

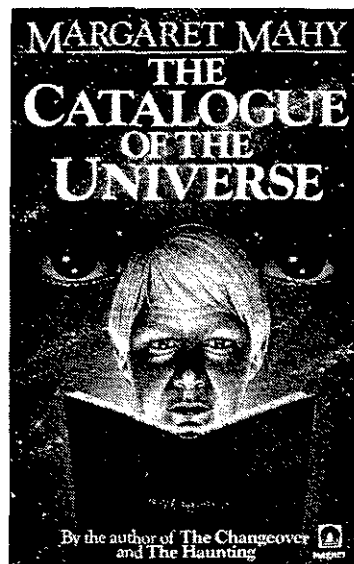


'Romantic notions': Revisiting Margaret Mahy's *The Catalogue of the Universe*.

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Margaret Mahy's *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985), has not received as much critical acclaim as her other award winning books for teenagers, *The Changeover* (1984), *Memory* (1987) and *The Tricksters* (1986), but it is a lively book with some of Mahy's most entertaining and memorable teenage characters. This year Puffin Books is publishing it for the first time as a 'new' title, so it is an interesting time to re-visit the novel. *The Catalogue of the Universe* explores aspects of romance through the activities of Tycho and Angela, the main characters, who research and collect what they describe as 'romantic notions' (p.9). These are collected mainly from books and films, but they are also collected from real life, from the experiences of their families and friends, and from a range of other sources including 'fairy tales, novels, romances, accounts of the behaviour of birds, of chromosomes, or quarks' (p.28).

Mahy is one author described by Leonie Rutherford who presents an 'overt or metafictional questioning of the romance form' (Rutherford 1993, p.3). The widely popular romance genre in which 'girl gets boy', or vice versa, and lives 'happily ever after' represents an ideal world, while Rutherford writes that 'the antiromantic mode



gives us a representation of the world as we believe it really is' (p.3). Romance novels in the 1990s are still enjoying a wide following, and the statistics about teenage pregnancies highlight the romantic views of the majority of teenagers. For example, in *The Australian* on 3 July 1996 Katherine Towers writes about a study of teenage pregnancies that:

Adolescent perceptions of pregnancy and parenthood are overly romantic and idealistic, a key reason one in four 13 to 19-year-old females become pregnant, a South Australian study has found. (p.5)

This study also found that teenage boys were just as

romantic as teenage girls. The concerns about this teenage interest in idealised romance have been explored in many sources, including Janice Radway's book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1984). Novels in the romance genre include men and women who fulfil stereotypical roles, such as women being passive, nurturing and sensitive in contrast to active but emotionally detached men. The models of behaviour which these stereotypical roles present are a matter of concern because they present a viewpoint which is in opposition to the feminist position which requires active participation from women in order to achieve real social change, and they also present a viewpoint about men which is in opposition to the contemporary acceptance of men as being just as sensitive, nurturing and emotional as women. In contrast to the romantic and idealistic contemporary teenagers described by Katherine Towers, the characters in *The Catalogue of the Universe* are presented in a context which both qualify and endorse the 'romantic notions' which are seen in contemporary teenage populations as well as in the mass-produced romantic novels. The book provides insights into teenage romanticism, and presents a valuable qualification of simplistic 'romantic notions' through what

Leonie Rutherford described as a 'metafictive questioning' (1993, p.3) of the romance form, and it also appears to present simultaneously both romantic and antiromantic views of the world as different, but not necessarily contradictory, aspects of experience.

