

“I have been told that human beings seldom dream about cherubim”

Unconventional Representations of the Divine in Madeleine L’Engle’s *Time Quartet*

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Madeleine L’Engle’s writing is a kaleidoscope of science and theology, with an abundance of literary and spiritual insights. For decades, readers have been inspired by the familiar characters in her *Time Quartet* novels. Yet these readers are confounded by the supernatural beings she populated in the texts. One of the ways this mythopoeic writer indicated her spiritual inclinations was by her unconventional representations of the divine through her masterful use of the suspension of disbelief that serves as a possible spiritual vision. Decades after the publication of *A Wrinkle in Time*, her writing continues to inspire and puzzle readers. Madeleine L’Engle’s *Time Quartet* novels continue to evoke curiosity among literary scholars because of her boldness for integrating spirituality with science. Scholar Carol Chase, who closely followed L’Engle’s writing, explained that L’Engle had developed a personal theology, an insightful understanding of human mortality, and a spiritual vision to orchestrate wholeness for all humanity (Chase 27).

Madeleine L’Engle constitutes her theology by the influences from both scripture and literature. She demonstrates her literary insight in one of her essays, “Childlike Wonder and the Truths of Science Fiction” where she explains the importance of science fiction in childhood development. When discussing storytelling, L’Engle explains:

A successful story, no matter how soaring the fantasy or how offbeat the science, must be believable. A child must be encouraged to suspend disbelief. Tolkien’s hobbits are as realistic to a child as Judy Blume’s teenagers, and Anne McCaffrey’s dragons are as believable as giraffes. To

quote Aristotle, “That which is probable and impossible is better than that which is possible and improbable.” (“Childlike” 758)

According to L’Engle, children are brought into the narrative’s world through the author’s magical writing when they accept the novel’s reality. Juvenile fantasies, both past and present, are texts that appropriate the reader’s consensus reality into an imaginative actuality (Coats 350). Comparing familiar fictional characters to universally recognized fantasy novels, L’Engle demonstrates that fictional beings can be just as authentic as our own reality. Literary scholar Marek Oziwicz argues that fantasy authors like Madeleine L’Engle have “assumed the existence of the supernatural, have asserted that humans are moral beings who want to understand right actions and live it, and have written from the depths of their being both as humans concerned with our eternal searching for meaning” (Oziwicz 67). The philosophical dimension L’Engle conjures is to evoke the reader’s desire for the probability of the impossible. Readers become acquainted with Madeleine L’Engle’s unorthodox representations of the divine who surpass traditional artistic representations and religious ideologies. These unconventional individuals become authentic through the suspension of disbelief, which is exemplified by character and reader emotional response, creative language, and the author’s focalization on the human senses. Instead of the reader being constrained to a lethargic, passive stasis, L’Engle reinvigorates the suspension of disbelief to engage the reader’s environment and equip them with a plausible, spiritual vision.

Madeleine L’Engle manifests this assumption of the supernatural through unorthodox divine depictions in her *Time Quartet* novels: *A Wrinkle in Time*, *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, and *Many Waters*. The *Time Quartet* chronicles the Murry family’s adventures, as their home becomes the epicenter of voyages through space and time. In each novel the Murry family

encounters unconventional representations of the divine, which transcend artistic representations and religious ideologies. Rather than showing high spiritual potency and divine attributes, these deific characters have human emotions and exhibit limitations. Additionally, they often behave as if they were human themselves, which is ironic for a group originating from the heavenly realms of perfection.

Madeleine L'Engle's spiritual traits, integrated with a scientific curiosity, not only distinguish her among juvenile authors but render her a puzzling one as well. Her biblical insights are imaginatively expressed in her memoirs and devotional non-fiction material, while detailed in her fictional texts. Marek Oziewicz interprets the *Time Quartet* novels "as an extended imaginative speculation on the Christianity of the third millennium, one that integrates a mature spiritual vision with that offered by modern science" (Oziewicz 181). In the midst of scientific discourse, the novels are interspersed with scriptural quotations and theological discourse vocalized by her intellectually minded characters. *New York Times* columnist Ruth Franklin argues that "these religious trappings are pressed, sometimes awkwardly, into the service of L'Engle's idiosyncratic brand of spirituality, which is layered with science and secular humanism and incorporates many personal quirks" (Franklin). Katherine Paterson, author of *Bridge to Terabithia*, offers an insightful response to the reception L'Engle's series received from the secularists and the Christians:

In our world, there are the scientifically minded that scoff at the stories told by the religious and the religiously inclined who refuse to accept the theories of modern science. The first group will wonder how a woman of Madeleine L'Engle's intellect could possibly be a Christian, and the second will wonder how a *real* Christian could set such store by the

words of Godless scientists. But Madeleine was, first of all, a searcher for truth, and so *A Wrinkle in Time* draws us into a new kind of thinking.

Things are truly not simply what they seem in science *or* in religion.

And if we graduate, as she did, from Newton to Einstein, we might discover that those two worlds are not as far apart as we imagined. (Arthur 108-109)

Katherine Paterson not only illuminates the reader's response, but also explains the reasoning behind why the modern reader sees the "awkwardly" pressed religiosity in *A Wrinkle in Time*. Paterson also illustrates how *A Wrinkle in Time* sparked a provocative reaction within the Christian community while confounding the scientific establishment. L'Engle's *Time Quartet* originated from a radical intention for seeking truth that neither the secularist nor the Christian opinion could satisfy. Throughout her works, L'Engle constantly reiterated that she saw no conflict between the two systems of thought. As a storyteller with intellectual bravery, L'Engle embraced the relationship between Christianity and science; some of the critics saw this relationship as an insurmountable perspective (Oziewicz 172). L'Engle explains in her creative memoir *Walking on Water* that *A Wrinkle in Time* was a spiritual quest in the pursuit of truth:

I asked questions, cosmic questions, and the German theologians answered them all—and they were questions which should not have been answered in such a finite, laboratory proof manner. I read their rigid answers, and I thought sadly, *If I have to believe all this limiting of God, then I cannot be a Christian ...* It was the scientists, with their questions, their awed rapture at the glory of the created universe, who helped to convert me. In a sense, *A Wrinkle in Time* was my rebuttal to the German theologians. I thought of it, at that time, as probably a very heretical book,

theologically speaking, which is a delightful little joke at my expense, because it is, I have been told, theologically a completely orthodox book. (*Water* 108-109)

Madeleine L'Engle's spiritual pilgrimage is mapped out by soul-searching and investigating the sciences that affirmed the truth she was looking for. As documented in interviews, she claimed that German theologians wrote in "long, German sentences—never use two words if you can use twenty" (Horne 100). L'Engle complained that these theologians didn't talk enough about God and didn't provide a universe that she could believe in. Theologians according to her, "are looking for a word about God" (Horne 140). What disappointed L'Engle was that the "word" these German theologians were searching for was a word that didn't exist, because her questions about God didn't have concrete answers. However, she found her answers through science, enabling her to see an Intelligent Designer with works imprinted throughout all of creation. As Carol Chase documented, L'Engle sought out the astrophysicists, the scientists, and the modern mathematicians when she failed to find concrete theological answers to God (Chase 58). One of L'Engle's prized theologians was actually Albert Einstein. L'Engle affirms this acclaimed scientist to be a theologian because "he said that anyone who is not in awe at the mind behind the universe is as good as a burnt-out candle" (Horne 76). Therefore, she found the scientists were posing the right questions because she was convinced the German theologians were hindering God with their "laboratory answers." L'Engle illustrates her reasoning by using higher mathematics: "my true theological reading turned out to be my discovery of higher mathematics ... Higher mathematics deals with ideas, where, for instance, you have an equation that does not have one answer. You have choices of answers" (Horne 34). The German theologian's answers were depressing to L'Engle and weren't direct answers to her pressing questions: "What is God like?" and "What is it that humans don't know about the divine?"

