled André Smit. The most intriguing of these relationships are undoubtedly the relationships between the headmaster and two dangerous, sought-after criminals - the youth criminal Glennis, and Jan Fiskaal - a notorious and dangerous bandit.

Story lines and narrative structure in selected titles in the *Keurboslaan* series

Unusual for series books is the fact that in the *Keurboslaan* texts time is not suspended and the passing of time is in fact emphasised. In each of the books in the series, close attention is paid to the school calendar, so that it becomes impossible for the author to 'keep' her characters fixed in a particular time period. Schoolboys grow up; they leave the school, study at University and are heard of again when they send their own children to Keurboslaan. When Roelof Serfontein started at Keurboslaan he was a young man in his twenties. In the last book in the series he is already in his sixties.

The structure of each of Blakemore's *Keurboslaan* novels is fairly similar. The plots in the books are generally more complex than those of most other series books for children, as most of the books in the series have a main plot and a number of sub

plots that are developed in great detail. In some of the books there are more than one main plot (see, for example, *Die Serfontein-kinders* and *Die Kroon van Keurboslaan*) whilst sub plots in the novels usually number at least four. However, in all her novels one gets the distinct feelings that both the main plot and the many sub plots are not quite at the centre of the narrative and that what is really foregrounded is the relationship between the headmaster and other characters.

Story lines are fairly tight, though often highly implausible and fairly repetitive. Nonetheless, the novels display a peculiar charm and the stories a certain authenticity, which is the hallmark of Blakemore's writing. In this section a brief outline of the story lines of thirteen of the twenty volumes in the series is given.⁷

Jong Dr. Serfontein [Young Dr Serfontein]

This book tells the story of Keurboslaan College for Boys' founding history and how it came about that Dr Serfontein became principal of the school. Roelof Serfontein comes to Keurboslaan in a state of shock and meets Mr Schoonbee, the school principal. A unique friendship develops between the two men, and Mr Schoonbee asks Roelof to stay on as school principal. On finding conditions in the school in a completely unsatisfactory state, Dr Serfontein sets about to change that in a very short period of time. He starts by making changes to the teaching corps. He sacks two teachers, Mr Austin and Mr van As, who he feels cannot be of any use to the school given their behaviour, which included encouraging students to smoke, telling crude jokes in the staff room, and engaging in some lewd (but unspecified) behaviour and taking pupils along on these excursions. An unqualified teacher, Mr Lamprecht, is instructed to select courses from UNISA's yearbooks and to enrol immediately if he

⁷ In all cases attempts were made to use the first published version of the title. In three cases this was not possible. In the case of *Die Kroon van Keurboslaan* (originally published as *Die Kroon van die Skool* by Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel) a copy of the Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel (APB) book was located, but the page on which the publication date is printed had been removed. Since APB did more than one reprint of this book, it could not be established whether the copy referred to in this study is the first edition or one of the later reprints. This title was reprinted by J.L. van Schaik Publishers in 1956, so it is certain that the copy used in this study predates 1956. With regard to the title *Rugby op Keurboslaan*, an original version of the book could not be located. It was decided to use the final manuscript, which has revisions by both Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik's reviewer made on the typed copy. The title was published in 1956 and from the correspondence between Blakemore and her publisher there is no indication that the publication of this title was delayed. It can therefore be safely assumed that the manuscript dates from 1955 or 1956. In the case of *Keurboslaan stuur Speurders*, it was impossible to find a copy of the original title (*Die Skool stuur Speurders*) published by Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel. The publication date of the first edition of this title is unknown, but the second print of the first edition was published in 1949. As a copy of this reprint could not be located either, the first publication of this title by J.L. van Schaik in 1958 was used.

