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

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

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March, 2012

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.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr Jenny Lawn for the astute guidance, kind and gracious perseverance, and legendary, infinite patience.

Thanks to Dr Kathryn Walls for offering the Honours level paper on children's literature in which I was reacquainted with Margaret Mahy's work, and the initial suggestion of a thesis.

Thanks to all my parents and my wider family scene, for demonstrating that excellence can come in many shapes, sizes, and hair-styles, and that it can be radically so in a diverse range of imaginative ways.

Finally, thanks also to all friends and colleagues at Gwangju University and Chosun University, and also to Bee Tankard, Pete Schandall, and Peter Gallo.

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Chapter One – *Introduction*: Bruner, Butler, Barthes, and Bakhtin

The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (2004), p.29.

i) Mahy, the Self, and Adolescent Literature

My childhood was not bereft of books. My mother, being an early childhood primary school teacher, had a habit of sharing the latest Lynley Dodd publications at the dinner table. I seem to also recall someone once actually reading me *A Lion in the Meadow* (1972), but it was due to the coincidence of a friend asking me to return an Enid Blyton's *Famous Five Three-in-One Special Edition* to the library for him that first got me hooked on reading. Eventually this led to my interest in studying English literature, and living in the capital city I found political science fulfilled my interest in the relevance of history at university.

When I finally sat down on my flat-mate's couch to read *The Haunting* for a postgraduate course a full twenty-two years after it was written, two things occurred to me: Mahy had written it in a style curiously open to interpretation, and at least one of those possible and probably intended layers of interpretation was an allegorical reading of the coming out of an identity of difference within a family which could be applied to sexuality, despite the story presenting a relatively simple literal reading of the character being an individual with magical powers.

Since that first reading of *The Haunting* in 2004 I have become more convinced of a similar sense of openness of interpretation and liberation of theme in Mahy's three other juvenile fiction gothic magical realism coming-of-age novels: *The Changeover* (1984), *The Tricksters* (1986), and *Alchemy* (2002). The major commonality is that all depict female characters at a liminal stage of life entering, passing over the threshold of adolescence and into adulthood, and following processes of development of identity while making life-defining choices. Their choices are often about being open to communication and deciding upon an open-ended subjectivity: exploring authentic ways of knowing oneself and others, speaking in an inquiring and honest way, and being an active part of society, as opposed to closed ways of knowing and speaking, and as against being an isolated young adult. Mahy symbolizes this openness with the path of choice of magical empowerment and transformation, as the female (and in one case, also male) characters accept and embrace, metaphorically and often literally, the identity of difference in themselves and thus simultaneously the other.

Read with a Bakhtinian theoretical framework, all these texts also offer examples of characters exploring identity options in dialogic discourse with other characters. The characters facing magical transformation beyond their liminal teenage stage of being neither child nor adult talk, argue, joke, weigh the value of others' opinions and insights, and accept or reject those perspectives. In these (and many other) novels, Mahy often depicts young protagonists who identify as writers, though she also describes them learning to "read" the many various signs associated with different identity positions when in society with others. Bakhtinian theory focuses on reading the ideological perspectives represented within the individual speech act, and so offers a multitude of tools for approaching these works, all rich in dialogue.

The four novels form a natural subset within Mahy's extensive oeuvre as they all feature gothic imagery, can be classified as magical realist, and involve teenaged female characters undergoing transformational experiences. Others of Mahy's titles within the field of juvenile literature include elements of the gothic, particularly *Dangerous Spaces* (1992) and *The Other Side of Silence* (1995). However, neither is a coming of age narrative, and in the former all fantastic events take place within another magical dream world, but the genre of magical realism itself implies the very absence of boundaries between the world of reality and fantasy.

Louis Leal describes magical realism in this way:

Magical realism does not use dream motifs; neither does it distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature or

science fiction do [...]. In magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. (Leal, p.121)

Considering that *The Other Side of Silence* contains no particular elements of the fantastic, neither can be categorized as falling within the genre of magical realism. The four texts of this study contain examples of the magically fantastic but in a setting squarely within the realm of the everyday world, which here, as in the majority of Mahy's adolescent fiction texts, centers on the family home.

Individual Mahy texts have been noted as gothic, for example by Lovell-Smith (2007), who, in regards to *The Tricksters*, effectively fixed the location in a chronotope-like time and place in relation to the genre. A more complete study of Mahy's use of gothic motif or a study of the location of a wider selection of her novels within the genre itself is yet to be completed. This seems remiss given that in interview with Murray Edmond as long ago as 1987 Mahy voiced such enthusiasm for Angela Carter and her story "The Bloody Chamber" (1979), a rewriting of the famous gothic story *Bluebeard*, that she made the point of locating her personal copy within her library immediately to quote from and show to the interviewer.

Carter's influence is evident in Mahy's use of gothic imagery and the motif of the strong female hero in the novels I have chosen, not just within the image of mothers rescuing daughters, but sisters rescuing brothers in two of these stories, and a female protagonist rescuing herself, a ghost, and by extension her own family in another. In

only one does a male protagonist gets to save his female love interest, and even then the final steps to her own transformation are taken by her. The public spaces of the open beaches, crowded family living-rooms, and private bedrooms Mahy all depict as haunted in a peculiarly New Zealand gothic way, and all serve to reflect the internal fears of the young preparing to step beyond the realm of the known as they enter a period of transformation and fear of the unknown in terms of their new identity and transforming relationships with others, primarily within the society of the family.

Others have spent much time and space defining both children's fiction and the important subset of adolescent fiction, also variously termed variations on young-adult literature or juvenile fiction. I am less interested in the different names than in the common questions to which the general category of children's literature gives rise, as most clearly defined by Jacqueline Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan: or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). Such questions in light of Rose's work have recently been outlined by Maybin and Watson (2009) as pertaining to the paradox of books written, published, disseminated, and largely bought by adults, and yet defined as being 'for children' or teenagers. Maybin and Watson paraphrase Rose in describing children's literature as being more about "how adults view childhood" and therefore its being "symptomatic of the entire culture, a body of work which is just as much about what it means to be "grown-up," arguably the subject matter of all literature, as about what it might mean to be a child" (Maybin and Watson, pp.3, 4). That children's literature can not only be read as reflecting wider society but that it is deliberately written expressly

for this purpose is a view strongly supported by Alison Lurie (1990) and a wide selection of work on fairy tales by Jack Zipes (1983).

Whether or not Mahy wrote these books with the purpose in mind of influencing society is both irrelevant and entirely my point. It is irrelevant to the child reader at the time they first engage with and enjoy the books. I think it would be fair to presume that the children who participated in the voting which helped first nominate and then award the 1982 Carnegie Medal Award to Mahy for *The Haunting* cared not a jot for her wider purpose or any supposed 'subversive' goal. That any book catches the attention of so many is surely testament to its ability to provoke emotional and intellectual reactions in a conscious, overt and immediate way, without necessarily providing fodder for navel-gazing scholars who like to think too much about implicit meanings. And yet, according to Mahy herself, the influence of books read in childhood is crucial:

A child is born with a pattern of imaginative acceptance, mainly determined by its humanity, but also containing individual features. Just what ideas and what images will be made available to it is a matter of chance, but on the inherited template a structure is built which locks together in a pattern that is almost certainly as individual as a person's fingerprints. This pattern is established in childhood, perhaps following similar lines to language development and controlled to some extent by physical mechanisms. There does appear to be an optimum time for

learning language which is prior to puberty. I suspect that this may be a vital time for imagination, too. [...] The Hero, the Hermit, the Wise Witch, the Magician, the Warrior Maid, the Lovers: all the archetypal surrogates are established as companions for a lifetime. So the images and models that children receive are very important. (*A Dissolving Ghost*, p.89)

One can see here in Mahy's depiction of the influence of childhood reading a clear definition which could easily stand for that of intersubjectivity itself: the process of socialization and the decisions one does or does not make in accepting or rejecting the messages one gathers from all the various different sources by which one is surrounded.

That Mahy's views find agreement and that her books have made an impact are two points noted within the unusual but widely noted autobiographical account of being a reader from childhood by Francis Spufford (2002). In this extended love letter to the numerous authors read in his childhood named *The Child that Books Built: A Life in Reading*, Spufford notes,

What follows is more about books than it is about me, but nonetheless it is my inward autobiography, for the words we take into ourselves help to shape us. They help form the questions we think are worth asking; they shift around the boundaries of the sayable inside us, and the related borders of what's acceptable. (Spufford, p.21).

Thus Spufford also sees books as contributing to the process of identity formation and the emergent selfhood. He later writes of reaching an age where he read for a great “articulation” — for books which would “extend to new subjects without it changing its nature”: “I looked for books that used familiar means to talk about new things” (p.170). He then laments the fact that he reached that stage a decade before the choices presented by Cynthia Voigt, Melvin Burgess, and Margaret Mahy, to whom he dedicates the lion’s share of that section:

Or the New Zealand novelist Margaret Mahy’s terrific Bronteesque supernatural thrillers, *The Changeover*, *The Haunting*, and *The Tricksters*. Mahy did family life with an elegant, witty realism that made you feel you were getting a leg up to being an altogether more noticing kind of person; simultaneously, she understood how inchoately sexy magic is, at a point in your life when real sex is still three wishes away, and gleams with as much mixed fascination and alarm as if it were truly a spell. Will it turn you inside out? Will it steal you away from yourself? (p.171)

It is interesting and entirely appropriate that Spufford includes *The Haunting* centrally within his brief list of Mahy’s supernatural thrillers, of which he presumably sees all dealing with both magic and sex. The character of Tabitha in *The Haunting* features as the secondary focalizing protagonist; she is an active, vocal and prepubescent character more interested in ice-cream and swimming than being attracted or

attractive. But as Judith Butler pointed out in 1990, there is sex, and then there is gender, and then desire is another aspect of sexuality again.

In the preface and first chapter of her seminal *Gender Trouble* (2006), Butler explains how all three areas of identity are variables and thus destabilize the very notion of the word 'woman' (p.6). As I shall show, Mahy manages to exemplify such destabilization of identity labels with regard to similar such traditionally oversimplified terms in all her novels, and within *The Haunting* in relation to labels like mother, story, and hero.

Tabitha becomes the hero on her quest to save not Sleeping Beauty but rather her similarly bed-ridden younger brother, the subject of a haunting less of ghosts than of a similarly perilous threat: an uncle with a proclivity for showing off magically and social skills so dangerously under-developed he resorts to essentially kidnapping his nephew for company. But the adult reader possibly reads more than that, and so Mahy writes for a multiple readership, particularly including the implied child reader, and a category that I shall term the implied writerly adult reader.

Kimberley Reynolds (2011) describes simplistically a difference between writing for children and teenagers as including stylistic complexities including sex, swearing and violence, and bleak endings (p.7). While I agree with Reynolds to an extent, Mahy herself seems more partial to ambivalence and the contingent openness to categorization, and according to her first essay within her non-fiction collection, she sees herself in these very terms (Mahy, *A Dissolving Ghost*, p.33). Following on from the work of Rose, Butler, and Reynolds then, and further informed by non-fiction

publications by Mahy herself, I suggest that particularly in the four gothic novels central to this thesis, Mahy describes how the individual teenager might resolve issues of identity within families where discussions impinging upon identity itself are a source of conflict to the extent that a bleak ending is shown by Mahy to be a very real possibility, however her stories do end.

I do not suggest that Mahy intends for these books to be taken in any way literally or as self-help instruction manuals for any implied or real angst-ridden teenager. And yet the practical application of her fiction is a topic to which Mahy returns within her non-fiction, for example in the text for her speech “Over Their Heads?”:

I hope the stories I write will end up by making the world more comprehensible, if only by allowing readers to contain mysteries and ideas peripherally. They can add to the unconscious texture of things, or they can be consciously located and used when needed. (Mahy, pp.126-127)

I further make the case that two more commonalities within these four already similar novels include:

- 1.) that Mahy sees sexual identity — in terms of sex, gender, desire, and orientation — as a site of ambivalence, potential conflict, and ultimately also a sign of freedom; and,

2.) that the central characters, in their challenge to establish identity, must negotiate the stories told by others in their immediate societies, whether family or otherwise, and must establish in what ways those stories are true, honest, and useful or otherwise.

Further, ideas of difference can be aligned with sexuality in a Mahy text. At the point of plot climax all four feature the symbolic coming of age, and in the case of *The Haunting* the coming out, of a female character. Leading up to this point in each narrative then is the story of how these characters establish the development of their more mature identities given all the messages they receive from those around them about what is acceptable and desirable or not, and how they deal with those messages with all the challenges of intersubjectivity that a life shared with others and “the other” entails.

Mahy intends, I suggest, that the patterns of inter-subjective discourse described in her novels can be consciously or unconsciously overlaid on the wider world of family life and society beyond the pages read by child, adult, or adolescent, thereby offering a positive model for acceptance of self and other. To extrapolate further, or extend an interweaving of these two threads, one could contrive to connect the dots between Mahy’s implied messages within and between her narratives: telling and believing stories is an ambivalent power, bringing risk and reward for the storyteller and reader or listener alike, just as ambivalence about sexuality provides sites of instable identity. Furthermore, telling and interpreting stories, whether true or otherwise — about sex, gender, and sexual attraction — is a given, and an interpretive skill worthy of the most

subtly didactic and entertaining of novels, using a combination of identity markers for a multiple audience of younger and older, implied and real readers.

ii.) Science-fiction, Barthes, and Openness of Text

There are two strands of evidence I offer with regard to the suggestion that Mahy intended these novels, and particularly *The Haunting*, to be read for deeper layers of meaning by some readers used to reading and looking for such: her recurring use of the phrase 'science-fiction' and Mahy's own reference to being a writerly writer.

Mahy seems to use the phrase 'science-fiction' as her own kind of ironic short-hand for the realm of imaginative possibility which exists within any given text which purports to relate a truth, social or otherwise. Her apparent disdain for 'facts' and her sense of scorn for science, despite her simultaneous and long-held fascination with it, is documented by her thoroughly within the eponymous essay "A Dissolving Ghost" within her collection of non-fiction essays and speeches, published in 2000. Describing the history of her learning to view accepted facts with a mixture of wonder and skepticism, she says: "The imaginative truth and the factual truth are at odds with one another" (p.33), and "nowadays no astronomer seems to believe that the earth fell off the sun. What I learned as truth [from *Arthur Mee's Encyclopaedia*] back then was another mistake" (p.37). Mahy, having criticised the track record of factual "scientific" evidence within the pages before and after these quotations, uses numerous adroit examples of mathematicians and scientists who have arrived at correct conclusions despite making "mistakes," and others who have been wrong and yet been believed as

having produced literally correct truths, and still others who have produced “the truth” yet been scoffed at and disbelieved. Her conclusion to this section seems to contain her mantra, or approach to the irony of changeability and instability of scientific facts, and therefore her privileging of the kind of home-truths contained within fiction:

I know by now that facts, even marvelous ones, slide around, and that people get things wrong, and always will get things wrong, and the truest thing in science is wonder, just as it is in story. And I never forget that the story is as important to human beings as science; more powerful at times because it is more subversive. It was the wonder of the facts not the accuracy of them [...]. It's the wonder that makes me read Stephen Hawking and physicist Paul Davies. (p.40)

So, much in the same way in which science-fiction writers like Arthur C. Clarke imagined technological advancements and then, remarkably, saw such technology developed and widely adopted, Mahy values the role of story in its ability to create new possible realities by leading the reader to wonder at, imagine, and thereafter “desire” those alternate personal possibilities (p.40).

In the next section of “A Dissolving Ghost,” Mahy segues into a discussion on the presence of social realism in her fiction. Under the sub-heading “A Fairy Tale Disguised” she explains layers of personal and social truth within her 1987 novel *Memory*, telling as it does the tale of a young man who finds and looks after an elderly woman suffering from Alzheimer’s disease — a problem of loss of memory — while in an ironic inversion

he also learns to deal with his own painful memories of personal loss. This juxtaposition, like the term “science-fiction,” reveals her interest in seeing layers of social truths enriching what she otherwise terms structure or form “from folktale” (p.42).

Jerome Bruner (1991) writes of the telling, receiving and interpreting of narratives as “hermeneutic composability” which he sees as being the act of creating an interpretation. He sees “narrative necessity,” which he also calls “narrative seduction,” as the compelling feelings of wanting to believe. Bruner uses science-fiction similarly to Mahy in his example of Orson Welles’s famously convincing radio show *The War of the Worlds* to demonstrate how the imagination can lead to “narrative necessity” in a triumph over “logical necessity.” He suggests an alternative title for the former could be “narrative seduction” which relates quite directly to Mahy’s oft-cited interest in the power of desire; she writes and speaks of desire in her fiction in terms of sexuality and other contexts such as a missing parent; her non-fiction refers to the desire to believe, or rather suspend disbelief, and to be caught up in a well-conveyed narrative due to an “appetite for marvels” (Mahy, *A Dissolving Ghost*, pp.34-35).

Bruner goes on to describe the alternative to narrative necessity as being “narrative banalization” wherein the author closely follows the structure established by the genre ahead of them, letting the expectations of the readers for a narrative of that genre do the interpretative work. The readers’ expectations for interpretative diversity are limited by prior experience, and as a result the text is likely to effectively remain closed

in diversity or richness of interpretation, lacking connection with any personal or local socio-cultural relevance. In this way Bruner places emphasis on narrative itself as the site of interpretative provocation and stimulation; he mentions Roland Barthes and his notions of “readerly” and “writerly” texts, lauding the latter as they “challenge the listener or reader into unrehearsed interpretative activity” (p.8). Bruner was in favour of the open text and the challenge to provide an interpretation of highest quality due to creating an “intuitively convincing account” (p.7). He goes on to link Todorov’s idea of the role of the narrative being to render “previously familiar ones uncertain or problematical, challenging a reader into fresh interpretative activity” (Bruner, pp.12-13) and he compares this idea with that of Roman Jakobson’s task of the artist: to make the ordinary strange. I would link these sentiments to the quotation from Judith Butler used as an epigraph to this chapter, with its talk of the home and the imaginary, seeming to evoke the female gothic through its emphasis on making the homely and familiar discomfotingly strange.

The Changeover deals most directly with a teenage girl’s coming of age and coming to terms with the sexuality both of herself and her mother. Emphasizing this point, it takes as its source of melodramatic and metaphorical power her initiation into a witchcraft coven, as she steps over the liminal threshold from childhood into adulthood, and by extension, and with the aid of her love interest, into active sexuality. The setting and use of more traditional fantasy motifs within *The Changeover* seems to

take the place of Mahy's using the word 'science-fiction' within the other titles in this study amongst many of her other texts.

This link is given further weight in the foreword to *A Dissolving Ghost* where she states in an aside, with what I take to be a large dollop of irony: "fantasies are for children and science-fiction addicts" (p.8). Both fantasy as described in Butler's comment and science-fiction share the common element that they imagine alternative possible worlds not unlike the one we share now, and they often deal with potential for the human condition to be extended by fantastic transformative powers; they offer visions of ordinary people living life within alternate realities. They both privilege and stem from the imaginative world of possibility. Magical realism in Mahy's hands then takes the world of the melodramatic ordinariness of the teenaged life and combines it with the fantastically imaginative, possibly offering both a reprieve from that reader's own life of dramatic instability, and a tantalizing glimpse of a world of potential imaginative possibility.

The second strand of evidence which I take to be a clue that Mahy has deeper, more meaningful story-line elements of social-realism within her adolescent fiction is simply that she admits to liking to read that kind of story, and to writing the kind of story which she does like to read herself:

I suppose that many writers write, as I do, out of an unreasonable expectation: that a reader will live with the story on and off over many years and that the story will change, grow and stretch with them, that as

the reader changes the story will change too — not in its words but in the span of its meaning.

I am the sort of reader who reads like this and I know I am not alone in returning to stories and suddenly discovering something new in them, partly because I have brought something new to them as a reader, or because the author has hidden something there that I have only just recognised. (Mahy, *A Dissolving Ghost*, p.18)

I read this excerpt as relating to the works of Barthes in two ways. First, Mahy seems to be describing herself as a writer's writer, or rather, in Barthesian terminology, a writerly writer; she is writing for readers who like to work at interpreting the text and contributing to the creation of the story by engaging their imaginations and making full use of their own personal experience and understanding of potential meanings the author could be construing so as to inform their interpretative framework as outlined by the clues or "signs" within the text.

Second, and also following on from this first point which stems from Barthes' *S/Z*, if Mahy was referring to her following of a Barthesian approach to literature, it then follows that she may well consciously aim at producing texts falling within what Barthes calls the "symbolic code," meaning primarily that they are "open to interpretation." Given all the examples of parallelism, contrasts, and even binary opposites which I shall point out in the following chapters, according to the description offered by Peter Barry, there seems to be evidence for this Barthesian reading, if not

also a Barthesian writing: “instead of going straight into the content, in the liberal humanist manner, the structuralist presents a series of parallels, echoes, reflections, patterns, and contrasts, so that the narrative becomes highly schematized” (p.52).

