American novelist, poet, playwright, and essayist. L'Engle's works are characterized by their spirit, optimism, and subtle religious undertones. Her novels for young adults couple traditional action and adventure with modern philosophical and scientific problems and discoveries. A central concern is the importance of a secure and caring family life; this theme is fundamental to A Wrinkle in Time, L'Engle's best-known novel. Nurtured in a loving atmosphere, the Murry children find inner strength as they conquer the paralyzing forces of evil and mass conformity in order to save their father. It is in part the thematic universality of A Wrinkle in Time that brought it the distinction of several awards, including the 1963 Newbery Medal. It is also the first science fiction novel for young people to be considered a part of the mainstream of children's literature, and it spawned several sequels. The solidarity of the Murrys was anticipated by L'Engle's popular books about the Austin family. Although more conventional and less intricate than her other series, Meet the Austins and its sequels presented a close-knit family who solved their problems together. L'Engle was criticized for creating a too-perfect family with the Austins, for cluttering her other novels with an overabundance of character and incident, and for overemphasizing her themes. She does not consider herself a didactic writer, and claims to be only a storyteller. Although her abilities as such are unquestionable, her books give her readers deep thought provocation, which attests to her statement that she writes for young people when the subject is "too difficult for grownups." (See also Contemporary Authors, Vols. 1-4, rev. ed., and Something about the Author, Vol. 1.)

MARY ROSS

[The charm of "The Small Rain"] is its naturalness as a record of childhood and youth... Miss L'Engle tells the story straightforwardly, without sentimentality, but with quick insight into the keen and contradictory emotions of the years when a girl is struggling to find out what she is and what she wants. In this her picture of the girls at boarding school is notable... "The Small Rain" is in no way the too common story of unhappy and misunderstood childhood which many novelists seem impelled to write. Miss L'Engle gives you Katherine and her family and friends with an objectivity that makes you respect and like them as individuals. The setting and the events of the story are in themselves interesting. Its distinction, however, arises from the clarity and naturalness with which it recaptures the protonic course of youth, reminding you that what has happened by age twenty is neither simple nor important. (p. 2)


NINA BROWN BAKER

Katherine [of "The Small Rain"], despite her quite special environment, seems typical rather than unique. Her heartaches and raptures, her yearning for "someone you can really talk to," her high resolves and black despair, are nothing but the old achingly familiar process of growing up. And yet, the young (and those who have not forgotten how it feels to be young) should find this a moving story... "The Small Rain" gives evidence of a fresh new talent.


EDWARD WEEKS

Madeleine L'Engle is a newcomer and I mention her first novel, The Small Rain, because in it she succeeds in creating the character of a young artist, one of the most difficult assignments in the whole range of writing. This is the young and refreshing story of a musician growing surely with self-dedication in the midst of Bohemian New York, a realm which can so easily be cheapened, sentimentalized, or exaggerated. Her novel is written with good taste and clear understanding, and while she has much to learn in the pointing up of conversation and in the natural cutback of introspection, the undeniable vitality of her writing is good to discover. (p. 125)


EUNICE HOLSAERT

Miss L'Engle's second novel ["Ilsa"] does not warrant the enthusiasm with which her first offering, "The Small Rain," was received. The novel is told in the first person by Ilsa's perennial admirer, a sapless youth of the old...
South, whose sensitivity and humility do little to relieve the tedium of his perpetual, unspoken devotion. . . . [L'Engle's characters] would probably not survive on a soap opera.


Ellen Lewis Buell
There are poignant overtones in ["And Both Were Young"], for the time is today, and the shadows cast by the war give depth and veracity to Philippa's enlarging perspective. The ending seems a little anticlimactic, following as it does a dramatic and significant episode. But teen-aged girls will find this a satisfying story, sensitive, understanding and stimulating.


Rose Feld
When does a child cease to be a child and stand in the isolation of an individual? When do parents cease being parents and become unknown human beings? These are the questions, fraught with deeply rooted emotional complications, that Madeleine L'Engle explores in her new novel, "Camilla Dickinson."

Camilla, herself, fifteen years old, is the narrator of the story. It is through her eyes, her feelings, her fears and her bewilderment that the sensitive, fragile texture of a girl's coming of age takes form and pattern. . . . Perceptively, with a tender understanding of the vulnerability of a growing girl lost in the confusion of intuitive but formless knowledge, Miss L'Engle portrays the shock with which Camilla discovers that Jacques Nissen, a frequent caller at the Dickinson home, is her mother's lover. . . .

Telling her story through Camilla, Miss L'Engle succeeds admirably in portraying the painful awakening of a finely wrought adolescent. She is less successful in portraying some of the adults in the story. But in the realm of troubled, questing youth, Miss L'Engle has the sensitive touch of one whose emotional remembrance has the clarity of the living moment.


