The power of Allegory in science Fiction-L'Engle's A. Wrinkle in Time as an Example

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Abstract

Madeleine L’Engle’s A Wrinkle in Time was so controversial when it was written in 1960. It was rejected by over twenty publishers before it was published in 1962. Her belief in Religious Universalism resulted in her works being banned from Christian bookstores and schools. L’Engle’s philosophy is the that of happy religious pluralism in which Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and even scientists can live together in peace. This paper shows the peculiar use of allegory by this writer in science fiction. No writer can ever intentionally write an anagogical meaning into a text, perhaps it is this highest level of allegory that readers reach or discover by means of allegoresis. L‟Engle contends that the anagogic level of allegory is what makes a book available in more than one culture. She reflects the concept of time through the use of allegory as well. The study reflects how this scientific fiction has used a peculiar lens to depict the notion of Time. Moreover, this study shows how the ability of allegory and fantasy to serve as tool for art in troubled times, and to appeal to readers of all ages, gives these genres power to teach, heal, and endure.

Keywords: Allegory, science fiction, Religious Universalism

قوة الرواية في الخيال العلمي لمادلين لانجل - تجعيدة في الزمن - نموذجا

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ملخص

تعتبر رواية تجعيدة في الزمن للكاتبة مادلين لانجل من الروايات المثيرة للجدل في فترة كتابتها في سنة 1960.فقلد تم رفضها من اكثر عشرين ناشر في 1962 .ولقد تم حظر هذه الرواية في المكتبات المسيحية والمدرسية وذلك بسبب فلسفة الكاتبة وايمانها بالدين العالمي . ان فلسفة لانجل كما عكست بروايتها هي التعددية الدينية السعيدة حيث يمكن للمسيحيين واليهود والمسلمين والبوذيين وحتى العلماء العيش في سلام. يبرز هذا البحث الاستخدام المتميز للاستعارة الرمزية لهذه الكاتبة في رواية الخيال العلمي. ويظهر البحث كيف انه لم يسبق لهذه الكاتبة احد في هذا التوظيف الرمزي الروحي بالاستعارة المجازية والذي يعتبر المستوى الاعلى للرموز مما يتيح انتشار الرواية في اكثر من ثقافة. كما عكست هذه الرواية فكرة الزمن من خلال استخدام الاستعارة الرمزية ضمن الخيال العلمي. اضافة لذلك يصور البحث قدرة الاستعارة الرمزية كاداه للفن القصصي والفن في الازمنة العصيبة وايضا قدرتها ان تروق للقراء بكل الاعمار في جميع الاجيال وكيف اصبح هذا جنسا ادبيا للتثقيف والشفاء والصبر.

كلمات مفتاحية : الاستعارة الرمزية ، رواية الخيال العلمي، الدين العالمي

"A book, too,
can be a star, a living

fire to lighten
the darkness, leading
out into the
expanding universe."
Madeline
L'Engle

A Wrinkle in Time was so controversial when it was written in 1960. It was rejected by over twenty publishers before it was published in 1962. Her belief in Religious Universalism resulted in her works being banned from Christian bookstores and schools. L'Engle's philosophy is the that of happy religious

pluralism in which Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and even scientists can live together in peace.

Madeleine L'Engle (1918-2007) was the Newbery Medal-winning author of more than 60 books, including the much-loved A Wrinkle in Time. Born in 1918, L'Engle grew up in New York City, Switzerland, South Carolina and Massachusetts. Her father was a reporter and her mother had studied to be a pianist, and their house was always full of musicians and theater people. L'Engle graduated cum laude from Smith College, then returned to New York to work in the theater. While touring with a play, she wrote her first book, The Small Rain, originally published in 1945. She met her future husband, Hugh Franklin, when they both appeared in The Cherry Orchard. Upon becoming Mrs. Franklin, L'Engle gave up the stage in favor of the typewriter. In the years her three children were growing up, she wrote four more novels. Hugh Franklin temporarily retired from the theater, and the family moved to western Connecticut and for ten years ran a general store. Her book Meet the Austins, an American Library Association Notable Children's Book of 1960, was based on this experience. Her science fantasy classic A Wrinkle in Time was awarded the 1963 Newbery Medal. Two companion novels, A Wind in the Door and A Swiftly Tilting Planet (a Newbery Honor book), complete what has come to be known as The Time Trilogy, a series that continues to grow in popularity with a new generation of readers. Her 1980 book A Ring of Endless Light won the Newbery Honor. L'Engle passed away in 2007 in Litchfield, Connecticut.

