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Abstract

Examines the theme and spiritual functions of listening in the third Murry family novel, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*: as participation in an interconnected universe, as embracing humility, as a witness to cosmic community, and as a sacrificial act. Connects these ideas to her larger theological and interpersonal themes.

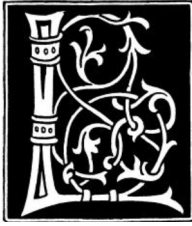
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LISTENING AS HEROIC ACTION
IN L'ENGLE'S
A SWIFTLY TILTING PLANET

CARA-JOY STEED

THE VICTORIAN mythopoeic author George MacDonald once suggested that “[w]e spoil countless precious things by intellectual greed” (222). By this he did not mean to diminish the value of exercising our cognitive abilities; rather, he meant to remind us that not all truths can be grasped by the intellect alone. Strongly influenced by MacDonald’s world view, Madeleine L’Engle’s *Time* series evidences a similar challenge to the appeal to autonomy embedded in rationalism. L’Engle, like MacDonald before her, infuses her characters with childlike wonder and openness to intuitive knowledge: characteristics that mythopoeic authors suggest are not irrational, but rather necessary counterparts of rationality. In response to L’Engle’s presentation of childlike openness to intuition as a virtue, and a heroic one at that, several critics, including Rolland Hein, Monika Hilder, and Marek Oziewicz, suggest that L’Engle’s mythopoeic *Time* series can serve as a particularly apt challenge to the approaches of both modernism and postmodernism to self-reliant rationalism. While L’Engle belongs neither to strictly modern nor postmodern schools of thought, the mythopoeic imperative of cooperatively embracing possibilities beyond rationality, willingly looking beyond empirically validated facts, and accepting the limitations of rationalism is, in part, compatible with a postmodern perspective.

Like postmodernists who see modernism’s idealization of strictly rational approaches to knowledge as limited and untenable, mythopoeic authors such as L’Engle assert that isolated empiricism is an incomplete form of knowledge. Where L’Engle, like most Christian mythopoeic authors, diverges from postmodernists, however, is her fundamental belief in the ordered nature of the universe. Where postmodernists see reality largely as a personal construction resulting from the influences of culture and environment, devoid of meaning in and of itself, Christian mythopoeic authors approach reality as ordered, interconnected, and most importantly, meaningful. So, while L’Engle does not adhere to a postmodernist perspective, that is, one that asserts individuals are the authors of their own construct of reality, and therefore largely bear the

burden of ascribing meaning to it, postmodern ideology shares a space with Christian mythopoeic authors such as L'Engle who challenge the demythologizing emphasis of rationalism: a challenge where openness to intuitive ways of knowing, an imaginative sense of hope, interdependence, and a sense of participating in the universal drama can be encouraged.

In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, L'Engle's third novel of the *Time* series, a keen awareness of interdependence and joy in the universal harmony results in an emphasis on listening as a heroic action. Overall, L'Engle's heroic model advocates virtues of love and humble cooperation over traditional heroic qualities of independence and strength. As critics including Kath Filmer, Donald Hettinga, Hein, Hilder, and Oziewicz note, L'Engle's protagonists embrace an ontology based on childlike interdependence and receptivity: a state of being that transcends the individualism often embodied by many traditionally admired heroes. In L'Engle's interconnected galactic community, listening is an activity of supreme importance. When each action and inaction is a thread in the universal tapestry, individual actions count: not because a person is qualified, but because a person is part of the very fabric of cosmic existence. Indeed, it is this very awareness of interconnection that necessitates characters who model a posture of humility. To listen is not merely a passive response to life's circumstances; rather, it is an integral characteristic of the humble childlike hero who is actively attuned to mythological truths of interdependence. Indeed, L'Engle's heroic characteristic of listening is consistent with what critics of fantasy have called a new mythic vision; that is, a highly relevant model of heroism which subverts traditionally celebrated models of autonomy and intellectual acumen, and in their place highlights unity, interdependence, and the sacredness of life. For L'Engle, all these characteristics are intrinsically connected with one overarching activity: listening. In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, four facets of listening will be explored: listening as participating in an interconnected universe, listening as eschewing self-reliance and embracing humility, listening in the presence of cosmic community, and finally, listening as sacrificial. Taken together, these characteristics of a re-envisioned heroic model shatter traditionally idolized qualities of autonomy, distinctive ability, and desire for power; and, in their place, emphasize a mythic sense of interconnection, childlike wonder, humble cooperation, and sacredness of life.

In outlining the literary and social implications of L'Engle's vision of heroism, several critics have commented on L'Engle's subversion of conventionally recognized heroic values. Traditional heroes usually have a physical and/or mental superiority that contributes to a self-reliant attitude. David Emerson, for example, speaks to this literary tradition of idealizing physical and mental valor in his extrapolation of Joseph Campbell's analysis of the quest myth. Emerson, like Hilder in *Educating the Moral Imagination* and *The*