Trudie Osborne
Like many a gossip who, in talking about others, chiefly reveals herself, this novel about adolescence ["Camilla Dickinson"] throws its strongest light on adulthood—a state which, if this book is correct, can only be described as a mess. (p. 14)

Most of the cast bespeaks hopelessness and futility and generally leaves a bad taste in the mouth. All the characters intrigue, but not all are clearly realized. In two cases the author has resorted to annoying tricks of speech to supplant inadequate characterization. They are Camilla's mother, who never ends a sentence, and David, a young veteran, who never properly begins one.

Camilla herself passes the fictional test of growth. In the opening pages she combines a precocious adult perception with the childish innocence of another age. It is a combination that might have stepped, if not from a book by one of the Brontës, certainly from the pages of a manuscript written with a quill. By the end of the story the innocence has vanished, and Camilla's awareness, if not her understanding, has caught up with her perception.

Miss L'Engle has chosen New York as a backdrop. Her present-day New York is recognizable but, as often happens, it remains a fictional vacuum. No author to ignore challenges, she has further elected to write in the first person, from the point of view and in the thought idiom of 15-year-old Camilla. It is a narrative path thick with pitfalls. On the whole, she has traversed it well. (pp. 14-15)


Harrison Smith
A month ago J. D. Salinger told the story of what happened to a sixteen-year-old boy in the three days' interval between his dismissal from a private school and his return to his parents' home in New York's Park Avenue, ill and in a state of mental and physical shock. "Catcher in the Rye" is rapidly climbing toward the top of the best seller lists, and now it seems likely that Madeleine L'Engle's newest novel, which is concerned with two weeks in the life of a fifteen-year-old Park Avenue girl, may follow in its steps. There is a remarkable similarity in these two diverse books. Both are told in the first person, and both are concerned with the problems of a sensitive adolescent faced suddenly with the necessity of crossing the dividing line between childhood and maturity.

Miss L'Engle's "Camilla Dickinson" has more innate strength and stability than Salinger's Holden Caulfield. (p. 18)

The success of Miss L'Engle's appealing novel depends on the sensitivity and the understanding with which she reveals the mind of a charming young girl. There is nothing wrong with Camilla, who has courage and imagination, and who, unlike Mr. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, could not be made to endure what was ugly, cruel, or false among his fellows or the adult world. But there is a deeper division between "Camilla Dickinson" and "Catcher in the Rye." Mr. Salinger's magic depends for the most part on the authenticity of Holden's language which gives the illusion of being taken from life itself. Camilla's words and thoughts have the appearance of being interpreted at times through the novelist's words. Sometimes it is Camilla speaking directly to the reader but more often it is Miss L'Engle. It is unlikely, for example, that a fifteen-year-old girl could recall accurately every sentence of a long dialogue she listened to when she was five years old. This is perhaps a distinction without a difference, and it does not destroy the charm, the pathos, and the meaning of her book. (pp. 18-19)

Harrison Smith, in The Saturday Review of Literature (Entire issue copyright 1951 by Saturday Review Associates, Inc.; reprinted with permission), September 1, 1951.

Ruth Hill Viguers
Anyone who has traveled with four children, or even less,
over thousands of miles, camping nearly every night in a
different spot, knows how much can happen. "Adven-
tures" become almost commonplace. Perhaps no one
family could have had all the variety of experiences that the
Austins had on their journey [in The Moon by Night], but
not one of the events is impossible or even unbelievable.
From time to time I found myself thinking, "Oh, why
didn't they stop there long enough to see . . ." and then
remembered I was reading a story. If a veteran reviewer
could be so convinced of the reality of a book, it will surely
be alive for young readers.

Vicky matures to the point of feeling life is still worth living
after having her young belief in the inevitability of justice
shattered. Her efforts to find herself, to help the boy who
needs her friendship, to put in perspective all she has been
taught of life and death, human relationships, and religious
faith, involve much thoughtful analysis and bring this story
very close to young people. Woven through are passages
that some might consider sermonizing, but they are so in
character and so spiced with reality and humor that I think
young people looking for answers to their many questions
will appreciate them.

Idealistic and wise, this is also absorbing reading and very
much a story of today, contemporary in feeling, incident,
and characterizations. Elizabeth George Speare, in her
Newbery Acceptance last June quoted Joseph Wood
Krutch, "If Love, and Honor, and Duty can be salvaged,
then someone must write about them in a fashion which
carries conviction." In this book Madeleine L'Engle has
done just that. (pp. 165-66)

Ruth Hill Viguers, in The Horn Book Magazine
(copyright © 1963, by The Horn Book, Inc., Bos-
ton), April, 1963

ALICE DALGLIESH

[The Moon by Night] is another, and independent, book
about Vicky and her family, who first appeared in Meet the
Austins. [The Austins are] as real a family as you find in a
book . . .

