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ARTS | BOOKS

A New 'Wrinkle in Time'

Madeleine L'Engle's 'A Wrinkle in Time' has sold 14 million copies since its publication in 1962. Now, a never-before-seen passage cut from an early draft is shedding surprising light on the author's political philosophy



Madeleine L'Engle with granddaughters Charlotte, left, and Léna, circa 1976. PHOTO: CROSSWICKS, LTD.

By **JENNIFER MALONEY**

Updated April 16, 2015 10:45 p.m. ET

Madeleine L'Engle, the author of "A Wrinkle in Time," resisted labels. Her books weren't for children, she said. They were for people. Devoted to religious study, she bristled when called a Christian writer. And though some of her books had political themes, she wasn't known to write overtly about politics. That is, until her granddaughter, Charlotte Jones Voiklis, came across an unknown three-page passage that was cut before publication.

The passage, which Ms. Voiklis shared with The Wall Street Journal so it could be published for the first time, sheds new light on one of the most beloved and best-selling young-adult books in American literature. Published in 1962, "A Wrinkle in Time" has

sold 14 million copies and inspired a TV-movie adaptation, a graphic novel, and an opera. Meg Murry, the novel's strong-willed misfit heroine, has been a role model for generations of children, especially girls. Now, Jennifer Lee, the co-writer and co-director of the Oscar-winning animated film, "Frozen," is writing a film adaptation for Disney.



Charlotte Jones Voiklis looks over early drafts of her grandmother's book 'A Wrinkle in Time' at the library at Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York in February. *PHOTO: KEITH BEDFORD FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

A witches' brew of science fiction and fantasy, Christian theology and a hint of politics, "A Wrinkle in Time" has long been considered influenced by the Cold War. It explores the dangers of conformity, and presents evil as a world whose inhabitants' thoughts and actions are controlled by a sinister, disembodied brain.

Many readers, then and now, have understood the book's dark planet Camazotz—a regimented place in which mothers in unison call their children in for dinner—to represent the Soviet Union. But the passage discovered by L'Engle's granddaughter presents a more nuanced worldview.

In it, Meg has just made a narrow escape from Camazotz. As Meg's father massages her limbs, which are frozen from a jarring trip through space and time, she asks: "But Father, how did the Black Thing—how did it capture Camazotz?" Her father proceeds to lay out the political philosophy behind the book in much starker terms than are apparent in the final version.

He says that yes, totalitarianism can lead to this kind of evil. (The author calls out examples by name, including Hitler, Mussolini and Khrushchev.) But it can also happen in a democracy that places too much value on security, Mr. Murry says. "Security is a

most seductive thing,” he tells his daughter. “I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s the greatest evil there is.”

Ms. Voiklis said she wanted readers to know the book wasn’t a simple allegory of communism. Instead, it’s about the risk of any country—including a democracy—placing too much value on security. The tension between safety and personal freedom is an idea that resonates in today’s politics.

“It’s normal to be afraid,” said Ms. Voiklis, who manages her late grandmother’s estate full-time in New York. “But you can’t let the fear control your decisions. Otherwise, you risk becoming like Camazotz.”

Ms. Voiklis found the excerpt a few years ago, as she was doing research for the release of the book’s 50th-anniversary edition. It was part of the earliest surviving typewritten manuscript, which for years was stored in L’Engle’s home and later moved to storage.

“A Wrinkle in Time” is a cultural touchstone. The Newbery Medal-winner was the first of five books in L’Engle’s so-called Time Quintet. On “Lost,” the television series whose cult following dissected its frequent literary references, the bookworm Sawyer reads a copy of “A Wrinkle in Time.”

