# Fascism in Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle In Time



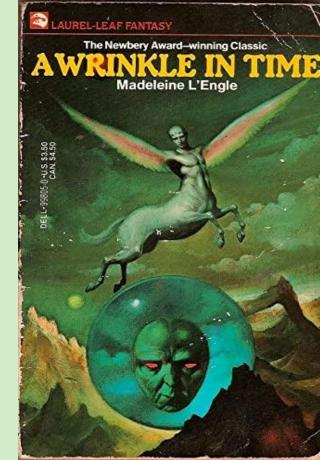
## Celina Loew, Northwestern Polytechnic Student Research Conference 2022

#### The Overarching Theme

- The theme present with Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle In Time is the struggle between individualism and conformity within the modern
- Kathy Bird illustrates within her article that the concept of individuality is promoted within past and present works in American literature (707).
- Throughout the novel, the protagonists promote individuality/individualism and unique traits that defy conformity, while the antagonists present radical conformity, otherwise seen as fascism

#### Individualism

- American literature of past and present evokes the value of individualism and presents that the concept of individualism evolves with its circumstances (Bird 707).
- Individualism is a freedom that comes with the knowledge that an individual is not only responsible for their successes, but their failures as well (Bird 706).
- As illustrated by L'Engle's protagonists, individualism is presented through their successes, failures, strengths, and faults.
- L'Engle's novel warns readers of the fast-approaching collectivist societies (Bird 710) and the dangers this presents towards individualism, as seen by the antagonistic forces within the narrative.



#### Camazotz

- In the novel, when the reader first encounters Camazotz, there is an immediacy of likeness and spatial conformity: "Below them the town was laid out in a harsh angular pattern. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small, rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers there would be exactly the same number for each house" (L'Engle 115).
- On Camazotz, IT controls all thought and behaviour, making the planet void of any individuality (Bird 711); this voidness is particularly illustrated by the domestic space of the houses.
- On the planet, Meg utilizes the power of independent thought (Bird 711) to escape the radical (fascist) conformity and control exerted by IT. The depiction of Camazotz further emphasizes the warning L'Engle conveys of collectivist societies to the concept of individualism.

#### **Fascism: An Overview**

- As described by Arthur J. Jacobson, fascism can be viewed as a perversion of conservatism; it not only trusts tradition but gives it a biological foundation and sacred residence, and it not only distrusts reason but recoils and abandons it as a regulator of and limitation of human affairs (403).
- Reason, is the rationality and choice in the actions an individual commits. The lack of trust fascism places upon reason emphasizes the lack of individuality within fascist states as the people have no control over their own actions and choices.
- As reason directly tied to individuality, it illustrates that the ability to make one's own choices is a vital part of the human. In A Wrinkle In Time, individuality and reason is what the protagonists use against the fascism regime on Camazotz.
- Jacobson states that the fascist knows in a world where reason is always a temptation, tradition must be merciless and hard (403). Camazotz best exemplifies this statement through the action of highly regulated repetition and scheduling.

#### Fascism on Camazotz: Conformity and Tradition

- On Camazotz, the tradition fascists pay tribute to, as stated by Jacobson, are the rigorous schedules implemented upon the society. By creating like spaces schedules, the citizens of Camazotz become entangled within a repetitive cycle that serves as their tradition: "All in rhythm. All identical. Like the houses. Like the paths. Like the flowers" (L'Engle 115).
- The danger of these traditions/schedules is the prospect of breaking them and being seen by higher authorities (i.e., IT).
- The terror of breaking the implemented traditions is depicted by all citizens of Camazotz, yet the most vivid representation is illustrated by the mother the three protagonists encounter: "Oh, no! The children in our section never drop balls! They're all perfectly trained. We haven't had an Aberration for three years" (L'Engle 118).
- This fear of aberration perfectly describes the radical conformity of fascist regimes, and the danger individuality has to them.