The plot of *The Catalogue of the Universe* revolves around two families, the May family and the Potter family, with Angela May and Tycho Potter being the main protagonists. Angela, the illegitimate heroine, has never met her father, and she has been told by her mother, Dido, that the reason why her father, Roland, does not live with them is because he cannot leave his other family. Angela counts her mother's experience as a solo parent as a 'romantic notion' because she 'sacrificed all for love' (p.9) and because although Dido and Roland had had to part 'they planned to be united for ever in their baby' (p.62). The events which occur when Angela sets out to find her father with the reluctant support of her friend, Tycho, are the substance of the book. The Potter family has two parents and three children, Tycho, Richard and Africa. Africa is married to Hudson and has a baby son, Hamish. While the book focuses on the developing relationship between Angela and Tycho, the changing Potter family relationships are also

significant and present different versions of romantic relationships. Tycho's problems are quite different from Angela's. Although he is a clever, attractive person with a supportive, if inhibiting, family, he has difficulty accepting that he is desirable because he is not good looking. His reading and film viewing give him a view of a romantic hero which he does not match. Although Tycho finds Angela attractive, and this is reciprocated by Angela, part of the significance of the relationship between Tycho and Angela is their sharing with each other complex philosophical ideas in an attempt to make sense of the world around them. Tycho and Angela discuss notions of truth and the meaning of existence using a range of mathematical and scientific methodology, as well as finding analogies in romantic fiction and film. They explore the confusions in the patterns of truth which they were told about, and consider the contradictions between those and social expectations. However, although they make fun of romance, as Dido says, they are 'riddled with it' (p.117).

Their romantic ideas are qualified in many ways in the book through comparisons with other romances, through their own intellectual discussions, and through a range of images. The central image in *The*

Catalogue of the Universe is the patterning of interlocking and overlapping cycles or spirals. This image is seen through natural phenomena such as the enormous galactic spirals observed through Tycho's telescope which make up what is known of the universe, and also in the repetitive man-made domestic cycles of washing up (p.175) or stirring coffee (p.58, p.131). There are many examples of different cycles in the book. One is Richard's dream of wheels within wheels from which he wakes when the telephone rings (p.12); others are the orbit of the Jupiter probe during the autumn when the Potter family are on holiday (p.113), the rotation of the moon and stars which Tycho observes through his telescope, the routines of everyday life like going to work and to school, the cycle of life through birth, life, love, and new life, the mechanical collections of circuits and wheels such as bicycles, clocks, cars and telephone circuits, the routine of scything the grass with the implications of Old Father Time wielding the scythe (p.179), and also the cycle of preparing food and eating meals with the associated unromantic routines of changing nappies (pp.14, 163) and emptying the chemical toilet (p.40).

The cycles are interlocking but still independent, coming

together and moving apart in three dimensional planes, as in the interlocking cog-wheels in the workings of a clock. A cycle is a significant image for the pattern of romance because although the patterning of each cycle is constant, the interactions of cycles demonstrate in mechanical terms how relationships change as people come together and move apart. The image of a clock, which is used several times in the novel, clarifies this concept. At any one time within a clockwork pattern, only parts can be observed, because a knowledge of the whole depends on one's viewing the whole from different angles or perspectives. A limited point of view from inside the moving cogs restricts the perspective of the whole pattern. This image suggests that the characters, too, revolve in their own orbits, and while there might be an overall pattern to the revolutions, the lack of total perception of the pattern makes relationships seem coincidental, accidental and irrational. Because the cycles are constantly moving, people have to guess, imagine or intuit, aspects of the pattern. We may not know whether relationships will be long-lasting or short-term, because that depends on the scale of the cycles which are coinciding. The duration of a relationship is relative. Romantic relationships in the book appear transitory, as

Africa says after she leaves her husband, 'Anyhow, who says it's got to last for ever to be real?' (p.166).

The mathematical precision of the imagery of clockwork and spirals suggests a logical approach to romance with the potential for mathematically exact reciprocal relationships which, once the relationship has been identified, will result in a long term match. However, despite this appearance, the book demonstrates that scientific methodology does not necessarily result in logical outcomes. For example, orbits previously thought to be symmetrical have been found to be asymmetrical, so that there is a 'wobble' as each orbit is completed. Angela and Tycho know that the orbit of Mars which looks circular is, in fact, an ellipse with two focuses (pp.44-5). By analogy, this image suggests that, like the orbit of Mars, a romantic relationship has two focuses, one for each person, so that the orbits cannot be identical. The 'wobble' in the way relationships move together and apart is different for every relationship so that the impact on each individual is different. The interactions are asymmetric, which results in what appear to be unpredictable developments in relationships.