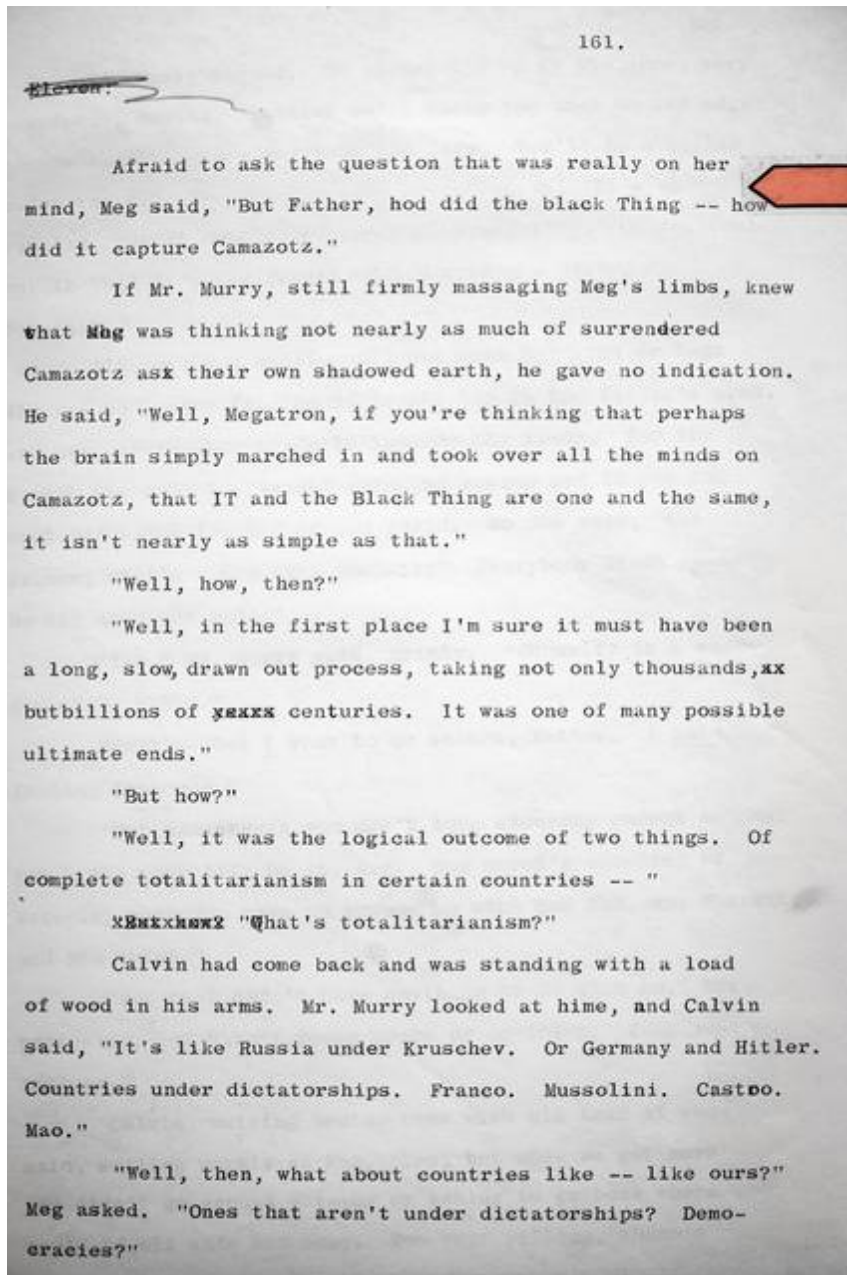
The novel inspired author Rebecca Stead to write her own Newbery Medal-winning book, “When You Reach Me,” whose protagonist, Miranda, reads “A Wrinkle in Time.” L’Engle’s works have also sparked the interest of scholars in the U.S. and abroad. In 2012, Farrar, Straus and Giroux published an oral history titled “Listening for Madeleine: A Portrait of Madeleine L’Engle in Many Voices,” by literary historian and biographer Leonard S. Marcus.

A three-hour live-action television adaptation, originally conceived as a miniseries, was broadcast on ABC in 2004 and released on DVD. Distributed by Disney, the production didn’t impress L’Engle. “I expected it to be bad, and it is,” she told Newsweek.