Feminine Ethos in C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, comments on the masculine characteristics that have traditionally marked a protagonist for success. He suggests that "[t]he quest story [...] almost invariably featured male protagonists who relied on things like the use of force to defeat an enemy, or courage and daring in order to voyage to unknown lands. [...] [and although] sometimes [s/he] had companions [...] the hero was still the leader" (132). Further, Emerson goes on to identify "independence and individual initiative" as "valued attributes of the traditional quest hero" (132). As other critics have commented, this quality of autonomy and self-direction can be seen throughout various traditions of heroic models. For example, Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara outline the Medieval Germanic heroic model which embodies "*prowess and wisdom*" (120). Dickerson and O'Hara posit that these attributes are based largely on physical strength and ability, and quoting R.E. Kaskie's words, "practical cleverness, skill in words and works, knowledge of the past, ability to predict accurately, and ability to choose rightly in matters of conduct" (120). While L'Engle by no means denies excellence as something to be strived for, her narratives make no room for these skills to be used as a stand-alone measurement of worth or accomplishment. Her mythic vision of an interconnected world demands protagonists who humbly work together and listen to the rhythm of the cosmos, not their own skills or ego. Indeed, critics including Hilder and Oziewicz have pointed out that many traditional heroic models which emphasize autonomy through mental and physical strength are in direct contrast to L'Engle's holistic model of cooperation, love, and openness to intuition.

In reference to more modern patterns of heroism, critics including Hein, Hilder, and Oziewicz explore L'Engle's remedial model of heroism in relation to classical and post-enlightenment rational discourse. For them, L'Engle's holistic approach to knowledge subverts an unqualified emphasis on rationalism and creates a vision of wholeness through intuitive, imaginative, and mythic ways of knowing. For example, Hilder discusses classical ideas of heroism present in Milton's characterization of Satan with reference to the "masculine" characteristics of "reason, autonomy, and egotistical power" that have traditionally been privileged above "feminine" attributes of "interdependence" and "imagination" (*Educating the Moral Imagination* 25). She suggests that Milton deliberately imbues these characteristics into his representation of Satan in order to emphasize the danger of these traditionally privileged features of the classical heroic model. For Hilder, mythopoeic authors such as L'Engle, who subvert the literary tradition of privileging rationality and self-reliance, provide a vision of healing and wholeness to a society fractured by an overemphasis on independent strength, ability, and rationalism.

Hein and Oziewicz also discuss the holistic approach to knowledge L'Engle employs in her *Time* series' treatment of rationalism. Hein briefly delineates the lingering effects of the Enlightenment's castigation of myth in favor of "a scientific rationalist approach" whereby "no rightly reasoning individuals would take [myth] seriously" (7). Moreover, in his article "Joseph Campbell's 'New Mythology,'" Oziewicz discusses how the Enlightenment's severely imbalanced focus on pragmatic rationalism and diminution of mythological ways of knowing has seeped down into current perspectives ("Campbell" 121). Hein and Oziewicz therefore see mythopoeic literature, or literature which incorporates archetypal mythic elements into new narratives, as incorporating methods of comprehension which counter the post-Enlightenment's stifling, autonomous, and reductionistic approach to knowledge (Hein 6-9 & Oziewicz "Campbell" 122-3). As these critics argue, traditional heroes who trumpet self-reliance and internal senses of loci are incompatible with L'Engle's mythopoeic vision of humble cooperation. Indeed, as contemporary mythologist David Leeming suggests, the "individualistic," "conquering" (158-159) heroes of the past must be replaced by heroes inspired by "wonder and awe in the presence of the interrelated cosmos" (158): precisely the intuitive characteristics L'Engle has presented in her *Time* series.

It is significant to note, however, that L'Engle's rejection of autonomous rationalistic heroism is not born out of distrust of reason; rather, it is born out of the belief that an understanding of the interconnected nature of the universe cannot be arrived at or acted upon by rationalism alone. For L'Engle's protagonists, playing an active part in the universe is grounded in being intuitively aware of the cosmic rhythm of interconnection. Indeed, this core belief in the interconnected nature of the universe is characteristic of mythopoeic literature in general; several critics including Brian Attebery, Hein, Francis Molson, and Oziewicz discuss the important theme of interconnection in mythopoeic fantasy. As Oziewicz suggests, mythopoeic literature privileges a worldview of interconnectivity, and, indeed works quite deliberately to expand "our awareness of [...] interrelatedness" (*One Earth, One People* 9). This overarching theme of interconnection is particularly important for the re-envisioned hero of mythopoeia because it means that individual actions are never discrete: individual actions always take place within the context of an interrelated web of influences. Attebery comments on the heightened importance that individual actions have as a result of this overarching theme of interconnection. He suggests that "[acts] in fantasy are always meaningful, because everything connects with, or signifies, everything else" (13-14). Similarly, Molson asserts that fantasy literature emphasizes that "whether large or small, deliberate or not," people's choices and actions always matter because they can have "worldwide consequences" (94). For L'Engle, the extent of universally

intersecting influences and consequences is beyond the realm of autonomous rationalization; therefore, heroic models which glorify autonomous heroes who succeed through rationalism are woefully inadequate for a mythological worldview which asserts universal interconnection.