Madeleine L‟Engle‟s A Wrinkle in Time is the first book in a four-part series concerning an unhappy girl, Meg Murry, who must journey on a quest to find and free her father, and at the same time to defeat an evil force trying to conquer the universe. The story focuses on the trials and tribulations of young protagonists battling larger, evil forces at work in her world. the novel shows deep allegorical expressions and interpretations that let the readers to understand the alternatives they must undertake between good and evil and the change that happens as a result, leading them to grasp the interconnectedness of their lives to the greater entity. A

Wrinkle in Time can be read allegorically as narratives of psychomachia, interconnectedness, or the complete power of love.

The Use of Allegory and Fantasy in Science Fiction

The ability of allegory and fantasy to serve as "escapist art in troubled times" (Brottman B16), and to appeal to readers of all ages, gives these genres power to teach, heal, and endure. L‟Engle acknowledges this when she says that "story helped me learn to live" (Hettinga 1). Both Story and allegory help us live and also provide us with a way to grow and develop. In order to achieve the "imaginary development" (Gates, Steffel, and Molson 116) needed to instigate any form of personal growth or change as often promoted by allegorical
literature, one must "dare [to] disturb the universe." L‟Engle herself was an avid proponent
of this theme, frequently quoting this line from T.S. Eliot‟s poem "The Love Song of J.
Alfred Prufrock." In an address to the Library of Congress entitled "Dare to be Creative,"
L‟Engle says that "good questions are more important than answers, and the best Children's books ask questions, and make the reader ask questions. Every new question is
going to disturb someone's universe" (23). She is also quoted by Marek Oziewicz in One
Earth, One People as arguing that:

> those who dare disturb the universe have many things in common. They refuse to
> submit to bullies. They will not tolerate phoniness and sham and pretense. They will
> not settle for the easy answer. They keep on asking questions – of themselves, of the
> world, of the universe – long after it is clear that people want answers, not questions;

bread and circuses, not justice. (171)

With these allegorical features in mind, L"Engle states in "Dare to be Creative" that
Children's authors have a heavy responsibility (13). She argues that since "children's minds
are tender" and "far more tough than many people realize…they have an openness and an
ability to grapple with difficult concepts which many adults have lost" (13-14). It is surely
this openness and ability, L"Engle says, which not only allow children to grasp allegory, but also make it the perfect genre for adolescent and fantasy literature.

Noel Perrin reflects this meaning in his article "Science Fiction: Imaginary Worlds and Real-life Problems." Perrin says that allegory, fantasy, and especially science fiction are "where you go in literature if you want to hear people openly and seriously talking about meaning" (in
Lenz 246). And here lies the ultimate power of allegory, fantasy, and science fiction - the
power to create and discover new meanings where we saw none before. L"Engle
acknowledged this when she stated in her Newbery Medal Award acceptance speech, "The
Expanding Universe": "Even the most straightforward tales say far more than they seem to
mean on the surface...how much more there is in them than we realize at a first reading"
(245). In science fiction, authors and readers alike understand more from the text than with
traditional allegory. The didactic nature of traditional allegory repels modern readers who do
not wish to be preached to, but rather wish to seek their own knowledge and meaning. Thus, allegorical fantasy, as shown is a means of instructing young readers in the allegorical implications evoked in the text.