L’Engle’s publisher, Macmillan, which in March released a paperback version of the graphic novel, said it has no plans to include the deleted passage in new editions.

Ms. Voiklis has shared the passage with Catherine Hand, a producer on the film adaptation in development by Walt Disney Pictures. It isn’t clear whether Ms. Lee will direct the film, and casting hasn’t been announced. Ms. Hand said it was too early to comment on the project.

Read the Full Passage



KEITH BEDFORD FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

"As an 11-year-old, I read 'A Wrinkle in Time' and spent many a daydream and sleepless night imagining what it would be like to break free from the limitations of time," Ms. Lee wrote last fall in a short piece for WSJ Magazine, which invited her to write on the subject of the future.

Readers love the novel's band of oddball characters: math-whiz Meg, who is miserable at school; her precocious, telepathic brother, Charles Wallace; Meg's budding love-interest, Calvin; and a wacky trio of shape-shifting women — witches? angels? — who guide them on their dangerous journey.

"A wonderful aspect of 'A Wrinkle in Time' is its celebration of the different," author Katherine Paterson wrote in the introduction to the 50th-anniversary edition.

"In fact, hell, as it is embodied on Camazotz, is being exactly like everyone else."

Scholars invited by the Journal to review the new passage say it offers a window into L'Engle's thinking. The excerpt is the most direct discussion of politics in her writing, the scholars said, offering a richer explanation of the author's political views.

They agreed with Ms. Voiklis that cutting it was the right decision, one which strengthened the narrative. The section was too didactic, and would have dated the book, some said. Suzanne Bray, a L'Engle scholar who teaches at Université Catholique



Madeleine L'Engle in her office at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City, 1977 PHOTO: CROSSWICKS, LTD.

de Lille in France, said the section likely was cut precisely because it was “too political, or too obviously political”—something the author generally avoided in her writing.

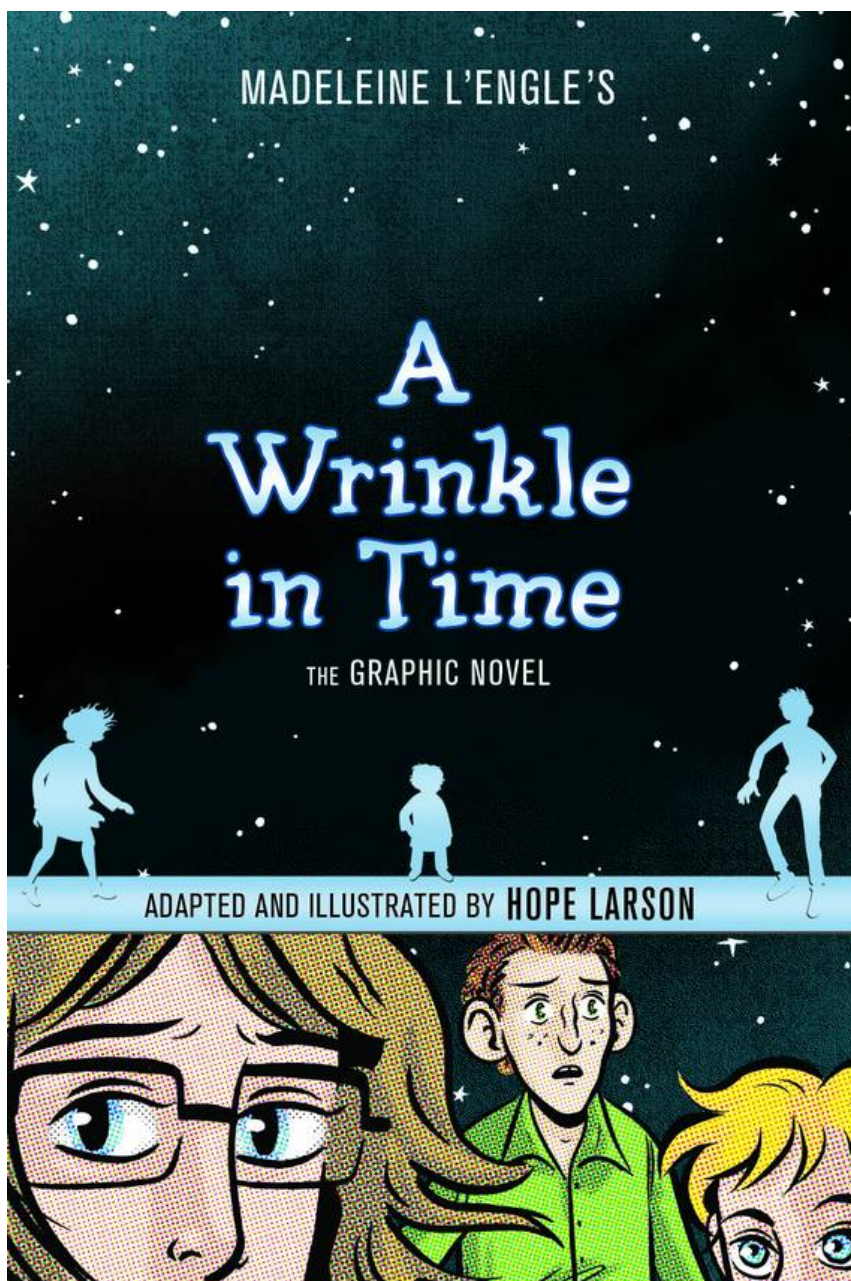
In the passage, Meg pushes back against her father’s argument about the dangers of fixating on security:

“Well—but I want to be secure, Father. I hate feeling insecure.”

“But you don’t love security enough so that you guide your life by it, Meg. You weren’t thinking of security when you came to rescue me with Mrs. Who, Mrs. Whatsit, and Mrs. Which.”

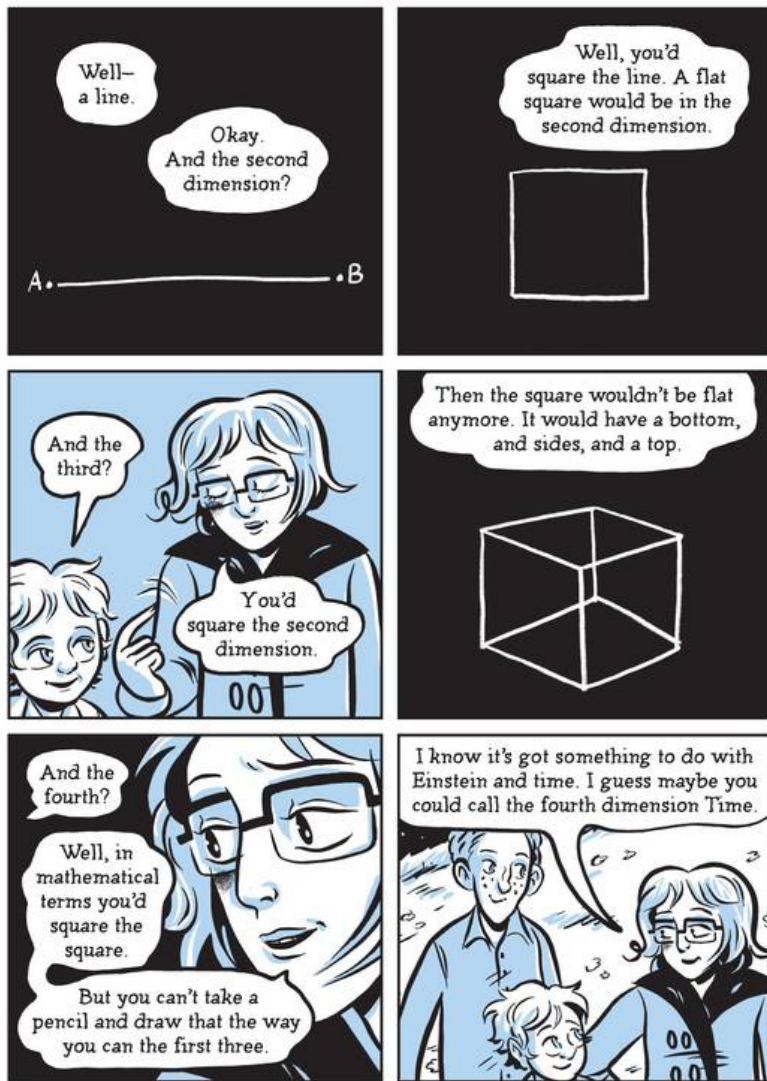
Naomi Wood, an associate professor at Kansas State University who has studied L'Engle, said she was intrigued by the conversation between Meg and her father. "It does confirm that L'Engle had the democratic, capitalist U.S. in mind as well as the autocratic, communist U.S.S.R.," she said.