In terms of romantic relation-

ships the wobble in the cycles as people come together results in individual problems between the protagonists, and a range of different solutions to similar difficulties. For example, for Dido, the 'wobble' meant that her love affair with Angela's father, Roland, lasted for a very short time before Angela was born, with the result that she brings Angela up on her own. For Tycho's parents, Mr and Mrs Potter, the relationship is sustained for a much longer time than that of Dido and Roland, but it is one of loyalty and friendship rather than romantic love. For Tycho's sister Africa and her husband, Hudson, the relationship lasts longer than that of Dido and Roland in that they are married before they have their child, Hamish, but their relationship disintegrates during the book. For Tycho and Angela at the beginning of their relationship these parallels suggest an uncertain future.

Like the scientific methodology, romance in *The Catalogue of the Universe* appears to be accidental and temporary. Accidents are the basis for much of the plot and character development and are significant to many aspects of the relationships in the book. At the most basic level, Angela's existence owes itself to the accident of Roland and Dido's lovemaking (p.93). Similarly, Angela does

not plan to go to bed with Tycho, it is what happened at the time (p.144). There are many other accidents with far-reaching implications in the book. Mr Potter is knocked off his bike by accident, which causes his epilepsy. This has implications for the whole family and their friends, but particularly for Tycho who is labelled, falsely, with a similar disability. The car accident in which Jerry Cherry is injured could be the accident that Dido predicts on the hill road, and for a while it is not clear who is in the car. This causes extreme anguish for Angela, who thinks that it is her mother in the accident. That same car accident makes Tycho a hero because he has the opportunity, and the courage and strength, to save Jerry Cherry's life. The implications of that are wide-spread in that the action becomes public, not only to the families concerned, but to the community in general through newspapers. Angela even says good things by accident, as when she says that they will be late for a 'wobble in the cemetery of the world' (p.47), in which the mistake of 'cemetery' for 'symmetry' is both descriptive of her perception about the world and also prescriptive of later events. As Tycho replies, 'I expect a lot of the best things are said by a sort of accident' (p.47).

Accidents all have their own causes which are centred in the

people involved; for example, if the Cherrys had been more careful the brakes would have been checked and the car accident would not have happened (p.157). Similarly, if Dido had not been so overwhelmed that someone as good looking as Roland had been in love with her, despite her plain looks, Angela would not have been born. Conversely, what looks like an accident may be deliberate, as in the case of Angela's 'accidental on purpose' encounters with her father Roland (p.87). However, the book appears to suggest through the cyclical imagery that what often looks like chance and coincidence is predestined. Complex types of magnetism, such as sexual attraction and the human need for love, create wobbles in the smooth running of the orbits, and the dual human attributes of feeling and thought create their own tension within each individual. What seems accidental may be part of an overall pattern which we cannot perceive, a 'grand design' which Tycho and Angela discuss as the concept of 'the doctrine of signatures'. The continuing problem with the theory is that we cannot perceive the design which is elusive, so the theory is no practical help, and true love, like other human activities, continues to appear to be accidental, irrational, elusive and temporary.

As seen earlier in the example of the clock, mechanical man-made imagery helps to identify the nature of the love experience. Romance itself can be seen as a man-made concept, so that the expectations set up for long-term fulfilling romantic relationships are just as likely to be flawed as other man-made mechanisms. Gears in cars and clock mechanisms are related to the development of the understanding of relationships. While the duration of the period of a romantic relationship in the book appears to depend on the scale of the orbits of the protagonists and the specific nature of the wobble in each cycle, the relationships which are made between events depend on the gear being used. When Angela is talking to her father, links are made between past apparently unrelated events, so that she can perceive a truth which is different from that which she had previously believed, and this is presented through the image of a gear change (pp.90-1). When this image is linked to changes in perception it suggests an inevitability about love being necessary for human growth and understanding. Gears freewheel until linked with a new gear, but the potential for the gears to be engaged is always there. The mechanical image is also significant in that, unlike celestial orbits, it takes deliberate human intervention to

change the gear, and the imperfect nature of human 'driving' means that some gear changes are more successful than others. While this suggests a pessimism about the long-term nature of love, it also allows for optimism in that a successful relationship is seen to be possible — if only for the duration of the time that that particular gear is engaged.