Vicky, the narrator, meets a boy who interests her because
he is so different—but he is disturbing to her family. His
effect on Vicky's slightly uncertain but really firm faith in
God—and in life—makes a good story, one that may, in so
far as it is possible, give reassurance to girls who need it.
But occasionally they may wish that Vicky and Zachary did
not take themselves quite so seriously. (p. 77)

Alice Dalgliesh, in The Saturday Review (Entire
issue copyright 1963 by Saturday Review Asso-
ciates, reprinted with permission), May 11, 1963.

Judging by the frequency of their appearance books with
some sort of gimmick involving the fourth dimension have
substantial appeal for younger readers. [A Wrinkle in Time]
adds a fifth, though it is not quite clear what it is, which
enables persons with the right "equipment" to translate
themselves (if that is the right word) to other planets, or,
indeed, other points in time. It would not be fair to the au-
thor to disclose even a hint of the development, in the
second half of the book, of this technique, but one thing can
be said at once: Meg, little Charles Wallace, and the older
Calvin are far more interesting and appealing as children
before that development than at any time after and they do
not as creations deserve the strain and fear that is part of
their treatment as the story moves on. It is rather terrifying
to reflect on the realities of modern life which make Made-
leine L'Engle's science fantasy possible and I am not at all
certain that the book ought to fall into the hands of highly
imaginative children who may still be afraid of the dark.
Still, as there is now a swing of opinion away from the
theory of horror in fairy stories and the corrupting influence
of adult cinema, it may in this case be all right. There is no
doubt that she writes well—devilish well—though her be-
neficent replacements for the Three Witches, Mrs. Whatstis,
Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which are not altogether convincing,
one might think. (pp. 154-55)

The Junior Bookshelf, July, 1963

RUTH HILL VIGUERS

I have often wished it were not necessary to review a book
immediately upon publication. Children's reactions and
acceptances are always important and there should be time
to be aware of them. The critic's own perspective on a
book is often clearer months after it is read. I felt that way
about Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time. I reviewed
it favorably upon publication. Months later the book's ex-
traordinary power began to show itself in the way incidents
kept coming to mind, in the hold it had taken on my imagi-
nation.

I cannot forget the personalities of the children: precocious
little Charles Wallace; Meg, whose faults alone—anger,
impatience, stubbornness—could save her; the three
strange beings who emerge at times as eccentric but very
kind old ladies. (p. 25)

Miss L'Engle has referred to her book as a parable; but it is
first of all an exciting adventure story, with something im-
portant added—the overtones that will make it worth
reading many times and will give new meanings with each
new reading.

Here is a book which the analytical reviewer might charac-
terize in this way:

A mingling of realism and science fantasy
which incorporates the concepts of time
travel, extrasensory perception, and inhab-
ited planets in outer space. Excellent writing
style, involved plot. Vocabulary and literary
references too difficult for the average fairy-
tale audience.

An imaginative analyst might compare the three spirits with
the witches of Macbeth, point out analogies to modern life,
and cite the value (or confusion to the unread child) of the
literary quotations. Both reviewers would be doing what
C. S. Lewis calls judging "the instrument by anything
rather than its power to do the work it was made for," criti-
cizing "the lens after looking at it instead of through it."

We are so busy doing things with the work
that we give it too little chance to work on
us. Thus increasingly we meet only our-
selves.

Here certainly is a book which should not be used but
should be received, full of words which are "exquisitely
detailed compulsions on a mind willing and able to be so
compelled." Here is a book requiring an approach which
allows margin for surprise. (pp. 26-7)
CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM, Vol. 12


CAROLYN M. LIGHT

Following the theme which characterizes her last two books, that of young protagonists who make travel and an interest in science the roads of maturity, Madeleine L'Engle has created a . . . novel [The Arm of the Starfish] demanding a place on all young adult bookshelves . . . .

[It presents] that type of smooth running plot which immerses one to its end in story alone, and only then delivers in brilliant flashes a shower of meaning and application. Some handlings of situation are overdrawn, being perhaps too intense pockets of the author's perceptive sensitivity. Usually the tone is even and natural, suspense building up through the clash of events upon the perplexed and wary minds of both boy and reader. It is a book about love and loyalty, about the difficulty but necessity of committing oneself to a cause the implications of which extend to "Heaven and the future's sakes." Could anything be more relevant to the challenges facing Adam's generation today? Could any problem be for them more pressing than his—to find selfhood and vocation "Where love and need are one." (pp. 36-7)

Carolyn M. Light, in Best Sellers (copyright 1965, by the University of Scranton), April 15, 1965.

