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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION GIVES AWARD TO NEW ZEALAND AUTHOR MARGARET MAHY

WINNIPEG – Prolific New Zealand author Margaret Mahy, recipient of the ChLA's Phoenix Award, will be honoured this Saturday at a banquet at the Inn at the Forks. She is receiving the award for her 1985 novel, *The Catalogue of the Universe*. The award, named for the fabled bird that rose from its ashes, is given annually to a book that was not recognized for its excellence when it was first published 20 years before.

Mahy says that she is “fascinated by the underlying idea” of the award. “So many great stories escape notice in their own time,” she says. “It is great to think that certain books would have, as it were, a second possibility.”

Scholar Michael Levy from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, who is speaking on another of Mahy's works at the conference, explains the rationale of the award. “When you look back over the history of the Newbery and the other major awards you recognize that some of the books that won are still living, breathing presences in the field, but that others have essentially disappeared from view. Something about them attracted the judges at the time, but they lacked legs. In contrast, other works, books that may have been less highly thought of when they first appeared, have developed legs. Their reputations have grown and they continue to delight both children and adults to this day,” he says.

Levy describes Mahy's award-winning book as “superbly well-written and possessed of characters who are at once eccentric and enormously believable...there is a crispness and clarity to her prose that is exceedingly rare,” he says.

The Catalogue of the Universe is a story about Tycho, an observor of the night skies, and Angela, his love interest. When Tycho observes a “wobble in the symmetry of things,” the personal lives of the characters reflect this imbalance. Mahy says Tycho is one of her characters with whom she identifies the most. “Tycho's curiosity not only about astronomical matters but the ways in which human beings have instinctively tried to work out just what sort of universe we are a part of, is a reflection of my own curiosity,” she says.

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The ChLA is an international organization of teachers, scholars, librarians, editors, writers, illustrators and parents that encourages scholarship and research in children's literature. Its annual conference is held in a different location every year.

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To learn more about the conference or to register, visit
<http://chla.uwinnipeg.ca/conference.cfm> or contact:

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