(Horne 100). Through fiction, L'Engle surpasses the German theologians by critiquing their "answers" and illuminating their ideological blind spots; she finds their attempts to define God nothing more than "mud" (Arthur 100). L'Engle credited science with enabling her to answer finite questions raised by children and saints in complex and yet powerful replies in order to recognize the universe's mystery of matter and energy (Bray 134). Writing became a search for finite answers posed by doubtful people and skepticism from both disciplines. The amalgamation of science and spirituality is not just a direct reference to knowledge and intuition, reason and emotion, and intellect and morality, but also her imaginative means of healing the divide between science and religion (Oziewicz 183).

As a writer, Madeleine L'Engle's distinctive beliefs about the Bible and Christianity sparked criticism from the conservative members of the Christian community. L'Engle was raised in an Episcopalian church that she denounced as a disadvantage in her spiritual upbringing for she eschewed organized religion, nearly converting to an "artist-agnostic" (Arthur 28). She was prompted to undertake a spiritual pilgrimage because she learned nothing about God in "organized" churches. Faith, as she defined it, was the acceptance of doubt rather than the repression of it, provoking her critics to accuse her of celebrating disbelief (Hettinga 17). She defined the Bible as subjective: a collection of stories searching for truth rather than fact and a challenge to her imagination, all motivating her to convey these narratives through her writing craft (*Rock* 85-86). L'Engle defines truth as the "highest" fantasy: for her "theology" is a personal quest to comprehend the divine. Paradoxically, her Christian community attacked her as a New Age spiritualist for defining the Bible as story, celebrating the "acceptance of doubt," prompting universalism, and associating the occult into her novels (Hettinga 16). As Sarah Arthur comments, L'Engle didn't fully agree with the principle that one's faith can be reduced to

a collection of intellectually affirmed principles (Arthur 79). L'Engle's response to her critics' accusations was exposing their legalism and closed-minded assumptions:

If we fall into Satan's trap of assuming that other people are not Christians because they do not belong to our own particular brand of Christianity, no wonder we become incapable of understanding the works of art produced by so-called non-Christians, whether they be atheists, Jews, Buddhists, or anything else outside a frame of reference we have made into a closed rather than an open door. (*Water* 36)

L'Engle was very aware that her writing didn't conform to the conservative community's self-organized orthodoxy. She proposed, "My idea for the Gospel is not that it must be kept with a small group who is already there, but it is to be spread to the rest of the world that isn't there" (Horne 87). She proposed that Christianity shouldn't be a closed-minded system but rather a multi-dimensional life cultivated by various artistic means. As she explains:

To be truly Christian means to see Christ everywhere, to know him as all in all. I don't mean to water down my Christianity into a vague kind of universalism, with Buddha and Mohammed all being more or less equal with Jesus. But neither do I want to tell God (or my friends) where he can and cannot be seen. We human beings far too often tend to codify God, to feel that we know where he is and where he is not, and this arrogance leads to such things as the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch burnings and has the results of further fragmenting an already broken Christendom. (*Water* 23)

Not only was L'Engle affirming herself as not a Universalist, but she perceived the Christian criticism as being very reminiscent of historical tragedies. Her Christian critics imposed their own version of God while she wished to affirm the Christian's creed. In her defense, L'Engle explained:

I was always very conscious of the presence of God in my life, and I did a great deal of reading of myth, fantasy, and fairytale. I read the scripture the way I read anything else: for story and insight. So as a child, I lived in a world where God was a loving creator with a plan for perfecting a very imperfect planet—at least our part of the universe is not perfect. I had a hierarchy of angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. (Horne 136)

L'Engle wished to undo the “codifying” through her art and mend the tension within the Christian community. In her novels, her unconventional hierarchy of heavenly beings will reinforce her message.

Madeleine L'Engle's novels are not limited to a collective of artistic expressions but exist as an exploration of her faith as well. Perhaps what is most confusing in L'Engle's theology is her unwillingness to limit God in any way in language and imagination which are all inadequate for describing the divine's essence (Hettinga 18). Thus her writing became an assertion of her admiration of the universe and the divine. Art, as she defined it, should surpass any form of limitations. “If we limit ourselves to the possible and provable ... we render ourselves incapable of change and growth ... If we limit ourselves to the age that we are, and forget all the ages we have been, we diminish our truth” (*Rock* 91). With the combination of her unwavering faith and her artistic persona, L'Engle explores the deeper mysteries of the unknown. She affirms the writer's role as storyteller: “The storyteller is a storyteller because the storyteller cares about

truth, searching for truth, expressing truth, sharing truth” (*Waters* 95). L’Engle has often returned to Aristotle’s claim “that which is probable and impossible is better than that which is possible and improbable.” She argued, “it’s all tied in with Coleridge’s ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’ If the artist can make it probable, we *can* accept the impossible ... we should be less restricted in ordinary life than we are. We are not supposed to be limited and trapped” (*Waters* 69). Instead of being submerged in a passive engagement, L’Engle invites her reader to reconsider the suspension of disbelief as access to spiritual truth.

For fantasy authors, the suspension of disbelief is crucial in order for the reader to be transported into the author’s secondary world. These authors are in debt to the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who invented the term to describe the reader’s credulous feeling as he is drawn into the literary work’s reality (Holland 60). Coleridge laid the groundwork in the ever-growing debate about drawing the line between imagination and fantasy, which future writers would engage in through their own craft (James 9). Coleridge internalized the imagination as “the living power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation” (Coleridge 585-86). However, imagination’s potency was to be tested by the rise in skepticism, especially towards the supernatural’s existence. To combat this skepticism and to uphold “an analogous feeling to the supernatural,” Coleridge announces:

My endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural,
or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward human nature a
human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these
shadows of imagination that willing *suspension of disbelief* for the moment
which constitutes poetic faith. (Coleridge 586)

Coleridge applauded literature's ability to enthrall readers but wanted to describe the reader's mental activities. He offered the most plausible and metaphysical explanation of how the reader receives the artistic allusions from the writer's "shadows of imagination." Additionally, Coleridge saw an interplay between faith and knowledge within the reader's mind (Tomko 76). From observing William Wordsworth's endeavors, Coleridge believed that a writer should: "excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us" (Coleridge 586-87). If the reader is willing to suspend his disbelief in the supernatural, then the reader will emotionally react effectively in their respective reality (Kivy 100). Coleridge sought to maintain the reader's reception of fantastical literature and maintain their wonder of the author's skills. Furthermore, Coleridge believed that a reader experiences a subtle dialectic between belief and disbelief, between reality and fiction, and between acceptance and resistance (Tomko 47). Decades after Coleridge's theory, J.R.R. Tolkien elaborated on the suspension of disbelief within fantasy literature:

Children are capable, of course, of *literary belief*, when the story-maker's art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called "willing suspension of disbelief." He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary world again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. (Tolkien 52)

Tolkien clarifies that the suspension of disbelief becomes a measurement for aesthetic purpose that fortifies the author's goal to transport the reader into the novel (Tomko 55). This is why Tolkien was focused on Coleridge's concept because he affirms artwork as being a source of consolation. The Middle Earth author believed Coleridge's term to be "a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed" (Tolkien 52).

Tolkien is warning that a story-maker's art, if not executed correctly, has the potential of failure. A poorly fabricated fantasy is equivalent to "make-believe" and unable to cast a "spell" over the reader. Being a writer, Tolkien was aware of skeptics and the internal workings within the human mind. As he affirms: "Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason: and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity" (Tolkien 65).