ALICE DALGIEISH

The qualities that made A Wrinkle in Time popular are all [in The Arm of the Starfish], though the plot and characters are kept under better control. At first the story seems a cloak-and-dagger affair; it teeters on the edge of melodrama, becomes mystical in tone, and, if you read the note in the front matter, appears also to be science fiction. There is a "message," which is more skilfully presented than that of the former book. The characters are alive and possible—including the Jesus-like Joshua, who proclaims his non-belief in a personal God, yet cares about humanity even to the fall of a sparrow. (p. 45)


CAROLYN HOROVITZ

A most popular and original book is A Wrinkle in Time. The book sparkles with the author's vitality and imagination and proceeds at a fast pace with recognizable character types. Her contributions are ingenious but not deep. The climactic scene in which Meg stands crying before Charles Wallace bothers me for two reasons. First of all, I find it hard to understand why she could not have done this before; secondly, if Mrs. Whatsit could tess her and Charles Wallace away from IT, why couldn't she have been with them before and saved them from their father's inept teasing? Here, it seems to me, the ground rules of the plot have been violated. In the previous visit to IT, the children had to go alone; now Mrs. Whatsit is there to tess them off. This may seem minor, but it is of a piece with the main criticism I have to make of this book; there is a facility about it, a slickness in characterization and dialogue which makes me feel that I have been dealt with less than directly.

There is no question but that the book is good entertainment and that the writer carries the story along with a great deal of verve; there is some question about the depth of its quality. (p. 159)


ELAINE MOSS

Madeleine L'Engle's Meet the Austins . . . deserves notice because it takes one small step towards filling the yawning spiritual gap in novels for the young. As unfashionable as covered knees, it explores, from the secure anchorage of a happy American family, the meaning of life and death. (p. 702)

Elaine Moss, in The Spectator (© 1966 by The Spectator; reprinted by permission of The Spectator), June 3, 1966.

[Meet the Austins] might perhaps be sub-titled "The Family That Never Was." Nevertheless, there is a refreshingly wholesome feeling about this New England doctor's family who gather a report of sudden death, a bicycle accident, and the disruption caused by a spilt orphan, determined by any means to be the centre of attention. The four children and the outsider, ranging in age from about six to thirteen, are delightfully true to life, excellently observed, and the parents, so understanding and sane, are as parents should be, finding time to share with the whole family the beauty of a night sky or frost in the moonlight. (p. 253)

The Junior Bookshelf, August, 1966.

JEAN C. THOMSON

[The bizarre story of The Young Unicorns] turns on a power-mad brain surgeon's discovery of the stunning potential in a micro-laser to control men's minds. What's most fun here is the author's outrageous imagination coupled with her ability to characterize so many people adequately; the sheer number, however, will occasionally leave readers bewildered. Dave, a troubled youth, begins and ends the book, but in between the action sways away from him, and nearly all the characters receive equal time. Surprisingly, the supernumeraries and suspense-gorged plot are so integrated as to add up to a carnival show for young readers in a giddy, mind-stretching book. (pp. 149-50)


PAUL HEINS

[The Journey with Jonah, a dramatization of the story found in the Old Testament Book of Jonah.] amplifies the humor of the original and retains its basic meaning. Jonah, the somewhat pompous prophet, may be at odds with God and man, but he is not left alone. On every step of his way he is confronted by animal creation. His motives are probed by a pedantic Owl, a silly Goose, and a pert Jay—among others; the Rat family witness his ejection from the ship; and he engages in a conversation with the Whale. Through the prose and the verse, the rhymes and the puns,
is witnessed the animal world's revelation of the incomprehensibility of God's mercy, which Jonah finally acknowledges. (p. 184)


GERALDINE E. LAROCQUE

The Journey with Jonah abounds with delightful puns and saucy animals that reflect their common characteristics such as the wise old owl and the foolish goose. I am inclined to say that everyone will love The Journey with Jonah because I am so taken with it and because I find it impossible not to pile orchid after orchid upon Newbery Prize winner L'Engle: but experience impels me to moderate that "everyone" in spite of myself.

So compelling is the play that students reading it may want to read the story of Jonah in the Bible. Because the subject matter is open to treatment in depth or to understanding on a literal level, I believe the play can be read anywhere from Grades 7 to 12. The animals may appeal to younger students, and their symbolic attributes will appeal to the more mature. The same is true of the style; its refinements can be appreciated by the better reader but its intent can be grasped by the less proficient. (p. 753)

Geraldine E. LaRocque, in English Journal (copyright © 1968 by the National Council of Teachers of English), May, 1968.