The telephone is another image of complex man-made inner circuits which suggests something of the nature of the difficulty of achieving successful personal communication. Its use in the book reflects apparently irrational communication difficulties between people, and demonstrates the imperfections in the human intervention of an apparently perfect system. Speaking to people on the telephone completes a circuit when it works effectively. There are many effective telephone conversations in the book, and there are also unsuccessful attempts to communicate when the circuit is broken for a number of reasons. Even the telephone book itself, a type of 'catalogue of the universe', is the key to Angela finding her father (p.59) by providing the information required. The range of ways the telephone can enhance and also disrupt communication between people reflects the social problems associated in any communica-

tion. However, in relation to romance the circuits present a microcosm of the major circuits of love relationships in the book. Some communicate successfully, some receive messages through indirect means, and some do not communicate at all. Yet the use of the imagery of the telephone also highlights something of the nature of the irrationality of the human uses of a mechanically precise man-made instrument. This suggests that the notion of romance is man-made. It is the way events and people fit or do not fit expected patterns that creates many of the successes or disappointments in relationships. To elaborate, just as people take many ideas for granted, like the idea of romantic love, we take the telephone system for granted because its use is so universal. While we can use the telephone effectively the whole system of telephone circuitry is not necessarily clearly understood and its workings can seem irrational and in the realm of science fiction just as, for example, the telephone in Roland Chase's office was described as 'a light, modern, science-fiction telephone' (p.86). The system is firmly based in sound scientific methods and technology, but people disrupt its smooth operation, or create the 'wobble' in the circuit of effective communication. The way the telephone operates parallels the

interactions of people in love relationships whose messages sometimes communicate and sometimes do not. The telephone 'double talk' which Angela evokes as she leaves Tycho with her mother after the car accident suggests a different aspect to the nature of the difficulty of communication:

'See you around, Big Science,' she said. 'I'll ring you.'"

To Tycho this sounded like the sort of thing employers were supposed to say if they didn't want to employ you.

(p.157)

As Tycho realises, '... what more could she have said, at that place, at that time?' (p.158). Her actions are dictated by more than her simple response to Tycho. She wants to keep her new relationship with Tycho secret, just as he does. In the audience, which includes rescue workers and her mother, there is no possibility for true communication: there has to be some sort of dissimulation to hide their relationship. The problem is that it also hides what Angela means from Tycho so that he is unsure whether to interpret her statement as a brush off, or as an effective way to hide their relationship from bystanders. As Tycho says earlier, 'Truth's furtive' (p.44), and this is also true of their attitude to hiding their romantic relationship from

others. For Tycho who is unsure about the nature of true love it is too soon to feel secure in a changing relationship, particularly given the disruptions in Angela's life which motivated her need for him. The relationship which is clear and simple to the two of them together is complicated by the involvement of other people.

Each different cyclical image used in the book offers a different aspect to the overall experience of life by evoking a different context and providing different insights into the issues and difficulties involved in relationships. While the image of the telephone promotes an awareness of the nature of communication, other cycles present different insights. The imagery relating to the cyclical movement of money in the context of romance is relevant in its presentation of many aspects of one of the pressures which is significant in a long-term relationship. In the book, money is seen to be important for everyday operations as well as for bargaining positions between people. For example, just as not having the right money for the telephone restricts communication between Angela and Dido, the limited money available to them as a family restricts all aspects of their life. The fact that Angela does not have colour pencils on her first day at school

so that Tycho meets her when he lends her his is one example, and another is the nature of the house which they can afford, which embarrasses Angela because of its outside lavatory (p.39). The May's unusual house evolves as their financial circumstances change, and while friends like Tycho are welcome there, other boyfriends are not. Poverty is seen to be a problem but not a debilitating or permanent one. As Tycho recognises, living on the top of the hill 'suggested a family poorer than his own, but free of the rules that restricted all the houses further down' (p.142). Conventions change according to financial circumstances, and poverty is seen to have the potential to bring freedom along with its hardship.