J.R.R. Tolkien's vision of fantasy intersects with Madeleine L'Engle's imagination because the suspension of disbelief is more than a passive activity, but a path to embark on spiritual truth. Both writers are intrigued by the suspension of disbelief because both believed fantasy to be arousing wonder for the reader. Within Tolkien's perspective, myths provided readers a glimpse of a greater narrative that undergirds the universe; L'Engle was intrigued by the best "myth" which was the story that inspired and enchanted readers (Arthur 78). Tolkien denotes fantasy (Faerie) as existing in another realm or, in the clichéd phrase, "in a land far, far, away." The Middle Earth creator produces a new appreciation for fairy tales, an appreciation to be used for the equivalence between fantasy and faith. Faerie is similar to Magic and yet Tolkien affirmed that it goes beyond a magician's tricks. As with C.S. Lewis's Narnia novels, *The Lord of the Rings* reinforces the idea that fantasies should provide healing to the earth and emphasizes the

importance of significant deeds (Levy 134-135). Following Tolkien's prescription of consolation in a fairy story, L'Engle creates complex characters that embark on treks for "eternal truth." Unlike the Orc armies and the Dark Lord Sauron, the dragons that Meg Murry must face in *Wrinkle* are projections of her mental insecurities, and misconceptions of reality (Hettinga 24). L'Engle will use fantasy to make her worlds personal for the reader and offer a possible glimpse into lasting truth. Fantasy, as defined by L'Engle, is "is going beyond easy possibilities to the possibilities which are much harder, which open us and push us. Fantasy goes beyond proof to possibility. Fantasy is true, leading to a larger truth" (L'Engle, "Searching"). L'Engle's consolation is greater than Tolkien's because she creates a world where readers, possibly dealing with similar insecurities, can join Meg in a quest to extinguish these anxieties in their lives.

While Tolkien and L'Engle's perspectives of fantasy intersect, both writers converge with one another on the imagination and the divine. Religious or not, these myths prompted the two writers to explore what had already been established within the literary canon. In parallel, L'Engle mirrors Tolkien's finding by stating, "the lines between science fiction, fantasy, myth, and fairy tales are very fine, and children, unlike many adults, do not need to have their stories pigeonholed" ("Childlike" 757). Tolkien and L'Engle advocated a specific literature to explore spiritual issues; in doing so, they redeemed the imagination from intellectual dogmatism and literal bias of illiberal Christianity (Oziewicz 177). While Tolkien's trilogy has spiritual inclinations, L'Engle's *Time Quartet* vociferously promotes religious applications and aims to visualize the divine realm. L'Engle commissions her readers to be receptive and reconsider imagination's potency. She bids the reader to "read a book with open hearts, I mean that I hope that you will be tuned to the truth which is beyond provable fact. Don't be afraid of open doors and windows. Does the book have the ring of truth?" (L'Engle, "How Long" 981).

Because both approach literature with spiritual perspectives, Tolkien and L'Engle acknowledge the dominance of the overarching Biblical narrative. Tolkien established the foreground to reveal to the readers that fantasy is a smaller version of the greatest enchantment of all. Furthermore, Tolkien introduces the Greek term "eucatastrophe," which refers to a sudden turn of events, resulting in a happy ending. Out of all the existing narratives, Tolkien found the Christian narrative to be the most representative of all fairy tale elements:

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories ... the Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the 'inner consistency of reality.'

There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true. (Tolkien 77-78)

While all may not accept his proposition, Tolkien's conclusion nevertheless opens up new possibilities. The validation of Christ's resurrection resounds in all the fairy tale's happy endings, which correlates with Tolkien's personal statement on creative principles. Sarah Arthur acknowledges Tolkien's accomplishment as one who believed a myth gives one a glimpse of a larger narrative that undergirds the universe: a future story that will be fully revealed (Arthur 77). L'Engle attests to Tolkien's conclusion by affirming that "resurrection is real and it is not made up ... you can't prove it but you can't kill it" (L'Engle, "Searching"). Like Tolkien, L'Engle was fascinated by the idea that the greatest myth of all was the story that enchants and changes

the reader (Arthur 78). The *Time Quartet* novels not only give ways for the reader to experience wonder, but also provide the opportunity to exercise faith.

With the establishment of faith, Tolkien and L'Engle propose that the suspension of disbelief serves a greater goal: the possibility of spiritual belief. Literary scholar Millicent Lenz affirms Tolkien's requirement for the suspension of disbelief for fantasy as "the response that Tolkien calls "literary belief," to the end of imparting a fresh vision of truth. At its finest, fantasy offers not escape but encounter with psychological and spiritual realities" (Lenz 416). Lenz professes that fantasy will bring the reader closer to a spiritual reality, even if it is a reality they wish to be concealed from. As such, religious faith must be unwavering and unquestioning in its commitment in searching for a rational examination of truth (Tomko 75). L'Engle projects her unwavering faith in the *Time Quartet* novels by formulating questions and resolving these inquiries through her spiritually insightful characters.

In each *Time Quartet* novel, Madeleine L'Engle introduces her atypical host of heavenly beings through her methodological usage of the suspension of disbelief, which is evidenced by exacting language and peculiar imagery. As Wayne G. Hammond has observed, the Murry children are convinced that reality is comprised of the rural Connecticut landscape, unknowing their house will become the epicenter of the universe (Hammond 41).

A Wrinkle in Time is a fantasy quest that introduces Meg Murry, a stubborn girl who resents her flaws, and her uncanny brother Charles Wallace. Both children are speculating on their father's absence. Accompanied by their friend Calvin O'Keefe, the children are called to an adventure by three elderly women: Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which. The trio beckons the children on a quest which takes them across the universe in search for Mr. Murry. As the children are transported from planet to planet, their understanding of reality is replaced by a new

cosmic awareness. Through their quest, the children are warned that the powers of darkness may be closer than they think.

A Wrinkle in Time introduces divine beings concealing their supernatural attributes with a façade, which is exemplified by the three elderly ladies. Upon introduction, these beyond-reality figures share the same hindrances and human emotions that some mortals wish to be liberated from. L'Engle brings the reader to the Murry's rural farmhouse during the height of a storm, as she integrates supernatural hints by the agency of "the wraithlike shadows that raced along the ground" (*Wrinkle* 1). From these shadows, the first group of supernatural characters emerge. Mrs. Whatsit is depicted as a comical elderly woman outlined with "several scarves of colors, a man's felt hat, a shocking pink stole knotted about a rough overcoat, and black rubber boots covering the feet" (*Wrinkle* 21-22). Keeping the conservative accusations of L'Engle promoting witchcraft in mind, Mrs. Whatsit explains she was "blown off course" (*Wrinkle* 21). Such a phrase implies that she has mastered broomstick flying and is a "practicing witch." On the contrary, Mrs. Whatsit is equipped with knowledge about scientifically inconceivable subjects. The next member of the trio is Mrs. Who, a woman who communicates with quotes from literary figures and philosophers. Her introduction comes when Charles Wallace takes Meg and Calvin to the "dilapidated old house" (*Wrinkle* 40). L'Engle administers uncanny images: "blank windows reflected in a sinister way," "an old black crow," and "a big black pot hanging over a merry fire" (*Wrinkle* 41). Such images would suggest these women are occult practitioners. Within this haunted house, the children encounter Mrs. Who, appearing as "a plump little woman" with "enormous spectacles" who thinks it is "fun to stay in a haunted house" (*Wrinkle* 42-43). Mrs. Who speaks through quotations because she "finds it so difficult to verbalize ... it helps her if she can quote instead of working out words on her own" (*Wrinkle* 69). Mrs. Which,

the most formidable of all three, is restrained the most. The novel presents her as a shimmer who finds materializing a “very tiring” procedure. When she does materialize, she appears as having “a black robe, and a black peaked hat, beady eyes, a beaked nose, and long gray hair; one bony claw clutched a broomstick” (*Wrinkle* 68). The narrative suggests that this manifestation may not be Mrs. Which’s true form. Mrs. Which seems to have adopted this appearance for sheer fun: “just to keep [Mrs. Whatsit & Mrs. Who] happy” (*Wrinkle* 68). She also implies that “we mustn’t lose our sense of humor. The only way to cope with something deadly serious is to try to treat it a little lightly” (*Wrinkle* 69). While these three “stars” or “angels” are ambiguous in form, they each contribute to L’Engle’s point that one must look beyond appearance. Likewise, the reader should be more attentive to the ladies’ ‘game’: “full of both laughter and comfort, but it was only the tiniest facet of all the things Mrs. Whatsit *could* be” (*Wrinkle* 104).

