Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance by Margaret Mahy", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/118. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Margaret Mahy

The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance

United Kingdom (1984)

TAGS: Charon Eleusinian Mysteries Katabasis Lemures Orpheus Persephone Underworld





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1984
First Edition Details	Margaret Mahy, *The Changeover*. London: J. M. Dent, 1984, 214 pp.
ISBN	0689503032
Awards	1984 – Carnegie Medal (The British Library Association)
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Magic realist fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Portrait of Margaret Mahy with her dog, courtesy of David Alexander.

Margaret Mahy , 1936 - 2012
(Author)

Margaret Mahy was born in 1936, in Whakatane, in the North Island New Zealand, the daughter of an engineer (a bridge-builder) and a teacher. From her early years, she was a precocious reader and writer. She studied for a BA at the then University of New Zealand, before training as a librarian in Wellington. Her first stories were published in the New Zealand School Journal, and were published internationally from 1969, following their discovery by an American editor. Before she was able to support her full time writing, Mahy drove a book bus in Canterbury, in the South Island, and worked as a librarian at the Christchurch Public Library. She wrote over 100 works, including novels, story collections, picture books, songs, essays and plays, and received many literary awards, both nationally and internationally. She was awarded the New Zealand Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement (2005), and the Hans Christian Andersen Award (2006) and the Sir Julius Vogel Award for Services to New Zealand Science Fiction and Fantasy (2006). She died in 2012. In 2015, the *Margaret Mahy Family Playground* was opened in central Christchurch.

Sources:

Dossier, *Nomination to IBBY Hans Christian Andersen Awards DATE. Country of Nomination: New Zealand; Writer Candidate: Margaret Mahy*.

Duder, Tessa, *Margaret Mahy: A Writer's Life*, Auckland: Harper Collins, 2012.

Profile at the bookcouncil.org.nz (accessed: June 27, 2018).

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Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Adaptations

Film:

Stuart McKenzie, Miranda Harcourt, dir., *The Changeover*, New Zeland, premiere: September 25th, 2017, 95 min.

Translation

Chinese: *Bian Shen,* Hu Nang Chang Sha: Hu nan shao nian er tong chu ban she, trans. Hu xian yao, 2009.

Finnish: *Noitavaellus,* trans. Kristiina Rikman, Helsinki: Tammi 2007.

Dutch: *De Inwijding,* trans. Jo Fieldeldij Dop, Patt Voorsmit, Groningen: Wolters Noordhoff, Amsterdam: BulkaBoek 1999.

German: *Tochter des Mondes,* trans. Cornelia Knitz-Arnold, Stuttgart: Spectrum Verl., 1987.

Spanish: *El Rituel,* trans. Lucinda Bianco, Barcelona: Ediciones B, 1988.

Swedish: *Forvandlingen: en Overnaturlig Romans,* trans. Mats Thorell, Stockholm: AWE Geber, 1996.

Summary

In *The Changeover*, 14-year old Laura Chant is the child of divorced parents who are finding new partners. Babysitting her 3-year old brother, Jacko, she goes into the shop of Carmody Braque, an antique dealer who is a lemure, an Ancient Roman vampire. The lemure stamps his image on Jacko's hand, and takes possession of him, draining him of his life-blood. To defeat the lemure and save her brother, Laura seeks the help of a boy at school whom she knows is interested in her, 17-year-old Sorenson (Sorry) Carlisle. His mother and grandmother are witches, as is Sorry. Together they perform a "changeover," a feminine ritual (an Eleusinian rite) that enables her to become a witch. This ritual involves an Orphic journey into the recesses of her soul and imagination. Once she is changed over, Laura combats the lemure, imprinting an image of herself on him, and turning him into a bundle of dead leaves. Jacko is saved, Laura and Sorry agree to wait to become lovers, and Laura accepts her divorced

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	mother's new boyfriend.
Analysis	*The Changeover* is the first of a series of young adult novels by Margaret Mahy, in which New Zealand adolescents come of age through stories connected with classical myth, literature, and philosophy. Drawing together themes such as the *katabasis*, the journey to the (literal or figurative) underworld, Mahy employs the motif of the Orphic and Eleusinian underworld journeys, connected with ideas about feminine vs masculine power, to allegorize the coming of age of a teenage girl. Classical journeys and figures interweave with ideas about romance and sexuality, and with a lightly handled magic realism and suburban Gothicism. The ancient Roman monster is contrasted with life in modern New Zealand, and Laura's multicultural heritage, which includes Polynesian and European strands. Mahy's literary heritage is largely European, but her interest lies in interweaving literature that appeals to international readerships with specifically New Zealand settings and concerns.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Charon Eleusinian Mysteries Katabasis Lemures Orpheus Persephone Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Coming of age Divorce Family Femininity Romance Sexuality Siblings
Further Reading	Butler, Catherine, "Margaret Mahy: Librarian of Babel", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 39.2 (2015): 129–145. Gose, Elliott, "Fairy Tale and Myth in Mahy's The Changeover and The Tricksters", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 16.1 (1991), 6–11.

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Hale, Elizabeth, Sarah Fiona Winters: *Marvellous Codes: The Fiction of Margaret Mahy*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005.

Jackson, Anna, Geoffrey Miles, Harry Ricketts, Tatjana Schaefer, and Kathryn Walls. *A Made-Up Place: New Zealand in Young Adult Fiction*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011, 224 pp.

Pohl, Michael, *Classical Myth and Margaret Mahy's Young Adult Fiction: A Thesis Submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature*; Victoria University of Wellington, 2010.

Waller, Alison, ""Solid All the Way Through", Margaret Mahy's Ordinary Witches", *Children's Literature in Education* 35.1 (2004): 77–86.

Addenda

Mahy is a New Zeland writer,though many of her books were first published overseas.

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