wants to stay on at the school, while two elderly teachers are accommodated in non-teaching posts (as accountant and individual music teacher respectively). Dr Serfontein then introduces changes in the school routine by instituting compulsory sport activities, introducing physical education and study periods, and changing the diet, meal times and sleeping arrangements. At first, his reforms are met with resistance from the boys, but after a few confrontations, in some cases involving corporal punishment, he wins their loyalty and support. Two schoolboys – Booyens and Oelofse - are sent away from the school because the headmaster feels that they do not have a positive influence on the others and are incapable of reform. Nonetheless, they are referred for psychological treatment. With Mr Schoonbee's consent and against Wienand's advice, Dr Serfontein borrows money from the Jewish town attorney, Mr Davis, against the expected royalty payment for his first novel to upgrade facilities at the school. Mr Davis, a shrewd businessman, tampers with the contract, and the school's existence is threatened when the sum of money needs to be paid back to Davis earlier than agreed. The crisis is averted by the resourcefulness of Oscar Wienand, a senior pupil, who had befriended Roelof and employed unconventional methods to raise the required funds. When Dr Serfontein is informed that he has inherited the Maxim fortune, he decides to spend a substantial amount of money to develop the school. When his planned trip with Mr Schoonbee to Europe is cancelled after Mr Schoonbee's stroke, Roelof Serfontein decides to stay on permanently as headmaster of Keurboslaan College for Boys. The story is framed by the budding friendship between Roelof Serfontein and his youngest pupil, Eugene Krynauw, Roelof's love for and concern about Mister Schoonbee, and his comfortable and brother-like relationship with his rebellious pupil Oscar Wienand.

Keurboslaan se Eerste Kaptein [Keurboslaan's First School Captain]

Dr Serfontein's first novel, *Valhalla*, is acclaimed by the literary establishment as the master piece of the past ten years. But Mr Schoonbee's health is ailing and Dr Serfontein spends much time at his bedside. Wienand is appointed as Keurboslaan's first school captain. One of the youngest pupils in the school, Eugene Krynauw, who is devoted to the headmaster, accidentally takes a briefcase belonging to Mr Davis, the town attorney - who has had a very strained relationship with the school - because he thought it belonged to Dr Serfontein. Krynauw is too scared to admit to his wrongdoing and becomes withdrawn and quiet. Amid a lot of schoolboy pranks, tension builds up yet again between Mr Davis and the school and Mr Davis threatens to expose in newspapers the fact that a Keurboslaan pupil stole his briefcase.

Rumours spread by Mr Davis reaches the University in Johannesburg where two of Dr Serfontein's brothers and his father hold positions and the publicity is very damaging to the school. In the town of Keurboslaan, Wienand meets an elderly Afrikaans man, Mr Wessels, who receives a pension from the Anglo-Boer War and who has had to borrow money from Davis because his wife is ill and he could not afford the medical treatment. Wienand's investigations show that Mr Davis had been charging many old people at interest rates far above the legal norm. Moreover, Mr. Davis sells the loan documents to debt collectors in Johannesburg, who come and claim their debts with no regard for the personal circumstances of the debtors. When Mr Davis tries to impound the house and meagre possessions of the family Wessels because they are unable to repay their debts, the headmaster arrives on the scene and loses his temper. He literary almost kill Mr Davis, but at the last moment sanity prevails and he punches Mr Davis neatly with the fist. Dr Serfontein threatens to kill Mr Davis if he ever tries again to charge poor people exorbitant interest rates and appoints Mr Wessels as school caretaker. When Eugene Krynauw discloses the facts about the stolen briefcase, Wienand searches the brief case and finds all the loan documents, which can be used as damaging evidence against Mr Davis. The school is thus saved from impending ruin yet again, as Davis is forced to retract his allegations. Dr Serfontein is a highly strung personality and when he receives a set of lists and figures from a junior member of staff and finds many mistakes, he loses his temper completely and gives the young man a very severe scolding. Mr Schoonbee overhears this and tells Roelof that he had disappointed him with his behaviour. Dr Serfontein does not know how to deal with personal conflict and therefore does not apologise. Eugene Krynauw, who was asked by Wienand to keep an eye on Dr Serfontein, phones Wienand at the University and asks him to come through to Keurboslaan to remedy the situation. Mr Schoonbee's health is very delicate and everyone is concerned that he may die before reconciling with Roelof. Wienand pleads with Mr Schoonbee to forgive Roelof, arguing that the headmaster had apologised to the young man that he had scolded and that Mr Schoonbee was taking his punishment of the young Dr Serfontein too far. Mr Schoonbee is subsequently reconciled with Dr Serfontein and dies peacefully in his sleep a few days later.