The unconventional dimension of the three Mrs. characters generated antagonism from the Christian community. A fragment of the Christian population has criticized *A Wrinkle in Time* because they believed that L’Engle promoted black magic through Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which. These Christians based their evidence on “the use of runes, scrying, astral travel, and a medium with a crystal ball” (Hettinga 16). L’Engle addresses these accusations on the planet Camazotz when a possessed Charles Wallace calls the trio “old witches.” Meg rebukes Charles Wallace, asserting the three are not “witches” (*Wrinkle* 157). Calvin agrees and views the ladies’ appearance as “their game, their way, maybe, of laughing in the dark” (*Wrinkle* 157). Sarah Arthur reports that these conservative Christians, whom L’Engle defined as “fundamentalist literalists,” pronounced *A Wrinkle in Time* as nothing more than “spiritual poison for children” (Arthur 51). Ultimately, L’Engle uses “witchy” exteriors to camouflage her divinities: not to administer “poison” into her readers, but as a means of weaving wonder. To

her critics, L'Engle responded in a particular interview, "there is no way they are witches. They are guardian angels—the book says so. You don't have to clarify what is already clear" (Arthur 51).

A Wrinkle in Time's skillful usage of the suspension of disbelief enables the Murry family to partake in experiences with the scientifically impossible. The most notable example is Mrs. Whatsit's passing remark to Mrs. Murry: "there is such a thing as a tesseract" (*Wrinkle* 27). Upon hearing this, Mrs. Murry "went very white and with one hand reached backward and clutched at a chair for support" (*Wrinkle* 27). For a scientifically grounded individual, Mrs. Murry's reaction is strong in light of revelation. L'Engle evokes this reaction within Mrs. Murry because she previously considered a tesseract as a "joke" and "concept" in science (*Wrinkle* 29). Mrs. Whatsit's comment arouses Mrs. Murry to go beyond scientific concepts and accept them as a "fantastical truth." Returning to L'Engle's "Childlike" essay, Mrs. Murry's reaction functions as a paradigm of the scientist's discoveries coming outside of the "immaculate laboratories" ("Childlike" 756). In retrospect, when considering Charles Wallace's abnormal intellect, she mentions: "maybe that's why our visitor last night didn't surprise me. Maybe that's why I'm able to have a willing suspension of disbelief" (*Wrinkle* 55). Her reaction is equivalent to L'Engle's reiteration of Aristotle's "probable impossible" and models perhaps a scientifically minded spiritual person (Oziewicz 184). Perhaps the most profound example of suspension of disbelief is Mrs. Whatsit's metamorphosis on the planet Uriel.¹ No sooner have they arrived on Uriel than Mrs. Which instructs Mrs. Whatsit to change because the children "may as well know" who they are (*Wrinkle* 72). Mrs. Whatsit transitions from an old woman into

¹ In Chapter 4, Uriel is the first planet that the children are transported to. It is the "third planet on the star Malak in the spiral nebula Messier 101" (70). L'Engle describes Uriel's landscape as "golden with light. The grasses of field were a tender green, and scattered about were tiny multicolored flowers." Here the trio inform the children that their quest is to find Meg's father. The children are given a tour and are introduced to "the Black Thing," which has shadowed their planet and threatening the universe.

A creature more beautiful than any Meg had even imagined, and the beauty lay in far more than the outward description. Outwardly Mrs. Whatsit was surely no longer a Mrs. Whatsit. She was a marble white body with powerful flanks, something like a horse but at the same time completely unlike a horse, for from the magnificently modeled back sprang a nobly formed torso, arms, and a head resembling a man's, but a man with a perfection of joy ... from the shoulders slowly a pair of wings unfolded, wings made of rainbow, of light upon water, of poetry. Calvin fell to his knees. "No," Mrs. Whatsit said, though her voice was not Mrs. Whatsit's voice, "Not to me Calvin. Never to me." (*Wrinkle 73*)

Creatively, L'Engle pulls the rug out from under both the reader and the characters' feet by displaying someone beyond their imagination. The "wild colors of her clothes became muted, whitened" (*Wrinkle 73*) giving way to a being beyond the children's reality. The readers must work with Meg's imagination, who tries to generate a mental image. For Meg, this woman is now "Not like a Greek centaur. Not in the least" (*Wrinkle 73*). Meg associates a Greek centaur with her experience because it is the only mental image that she could muster in describing Mrs. Whatsit's new appearance. Moreover, L'Engle's simple language used to formulate the creature's wings made of "rainbow, of light upon water, of poetry" compels the reader to visualize what "light upon water, of poetry" really looks like. A moment like this is when L'Engle has produced wonder within the reader. L'Engle uses Meg to express aesthetic association and Calvin O'Keefe's reaction to a supernatural encounter. Paraphrasing the German theologian Rudolf Otto, the divine is "a great and terrible mystery, whose presence, both fascinating and frightening due to unfamiliar otherness, evokes the feelings of awe, dread,

abasement, and absolute obedience” (Laszkiewicz 47). Calvin’s reaction is a quintessential example of encountering the divine because the power radiating from Mrs. Whatsit’s new form stimulates wonder and adoration. Furthermore, Mrs. Whatsit’s transformation becomes a classic example of a human undergoing a new experience that never could come through one’s reality (Hammond 41).

Despite the highly unusual portrayal of these divinities, L’Engle frequently echoes traditional scriptural reference. Biblical references are sprinkled throughout the text and they are quoted by the characters both human, alien, and supernatural. In this specific moment, Mrs. Whatsit’s refusal of worship can be paralleled to accounts in the Bible. In particular, Calvin’s action is reminiscent of Revelation 22:8-9 when St. John falls down before an angel who refuses his worship by saying, “I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets... Worship God!” Calvin’s reaction generates a reverence for the supernatural, and this reverence is evidenced by describing them on Ixchel as “guardian angels,” and even going to the extreme of calling the three Mrs. figures “messengers of God!” (*Wrinkle* 210). In Meg’s perspective, Mrs. Whatsit is one “beyond human understanding. What she saw was only the game Mrs. Whatsit was playing; it was an amusing and charming game ... but it was only the tiniest facet of all the things Mrs. Whatsit *could* be” (*Wrinkle* 89). L’Engle encourages her readers to vigorously exercise their imaginations because the fantasy she employs is an avenue for a higher truth and an indication of what the three ladies “could be.”

Conveyed through the suspension of disbelief as unorthodox divine beings, the trio, curbed with limitations, assists the children in completing their quest. For the novel’s remainder, Mrs. Whatsit becomes the spokesperson for the trio “who can’t take any credit for my talents” and made “far too many mistakes” (*Wrinkle* 95). As one who is 2,379,152,497 years 8 months and 3

days old, Mrs. Whatsit is “still young and naïve.” This disclosure from a supernatural being is relatable to the reader because it prompts the reader to reflect on their own personal shortcomings. Mrs. Whatsit’s confession strengthens relatability with the children. Upon arriving on Camazotz,² Mrs. Whatsit tells the children: “You three children will be on your own. We will be near you; we will be watching you. But you will not be able to see us or to ask us for help” (*Wrinkle* 111). Nevertheless, the trio equip the children with gifts, about which Meg is most reluctant. Mrs. Whatsit bestows Meg with her faults, which she loathed from the novel’s beginning. Meg’s refusal to accept her faults results in the near manifestation of evil via the influence from IT. These “messengers of God” appear once more on Ixchel,³ only for Mrs. Whatsit to anticlimactically inform Meg that “we can do nothing on Camazotz” (*Wrinkle* 213). Because of the spiritually enriched conversations with Aunt Beast, Meg slowly understands that only she could save Charles Wallace (Hettinga 30). Nevertheless, Meg sees beyond the banal rudimentary life pattern. *Wrinkle*’s discourse is set on the focalization of Meg’s internal feelings, beginning with fear and discouragement and concluding with a “tangible” love and joy (Brady 41). Despite being “backwards” and “hotheaded,” Meg accepts that only she can be the hero for she knows Charles Wallace the best, better than the angelic women. The three ladies give Meg the “privilege of accepting this danger” (*Wrinkle* 221). Instead of reassuring Meg about her faults, the supernatural trio equip her with paradoxical Christian wisdom and a love deeper than any romantic, superficial, or fraternal feeling (Hettinga 30-31). In “all of her weakness and

² Camazotz is a “shadowed” planet where Meg and Charles Wallace’s father is held captive. The planet is a mirror image of earth, but this planet is ruled by an evil entity named “IT,” who is a disembodied brain. Camazotz is a planet of conformity and all the inhabitants walk and act alike. Camazotz is a mirroring of Communism and in L’Engle’s era, the Soviet Union.