In L'Engle's narratives, an intuitive revelation of belonging to a pervasively interconnected universe is often expressed in terms of being attuned to the universal or ancient harmony. Moreover, L'Engle asserts that this intuitive awareness of connection is often present in archetypal themes discussed in Fairy stories. In "What is Real?", L'Engle suggests that recognizing the archetypal elements present within most Fairy tales is integral to achieving human potential. Like J.R.R. Tolkien's Cauldron of Story metaphor (Tolkien 10), L'Engle suggests that successful authors employ archetypes to help us grasp mythological truths and understand our potentiality in the cosmic rhythm. For instance, L'Engle's description of the archetypal younger son who does not buy into a world of "Do It Yourself-ism," is not in "a wild hurry," and does not see himself as "set apart from or better than others" is accustomed to cooperation, fostering a sense of wonder, and nurturing a listening ear ("What is Real?" 449). And, it is precisely this habit of astute listening (whether to a wolf with a trapped paw, a bird with a broken wing, or an old woman in the forest) that sets up the younger son figure as a heroic model in mythopoeic literature.

Now that we have briefly discussed the unique position that mythopoeia takes within a literary tradition influenced by the idealization of autonomy and rationalism, we will take a closer look at the four facets of listening which are endorsed in the heroic model of *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*: listening as an act of participation in the cosmic rhythm, humble interdependence, community, and sacrifice. In this schema, the first aspect is a spiritually informed approach to reality that evinces intuitive listening as a powerful form of participation in the interconnected universe.

Like the other novels in the *Time* series, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* opens in the loving warmth and safety of the Murry kitchen; in this text, the family has gathered for a celebratory Thanksgiving meal. It is soon revealed that Meg has married Calvin, a co-adventurer from the earlier narratives, and that she is expecting their first child. While Calvin is absent at a medical conference, his reticent mother, Mrs. O'Keefe, is present at the family gathering. Her taciturn presence, along with the unseasonal rain, sets the tone of mystery that is characteristic of each installment of the *Time* series. After Mr. Murry receives a phone call from the president of the United States, he announces over the nearly set table that the president of Vesputia, El Rabioso nicknamed Mad Dog Branzillo, has threatened a nuclear attack on America. Mr. Murry explains that Vesputia's threat of retaliation is a direct response to America's gluttonous use of resources and disregard for the environment. The family all agrees that

although America is the intended target, such an action would have fatal global repercussions, thereby setting the theme of interconnection that is present throughout the entire narrative. Despite much anxiety and restlessness, the Murry family decides to continue with their Thanksgiving traditions: traditions which are continually interrupted by Mrs. O'Keefe's nearly unintelligible musings. After Mrs. O'Keefe has knocked over several glasses and made numerous effortful incoherent statements, Meg notices that her younger brother, Charles Wallace, and Mrs. O'Keefe are paying particular attention to each other. Finally, by the conclusion of dinner, Mrs. O'Keefe has disjointedly uttered the rune on which the theme of the narrative is built:

I place all Heaven with its power
And the sun with its brightness,
And the snow with its whiteness,
And the fire with all the strength it hath,
And the lightening with its rapid wrath,
And the winds with their swiftness along their path,
And the sea with its deepness,
And the rocks with their steepness,
And the earth with its starkness,
All these I place
By God's almighty help and grace
Between myself and the powers of darkness! (269)

After the Murry family has witnessed several unexplainable environmental events that coincide with Mrs. O'Keefe's reiteration of Saint Patrick's rune, the pattern of interconnecting influences between the natural and supernatural realm is established. Moreover, as the rune suggests, Heaven (or, a unifying transcendent force of love and goodness) and the cosmos epitomize and effect order. Subsequently, although the rune holds no rational significance for averting the impending disaster, Charles Wallace follows an intuitive compulsion to go to the star-watching rock to "listen" (34). By the middle of the second chapter, then, the cosmic pattern of interconnection and the heroic characteristic of listening have been intimated.

The dedication to practicing intuitive listening to the numinous force of love at the heart of the universe marks L'Engle's heroes as powerful agents of unification in our demythologized Western culture. As Filmer, Hilder, and Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Oziewicz note, the marginalization of religious discourse in Western culture has resulted in a vacancy of meaning; a "pervasive sense of a crisis of hope," as Hilder posits ("George MacDonald's Education into Mythic Wonder" 176); "skepticism," "nihilism," and "disillusionment," as Filmer asserts (11); and finally, complete "material reductionism," according to Deszcz-

Tryhubczak and Oziewicz ("Introduction" x). In such a climate stripped of mythological significance and expression, L'Engle's heroic model provides validation for repressed spiritual longings without alienating intellectual sensibilities. In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, Charles Wallace is presented as both an intellectually gifted and a spiritually sensitive character. L'Engle does not suggest that Charles Wallace must learn to despise his intelligence before fulfilling his spiritual quest, for indeed as Oziewicz suggests in "Joseph Campbell's 'New Mythology,'" spiritual and empirical ways of knowing are not dichotomous (124). For instance, after Charles Wallace has uttered the first segment of the rune by the star-watching rock, he is presented with a unicorn: a mythological creature that challenges the boundaries of scientific and rational possibility. When Charles Wallace asks the unicorn, Gaudior, if he is real, it is clear that Charles Wallace is not going to get an empirically justified answer: "I am not real. And yet in a sense I am that which is the only reality," Gaudior tells him (45). In this sense, L'Engle reminds us that spiritual and intellectual ways of knowing are different; however, the validity of one does not diminish the veracity of the other: acknowledging spiritual truths does not insult cognitive capabilities.