Keurboslaan se Struikrower [Keurboslaan's Bandit]

A dangerous bandit, who has on more than one occasion held up people and taken their belongings, plagues the Keurboslaan surrounds. The police are of the opinion that it is only a matter of time before this criminal kills someone. In Johannesburg, Dr

Serfontein is introduced to Captain Alwyn, who informs him that he is coming out to work with the police on the case of this bandit, known as Jan Fiskaal. At one point, the headmaster also falls prey to this criminal. Whenever there is an interaction between Jan Fiskaal and Roelof Serfontein, spectators later remark about the special tension in the air that characterised the moment, almost as if Serfontein exerted a kind of influence over the criminal and as if the criminal was drawn to Serfontein's personality. Whereas most people instantly dislike Captain Alwyn, the police officer, Dr Serfontein is far more tolerant with Alwyn than is his general disposition towards strangers. Jan Fiskaal manages to undermine discipline in the school by spreading false rumours about the headmaster's morality and leading one of the school's more troubled pupils, André Smit astray. Against the headmaster's explicit instruction, Smit goes to Greylingdrift, a notorious gambling spot owned by Sarnovitch. Eugene Krynauw unexpectedly ends up with Smit at Greylingdrift. Here, Jan Fiskaal, who has a cunning ability to imitate other's accents and way of talking, pretends to be Dr Serfontein and tells Krynauw in the dark that neither of them should find themselves in a place with such a reputation and that the best they could do is never speak about it again. This incident deeply shatters Krynauw's trust in Dr Serfontein. Through a series of events, it becomes clear that the headmaster had always known that the bandit Jan Fiskaal and Captain Alwyn was one and the same person. As a young man, he had been wrongly accused of and convicted for theft. He had to serve a prison sentence and by the time his innocence was proved, both his parents had passed away. A special bond developed between the headmaster and the bandit, and the headmaster – with the consent of influential members of the police in both South Africa and the United States - assisted Jan Fiskaal in the end to escape police capture and to flee to the United States where he opened a clinic for the rehabilitation of youth offenders with funds provided by Dr Serfontein. Smit is held back one year as punishment for his behaviour, whilst the relationship between the headmaster and Eugene Krynauw is mended.

Die Hoof van Keurboslaan [Keurboslaan's Headmaster]

Flip Venter, a young youth offender, escapes from the office of the probation officer. Through a chance encounter with another boy, he comes onto the idea to go to Keurboslaan in this boy's place. Of course, the headmaster quickly uncovers this state of affairs, but he decides to keep quiet and give the boy a chance to find and prove himself. Eventually, strongly influenced by Dr Serfontein's example, Venter comes clean and is fully accepted as a Keurboslaan scholar. He is also reconciled

with his stepfather, whom he never wanted to accept because he felt that he had taken his own place in his mother's life. In the same book, André Smit goes through a difficult time, because his friends all are in their final year of school and prefects, while he has had to stay a year behind. As a result, he returns to Greylingdrift, where he is lured into playing cards with Sarnovitch until he owes him a lot of money. In an attempt to win back more money in order to repay Sarnovitch, Smit slips out of school every night to play cards until he wins. The headmaster goes to collect him at Greylingdrift and ends up in a fistfight with Sarnovitch. During the same period an escaped black prisoner tries to set the school alight in a way that would most definitely also have meant killing himself, but the young Flip Venter manages to fend him off.