GERALDINE E. LAROCQUE

A very unusual novel, both frighteningly realistic and highly imaginative, The Young Unicorns... maintains Madeleine L'Engle's reputation as one of the finest of the present day authors writing for young people. (p. 296)

Because the manner of the telling and the sense of confusion and mystery created by the unknowns are integral to the enjoyment of the book, recounting the plot here would be a real disservice; but it is important to say that the book deals with profound questions of philosophy and psychology. A special novel, which can be read by some junior high school boys and girls but which, because of the intricacies of plot and philosophy, might be recommended more successfully to older readers.

Barbara M. Castellano... sees the book as the story of the development of one of the main characters, Dave, as he learns to love and trust people, as he breaks down the barriers of his disillusionment with others. In speaking of Canon Tallis who solves the mystery of the sinister events, Barbara Castellano says:

He is a profound thinker, deeply concerned with moral-theological issues. It is he who provides the masked theme of the book: the immorality of establishing a Utopia at the expense of human freedom. His point of view corresponds to the Miltonian concepts of liberty and license. Man can only have dignity if he can choose good. The villain of the piece proposes to eliminate that choice, and L'Engle's argument against such control of the human spirit is as good as any in contemporary adult fiction. (pp. 296-97)

Geraldine E. LaRocque, in English Journal (copyright © 1969 by the National Council of Teachers of English), February, 1969.

"The dragons and the owls honor him because he gives waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, and drink to his people." The words of the child's mother articulate what has become apparent during the procession of real and fabled creatures to the desert caravan's overnight camp. Each in his own way does obeisance to the joyful little boy; it is the "extraordinary night... when nobody was afraid and everybody danced." As designed, [Dance in the Desert] as a whole is a desert night on the journey into Egypt, the text appearing against the glowing sands, the flickering fire, the shadowy dunes; fittingly, the last picture is an almost traditional Madonna and Child. What may seem florid (in the illustrations) and sticky (in the story) to some is, if taken in the spirit in which it was meant, a fervent testimonial (p. 372)


These poems [in Lines Scribbled on an Envelope and Other Poems] are less traditional, both in style and substance, than much of the poetry written for children (no chirpy birds or sticky eccentricities) but they have a familiar large optimism and heavy social consciousness.... Several flunt with Biblical lines—both "Shout Joy" and "The Baby in the Bath" use echoes from the psalms—while others concern light exotica—the unicorn, the phoenix, the roc ("But the only meal of suitable elegance / For a flock of young roc is a handful of elephants. / Rockabye, rocklings, roc, roc, roc a bye"). The verse forms vary considerably—simple rhyme, sonnets, free verse—but only a few are strong and forceful and the very personal projections of uplift and enthusiasm are limited in appeal. (p. 681)


The Young Unicorns seems a more resolved and complete work than A Wrinkle in Time, the book by which the author is so far known here. That, too, was about the battle of good and evil, in a world of modern science and ancient forces, and it had some unforgettable passages of fairy-tale magic and witchery; but it had its weaknesses too, not the least of them something over-local and over-sentimental in the politics of the message. The Young Unicorns (where, in spite of the prevailing strangeness, nothing of the seeming-supernatural is left without a rational explanation) is a good deal more subtle in its complexities. And even those young readers who contrive to bypass the thought and the allegory, cannot but be impressed by the sheer melodramatic thrills of the plot. A triumph of the possible rather than the probable, one might think, but it is logically credible and certainly imaginatively so.


JOHN CONNER

Young readers who remember Madeleine L'Engle for her exciting A Wrinkle in Time may enjoy "The Sea Monster..."
“Summer City,” “The Monkey,” “The Dragon,” “Song of Simeon,” and “The Parrot” in [Lines Scribbled on an Envelope]. These poems present a segment of life in a quasi-humorous way sustained by a youthful point of view. They also represent Madeleine L’Engle’s marvelous gift for combining dissimilar elements from opposing historical periods.

But most of the poems in this collection will appeal to older adolescent and adult readers because the poet views her subject matter in retrospect. She is a concrete adult wondering about present day values in terms of birth, death, passion, and religious experience. I believe it must be these poems which made Madeleine L’Engle hesitate about publishing this book. In her preface to the volume she writes of being afraid “of making myself vulnerable to people I don’t know.” She is aware that the distilled language of verse magnifies her thoughts.

A marvelous image of an unhappily thrashing sea monster in the poem of the same name who waits forever for ships to fall off the horizon because people no longer believe the world is flat contrasts with the symbolic hole in the world in “Lines After M. B.’s Funeral” through which the poet hopes to see where the wind comes from and where the light begins. These examples suggest the range of images in this brief volume of verse. Individual poems may appeal to widely different audiences.