In some ways, the use of intellectual characters to destabilize constructed borders between real and not real, fact and not fact fits well with a postmodern approach to reality. Consider, for example, that L'Engle's mythic vision is often furnished with highly intellectual characters. As Hettinga notes, the Murry family "is extraordinary in its high concentration of unusually [scientifically and intellectually] gifted individuals" (22). L'Engle's narratives, however, do not employ a type of duplicity by deriding the intellect through the use of intellectually gifted characters; rather, she suggests that a spiritual vision is not incompatible with an intellectual one because, to borrow postmodernist terms, the reductive rationalism inherent in the either/or binary of "what is real" is fundamentally flawed. As Melody and Richard S. Briggs suggest, fantasy's invitation to explore "beyond the boundaries of the empirical and self-imposed limitation of the scientific-rational worldview" is well suited to the questions that can arise out of both spirituality and postmodernity (43). For example, the postmodernist rejection of categorically rigid definitions, classifications, and answers is reverberated in Charles Wallace's reiteration to Gaudior, "[y]ou're real and you're not real" (46): an assertion that demonstrates Charles Wallace's understanding of the fluidity of knowledge. Ultimately, Charles Wallace's acceptance of Gaudior's anagogical, or spiritually allegorical, significance subverts the traditional hero's insistence on a reality within which s/he can exert autonomy.

By rejecting the "hegemony of rationalism" (Hilder, "George MacDonald's Education into Mythic Wonder" 185) and accepting the

implications of Gaudior's reality, Charles Wallace embraces a framework which demands a re-envisioned heroic model: a model grounded in wonder, love and interconnection, and expressed through listening to the cosmic harmony. As Charles Wallace allows himself to be immersed into the realm of mythological truths, he becomes increasingly aware of the interrelated nature of the universe. As Gaudior explains to Charles Wallace, no action is ever done in complete isolation because everything is interconnected: "[e]verything that happens within the created Order, no matter how small, has its effect. If you are angry, that anger is added to all the hate with which the Echthroi [or dark force] would distort the melody and destroy the ancient harmonies. When you are loving, that lovingness joins the music of the spheres" (60-1). As Charles Wallace has earlier witnessed the creation of the young Earth when the undistorted ancient harmony could be heard at its clearest, he understands that the universe has been ordered by love, and that the cosmic melody results from every part of creation functioning within its role. Though only Charles Wallace has been physically taken on this journey in time, Meg has been *kything*, or lovingly knowing, "through Charles Wallace's knowing," from her childhood bedroom in the Murry house for the duration of the quest; therefore, she has also witnessed the birth of the Earth (49). The "surge of joy" both siblings experience in hearing the "joyful rhythm" of the newly birthed planet gives them the intuitive knowledge that "it was good. It was very good" (49-50). It becomes clear that although the Echthroi have corrupted the harmony of the melody, the cosmos is still ordered, and personal existence still has meaning. This revelation of the cohesive power of goodness, love, and meaning at the heart of creation is, as Hein says, not "opposed to reason, but rather transcends it" (271). Charles Wallace's experiential knowledge of the ordered and purposeful nature of the universe equips him to relinquish rationally defined demands of knowledge and take on a posture of listening: a necessary attitude for those fighting on the side of good in the cosmic battle against the Echthroi.

L'Engle's emphasis on intuitive listening does not endorse irrationality; rather, it endorses opening oneself up to information beyond the reach of empirical rationalism. In line with Oziewicz's analysis, L'Engle's mythopoeic framework destabilizes the unqualified privileging of either purely rational (*logos*) or purely mythological (*mythos*) approaches to reality, and instead creates "a template of fiction which integrates *mythos* and *logos* as complementary ways of realizing and expressing the full human potential" ("Campbell" 124). The danger of autonomously acting on rational information is something Charles Wallace, with his extraordinarily high IQ, must learn throughout the text. When Charles Wallace only uses a rational approach to knowledge, he misses the significance of Mrs. O'Keefe's relationship to the rune. As a result of autonomously devising a plan based on a rational understanding of Mrs.

O'Keefe's biographical information, he endangers both himself and Gaudior by insisting they go to Patagonia. Charles Wallace's actions in this situation are reasonable: he learns information about Mrs. O'Keefe's history and independently rationalizes that it should be acted upon in a certain way. The problem is not that he has used his mind; the problem is that he relies solely on his rational deduction. L'Engle does not deride mental faculties; she does, however, highlight the necessity to heed both the intellect and intuition in order to act as a holistically informed individual. As Carole Chase suggests, "[t]he people who Madeleine considers 'luminous' are those who use both their intellect and their intuition to the fullest" (144). Indeed, L'Engle herself asserts in *Circle of Quiet* that "we do not go around, or discard the intellect, but we must go through and beyond it. If we are given minds we are required to use them, but not limit ourselves by them" (43). For L'Engle, then, the willingness to step beyond limiting rationalizations, maintain a sense of wonder, and listen are necessary to embodying the re-envisioned heroic model.