Keurboslaan se Peetvaders [Keurboslaan's Godfathers]

Dr Serfontein agrees to admit a scholar for a test period. Wentzel Elsenach was brought up by his father, a religious fundamentalist, in the bush and has had very limited contact with people. He survived from catching small animals and made himself clothes from their skins. He had never learnt to clean himself and can only read the Bible. He is also not used to speaking and becomes violent and aggressive when he interacts with other people. He was found by a local reverend, a brother of one of Keurboslaan's teachers, and that is how the case came to the attention of the headmaster. From what the boy had said, it could be deduced that his mother had died when he was still a very small boy and that he grew up with his father. His father became ill and left to his own devices. Elsenach is taken in by the headmaster, who manages to subdue him through his magnetic personality and persuades him to follow orders. Flip Venter and Eugene Krynauw are appointed as his godfathers. A few months later, Elsenach's father arrives back at the house of the reverend claiming that he wants his son back. It is clear that he is a very dangerous man with serious psychological problems. Dr Serfontein is called in and he once again has to make use of his strong personality to subdue the disturbed and dangerous man until his brothers (both medical specialists) arrive from Johannesburg. With the help of his brothers it is determined that Elsenach is not disturbed after all but that an accident a few years earlier (the wheel of an ox wagon ran over his head) caused some nerves in the brain to press against each other. This is what caused the man's violent spells. The headmaster's brothers agree to perform the required operation and take him to their clinic in Johannesburg. Here, Elsenach informs Roelof Serfontein that his wife is still alive, but that he had chased her away and threatened to kill her in one of his

violent rages so that she had to flee from him. Dr Serfontein finds the mother and the family is reconciled.

Avonture op Keurboslaan [Adventures at Keurboslaan]

The restless André Smit is once again involved in trouble and this time makes acquaintance with two shady characters named Fiske and Brady, who lead him to the notorious and strictly forbidden Greylingsdrift for a third time. Unfortunately, André had accidentally mistaken Eugene Krynauw's blazer for his own and had left it at Greylingsdrift. While Eugene now finds himself standing accused of breaking one of the strictest school regulations, out of loyalty to his friend he refuses to tell Dr Serfontein that Smit was the culprit. Even though Dr Serfontein and all the others know that Krynauw is not guilty, Dr Serfontein decides to expel him from school. For Eugene, this is a bitter blow, as he feels that the headmaster is trying so hard not to display any personal feelings towards him or do him any favours, that he gets penalised more severely than any other person in the school simply because of his friendship with the headmaster. It is during this period that Dr Serfontein's niece, nine-year old Tessa Serfontein, arrives at school and declares her decision to come and stay with her uncle. The headmaster's investigations reveal that there are indeed tensions between Tessa and her mother, Coralie, and that Coralie blames Tessa for not being a boy after she had lost her son. Dr Serfontein feels that his brother's role in the whole affair has been less than satisfactory and thus adopts Tessa. Tessa is an emotionally demanding young girl, but secretly everyone at Keurboslaan is relieved about her arrival, as she forces her uncle to eat more regularly and sleep more often. Krynauw is readmitted to the school, but relations between him and Dr Serfontein remain strained. Dr Serfontein refuses to appease Krynauw, whose attitude he regards to be immature. Krynauw comes to the realisation that it will always be difficult to be the friend of someone like Roelof Serfontein and that he must be prepared to make sacrifices if he wants to maintain this friendship.

Twee Nuwe Seuns op Keurboslaan [Two New Pupils at Keurboslaan]

Three new boys are accepted into the school. One is Tonie Wilke, the son of Wienand's sister who had died in a car crash. The second pair is Everard and Bertrand Spaulding, sons of Dr Serfontein's British friend and international musician Arthur Spaulding and his late wife Wanda Svoboda - the Russian opera singer who was the headmaster's fiancé before she eloped with Spaulding. The boys had been

at school in Britain for short periods, but have travelled with their father on his world concerts for most of their lives. Their father is concerned about the influence of such a lifestyle on his sons and is especially worried about the behaviour of his youngest son. The three boys soon become part of school life with all its ups and downs. As boys, they are also inclined to disobey the school rules, but the young Spaulding refuses to be punished by the headmaster. Dr Serfontein gently persuades Bertrand to accept corporal punishment from him. This book also tells the story of the young and inexperienced Mr Dempers who does not manage to be firm with the boys. In turn, the boys take advantage of his kindness and makes him the victim of their pranks. Tonie Wilke manages to befriend the difficult and neurotic Mrs Coralie Serfontein, who had rejected her daughter because she was so hurt by the loss of her son.