Few Barthesian studies have even included Mahy’s work, let alone focused on her texts exclusively. But this thesis does not undertake a study of Mahy via Barthes; I mean here merely to flag the point that, concurrent with all Mahy’s discussion within her non-fiction — itself at times demanding of interpretation and opaque in meaning — and given her examples of patterns, form, and even structure, that Mahy certainly seems to write as she likes to read: in a Barthesian writerly fashion, deliberately open to interpretation and re-interpretation.

iii.) Bakhtin’s Ideological Novel: Dialogism and the Openness of Discourse

While a study of Mahy’s work via Barthes may be valid and useful, Bakhtin’s theories are so to a much greater extent. Indeed Bakhtin and Mahy share within their non-fiction an almost uncanny range of similar concerns.

Bakhtin was interested in many aspects of life and literature, including how an understanding of the nature of truth is established in society or discourse between many voices, and how it is similarly represented within a novel. Kathryn Walls has noted how Mahy “alludes frequently — if not obsessively — to what she calls the ‘truth’ of fiction” (p.149) and as noted, she writes narratives strong in dialogue.

Furthermore, in his first publication stemming from his dissertation, eventually entitled

Rabelais and His World (2009), Bakhtin spent a chapter describing the history and usefulness of laughter in resisting hypocrisy; Mahy published a somewhat comparable essay in booklet form entitled *Tragedy's Wild Twin: The Mixed Nature of Humour* (2004), following her interest in the purpose and usefulness of comedy.

Bakhtin was also interested in the imagination, questions of difference, and how the novel as a relatively new genre was better for representing truth in the modern world than a monologic epic narrative. He presented some of his earliest and most useful ideas in a collection of four essays within the volume named *The Dialogic Imagination*. He sought the ideological position of authors and characters as represented within the dialogue or rather 'speech actions' of characters and the narrator. Mahy creates patterns of relationships and interactions between characters wherein those patterns create impressions on the imagination of the reader. She very clearly explains her reasoning behind this practical approach to the theory of her writing in a speech given a full three years before *The Haunting* was published. She cites the example of the first western-style builders to arrive in colonial New Zealand. Not having been taught to notice or even imagine any importance from the fact that the sun could shine from a different direction other than south, they had never imagined anything other than their expectations or what their "reality inside" had allowed ("On Building Houses that Face Towards the Sun," p.93). Apparently incapable of adapting to, being accepting of, or even noticing the clear difference in the direction from which the sun was shining now that they suddenly lived south of the equator, they continued constructing

buildings facing away from the sun. Mahy's message is that she wants to help readers accept difference from normative or habitual expectations, starting with building in their imaginations recognition of the process of accepting difference in the stories they read.

In adopting and evaluating Bakhtin's interpretive methods and central concepts to derive insight from Mahy's work, I will borrow largely from Robyn McCallum, a Bakhtinian scholar of children's literature. In her exhaustive and intricately detailed study she points out her primary interest as being how Bakhtinian theories have a "particular pertinence" to adolescent fiction, representing as they do subjectivity as being "dialogically constructed through interrelationships with others, through language, and/or in a relation to social and cultural forces and ideologies" (pp.7-8). I am particularly interested, however, in the four areas of intersubjectivity, dialogic, chronotope, and the carnivalesque.

Intersubjectivity is a term used in many different liberal disciplines including psychology, and is indicative of identity formed through discussion. While not created by Bakhtin, many of his most important ideas for analyzing texts — such as the dialogic — stem from the idea that identity is formed in dialogue with others.

McCallum describes the narratives she studies in her chapter on intersubjectivity as being "concerned with interrelations between the self and others, and between the self and the physical and social world" (McCallum, 1999, p.24). The use of spoken words seems clearly marked in Mahy's narratives as key to psychological health.

Characters characterized as aloof or silent are typically showing signs of being troubled. Voorendt (2007) has pointed out the predominance of cases of the unsettled psyche in Mahy's works, and Walls (2008) points this out in relation to the Adlerian psychoanalytic influence apparent throughout Mahy's novels; Walls herein highlights the most obvious example being Mahy's 1997 title *The Other Side of Silence*, about an elective mute. Suffice it to say here that discussion, dialogue, discourse and debate are healthy signs in most Mahy novels including the four of this study, as characters typically emerge from solipsistic self-concern to transform their identities into a state of engagement with others, in word and action.

Focalization is a term actually created by the French literary theorist also interested in narratology with regard to the novel, Gerard Genette. Stephen's definition of focalization points out that the narrator describes the perspective of at least one character and the narrator (Stephens, 1992, p.27). By the effect of distinguishing between that character and the narrator the author creates a representation of what Bakhtin termed 'polyphony,' by which the relationship between at least two different perspectives is highlighted (McCallum, 1999, p.30). Thus while Bakhtin did not invent this term, it is central to his concern of how an author presents differing ideological points of view to the reader. This has the effect in turn of informing the reader that there is more than one point of view possible, and so leaves the text open to the reader's own interpretation. The ability of the evolving character and developing reader to accept the idea that more than one point of view is possible is a sign of

maturity and experience within the inter-subjective nature of family and other relationships in a Mahy text. Focalization by one or more characters aids this process for the reader.

'Chronotope' is probably the most esoteric of Bakhtin's theoretical contributions. Put simply, it is the intersection of time and space represented as meaningful to the narrative within the language of the narrator or a character. Within the essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" contained within *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin describes it as being borrowed from mathematics "almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)." By using the concept of chronotope, Winters (2008) identifies a rich seam of Mahy's social realism which had been seemingly hiding in plain sight within her adolescent fiction for some time: the issue of the identity of characters with regards to ethnicity within the setting of Aotearoa/ New Zealand. In her journal article entitled "Aliens in the Landscape: Maori Space and European Time in Margaret Mahy's Fiction," Winters identifies Mahy's ongoing though sensitive and subtle inclusion of identity markers of ethnic difference for many of her characters. Extending from the common family setting, Winters points out that many of Mahy's most successful books were published in 1980s New Zealand, which saw a period of challenge to Pakeha to "re-imagine their relationship to Maori land," and she equates "the two states of being an adolescent in a troubled family and being a Pakeha in a troubled country" (Winters, 2008, p.408).

As it happens, Nikolajeva — noted by McCallum for being the first to apply Bakhtinian concepts to children’s texts and particularly the challenging notion of chronotope (McCallum, 1999, p.185) — describes time in children’s literature as gendered. Perhaps she was inspired by Bakhtin’s vivid personification of the relationship of “time-space” to the novel in *The Dialogic Imagination*, where he states: “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.” Nikolajeva suggests male time is linear while female time is circular, with spaces “closed and confined” (Nikolajeva, 1996, p.125). This leads me to suggest spatial locations may also be gendered, which certainly relates well to Mahy’s four gothic texts located in the enclosed and female space of the home. Holland and Sherman describe the gothic at its most elemental as “the image of woman-plus-habitation” (1977) and Kavka describes the domestic setting as “a fundamental element of the female gothic” (2002). The notion of time-space having an influence on a narrative equal to another character is certainly not a new or unpopular concept. Indeed in Hale and Winter’s collection of essays on Mahy’s work the most common recurrent theme is that of the setting in terms of place and time, often referring to connections between the present and past, usually in terms of colonial and post-colonial implications. The difference in Bakhtin’s concept of the importance of the relationship of time-space to narrative is what he terms its “intrinsic generic significance.” In the case of the genre of four texts studied here then, whether considered as gothic novels or as adolescent fiction (or children’s fiction but with a narrative wherein an adolescent steals the scene at the point of plot climax, as in the

case of *The Haunting*), time could be said to take on flesh in that the four female characters are experiencing a time of transformation. Although Roland of *Alchemy* is the only male focalizing protagonist in these four Mahy stories, in the narrative of his quest he saves and releases Jess from the space of her gothic entrapment in her own self-obsessed world revolving only around the conflict with her parents, and they both transform in the process.

The carnivalesque was amongst Bakhtin's earliest ideas and it was explained by him within *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965). In these works he compares the original carnival with the modern Mardi Gras-type spectacle and bemoans the loss of potency of the modern event to create change, to overturn and upend social hierarchies, truths, and political structures, even though officially only for the temporary period of a day of feasting. The representation of the event remains inscribed in a novel for a more enduring period, and so Bakhtin saw its potential as a site of political resistance and potential change, both cultural and political.

Within Hales and Winter's important collection of essays on Mahy in 2005, Cohoon published "Pirate Parenting in Margaret Mahy's Middle-Grade Readers." She herein combines feminist analysis with queer theory and Bakhtinian notions of the carnivalesque to show how Mahy uses two of her children's middle-grade readers to "expand conventional representations of parenting to explore expressions of sexual identity and gender roles" (Cohoon, 2005, p.84). Cohoon creates a convincing case for

a rereading of two or three selected Mahy texts which she claims offer “representations of alternative family structures” in which the “representations of solo parenting might be read as queer — as pirated by those whose lives somehow sit outside ‘conventional’ parenting structures of mother/father/children” (p.84.). Cohoon suggests Mahy achieves this via a carnivalesque and playful upending of traditional social expectations:

Often, gender-role reversal precedes the public sharing of desire, and the confusion over who loves whom connects the pirate parents to the carnival fools, whose function is to use bawdiness and humour to explore private aspects of gender roles, including sexual identity. ... Pirates, then, whether they are seen in historical or in more contemporary literature, offer alternative, dangerous versions of family life that are non-normative if not explicitly gay or lesbian. (p.87)

In this way, then, Cohoon effectively uses Bakhtinian theory to offer a valid ideologically based rereading of Mahy’s writing for younger children. More recently Babette Puetz has achieved a similar result in her study of the carnivalesque within *The Tricksters*. As this relates to my own study I shall save most comment on *The Tricksters* for the appropriate place in Chapter Three.

iv.) Structure

The following chapters follow a structure as dictated by a mixture of the chronological order in which they were published, and the interrelation of my twin themes of story and sexuality as presented within the four texts. The three titles written for older adolescents and which deal with sexuality explicitly will be examined first and in a standard chronological order. I shall move from there to the final chapter on *The Haunting* despite the fact that it was published earlier than *The Changeover* by two years. By this means I hope to present this relatively open text in a new light with regard to its covert and more subtle implications of sexuality.

Within each chapter I review the key instances of representations of intersubjectivity as seen within examples of dialogue and interaction between the main characters which carry the themes and plot threads toward the conclusion of each narrative.

This approach, involving a focus on character clusters and their key relationships, is relevant and necessary given my focus on inter-subjectivity and its vital role in the development of identity for the adolescent protagonists described. Mahy often presents characters returning to further dialogue with each other, sometimes in examples of monological agreement, and other times in more dialogic conversations.

The processes by which they arrive at the decisions they make given the pressure inevitably produced by the points of climax within the narratives often relate to dialogic interaction with at least one other character, if not a combination of others from the family or beyond, often revisiting recurring themes or topics in light of new

information or experiences. How those other characters present themselves and their views as stories to the protagonists, and often with regards to issues of sexuality. then, makes for the source of internal conflict driving the narrative and the central characters towards the eventual and final speech-acts, typically accompanied by more physical actions.

In Chapter Two I study how *The Changeover* is Mahy's more straightforward description of a coming-of-age narrative. Sexuality is here less a metaphor for coming of age than a parallel of magical empowerment and transformation. Laura develops subjectivity in dialogic relation to two groups representing the two plot threads, including her mother and her mother's new boyfriend in one set, and her love interest and an evil spirit in another set. *The Changeover* sees Laura's father and Sorry, her love interest both provide transport between the various settings, and the public space of the school yard is somewhat controlled by Sorry the male prefect, but in her own and Sorry's home it is clearly the domain of the mother. She ends up inverting power structures in relation to both the evil spirit and forms a relationship of virtual power over the boy who was previously in authority over her at school, in a parallel inversion to her inability to accept her mother's new relationship; by the end of the narrative she accepts the possibility of her mother's re-marriage. Sexuality is dealt with in an overt and frank way, and stories of the challenges and pleasures of adult relationships are sites of initiation into the magical world of the grown-up.

In Chapter Three I examine *The Tricksters*, wherein Harry encounters a selection of three confrontational brothers with whom to trial dialogic subject positions as she largely avoids interaction with her well populated and equally boisterous family. Whether the brothers are a mere projection of Harry's split subconscious or a spiritual visitation from a watery grave of long past years is a Mahy's challenge to the reader to interpret. Within *The Tricksters* Harry's mother rules the holiday home from the kitchen, but outside her brother goes sailing and Harry has encounters with the three trickster brothers on the beach and on the hill behind the house. Harry affects a power inversion in her relationship with her typically overshadowing sister, and lays the ghosts of Christmases past to rest in a way that sees her no longer need to hide within the writing of her subjectivity in her mind and secretly written novel, but lets her venture out into real authentic discussions with her sister and wider family again. Teen-aged first sexual experimentation is again dealt with overtly, and stories are sites of mysterious and troubling family secrets.

In *Alchemy* within Chapter Four, Roland quotes Robert Browning's famous poem about the character Childe Roland travelling on his quest to the dark tower, and Mahy's Roland does travel, by bicycle and family car to and from various locations especially beyond the public space of the park across the protective stream all the way to Jess's home with its haunted stairwell. Therein he saves her from the trap of her parent's upstairs bedroom as a site of sexual-psychic conflict, and the magical confrontation in the downstairs kitchen. Jess, when observed from afar by Roland during lunch breaks

at school, seems both detached from the public space of the common playground and also sheltered by her tree, another symbol of nature and the feminine as with witchcraft. A diverse range of aspects of gender and sexual attraction is dealt with, including issues of gender roles and the authentic relationship as against insincere, inauthentic relationships. Stories thus become sites of power over the other, whether that other is a current or potential love interest, and in corrupt or healthy relationships.

In *The Haunting* all action takes place in the two female-dominated family homes, particularly the shared public spaces of the living rooms, except for when Tabitha visits Great-Uncle Guy in his doctor's surgery, and two more: when Barney is being haunted by Great-Uncle Cole in his thoughts, imagination, and his very private bedroom, and where Barney washes the dishes with his father in the (traditionally, stereotypically) female space of the kitchen. I shall return to these last two examples later in the final chapter, presenting as they do interesting complications to notions of gender roles and questions of performativity. Issues of sexuality then are explicit with regard gender roles and relationships between genders, and implicit or overt in terms of allegorical interpretation for the implied adult reader. Stories are again sites of power, influence, and potential corruption via the story-lie and potentially affecting monological coercion into corrupt relationships, or an honest sharing of identity and self within authentic, open family relationships.

Chapter Two - *The Changeover*: It's Only Natural Dialogism

Published in 1984 two years after *The Haunting*, *The Changeover* won Mahy her second consecutive Carnegie award. It endures in relative popularity on website message boards and as a subject of critical study. Perhaps the former is due to its relatively obvious, overt use of the coming-of-age motif in parallel with the theme of magical empowerment. As referenced in Chapter One with Spufford's claim as to the "inchoately sexy" nature of magic, Mahy was ahead of the modern pop fiction curve, perhaps, along with the likes of Annette Curtis Klause's *The Silver Kiss* (1990), even contributing to the movement towards the current trend for teenaged vampire-meets-girl fantasy. And yet despite, or even because of its overt nature, sexuality within *The Changeover* is virtually downplayed. The protagonist, Laura, is immature in refusing to accept her mother's sexual needs when Kate starts a new relationship. Dialogic conversations are shared between Laura and her mother Kate and Kate's new boyfriend Chris on one hand, and Laura's new friend Sorry on the other, Chris in symbolic parallel to the lemure. Laura and Kate compete over the bath towel and argue over the necessity and cost of Kate's new hairstyle; Laura challenges Kate, Chris, Sorry, and in the end the lemure as well. Chris humours her and accepts her taunts good naturedly, but Kate teaches her the assertiveness she needs to deal with the lemure and Sorry alike as she also learns that her mother's feelings towards Chris's opposite sex are as natural as Sorry's and her own.

Conversation, words, and stories thus play a pivotal role in all of Laura's relationships; she talks with all other characters, and occasionally the other characters talk to each other, but that is typically fairly incidental to the story in which the narrator follows and focalizes Laura's point of view consistently, even when she does not know who is speaking to her:

"It's going to happen," said a voice.

"What's going to happen?" Laura asked before she realized that the voice had spoken inside her, not outside in the room.

It's a warning, Laura thought with a sinking heart. She had had them before, not often, but in such a way that she had never forgotten them.

(p.3)

Given the complications of the plot and being a teen-aged girl growing into womanhood, Laura has to negotiate her developing subjectivity with every character with whom she interacts except her young brother Jacko, who, even more than Barney of *The Haunting*, spends most of the narrative necessarily passive, sick in bed. Already finding it difficult to get quality time to communicate seriously with her mother, the threat of Kate's new boyfriend to what little shared time remains sees Laura try confronting her about both Jacko's mysterious illness and the threat of the love-interest. Rather than being taken seriously, however, her mother's reinforcement of her immaturity drives Laura to initiate her own conversations and share life stories with the mysterious older student Sorry Carlisle, ostensibly for the sake of support in

battling the lemure. In so doing, she establishes trust and also awakens her own sexual desire and starts to affect her own growth. Throughout all exchanges with the lemure he is never silent, but entices, cajoles, and entraps with words, and is similarly caught out by Laura with Sorry's magical help. Following the power reversal he is not silent until the wind blows away the last traces of his storied existence, pleading and begging her for mercy to affect a swift end. Laura's emotional maturity is thus finally marked by Mahy's character development in Laura's letting go of her anger and will for revenge in granting and affecting the lemure's final demise.

i.) The Sexual, the Magical, and the Conversational

Laura Chant emerges from the shower one average morning in preparation for school after dreaming of being elsewhere in a virtual time-space displacement. Having fixed the chronotope by way of juxtaposition between the exotic location of the Eiffel Tower in Paris with the mundane of a shampoo factory in Paraparaumu, Mahy characterizes Laura instantly as a dreamer desiring of adventure. As she looks in the mirror a similarly dislocated voice speaks inside her mind warning her of some ill-defined impending happening just as she notices her image maturing suddenly:

But her reflection was treacherous. Looking at it, she became more than uneasy; she became frightened. [. . .] the face was not her face for it knew something that she did not. It looked back at her with fears and

pleasures she could not entirely recognize. There was no doubt about it. The future was not only warning her, but enticing her as it did so. (pp.3-4)

Mahy thus begins the story binding the intertwining magic and the feminine-sexual/domestic plot threads with the cord of development and a foreshadowing of Laura's impending and emerging maturity.

Laura does not meet a good looking sensitive new-age vampire, but her own latent extra-natural powers had already identified somewhat of an equivalent in Sorensen 'Sorry' Carlisle, an older student at her school, a prefect, and a male witch with the mild degree of identity conflict that his name and gender might imply. Mahy indicates this in a nicely Bakhtinian symbol referring to the speech-act itself: he stammers, although this tends to be when remembering his troubled past. His genuine interest in Laura turns out to be handy, however, after her young child brother gets infected with a magic life-leaching stamp by an evil, magical lemure - a vengeful spirit from Roman mythology - who provides the source of conflict for the magical plot thread from the second chapter.

The domestic plot thread revolves around the relationship between Laura and her solo mother, complicated not by the sudden presence of the lemure but rather her mother's new boyfriend, introduced in the third chapter. The threads intertwine by Chapter Four when Jacko is clearly ill and her mother quite obviously in love. In a fit of frustration partly also from losing a discussion with her mother's love interest Chris,

Laura sets off into Chapter Five with a sense of resolve to confront Sorry and ask him for help. Given a bit of space for the development of sexual tension and wordplay between the two it takes a couple of chapters before she wins his, his mother's, and grandmother's confidence, but at the same time catches Chris emerging from the female space of the house to collect the milk early in the morning wearing only her mother's raincoat.

In Chapter Eight then the older Sorry provides valuable context, wisdom, and even counseling to Laura as she finds perspective on her mother's sexual needs while also worrying about the ever worsening state of Jacko. In terms of inter-subjectivity, this chapter is absolutely central, for by the end of it Laura has repaid in kind, even if not aware as a younger implied reader may not be that Sorry has — probably, subtly, and implicitly — confessed to being raped as a child (p.115). After this warning of the dangers of entering the adult world of the sexual, psychic balance is found after her own father addresses her in childish terms of endearment, and she makes up her mind to go ahead with the initiation into witch-hood and by extension adulthood.