#### Fascism on Camazotz: Dangers to Conformity and **Tradition**

- Jacobson writes that "the fascist knows that sustaining tradition in the face of reason requires discipline and violence.... It requires keeping the strange, the different, the other at bay" (404).
- In A Wrinkle In Time, the "other" that Jacobson refers to is represented by the three protagonists: Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace. All three have exceptional abilities that signify them as strange, different, or unique, and set them apart from the conformed individuals of society.
- Meg is the best example of "the other" through her extreme stubbornness to conform to both the society of her home and the society of Camazotz.
- This individuality is condemned by IT, though it becomes Meg's greatest gift against the dangers that the radical conformity of Camazotz presents.

#### **Breaking the Tradition: Individuality and Love**

- Meg overcomes the fascist regime of Camazotz by utilizing her fault, which is her refusal to conform, as her greatest power. Her individuality in the face of radical conformity is what saves her family.
- In refusing to conform to IT, Meg illustrates an emotion and behaviour that fascist regimes neither practice nor endorse: love.
- L'Engle depicts the power and individuality of love through just a few words: "Love. That was what she had that IT did not have" (L'Engle 228).
- By using love as the factor that frees the protagonosts from radical conformity, L'Engle depicts that repetition and tradition as stability factors vital to the fascist regime are threatened by the irregularity and spontaneous nature of love.
- Love, in being something an individual freely commits to, directly stands for the reason of being that is dangerous to fascist regimes as illustrated by Jacobson; Meg chooses to love, she chooses how to love, and how to display her love.
- This emphasizes individuality because love is something different for everyone who engages in it.

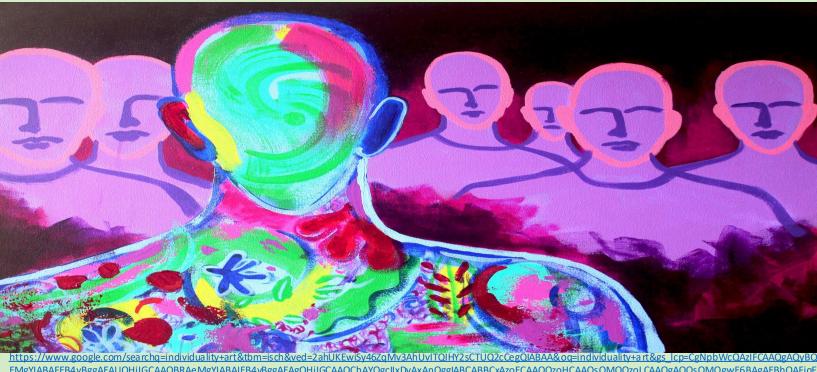


#### The Real World: A Comparison of Camazotz and Nazi Germany

- 1. Fascist Regimes have controlling and persuasive leadership, resulting in the conformity of populations to the changes and expectations of the
- 2. Traditions and routines are important for the efficiency and stability of the
- 3. People that threaten the efficiency and stability of the state are rid of.
- 4. Youth indoctrination is a significant factor and ensures the stability of radical conformity in the future.

#### The Real World: Modern Society, Conformity, and Individualism

- Although there is a rise of individualism as a vital component of the modern society, conformity still reigns as the mediator between the individual and society. This creates the notion that conformity is the safer and favourable choice.
- For instance:
- Schools: the presence of cliques and the need for teachers to assimilate ess progressive students with the majority of the class population.
- 2. Society: ostracizing those different from the self or the group.
- 3. Politics: conforming to one perspective and condemning those whose perspectives do not align with the self.
- 4 ... 5 ... 6 ...
- By viewing the need to conform in some of the broadest areas of modern societies, one sees that there is a persistence of conformity that overrides the promotion of individuality.
- L'Engle continually illustrates within A Wrinkle In Time that individualism is in danger because of collectivist societies.
- Although not radical, many modern societies practice the promotion of individualism in regard to groupings of people because it is easier to appeal to groups rather than to singular individuals.



"Like and equal are two entirely different things" (L'Engle 177).

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