Reading Lines Scribbled on an Envelope is a deeply moving experience. I’m glad Madeleine L’Engle had the courage to reveal herself to her readers. (p. 302)


In [Dance in the Desert, a] fairy tale about the Flight into Egypt, the desert animals and birds come by night to the caravan with which the Holy Family is travelling and dance to Jesus by the light of the campfire. . . . The story is rather hard to accept: not so much the inclusion with real animals of the dragon and unicorn (vindicating the Virgin’s purity by placing his head in her lap), as the unconcern of the rest of the caravan at these unusual happenings. (p. 88)

The Junior Bookshelf, April, 1970.

JOHN W. CONNER

A generation of adolescent readers has been charmed by the many writing moods of Madeleine L’Engle; perhaps the sense of togetherness in Meet the Austins, the mystery and suspense of A Wrinkle in Time, or the romantic adventure of And Both Were Young. Miss L’Engle’s new novel, The Other Side of the Sun, is an adult one, but older adolescent L’Engle fans will welcome a new facet of this fine author’s talent.

Madeleine L’Engle has a very special way with words. She shapes sentences so that the syntax suggests movement and feeling beyond the descriptive power of the words themselves. Never has this been more apparent than in The Other Side of the Sun. (p. 1154)

The Other Side of the Sun moves sedately, revealing little by little the complex familial intrigue which threatens various members of the Illyria family. Slowly Miss L’Engle builds the tension. Finally it is released in an eruption of witchcraft, confabulation, and vigilante slayings. Early in the novel the words of the first white co-mistress of Illyria set the theme: “Only on love’s terrible other side is found the place where lion and lamb abide.” It is the search for that other side of love which motivates a reader to unravel the mysteries of Illyria. And it is a fruitful search. . . .

Adolescent readers will be intrigued by the value systems employed by various characters in The Other Side of the Sun. I think they will be shaken, as I was, by the pervading sense of evil in the practices of witchcraft. The Other Side of the Sun is excellent reading fare for the older adolescent who is prepared to consider the ultimate price a human being must pay for the values he upholds. Miss L’Engle is to be congratulated for adding an important new dimension to her varied writings. (p. 1155)

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POLLY LONGSWORTH

Anyone who has read many of Madeleine L’Engle’s excellent novels for young people must hanker to know something about her, to find out why beautiful mothers and radiantly warm family life recur in her books, and why her female characters achieve fuller dimension than her male, and how she dares champion the forces of good in these dark times.

The chance to know her comes on like a Newfoundland puppy in “A Circle of Quiet,” a long, loosely-structured, personal statement of her convictions, experiences, ponderings, self-analyses and philosophizings in which the reader discovers her discovering herself.

At age 51 Madeleine L’Engle is experiencing what [Carl Jung called individuation, and she calls ontology—a coming to the real self. She employs the image of the burning bush—with everything non-essential burned away and only the real remaining—to describe the process she is undergoing and to justify culling her journals and her recent experiences to explain who and where she is. The result is an amorphous grouping of short essays focusing on the intrinsic values of her life as mother, wife, writer and friend. It is a fusion of autobiographical detail, practical advice to writers, demonstration of her craft, short intellectual excursions in search of truth and definition, passionate defense of the need for love, charity, compassion, laughter, community and commitment in our lives, and, most important to the author, a confirmation of her evolving belief in a loving Creator.

Any human confession presents the opportunity to play God, and the responsibility for doing so with justice. “A Circle of Quiet” reveals a loyal, wise and passionate individual, whose response to life has influenced others through friendship and through her writing. She has made a highly vulnerable declaration, sprawling, flawed, and full of material redolent of women’s magazines. That she is cognizant of her faults doesn’t entirely justify them. For instance, she makes a lot of perfectly obvious, ordinary observations which rob the book of a penetrating quality. This is disappointing.

Miss L’Engle does not pretend to be an intellectual; she buffers her good intelligence with faith and feeling. Nor is she writing a work of fiction. But there is an unnecessary Oz effect here. The all-too-human individual revealed be-
L'Engle's books. They might be as curious as I to meet the real Madeleine L'Engle.

And so, A Circle of Quiet has found its way into this column, and I predict it will find its way into the hearts of Madeleine L'Engle's fans, adolescent and adult. (pp. 767-68)

John W. Conner, in English Journal (copyright © 1972 by the National Council of Teachers of English), May, 1972.

MAY HILL ARBUTHNOT and ZENA SUTHERLAND

[Meet the Austins is one of the first family-centered books] since Little Women to handle the death of a loved one so well (p. 462)

The children's ups and downs, a serious brother-sister conflict, some funny and some grave situations—all develop against a background of family love. This is a fine family story, as unusual and provocative throughout the whole book as is its first chapter. (p. 463)


JOHN ROVE TOWNSEND

The most ambitious of American SF stories for young people is Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time...