Die Kroon van Keurboslaan [Keurboslaan's Crown]

It is Eugene Krynauw's final term at school. Roelof Serfontein sends away the school secretary, Miss Conradie, to undergo surgery in his brother's clinic. The school has to find a replacement secretary and Roelof Serfontein employs the services of Mrs Helen Bielefeld, a widow who had lost her husband and baby due to illness when they were working in Switzerland as journalists. Helen makes her presence felt at Keurboslaan and soon wins the trust of the headmaster's niece, Tessa, who is living with him permanently, the school matron, Mrs Mostert, and schoolboys and staff alike. She quickly picks up on the deep sympathy that exists between Roelof and his pupil, Eugene Krynauw. An exceptional quality of Helen's, which everyone remarks upon soon after her arrival, is the fact that she is not intimidated by the headmaster's prestige or his dark moods. He finds her even temper, efficiency, and strong will unsettling. In the meantime, the schoolboys plan a schoolboy prank to adapt the script of the operetta that they have to perform at the end of term to rid themselves of the embarrassment of having to appear in a classic Greek drama. When a contagious disease spreads through the town of Keurboslaan, there are fears that the school may be affected too. A tense period follows during which almost half of the boys fall ill. When the crisis is over, it is Helen who realises that the headmaster's stern exterior and his order not be disturbed is in fact his strategy for disguising the fact that he has fallen ill too. Together Helen and Krynauw together nurse him back to health, though there are times when they fear for his life. It is during this period that Krynauw realises that some emotional bond is developing between Helen and the headmaster. Just when everything at the school seems to return to normal, a

young black chief living in the mountains surrounding Keurboslaan receives a vision – brought on by malaria and encouraged by his witchdoctor - which convinces him that he is to free his people from white oppression. The witchdoctor tells him that the way to achieve this is to slaughter a 'white goat' (a young white child). When two young Keurboslaan pupils are subsequently captured by a drunken group of black men, Helen, Krynauw and Dr Serfontein hear their screams and are on the scene to help. They manage to free the two children but are themselves captured. During the tense hours during which they are almost certain that they will not survive, Krynauw overhears Dr Serfontein asking Helen to marry him. It emerges that he had asked her earlier, but that she had refused as she had vowed after the death of her first husband and baby never to get involved in an intimate relationship again for fear of losing someone she loves once more. Krynauw and Helen manage to escape by following the strategy outlined by Roelof. As they are fleeing they see the headmaster being killed. It is only then that they realise that it had been his plan all along to free them in exchange for his life. As it turns out, they were mistaken in what they saw and Roelof managed to survive the ordeal. Roelof and Helen, to everyone's surprise and excitement, go ahead with their wedding plans and Dr Serfontein asks Eugene Krynauw to be his best man.

Spanning op Keurboslaan [Tension on Keurboslaan]

Dr Serfontein is ill and he is trying his level best to hide this fact from his wife, who was so traumatised about the loss of her first husband and baby that it was only with great difficulty that he managed to convince her to get married again. His best efforts despite, Helen Serfontein is only too aware of her husband's condition. Despite their own feelings of despair, staff members and pupils all become involved in the efforts to keep the fact of the headmaster's illness away from his wife, which leads to a number of misunderstandings. To protect his wife, Dr Serfontein withdraws into himself and announces that he will have to go away on business for an indefinite period. For Helen this is the ultimate proof of the graveness of his condition. At his brother, Dr Martin Serfontein's clinic, Dr Serfontein is diagnosed by the world-renowned Danish scientist Dr Nordstrom with a terminal illness and is given three months to live. Dr Serfontein writes a letter to Advocate Krynauw, Eugene's father, to inform him of his condition and to ask him to start preparing his son for what was to come. By accident, Krynauw opens this letter. Krynauw decides to inform the Serfontein family and Dr Serfontein's financial manager, Oscar Wienand. The following weeks are some of the most difficult times ever experienced by those close