Newly empowered she confronts the lemure and saves her brother. Armed with her new-won self confidence learned from both her mother and her new mentor witch-friends, further steeled with the experience of dealing successfully in words and actions with both her own boyfriend/love interest and the unfriendly neighbourhood spirit, she finds by the end of the narrative that she has developed more than enough

maturity, inner resolve, and confidence in her ability to hold a civil discussion with her mother and *her* new boyfriend.

Character development thus traces Laura's evolution from a fairly petulant teen-aged girl not accepting of her mother's sexual needs to a young woman engaging in polite conversation with her mother's new boyfriend, while simultaneously marking her emerging confidence in relationship to Sorry in a number of ways but culminating with the mature realization and acceptance that their newly developed relationship might not last forever.

ii.) Laura, Kate and Chris: Transformation, Humour, and Dialogism

Laura's initial challenge is to catch Kate's attention long enough to make herself understood clearly, and thereafter to understand the impossibly complex and opaque world of adult signs. The sense of Laura's competition and Kate's slightly disheveled state of daily life just coping as a single mother is heralded immediately by Mahy in a wonderfully common and comedic example:

"There's no towel, Mum," she called fretfully, but as she spoke she saw a towel in a heap by the door and grabbed it eagerly. "It's all right! I've got one. Oh blast! It's damp."

"First one in gets the driest towel," Kate shouted back from the kitchen. (pp.1-2)

Mahy continues this through another page or two, even following Laura's frightening image alteration in the mirror, where she is completely earnest but her mother replies with a humorous aside:

"Mum! She said. "No fooling! I've had a real warning."

"What do you mean?" Kate's irritated voice struggled up through the mattress. ...

"I looked in the mirror and my reflection went older all of a sudden," Laura said.

"Wait until you're my age and that will happen every morning," Kate declared, her voice still muffled. (p.4)

Laura's efforts to be taken seriously continue in vain, even when out in the roll-started car and with her fresh found fear she confides in Kate:

"Just for a moment I thought you might fall under the wheels and get mashed up."

"You and your warnings!" Kate said affectionately, but almost as if she were speaking to Jacko instead of Laura, who was fourteen and deserved a different voice. (p.7)

The sense of being regarded as immature by her parents is a recurring sign linking the chapters. In Chapter Three for example, even when speaking of adult matters the narrator makes it clear that Laura is aware that she's being spoken to with less than full

trust as an adult. When musing at night about the attractiveness of her mother she offers the compliment in comparison with her father's new wife:

"You're too kind to me," Kate said when Laura mentioned this. "It's best the way it is. We liked too many different things and I thought I'd change him to my way of thinking and he thought he'd change me to his.

...

"However, I must say he loved you, Lolly. Write him a letter, or go and stay with him in the school holidays. I'd miss you, but I wouldn't mind."

"You sound all reasonable, like a children's book on divorce," Laura complained. (pp.25-26)

The narrator focalizes Laura's thoughts and shares her understanding that however messy Kate is with the bathroom towel, she makes an effort with the truth, and actually imparts wisdom and potentially practical advice about adult relationships in this passage. To an adult reader this would appear as an example of a grown-up trying to be sensitive and kind about a delicate subject, but Laura's lack of maturity obscures this subtlety from her and so she returns Kate's effort with a blunt, potentially hurtful complaint. Despite this, a dawning awareness of her own immaturity is revealed on the very next page when she tries to speak the bold truth to Kate about Jacko's magically infected hand:

“There’s a really horrible man ... and he frightened Jacko.” As she spoke she knew her words were reducing the experience to a childish complaint, not revealing its true quality. (p.27)

Mahy completes this with a confirmation in the eyes of the adult reader that Laura really is quite young when immediately following this conversation, despite being aware of the potential danger Jacko faces, she asks her mother if they can play Space Invaders, and then tells her not to forget the fish and chips. But maturity remains her goal. As the narrator focalizes her thoughts about Jacko’s infected hand she scolds herself:

... the stamp was part of him now, more than a tattoo – a sort of parasite picture tunneling its way deeper and deeper, feeding itself as it went.

“Ugh! What a thought!” Laura said. “Grow up! Be mature!” (p.31)

Despite her wishes to be mature, Mahy represents inter-subjectivity in an entertaining example of Laura emulating Kate’s penchant for humour at inappropriate times. When Kate finally returns home late with the fish and chips she also brings with her the last customer from the bookshop in which she works:

The man’s name was Chris Holly.

“Short for Christmas?” Laura asked, but apparently his full name was Christopher. (p.32)

Laura meets more than her match in Chris, however, as his sense of humour is good natured and therefore a sign of maturity which she must learn to emulate. Chris ignores her joke at his expense just as Kate ignores her complaints, and he continues by joking about the name of their babysitter who does have an unusually strange name:

“How could you leave your baby with a baby-sitter called ‘Fangboner’?”

Chris asked. (p.33)

This joke at the expense of someone not actually there, and therefore not hurt by it could be seen as an effort to offer an inclusive joke, a sharing of the joke with Laura. After more discussion between Kate and Chris about books, from which Laura feels excluded, she decides to go to bed:

“Give me a kiss!” Kate commanded.

“It might be setting a risky example,” Laura said, making a joke of a serious thought.

“That’s cheeky,” Kate said, without particular resentment, however.

“And shrewd,” Chris agreed. (p.34)

This brief exchange belies Laura’s feelings of being excluded and also her fairly petulant and truculent nature; her sense of humour betrays a sense of resentment, as if her mother is deliberately excluding her. The value of jokes and a shared sense of humour

is made explicit by Kate in the next chapter, which starts with Laura assuredly not joking:

“You like him, don’t you?” Laura asked accusingly.

“Yes, I do,” Kate answered at once [...] “He looks really mischievous about solemn things, not just big, solemn things like politics which anyone can make fun of, but little ones like – telephone bills. [...] All that stuff about Mrs Fangboner . . . it was a sort of line really. He just wanted an excuse to talk to me. Still, it was a cunning thing to pick up on because it led to sharing jokes and that’s a short-cut to getting to know someone. If your jokes match up, it’s like being Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*. Off you go through the third square by the railway and find yourself in the fourth square in no time.”

“He could have bought a book,” Laura said. “That’s a very attractive thing for a customer to do.” (p.36)

This again then shows Kate making the effort to be sensitive by explaining the nature and development of adult relationships. It is akin to a training prior to initiation much as the Carlisle witches are to offer in parallel soon hereafter. Laura’s trite response shows she is still not ready to grasp the value of her lessons in a mature way. This is further highlighted in Chapter Four when Laura is outraged Kate has had her hair done despite the household budget being already spent for the week. That Laura is privy to such information again shows her liminal state stuck between childhood and adulthood,

as she struggles with the adult reasoning behind Kate's seemingly irresponsible decision-making. In the same scene she refers in a growl to Chris as "that American" and uses Jacko as "a move in a complicated private game where the rules were barely understood" (p.41). This game is emotional blackmail, and sees a return of the competition motif between Kate and Laura, but the competition is not a friendly game to Laura. She grumbles about Kate "flinging money about," but gets a positive response from Kate who promptly changes the subject (p.42). She asks Kate whether she "has to go out with this American?" Kate responds defensively and points out that Chris is Canadian, but replies calmly: "and anyway I'm interested in Chris as a person, not as a nationality" (p.44). This leads up to the first turning point in the plot where Laura finally succeeds in getting a reaction out of Kate, in a chain reaction string of ironic heartfelt exchanges which allow Laura to both feel empowered while also seeing the authentic relationships that exist between her mother and herself, and also her mother and Chris:

"All right! Go then! I expect you'll have such a good time you'll find it easy to forget about Jacko."

Kate looked over the family table with a clear, cold expression.

"Laura, you're not to speak to me like that," she said. "You've got too much good sense to imagine I'd go out if I had known that Jacko was going to be sick [...] You're not to worry – and you're not to be mad at

me for taking one evening off.” She sounded firm and, on the whole, Laura had to admit, reasonable. (p.44)

Following from this episode of Kate’s teaching of the art of being assertive, Kate nevertheless changes her mind about going out, thereby also showing an appreciation for Laura’s perspective. She overhears Chris’s response of genuine disappointment and her mother’s efforts to make it up to Chris and then changes her mind, encouraging Kate to go, but Kate says “No!” in what is described by the narrator from Laura’s perspective as “obstinately.” Actually, Kate is showing her the value of firstly being flexible, but then of sticking to her convictions.

While Kate is changing out of her nicer dress, however, Laura takes the opportunity to call Chris a “stray man.” Instead of reacting in kind though, Mahy has Chris sit down and actually ask Laura about her meanings, allowing her to verbalize her feelings and explain her perspective. Laura shares her truth and sounds reasonable to Chris who offers an exchange of his perspective, and adds a self-revelation of his own insecurity based on the fact that his wife had left him. He speaks with her directly as an adult, but also offering his own sense of vulnerability as something like a peace offering, and then changes the subject to the terrible sherry about which he jokes when Kate re-enters the room:

“You’re not only standing me up, you’re trying to poison me,” Chris Holly said to her, and something in his voice eased Kate’s expression and she smiled with undefined relief. (p.49)

This passage shows not only Chris’s sense of humour, but focalizing as it does Laura’s point of view, her lack of understanding of the dynamics of their relationship is signaled by the use of the words “something in his voice” and “undefined.” That Laura noticed the micro-expressions within Chris’s voice and Kate’s expression is again an indication that she is entering the adult world of new signs and meanings, but she is yet to fully comprehend them. That Mahy has Chris switch topics and make a joke appears like Mahy is teaching this skill of coping to new readers. Upon Chris’s return from swapping the tickets, he brings with him gifts of lemonade and in a reference to his and Kate’s personal in-joke, some “non-symbolic sherry”:

Laura had a little bit in a glass topped up with lemonade.

“It makes it symbolic all over again, but in a different way,” Chris said.

(p.51)

The way in which Chris intends that statement to be taken is not clarified to Laura or to the reader, however, in light of Laura’s impending initiation with the Carlisle witches, the sherry can be taken as symbolic of her initiation into the realm of adulthood, as he takes her perceptions and perspective seriously and she partakes of the shared adult experience of enjoying alcohol.

As with Chris's sitting down to speak directly with Laura effectively being on her level, the sharing of the sherry then is also an action that indicates a degree of equality, even despite her cup also containing lemonade. In a case of false parallel, the next scene sees her pour a glass of water for Jacko, but even though her doing so is to comfort him in his gradual process of possession by the lemure, her words accompanying her actions carry her conviction that she will take responsibility for Jacko by finding and stopping the lemure. This then is the magical turning point to accompany that of the domestic world with her mother and Chris, and the interplay of the two is marked by Mahy by what Bakhtin describes as time and space "taking on flesh":

Only a second or two had passed, but time, worked on by the excited energy of her fear, had altered yet again for her. There were probably small triangular formulas for it which she would have to do in fifth-form physics next year — time divided by fear multiplied by imagination and so on. [...] Time had indeed gone strange and the day before felt as if it stretched back as far as the limits of her memory. (pp.52-53)

At this point then, she makes an adult decision and determines to seek magical help. Having been to see Sorry and his mother and grandmother, she learns about the possibility of the changeover, but upon her return gets the shock of seeing Chris in the raincoat collecting the milk from the gate. When she finally returns to the house after talking through the situation with Sorry, she has another adult conversation with Kate when Chris leaves:

Left alone, Kate and Laura looked at each other cautiously, like people just getting to know one another after a long and transforming separation.

“Even if you just did it for consolation and all that,” Laura said after a moment, “doesn’t sex . . . I mean it only works with enthusiasm too, doesn’t it?”

“I did feel enthusiastic,” Kate said, getting up, “but I’ve dealt with enthusiasm before now. I can manage enthusiasm. It’s sadness I find difficult. Laura – they think Jacko is going to die . . . I know they think it.”

(p.124)

In this way then Mahy shows Laura grasping for insight and seeing how intimacy can be consoling, but also shows her trying to understand Kate’s perspective but not having had the experience is unable to express attraction in terms other than with the weak term “enthusiasm.” Kate accepts her question seriously and immediately puts it in perspective; in terms of emotions and in relation to impending death sex is markedly less important. What follows, however, is Kate’s full admission of worry which descends quickly into guilt and the explanation for Jacko’s birth:

“I didn’t really want another baby, you know. I only had Jacko because I thought your father might leave — he was already having an affair with Julia then and I knew that this time it was serious, so I had Jacko! Still it’s a rotten reason for having a baby, just to tie someone to you, isn’t it?”

[...] in a superstitious way I feel that [Jacko's sickness is] a sort of punishment for past mistakes."

"I don't believe that for a moment," Laura cried. (pp.124-125)

This then is Kate revealing her own vulnerability and sharing a full, previously hidden, and very adult truth, and therein relating to Laura as a full adult. From this point, Laura takes the initiative; she asks to go to the hospital to see Jacko, she phones and agrees to the changeover, and she goes through with the magical initiation. As a sign to herself and others of her acceptance of the challenge of taking on an adult responsibility, she helps herself to her mother's makeup:

Laura couldn't resist using eye-liner and mascara and thought she looked like the heroine of some foreign film.

Later, at the hospital, staring at Jacko, all this seemed childish. He had become part of the hospital's machinery. (p.126)

By marking Laura's realization of the childish nature of dressing up like an adult at such an inappropriate time, these three efficient lines do much to develop the plot and character description. Firstly, they show the rapidly increasing rate of her developing maturity as Laura learns to reflect on her own subjectivity and actions at an increasing rate. Stating that Jacko "had become ... machinery" is not a mere simile, but rather an even stronger metaphor. The implication is that it was Laura who thought it, however, the paragraph break and the restart on a new line indicating the time and location

difference also serve to distance the implied reader from the text, offering the opportunity to pause and check whether this mature reflection is focalized by Laura, or by the narrator. The middle sentence above does not read "... all this seemed childish to Laura." This has the effect of bringing the implied reader back to the narrator's third person omniscient perspective, allowing the actual young reader practice at taking a more objective perspective, a more mature reading strategy, and in terms of points of identity and identifying too closely with the central character, a more rational approach to dealing with an otherwise fairly traumatic situation.

This all goes to draw a picture of a developing identity subject to the impressions and influences gained from those around her. Laura's subjectivity develops apace, as she learns to think, speak, and act for herself in relation to her mother, and to interact in a mature fashion with Chris. Probably the clearest example of Laura's maturing in subject position, however, is the contrast between her dialogic opposition to the idea of her mother Kate's sexual attraction at the start of the story where she addresses her "accusingly," and "in a cruel voice" of wanting to go out on a date (p.44), and her later openness to the suggestion of Kate and Chris getting married (p.210).

iii.) Laura, the Lemure, and the Carlisle Witches:

Dialogic Magic and the Move to Adulthood

In this study of a cluster of character relationships and the intersubjectivity that Laura shares therein, my main focus is on her dialogic relationships with Sorry, and then as

her relationship and trust with him grows, her challenge to the lemure continues as the main site of dialogic discourse and conflict. Laura in relation to Sorry seems like a different person in relation to Kate, as Kate continues to notice Laura only when confronted directly. In a similarly confrontational approach Laura walks to Sorry's home and enters his bedroom and finds he, on the other hand, is interested in both talking with and looking at her immediately, and all too soon attempts to touch her too.

In the early scene of Kate and Laura's first real conflict over Chris (p.44), Kate replies firmly and evenly, setting an example of assertiveness which Laura later emulates in her discussion with Sorry about the nude poster with her own photo pinned to it (p.96) which he later takes down on her behalf. In the meantime, at the very start of Chapter Eleven, significantly entitled "Change for Ever," Sorry tries to convince her that Kate's dating Chris, even when Jacko is ill, is actually a positive thing. In an example of a dialogic discussion, they share different perspectives, interrupted only by the narrator's focalization of Laura's gaze at Sorry's shoulders:

"You'll forget it," said Sorry, trying again. "Forget it now."

"I won't!" Laura said, with sullen determination. "I'll never forget it."

"Well no, perhaps not totally forget it." Sorry grew increasingly perplexed and irritated. "You'll just stop thinking about it. Other things will happen and you'll start thinking about them instead, so you might as well stop thinking about it now." He took off his jacket as he spoke, so

that the sun fell on his back and shoulders. They came around a bend in the path and looked into a bay (p.111).

In this way then Mahy characterizes Laura as still immature enough to speak in sulky sullen determination, and yet mature enough to notice the sun highlighting Sorry's male form. She also makes Sorry out to be immature enough to get irritated, but sensitive and genuine enough to persist in trying to communicate and explain the process of growing up and using non-specified distractions to aid in getting over childish hurts. Together, they travel and turn the literal and metaphorical corner of maturity and of nature.

Set against the dilemma of saving her younger brother from the life-force leeching power of the lemure's evil stamp, Laura must also decide to engage with Sorry's mother and grandmother in order to gain the powers necessary to confront Carmody Braque to break the power of his magic stamp on Laura's young brother's hand. The decision is effected just over half way through the book, which starts with Laura putting on makeup and her best sundress "in case she saw Sorry later" after visiting the hospital to check with the doctor about young Jacko's state (p.126).

Upon the doctor's confirmation that there is nothing more that can be done, Laura marches to the nearest phone and agrees to the initiation into witchcraft. This demonstrates her emerging confidence in her own agency. To underline the connection of her maturing identity with the natural, and sexual development, Winter,

the head witch, instructs her not to eat anything all day, and then asks Laura if she is still a virgin. To the implied adult reader coming as this does after Sorry's subtle story probably admitting to being raped, the context of natural versus unnatural and the understanding of notions of corrupt desire and adult/sexual relationships is placed in a new light. Laura's decision to go ahead with the initiation into witchcraft and the adult world is thus weighted with very real risk. Her sundress, makeup, and the mention of virginity foreshadow the approaching initiation to sexual adulthood by highlighting the relative innocence of her natural identity.

In the final part of Chapter Eight Laura is confronted by her estranged father who has come to the hospital to see Jacko with his new "second wife, pretty Julia, quite noticeably pregnant" (p.130). Mahy ends the chapter on this view from Laura's perspective, and yet describes no opinion, feeling, impression or judgment until the next chapter, other than Laura's reaction upon seeing her father again, which was of not recognizing him for an instant despite his having spoken what is obviously an affectionate term of endearment, calling her what to an earnest teen-ager may appear to be a patronizing term of endearment for a young child: his "woolly baa-lamb," and then telling her she has "grown up." This then reflects her new state of identity, as she has already left behind the childish and started a move toward the realm of the adult in earnest.

That Mahy excludes any further comment on Laura's father again implies that her reaction was not worth describing. Again, this sudden lack of focalization or any

description leaves the implied reader a space to wonder what Laura's reaction should or could be as a child or an adult, and in the process the reader is left the space to actively interpret the best course of action to take, in order to achieve a similarly active subject position as Laura develops apace.

In what is an example of focalization shifting between the narrator and Laura as the focalizing character, in the first section of Chapter Eight, Sorry introduces his life story to Laura as she watches and listens and interprets his micro-expressions just as she reads his, representing their growing natural trust in, and fascination with each other:

They disturbed a heron sitting on a partially submerged log, and it rose and flew past them [...] Laura wished she could fly off alongside it, and then dissolve into the honey-coloured air.

“No chance!” said Sorry beside her, reading her as though by some uncanny skill of his own” (p.112).

Just as the bird represents Sorry's affinity with nature, he is also a site of natural attraction for Laura. This section of a few pages of Laura and Sorry's intense discussion serves to show the inter-subjective nature of their relationship developing depth and trust through dialogue, with the focalization moving between the perspectives voiced by all three subject positions so as to allow a younger implied reader to move between points of identification with each.

Once Laura has survived the changeover she proceeds posthaste to confront her dialogic magic nemesis, the lecherous lemure Carmody Braque. His politeness immediately tells a kind of story-lie of false concern as he begs forgiveness for mistaking her and Sorry for Jehovah's Witnesses, in a parallel foreshadowing of his impending demise and earnest entreaties after genuinely mistaking the pair's intentions. Having been informed of the possibility of a magical plea-bargain though, his desire is aroused, his actions speak more honestly than his words, and Laura's newly enhanced magical sensitivity gives her insight into his body language:

She looked up into his eyes and saw there, not the curious wolf, not the tiger that Sorry sometimes suggested, but something so insatiable that her recognition of it caused the sunlight to falter and the roses, the neat lawn and the expensive house to undergo a transformation. [. . .] On this occasion it was her lot to see it almost pure in the round, bird eyes, in the angle of his head, mirroring the more innocent, but none the less terrible, attitude of a hawk about to tear a live mouse in two, and all she had to combat it was an old ritual of possession which her hard-won new nature enabled her to use. (pp.161-162)

The narrator's focalizing of her noting his natural but deadly innocence may well be what helps Laura to decide to spare him an agonizing life and grant him a quick death in the final passages of the narrative. Alternatively, it may well be her projection of her own sense of innocence onto what is supposedly just a very corrupt old male spirit.