³ Ixchel is the planet where Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murry “tesser” as they escape Camazotz, leaving Charles Wallace who has fallen under IT’s influence. The planet is very grey and lacks visible light. The creatures have the appearance of mammoths but have indentations for faces, and tentacles for arms. These creatures’ sight is faith-based. The creatures give the humans shelter and nurse Meg to health because she was harmed in the tessering. Aunt Beast makes many biblical references while she cares for Meg.

foolishness and baseness and nothingness” (*Wrinkle* 229) Meg rescues her brother, an action equivalent of an angel’s own doing.

As more unorthodox celestial beings make their acquaintance with the Earth, Madeleine L’Engle gives more dimensions to her divine characters. *A Wind in the Door* enables one to comprehend divine beings that contradict the reader’s presumptions. This novel begins with Charles Wallace announcing, “There are dragons in the twins’ vegetable garden” (*Wind* 1). *A Wind in the Door* begins with Charles Wallace battling a sickness while claiming to see dragons out in the vegetable garden. In addition to Charles being bullied at school, Meg fears for her brother’s hallucinations. Their mother and long-time friend Dr. Louise Colubra attempt to help Charles while investigating a new scientific concept: farandolae and mitochondria. Charles Wallace’s hallucination is actually a cherubim named Proginoskes. The cherubim and an angelic figure named Blajeny come to the children seeking their help. They all must combat the Echthroi, L’Engle’s version of fallen angels, who are threatening Charles Wallace and the universe itself. Meg, Calvin, and Proginoskes must go within one of Charles Wallace’s mitochondria in order to save him and ultimately restore harmony in the universe.

Like the guardian angels from *A Wrinkle in Time*, *A Wind in the Door*’s divinities are uncanny and contrary to artistic and religious interpretations. A new cast of benign entities like Blajeny, the angelic teacher and Proginoskes, the multi-winged cherubim, make their acquaintance with the earth. Charles Wallace’s “drive of dragons” is a cherubim whom L’Engle portrays as “a misty, feathery sphere,” with “little spurts of flame and smoke spouting between the wings, wings in constant motion, covering and uncovering the eyes”; and “many eyes” (*Wind* 60-61). Proginoskes, the “singular cherubim” introduces himself by remarking, “I suppose you think I ought to be a golden-haired baby-face with no body and two useless wings. I am practically

plural. The little boy thought I was a drive of dragons, didn't he? I am certainly not a cherub. I am a singular cherubim" (*Wind* 61). Throughout the centuries, the artists favored cherubs for their presupposed spiritual affinity, enabling them to do any universally given task (Rice 24). Proginoskes is criticizing the artistic perception by dismissing Michelangelo's cherubs bearing the Lord in the Sistine Chapel and the nostalgic representations of the Assumption and Immaculate Conception illustrations. Proginoskes, nicknamed Progo by Meg, doesn't understand why "earthling artists paint cherubim to resemble baby pigs" (*Wind* 61). Prior to the artists, scholars have reverted to the Bible for descriptions of cherubim as seen in Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Revelation (Durijs 14). L'Engle appropriates these descriptions, because according to Progo, "when a cherubim takes on matter, this is how [I appear]" (*Wind* 135). For L'Engle, the image of angels surpasses the illustrations in juvenile books, Christian children's books, and the Bible itself (*Water* 10). L'Engle herself has referred to Ezekiel's⁴ vision of "incredible wheels" as an experience beyond reality and ordinary proof ("Searching"). As previously in *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg suspends her disbelief when she encounters Progo again: "You're real, you're not something I dreamed after all!" (*Wind* 86). As if he wasn't amused, Progo replies, "I have been told that human beings seldom dream about cherubim" (*Wind* 86). Although Meg previously considered him to be a mental apparition, Proginoskes indicates that he is an authentic part of reality.

As one who is presented as unorthodox in appearance, eclipsing human artistic and mental perception, Proginoskes unfolds unconventional limitations of his own. A cherubim's role is believed by theologians as one who is "fullness of knowledge" and has given complete allegiance to God (Bussagli 766). L'Engle doesn't subscribe to the theological beliefs because

4 The book of Ezekiel begins with a vision. In the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar river, Ezekiel has a vision of creatures which are the scriptural description of Cherubim and throne-chariot wheels. The full description can be seen in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

Progo states that “even a cherubim has limits” (*Wind* 87). The word “proginoskes” derives from the Greek “progignoskein” which translates to “to know” (Brady 144). Keeping this information in mind, readers might be alarmed that L’Engle would contradict the theological and artistic implications of cherubim. Mystic thinkers, who have studied angels, believe the cherubim to be symbolic individuals having complete awareness, wisdom, and comprehension of God’s existence (Dujric 12). As one whom the reader assumes has been in service to the Lord, Proginoskes expresses fear: “I’ve never been to Earth before, I’m too young, I’m scared of the shadowed planets, what kind of a star has this planet got, anyhow” (*Wind* 91). It is apparent that this angelic being displays the anxiety and fears of a regular human individual.

The next divine being in the group is Blajeny who is strange in appearance and full of idiosyncrasies and yet unique responses to the reality-perplexed characters. Blajeny’s figure is very ambiguous and the author scatters particles of his image throughout the novel. L’Engle sketches Blajeny as being clothed in a long robe that seems “chiseled out of granite” (*Wind* 59), eight to nine feet tall in height, “dark as night and tall as a tree” (*Wind* 60), and having “strange luminous eyes” (*Wind* 67). For a menacing appearance, Blajeny is gentle and gifted with a musical voice. Blajeny’s arrival creates suspension of disbelief through the character’s own struggle to accept his reality. This is L’Engle’s rhetorical strategy of critiquing the existence of the supernatural because the characters express concern for their mental well being. The children are insistent that either their minds have “snapped” or they are asleep. Blajeny assures the children that they “are awake” (*Wind* 62). Constantly, Blajeny poses the question “What is real?” and reminds the children that “size does not matter.” Blajeny lectures the children that reality is dependent on one’s belief and one must comprehend with the heart as well as the mind: imagination and intuition may be more practical than reason alone (Hammond 42). Reality may

be limited or be unlimited by conviction. L'Engle's most insightful conversation distinguishing reality against illusion is when Mr. Jenkins, Meg's school principle, encounters Blajeny and the other divine beings. Mr. Jenkins is referenced as a "limited one" whose imagination has "been frozen for a long while and hasn't had time to thaw" (*Wind* 181). Mr. Jenkins is convinced he is suffering from a nervous breakdown, but Blajeny combats the conclusion by suggesting:

You don't need to have one if you don't want to. You have simply been faced with several things outside your current spheres of experience. That does not mean that they—we—do not exist. Mr. Jenkins tottered towards Blajeny, sputtering, "Now, see here, I don't know who you are and I don't care, but I demand an explanation." Blajeny's voice was now more like an English horn than a cello. "Perhaps in your world today such a phenomenon would be called schizophrenia. I prefer the old idea of possession. (*Wind* 142-143)

Rhetorically speaking, both of Blajeny's responses are deeply insightful. In the first dialogue, Blajeny suggests this human has lived a very limited life with a narrow mindset. Nevertheless, one's narrow imagination doesn't justify the nonexistence of the supernatural and doesn't subdue the divine's quantum elements. Norman Holland, who takes a neurological view, remarks that anything factual or abstract is shaped by the brain's manipulation of the external world (Holland 69). Additionally "reality checking involves a continual assessment of the relation between behavior and the environment. Without movement or the impulse to move or some plan to act, we need not check the reality of what we perceive, *and we don't*" (Holland 69). Blajeny's second answer implies that mental conditions may enable a person to access different realities.