to the headmaster, and the strained relationship between Helen and Roelof becomes a further source of anxiety. It is Dr Martin Serfontein who discovers that Dr Nordstrom's wife, Ada, had died two years earlier from the same condition that he diagnosed in Roelof Serfontein. His wife's death traumatised him to such an extent that he became neurotic. Martin Serfontein establishes that Roelof Serfontein suffers from a problem with his digestive system that will need only minor surgery and not from a terminal illness. The headmaster and his wife are reconciled and their first child is born at the end of that year. They ask Krynauw to be their son's godfather.

Die Serfontein-kindere [The Serfontein Children]

This book tracks the relationship between Dr Serfontein and his children. Dr Serfontein is a very reserved person and while he loves his children deeply, his relationship with them is very formal and he very seldom touches them. Dr Serfontein deliberately keeps some distance between himself and his children as it is his greatest fear that by openly displaying his love he will tie them to himself and the family in a way that will deny them their freedom. On the Serfontein family's annual trip by cruiser from Europe, the eldest of the Serfontein children, Josef and Richard, befriend the outgoing Karl Goosen. However, it is their parents that notice that something is amiss with the boy. In an informal discussion with the boy's parents they are informed that Karl is their adopted son. Though they explained that he had given them much pleasure in the past, they claimed that he had started showing signs of kleptomania. The Serfontein couple suspects that there is something more to the story and they happen to come across an incident where Mrs Goosen shouts abusive comments at the son. After establishing that Mrs Goosen suffers from a psychological condition, Dr Serfontein offers to take Karl Goosen in as a pupil at Keurboslaan. While the Serfontein children are very fond of Karl, the first term at Keurboslaan proves to be a difficult time for all. The relationship between Dr Serfontein and his second eldest son, Richard, is especially strained, in part because they are so alike and Richard is too young and inexperienced to know how to conduct a relationship with his father. Mr Venter, a Keurboslaan teacher, ends up in a fight with Dr Bickard, a retired doctor who is also an alcoholic, after the latter made a snide comment about Dr Serfontein's character. The story gets round and some of the schoolboys, among them Dr Serfontein's eldest son Josef, decide to take revenge on Dr Bickard by breaking into his laboratory and setting all the animals free. As a result of these developments, the Serfontein children have little time to spend with Karl and he feels increasingly isolated. His kleptomania re-emerges and he

takes some money from the school matron's office. Richard, who realises that they have neglected Karl, undertakes to help him to put the money back. However, they are caught in the act of putting the money back and as a result Richard stands accused of stealing money. Unfortunately, this event took place on the same day that Richard for the first time managed to overcome his shyness and expressed his love for his father. Since this is the first time that Richard has had to receive punishment from his father, he finds it very difficult, more so because he feels that he is being punished precisely at the moment that he and his father have developed rapport. He requests to be sent away to another school. His father agrees, but Richard is so unhappy when he is sent to Grant's College that Eugene Krynauw calls Dr Serfontein and asks him to come through to Johannesburg to sort out things with his son. Richard and his father manage to talk things through and they both return to Keurboslaan. In the meantime Tessa, Dr Serfontein's niece, decides to leave her husband, Dr Eugene Krynauw, because he is spending too much time at the hospital and too little time with her. When Karl Goosen admits to having stolen the money, Dr Serfontein locks him up for a day in the school sanatorium without speaking to him. Dr Serfontein's son Josef is so aggrieved about his father's attitude towards Karl, which he regards to be unjust, that he throws a bunch of papers on his fathers' desk into the fire. As it turns out, the papers were the final manuscript of Dr Serfontein's latest novel. Actually, Dr Serfontein never planned to send Karl away and only kept him in the sanatorium one day so that he could have enough time to understand the severity of what he had done. To make matters worse, Berrie, the third Serfontein son is knocked over by Dr Bickard in a freak motor car accident, and it is only through the skill of Dr Krynauw that his life is saved. It is in these difficult times that Krynauw and Tessa are reconciled and Dr Serfontein starts re-writing the novel that was destroyed in the fire.