A degree of the carnivalesque is achieved with Laura's dressing up in a jacket and wearing dark sunglasses, apparently so that Carmody Braque cannot discern her new nature from seeing her eyes. It also is a repetition of her desire to appear like a mature glamorous movie star — a sex symbol — from the earlier chapter when she put on make-up. The carnivalesque power switch is achieved when she initiates the switch by secretly adopting his sociolect: by telling a story-lie convincingly enough to lure him into letting his sense of desire for her drop his guard, and then invite her to cross the liminal threshold separating her from him. Just as he offered a secretly magical stamp to Jacko, Laura offers her secretly magical self to him. They negotiate to an impasse in their dialogic negotiations over her body and life spirit:

“Show yourself!” But Laura did not move.

“Only for Jacko,” she repeated, pushing her hands into her pockets and shrugging her shoulders as if she were drawing herself in, making herself a smaller target for his darting gaze to strike.

“You are in no position to bargain,” said Carmody Braque, looking watchfully at Sorry. (p.165)

This then is Laura's lesson well learned from Kate about being resolute in the face of a direct challenge. It stands her in good stead as she stands up to the increasingly powerful Carmody Braque and entices his desire with her own mortal lively self, with her magic stamp hidden deep in her pocket and her secret plan cloaked only by Sorry's magic, the jacket and the dark sunglasses. With regard to sociolect and the

transference of speech-act, the power inversion is between Carmody Braque and Jacko himself. In Chapter Two Jacko's naturally childish enthusiasm for stamps is clear:

“Stamp please!” he shouted, and Mrs Thompson put a Mickey Mouse stamp on the back of his hand.

“Two hands, please!” he begged for he knew there was a Donald Duck stamp hidden at the librarian's elbow (p.18).

In terms of the Bakhtinian speech-act and intersubjectivity then, upon Carmody Braque's being stamped with Laura's powerful magic stamp, he reverts from the lecherous, carnal desire-driven lemming to a childish state of begging even beyond that of Jacko's:

An energy as strong and sweet as honey flowed into her, and Carmody Braque fell on his knees, just as she had once done by Jacko's bed [. . .]

“Please . . .” he cried, “my dear, young lady . . . I'm pleading with you! Is that what you want? I'll let the little brother go, of course. I'll find someone else. I didn't understand. Honour among thieves . . .” He whined and wriggled closer to her, as if he might try to touch her.

In this way then, Bakhtinian analysis including study of the sociolect and individual speech-act as it is traded in dialogic conversation provides insight into the way Mahy conceives of the inter-subjective relationships through which Laura develops her own newfound sense of maturity.

Chapter Three – *The Tricksters*: Rewriting the Inter-subjective Self

Ariadne “Harry” Hamilton, aged seventeen, is the middle child of approximately five, including brother Charlie, the oldest sibling, Christobel the antagonist, twenty years old and the oldest sister Serena, first after Harry; and the younger Benny, who, like Harry, wears “clever-looking glasses.” The extended family includes father Jack, mother Naomi, and, as it finally turns out, Christobel’s friend Emma and her daughter Tibby.

The Christmas holiday gathering also includes Charlie’s friend and sailing partner Robert, sometime suitor of the changeable Christobel. Into this mélange of family dynamics then arrive the three peculiar brothers, all slightly different in appearance and personality, but with strangely matching scars on their foreheads: Ovid the “head” and leader, Hadfield the brutish bully and instinctive one, and Felix the quiet sensitive “heart” type, together appear and profess an historic interest in the old holiday home, and being a time and place of holiday celebration they are welcomed amidst the noise and collection of celebratory revelers.

The first words spoken in *The Tricksters* are those in Harry’s own memory from many Christmases ago: “Something is waiting!” The location of the words foretell the gothic location of Harry’s life: in her imagination, remembering the past, and imagining the future, not quite sharing the present with the other people in the family car as it arrives at the secluded old holiday home.

The second words are from her father Jack to the visitor from overseas, given pride of place in the other front seat: "It's haunted, of course!" (p.3) Jack remarks this comment in jest, but proudly, as if he is playing at being serious. It turns out to be another action forewarning the reader of the characters' past involvement in the current state of the narrative, Jack being called the more juvenile, childish, or female name "Jackie" by the youngest of the three sisters and being teased for some dim memory of involvement in "the wife-swapping days" (p.10), implying that some history has occurred to alter the balance of respect in such an intriguing way.

In terms of inter-subjectivity and sociolect, the English visitor learns the Maori word for house, and that the children have their own language of animal noise words, and that the children have a "private ceremony" where they invoke the spirit of the long dead former occupant of the house Teddy Carnival. Such verbal games of inclusion and exclusion and tempting fate are continued when Harry entertains Serena with fanciful notions of a book that writes the future (p.23).

Fate, it turns out, had already been tempted, and her parents still have dialogic squabbles about domestic things like the best way to deal with burnt biscuits: Christobel criticizes Naomi for the imperfection and Jack does not support her against her disrespectful daughter. The narrator is equally unreliable, reporting only that Tibby's father was "known to be" Sam, not that it was actually Sam, "vanished forever" (p.28) and thus leaving the unstated question open. Not long after the brothers' arrival relationships start getting more strained, and Hadfield proves not merely unreliable

but actually treacherous as he poses as Felix in the dark and sexually assaults Harry on the darkened secluded beach, heralding more clearly and loudly the question of identity confusion.

As the summer wears through the season of celebration the brothers interrupt the carnivalesque family beach party, Felix and Harry get become involved, Christobel breaks up with Rob and becomes infatuated with the older British visitor Anthony, and Emma and Rob also form a couple. Upon returning indoors from a meeting with Felix and being caught in the rain, Harry catches Christobel laughing at while reading from her secret novel. Harry insults her in return, calling her stupid for not knowing the family secret which she thereafter shares, causing the dramatic climax and also allowing for resolution within the denouement, particularly between Christobel and Harry who finally share meaningful conversation rather than meaningless banter about their own appearances.

i.) Harry, Herself, and her Family: Introspection versus Intersubjectivity

After the two car-loads of family and friends arrive, unpack, and note the stocked bookshelf in the sitting room and point out the pictures of the original inhabitants, they swim and relatively little open dialogue takes place as people spread out around the house, beach, and bay, chatting occasionally. Nevertheless Harry is “sick of feeling closed in by people, above and below, of being good old Harry, not wonderful Ariadne,

for that was her real name” (p.22). The narrator focalizes Harry’s thoughts in this way, via much free indirect speech, throughout the narrative.

Bored and chatting with Serena, she tells her vastly imaginative stories for the sake of her entertainment and wins her respect but unwittingly starts to cast a spell, perhaps over herself more than rest of the beach-side lodgers. She meets the three strange brothers on the beach, which Lovell-Smith (2007) labels clearly as a site of the gothic specific to Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

Harry tests the boundaries of living in an imaginary world of what amounts to her own realm of magical realism, where the walls between what is imagined and what is “real” are blurred. As distinct from Ovid or Hadfield, her character’s “real” opposite or foil is her mother, Naomi, an historian, and who therefore works with what are typically taken to be facts but are really stories of the past; she tries to live in the practical world of family meals, dishes, and dealing directly with family dramas when necessary.

With the first appearance of the Carnival brothers on the public beach while Ovid wears a white toweling beach-coat as barely distinct from Anthony’s blue, Harry arrives back on shore in her blue canoe. She had apparently paddled around two islands while also overhearing the brief discussions between Anthony and Emma, and then Anthony and Christobel and Robert, all back on the beach. This then is the first instance of an apparent physical distancing of Harry-as-potential-narrator from the other characters as source of dialogue. (p.77)

Having taken the blue canoe out towards the islands, Harry looks back at the “doll’s-house beach” where other characters are talking (p.74). The narrator soon adds: “From the beach Emma and Anthony saw Harry, the Robin Crusoe of a doll’s house island.” This one sentence in and of itself compresses meaning into a tight package, including as it does the intertextuality of reference to Robin Crusoe, with its implications of being deserted, lost, and alone on an island far removed from civil society, and also, with its implications of reinvention of that society, and the writing of story itself. The inclusion of the repeated reference to a doll’s house adds to both the mental image created in terms of size-depth perception, but also reinforces the idea of Harry and the other characters being toys moved around on a tiny stage in the play-space of the imagination. Furthermore, this telescoping of perspective I take as a Mahyesque hint to the wary writerly reader that Harry’s unnatural ability to overhear conversations from afar is really a result of her over-active writerly imagination.

The idea of time and space seems again compressed with Harry’s sudden return at the end of the two pages’ worth of brief but important conversations (p.78). These conversations place Anthony at the center of desire of all the young women on and looking at the beach, immediately before the re-arrival of the Carnival brothers, closely followed by Harry herself. At a time and place where she feels otherwise inadequate alongside her uber-confident flirty elder sister, and Emma — whom Anthony watches “walk out up to her knees in the green water and then fall forward into a long dive. Her arms flashed as she swam” (pp.76/77) — the “melting” of time and distance allow

Mahy to suddenly re-inject Harry — and/or her projected self through the Carnival brothers — into the social milieu on the beach, indicating Harry’s sudden interest, or projection of her own desire to be so involved.

Another such instance of what I term a “Mahy time-melt” occurs as Harry goes to sleep weeping after encountering Hadfield on the beach. The narrator does not describe her sleeping, and so she does not awake from sleep, but rather starts overhearing Ovid and Hadfield talking the next morning as they enter the house. Christobel also arises, uncharacteristically up before Harry who has either skipped her habitual morning run, or has completed her wash as is indicated by the narrator describing her combing her damp hair before descending to confront Hadfield with his black eye.

The omission of mention of Harry’s washing is possibly a common narratorial device; however, the way it rides on into the narrative in the form of piggy-backing on a time-melt is even more subtle. There is no seam in Harry’s thoughts to indicate that she slept the night before:

Yet then she wept a few tears quite unexpectedly as she went to sleep and wondered why she was feeling so sad. There was a poem she had once read about Leda assailed by the god Zeus in the form of a swan. Leda had been “caught up and mastered by the brute blood of the air.”

Crossing out her story, Harry might be saying goodbye to her chance to be Leda all over again.

As she turned this thought over and over, struggling to patch a

meaning out of it, she heard the door open.

“No one!” said Ovid’s voice (pp.106/107).

Is this Mahy’s hinting that the whole text, including that of the narrator, is the product of a sleeping, dreaming character from this point onward? Either way, this omission calls into question the reliability of the narrator again, while also adding an uncanny dimension to Harry’s occupation of the gothic space in the attic and her morning ritual descent. There is a large lack of consistency as to what Harry can hear at some times and what she cannot at others.

In the one episode more akin to a time-slip, albeit equally strangely localized, Harry descends from her loft to discover the hallway has suffered a ghostly redecorating job. Although the overbearingly direct Hadfield, in the confrontation episode with Naomi and the family soon after, describes it as “Time travel, almost” (p.166), actually, the description of mildew and faded flowers of the hallway is an extension of the gothic motif from the attic — where, for example Frankenstein had his secret laboratory in the top of his house, or Lord Byron’s Manfred who practiced dark magic in a tower — to the public through-space of a corridor. Mahy here indicates that the characters need to move together through history, or rather, to deal collectively with the shared history, to resolve the story as represented by the book lying open and next to the roses, in order for the narrative to achieve a conclusion akin to more freshly cut, sweeter-smelling roses.

The theme of togetherness or inter-subjectivity of the sexual nature of the metanarrative is marked by Harry, the isolate, finding union with an “other,” and also by the rest of the family finally being completely honest about the origins of baby Tibby. Mahy thus balances the story of the pursuit and gaining of carnal knowledge, or the dual aspects of risk of sexual development; it can bring liberation (Teddy Carnival) and empowerment (Harry), and it can also produce unwanted pregnancies, complications, and dramatic family Christmases, humiliation to those who act unwisely on their imaginations (Jack and Emma), and the eventual public exposing of secret stories and histories, however odious the process (Jack, Emma, and Harry).

The dual nature of this story of benefit versus risk is indicated in the haunted hall-way scene by the narrator’s description of Harry being trapped between the two doorways:

“Harry clasped her hands together; something moved at the far end of the hall. Her throat tightened, but it was only her reflection moving unexpectedly in an old mirror, reflecting the hall and the door of coloured glass and the morning beyond it. She stood between the real door and the reflected one, held in the yellowing mirror like a fly in amber. The book on the table filled her with horror.” (p.147)

In other words, for the story to resolve satisfactorily Harry has to choose between moving towards the false doorway of the mirror with her own haunting reflection, or the light of a new day and the freedom of social engagement in the world beyond the front door’s coloured glass.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Harry's own novel plays an important role in the intersubjectivity of *The Tricksters*. According to Mahy and Bakhtin alike, a developing identity is particularly subject to influence of novels as well as the examples of other people's lives. The image of a story being written by a character plays an important role in this novel as in others by Mahy. In the start of the story Harry promises to write a magical book capable of making "something happen in the outside world by the power of its stories" (p.24). Given her sense of division, with "the homely, familiar world behaving in a normal way on one side, and on the other a prospect of madness" (p.26), and her confession "It's happened at last... I've gone mad from imagining things" (p.28), and "She took the book out and looked at it, thinking it might be the source of her madness" (p.40), through to the end point where she burns her novel on the beach, Harry's novel focuses on the dramatic and romantic, and serves to highlight and emphasize the same in her own life. It forms an interpretive framework by which she sees the world around her, much as Mahy suggests in her own non-fiction happens in the realm of life beyond the page. The book then, is the site and the source of her split consciousness, dreaming her own imaginary potential love-story boyfriends into the uncomfortable coexistence amongst the already crowded family space.

The idea of the madness of the protagonist/narrator is given further weight later on when the narrator does not describe Harry's feelings for her written hero who, it is revealed, is not the Prince Valery, nor the winged "enemy-lover" Belen, but a third character named "Conrad." Immediately following this revelation, Harry descends from

her attic and goes out into the (dark) night whereupon she meets Hadfield posing as Felix; he invites her to “give in to darkness.” This is another Mahyesque nod to the adult writerly reader aware of Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*, with its description of the dangers of power at the price of sanity and isolation. Thus the influence of texts on intersubjectivity, or intertextuality, is another strongly recurrent trope in *The Tricksters*, as Pohl (2010) and Proffitt (2011) have both recently shown in this and others of Mahy’s works. Predominant amongst these in *The Tricksters* with reference to the theme of sexual attraction is Charlie teasing Robert about developing his relationship with Emma, when he quotes the title of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to Robert the morning they are overheard by Harry before they go sailing (p.145)

Focalization within *The Tricksters* is performed largely by a third person narrator of limited omniscience who mostly focalizes Harry’s subject position in the first half of the narrative in a style similar to a camera-eye perspective, recounting conversations supposedly overheard by her as spoken between other characters. As the narrator continues to follow Harry’s perspective, due to the questionable stability of her mental health, the narrator becomes more obviously and necessarily unreliable. She overhears conversations from her place in the ‘head’ of the house, up in the attic, or, from next to or nearby other characters. The question then becomes whether she is wholly imagining the dialogue between characters when she is eventually clearly too far away to hear them, and invents their dialogue to fit the story in her imagination, as is

necessary to presume especially for the relatively strange events of the second half of the narrative.

There are only two times when the narrator, “speaking” from Harry’s perspective, makes clear that she could not clearly make out the words of other characters. The first is immediately after her having been sexually assaulted by Hadfield posing as Felix on the beach at night. Having deleted the scene in her own book corresponding to the female antagonist having choice “taken away from her” Harry then “wept a few tears quite unexpectedly as she went to sleep and wondered why she was feeling so sad.” (p.106) This event marks her mental state; the point here being not that she should not be feeling sorry for herself after any form of assault, but that it should be unexpected and lead to her wondering why she was feeling so sad seems irrational. She then overhears Hadfield and Ovid talking, but, it is not clear if she has already gone to sleep and woken in the morning (which is most likely), or if she is not asleep yet, or, equally likely, she is lost somewhere between dreaming and imagining. What is made clear is that she cannot make out their words completely:

Hadfield then said something in a low voice, which Harry could not hear.

“Remember . . . ?” Ovid’s lighter voice was easier to hear than Hadfield’s.

“Of course I remember,” Hadfield replied. “We’ve got the same memories.” (p.107)

This shows the narrator accessing Harry's consciousness in an example of free indirect thought in a rare example of tracing her perspective exactly, although the reliability is, paradoxically, compromised by her likely being asleep.

The first chapter of Part II is entitled *Magical Changes*, and it begins with Harry overhearing Charlie comforting and encouraging Robert because of Christobel's breaking up with him:

She knew they were standing on the edge of the verandah, assessing the wind and weather, eating doorstep sandwiches for breakfast.

Robert's words were inaudible through his sandwich.

"Just think of the sailing! Forget the rest!" Charlie said. [...] Robert said something inaudible. (p.144)

These are the two examples of indirect speech demonstrating Harry is at times unable to hear other characters' words. Following this scene many others follow where Harry is either present but too far away, or simply no-where in the vicinity to allow her overhearing and therefore being the source of indirect narration. Therefore, either all following conversations are purely the result of her wild and fantastical imagination, or, the narrator is dependable and accurate, and the fantastical events do take place as described.

ii.) Sites of Conflict: The Dialogic Family

Other characters fill in the spectrum of real versus imagined, including Harry's father Jack, who is imagined by her simple, exuberant sister Christobel to simply be handsome and wonderful, despite being referred to by younger, more innocent sister Serena as "Dad, I mean Jack" (p.61), in a foreboding hint at some fairly recent change in the entire structure of family relationships. This then is the crux of the difference in perception between what Harry's privileged position as "a writer" allowed her to see (or rather hear by eavesdropping on her parents), and what Christobel imagines. Thus Jack's indiscretion coupled with Christobel's blissful ignorance provides a source of power in the form of secret knowledge for Harry.

A good example of Mahy both characterizing the three more active older members of the family and foreshadowing the conflict through a single page of dialogue is the burnt biscuits conversation:

"Oh Ma! What's in this tin? Don't tell me you've been burning things again."

"Only baking!" said Naomi, sounding rather ashamed.

"They're the same thing with you. You burn things so often it's pagan!" exclaimed Christobel. 'Buy biscuits! *Buy* them! You can afford to.'

"I feel guilty doing that," Naomi protested vaguely. "You know, Mother

goes out to work, family life breaks down.”

“Burning biscuits won’t stop any breakdown in family life,” Jack declared. “Honestly, Naomi — here’s a great one-way river roaring down at you, and you try to charm it away by holding out a biscuit to it.”

“Better than you, though,” Naomi retorted, much less vaguely. “You just lie down and let the river run over you, then swirl off, smugly saying, ‘Disaster! Just as I predicted!’ Jack there is a definite difference between defeat and maturity, you know.” (p.42)

In this way Christobel often cheerfully accuses and insults everyone, even her own mother; Naomi sounds ashamed to Christobel and protests the suggestion of abandoning her attempts at being a model mother, and yet offers retort to Jack’s declarations and suggestions of her ineffectiveness, and points out his avoidance of taking any responsibility. He has abandoned any pretence at fulfilling his gender role as a responsible father, or even just as a parent.

Naomi’s desperate attempts to hold the family together are returned to at the end of the narrative, where she makes excuses for Jack and shows herself to be reduced to the inept despite her efforts to be complicit in trickery against the truth, as she adds: “I know, I just *know* that there’s some trick in all this, and if only I can get the hang of it our lives will end up better for it all, richer and stronger. If only I could be certain what the trick is. But I’m reduced to crossing my fingers” (p. 253). She is therefore the most rounded, complex character, responding as necessary to situations and other

characters from the center of the family, and yet offering little time to Harry:

“Someday I’ll sit down and have a real talk with you, Harry, I promise I will” (p.256).

That Christobel is an antagonist within the family is reinforced in the denouement, when, despite having shared the dreadful family secret and thoroughly ruined Christmas for everyone, Christobel remains the center of her mother’s attention, even retreating to the city together until new year’s eve. She is not a flat character though, as she effectively teaches Harry by example of how to dress up, directly address members of the opposite sex, and fully use her powers of agency within the family and circles of friends. Furthermore, also in the denouement, she approaches Harry and shows a subtlety of thought about family dynamics and relationships that surprises Harry with its depth:

“It’s a trick — getting the right thought to concentrate on,” Harry said, and Christobel nodded and frowned.

“It’s trick, not truth.” She sighed. “But the real trick is to use the tricks, but never forget the truth. You do what works. ...” (p.258)

In this way Mahy continues to resist any temptation to oversimplify characters and situations, but rather continues to create positive models of intersubjectivity via dialogue between the protagonist and antagonist, and shows the strength and resilience of Harry’s natural role-models, her mother and elder sister. They are reframed in the end as the real tricksters, destabilizing Harry’s expectations as much as

the Carnival brothers and her revealing of the family secret, in their supposed ruining of the attempt at an idyllic Christmas vacation. The inter-subjectivity of the three is, in a Bakhtinian sense, expressed by Mahy's use of the word "trick" connecting the three female characters as they continue to together deal with the intricacies and challenges of family relationships.