The cyclical nature of money as it changes hands and the fluctuating value of different currencies reflects the irrational nature of the relationships themselves. Although Mahy's books demonstrate a respect for the value of money, having money is not seen as a major advantage to romantic relationships, although it allows living to be more comfortable. The issue of the value of people being presented in terms of economics is a regular feature of the book. Angela perceives that Tycho is a friend who is 'more precious' than a boyfriend (p.11), while Angela is seen to

be 'her own currency' (p.3) whose dowry is the good looks she inherits from her father. The relationship of money to relationships is seen in many ways through the book as money is earned, lent, wasted, lost, and spent, or misspent on a range of commodities. Yet there is also a sense of profit and loss explored through personal relationships which suggests something of the fluctuating value placed on people. For example, Dido's loss of romantic love when Roland leaves her contrasts with the resulting gain of Angela's love which she sees as a profit. Africa describes her return home in terms of change from an unprofitable financial transaction when she tells Tycho that 'the bad penny's come home again' (p.163). The role of Roland's money, which Dido falsely tells Angela that they receive, is a significant one. Roland is an obvious source of money for Angela and he receives her approach to him in economic terms. He thinks that Angela wants to blackmail him (p.89), while Angela believes that he is paying maintenance for her. Dido thinks that accepting money from him will give him some sort of power over the family. Although Dido accepts money from Roland's mother (p.175) it was used to buy baby gear instead of the abortion for which it had been intended, and Roland is never asked to contribute money to

support his daughter. The idea of making money from Roland is rejected by both Dido and Angela in favour of retaining personal dignity and freedom. Mahy's characters are presented in relationships which cannot be bought and sold but which do vary in value. The old link between money and marriage, with a dowry changing hands and the associated expectation by parents of being supported by their children in their old age, is rejected, and while marriage itself is not entirely rejected in the book as a fulfilling environment for love, it is not entirely supported either. Money demands an artificial relationship which, like the legal bond in marriage, is irrelevant to true relationships and can confine the individual's freedom to make choices.

The scientific, mechanical and economic imagery discussed is appropriate as metaphor for the nature of love in that the lack of precision of the methods and procedures and the irrational fluctuating changes represent the nature of love. The earliest scientists were 'imagination men' (p.116) who made scientific discoveries through gigantic leaps of imagination because they did not have efficient instruments to prove their ideas. These appear to be irrational although, once technology catches up with their ideas, many are later proved to

be true. Similarly, other terms which appear to be logical are irrational. For example, as Tycho explains to Angela, in mathematics the square root of two, which should logically be rational, is an irrational number (p.45). Angela presents Tycho with her version of the square root of two as applied to sexual relationships:

"The square root of two was an irrational number. Well, it still is, isn't it, and people are still trying to pretend differently."
"That's really coarse," Tycho said, after considering this.
 (p.181)

The pun on the word 'root' links the lack of mathematical logic to the lack of logic in sexual relationships. There is a mismatch between logical expectations for fair dealing and reciprocated actions and what happens in life. As Tycho explains to Angela, people find symmetry satisfying (p.44). However, romantic love is not an ideal unchanging condition, it is illogical, asymmetrical and unfair. The imagery of the universe suggests that the problems which lead to difficulties between people in romantic relationships are not only human ones, they are also universal. The best thinkers, philosophers, scientists and mathematicians located errors in nature which are reflected

right through the universe. Similarly, man-made mechanical objects which should be free of problems because of their logical design are none-the-less subject to failure through human error, so by analogy, man-made romantic notions are also subject to failure.