The term “allegory” comes from the Greek roots allos meaning “other” and agoreuein meaning “public speaking” or “to speak openly in the marketplace” (Fletcher
2). Angus Fletcher also identifies a later meaning, allegoria or “inversion,” meaning “one
thing in words but another in meaning” (2). William Flint Thrall et al. define allegory in the
1960 edition of A Handbook to Literature as:

> a form of extended metaphor in which objects and persons in a narrative are equated
> with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself; allegory represents one thing in the
> guise of another – an abstraction in that of a concrete image…Allegory attempts to
> evoke a dual interest – one in the events, characters, and settings presented, and the
> other in the ideas they intended to convey. (7-8)

Allegory is not just as a “technique of aligning imaginative constructs, mythological or poetic, with conceptual or moral models” (as Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins do in the second edition of the Harper Handbook to Literature), but rather, to see the different perspectives of allegory; and how it “patterns the fictional world in order to suggest meanings to the reader” (Timmerman 6), and then to create sense out of those patterns and meanings. Charles Feidelson, however, gives us ample cause to remain with allegory when he explains:

> It is in the nature of allegory, as opposed to symbolism, to beg the question of
> absolute reality. The allegorist avails himself of a formal correspondence between

"ideas" and "things," both of which he assumes as given; he need not inquire whether
either sphere is "real" or whether, in the final analysis, reality consists in their
interaction. (8)

Deborah Madsen explains in her work *Rereading Allegory* that the classical definition of allegory as "a style of interpretation that imported to a text some external and extrinsic meaning; the text was assumed to operate as a kind of code, concealing a systematic
analogy with some external discourse, often philosophical" (2-3). Thus, there is a hidden
language of signs and codes which only the knowledgeable reader could discover. When this is done, the reader could undercover the deeper philosophical meanings hidden within the text.

Many critics classify L"Engle"s *A Wrinkle in Time* as equal parts fantasy and science fiction. Discussion throughout L"Engle"s *Time* quartet focuses on detailed explanation and use of physics, cellular biology, and chemistry. While their application and outcomes are most decidedly fantastic, their mere presence imports the realm of science fiction. Science fiction is a much more modern concept than fantasy, born from the rapid scientific development of the late industrial revolution through the nuclear age. In a purely denotative sense, science fiction is "imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or speculative environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel" (Science Fiction). The term "science-fiction" was first used in a literary sense in 1851 in William Wilson's work A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject in which the author hopes more works of science fiction will be written as they would "likely fulfill a good purpose" (Wilson 138).

John H. Timmerman differentiates between fantasy and science fiction to "marking the differences in identical twins" (13). He shows three key differences between fantasy and science fiction in *Other Worlds*: The Fantasy Genre. The first is merely in mode of transportation; Timmerman says that in science fiction, travel to another world or place is "always dependent upon a scientific or technological

device," whereas fantasy "may make the use of [such] a device, but it is usually a magical device" (14)1. *A Wrinkle in Time* uses devices that are more scientific than fantasy in order to transport the heroine and hero to their "other worlds." Timmerman also says that science fiction demands from readers to suspend their disbelief in order to believe that, given the scientific evidence used in the text, the situations, places, characters, and so on are real; fantasy simply asks the reader to believe it is a "probable
world" (14). The final difference is that science is "futuristic," it is "interested in the effects of science and technology on man in a future state" (14), whereas fantasy" calls forth a wholly other world" (15) completely indifference with the future of humankind .

In the rhetorical attitudes and stances taken toward and deployed within these genres, there are many similarities between allegory and fantasy in science fiction. In her work *Modern Allegory and Fantasy*, Lynette Hunter examines these parallels and similarities. Hunter compares the active and passive voices in allegory and fantasy to show how they are similar in rhetorical argument. Readers of both allegory and fantasy take different approaches to the text's deeper meanings. Allegory and fantasy readers must react with the text before being left to grasp and "assess the implications" (181). Hunter also believes that, because of their distinctive features, neither allegory or fantasy is "limited to attitudes toward perception and knowledge" (182). Donald Hettinga quotes L'Engle defining fantasy as "a search for a deeper reality, for the truth that will make us more free" (Presenting 11). Both forms of narrative serve a "deeper reality" and "truth that will make us more free" (11). Finally, Hunter contends that allegory and fantasy are linked by their shared dependence on and application of a basic concept or value - whether it's the war between good and evil, as many fantasy writers contend, or the quest for knowledge. Another important aspect between allegory and fantasy is their structural similarities. Both allegory and fantasy stories has The journey, a detour from the route, guides to assist the hero or heroes along the way, and, finally, a happy ending are all part of both allegorical and fantasy stories. And finally there is a decision between good and evil, justice and wrong.