Or such is the interpretation of this real adult reader. It would be interesting to know how readers of the targeted age of about 15 years-of-age interpret this whole text, and this point of development in the narrative, and, what Mahy intended the implied reader to make of this all.

One of the first main strange sequences comes as Harry has walked up the hill with Felix, and the rest of the family is negotiating the strange circumstance of the reconditioned hallway with Ovid and Hadfield. Having just talked Naomi down, the two other Carnivals converse:

"Tolerance triumphs!" proclaimed Ovid, while Naomi's mouth hung open uncertainly.

"Either that or self-preservation," said Hadfield quietly, nodding at Naomi, apparently agreeing with something before she said it. (p.168)

Use of the word "apparently" here is a rhetorical device to invite the implied reader to wonder who was doing the observing and who is suggesting the interpretation. Either way, the omniscient narrator has moved well away from Harry's perspective, and so

the narration stems either from her increasingly far-fetched imagination or from an omniscient narrator now detached from her consciousness and relating events independently, but not actually taking anyone else's subject position. The narrator does not share the thoughts of other characters in this scene as it did Harry's previously, but remains relatively aloof and unfixed, thereby indicating the relatively fluid state of her own identity as she tests various subject positions against her three men of the sea.

iii.) Harry and the Visitors

While lonely Harry tests the boundaries of her imagination by dreaming three imaginary handsome ghostly friends into her reality, her father and elder sister's best friends had also, previously, been testing boundaries with each other. Jack and Emma had previously imagined a sexual encounter and then found that this had also led them to an altered reality, with the eventual production of the baby Tibby as proof to all concerned. In a family where the supposed patriarch has abdicated moral responsibility and side-stepped leadership, his agency is thereafter reduced mostly to reading stories to the children, and being the butt of jokes about wife-swapping from Christabel, thus doubly barbed due to the inadvertent nature of their proximity to the truth of his indiscretion with her own best friend. (p.45)

Similarly, the presence of the fairly mysterious stranger Anthony Hesketh, with his dark glasses and tendency to blush dramatically when confronted by Christobel as to his

past, presents fertile grounds for Harry's imagination. At first it seems as if his character is imagined divided into the three carnival brothers by Harry, a point to which I shall return. Arriving as they apparently also just have, from England, and also strangely resembling the old photograph of Teddy Carnival, the three extra-mysterious brothers are presented as three aspects of a single personality:

But we came to exist all split up in Teddy. ... My father could encourage Ovid and countenance Hadfield, but he couldn't stand it when I showed. ... it's my job to make allowances and show compassion and inform them, but, with me so weak, they could scarcely support their own existences. (pp.222/223)

This section is soon reinforced when Felix describes the brothers again as "... head, heart and that instinct." (p.224) The use of relatively formal, archaic words such as "countenance," and phrasing such as "scarcely support their own existences" links this character not to Anthony, but rather links Felix as Harry's hero to Lady Jessica's hero Prince Valery in her own secretly written unfinished novel:

"How beautiful the Lady Jessica looks," said a friend of his...

"Beautiful and happy?" said Valery. "That is much too ostentatious.

She certainly overdoes things."

But Felix-as-heart shows concern and interest in Harry in a genuine, well-rounded character way, by not merely being interested in her sexually, but by sharing advice

about interaction within her family. The heart of the imagined Teddy/Anthony set, Felix, reveals to Harry another set of three characters including herself and her two sisters:

“There’s Christobel on ahead of you, and Serena coming up behind, trying to get your attention, and you worrying too much about Christobel to notice Serena. ... She tries to be on your side. ... She’s got one beautiful, powerful sister and one mysterious, silent one. She wants the best of both” (p.194).

He here acts as a catalyst, pointing the way to greater interaction particularly with Harry’s younger sister, and is thus a trickster character in this benign way relative to Ovid, the conjuror and threatening head of the group and previously the head thinker or spokesperson for the three. Hadfield is left to represent instinct, sexual and otherwise, and be the relatively flat character.

That the three tricksters are at least symbolically Harry’s displaced and split self projected is indicated by Mahy in Felix’s sudden springing of leaks at the climax of the story, for, having sprung from Harry’s imagination while in the water, the three “more than brothers” are made not of blood, but sea water, and, upon her use of her powerful secret to hurt Christobel and her family, she effectively breaks her own heart, or that of Felix, or both, as represented by the narrator describing Felix suddenly starting to dissolve into thin air:

Harry wondered savagely if [Felix] had lured her out of the house so that Hadfield could steal her book and Ovid could use it to strike at her family. As she thought this, she actually spoke her thought aloud, and though her voice was lost among other voices, Felix heard it and now, as if he had been suddenly drenched, his face shone and trickled with a thousand springs of slick dew that sprang out of him. He began to flow like a man brought out of the sea. (pp.232, 233)

“Behold how mind and instinct become the servants of the heart,” he announced like a showman. “I am the true Carnival magician. Hey presto!” and he crumpled like a jigsaw-puzzle man falling apart. His disintegration instantly infected his brothers. They dissolved, they vanished (p.234)

The narrator then describes Christobel as being “saturated” with distress and bewilderment, making a psychic/ physical link between the three brothers and the three sisters. More importantly in a Bakhtinian context, however, is the speech style of Felix here, who continues to use a flowery, formal Victorian theatrical dialect, reflecting the characters within Harry’s own manuscript, so further reinforcing their agency on her behalf, or rather, her projection of herself. Having related to her intellectually (Ovid), instinctively (Hadfield), and in a heart-felt way (Felix), and then finally discharged the fateful, powerful secret, Harry has no further use for them, and so they disappear with a verbal flourish as dramatically as they seemed to exist.

iv.) The Author, Focalization, and Dialogism

As mentioned in the introduction with reference to Mahy's non-fiction, Mahy describes herself in terms of what Barthes refers to as a writerly writer; she writes for herself as a reader of the type of text that she wants to read. She likes to read and write books with both self-conscious references and complicated clues as to meaning, interpretation, and, also, ambiguity of gender in the characters. That the three Carnival brothers are an externalization of Harry's sexual attraction towards Anthony is indicated by Mahy in the name of her hero, Prince Valery, a predominantly female name just as Harry is a male name for a female character. Anthony displays similarities with Ovid in appearance, anachronistic and gender-ambiguous dress in wearing a beach-coat (pp.55/78), and more direct speech style.

Interestingly, it is immediately following this incident that Harry descends from her attic again to find the wallpaper in the hall has changed, reverting to the green floral design of the house's original days about 90 years ago. Despite the obvious colour difference, this may well be Mahy making an allusion to *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), with its emphasis on the recurring floral pattern, the location in a holiday home far from town, and on Harry's feelings of being trapped (between the real door and the doorway of the "yellowing mirror" while feeling 'like a fly in amber" (p.147). Further, she is a female protagonist of questionable and potentially deteriorating mental stability and fluctuating identity living in an attic.

The major difference between the two narratives is the outcome of the protagonists. But seen another way, *The Tricksters* is more likely Mahy's incorporating of Gilman's personal story, told for young adults. Gilman somewhat famously wrote her short story in an effort to refute her physician's prescription for depression by isolation and abstaining from writing and any other form of stimulation. Harry deals with her depression rather by simply crossing out the parts of her story she does not like, by avoiding the unattractive, horrible book on the table in the hall haunted by the house's memories, and also by avoiding the momentary temptation to regress to childhood by running to her parents when scared but instead by then stepping beyond the verandah to go meet Felix again and continue "their dangerous companionship" (pp.148-152). In other words, Mahy is here again offering a pattern of positive intersubjectivity, describing a protagonist overcoming a challenge by turning outwards and engaging with the other, rather than by falling victim to internalized fears and remaining in an effectively isolated, infantile state. In terms of a Bakhtinian discourse comparing the two texts then, despite what is likely to be a similar end-goal of the authors, Mahy's *The Tricksters* diverges from Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, offering dialogism, or a discourse between a diversity of subject positions within its own narrative and between its own and other stories, in this case concluding with a happy ending for the protagonist, rather than creating a text in monologic agreement with Gilman's main character's relatively unhappy end state.

Within the realm of the imagined internal world of the narrative, the previously secret novel written by Harry is an equivalent to those forbidden texts written secretly by Teddy and his sister Minerva: *Seven Ways to Outwit the Black King*, and *Advice to Mortals by the Goddess of Wisdom and the Boy Enchanter* (p.209). The imagined or ghostly existence of the Carnival brothers, with their names derived from books on the bookshelf inside the house, is described by them as an effort to rewrite their own unhappy ending. By the internal logic of the story, Harry's engaging sexually with Felix as the heart of the three frees them to dissolve back into nature, absolved of the guilt or some such hang-up due to Teddy's erroneous effort to live by instinct alone, disallowed as he was by his father Edward Carnival to live by following his heart.

The sexual/romantic encounter also sees Harry mature to the point where she is empowered to confront Felix, and Christobel, and by default her mother, finally displaying agency in taking a lover and then in communicating freely in front of her whole family. By bridging the gap of family secrecy she opens the possibility of the previously completely self-centered Christobel to start acknowledging her and communicating effectively with her as an equal, as a kind of consolation prize in lieu of quality time with her mother.

That the narrator informs the reader of the existence of the two Carnival children's two old books in the kitchen discussion between Anthony and Naomi suggests that either the narrator is completely independent of Harry, or, the narrator is Harry and the

whole narrative is created by her, perhaps in her new book under her pillow on the final page of the metanarrative.

Harry's explanation to Serena as to why she burned the manuscript — that it was because people laugh at her writing — has the ring of partial though outdated truth; but again, her actively discussing serious topics with Serena describes a pattern of agency, of positive engagement for a young implied reader to consider, much like the act of burning the book and no longer needing an answer from a ghostly imaginary friend/lover as to whether it loves her, and so being left with a family of "real" people with whom to relate (p.254).

More unreal characters, or rather superficial and supernatural together are found at the gothic beach party which takes place in the lead-up to the climax. Everyone is present, and fittingly for the original concept of carnival it is a dress-up or costume party, despite the impractical nature of such on a summer-time beach in a secluded rural New Zealand setting. Significantly this chapter is entitled "Breaking Free," and at the end of it Harry runs free of the event with Felix. More significantly, Mahy's use of the term "science-fiction" appears, applied in description of Christobel's eyebrow make-up for her costume. This suggests that despite this scene not being the climax in terms of the narrative's plot, it is nevertheless pivotal in relation to the development of the story. In a regular carnivalesque sequence, power structures alter: the poor may dress up as royalty, rules prescribing gender roles and boundaries of sexual politeness

are freely broken, and similarly, in this chapter, opposites in terms of the empowered and the disempowered within the context of the narrative are played out.

The first immediately obvious role reversal is that it is Christobel, who soon “begs” for Emma’s help to “Make me completely amazing!” (p.190) and is quoted as being dissatisfied with herself, whereas Harry “wanted to draw wonder up out of herself. It was no longer enough to be Ariadne alone up in her room. [...] she now wanted everyone in her family to know her too. [...] Harry’s fancy dress would have to be her true, astonishing self” (p.188). She accordingly dresses in her black swimming suit and a unicorn skirt and, as the narrator says, “left it at that.”

While walking from the house down to the beach, Harry is described as like “the soldier in *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*,” ostensibly because she descended into a “magic land” of “marvellous company, centaurs and griffins.” Another layer of implicit meaning here, however, is that the soldier from this relatively obscure tale (number 133 of the Brothers Grimm’s collection) is about a soldier who outsmarts the king of his own land and the inhabitants of the magical one to win the prize of the king’s eldest daughter, achieved partly through use of a magical cloak of invisibility. Here, in another inversion, Harry appears more visible than she has since the first chapter’s description of her as “half hidden by her glasses and her curtains of reddish-brown hair” (p.4).

This leads in turn to another seeming inversion as evident by Felix’s reaction when she appears to him there, as he “either blushed or shifted, so that his face flared with

sudden light, turning away almost at once.” In other words Harry has finally developed a sense of confidence in her own sexual identity to the point where she has acquired an obvious power of sexual attraction over Felix, as evident from his reaction at her appearance in a skin-tight top.

In a repetition of Mahy’s point made in her non-fiction about the displacement she felt as a child reading about wintery northern-hemisphere Christmases while in summary New Zealand, this truth of Mahy’s “real” life is included in this chapter too:

“Holly and roses!” exclaimed Anthony, rather as if he were making fun of a Christmas that defiantly mixed its summers with story-book winters.

“The holly’s just plastic,” Serena said anxiously, in case he had been tricked by it.

“No robins?” Anthony asked. “Don’t you have a wind-up robin or two?”

This small exchange describing the light humour of Anthony with the young girl Serena then includes a privileging of inversions of three strands of opposites: the “real” summery Christmas for the “story-book” winter; the “real” local nature is replaced by the plastic holly, (non-native and plastic) roses, and robins; and the simple, earnest, honest, yet misplaced truth as spoken by the innocent Serena, as opposed to the gentle joking yet accurate observations offered by Anthony.

In this chapter there are two more examples which demonstrate a temporary inversion in power which takes place with regard to the three Carnival brothers. Up until this

point, they have been characterized as menacing (p.54), dangerous (p.97), and violent (p.165). Yet in the first example, full of double entendre and symbolic meaning for the adult reader, Felix is shown to the implied child reader alike to be vulnerable and lacking in knowledge:

He was still playing with the cigarette, tapping it on the back of his hand, putting it between the index and second finger of his right hand and looking at it curiously.

“You just don’t know what to do with it, do you?” Harry said, grinning.

“I didn’t ever do it before,” he replied vaguely. “But others did.”

Although Felix could be described as the less imposing of the three brothers embodying as he does the heart of the late Teddy Carnival, for any ghostly haunting presence to sit around and sheepishly admit to sexual inexperience is, at the very least, a farcical inversion of the expectations of the adult writerly reader who will recognize the phallic imagery.

In the second example, Hadfield starts a fight with Felix, risking ruining of the party atmosphere, but before more than a couple of blows can be landed, Anthony steps in and quotes from Teddy and Minerva’s own story book to them, cutting off their aggression, scolding them, and reducing them to the child Teddy Carnival was when he would have written the book. Ovid, disempowered, immediately apologizes and calls his brothers “clowns” (p.200). In the final inversion of the chapter mood and

symbolism together switch from fighting, the ultimate anti-social expression, to dancing, perhaps the strongest symbol of sociability (p.201).

Yet even this dramatic example, final within the internal chronology of the chapter, is not the most important positive example of social intercourse, or pattern of imaginative acceptance. Before the fight, and about the time when Harry and Felix are sitting discussing his lack of experience with phallic objects, he delivers two messages of wisdom and interpretation clearly on the importance of inter-subjectivity to Harry. The first is that which I have already outlined, regarding Serena's desire to emulate both Christobel and Harry herself. When she demands of him how he knows this, he offers the second description of inter-subjectivity in action, in relation to his brothers and his self:

“How do you know about Serena?” Harry asked.

“Nothing said, but there's a lot of looks I recognize. I know them by heart - by heart!” he repeated, putting his hand on his chest. “I've felt some of them on my own face so when I see them here I know just what itchings go to make them. As to what's happening between Ovid, Hadfield and me, we're getting a bit mixed. I'm becoming more eloquent in their lives - that's all.” (p.195)

The description of one being eloquent in another's life is a wonderfully apt description for the positive nature of inter-subjectivity. That this pearl of wisdom should fall from

the mouth of a ghost with identity issues immediately having just admitted inexperience to his girlfriend is part of Mahy's humour for the implied adult reader.

Conclusion

Against the three trickster brothers Harry tests the boundaries of her imagination and her sexuality, and writes about it all in a possible foreshadowing of events in her own draft of a novel.

That Harry is working on a novel is significant as it signals to the reader as with Tabitha's writing in *The Haunting*, that story is important to the narrative. All of the other texts deal with the problematic nature of story, in reference to the danger of the power of the imagination being able to influence "real" life and the character writing, telling, or being told stories.

Mahy makes it difficult to say with any certainty whether Harry and her family and friends imagined their relationships, discussions, and encounters with the three Carnival brothers, or "actually" met them in the sense of the internal reality of the novel. Regardless of the corporeal versus spectral nature of the three mysteriously ghostly characters, Harry spends a significant proportion of the narrative engaging with them, talking, chatting, observing, flirting, and meeting alone late at night, while at times she also speculates as to their reality and considers the power of the secret story

she writes in her bedroom in the attic, and ponders her identity as she shares it with her extended family and new friends, before she realizes that her imaginary world is endangering her and holding her back from the more authentic relationships for which she is now ready.

Chapter Four – *Alchemy*: Recasting the Self

Alchemy is unusual within Mahy's canon in that like *The Haunting*, it is about the coming of age of a young woman, and yet it features a male protagonist for whom magical giftedness is a previously scorned family trait. Indeed these characteristics make these two texts a natural pairing. The absent parent in *Alchemy* is neither deceased nor replaced with a step-parent, however, but rather merely absent in a case of virtual abandonment in a way more akin to Laura's father within *The Changeover*, although Roland's father only appears in the opening flashback memory sequence as Roland remembers his childhood, and in a phone-call conversation relayed by Roland's mother in the final episode (apart from a case of virtual possession at the climax in the narrative when Roland's father speaks through him). The denouement involves a large dose of pathos, again unusual for Mahy, and yet effective within the context of a narrative in which the central character is a young man maturing and making life decisions about how to relate to women, while being raised by an obviously stressed solo mother, and for whom his father had – at first impression - given up the task of being any kind of a role model.

Major settings include the home, a single-story house perhaps reflecting Roland's almost-equal status with his mother as virtual head of the household in relation to his two younger brothers. The importance of the family setting is underlined by the mere inclusion of chapter six, entitled "Remembering Midnight Tears." Barely more than two pages, it outlines Roland's memories of his father leaving and his mother counting

change for a taxi as a solo mother, and learning to cope by twisting “everything back into some sort of shape; [Roland’s mother] had mended or half mended the breaks so that things worked well enough to get from one day to the next. Slowly, she had won power over her altered world” (pp.52/53) In this way then, this narrative portrays Roland’s mother as the solo parent and lone role model, as Roland learns to apply his inherited magical power and developing maturity and mental faculties over the rapidly altering, twisting world beyond his home.

Other main settings include the quasi-public spaces of school and the supermarket, and the fully public space of the park, bordered by a stream, and traversed by a path leading to the mysterious Jessica Ferret’s house. Other characters include Roland’s girlfriend “Chris” Glennie, the beautiful, confident, feisty analogue of his mother, the teacher and strange story-telling Mr. Hudson, and Quando the Magician, who by coincidence reappears in Roland’s life just as Mr. Hudson starts telling his strange tales about Jess Ferret.

Roland is set on the path of engagement with Jess by what turns out to be somewhat of a tall tale told to him by catalyst character teacher Mr. Hudson supposedly in an effort to learn more about Jess’s family life. Accused of shoplifting from the supermarket Roland is blackmailed by him into spying on and engaging with Jess. He also learns to deal directly with his confusion and guilt over his previous shoplifting episode, his family life, and with his demanding girlfriend who will not brook a lack of attention or his showing of interest in anyone else and least of all the school pariah

Jess Ferret. As if this is not enough, he starts hearing voices in his head giving him advice and feedback on his actions. Roland is thus characterised as a stressed young man who although at the pinnacle of performance and pride in his school, is suddenly also subject to an increase in signs of psychological stress and strain.

Roland and Jess meet in front of the local museum café to talk. They share stories of their own families, selves, and the shared situation confronting and concerning each, and form an initially uneasy alliance that develops over the course of the rest of the book into a fully fledged relationship.

In terms of the description of intersubjectivity within this episode, Roland and Jess discuss magicians (described by Jess as having a kind of “sympathy”) (p.186), they stare “into one another’s eyes” (p.188), share honestly about themselves and their family lives (p.192), and most importantly, tell each other their impressions of the other:

“Anyhow, are you saying you’re one of these magicians?” he demanded rather aggressively.

[...] Once again their eyes met. [...] He thought he saw himself, suspended among those remote pinpricks of light.