L'Engle was born in New York City in 1918. When she was 12 years old, her parents dropped her off without warning at a boarding school in Switzerland. It was a traumatic and isolating experience. She attended Smith College and was working as a novelist and theater understudy in New York when she fell in love with a fellow actor, Hugh Franklin.



'A Wrinkle in Time' graphic novel, illustrated by Hope Larson. PHOTO: HOPE LARSON/CROSSWICKS, LTD.

After their first child, Ms. Voiklis's mother, was born, they abandoned their theater careers and moved to rural



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Connecticut, where they ran a general store. L'Engle was restless there. Grappling with existential questions, she turned, by chance, to the writings of Albert Einstein and other physicists.

The names Mrs. Who, Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Which popped into her head as she and her family drove through Arizona's Painted Desert on a camping trip in the spring of 1959.

At the heart of the book is Meg, a temper-prone teen struggling to harness her intellectual gifts. She, Charles Wallace and Calvin travel through time and space to rescue Mr. Murry, a scientist who has gone missing on a secret assignment for the U.S. government.

Publishers didn't know what

to make of it and one after another rejected the manuscript.

"Today I am crawling around in the depths of gloom," the author confided to her journal on Sept. 17, 1960, after a rejection from a publisher who suggested it be cut in half. "I'm willing to rewrite, to rewrite extensively, to cut as much as necessary; but I am not willing to mutilate, to destroy the essence of the book."

L'Engle finally found a collaborator in John Farrar of Farrar, Straus and Co. (known today as Farrar, Straus and Giroux). But even he had misgivings. He took her to lunch with Hal Vursell, who would edit the book.

"They warned me, 'Now, dear, we don't want you to be disappointed, but this book is not

going to sell. It's much too difficult for children," L'Engle recalled in a foreword to the 25th-anniversary edition.

"The problem wasn't that it was too difficult for children," she wrote. "It was too difficult for adults."

There is no known correspondence between L'Engle and her editor discussing the changes they made to "A Wrinkle in Time," and the author's journals don't offer any clues, Ms. Voiklis said. So it isn't clear whether Mr. Vursell proposed cutting the passage or the author decided to on her own. The various drafts aren't dated or numbered, though Ms. Voiklis has assembled them in roughly chronological order.

Even without the new passage, the danger of conformity remained a strong theme in "A Wrinkle in Time"—and not just in the scenes on the dark planet Camazotz. Meg chafes against pressure to conform in her New England town, where she "feels alienated and weird because of her inability to 'pass' as average or normal," Ms. Wood said.

L'Engle felt a great affinity with Meg.

"She learned to be by herself," Mr. Marcus said of the author as a girl. "That's Meg."

Corrections & Amplifications

Charlotte is on the left and Léna is on the right in the photo of Madeleine L'Engle reading to her granddaughters. A previous version of this article misidentified the granddaughters in the photo.

—*Ben Fritz contributed to this article.*

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