The most strong link between allegory and fantasy/science fiction is the transforming aspect of both genres. Literal story and characters are converted into deep and varied meanings in both genres, and the reader reacts towards the hidden theme of the allegory. Gay Clifford puts this transformation the center of her entire book *The Transformations of Allegory*, in which she says that allegory, like fantasy, is a “mode capable of subsuming many different genres and forms” (5). Both allegory and fantasy produce polysemous interpretations that emerge from the text but go well beyond its literal meaning. Allegorical fantasy is a phrase that combines both elements of allegory and fantasy, ensuring that its role is “not to provide tidy morals, but to provide growth by experience” (Timmerman 31). All fiction requires the protagonist to embark on some sort of journey – physical, mental, or emotional – throughout the work, if the protagonist embarks on the journey solely to advance the plot or allow specific plot elements to occur, the text is unlikely to be allegorical or fantasy-based. The narrative is allegorical or fantasy-based if the journey is vital to understanding the final message and making a clear choice between right and wrong, good and evil. American poet and novelist Don Williams, Jr. says, “The road of life twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet our lessons come from the journey, not the destination” (Williams). This is undoubtedly true of allegory, as well as practically any other work of fiction that allows for wide interpretation fiction; It absolutely applies to LEngle's time-travel trilogy, especially A Wrinkle in Time. LEngle's characters travel not just across physical space and mental development, but also, through time. Gates, Steffel, and Molson shows that “empathic insight,” as coined by D.W. Harding, “allows the spectator to view ways of life beyond his normal range…he can achieve an imaginary development of human potentialities that have been rudimentary in himself” (116). L‟Engle‟s A Wrinkle in Time reflects Harding‟s insight. Just as all the main characters, Meg Murry, Charles Wallace Murry, and Calvin O’Keefe in *Wrinkle*, undergo individual transformative quests and changes, so too does the reader permit him/ herself to pass through personal quests and changes.

For the sake of saving their father, Meg and Charles Wallace, joined by Calvin O'Keefe, must travel through space and time via the "fifth dimension" (Wrinkle 88). Charles Wallace describes how the fifth dimension is generated via

geometric principles such as "squaring the square" of the fourth dimension to create a "tesseract" using simple analogies (88). This fifth dimension permits Meg, Charles Wallace, Calvin, and the three Mrs. W 's to go to Uriel, where they meet the Black Thing for the first time, and subsequently to a two-dimensional planet where the children cannot survive. Later, they traveled to the Happy Medium's foggy kingdom, Camazotz's dystopia, Ixchel's comparative utopia, and eventually back to the vegetable garden where they began their voyage. These physical travels allow for both allegorical and physical development. Meg and Charles Wallace, the two main characters of A Wrinkle in Time, go on a mental, emotional, and spiritual adventure in addition to their physical journeys throughout the universe. Meg characterizes herself as "full of bad feelings" (Wrinkle 17), a biological error (61), and not patient prior to her adventure (71). After being left with nothing but her "flaws" (112) to help her, Meg discovers that it is her flaws – "anger, impatience, and stubbornness" (176) – that finally help her escape from IT. This development process also leads Meg to the final stage of her spiritual journey, in which she must save Charles Wallace from IT on her own. Throughout the story all Meg seeks is a “quick fix” for her “problematic reality” (Hettinga 25) of accepting herself as she is, “both the good and the bad” (26), and what she can do and fulfill. Meg is " tired and unexpectedly peaceful " (Wrinkle 215) in the midst of a childish rage when she realizes that she is the only one who knows and loves Charles Wallace enough to fight IT on his behalf. This enlightenment brings Meg's spiritual journey to the end , and she transforms into "someone who no longer perceives the world as she did at the beginning of the story" (Hettinga 25). In L‟Engle‟s narrative, even the names of the stopping places are allegorical. The first planet, The first planet, Uriel, is an allusion to the fourth archangel, who is regarded as a messenger of warnings in Judaism and gnostic Christianity. Uriel is sent to Noah in the Book of Enoch to warn him of the flood ; similarly, Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin are warned of the danger of the "shadow that was so terrible that…there never had been before or ever would be again, anything that would chill…with a fear that was beyond shuddering, beyond crying or screaming, beyond the possibility of comfort" (Wrinkle, pages 81-82). The dystopic Camazotz is an allusion to another divinity; this divinity, the Mayan Indians' terrifying bat god, is associated with death and sacrifice, which is suitable given that the planet's population has been sacrificed to