“I’m telling you that *you’re* one” Jess replied (p.189). [Emphasis in original]

Indeed, it later seems that the source of the voice inside Roland’s head is his father; when he returns home immediately following the resolution of the plot conflict, he

finds his tearful mother on the phone receiving a long-distance call from his father who has suddenly decided to visit again after a ten-year absence. This appears to have been enabled by Roland who achieves the resolution by learning valuable lessons about himself from having originally accepted the imagined risk to meet and talk openly with Jessica. In the same way then that Darth Vader changes from being the arch villain to a donor character by sharing important information on the identity of the hero (and eventually saving Luke's life in *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*), both Jess and Roland's father too is also re-characterized, with Jess transforming from socially excluded other to donor character, and eventually to love interest.

i.) Roland, Chris, his mother, and Jess: Sociolect, and Dialogic Intersubjectivity

From a Bakhtinian perspective, using the language of the subject position with which he previously identified, Roland transforms from being part of Chris's "crowd" to being a "loser," and the very idea of meeting with Jess "the Weasel" Ferret leads him to protest, leaving him sounding in a way he describes as "utterly uncool" (p.25).

The main single word used to reference an ideological position between characters at school is the reference to Jessica as "the Weasel." The change in Roland's identity in relation to both Chris and Jessica is marked in chapter twelve, entitled simply "Alchemy" so as to denote the personal or inter-subjective changes taking place within Roland: "On Friday, Roland would not have thought twice about hearing her called "the Weasel". Now, however, he felt treacherous for the second time in a single lunch hour, this time because he did not challenge Jess's nickname" (p.97). The character's

awareness of the importance of this naming-word is akin to a Bakhtinian sensitivity to its power of fixing an ideological identity; it's a description of a self-awareness of the dialectical position Roland is beginning to inhabit.

Mahy characterizes Roland as initially emulating Chris's New Zealand youth colloquialisms, quoting Chris as using a sing-song phrase empty of literal meaning but versatile in application, sometimes as an attention-getting device, other times as a verbal vehicle for scorn:

“Whoo-hoo! Wake up,” called Chris, waving her hand in front of his face. “Stop dreaming about me! Here! This way! I'm over here, being sexy and fascinating.”

“He's wallowing in Hudson's praise,” said Tom.

“La la la!” she sang, looking over at Tom with her usual good-natured mockery. “He's having you on, Tommy. Old Hudson gave him a rocket about something. He's been *munted*. I can tell.”

[...] “I blew it over that Kiwi film piece,” he said, inventing quickly. “I just put down the first shit that came into my head and Hudson decided to have a crack at me. You know! “You're not in my class to coast along! Blah! Blah! Blah!’ Like that!” (p.32)

This scene is revealing when read with a Bakhtinian attention to the idea of monologism. The language of discourse as defined by Chris is being agreed to by Roland, as he follows her lead in using local colloquialisms, and sing-song phrases

interspersed with profanity. The similarity, for example, between “La la la” and “Blah! Blah! Blah!” is in both the sound of the final vowel sound, the double repetition, and in their shared lack of regular definition and virtual emptiness of meaning.

This emptiness of their relationship is thus characterized by the idiolect in the exchanges between Chris and Roland, in Roland’s “inventing” a story — more commonly known as lying — and immediately following this exchange, a further revelation by the narrator:

Only yesterday afternoon, sitting in her bedroom, she had half sighed, half sobbed into his shoulder, “*I do want to ... I do...*” But, having said this, she had added that her mother would be home soon and had pulled away from him. (p.33)

In other words, just as actions speak louder than words, the agreement of language styles is not in agreement with either character’s ideological subject position, and foreshadows Roland’s impending “dumping,” their emotional parting, and the end of the relationship.

By contrast, in an intersection of motifs whereby intertextuality is used consciously by Mahy to represent inter-subjectivity, Roland, in discussions first with his mother and then with Jess, discusses famous literary texts which are represented as meaningful to them. In explaining about the hereditary nature of his magician’s talent, Mrs Fairfield, Roland’s mother, describes being aided to dream about her favourite novel *The Secret*

Garden by Roland's grandfather (p.153). In another later scene Jess describes the meaningfulness of a poem by William Blake and explains how she thinks Blake was "like us" (p.200). This is the language of inclusion and being taken into confidence, and sees interpersonal links being made, thereby strengthening the relationship.

Furthermore, the idea of self-as-text needs recognition here. Mahy published a short story for adult readers including the idea of the body as text, in that case a map. What then should a child reader make of the mention of the comparison of Mrs Fairfield's new hairstyle with that of Chris? Upon Roland's awakening late one night he wanders towards the kitchen and finds his mother waking up in a chair, while now "wearing her hair in a short plait, very much as Chris wore hers" (p.147). Whether or not this is a coincidence is not clear, however, following another late night chat the next morning, "Roland dropped an arm around his mother's shoulder and placed the parody of a tender kiss, beside her ear. He knew that she would understand that he was remembering their midnight conversation and was letting her know that, even with blatant, morning sunlight beating in through every eastern window, it was still being appreciated" (p.161). Finally, following a conversation with Jess on the phone his mother asks after Chris, and then "gave him that sly, shy look, relieved, and oddly flirtatious" (p.174).

This series marks Mahy's description of the transference of Roland's affections from Chris to Jess via his mother, despite his mother's seemingly misplaced affections, as expressed through the text of her vocalized language and her hair-style.

It also echoes Mahy's inter-textual references to the Byron-esque hero. Lord Byron himself famously left Victorian England due to scandal associated with incest. While Byron's real-life story was to do with his half-sister, not his mother, the inclusion of allusions to such is in fitting with Roland's repeating of his Byron quote, describing himself as a kind of action hero, as Byron liked to have himself portrayed. Thus Mahy portrays Roland as subject to the influence of story in the way he thinks of himself, and how this plays out in his approach to dealing with relationships with an adventurous and heroic attitude.

Alchemy is narrated by a third-person limited omniscient voice. The narrator describes the sequence of events within the narrative exclusively from Roland's position, often describing what he sees and thinks, usually in quite a lot of detail. Indeed, even before the book officially starts chapter one, a prologue of sorts presents with a description of a memory/flashback sequence entitled "Dreaming" opens with the words: "So here it was again... coming through the dark at him – the dream, the nightmare that had haunted him for years. OK, he'd been through it all before. He already knew what was in store." This is the voice of a narrator in full control of the story, depicting a character who is clearly not in control, but rather is subject to a repeat "haunting" by his dreams. That the dream might be different in outcome or import is implied by its positioning at the very start of the story, in much the same way as the gender of the main character is referenced by use of the word "he" (7).

What appear at first to be dreams or flashback sequences are denoted by use of italics. In these sections, the narrator actually describes what Roland sees and feels more than thinks:

Look! There they go, moving through the fairground, side by side, Roland and his father — hand in hand, yet apparently joined in other ways as well. And, in spite of the reassuring way his father’s hand curls around his fingers, Roland — the watcher — knows that Roland — the dream child — is becoming more and more alarmed with every step. (p.7)

The description of Roland’s feelings here as both the original subject of the experience, and as the older character later reflecting on the experience, is again Mahy’s use of placing a story within a story, or creating a fiction within a fiction, a simulacra of reality. This then is Mahy’s way of leading the reader “down the rabbit hole” into another realm of the imaginary, as did Lewis Carroll with Alice’s descent into Wonderland.

More than this, however, it portrays the split in the character’s consciousness and identity, as denoted by the switch from past tense to present tense between Roland’s current thoughts (described in the past tense) and his flashback memories (described in the present tense so as to make them seem more immediate and relevant). The very first line of the book portrays the potential state of confusion and ambivalence this textual device creates: “So, here it was again” (p.7).

This split is then developed and portrayed as being similar to a breakdown, or lack of internal cohesion. On the very next page one paragraph starts off italicized and describing Roland's internal reactions to the dream, in examples of free indirect thought set in the present continuous, but concludes in non-italicized text and yet still in the present continuous, although with the use of parenthesis to symbolize the current thought within the presently dreamed memory-flashback:

I've been here before, he finds himself thinking – finds himself knowing – as they idle along through the fair. ... Looking at the bright, bobbing shapes against the yellow-green of new spring leaves, Roland thinks, There they are again, and walks on beside his father – the very father who will disappear on the day that Roland's youngest brother, Martin, is born. (How can I possibly know that? Roland is wondering. Look! That's me walking along! I'm only about four years old. Martin won't be born for four years) (p.8) [Ellipsis mine; emphasis in the original.]

This textual device serves to establish patterns of expectations within the mind and understanding of the implied reader, firstly that careful attention to detail of who is "speaking" is necessary, and secondly that the personal history of the character is clearly of vast importance to the narrative; an understand of exactly why this is so is likely to be a challenge shared by the protagonist and the reader alike, at the behest of the narrator.

The magical voice of Roland's missing father seems at times like an extra layer of Roland's extroverted voice of conscience, giving him advice when he may not expect it to be necessary. This voicing is also demonstrated in examples of text expressed as free indirect thought.

"Yes! it is saying ... Yes! Over and over again. Then, Up! Up! Up! And, almost immediately, that other inner voice speaks out once more, warning him, just as it had warned him earlier about talking too freely to Quando. Whoa! Careful! it says. Take no notice! It's nothing! It's nothing! It's nothing! Three times, like a spell. But the other voice is strong. It rises in pitch and intensity. Up! Up! Up! Yes! it insists." (p.15)

In this way then, in a Bakhtinian sense, a third voice is placed in dialogical context alongside that of the narrator and Roland, largely occupying the same ideological subject position.

This subject position is in heteroglotic opposition to those initially of Jess, but rapidly more often to Chris, and then Quando. In the earlier example mentioned in the previous section of my study, wherein Roland is musing and mulling over Jess and his deteriorating relationship with Chris in the school grounds during a break-time, the narrator's voice interrupts to make this quite clear, highlighting the point, stating in its own voice:

Now, she was deliberately reminding him, Roland supposed, that she still belonged to herself (p.31-33).

The inclusion of the words “Roland supposed” while referring directly to Roland’s thoughts, actually highlight the role of the narrator in telling us this fact. This phrasing thereby places the narrator’s role and voice in view, effectively representing another perspective to that of Roland, namely, that of the narrator. Given that the narrator is describing Roland’s thoughts of Chris’s words, this scene can be read as an example of Mahy teaching reading strategies of other adult verbal queues, while simultaneously producing a distancing effect between the author and reader via the range of characters, not solely the protagonist Roland.

ii.) Roland, Quando, and Mr. Hudson: The Monologic Story-Lie and Dialogic

Doubt

As aforementioned, the main antagonist and therefore the primary voice of dialogic opposition to that of Roland comes from Quando the Magician. In the start of the chapter immediately after rediscovering Quando in the park on his own, Roland is described by the narrator as watching Quando following his performance and while in discussion with him:

“Look! Thanks for your cooperation” [Quando] said, smiling. Under the paint his mouth seemed to curve up more on the right cheek than it did

on the left. He must be smiling. White powder fell out of the creases of the smile. He looked right then left. (p.115)

The phrase “He must be smiling” is an unattributed free indirect thought. It raises the rhetorical question as to whether it was supposed to be Roland, his father/conscience, or the narrator voicing this thought. The point, however, is moot at this stage, because either way amounts to the same ideological subject position, in opposition to that represented by Quando’s tricky, dishonest smile. Like the powder — white for the colour of innocence — it does not stick; it falls off his face and like his smile is an external, non-authentic artifact, designed to conceal as further supported by his shifty, unsettled eyes as noted by Roland’s narrator.

This attention to the detail of micro-expressions is another layer of ‘truth’ Mahy has incorporated into this novel to such an extent as to be a virtually didactic tutorial on the topic, although it interests me primarily as it also expresses the opposing ideological perspective as shared by both the Quando/Hudson character and his brother, the other other, “Old Hudson” the teacher. In an earlier sequence, the lesson of actions speaking louder than words is again emphasized in one brief exchange:

“If [Jess] does talk to anyone it’s probably to keep them at a distance. Odd, when you come to think of it. Most talk is intended to bring people closer, isn’t it?” He hesitated; his eyebrows arched delicately. “Was her mother surprised when you turned up on her doorstep?”

“Her parents were at work,” said Roland. The same betraying

excitement that Roland had glimpsed on Friday came and went before Mr Hudson could prevent it. And Roland not only saw it again now, but also saw Mr Hudson struggling to iron it out of existence — too late, as it happened, because by then Roland knew for certain that whatever was generating Mr Hudson’s keenest interest was certainly not concern about Jess. What Mr Hudson *most* wanted to know about was to do with the presence or the absence of her parents. (p.92) [Ellipsis mine; emphasis in the original.]

By portraying both Quando and his brother in the same way, as communicating in the same deceptive way, using words of dubious quality and facial expressions of more subtle depth, Mahy not only emphasizes their shared subject position but teaches the importance of looking at the detail, and measuring the quality of the actions behind the always potentially duplicitous words.

One site of a virtual time-slip experience is Quando’s “wonder-box,” the coffin-like, or perhaps more accurately closet-like cabinet into which Roland enters twice, both times seeing stars while simultaneously performing a magical loss of corporeal substance. The usefulness of Roland’s experience of Quando’s magical/liminal space within the narrative is explained as allowing Quando to both identify Roland’s magical powers, and later to hypnotize him into stealing the pens and pie (p.215). More than this, it seems to be a site for Mahy herself to play a punning-game with the implied adult reader, with barely veiled references to a camp sexuality as seen in the combination of

Quando's make-up, his lisp (p.144), his "giggle" (p.144), and his invitations to enter into his wonder-box able to be read as only an adult aware of potential double entendre is able.

Whether or not one reads this aspect of *Alchemy* in such a way, the wonder-box still serves as a site for a trauma so enduring to the younger Roland character that he still has nightmares akin to flashback time-slips about it as a seventeen-year-old. This, in itself, offers an emotional weight analogous to few other stories than a personal history of sexual violence, and hints at a potential connection with Sorry's similar personal backstory from *The Changeover*.

The obvious site for the carnivalesque within *Alchemy* is the local suburban fair where Roland first goes with his father as recounted in his flashback-memory. It presents the first of the realm of the strangely inverted, wherein the unnaturalness of the space is defined by Quando as being a place where there's "more space inside than outside it." This is a Mahyesque reference to the Tardis of the famous and typically fairly camp science fiction character Dr Who, who always seems so dramatically and unerringly platonic with his nubile young female side-kicks. His beloved time-space travelling machine, famously in the shape of a London "police box," has more space inside than outside.

If the carnivalesque can refer to a humourous inversion of expectations and the expressions on the faces of characters, then the start of chapter twenty-one presents a

delightful page of a family scenario. Roland is addressing himself in the mirror as he dresses for school, effectively and literally recreating a unity of character, as he states:

“No one’s going to drive us apart... We’ll stick together, you and me! I’ll be a good prefect and you’ll be a good reflection. And I’ll concentrate on Chris. She deserves the best. Like, she deserves you, which is to say me ... Well, me the way I’m going to be from now on ...”

“Hey! Roley’s lost it, at last,” yelled Danny peering in at the open door. “He’s talking to himself.”

“What’s he saying?” Martin called, and came to stare through the door, as well.

Roland looked at their sharp, bright faces and knew they were anticipating some kind of brotherly abuse. He took a breath.

“I was just saying what good brothers you are, and how lucky I am to have you,” he said in a syrupy voice. Danny and Martin stood staring at him, grins fixing then fading. Their frowning eyebrows and open mouths expressed a sort of puzzled disappointment. Triumphant, he strolled past them, making for the kitchen.

“You were not saying that,” Danny shouted after him. “I know you weren’t.”

The sense of surprise, or the *verfremdungseffekt* of inverted expectations as experienced by the brother characters is seemingly supposed to be transferred to the

reader as Roland walks from them to his mother and greets her as a lover. The commonality between both encounters is his sense of playfulness; however, this actually reinforces the sense of a carnival-like engaging in a theatrical inversion of roles, of both power and, in the latter case, sexuality. His complimenting his brothers undercuts the power of their insults, and his pseudo-romantic greeting to his mother playfully pretends to place him as her partner rather than son.

The sense of an inversion of the natural order of things — particularly expectations — is established right from the beginning of chapter one, wherein Roland's thoughts on being called to Mr Hudson's desk are focalized in the very third sentence thus: "He knew at once that he was not going to be praised, something he had been anticipating" (p.18). This sense of the natural order of things not being right continues with Roland being teased by his friends and called to account for his unsavory meeting with Mr Hudson. "Roland tried a foolish grin, though foolish grins were not part of his usual repertoire" (p.32). Furthermore, equally unusual is his being blackmailed by Mr Hudson to spy, itself an unethical subject position for a teacher and therefore against all expectations; in so doing Roland has to affect an interest — a role play, one might say — in the most isolated individual in the school, despite being the boy going out with Chris Glennie, "certainly the most beautiful girl in the school" (p.20).

The second paragraph of the first chapter describes Mr Hudson as a magician of sorts: "Flicking the box open, Mr Hudson thrust his left hand into it with the confidence of a conjuror who knows he is going to whisk a rabbit from an empty hat" (p.18). By the

end of the narrative, Mr Hudson has learned from his student that Roland himself is more powerful a magician than even his younger magician/politician brother, in the ultimate power inversion of the story.

It is not the only major power inversion in the story, however, as explained by the narrator in the conclusion:

Both his father and grandfather had had that extra sense, but various things — the times they were living in, and Roland's puritanical grandmother, of course, along with her stern views of what should be decently possible in a puzzling world — had made them both shrink them from becoming wider selves.

For all that they had found furtive fulfilments. (p.267)

In no way can Roland's achievements in developing while maintaining a unity of identity being characterized as "furtive." Not only does he affect the likely reunion of his parents, but also brings about the reunion of Jess with her two parents, their release from her magic spell, found and rescued a true love at the same time as his true self, brought down a corrupt politician, kept his mother cheerful and his brothers in their place, and even exposed a lying teacher while faithfully fulfilling his duty as an obedient prefect.

If seen alongside the "furtive fulfillments" of his male forebears and placed in the context of the absence of a puritanical grandmother-figure, then a Bakhtinian

carnavalesque power inversion has indeed taken place in terms of both the gender/role-reversal and a power structure inversion. For Mahy this is an uncommon but vastly important trope which I shall refer to again in relation to *The Haunting*.

iii.) Roland and Jess: Sexual Intersubjectivity

Detailed descriptions of settings in terms of both time and space are also utilized by Mahy within *Alchemy*. Roland and his girlfriend and male friends meet, for example, in the open space of the school yard beneath the library windows. According to the narrator, they sit there “partly because it was sunny, [...] but also because the library was on a slight rise and gave them a dominant view across the school yard” (p.30).

In this way, Mahy indicates the “dominant” social grouping to which Roland belongs within the social structure at school. In contrast, Roland, in looking for Jess, has to “peer” out to “a particular seat” under a particular distant linden tree.

A linden tree, also known by its genus name “tilia,” is ripe with potential meaning from a broad range of possible intertextual references; however, the implied reader less well equipped with pre-knowledge is likely to take from it the general impression of nature, and of natural strength while standing solitary against the openness of the school field. Mahy’s aligning of the personal difference of being magically able with the natural is a trope which is underlined in all these texts, and again here within *Alchemy* as aforementioned due to the hereditary nature of the magicians. Quando is characterized as being unnatural when he sneers at Jess being blessed with magic in

the climax of the narrative: “nature squanders her riches” (p.254). Thus Jess’s magical abilities are hinted at by her being located under the tree before her full powers are revealed subtly within the public space of the library, and then later, more fully within the private, haunted space of her home, and its central site of psycho-sexual conflict: her parent’s bedroom.

This room upstairs does turn out to be the setting for the first half of the climax of the narrative, presenting as it does a space usually reserved as the most private and forbidden to the casual guest to a typical middle-New Zealand home. It is also the other place of time-slip description, alongside Roland’s experiences in Quando’s magic coffin-like box. The sex-as-magic motif is underlined by Mahy again in the climax by the actions and reactions of Roland and Jess to one-another. Having fought through the magical lack of clarity to climb the stairs to rescue her from her own lack of faith in her own magical powers, Roland discovers the power of attraction: “Sexual desire swept through him in waves of hot compulsion” (p.235). The two kiss, with Jess then exclaiming “Oh gosh!” like a little kid impressed by some magician’s trick. “Desire cast a spell of its own (p.236).” When moving together to go downstairs Jess takes a deep breath and the narrator describes her breasts moving against him, further eroticizing the location in time and space. Thus from the earlier portion of the book’s descriptions of Roland observing Jess from a distance, he has now obtained the object of his gaze of desire. But before they can have a fulfilling relationship, the two need to have a mutual trust and understanding. As they venture into the unknown realm of time beyond the

first kiss and oversight of parents as denoted by the lack of visibility of the stairway, Roland implores Jess to “Believe a bit harder.” This is reminiscent of the scene where faith is required to keep Tinkerbell alive as expressed by clapping for her in productions of Peter Pan, but in *Alchemy* it is expressed by Jess following Roland away from her parents and into the liminal space of the stairs beyond the bedroom.