Schizophrenia isn't the only mental illness mentioned because Meg expresses a similar anxiety. Meg was fearful that she might be "suffering from mass psychosis" and she "should see a psychiatrist at once" (*Wind* 77).

A Wrinkle in Time implements the suspension of disbelief as an acceptance of fantasy, whereas *A Wind in the Door* utilizes the experience to enable one to obtain a spiritual vision. Mental health is addressed throughout the second *Time Quartet* novel, as each character expresses concern over whether these divine visitations are genuine or not. What some consider a mental aberration, L'Engle implies are parts of a repressed reality. While conversing with Meg, Progo insists, "I'm real, and most earthlings can bear very little reality" (*Wind* 92). Blajeny suggests that inexperience doesn't justify non-existence. Returning to Coleridge's philosophy, Michael Tomko interjects:

Understanding gives us information about the material world, but only reason governs moral decision and meaningful experience. In *The Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge writes, "The eye is not more inappropriate to sound than the mere understanding to the modes and laws of spiritual existence." The understanding says nothing about spiritual truths because it lacks the faculty to perceive them and the language to describe them.

Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. (Tomko 80-81)

Comparing Meg and Mr. Jenkins's struggles to accept reality may be a spiritual lacking rather than a mental degradation. Blajeny encourages the humans to not comprehend reality with the mind: "your minds are very limited. Use your intuition" (*Wind* 146). L'Engle contests reality by creating characters with little to no spiritual faculty and exposes them to her version of unorthodox divinity. In the process of suspending their disbelief, L'Engle advocates that

imagination and intuition may be more auspicious than reason; children's pretend games are qualified as a truth seeking practice (Hammond 42). If anything, L'Engle regards fantasy as an expression for possibilities and enabling the reader to access spiritual truths.

Now that Madeleine L'Engle has established a mythopoeic version of the universe, she takes liberty by inventing more unconventional divinities who are embedded with unexpected boundaries and assumptions of human nature. *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, the third novel in the series, takes an alternative route in the quartet as L'Engle makes Charles Wallace the protagonist. Meg and Calvin are married and expecting their first child. The novel begins at a Thanksgiving dinner when Meg's father receives news from the White House that nuclear war is underway, jeopardizing the whole earth. Calvin's mother, who has joined them, keeps muttering an ancient rune, a rune belonging to St. Patrick. Charles Wallace becomes fascinated by the rune, and wishes there was something he could do. Going alone to the children's star watching rock, Charles shouts the rune and Gaudior, a time traveling unicorn, appears. Together, both unicorn and boy travel to the past to find a Might-Have-Been, a moment in the past, which can alter the entire course of events leading to the future. On their adventure, they must battle the Echthroi who wish to see the nuclear war happen. In each timeline, Charles Wallace must go within a historical person and live in their body. As the two travel deeper in the past, the Echthroi's attacks become more intense.

As an unconventional divinity, Gaudior the angelic unicorn tests Charles Wallace's considerations of reality and awareness of the universe. In the Western tradition, unicorns have been drawn into religious and scientific disputes, which characterize the unicorn as shy and concealing itself in nature (Sax 15). L'Engle undercuts the Western tradition by fashioning a cryptic but also stubborn unicorn. After shouting St. Patrick's rune, Charles Wallace's attention

diverges to a star which produces a radiating beam that “enfleshed itself into a body of a great white beast with flowing mane and tail. From its forehead sprang a silver horn which contained the residue of the light. It was a creature of utter and absolute perfection” (*Planet* 47). Like the inventive language used to display Mrs. Whatsit’s alteration, L’Engle is amplifying the scene and compels both boy and reader into rapturous wonderment. As she engaged her reader’s imagination, when describing Mrs. Whatsit’s divine centaur form, L’Engle contests the reader’s senses when she introduces Gaudior. Charles Wallace reaches out to touch the unicorn: “He could feel the warm blood coursing through the veins as the light had coursed between star and boy” (*Planet* 47). L’Engle linguistically challenges the reader’s sense of touch to make this new divinity believable to the reader as well as to Charles Wallace. In the previous novels, however, Charles Wallace’s reality is tested when he asks the unicorn if he is real. Gaudior’s response is baffling: “I am not real. And yet in a sense I am that which is the only reality” (*Planet* 47). Gaudior’s answer is ambiguous because it makes Charles Wallace suspicious of his reality. Cara-Joy Steem notes L’Engle’s attribute as a mythopoeic writer, by making her protagonists “aware of the cosmic rhythm of interconnection” (Steem 36). As a writer, L’Engle implants this awareness by forcing her protagonists to unfold within the assumptions of their worldview. Charles Wallace inquires more of the unicorn by asking, “what are you, really?” (*Planet* 48). The unicorn counters Charles Wallace with the same question. For Gaudior to say he isn’t real and contradict his original statement harkens to L’Engle’s idea that reality is subject to change in different perspectives. Cara-Joy Steem correspondingly affirms the contrast between spiritual and intellectual perception because “the validity of one does not diminish the veracity of the other ... spiritual truth does not insult cognitive capabilities” (Steem 39). For L’Engle, the suspension of disbelief is not just access to a secondary world in a literary scheme but also the

probability for a spiritual acceptance. It would seem that despite his knowledge, Charles Wallace's spiritual faculty is weak. Gaudior warns the boy to, "not push your understanding too far" (*Planet* 49). Gaudior may be implying that Charles Wallace has a weak spiritual lens.

A Swiftly Tilting Planet functions as a commentary on humanity's finite knowledge and humanity's reliance on temporal means. At one point, Gaudior becomes annoyed with the boy's questions: "Questions, questions! I am not some kind of computer. Only machines have glib answers for everything" (*Planet* 61). L'Engle observes that humans "turn to technology, which I'm for, into technocracy, which I'm all against" (Horne 161). In line with L'Engle's mythopoeic framework, Charles Wallace suspends his disbelief by immersing himself into mythological truth, which leads to an interrelated understanding of the universe (Steen 40). The suspension of disbelief, as Coleridge understood it, involves "faith" and "knowledge" as intertwined and not opposed to each other. Michael Tomko validates the process by adding, "*faith* and *reason* converge in a way that allows an individual to behold and *know* the fullness of reality. This faithful and reasonable beholding is the resource Coleridge offers for wrestling with the epistemological and aesthetic problems of his day" (Tomko 76).