In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, Charles Wallace is called to act upon his understanding of interconnection by abandoning an autonomously determined agenda and immersing himself in the consciousness of another. Gaudior explains that Charles Wallace's mission includes "travel[ing] in and out. [...] of time. [...] and people" in order to amend Might-Have-Beens leading to the Vespugian president's current nuclear threat (53). As Gaudior explains to Charles Wallace, "there is always a moment when there is a Might-Have-Been. What we must do is find the Might-Have-Beens which have led to this particular evil. [...] It is possible that you can move into the moment of a Might-Have-Been and change it" (55). Though not immediately revealed to Charles Wallace, his ultimate mission is to adjust the Might-Have-Beens contributing to the genealogy of the current Vespugian president. However, this dangerous mission is not to be accomplished through employing traditional heroic qualities rooted in mental prowess and the ability to control others: a framework within which, as Walter Wink suggests, "overcoming evil through violence" is often advocated (28). Instead, in line with Wink's assertion that L'Engle shows that "it is love that overcomes evil" (31), Charles Wallace's success comes through developing a perceptive ear to the cosmic rhythm and humbly acting in harmony with love. As Gaudior tells Charles Wallace, Charles Wallace's task of going Within another to adjust a Might-Have-Been requires the complete abdication of personal ambition; it is the ultimate act of listening to another person, of losing autonomy, and of becoming one with, the universal pattern of interconnection. As Charles Wallace learns, the degree of interconnecting influences at work in the universe means that a single act of love one person exerts towards another has a great degree of influence; going Within another person to influence him or her with loving intentions symbolizes both the power of love and the degree of interconnection

at work within the universe. Hein's suggestion that "all created life is interdependent—not simply physically—but on the level of love" seems particularly apt in application to the significance of love in Charles Wallace's quest to amend Might-Have-Beens (276). Therefore, unlike traditional models of heroic action which require qualifications of physical or mental agility, L'Engle's narrative suggests that it is the humble desire to act in unison with the transcendent loving force at the heart of creation that qualifies one for heroism.

For L'Engle, a mythological understanding of the intersecting and correlating influences at work within the cosmos empowers individuals to embody the first feature of her heroic model: listening to the meaningful cosmic rhythm of interconnection. In light of interconnection, individual action is honored while individualism is rejected; therefore, the second characteristic of listening in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* is a posture that results from a mythic understanding of interdependence: humility.

As the next aspect of L'Engle's heroic model, humility will be seen as an integral component of L'Engle's vision of imaginative listening as heroic action. It must be noted, however, that contrary to its current connotation, in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, humility is not synonymous with a self-deprecating inferiority complex. In a culture "obsessed with empowerment," as Luci Shaw aptly asserts (17), humility has often been considered an unfortunate affliction of the weak or a façade of the powerful. For L'Engle, however, humility is neither a sign of weakness nor a ploy for power; instead, it is an appropriate response to a mythological insight of a numinous presence at the center of an interconnected universe. Indeed, the prominence that L'Engle places on humility shatters traditional conceptions of heroes as distinguished individuals characterized by distinctive, and often autonomously developed, capabilities. Colin Manlove's assertion that a central feature of fantasy literature is "a sense of 'meaning-in-the-mysterious' or even the numinous" that always results in wonder is consistent with L'Engle's emphasis of humility, for there is little room for pride within characters who position themselves in the posture of wonder (7).

This emphasis on humility and rejection of values emphasized in traditional frameworks of heroism is evident in L'Engle's depiction of the archetypal struggle between the two Welsh brothers whose genealogical perpetuation is at the heart of the narrative's structure. While Gwydyr allows the self-serving qualities of the traditional heroic model to consume him, Madoc expresses his attention to the cosmic melody by embracing the heroic characteristics of humility, which for L'Engle, leads to listening. Charles Wallace witnesses Madoc retell the legend that in order to escape their older brothers' violent struggle for the throne, Madoc and Gwydyr fled their father's kingdom by boat. However, during their journey they were shipwrecked; and, upon Madoc's rescue by the tribe of People Across the Lake, Madoc was told that his

brother had been fatally bitten by a snake. Filled with anguish, Madoc went into the forest to find his brother's body, but weak and unfamiliar with the landscape, it was once again he who needed to be rescued. Fortunately, he was rescued by Zyll, the daughter of one of the Wind People's tribe leaders. After being rescued, Madoc adopted the Wind People's customs, fell in love with Zyll, showed respect for the gods, and rejected veneration he said was unfit for mere mortals. Madoc refused the Wind People's attempts to "set him apart" because he understood the mythological truth that "people are meant to worship the gods, not themselves" (85). On the day Charles Wallace has arrived to go Within Madoc, Madoc is to marry Zyll and is having a conversation with his future father-in-law, Reschal. This conversation establishes Madoc as having an ear to the cosmic melody and embodying humility and a sense of wonder.