The resolution of the climax actually occurs downstairs, in the relative openness of the kitchen, and a common site for discussion leading to understanding in a Mahy text. In another common Mahy trait, Roland offers a playful gender role reversal, saying: “OK, here’s the kitchen. Tell you what — you sit down and I’ll be mother [and make the coffee]” (p.242). From Jess’s eventual explanations it emerges that the story at the center of the psycho-sexual/magical drama within the house was to do with the fact that Quando had been having an affair with Jess’s mother, and her parents were telling her stories — or rather lies — about the future of their relationship:

“I mean, they did try to be sensitive about it all, but every so often their faces just lit up with their own secret delights. And then it turned out the discussion was a sham anyway. Dad had already booked his flight. I think they had been a bit — well, scared — which is why they put off telling me [the full truth] until things couldn’t be changed” (p.248).

Jess then explains her fury upon discovering this deception and unleashing revenge in the form of a spell which causes them to “freeze” in time — or more accurately to the story to remain in a state of magic deep sleep — until Jess finds her own sense of

renewed unity with her eidolon and, in a fittingly meaningful symbol of potentially positive interaction and intersubjectivity an embrace with Roland. In this way then, the kitchen is restored to a site of relative safety and a place of harmonious sanctity.

Conclusion

In perhaps the most important of a few parallels to the poem by Robert Browning, an aspect of challenge the protagonist Roland from Mahy's text deals with is the internal, or the mental/emotional struggle of daily life while making the journey to the "dark tower." The tower in this case is represented by the upstairs rooms of the strangely eerie two-storey home in which Jess lives, apparently alone except for a spectral presence he observes on the landing of the staircase. In other words, Roland is characterized as being subject to the stress and challenge of living in a solo-parent household, while also having the pressure of expectation from his success as a student from his teacher and class-mates.

Another connection is that in Byron's poem the protagonist is known by the title "childe," a medieval term for untested knight. The Roland in Mahy's text is a school prefect, an analogue for a young person on whom heightened expectations are placed, but as yet inexperienced to any significant extent in the world beyond school; not dissimilar from an untested knight then.

Despite the relatively mature protagonist in *Alchemy*, the characterization of the corrupt nature of the villains is relatively simplified, although in another unusual step

for a Mahy text, magical power in the case of Quando the Magician represents a means to gain, and therefore is an equivalent of political power. The sub-text is that power corrupts, as demonstrated within the text by the lying, manipulative teacher who further turns out to be the brother of the devious, manipulative local politician/Quando the Magician. It further emerges that this character is hungry for power in all its forms: magical, political, and, it is implied in his meeting with Roland, corrupt sexual (p.122/123). It is left to the power of love and inter-subjectivity inherent in the symbolism of sexuality and story to then complicate this otherwise simple message within *Alchemy*.

Chapter Five – *The Haunting*: Keeping Intersubjectivity within the Family

Introduction – Recurring Themes and Plot Threads in Parallel

A Bakhtinian reading of Mahy's narrative approach to telling the story within *The Haunting* is useful for unlocking the as yet critically unnoted depths within this, Mahy's pièce de résistance. I use this label conscious of its weight and due to the multiple and ironic layers of meaning in the construction of the narrative: almost all characters described are those within the extended family, and setting is almost entirely within the family home of the Palmer children, and yet as simple as these two aspects of the story would appear to make the telling, the bi-focal approach Mahy adopts in sharing the focalization between Barney and Tabitha is necessarily more complex than the previous three novels. Due to the two focalizers, the use of which is a "polyphonic narrative technique," the novel is, as McCallum describes, a "multivoiced narrative" (McCallum, 1999, p.23).

Rather than the story being voiced by a third person limited omniscient narrator, the narrator of *The Haunting* is thus that of a third-person multiple omniscient, as the narrator switches focus from Barney to Tabitha and back again. *The Haunting* therefore differs from the other three novels in this series of gothic supernatural coming-of-age family dramas primarily in that it is mostly focalized by these two younger siblings of the Troy character who does eventually come out as magically different. However, despite Mahy's writing of this novel ostensibly for younger readers, this more complex

narrative technique reflects Mahy's effort to write for a multiple audience: the implied child reader, the implied adult reader of closed texts, and the implied adult writerly reader who actively constructs meaning from the text in the sense that Bruner and Barthes share. By way of its offering the extra third dimension and breadth of perspective, *The Haunting* thus potentially also offers a depth of interpretation far exceeding that of the other three novels in this study.

The allegorical nature of the magically different offers a deeper level of meaning to Mahy's work, and makes the connection between *The Haunting* and the other three gothic coming of age texts more obvious and fixed in meaning, via their age-appropriate methods of dealing with issues of coming of age, while also offering a pattern of imaginative acceptance for readers of all ages.

Integral to the twin themes outlined above, the narrative also contains twin plot threads which I relate to the two characters of Barney as foil/ unwitting subject of Great-Uncle Cole's misdirected quest, and Tabitha as hero/ protagonist/ demonstrator of agency through the very Bakhtinian concept of the speech act itself. If Great-Uncle Cole is the naïve dysfunctional anti-hero on his quest, misguided due to his believing the family story/lie, then Tabitha is the hero for the nature of her speech-acts, insistently talking, arguing, resisting authority, and questioning particularly of Great-Uncle Guy and Barney while on her quest for the truth behind Barney's haunting. In this light then, her villain is not Great-Uncle Cole but rather Great-Granny Scholar,

originator of the family story/lie, demander of silent and obedient children, and tyrannical monological matriarch.

The two youngest characters with their different personalities within the extended family parallel and reflect the different cultures and social norms within the two families, despite the recently arrived step-mother Claire's ineffective attempts at voicing demands particularly for Tabitha's submission to a subject position of polite behaviour bereft of any signs of difference, and so despite her authentically loving relationship within the Palmer household, Claire effects a subject position monologically aligned with Great-Granny Scholar's demands. Barney in public typically reflects the Scholar grandparent's generation by being inactive, largely silent, and playing victim to circumstance until such time as following her prompting he makes the decision to trust and confide in Tabitha; Tabitha herself represents the dialogic voice within the more unruly/liberal Palmer-household approach by being incessantly talkative and resolutely proactive in demanding and proclaiming "the truth." By the powers of the open honesty of her speech acts, hugs, and clumsy kisses on Barney's ear, she also offers loving and liberating relationships which influence the eventual outcome of the story and can therefore be said to have a virtually "magical" effect on the family commensurate with those family characters who "actually" have magical powers.

Chief among these is Great-Granny Scholar, embittered and dictatorial, who, in a mirror opposite of Tabitha, despite being magically capable has ironically also used the power of her words and non-magical actions to influence the course of family history.

i.) Action and the Speech Act:

Mundane Monological Silence versus Magically Dialogic Discord

The plot of *The Haunting* appears to follow a symmetrical structure. The first four chapters set the scene, introduce the characters, describe the terror of the young Barney, and raise the question for inquisitive readers as to what is actually happening. The middle four follow the Tabitha character who therein focalizes more as she seeks the true nature of the strange apparitions and haunting sounds, eventually demanding and obtaining more of the imperfectly understood truth out of the kindly and well-meaning donor character Great Uncle Guy. The final four chapters see the arrival of the previously-thought-dead Great Uncle Cole, and the outing of the two major family secrets: not only can women be magicians in the family, but, as is revealed, so too are both Great Granny Scholar and Troy.

The narrative thus portrays family interactions as a microcosm allegorically representing intersubjectivity within wider society particularly in the way people represent themselves through the power of the speech act in the stories they tell about themselves and their roles in an extended family/wider society. In a relatively but not completely covert way, the narrative also portrays sex, gender, and sexuality as

being ambivalent and porous markers of identity in parallel with that of a “magician” within the story itself.

Mahy starts Chapter One by characterizing Barney and having her narrator inform the reader about some aspects of his personal history, and sets this against his encounter with an enigmatic ghost with a mechanistic speech impediment, a penchant for flamboyant dress in blue velvet and lace, and outlandish behaviour — appearing as a photograph and then spinning around (perhaps meant to be interpreted by the writerly adult reader as “spinning out”). The apparition also seems to be suffering from severe identity issues, as strongly symbolized by the ghostly photographic image of the boy ripping itself up into tiny shreds and then dissolving away. It later emerges that the imaginative image was sent by Great-Uncle Cole, and he does indeed appear to have identity issues. Mahy manages to effectively convey this by the ghost’s speaking like a broken record or cassette on repeat play, speaking a phrase disturbing to Barney and yet meaningless to him and the first-time reader at this point.

On the way home from school as he was, Barney runs the rest of the way home and straight into the words of self-important sister Tabitha, who, in her first display of the power of her speech-act, tells him of the death in the family mentioned by the dissolving ghost, and thereby ironically frightens Barney to the point of fainting on the doorstep. Thus within the first chapter alone Mahy has created a microcosm of the story by setting up an opposition between Cole’s “real magical” with its emphasis on spectacle-as-action despite lack of effective meaningful communication, as against the

simply described “brown, round Tabitha” with her blunt but honest speech-act effectively and powerfully casting an unintended spell over the fainting Barney. This serves to underline Mahy’s recurring motif that the honest truth is both powerful and dangerous, and ascribes this power to Tabitha in a way effectively overshadowing older sister Troy for the majority of the rest of the novel.

Chapter Two introduces the rest of the Palmer household, and through their discussions of the recently deceased also introduces all the characters from the extended family on the maternal Scholar side. Their discussion introduces the element of mystery about one of the great uncles, described by the late mother Dove as having “a golden piece in his mind” (p.14). Having this “golden piece” is explained by Troy later at the climax of the plot as a difference representing magical abilities. The connection of gold with magic is another recurring motif seen later in *Alchemy*.

The next chapter starts with Tabitha and the children’s discussion of their dislike of the idea of visiting their Scholar grandparent’s home. Visit they do, however, and Barney finds that the house is a site of an even more direct experience of being haunted. The spectral presence meaningfully draws a speech bubble on a photograph indicating a further desire to say something, but in the process again ironically further troubling and alienating the increasingly skittish Barney. Fortunately for him Tabitha witnesses this magic yet ineffective attempt at communication, and she also starts a useful conversation with Great-Uncle Guy.

By Chapter Four then, Tabitha is engaged in the pursuit of the truth of what is happening to the increasingly frail Barney. She speaks with him about it all, and then alone again later that evening Barney actually also addresses his ghost which appears to him in his drowsy imagination as he is falling asleep, but to little avail.

Chapter Five sees the visit of the Scholar grandparents to check on Barney, following on from that by Great-Uncle Guy who reveals more of his insightful yet imperfect knowledge about his family and his brother, the mysterious and ostensibly late Great-Uncle Cole. Barney comes to the realization that it is Great-Uncle Cole who is haunting him; however, while he at first believes Cole to be dead (p.48), he still fears Cole's "need and purpose" (p. 49) in this way ironically and innocently expressing fears read by the implied writerly adult reader as implicitly predatory in a potentially sexual way.

Chapter Six returns to Tabitha's quest for truth, starting as it does with her speaking with Barney about his haunting before she decides to take matters into her own hands and go into town to talk again with Great-Uncle Guy. Seeing Tabitha will not be dissuaded from her question-based quest, he confesses to knowing Cole is alive. When she tells Barney this in the start of Chapter Seven, he is not surprised; when Tabitha detects the haunting sound of foot-steps emanating from around Barney, however, and then they go to tell Troy about it, Troy's reaction is quite surprising to her two younger siblings. She appears disinterested in their reports and purports to be unable to detect the sound of foot-falls. It later appears that she was, at this point, in

monological agreement with Great-Granny Scholar's ideological position of maintaining a silence and repressing any acknowledgement of such magical difference.

Chapter Eight sees much development in the narrative almost purely by way of dialogue or verbal interaction between the characters. Claire confesses over dinner to being a failure at understanding what's going on although it reads to the adult writerly reader as a cry of frustration at being incapable of affecting monological agreement in any of the younger characters. The children's father finally shows interest and engages in a deep, open discussion over dinner, wherein Tabitha and Troy both refer to Mrs. Gaines — the hired nanny of by-gone days — who "just didn't like little boys" (p.85), and Barney is assured of his safety by his father, but following dinner is again frightened by Cole's intrusion into his dreams, despite the Cole/ghost's first signs of faltering in its self-assuredness.

In Chapter Nine Cole finally arrives at the Palmer household and greets the children. Just as his reasoning with Barney and Tabitha is proving ineffective and he starts to verbalize a threat to carry Barney away with him against his will, Claire returns to enter the fray and issue her counter-challenge. Chapter Ten continues with their confrontation, develops with the entire family arriving, and ends following Troy's eventual outing of Great-Granny Scholar, her long-held secret of magical powers, and Troy's own magical difference. The resolution to these potentially stunning revelations is seen in Chapter Eleven wherein Tabitha echoes Troy's dialogical speaking of truth to power in describing Great-Granny Scholar as "pretty nasty a lot of the time" and "little

and miserable” (p.123) but balances these declarations with an equally revolutionary hug.

In a parallel display of openness to detent, Troy takes the suddenly demystified and dejected Great-Uncle Cole for a walk in a scene virtually re-characterizing him as an obedient puppy. Chapter Twelve is a continuation of this process, but this time with Cole explaining himself to Tabitha and then obediently succumbing to her child-like magical-speech-act/spell in the form of her spoken desire he purchase ice-creams. Troy on the other hand is caught exercising her powers as if the world is her toy, and is shamed to tears by Claire who in turn offers words of encouragement and patience. Troy then expresses her love for Claire and Barney verbally, her statement accompanying as it does her hug of Claire which shows her words and actions to be in alignment, symbolic of her renewed active engagement in authentic relationships within her family. This combination of the speech act complementary of action then is Troy’s symbolic final and complete rejection of Great-Granny Scholar’s inter-subjective influence, with her insistence on silence, lack of obvious affection, and a rejection of any acceptance of (sexual/magical) difference. Claire’s ideological subject position, however, remains ambivalent and a marker of a position remaining fairly centrally contingent on the spectrum of acceptance of difference; she encourages Troy to continue as she always has, expressing therefore acceptance of Troy’s identity as different, but not — at this stage — accepting overt outward expression of it.

The tale of *The Haunting* can therefore be seen as allegorical of a power struggle over the acceptance of differences within a family representing those within wider society, as a teenager decides and finally risks expressing an individual identity of difference while simultaneously learning to engage and love and be loved by those immediately around.

ii.) Identity as Story: Intergenerational Negotiation of the Intersubjective

Barney and Claire: Love and Lies by Words and Action

Identity within the bounds of a meaningful relationship is marked by Mahy as being of central concern from the opening scene of Chapter One, wherein Barney's thoughts are focalized by the narrator in the first paragraph: "... he had thought that being haunted was a babyish thing that you grew out of..." (p.1). On the same page soon thereafter, the narrator further characterizes Barney via his loving relationship with his mother-figure, symbolized by the parallel and mutually reinforcing combination of words and actions: "He could not remember his own mother and Claire had come as a wonderful surprise, giving him a hug when he came home from school, asking him about his day, telling him about hers..." (p.1). From the outset Mahy hereby shows the symbolic importance of agreement between words and actions to a real, loving relationship, and Claire's example of this to her new family is what marks her as ultimately different from Great-Granny Scholar. Furthermore, Claire's complicit acceptance of what she believes to be the story-lie of Barney's imaginary friends

foreshadows and parallels the Scholar grandparent's complicit acceptance of the story-lies about Great-Uncle Cole as iterated by Great-Granny Scholar.

Mahy draws Claire as a potentially stereotypical "bad" story-book step-mother as seen in a Bakhtinian examination of her idiolect. Following on from the display of magic in the Scholar Grandparent's home sitting room and Great-Granny Scholar's misplaced scolding of Barney and Tabitha, Claire's equivocating in terms of her support for Tabitha and Barney as part of the Palmer family is further pointed out by her commenting on this exchange on the way home. While perhaps a comment made in at least partial jest, her motivation for their good behavior is shown to be ultimately selfish: "... I always want you to behave marvelously in public so people will know what a wonderful stepmother I am." Her dislike of Great-Granny Scholar's comments to Barney are shown to be related not to the nature of the comments themselves, but rather their public nature: "But I don't care if she's one-hundred-and-fifty, she shouldn't speak to a little boy like that – not in front of everyone." And her adopting of Great-Granny Scholar's pointedly negative idiolect is demonstrated by the use of a double-negative, and two more statements which are simply negative, one in its use of the negative imperative, and the final one in its emphasis of Barney's failing: "You're not unreliable Barney, don't think it, though it was clumsy of you to spill that tea." (p.29) Claire's negativity towards Barney is important to the story of Tabitha's quest for truth insofar as it could potentially dissuade her from actively pursuing her case for fear of further negativity directed at herself. Moreover, it also further delineates

Claire's subject position as a character with the potential for finding monological agreement with Great-Granny Scholar in deed as well as word.

Barney and his father, Mr. Palmer

Barney's potentially misplaced trust in Claire is in symbolic opposition to the Palmer children's father who, it is soon enough revealed, has remained aloof since their birth mother's death, and so has not effectively been expressing a personal connection of any import to the children:

[...] though his father was closer and kinder than he had been before he married Claire [...] he was still somebody Barney was not sure about ... a jolly man who might turn out to be not very interested in his children in the long run. (p.38)[final ellipsis in the original]

The question of identity within loving relationships thus becomes of central concern to the implied writerly adult reader, within the context of a narrative where the narrator informs the reader that even the word-symbol "father" is open to redefinition. The role of a father-figure in the exchange of inter-subjective ideologies within a family social structure is thus destabilized within this story.

Barney's ambivalent feelings about his father turn out to be legitimate although a misplaced fear. It is legitimized by the eventual revelation that Great-Granny Scholar is one such parent, virtually disinterested in the emotional state of her children, or at least less interested in that than in their behaving in a monological denial of

individuality and difference. It is misplaced because Barney's father does turn out to be actively interested and even concerned for Barney, as is revealed in their discussion over dinner, and while washing the dishes in Chapter Eight, and in the conclusion.

Barney's lack of closeness to his father in the beginning of the novel is perhaps due, within the parameters of the implied back-story, to his father's wishing to avoid emotional closeness for the sake of sheltering his children from his grief immediately following the children's mother's death. This then is in further ironic opposition to the Scholar household, who saw Great-Granny Scholar engage to a greater extent with her children following the death of their father. Great-Uncle Guy reveals to Tabitha later that this was, however, in a largely negative way, with a lack of affection, and in Great-Granny Scholar's effort to establish her story-lies about magical difference needing to be repressed, and only existing within males within the family.

Barney and Tabitha, and the Story of *The Haunting*

Commencing the second section of the narrative, Chapter Four begins by immediately making clear Tabitha's mission to get to the bottom of the story, and simultaneously points out that story/lies can also be conveyed non-verbally:

"Something's wrong with you," Tabitha said, sliding through Barney's bedroom door. "May I come in?" she added, when she was already safely in and could not be got out again.

"Nothing's wrong," said Barney, pretending to read his book. (p.31)

Barney's pretense equates to a small lie, and is Mahy's way of showing Barney to be not so pure and innocent a child as his subject position relative to other characters would suggest. This is not the only example of his "telling stories" as Great-Granny Scholar puts it, as I shall mention in relation to his father. In contrast, however, Tabitha's actions are shown to be consistently honest in her persistence and resolute determination to establish the truth. This also underlines Barney's position as subject to Claire and Great-Granny Scholar's pressure to behave appropriately and avoid troublingly truthful acknowledgements of disturbing magical events. Fortunately, Tabitha has none of that, with another page's-worth of her berating him into opening up before she adds:

"... Secrets are like sore places — I know I should leave them alone but I can't help bothering about them. And if something's wrong I might be able to help ... I can be very helpful sometimes. Is something wrong?"

Suddenly Barney, looking at Tabitha's round face and shaggy curls, felt that she could be comforting as well as irritating — that he had to tell someone about his ghost, and that Tabitha, who was such a good talker, might turn out to be a good listener, too. (p.32)

This point then marks the first intersection of the two quests of this narrative, as Tabitha's relationship with Barney is shown to be authentic when she here earns his trust and he confesses his fears and the practical reason for his avoidance of talking

more with Claire: his belief that she should avoid any stress or worry on his behalf before giving birth.

Chapter Five also begins with Tabitha focused on Barney, and as at the very end of the previous chapter, her actions are described before her dialogue is voiced. Yet this is the chapter where the grandparent's generation all make a house-call ostensibly for a social visit, but actually to check on Barney and act as donor characters, each imparting a little more truth of the history of Great-Uncle Cole and the family story in his regard. And yet their donations of information are to the rest of the more passive family and not to the active seeker of truth, Tabitha. They all visit while Tabitha is away in the swimming pool, and so it is Barney's listening to the conversations that is focalized by the narrator throughout the chapter. This information serves to help the reader understand more of the background story, note the genuine concern and interest from the Scholars for the Palmers and Barney, and helps set the scene for the following chapter's startling revelations due to Tabitha's inquisitive demand for more information from Great-Uncle Guy on the Tuesday of the following chapter.