All cycles of life are seen in the book to be subject to the constraints of time and space. The cycle of the seasons is an example where scientific facts and romantic fiction come together. The novel is set in spring, the traditional romantic time for lovers, but for Tycho the romance of spring is qualified by the fact that spring brings an allergy (p.22) along with love. Later in the book Tycho is seen to be in a time which is free of seasons, but which is also full of human dilemmas. There is no pure unqualified romantic state demonstrated in the novel:

In this fifth season, for which he had no name, he could sit, a saviour of some kind, yet coloured like a butcher, watching Angela go away from him without once looking back.
 (p.158)

Tycho helps to save Angela from her own despair, and saves Jerry Cherry from the burning car, but that is not enough to change the inevitable

moving forward of the cycles of the seasons. Tycho is covered with Jerry Cherry's blood from his efforts as a saviour, but he is symbolically simultaneously also a destroyer of the state before 'the fall' because he destroyed Angela's virginity, and therefore he is rightly 'coloured like a butcher'. Love results in significant changes to the protagonists but the changes are ambiguous in that they are both destructive and constructive simultaneously. Tycho is burned physically when he rescues Jerry Cherry from the fire in the car (p.150), but Angela, the 'fiery angel', burns him emotionally, changing his perspective about himself. Through making love with Angela, the different, and opposite, worlds of thought and feeling come together for Tycho (p.84) and he feels that he is made whole through the experience so that the burning is simultaneously healing. For Angela, the sexual experience is more closely related to her search for her father, and as well as providing her with a new sense of identity it allows her to understand emotionally what she has been unable to understand intellectually about her parentage.

Angela's collection of romantic notions includes the romance of unrequited love. The image of the wobble in the cycle means that there are many loose ends

in the experience of love which are difficult to reconcile with the overall symmetrical patterns. Relationships are often seen to be one-sided and unbalanced. When Tycho talks to his mother about sex, questioning her statement that 'Between people who truly love one another, [sex is] very beautiful' (p.107) he raises the problem of unrequited love:

'What if only one person is in love?' Tycho asked, half-teasing her, but also because he wanted to hear her theory. 'Is that only half as beautiful?' (p.107)

Tycho's mother does not answer, but the issue is a real one in the terms of the book in the case of Dido and Roland. As Dido told Angela, 'I did love Ro. It was just that he didn't love me' (p.177), and this unrequited love is a romantic notion which is repeated in the book. All the romantic examples explored by Tycho and Angela in films and in literature are models of love failing or changing or being unrequited, including Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara whose relationship did not endure in *Gone With the Wind*, the characters in *The Sheik*, a book which romanticises domineering 'one-sided' relationships, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in which the ugly Quasimodo is hopelessly

in love with a beautiful girl. In all these stories the patterns of uncertain or unrequited and changeable love are the same although the events have different social repercussions according to their social environments.

One of the problems Tycho has about his relationship with Angela is that he feels that his looks do not enhance her. The romantic models in most of the books, plays and films alluded to in *The Catalogue of the Universe* are examples of symmetrical relationships in that the couples look as if they matched. They might not, in fact, do so, or not for long, but the looks are romantic. For example, in *Gone With The Wind*, *Casablanca* and *As You Like It* the main characters look well matched. These parallels and contrasts with heroes and heroines in literature, film and fairy tale qualify the view of love presented through Angela and Tycho's relationship. Tycho does not look like a hero, he is too short and plain and weak-hearted. Faced with the 'tattooed gang' (p.52) he feels cowardly, as if he will not be able to vanquish them to save the honour of his lady. He will not be able to get Angela up the Grand Staircase as Rhett Butler carried Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind*, because her feet will drag on the floor. He is a good friend, articulate, caring,

considerate, intelligent, humorous and cheerful, but these are not the features which figure largely in the romantic models in the books they were reading and the films they were watching. Rhett Butler may be attractive but, rather like Dido's report of Roland, he does not say anything particularly stimulating, other than, 'Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn' (quoted by Tycho and Angela, p.34). Tycho and Angela both send up the uninspired dialogue from *The Sheik*, 'Here is your desert lover. What I want I take' (quoted by Tycho, p.26). Tarzan says little apart from, 'I, Tarzan, you, Jane', and in *Casablanca* the memorable quotes are equally uninspiring, for example, 'Here's looking at you, kid' (quoted by Angela, 34).