IT. Thus, the physical stops during the travel become allegories in themselves and this because of L'Engle unique labelling.

Through the realms of allegory and fantasy, the protagonist meets guides who offer advice and support in order to help the protagonist complete his or her journey, get back on track, and make the best decision possible. These tools allow the author to manipulate the protagonist's cognitive and decision-making processes, and hence the reader's as well. Hettinga attributes the guides as "a sort of spiritual being, that one critic terms a „psychopomp, a role generally played by an angel in Christian thought" (Presenting 23).As it is accustomed in allegory, the three Mrs. W's names have significant meaning, just as the planets in *A Wrinkle in Time*. The Murrys have no idea who or what Mrs. Whatsit is when they first see her. LEngle clearly had a lot of fun constructing her three guides as metaphors or personifications for their roles and appearances in the novel. The other secondary characters operate as more direct personifications of the ideals and beliefs they exhibit. The Happy Medium and the Man with Red Eyes come one after the other in the book, and their titles have both literal (i.e. appearance) and allegorical connotations. The Happy Medium is exactly what it sounds like: a fortune teller who "star[ed] into the crystal ball...and she laughed and laughed at whatever it was that she was seeing" (Wrinkle 96). Despite their many distinctions, each of A Wrinkle in Time's six personified characters is an allegory for wisdom in some way. It does not take a tremendous leap of logic to see the relations between the actual abuse of intelligence and the allegorical abuse of wisdom. According to Mary Warner, LEngle tells the reader that "we too can transform ourselves and our world through love" (10).

L'Engle began receiving criticism from both the religious right and the religious left after the release of A Wrinkle in Time in 1962. Right-wing critics, on the other hand, objected to nearly the same things, calling her usage of witch characters in A Wrinkle in Time and nephilim in Many Waters "demonology" (31). As a result, fundamentalist Christians found her writing "too worldly," while secular audiences found it "too dogmatically Christian." Christian literalists denounce LEngle's literature as "new age and neo-orthodox" because her books incorporate elements from science fiction and New World aboriginal ceremonies (Ruiz Scaperlanda). L'Engle's significant use of science to reinforce her themes has

sparked a lot of religious criticism. L'Engle claims that "anything science can uncover simply gives us a wider view of the universe and of the Maker" (Hearne 31). In addition, LEngle's fiction features a diverse cast of people "technically not religious, not believers, but people who simply live their faith" (Ruiz Scaperlanda).

It is through allegorical fantasy the reader can become greater than we are, greater than we could wish to exist. (Nilsen 211). For almost forty years, generations of readers have read, interpreted, and appreciated Lengle's books, and given the cultural sensation they have become. The themes and aspects of the allegory stay the same, whether it is an allegory of psychomachia, connection, or the overriding power of love. There will always be journeys to be done, detours to be taken, and guides to be followed. These themes connect even more literary genres, bringing fantasy and science fiction to teenage and adult literature through the linkages of the realities generated by their allegorical interaction. If allegorical fantasy can help people connect with a higher power, it's because it's based on a truth that transcends time and space ("Expanding" 245).

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