Through Madoc and Gwydyr, L'Engle demonstrates both the potential inherent in a listener who is motivated by love and humility and the profound failure of a heroic model bereft of mythological insights. Just before the wedding ceremony, Gwydyr abruptly arrives from across the lake and demands Madoc's betrothed. In contrast to Madoc, who has demonstrated his humility by respecting the mythological truths of interdependence, Gwydyr arrogantly sets himself apart as an independent agent who is separate from the rhythm of community: "here I [Gwydyr] am king and god [...] I reign over the lake and all the lands around"(89). Moreover, unlike Madoc, who has adopted the Wind People's mythology, Gwydyr is devoid of wonder, and therefore sees his autonomously set laws as superior to the laws of the universal melody: "my laws are stronger than your laws," he says (89). It is clear that Gwydyr's desire to take Zyll as his wife is rooted in his consuming desire to fortify his position of autonomy and power: tendencies not unlike those often encouraged in the traditional heroic model. As Hettinga asserts, while Madoc "abhors violence, eschews power, and works for peace. [...] Gwydyr [...] embraces violence, covets power, and pushes for war" (43). For L'Engle, the ultimate result of actions motivated by pride, or the absence of wonder and humility, is devastation. As Charles Wallace soon learns when he is Within Madoc, there are two possibilities for the future: one of peace and one of destruction. From these two visions which Madoc has scribed through a puddle, Charles Wallace is able to ascertain that Gwydyr's toxic thirst for power will re-express itself in each of his descendants. The key to averting the future nuclear threat from El Rabioso, then, resides in amending the Might-Have-Beens that have led to El Rabioso's descendancy from Gwydyr. Indeed, if Madoc's genealogical line is perpetuated, El Zarco, the man of peace, will replace El Rabioso, the current Vespugian president who is threatening global destruction. L'Engle's rejection of heroes who embody an individualistic attitude, lack of wonder, and the desire to exert influence on

others is fundamental to understanding the emphasis she places on heroes who respond to the interconnected cosmic rhythm with humility.

Such a posture of humility and receptivity to the cosmic rhythm is clearly not based in traditional conceptions of capability because everyone, regardless of talent, has the ability to listen; indeed, in L'Engle's vision, heroic action has little basis in personal giftedness or talent. For example, while Charles Wallace is particularly intelligent and skilled at kything, it is his desire to listen to and act in tune with the cosmic harmony, rather than exercise his giftedness, that allows him to eventually adjust the genealogy of the Vespugian President from El Rabioso, the man of war, to El Zarco, the man of peace. Charles Wallace demonstrates that it is not acting on his own strengths or qualifications that will prevent nuclear disaster: he says to Meg at the beginning of his para-historical quest, "[i]t may not be me. [...] But it has to be somebody" (36). This attitude of humility echoes contemporary media commentator and theologian Dick Keyes's call for a counter-cultural model of heroism. For Keyes, genuine heroic action is motivated by the knowledge that "each person has the opportunity to play an irreplaceable part in the cosmic drama" (118). Keyes's suggestion that true heroism is indeed not motivated by the desire to outdo peers, but the humble desire to play one's part in the ordered and meaningful pattern of existence, emphasizes the profound importance humility plays in a re-envisioned model where listening is heroic. Likewise, Hettinga suggests that L'Engle emphasizes heroic action as informed by the humble willingness "to risk all to act on the behalf of others, and to do so with humility, conscious that every person has the same heroic burden and potential" (46). The heroic model of humbly listening for cues where one can participate in the meaningful universal pattern of interconnection advocated by Hettinga and Keyes results in a greater emphasis on listening to and acting with the universal harmony than on individual actions. Indeed, this pattern of heroism is clear in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* where individuals that actively listen to the universal harmony are less aware of their own individual actions than they are of the music to which they are contributing.

For L'Engle, characters that are attuned to the meaningful universal pattern of interdependence are humbled both by their influence and dependence on others. In "What is Real?", L'Engle's culturally subversive emphasis on motivation over qualification is apparent: she states that "we know we are not qualified, but that qualification is not what's important" (451). In contrast to the traditional heroic model where it is often precisely qualifications that are important, L'Engle's unique mythopoeic view of personal significance emphasizes the sanctity of life. However, not all critics agree that L'Engle's heroic model is empowering. In fact, Tanya Avakian finds L'Engle's treatment of individual talent at odds with L'Engle's purported vision of humility. Like Hettinga, Avakian comments on the number of "gifted" individuals present

within L'Engle's narratives (9); however, in contrast to Hettinga, Avakian seems to focus on merely the outward status of talented individuals within L'Engle's stories, and concludes that "[g]ifted children in L'Engle's world are the best reminder of the human relationship to God" (8). Perhaps for Avakian, the inborn talent many of L'Engle's characters have precludes the traditional sense of autonomously developed heroic characteristics of mental and physical skill. In contrast to Avakian's possible suggestion that L'Engle employs too many unrealistically talented individuals, Katherine Schneebaum suggests that in fact L'Engle's moral vision restricts the personal development of talents. Coming from a gender-studies perspective, Schneebaum suggests that L'Engle's female characters are encouraged to practice "passive" love, rather than autonomously develop other materialistically respected skills (36). It seems that in their search for signs of traditional heroic development, both Avakian and Schneebaum may undervalue L'Engle's focus on heroes informed by meaningful mythological universal unity. For L'Engle, it is precisely this heightened awareness of universal interconnection that frames listening as a heroic action. Her mythopoeic narratives present a meaningful existence where characters who embrace childlike interdependence are honored and traditional heroism is challenged. Indeed, L'Engle's vision is in line with Oziewicz's assertion that because "works of mythopoeic fantasy uphold belief in transcendence and in its intimate relation to human life," mythopoeic protagonists have an ethical and moral responsibility that surpasses traditional conceptions of heroism ("Campbell" 129). For L'Engle, the traditional celebration of material success and autonomy is disharmonious with an interconnected universe where success is based on the desire to keep in rhythm with the cosmic melody of love.