Kaptein Richard [School Captain Richard]

Dr Serfontein's second eldest son, Richard, is the new school captain. After the difficult period he had been through a few years earlier, he and his father have developed a very close understanding. This year, Dr Serfontein has decided to take in as a kind of sociological experiment four boys with troubled backgrounds who have been identified as juvenile delinquents. Loggerenberg, a large boy, initially struggles with his aggression, but manages to bring it under control. While Loggerenberg and Verryne seem to be adapting well to school life, the other two are finding it more difficult. The young Alberts, who was a member of the infamous Glennis gang, feels

especially traumatised about being away from Glennis, to whom he is very loyal. Logan, who has been abused by his grandparents in whose care he grew up, is a very fragile boy who suffers from nervous tension. Glennis, the leader of the Glennis gang, comes to Keurboslaan in search of Alberts and introduces himself to the headmaster as Benton. He is employed as a gardener at the school and while he believes that no one knows who he really is, both Dr Serfontein and Loggerenberg are aware of his true identity. Loggerenberg takes it upon himself to look after Alberts, who has yet again come under Glennis' spell. Alberts discovers that he would love to learn to play the violin and he is torn between his desire to stay at Keurboslaan where he will be able to follow this dream and his loyalty towards Glennis. Glennis, in the guise of Benton the gardener, is in a position to influence events at school and starts blackmailing Logan. As a result, Logan takes something from Richard's cupboard. When Richard happens to walk in on this scene, Logan successfully manages to place the stolen item in Verryne's pocket. Dr Serfontein expects of his son, who is also the school captain, to act as if he thought that it was in fact Verryne that had stolen the item, even though he and his father know that it had been Logan. Richard complies but is very angry at his father about what he considers to be unnecessary shock treatment for Verryne. After a series of events, a final confrontation follows when Glennis and Alberts manage to capture Verryne and Richard into a secret cave underneath the rock pools where they plan to extort money from Dr Serfontein in exchange for his son's life. Loggerenberg and Logan arrive on the scene and so does Dr Serfontein. In the end, all the boys show courage and bravery. For Alberts the most difficult part is to betray Glennis, but Dr Serfontein convinces him that Glennis, who sometimes suffers from severe headaches and dizzy spells, that disorient him, is in need of medical treatment and that if Alberts really cares about Glennis he would leave him in Dr Serfontein's care.

Gevare op Keurboslaan [Danger at Keurboslaan]

Berrie Serfontein, Dr Serfontein's third son, is going through a difficult period. Though he is well-loved by his family and friends, he somehow feels that he is less brilliant than his other siblings. He overhears a conversation between a strange man and his cousin, Gys Thiessen, in which the stranger, Mr Schuyler, threatens to reveal a secret about Gys' past and about Dr Serfontein if Gys does not pay him an agreed amount of money. Berrie had always known that Gys was not his aunt's own son, but now he realised that Gys was indeed the son of the infamous bandit, Jan Fiskaal, who operated in the Keurboslaan region many years ago. Berrie had heard many