Heroiné Meg Murry, who wears spectacles and has braces on her teeth, sets off with precocious small brother Charles and friend Calvin O'Keefe to rescue her scientist father from the grip of IT; a great brain that controls the lives of the zombie population of a planet called Camazotz. The power of love and the help of three witches who appear also to be angels enable Meg to triumph over evil (evil being the extermination of individuality). There is a luminous confusion about A Wrinkle in Time; it seems to be trying to do too many things at once. But it is an attractive book, splendidly unafraid of being clever or out-of-the-ordinary, and not concerned to reinforce the image of the regular guy or girl. (p. 215)


ROBERT BELL

Adult admirers of Miss L'Engle will appreciate [A Wind in the Door], her most virtuoso performance in fantasy to date, but I have a lingering doubt if any but the more virtuoso young readers will be able to escape a good deal of bewilderment. The plot is enormously exciting, though I have the same kind of reservations about the solution as some reviewers had about that in Alan Garner's The Owl Service. The book will not be for every child; a good many will find it puzzling, but for the discerning readers who are able to appreciate the symbolism it will make a lasting impression. (pp. 247-48)

Robert Bell, in The School Librarian, September, 1975

WAYNE DODD

[Madeleine L'Engle's A Wind in the Door] attempts to get
to the spiritual by way of fantasy/science fiction. But she also takes other routes as well: namely both the “dragon” road and that familiar street that runs through the unnoticed gap in the everyday and into the beyond. The result is that, in terms of wonder, we get nowhere. Mrs. L’Engle really can’t make up her mind whether she wants the reader to be involved in the realistic dimension of her story (which is rendered with superfluous and unselective detail) or to be caught up in the discovery of the “other” in our lives. The idea for this story is a promising one: the discovery (by the children) of the presence, in the strange illness of one little boy, of a whole universe of struggle between good and evil, order and chaos, integration and disintegration. This is the same territory C. S. Lewis worked, both in the chronicles of Narnia and in the Perelandra series for adults. The difference is that genuine wonder is never present in A Wind in the Door. The problem appears to be one of writing, primarily. For not only is there a confusion of routes (lack of commitment?) but also the spiritual (galactic) dimension, once moved into, is simply too confusingly vague and obscure to win acceptance. In addition, the treatment of the realistic point of departure is too charmingly eccentric, even, finally, clichéd—that is, cliché ideas of charmingly eccentric people. Moreover, A Wind in the Door shares what appears to be the burden of all fantasy/science fiction: only the idea really interests the writer. (p. 174)


[The O’Keefe family from The Arm of the Starfish are on hand in Dragons in the Waters] to join Simon Bolivar Renier and his spooky Cousin Phair on a freighter voyage from Savannah to Venezuela which looks at the outset a bit like L’Engle’s version of [Katherine Anne Porter’s] Ship of Fools. The O’Keefe kids haven’t outgrown their arrogance—no, Poly is given to bragging about her family’s doctorates real and potential, and excuses Simon’s eavesdropping because this is the end of the road when “Things are falling apart. The center doesn’t hold.” But there’s little time for metaphysical wrangles as we are introduced to the Orion’s passengers and crew, while Simon survives several attempts on his life and Cousin Phair is murdered. . . . [In the rush of new developments] one can be immune to the lure of the Quizanos or even unimpressed by the murder mystery’s solution and still be well entertained. Of all L’Engle’s novels, we find this the most satisfying, perhaps because it doesn’t demand to be taken with such deadly seriousness. Deduct ten points at the beginning for self-importance and enjoy the rest for a lark. (pp. 47-71)


BARBARA ELLEMAN

[In Dragons in the Waters] L’Engle writes a taut, intricately layered novel, charged with suspenseful twists and faceted into a thoughtful yet climactic conclusion. As in her other books, the power of love and cohesive force of caring are underlying themes, and the perceptively drawn characters, some of whom appeared in The Arm of the Starfish, are realistic in their conception, credible in their actions, and extremely human. (p. 1266)

Barbara Elleman, in The Booklist (reprinted by permission of the American Library Association; copyright 1976 by The American Library Association), May 1, 1976.

CYNTHIA BENJAMIN

There is enough adventure in “Dragons in the Waters” to make Nancy Drew and her chums squirm: a shipboard murder that could have been committed by any one of the passengers or crew; a kidnapping; an attack by a wild boar; a young boy lost in the Venezuelan jungle. . . . And much more. . . . The plot of “Dragons in the Waters” is complex and might be confusing to less able readers. The narrative is an intriguing mixture of contemporary allusions and gothic mystery. But does it work? Will readers find Simon’s decision to remain in the primitive Quizano village believable? It is a credit to the author’s skill at characterization that they will. (p. 22)


