



Photo by ATSUHI NISHIJIMA/DISNEY via The Associated Press

Oprah Winfrey in a scene from Disney's "A Wrinkle In Time."

# L'Engle's World

## 'Wrinkle in Time' defied trends and ignored the market

*"You have to write the story that wants to be written. And if the book would be too difficult for grown-ups, you write it for children."*

— Madeleine L'Engle

If this statement sounds contradictory or, at the very least, contrary to expectation, welcome to the world of Madeleine L'Engle.

Tomorrow Disney will release its 2018 film of L'Engle's classic "Wrinkle in Time," directed by Ava DuVernay, and starring Oprah Winfrey, Reese Witherspoon, Mindy Kaling, Storm Reid, Zach Galifianakis and Chris Pine.

A curious New Hampshire connection is that Jennifer Lee, a graduate of the University of New Hampshire — the first female director of a Walt Disney Animation Studios feature film and winner of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature for "Frozen" — also is an avid L'Engle enthusiast selected to write the screen play for "Wrinkle."

Written in 1959, "Wrinkle in Time" was rejected by 26 publishers even though L'Engle already had published six books. It found a home with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, which eventually published it as its first children's book in 1962. "Wrinkle" won the 1963 Newbery Medal, the Sequoyah Book Award, the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and was runner-up for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. It has been published in countless editions — 10 million copies — and has never been out of print. Yet, from the start, it was a problematic bestseller.



D. QUINCY WHITNEY

"Wrinkle" baffled editors, defied trends and ignored the market. It didn't fit any category and took on difficult topics like good and evil.

Was it for children or adults? Was it science fiction? If so, why was there a female protagonist? Wasn't it just a bit too philosophical?

To add to the puzzle, Meg Murry was not the classic heroine: She was plain, awkward, insecure and outspoken, painfully aware of her faults, but also memorable as her faults eventually save her life. One editor called the book "distinctly odd." To add to the enigma, "Wrinkle" became one of the most celebrated — and banned — books of the American Library Association, at 23rd among the most frequently challenged books of the 1990s.

Christians called it "anti-Christ;" others called it "too religious."

L'Engle's response: "If we are looking for life and love and openness and growth, we are likely to find them. If we are looking for witchcraft and evil,



One of the many renditions of cover art featured on L'Engle's "A Wrinkle In Time" since the genesis of its publication.

we'll likely find them."

Meanwhile, L'Engle battled for decades with producers who kept trying to rewrite the story, omit certain characters or convert it from a science story to a science fiction story — but L'Engle stood her ground.

The idea for the book began with three characters on a summer camping trip out west: "We drove through a world of deserts and buttes and leafless mountains, wholly new and alien to me. Suddenly into my mind came the names Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which."

At the same time, L'Engle happened to be reading the "new" quantum physics. The two merged not because L'Engle knew what she was doing, but precisely because she entered