stories about Jan Fiskaal before, but this was the first time that he is confronted with the claim that his father was close to Jan Fiskaal and actually helped him to escape from the custody of the South African police. Berrie is determined to protect what he sees as his father's honour and thus decides to take on Mr Schuyler himself. He is so preoccupied with his own dilemma, that he does not heed adequate attention to a new school regulation that no one is allowed near the cave because there is quicksand. He spins a story to Mr Schuyler about a cave in the vicinity of Keurboslaan where a treasure is hidden and eventually manages to convince the stranger that there is some truth to his story. He takes the man to the cave and lowers him into the cave. His plan is to hold Mr Schuyler captive until he signs a note saying that he admits to having blackmailed Gys Thiessen and that he agrees to leave Keurboslaan after which Berrie will free him. Unfortunately, the man is caught in the quicksand and Berrie realises that he will be responsible for a man's death. Richard arrives on the scene to help him and soon thereafter Richard's friends Ruysenaer and Willemse, and later the four boys, Logan, Verryne, Loggerenberg and Alberts. Still, they are unable to free Mr Schuyler. It is only with the help of Dr Krynauw, Dr Serfontein and Towenaar, Dr Serfontein's horse that they finally manage to pull Mr Schuyler out alive. The headmaster is very angry about what he regards to be his son's irresponsible behaviour. It is only when Mr Schuyler's jacket is recovered from the cave that the truth comes out. Dr Serfontein assures his son that the assistance he had provided to Jan Fiskaal took place with the full knowledge and support of the South African police.

Misverstand op Keurboslaan [A Misunderstanding on Keurboslaan]

Once again the school suspects that Dr Serfontein is very ill. This time the confusion arises from a conversation that the school's secretary, Barbara Venter, overhears in the headmaster's study. Dr Serfontein had just taken on a new writing assignment, this time to write the history of the world in several volumes, and Dr Krynauw teasingly asked him whether he thought that he would live long enough to finish the project. To this, Dr Serfontein replied that he was not a prophet that could predict such things. Helen Serfontein was present during the playful conversation but Barbara did not know this. Barbara, together with her brother Flip Venter and his friend Bertrand Spaulding, both of whom were former pupils that returned to the school as teachers, decide to tell Richard about his father's illness. Once again they are determined that word of Dr Serfontein's illness does not get round to Helen. Unfortunately, Dr Krynauw is away on business, so no one can establish the true

state of affairs. In their eagerness to keep things that may upset him away from the headmaster, many things go wrong. Josef returns home from abroad where he had met a young Afrikaans girl who danced in a club because she had no money. He felt protective of her and asked her to return to South Africa with him. However, when she is questioned at customs he announces that they are engaged. Because of his father's illness, he does not want to tell him about this dilemma and has to hide Amanda's presence from Dr Serfontein. Richard and his friends, in turn, have rescued two British pilots - who were accused of negligence after the plane they piloted crashed and they used their ejector seats to escape - from an angry crowd at the airport. However, after having done that they realise that they had no strategy in place to get the pilots back to their home country. At the same time, the schoolteachers are trying to take over disciplinary matters so that the headmaster does not overextend himself. Things go wrong and they have to take some of the pupils into their confidence and tell them about Dr Serfontein's illness to explain their strange conduct. Josef and his fiancé, Richard, a few of his friends and the two pilots end up on Dr Serfontein's farm in Swaziland. Here they find themselves in a dangerous situation when an angry mob congregates in front the house looking for a white woman missionary who they feel had betrayed them and who they wanted to kill. By that time, things had gotten so far out of hand that Dr Serfontein is informed of the true state of affairs. He has to take his own plane and rush to the aid of his sons and their protégées. Dr Serfontein manages to save the day and clear up the confusion about his health. In any event, he decides not to write the planned history volumes.

Conclusion

Keurboslaan's world is shaped by the figure of its main character, Roelof Serfontein, and the features of the landscape surrounding Keurboslaan. The books in the series span, in narrative time, a period of at least forty years. Situated in the countryside, away from the city, Keurboslaan College for Boys is presented as an enclave founded upon a specific ideal to provide quality schooling in Afrikaans to the sons of leaders of the 'volk'. While the stories are often predictable, implausible and repetitive, they foreground the development of relationships between people over many years. This is supported by the depth and roundedness of Stella Blakemore's characters.