The contrast between Tycho and these models makes it understandable that he might feel inferior not only physically, particularly in contrast with Angela's regular good-looking athletic boyfriends, but also different from the heroes in terms of conversation. However, despite everything, he wants to be a romantic hero who is loved by the beautiful heroine. The parallel of the Cinderella story which fixes Tycho, like Dido, in the role of the ugly sister who is rejected by the prince, also fixes Angela as Cinderella, in a divided

family with an ugly stepfather, who is saved by Tycho, as an unlikely hero. The sex roles are reversed, but the elements of the story remain, as Tycho, the apparent antihero, saves Angela from the belief that she is unloved. Tycho is also the hero who successfully fulfils the role of awakening Angela sexually, just as the Sleeping Beauty was woken to her sexual powers by the handsome prince.

The events do happen for Tycho, but not, as Dido says in a different context, as he most wanted them to happen (p.118). He does succeed in making love with Angela, and he does become known as brave through his actions in rescuing Jerry Cherry from a burning car after a crash, becoming a 'three-minute hero' (p.169). However, the events are not related in the sense of one event being causally linked to another. The image of the romantic knight who wins the love of his lady by rescuing her from danger and destroying dragons in her name is measured against the events in Tycho and Angela's story, and Tycho's actions do not match. When they make love, Tycho is aware that Angela has a particular need for loving care after the rejection by her father. Their needs coincide but they are centred in different emotions. Yet it is friendship, not love, that precedes the sexual development of their relation-

ship, suggesting that friendship is more significant long term than idealised romance.

The parallels between the protagonists in the book and those of romantic literature help to clarify the emotional impact of romance. Tycho knows the romantic framework with its potential hopelessness for long term happiness in love, but he hopes that the 'wobble' in his orbit will allow him more time to enjoy being in a reciprocated love affair with Angela. Practically, their parting seems inevitable. Tycho and Angela are at the end of school, and at the end of easy access to each other through sharing the school routines. They are both at the beginning of adult life, with its different routines, and all sorts of unexpected opportunities will be presented. But while all relationships are subject to the constraints of time and space, it is the very cause of the irrational behaviour, or the 'wobble' in the orbits, which gives Tycho hope (pp.159-160). The fact of the orbit means that there will be change, but some events have the potential to last longer than can be reasonably expected for the very reason that the cycles are not symmetrical.

Despite the overall pessimism about romantic love in the book, Mahy demonstrates through the range of experiences presented in this book that coping with the

unhappy, irrational and changeable nature of love needs special human attributes which are possible and attainable. Dido's advice to Tycho and Angela at the end of the book when she guesses the sexual nature of their relationship is: 'Don't take for ever, but do take care' (p.185) which suggests that 'caring' is a way to manage the irrational and temporal nature of love. There is every indication that Tycho and Angela's romantic sexual relationship will be temporary, despite their long-term friendship, but they have faith that perhaps they might get it right. Angela says:

'All the same, even if it is irrational, you've got to have a go, haven't you? You've got to believe that you're the one who's going to get it right, or where's the sense of it?' (p.181)

The book appears to suggest that although there is no rational sense in it, romance is inevitable, valuable and entertaining. Tycho and Angela are recognisable as everyday teenagers who are obsessed with romance, but they transcend stereotypical roles because they share both 'male' and 'female' characteristics and bring a strong intellectual approach to their problems. Similarly, *The Catalogue of the Universe* itself transcends the bounds of the romance genre by changing the traditional order

of the events of a romantic novel and by presenting in realistic terms the temporary 'happily ever after' stage of romantic relationships. Romanticism needs qualification, as Tycho tells Angela (p.81), and in *The Catalogue of the Universe* romantic love is qualified through the simultaneous presentation of both romantic and antiromantic views of the world as different, but not necessarily contradictory, aspects of experience.

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