So far, we have seen that L'Engle's mythopoeic vision of an interconnected universe is vital to her emphasis on childlike listening as a heroic action. We then established the importance that humility plays in her characters' imperative to hear and participate in the cosmic harmony. Next, we shall turn to the significance of cosmic community in her protagonists' commitment to listening.

L'Engle depicts the larger cosmic community who lovingly work alongside earth-bound humans in an overwhelmingly attractive manner. As Hein points out, "goodness is beautiful" and the joy that supernatural helpers are infused with is supremely "attractive" (267). Nancy-Lou Patterson also comments on the "rich and vivid life" with which L'Engle's supernatural helpers are bestowed (201). In fact, she suggests that L'Engle's narratives gain their "dynamism from the creative and attractive powers of the good characters" (202). Individuals who are acting out their appointed part in the cosmic rhythm are always acting in the company of benevolent characters who embody love and fight for good. Or, as Hilder says, "L'Engle establishes a sense of the universe as

not 'empty' but rather populated with beneficent figures acting together with human characters to sustain cosmic harmony" (*Educating the Moral Imagination* 134). The significance of acting with an ear to the cosmic community is an important theme in Charles Wallace's confrontation with the Echthros who is impersonating a unicorn. In this example, Charles Wallace is Within Chuck, a boy who has just endured a painful and serious brain injury. Charles Wallace is presented with a voice that sounds like Gaudior, but has a different message. When the voice says, "you are in control of what is going to happen" (215), Charles Wallace is able to see through this appeal to independence; and, contrary to the traditional heroic model which advocates autonomous action, Charles Wallace rejects the temptation to act as an isolated agent. In fact, Charles Wallace's decision is in direct contrast to the traditional quest hero that literary critic John Timmerman describes as classic. While Charles Wallace embodies the courage Timmerman suggests is typical to the traditional hero on his or her dangerous quest, Charles Wallace is not a mere autonomous hero on a lonely mission. By vividly depicting a cosmic community that surrounds Charles Wallace, L'Engle disrupts the glorification of the lonely hero who relies on nothing but his or her own ability. Timmerman's observation that classic heroes "must rely on nothing more than human imagination and intelligence" (45) is clearly inapplicable to L'Engle's re-envisioned heroic model. While L'Engle's heroic model emphasizes the significance of personal responsibility, her heroes never carry a burden completely alone; Charles Wallace is accompanied by Gaudior, who in turn is guided by the numinous presence of the wind. Therefore, in the context of L'Engle's presentation of supernatural community, Timmerman's assertion that "the wonder of fantasy is thus what *we might do*, not what others do for us" (45, emphasis in original) is only partially true in its application to L'Engle. In this rejection of the traditionally celebrated heroic of autonomy, Charles Wallace concretely establishes acting in rhythm with the cosmic community as an authentic, re-envisioned form of heroism.

In relation to the awareness of a loving cosmic community, the significance that L'Engle places on childlike listening to a transcendent unifying force at the heart of the universe has been commented on by several critics, including Rodney Mooney. Mooney comments on the importance L'Engle places on listening in terms of MacDonald's "Sacred Idleness." As Mooney describes it, Sacred Idleness is "the thought process in which one gains a higher sense of awareness [of transcendent reality] by thinking with his/her imaginative, subconscious mind" (73). Mooney suggests that L'Engle advocates Sacred Idleness as a way of becoming more aware of the loving transcendent presence of good at work in the cosmos (80). Indeed, it is this imaginative knowledge of the cosmic army of love that often sustains characters during difficult situations. For instance, in the previously discussed example of Charles Wallace's temptation by

an Echthros, it is his knowledge of Gaudior and the principles of Gaudior's heavenly community that inspires Charles Wallace to stay Within Chuck, even though being Within Chuck is psychologically excruciating. Moreover, Meg, too, gains much fortitude from this imaginative knowledge of loving spiritual forces. Despite her acute awareness of the serious dangers that Charles Wallace's mission entails, she is able to garner sustainable confidence in knowing that the cosmic battle in which Charles Wallace is engaged has meaning and his actions are significant. For both Meg and Charles Wallace, practicing Sacred Idleness, a form of imaginative listening practiced by childlike heroes, proves an intuitive method of strengthening their confidence in the cosmic force of good. As Mooney says, the spiritual practice of Sacred Idleness helps people align themselves against "the darkness and evil in the world" (80). For Meg and Charles Wallace, practicing childlike receptivity to the forces of good who battle alongside them provides strength to keep in rhythm with the cosmic harmony.

The final feature of L'Engle's re-envisioned framework for heroic action rooted in the mythological understanding of interconnection, characterized by humility, and accompanied by community, is accepting the burden of self-sacrifice.

L'Engle's model of the listening hero is profoundly informed by her vision of an interconnected universe; and, part of being an active member in such a connected community means that, while one does not quest for painful experiences, living a life led by love will include individual sacrifice. In contrast to the classical hero who is the master of his or her own individualistic universe, and therefore can treat suffering as an enemy to be defeated, L'Engle's heroes willingly accept painful personal sacrifice because they understand that they are part of a larger whole. This presentation of pain, however, seems to contrast Avakian's suggestion that L'Engle is "fascinated by pain" for the sake of pain alone (10). Although it is accurate that, as Avakian suggests, "there is a large dose of pain" throughout L'Engle's narratives, L'Engle's discussion of pain is not the result of mere "fascination" with it (10). Indeed, Avakian's observation that "too often in L'Engle's works, the ugly messy face people show as they go toward 'love's terrible other side' is celebrated in general and dismissed in the particular" is inconsistent with L'Engle's respectful treatment of individuals who suffer in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* (10). However, Avakian's observation warrants further analysis because L'Engle's protagonists, despite their willingness to take leaps based on intuitive knowledge, do often endure painful experiences and are called to make substantial sacrifices.

