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**Sex, Story, and Intersubjectivity:
Bakhtin, Mahy, and
Patterns of Imaginative Acceptance**

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of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Margaret Mahy is a household name in Aotearoa/New Zealand and has achieved a state of prominence and celebration internationally for the consistency and depth of quality of her writing for children and adolescents. Mikhail Bakhtin is finding increasing favour amongst Western literary critics recently, coincidentally following the rise of children's literature as an area of expansion of study and recognition of worth. One microcosm within that expanding field of study is the ideological nature of novels written for children and adolescents. Tracing the ideological within the novel is a major preoccupation of Bakhtin's work.

Children's literature has always been a site of ideological struggle as has been demonstrated by Lurie, Zipes, and others, often with regard to classic children's stories or the original nature of fairy tales and their retellings. At the date of publishing this study, however, few critics have applied a Bakhtinian reading to Mahy's literature. The results, however, have been revealing and worthwhile for those who have. The two writers share many concerns and interests including recognition of the novel as a potent force for change.

Supported initially by theoretical concepts offered by Jerome Bruner and Roland Barthes, who would appear to agree with Bakhtin and Mahy as to the importance of narrative and its openness to interpretation, this study then applies Bakhtinian theoretical ideas to a set of four of Mahy's works. Following an introductory chapter, the first text to be studied in this light is *The Changeover*, followed by *The Tricksters*, *Alchemy*, and *The Haunting*.

These texts share use of gothic imagery, occupation of the genre of magical realism, and a plot wherein young women negotiate the establishment of new identities within their families. Given the nature of such a setting and subject matter, each chapter examines in turn representations of relationships key to each narrative. This is with regard to the central themes of the nature of developing sexuality, stories written and told about self and other, and the process by which the messages and understanding of each are negotiated by the maturing protagonist.

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