Gaudior, just like the divinities in the previous novels, is unconventional in appearance and in the limitations that he must cope with. Gaudior is spiritually insightful, but he doesn't give Charles Wallace empirically satisfactory answers: "We don't have to know everything. We have a charge laid on us, and we have to follow where it leads" (*Planet* 119). Gaudior's incarnation is similar to Mrs. Whatsit's centaur-like creature for he is a unicorn of "absolute perfection." L'Engle has expressed a fondness for unicorns: "I believe in unicorns...I needed something to put up against the ugly beast that was good, and that's the unicorn" (Horne 187). The lore of the unicorn has epitomized ancient beliefs, it has operated in biblical tradition as images of divinity,

it has resurfaced on medieval tapestries, and it has been recognized as an animal of beauty and the archetype of magic (Laszkiewicz 45). L'Engle does follow the Christian lore, but condenses this unicorn's magical properties. Gaudior is unabashed about his home and frank about his abilities: "Heaven may have sent me, but my powers are closely defined and narrowly limited. And I've never been sent to your planet before. It's considered a hardship assignment" (*Planet* 49). Like the three Mrs. figures, and Proginoskes and Blajeny, Gaudior is aware of earth's bad reputation and considers the planet as a "troubled and shadowed one." As a member of her unorthodox divine community, L'Engle depicts Gaudior working along an abnormally insightful boy to save the universes once again and resolve L'Engle's version of the war in heaven. Being restricted in power, Gaudior pushes Charles Wallace to his fullest potential by time traveling to various "Might-Have-Been" locations. With each person he inhabits, Charles Wallace is limited to that individual's abilities of that particular past time. L'Engle makes the comparison between Charles Wallace and intercessory prayer by concluding, "when Charles Wallace limits himself to somebody else's limitations, he is moving with compassion into somebody else's problems, letting his own go" (Horne 169). Charles Wallace surrendering to limitations may have prompted Gaudior to confess his human preconceptions: "Those of us who have been around the galaxies know that such thinking is foolish. It's always easy to blame others. And I have learned, being with you, that many of my preconceptions about mortals were wrong" (*Planet* 180).

Gaudior is an unconventional divinity because he is subjected to human suffering and experiences mortal pain. At one point during their time travel, the Echthroi viciously attack the boy and unicorn, nearly extinguishing Gaudior's life. At first, Gaudior appears dead and lifeless.

L'Engle twitches the reader's heartstrings as Charles Wallace looks at the magical animal in agony:

The unicorn floated limply on the surface of the darkness, half on his side.

The boy bent over the great neck. No breath came from the silver nostrils.

There was no rise and fall of chest, no beat of heart. "Gaudior!" he cried in anguish. "Don't be dead Gaudior!" (*Planet* 167)

Seeing life quenched from the divine unicorn is upsetting to Charles Wallace and the reader because they assumed that Gaudior, as a divinity, shouldn't endure human pain. Having mortality bestowed on Gaudior and being left in the darkness creates uneasiness in the reader, because L'Engle's description is very reminiscent of human mortality. However, Gaudior returns to life and his breath "[comes] roaring out of him like an organ with all the stops pulled out" (*Planet* 167). Even though Gaudior's life is restored, his silver body is blemished with mortal wounds. Shortly after the incident and while they rest, Charles Wallace looks at Gaudior and "drew in his breath in horror ... there were red welts, shocking against the silver hide. The entire abdominal area, where the webbed hammock had rubbed, was raw and oozing blood" (*Planet* 175-76). With vivid language, L'Engle represents human wounds which are exemplified by "red welts" and "oozing blood" on Gaudior's celestial "silver hide." L'Engle uses mortal suffering to compel the reader to believe and make a *mysterium tremendum* being like Gaudior realistic. She picks these gruesome adjectives to stimulate the reader's senses, persuading them to believe and sympathize with Gaudior.

Many Waters, the final *Time Quartet* novel, is a biblical reimagining in which L'Engle parades her most eccentric divine entities. Sandy and Dennys, the younger twin brothers of Meg and Charles Wallace, are the protagonists in the concluding novel of the *Time Quartet*.

Chronologically speaking, *Many Waters* is out of order because Sandy and Dennys are depicted as smart-remarking adolescents in the first two novels, but are mature teenagers in the third novel. As children, the twins are constantly making side comments and become aggravated over things they “don’t understand” (*Wind* 235). Nonetheless, Blajeny has foretold that the twins “will be Teachers. It is a High Calling” (*Wind* 73). Regardless of the sequential anomaly, *Many Waters* can be characterized as a novel of the twin’s journey to becoming teachers. The twins admit that “we’ve never had very willing suspension of disbelief. We’re the pragmatists of the family” (*Waters* 24). Sandy and Dennys get their opportunity to suspend their disbelief when they are transported to a prehistoric version of the Earth, specifically Noah’s time. L’Engle draws on her theology to make the twin’s experience problematic because the realm she teleports the Murry twins into is a reality closer to the dawn of time, to creation’s origin (Haughton 113). L’Engle orchestrates poetic justice for the twins to partake in an adventure of their own and challenges their pragmatic assumptions on science and religion. The twins’ definition of a skeptic is, “someone who doesn’t believe in anything that can’t be seen and touched and proved one hundred percent. Someone who has to have laboratory proof” (*Waters* 105). The twins are symbolic of the skeptical children that L’Engle expresses concern for in her essay “Childlike Wonder and the Truths Science Fiction.” According to L’Engle, these skeptical children, “live in a limited world in which ideas are suspect. The monsters which all children encounter will be more monstrous because the child will not be armed with the only weapon effective against the unknown: a creative and supple imagination” (“Childlike” 757). The twins embody the children who haven’t internalized these mythical and biblical stories. Therefore, it is no surprise that the twins are distraught in their encounters with unicorns, mammoths, manticores, seraphim and

nephilim, which they conclude are beings “ruined by overpopularity” (*Waters* 26) and “aren’t supposed to be real” (*Waters* 38).

L’Engle utilizes the suspension of disbelief by challenging the twin’s perception of mythical creatures by using scientific language to engage their imaginations. *Many Waters* has various moments when Sandy and Dennys question their experience. The Murry twins insist determinedly that it was not possible that they, “tapping into their father’s partly programmed experiment could have been flung to wherever in the universe they were, on a backward planet of primitive life forms” (*Waters* 63). The prehistoric characters weave a philosophical strand through the novel by emphasizing that the twins’ accomplished actions would be inconceivable in their reality; in particular, the “virtual particle unicorns” in prehistoric reality are dependent on the humans’ belief to will them into existence (Hettinga 113). Accordingly, L’Engle has created a situation that compels the twins to surrender to the “probable impossibles.” Oziewicz reminds us that the scientific and spiritual perspectives are uniformly balanced throughout the novels and L’Engle’s commendation of science is accomplished by a spiritual deliberation (Oziewicz 185). With regards to their older siblings, the twins accept that their spiritual faculties require attention. Sandy’s perspective yields to this secondary world and his epistemology softens when he compares this fantastical experience to earth:

If Sandy could believe something as outrageous as that he and Dennys had actually landed in the pre-flood desert, and that they had become so close to Noah’s tent-hold, especially Yalith, that they were like family, and if he could believe that he was petting a mammoth, why should it be hard to believe in a unicorn, even if it was what Dennys called a virtual unicorn? His mother believed in virtual particles, and his mother was a scientist who had won the

Nobel Prize for discovering particles so small they were scarcely conceivable even with a wild leap of the imagination. (*Waters* 289)

L'Engle transports the twins into a secondary world and motivates them to reconsider their personal reality. The suspension of disbelief allows them to see how this prehistoric time is an extension of earth, the primary world. The mystical creatures and virtual unicorns are as realistic to the twins as their pet dog Fortinbras and the neighboring animals abiding in their Connecticut homestead.