Perhaps the two most vivid examples of sacrifice in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* are Mrs. O'Keefe and Matthew Maddox since listening costs them their lives. Mrs. O'Keefe, who once had "golden hair and bright blue eyes and a merry laugh" (170), is now a bedraggled, toothless woman who has lived a life so

painful that she has learned not to feel (275). However, despite her calloused wounds, L'Engle presents her as a champion of sacrificial listening. She listens to the compulsion to join the Murrays for Thanksgiving dinner (33), she listens to the rune at the dinner (23), she listens to the prompting to go to the attic and find the letters of her ancestors and take them to the Murrays (189), and she listens when she runs to the star-watching rock and gasps the rune with Meg over Charles Wallace's limp body (269). For Filmer, this willingness to self-sacrifice brings hope, "hope that in moments of dire need, there will be someone who cares enough to do as Mrs. O'Keefe has done" (118); in other words, there is hope in experiencing the human capacity to love. Matthew Maddox, too, evidences the human potential of love and sacrifice in the face of pain. Matthew, the wheelchair-bound author who scribes the *Might-Have-Been* amending narrative of a marital union that contributes to El Zarco's replacement of El Rabioso, experiences agonizing love for his brother's betrothed and a near crushing amount of both physical and psychological pain. Despite his personal pain, he perseveres in actively listening for the details he needs in order to birth his crucial novel in which "myth and matter merge" (256). Although he cannot rationally explain it, his intuitive knowledge, or practice of Sacred Idleness, informs him that "what happens in one time can make a difference in what happens in another time [...]" (256) and sustains him through the delivery of the novel until the time of his death.

While it is indeed evident that L'Engle does not lose potency, as Jane Yolen fears some children's fantasy authors do, by "shy[ing] away from asking for sacrifice" (63), sacrifice is never presented as a mere isolated exercise in pain. Rather, to quote Hilder from "Consolation in Un/Certainty," "[t]he very spaces of suffering [...] become *sacred* because they [...] honour the human story" (236). Indeed, one of the much discussed characteristics of fantasy is a sense of joy upon the conclusion; Tolkien terms this "joy of the happy ending," or Eucatastrophe, a "sudden and miraculous grace" that no Fairy story is complete without (22). However, as L'Engle asserts in "What is Real?", "[t]he happy ending [...] does not come free" (451). Timmerman asserts that the joy integral to the fantasy story is "not a joy separate from sorrow, but a joy distilled from the experience of agonizing choice and painful awareness of the errors in human decision making" (75). Moreover, Filmer asserts that L'Engle endows her characters with real humanity, and part of that humanity is pain and sacrifice: she says of suffering, "[i]n love there is hope; but in love there is pain. For that matter, when hope is strongest, pain also is often at its strongest. Pain seems sometimes even to generate hope; in hope lies the strength to endure pain" (117).

In this light, an individual's pain is not merely "dismissed," but respectfully addressed in a way that provides readers with tools for coping with the reality of suffering and love's call for sacrifice. This is not to say that in

L'Engle's vision individual sacrifice is not treated with individual dignity and compassion; Mrs. O'Keefe's and Matthew's pain is excruciating, but there is joy in the fact that they have acted their part in the universal harmony. As Oziewicz asserts of mythopoeic fantasy authors, "they sustain the belief in the ultimate conquest of death based on the conviction about the essential oneness and continuity of life" ("Campbell" 129-30). Matthew's death then is not a defeat, but an affirmation of life. An affirmation that the universe has meaning, that sorrow does not silence the ancient harmony, and that in love and sacrifice there is joy.

In this text, L'Engle has woven together her spiritual vision of interconnection, meaning, and significance and offers her audience a message of hope. In its pages the universal harmony is heard and the desire to listen is awakened. Throughout her reworking of mythological truths, readers witness the importance of being receptive to intuitive forms of knowledge and the dangerous effect of demythologized autonomous rationalism. Through Mrs. O'Keefe, Charles Wallace, Meg, and Matthew Maddox we learn of love, redemption, and sacrifice. For L'Engle, the rejection of egocentric independence embodied by traditional conceptions of heroism is a worthwhile sacrifice that allows us access to a realm where childlike wonder and receptivity bring joy beyond utterance.

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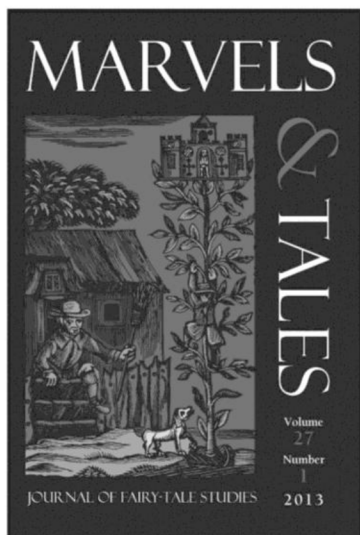
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