The narrator begins Chapter Six focalizing Tabitha, in the first sentence describing how she "really began to notice a difference in Barney." In the first sentence of the second paragraph the narrator further characterizes her as being "that careful observer and future novelist ... feeling troubled ..." and taking a few notes "without the usual feelings of pleasure and power" (p.51). This is a description of the hero taking stock, finding motivation, and preparing for starting her mission/quest later in the chapter.

She checks in with Barney again, further revealing the depths of her feeling for him, consulting with him, negotiating as to the best course of action. Upon feeling stymied after he leaves the conversation and the room, it is implied by the narrator that Troy then acts with her magical powers from a distance, making a suggestion known to Tabitha via her imagination: "Quietly, almost as if he were a sort of ghost himself, Great-Uncle Guy came into her mind. He had been kind and welcoming when they had paid their Saturday visit, and he would probably be at his office that afternoon." (p.55). Whether or not Troy is here being described also acting as a donor character for this idea, Tabitha does thereafter goes to meet the donor character of Guy, fulfilling her role as the hero of truth's cause in her own story of gender roles reversed, with her younger brother as the bed-ridden innocent Sleeping Beauty-type character.

In further support of the description of her as a dependable person who operates with mathematical accuracy she is characterized as turning up "at four-thirty precisely" (p.58) and upon the next page again as recounting "very precisely" about Barney's experiences of being haunted from the very beginning (p.59). Her trustworthiness supports the reading of her as the novel's true hero, prepared to do battle against the forces of lies and truthiness.

Cole and the Scholar Grandparent's Generation

During the visit to the Scholar Grandparent's home, Great-Uncle Guy relates the generally accepted story/lie that Cole "ran away from home when he was very young and he drowned in a river down south." Whether or not he still believes this to be the

truth is not clear at this stage, however, Claire again reprimands Tabitha, saying, “You do — you really do — talk far too much.” Grandma Scholar speaks in support of Tabitha’s questioning though, replying on her behalf: “Claire, I *like* to hear her talk...” (p.24) [Emphasis in the original].

Interestingly, in an apparently otherwise irrelevant minor earlier paragraph, the narrator recounts Grandfather Scholar offering a cup of tea freshly made by “Janet” to Great-Granny Scholar, and then adds an explanation in parenthesis: “(Janet was Grandma Scholar).” The direct insertion of this voice of the narrator creates the impression that the narrator is reliable in terms of letting the reader know all relevant information, particularly important in light of the eventual revelations later in the story.

Moreover, these instances of highlighting the character of Grandma Janet Scholar underline her subject position as a site of support for Tabitha’s resistance to the value of polite yet inauthentic relationships, and as such she can also be seen as a donor character to Troy on her path to self-actualization as much as Guy with his sharing of information, imperfect as it is. Mahy’s depiction of intersubjectivity within the social unit of the wider family featured in this novel thus hereby develops apace.

Cole and Barney: The Anti-hero’s Story

Another story of identity to emerge later in the narrative is that of Great-Uncle Cole and the reason for his sense of virtual entitlement to help himself to a child of his unmet relatives. The story he had been telling himself was that he would have been

doing Barney a favour by rescuing him from the non-differently magical family members. In terms of Mahy's conception of "patterns of imaginative acceptance" then, he was not capable of imagining the Palmer household as possibly being welcoming of Barney or Troy's magical difference as he had never experienced that kind of "story" himself.

In this way then, *The Haunting* works as a kind of cautionary tale, with Mahy the author able to be seen in a caring, motherly, didactic mode, warning of the dangers of the story-lie as if in retelling of *A Lion in the Meadow*, with Great-Granny Scholar as the story-telling mother using a story selfishly but ultimately resulting in the plan backfiring. Both the stories of Great-Granny Scholar and that of Great-Uncle Cole are also comparable to that of *The Great White Man-Eating Shark*, in that following the characters' efforts to convince themselves that their story-lie is for a good, what are actually selfish desires ultimately end up in humiliation for themselves. *The Haunting* works in a markedly similar way, and can be read as a story of the unraveling of the identities of the story-lie tellers seeking to exert their influence by misusing their powers within the society — and inter-subjective relationships — of their families.

Seen in this light, perhaps it is Claire's voice at the end of the novel which most clearly enunciates Mahy's own didactic tone, warning Troy as she does against the temptation to ever use the power to do anything other than write one's own life story in a tone of strident normalcy, despite Tabitha's freshly made complaints of wanting to be "special" and being "stuck with ordinariness" (p.122).

Cole's experience as related in the telling the story of his personal history to Tabitha in her interview in the final chapter supports his own views, as she asks him less about what he ever said, and rather about his actions with regard to his magical difference:

"What did you do?" she asked. "Did you live by magic?"

"I did this and that," Cole said. "... I did a lot of different things.

Sometimes I used magic to help me but only in small ways – only to do things people would believe in anyway. ..."

"So you've done nothing much with your magic really." Tabitha fixed him with a commanding eye.

"Only kept it a secret," Cole replied, "and shared it a bit with Barnaby."

(pp.128,129) [Emphasis in the original; ellipsis mine.]

Tabitha's interest in the family's special, magical difference is hereby downplayed by Cole and the potential for an amazing story to contribute to her world-famous novel is effectively nixed. Mahy instead seems to point to the value of the authentic relationship as a site worthy of Tabitha's attention, as immediately following the discussion above, Tabitha demands of Cole:

"And haven't you got any friends?" asked Tabitha incredulously.

"Oh, I know a million people," said Cole. "But no one knows me. That's why brother Barnaby was so precious to me. We really knew each other. No need to explain, to hide, to pretend anything was what it wasn't. ..."

(p.129)

That Cole's truth is less exciting to her than her expectations is marked by Tabitha's change of the topic soon after, to the more enticing subject of going to buy ice-cream for dessert. That she accepts him, his story, and his relationship as authentic and worthy of continued affection is amusingly marked by her offer to help him choose the correct flavour.

Tabitha and Great-Granny Scholar: Dialogical Conflict

Tabitha and Great-Granny Scholar have their first real clash of ideological subject positions in direct relation to truth and story soon after Tabitha witnesses the magically written message appearing on a photograph being looked at by Barney before he reacts and accidentally spills his tea. It is Tabitha who speaks out about it, exclaiming: "No pen or anything! Words just came. It was like magic." Claire responds: "Don't talk to me about magic." Soon after helping clean up the spilled tea she adds: "It's well and truly time we went ...," and then the narrator again describes her as she "herded Tabitha and Barney before her" this time in the obviously less pastoral setting, and so the more wild animal connotations are implied (p.28). This repeat description of Claire's subject position seems to be foregrounding the following exchange starting with Great-Granny Scholar:

"I heard what you said, and I think you should be old enough by now not to go showing off trying to make yourself interesting by telling silly stories."

"It wasn't a story," Tabitha said, and anyone who knew her could tell

that she wasn't showing off this time. She was puzzled and even a little bit frightened. "It was true! I always say what's true, don't I, Troy? It's one of those things that's wrong with me."

"She does tell the truth," agreed Troy. "Better to be like me and tell only lies."

This was a peculiar thing for anyone to say and particularly for silent Troy. Grandmother Scholar [sic] did not seem to notice how peculiar it was. She was not listening to Troy. (p.29)

Of primary importance in a Bakhtinian sense is the narrator's use of the words "silly stories" and "story" to mean, by implication, lie, a word immediately thereafter actually voiced by Troy. Secondly, the voice of the narrator in offering information about Troy directly to the reader again hints strongly that there is something different about her. Using the word "peculiar" twice to underline this point, the narrator then focuses again on [Great-]'Grandmother' Scholar, potentially distracting the reader from thinking too much about Troy's unusual statement. The use of the title "[Great]Grandmother" even by the narrator, however, rather than the more affectionate term Great-Granny, serves to further highlight the sudden distancing that this exchange has created, as ideological differences in oppositional subject positions are clearly demarked and the relationships strained further.

In terms of chronotope then, this scene marks the open space of the sitting room within the Scholar grandparent's home as the site of inter-subjective discussion within

the extended family, and in a nice case of narrative symmetry it foreshadows the eventual conflict three chapters from the end of the book in the Palmer family's sitting room.

It is the time and place whereby speaking out and asking around, Tabitha effectively offers open dialogic resistance to Great-Granny Scholar's hegemonic and monological efforts at colonization of the extended family. Furthermore in the build-up to the climax in the Palmer household's sitting room Tabitha speaks out against Cole's presumption that her family would in any way repress Barney's potential magical difference. This is a presumption he has formed after a life-time of living in Great-Granny Scholar's shadow; in Tabitha's public declaration of the truth of her family's moral support for the subject position of being differently magical she not only helps defuse Cole's distrust of the family, but also potentially offers encouragement and support to Troy's eventual decision to come out as magically different soon thereafter. By her public speech acts she thus effectively helps rewrite the story's ending by successfully offering a dialogic point of view.

Part Two - Sex, Gender, Sexuality, and Intersubjectivity:

Nature versus Lack of Nurture

The Palmer Children versus Great-Granny Scholar:

Nature in Dialogic Opposition to the Unnaturally Nurtured

As I have demonstrated in previous chapters of this study, in her other gothic coming-of-age adolescent fiction tales Mahy aligns sexuality with the natural, and therein by extension, sexuality via the natural with a state of innocence (with the exception of animalistic/bird-like Carmody Braque of *The Changeover* returning as he does to the natural/nature). With the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope in mind then, the imagery Mahy's narrator offers in Chapter Two of the children's crossing the immaculate green lawn upon arrival at the Scholar grandparent's house sets up a contrast of the natural versus the unnatural, particularly as against the unnatural perfect angry doll-like appearance of Great-Granny Scholar in the house with the weird blue carpet.

So, in the afternoon, brushed and polished and sworn to behave well, bony Troy, fat Tabitha and brown, shy Barney were herded across the beautiful lawn that belonged to the house where Grandpa and Grandma Scholar lived. (p.19)

The use of the word "herded" likens the children to animals, which on the one hand could be seen as a derogatory expression, and in relation to the Victorian era sensibilities of the correctness of the Scholar household this undertone might have

been appropriate. It also, however, implies a state of the natural, and creates a scene of idyllic imagery, like farmers herding a flock of golden fleeced lambs across a lush pastoral landscape.

This is in direct contrast to the following description of the small Great-Granny Scholar and the Scholar home wherein she holds court for the family from her throne, the largest chair in the room:

The sitting room, with its blue carpet and flowery chairs and curtains, was full of people. ... sitting in the biggest chair of all, Great-Grandmother Scholar ... She was absolutely neat, so neat that she seemed like a doll brought out of a glass case in a museum and sat up especially for the occasion. (p.19) [Ellipsis mine.]

Whatever Mahy intends the blue colour of the carpet to symbolize, its unnatural colour somewhat clashes with the image of the flowers inside and the implied green of the lawn outside; this establishes a degree of tension between the natural and the unnatural in the space of the sitting-room. Furthermore, in the same way as Great-Uncle Cole is later described as being a younger, shorter, and more child-like version of Great-Uncle Guy, Great-Granny Scholar is here characterized as being of one of the smallest people in the room as reinforced by the doll simile; being “sat up” on the largest chair also suggests the state of her childish nature, and highlights the unnatural order of her performance of the feminine in that location.

Her unnatural nature may be better described as un-feminine, or perhaps even more accurately “un-motherly” in her lack of affection displayed at this time and place of potential emotional vulnerability. This is further underscored by the narrator in contrast with the grandparent’s generation:

The great-uncles and the grandparents were really pleased to see them — there could be no mistake about that. They looked at the Palmer children so kindly and sadly and all gave them the same sort of kiss, a light, dry, summery brush on the cheek. It was more like being kissed by trees than by people. But Great-Grandmother kissed them as if it were something disagreeable that had to be done, grim kisses in the centre of each forehead, and everything she said was disagreeable too. (pp.19, 20) [Emphasis in the original.]

This remarkable imagery of the grandparents-as-trees underscores Mahy’s centering of a physical expression of affection as natural, and yet Great-Granny Scholar’s affections seemed forced and unnaturally accurately placed. That her bitter words align with her actions further supports the characterization of her thoroughly unnatural inability in the role as a mother-figure.

That the source of Great-Granny Scholar’s shame and will to repress any sign of difference is due to a Freudian connection to the sexual is further alluded to subtly by Mahy. Great-Uncle Guy explains to Tabitha:

My parents — your great-grandparents — were second cousins. Did you know that? I don't think my father ever worried about our family being different with their magical powers but my mother was obsessed with it.
(p.64)

In this way Mahy associates Great-Granny Scholar's obsession with difference with an implied sense of guilt or shame at any sign revealing the incestuous nature of her marriage. While the issue of the great-grandparents being cousins is stated explicitly, the implications are not drawn out, but are left for the implied adult reader to notice and note in a way that the implied child reader is not. Mahy therein shows how, despite the fact that some stories are valued for their truth, others are valued for their ability to obscure the truth.

Troy versus Great-Granny Scholar: Chronotope and the Carnavalesque

Numerous commentators have pointed out Mahy's recurring trope of mixing the sex and gender of the names of her characters, usually the protagonists, in such a way that resists stereotypical expectations of the characters' gender roles. The androgynous nature of the name Troy is a hint that this character might have such a difference. Mahy described in her interview with Murray Edmond of 1987 her own childhood history of writing about androgyny, and her interest in popular images of sexual ambivalence such as the pop singer Boy George (2000, p.105). Furthermore, she describes the name Troy's allusions to a city under siege; however, the image of a

secret power hidden within and waiting for the appropriate time for a surprising outing seems more relevant given the eventual developments within the narrative.

In terms of a Bakhtinian reading, Troy's coming out scene can be read as containing elements of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin points out the traditional carnival involved all participants in the creation of the spectacle. The arrival of the older generations unfolds like a procession. In terms of participation in the confrontational climactic scene, almost everyone in the room had been involved in the developing discussion except for the typically silent Barney and Troy. Troy finally speaks up only after Barney both makes his offer to go with Cole, and supports these words with the action of stepping forward to actually go. By the conclusion of what seems to be Troy's response, in the process of her coming out she completes two inversions simultaneously, her transition from relatively passive viewer to active participant, and, a power inversion in two ways. She strips Great-Granny Scholar of her empowering story-lies that only males can inherit the magically different family gene, and, by pointing out the true source of Great-Granny Scholar's shame — that she set her sister's hair on fire in a magical fit of jealous spite — she dis-empowers the story-lie that it is the magical difference is anything to be ashamed of to start with. Thus gender plays an integral part of the story-line. However, another aspect of the carnival with regards sexuality needs clarification at this point.

The narrative can be read allegorically as representing sexual difference. The term "coming out" has in this study been used in reference to the identity marker made

literal in the story, that of magical difference within the family. I do suggest Mahy intended an allegorical reading to be available to the implied and writerly adult reader. Certainly, in terms of emotional weight and Mahy's concept of patterns of imaginative acceptance, few other identity markers in 1980s middle-New Zealand would have potentially caused an equitable degree of internal family conflict. Indeed, in terms of chronotope and meta-narrative, the nation was at that time the site of discourse eventually resulting in the 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Act which saw legal discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation outlawed, for men. Following on from the British legal precedent homosexual acts between women had never been outlawed, as a result, apparently, of a royal pronouncement attributed to Queen Victoria. This factoid creates a curious parallel with Mahy's text in terms of female magical difference within the Scholar/Palmer families.

Conclusion

Having explained her writing style in the interview with Murray Edmond, Mahy then segues into a description of how she sometimes reads favourite old stories to younger grandchildren and then becomes overwhelmed by the layers of emotion built up from the years of added personal meaning, before she continues by explaining one such hidden layer of meaning for her, relating to the two sisters central to *The Haunting*. Tabitha, she explains, is a writing of herself as the real child she was, who talked far too much truth of all different sorts to the extent that other children didn't believe her.

Troy, however, was the silent one with the impressive hair Mahy one day realized was not herself, but was rather her projected desires:

I found myself staring at my reflection in the mirror, taking in my short straight whitish hair and ordinary face with puzzlement and knowing there had been a great mistake somewhere, for I did not look at all like that graceful girl with the dark and flowing hair I had imagined so vividly when I thought of myself [...] I had never looked like that [...]

Once again, sometime after *The Haunting* was published, I suddenly recognized the sisters Troy and Tabitha as having had their beginnings in that moment of puzzlement ... and the duality of real and romantic.

(Mahy, 2000, p.20)

Given that Mahy just told the reader that she enjoys adding hidden layers of meaning to her works consciously, and added to that now this declaration that she did not notice her having written this added layer of meaning about her desire for wonderful hair about herself into the story, one might do well to wonder just what hidden layer of meaning Mahy did write, *consciously*, into *The Haunting*, or any others of her works.

Within this chapter, however, I have again shown how Bakhtinian theories of intersubjectivity, dialogism, chronotope, and the carnivalesque can all be used to trace the ideological subject positions represented within the words, the speech-acts, and the actions of the characters and the narrative.

I have demonstrated how Great-Granny Scholar had affected monological silence within her household until such time as Great-Uncle Guy acted on the basis of story-lie she had told so many years earlier, potentially causing much more harm than the lie was originally intended to deflect. I have also shown how if it were not for Tabitha's speaking up and out consistently in support of truth, Barney, and then even Great-Uncle Guy, and given such a scenario even Troy may well have never felt supported enough to make her feet to stand up to speak out for herself.

Chapter Six — *Conclusion*

I return in conclusion to Bruner's point about "hermeneutic composability" — when there is no "unique solution to the task of determining the meaning for this expression" — and when there is no empirical method for determining the verifiability of the constituent elements that make up the text (as is the challenge with most liberal arts), he turns to Vladimir Propp for understanding as to how the challenge is to reassemble the parts of the narrative into a cohesive, re-constituted, functioning whole (Bruner, p.7). There is no perfect interpretation of any of these novels: I cannot say that *The Haunting* "is about" (x), (y), or even (S/Z), because there are too many logical inconsistencies. I do say, however, that it functions in the same imaginative pattern as an allegory for a coming out novel wherein the younger generation of the family stands in dialogic opposition to the monological great-grandmother's story-lie. They present a model for the use of their imaginations to find it within themselves to confront their fears of the other, accept their commonalities and differences, and then go and buy ice cream. As Bruner states in his distinction between literary narrative theory and his psychological perspective, "the central concern is not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (p.5). In other words, like Mahy, he also sees the novel as text open to interpretation actually having a practical application in the identity and subjectivity of the reader.

Following the reading then, the reader turns back from isolation with the text towards a reengagement with society, so on to contribute their influence in the ever-flowing currents of inter-subjectivity. Will the meditations inherent in the unraveling of the text have altered their way of seeing that society? Bruner adds to this thought:

The normativeness of narrative, in a word, is not historically or culturally terminal. Its form changes with the preoccupations of the age and the circumstances surrounding its production. Nor is it required of narrative, by the way, that the Trouble with which it deals be resolved. Narrative, I believe, is designed to contain uncanniness rather than to resolve it. It does not have to come out on the "right side." (p.16)

With that then, I am happy to recognize that this year is the thirtieth anniversary since Mahy won her first Carnegie Medal for *The Haunting*. Some things considered normal by wider society now were not so then, and, no doubt, the opposite is true too given other contexts.

In conclusion, it is evident that in these four novels Mahy writes for a multiple readership although with *The Haunting* she primarily targets a younger audience who happily — and in some cases even hopefully — takes the text at face value, glossing over the clues to a multiplicity of meanings which await the imaginative adult reader. It is also clear that amongst her many recurring motifs and common character types is a common ideological thread running through at least these few of her novels: it is an ideology of liberation, an openness of text and soul; an openness to reading and to

being read, but it is also a warning against those who would tell lies in the shapes of stories, and against those who would want to feed their own desires selfishly rather than share within an authentic relationship.

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Research Supervision Statement

Date 31st of March, 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to state that the research carried out for the masters thesis/research report entitled

SEX, STORY, AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: BAKHTIN, MAHY, AND
PATTERNS OF IMAGINATIVE ACCEPTANCE

was completed by Julian J.P. Warmington

in the School of ENGLISH + MEDIA STUDIES
Massey University, New Zealand, under my direct supervision. This thesis material has not been
used for any other degree. I played the following part in the preparation of the thesis:

ADVICE ON CONCEPTUALISATION, STRUCTURE + PHRASING


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

Thesis Supervisor

Julian J.P. Warmington

This is to state that the research carried out for the abovenamed Masters thesis/research report is
my own work and has not been used for any other degree.

Student Julian J.P.
Warmington

 31/3/2012