CRAIG WALLACE BARROW

Madeleine L’Engle’s A Wrinkle in Time is a splendid fantasy; . . . it seldom violates reality. The Murry family relationships, Calvin’s relationship to his parents, and Meg’s relation to school authorities and the community, as well as the character portraits, are probable and realistic. Envoy of the Murrys, gossip about the supposedly runaway father-husband, malice, selfishness, and even Charles Wallace’s arrogance, are unflinchingly presented. Tesseracting, a seemingly instantaneous movement in time and/or place, is given a metamorphic fifth-dimension explanation. The witches who were formerly stars dying in the struggle against the evil shadow fight a symbolic battle steeped in classical and Gospel-of-John traditions, a battle that is psychically realistic even though symbolic. One can even relate Mrs. Whatsit’s, Mrs. Who’s, and Mrs. Which’s actions to current theories of black holes in space and neutron stars; even the life style on Cantostotz has an affinity to entropy. The only weakness in the novel is the confrontation with the It-brain by Mr. Murry and the children; the shift from the symbolic to the actual confrontation is a dramatic collapse of an antagonist from the infinite to the finite much like the cannon battle in [John Milton’s] Paradise Lost. (pp. 295-96)


REBECCA J. LUKENS

A Wrinkle in Time [is] a fantasy which uses many of the devices of science fiction, but which does not rely on its machinery to produce story. Space and time fantasy can have fully developed character, and yet retain the ingenuity we find in science fiction. Even though the characters of A Wrinkle in Time have special mental powers, they do not lose their humanness. Father, the brilliant scientist, through
sheer human weariness has lost his fight with IT, the huge, disembodied brain. Meg struggles to hold back Charles Wallace, who—arrogantly believing in the superiority of mind—is drawn into IT’s control. Meg’s human stubbornness helps her rescue her father, but in the process she leaves Charles Wallace. Sustained by the strength of an indomitable human force, love, Meg returns to rescue her brother and reunite the family. These are round, three-dimensional characters; they can be found in science fiction. We can be made to care about the action, the ideas, the characters, and their relationships—when the characters are believable. (p. 27)

_Rebecca J. Lukens, in her A Critical Handbook of Children’s Literature (copyright © 1976 by Scott, Foresman and Company; reprinted by permission), Scott, Foresman, 1976._

JEAN F. MERCIER

The cast from the Newbery-award novel, “A Wrinkle in Time” and “A Wind in the Door” returns [in “A Swiftly Tilting Planet”] with the Murry children now grown. . . . Shivery and elegant twists of plot ensue as Meg and Charles Wallace employ time travel, telepathy, a Welsh rune and other means to prevent annihilation of the universe by a mad dictator. L’Engle’s gifts are at their most impressive here. Her ability to draw attention to familiar details of settings and characters is such that she slips seamlessly abstract scientific and moral principles into the reader’s consciousness, smoothly but surely. (p. 65)


L’Engle’s irksomely superior Murry family reassembles [in A Swiftly Tilting Planet] for Thanksgiving dinner, about ten years after Meg and Charles Wallace braved the _Wrinkle in Time_. . . . [Precocious] Charles Wallace, now 15, leaves his tesseract model and goes off to his star-watching rock to see what he can do to avert disaster. There, with the wind making the decisions and the evil echthroi trying to catch him en route, Charles rides a unicorn back in time and goes “Within” a series of individual consciousnesses. . . . The idea, according to the unicorn, is for Charles to influence a Might-Have-Been which determines whether Branzillo is descended from the good or the bad line, and thus (?) whether he will or will not start a nuclear war—a shaky if not asinine premise on which to build an earth-tilting adventure. The Madoc-Maddock-Madox-Mad Dog family saga grows in interest as Charles gradually figures out all the connections, but—though his mission succeeds somewhere in the 19th century—we never see him as anything but a passive, if uniquely present, onlooker. Meg’s role is even more passive and less engaging, as she alternates between wringing her hands in the family kitchen and stroking a strange dog on her attic bed while fretfully following Charles Wallace’s adventures in her “kything” mind. (p. 754)

_Kirkus Reviews (copyright © 1978 The Kirkus Service, Inc.), July 15, 1978._

KAREN M. KLOCKNER

[In A Swiftly Tilting Planet, the] author picks up themes from earlier books—time as a relative phenomenon, the interdependency of people and events, the importance of the individual—and presents them in an unusual framework. She considers the possibility of one person’s altering the course of history by traveling back in time and entering the consciousness of other individuals: “What happens in one time can make a difference in what happens in another time, far more than we realize. . . . Nothing, no one, is too small to matter.” . . . On one level the book takes place in the course of an evening; on another it spans centuries. Unfortunately, the different episodes are not well integrated, and the author’s tendency to philosophize interrupts the smooth flow of the narrative. Characterization, though, is carefully handled, and if the book is flawed on a structural level, it is impeccable on an emotional one. (pp. 525-26)