As the final installment in the *Time Quartet* series, L'Engle's fabrication reaches its peak as *Many Waters* ushers in more unorthodox divine creatures. L'Engle's imagination goes further into the heavens as she situates the two angelic groups on the prehistoric earth: the seraphim and the nephilim. Adnarel, who is a seraphim, is the only one who discourses on the nature of being a seraphim. Like Blajeny, Adnarel critiques the twin's suppression of the supernatural:⁵ "you live in a time and place where those like myself are either forgotten or denied. It was not easy to get you to believe in a unicorn until the need was desperate" (*Waters* 151). Adnarel's criticism speaks volumes to the twin's situation, because he affirms the twin's veiled rationalization of the supernatural. L'Engle has generated a world where the supernatural is plausible and its reality is either forsaken or denied. The supernatural has become dubious for mortals' acceptance just as Proginoskes declares humans "seldom dream about cherubim" (*Wind* 86). It is debatable if the seraphim's existence requires a child's faith, but it does shy away from the fact that the Murry children come from a world where the angelic existence is in question. The novel's closure,

⁵ Madeline L'Engle is participating in literary tropes in juvenile fantasy literature when magical beings are dependent on human's belief and become a companion to the human. In *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, while analyzing animal, toy, and miniature people fantasies, Edward James writes, "In most animal and toy stories, the non-human character is rather a companion to the lonely child, a role similar to the magic animal helper in folk tales...such comic and idyllic stories become rare toward the second half of the twentieth century as they provide no room for moral and existential issues emerging in children's fantasy during the 1960s and onward" (James 55-56). By assessing the twin's reality, Adnarel is postulating that magical unicorns and divine seraphims can still maintain relevance and can speak truth to the twin's "moral and existential issues."

which is reminiscent of classic juvenile fantasy literature, brings in a cliffhanger when the twins are transported back to their house. Sandy and Dennys are accompanied by two unicorns, Adnarel and fellow seraphim Admael. Very briefly, the unconventional beings inhabit the Murry's house and bid the twins farewell. L'Engle curiously probes the question twice through Adnarel's voice: "Do you believe in unicorns?" (*Waters* 349-350). In the fleeting moments of these select passages of the final chapter, L'Engle poses some fantastical closing thoughts:

Two unicorns in an old stone lab connected to a white clapboard farm were a strange sight. So were two tall, bright-winged seraphim ... Adnarel was sitting in their mother's reading chair, his golden wings drooping behind it. Admael was peering into one of her complex microscopes, hunching his pale blue wings.

"Do you believe in unicorns?" Adnarel's azure eyes were smiling. ...

Their mother's voice called, "Twins are you home?"

"Oh, oh," Sandy said. "We'd better get the unicorns out of here."

"They'll go as soon as they aren't believed in," Adnarel said.

Dennys exclaimed, "But Meg and Charles Wallace believe in unicorns!"

Admael asked, "And in seraphim?" (*Waters* 349-350).

Donald Hettinga notes that the twins don't appear overtly changed by their fantastical adventure as with their siblings, but Hettinga suspects that the twins are "probably homesick for the world where they met a love that supplanted their pragmatism with faith" (Hettinga 119). Following Hettinga's close reading, it is possible the twins have learned that the mythical creatures and the angelic beings they encounter are real because of their new spiritual belief. If the unicorns are

dependent on the suspension of disbelief, then nothing is preventing these unorthodox seraphim from entering the twin's primary reality.

Adnarel's explanation becomes unorthodox because it surpasses biblical expectations and conventional limitations. L'Engle enhances the division by classifying each supernatural order: the seraphim⁶ inhabit animals which are defined by nobility or gentleness like camels, pelicans, lions, golden bats, golden snakes, giraffes, snow leopards, and gray mice. The nephilim inhabit vicious creatures like vultures, crocodiles, mosquitos, and slugs (Hettinga 115). In addition to their animal hosts, the nephilim are distinguished by their deep, flamboyant shading while the seraphim display bright, heavenly colors. Adnarel converses with the children on a scientific level when they question him why he is sometimes a scarab beetle. Adnarel explains: "the scarab beetle is my earthly host...when I am in the scarab beetle, I must accept its limitations. When I am in the scarab beetle...I am limited by what limits the beetle. When I am in my seraphic form, I have fewer limits" (*Waters* 151,168). Adnarel speaks within the context of the twins' scientific knowledge, as demonstrated by his question: "I suspect that you also understand that energy and matter are interchangeable" (*Waters* 150). From a scientific vantage, Oziewicz gives a hypothesis about the angelic beings:

Whenever seraphim or nephilim take their animal hosts or convert into humanoid shapes "a vivid flash of light" accompanies the transformation. Whereas the nephilim "flicker...in and out of their animal hosts in a show of power," and the seraphim "do not like to waste power when it is not necessary" for both "it takes a considerable energy to transfer" and both do it in "bursts of primal energy" (Oziewicz 189).

⁶ Madeleine L'Engle's depiction of Seraphim is contrary to the Biblical description in Isaiah chapter 6. Here, Seraphim are described as angels having six wings and accompanying the Lord on His Throne.

Oziewicz's selective review is effective for a deeper scientific persuasion which vindicates L'Engle's hybrid of science and religion. In Marco Bussagli's description of the Seraphim, artists have speculated these angels are "close to God and the only ones who can look at him directly. Their name means "the burning ones," because God's heat sets them on fire" (Bussagli 766). Combining Oziewicz's scientific discourse and Bussagli's artistic speculation is a formula vindicating L'Engle's unorthodox thinking. L'Engle herself has stated that angels "have a wild and radiant power that often takes us by surprise ... they are messengers of God. They are winds. They are flames of fire" (*Water* 10-11). If L'Engle defines seraphim as "flames of fire" and is affirming Bussagli's simple artistic description, *Many Waters* is an unconventional representation of angelic embodiments complying with earth's quantum limitations. In spite of Adnarel's puzzling limitations, his scientific explanation is relatable to the pragmatist Murry twins. An angelic explanation on a scientific basis could be transferred to a "place where [seraphim] are either forgotten or denied" as a starting point for renewing an analogous belief in the supernatural. As L'Engle turned to science to enlarge her faith, she uses her unconventional divine characters to resurrect the twin's faith in the supernatural through scientific explanation, escorting the twins towards a spiritual belief.

Madeleine L'Engle's *Time Quartet* novels, with their memorable characters and unique narratives, continue to beckon readers and scholars towards the unorthodox theology that is orchestrated throughout. For the Murry children, the fabrics of reality are torn asunder to give way to the "probable impossible" that L'Engle has been so passionate to reveal to all readers. Through the torn fabric, a collective of unconventional divine beings are channeled through sensory details, descriptive language, and the emotional responses from both reader and character. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which's unconventionalism appropriates Christian

dogma in order to enlarge the children's faith and amplify their potential against the spiritual darkness plaguing their universe. Proginoskes disenchant the artistic interpretation and theological assumptions while Blajeny reconfigures the characters' acceptance of the supernatural. Though limited in power, Gaudior widens human perception of reality and prompts them to other possibilities. Furthermore, Gaudior is a divinity who undergoes human suffering, which makes this unicorn believable and relatable to the reader. The pre-historic seraphim remind Sandy and Dennys of the creative power of belief. The relation among these divine characters is their limitations and unorthodox representations. The theology that L'Engle exercises is using the suspension of disbelief not as a passive activity for the reader to engage in, but as an instrument for a greater goal. Samuel Taylor Coleridge devised the suspension of disbelief to combat the rise of skeptical readers and renew their wonder in the supernatural. J.R.R. Tolkien exemplifies the suspension of disbelief to comment on the failure of bad fantasy and the writers who can't sustain the reader's attention. Madeleine L'Engle is therefore a successful fantasy writer by not only maintaining the reverence of the supernatural, but also leading her reader to the fantastical realm of possibilities. L'Engle reminds her readers about the power in art. In her own words: "In art we are once again able to do all the things we have forgotten; we are able to walk on water; we speak to the angels; who call us; we move, unfettered among the stars" (*Water* 46-47). The *Time Quartet's* divine characters are limited to make way for the Murry children to strengthen their spiritual faculties and discover strength in their weaknesses. These characters mirror the readers in own personal lives, who may be perplexed with their own shortcomings and struggling faith. L'Engle demonstrates that the suspension of disbelief doesn't have to be a passive activity, but is a portal to experience the fantastic. L'Engle's fantasies are intended to be active because the language she uses makes the

reader willing to suspend their disbelief and enter her secondary world. She, engages her reader's imagination and human senses by providing a believable world where one can find consolation. The uncanny divinities become authentic, for L'Engle brings them to a lower plane, the primary world, and renews the reader's wonder because the divine doesn't have to appear in the guise of art and religion. Therefore, L'Engle's fantasies are a mode of engagement: she satisfies the reader's spiritual vision and desires for seeing the "probable impossible" come to pass.

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