

U. and IT: Control and Resistance from Krakatoa to Camazotz

Tightly regulated societies requiring the surrender of individual identity are presented as antithetical in the Atomic-Age Newbery-Award novels *The Twenty-One Balloons* and *A Wrinkle in Time*. Pène du Bois's Sherman appears to fit harmoniously on the utopian "fantasy island" of Krakatoa, whereas L'Engle's tearful Meg—with her gender-fluid adjuvants and rhetorically watery "tessering"—combats IT's desiccating influence on the dystopian planet Camazotz. This paper interrogates the societies' opposing valences by examining historical context, literary mode and genre, and the disruption of power structures by L'Engle's gender politics and Pène du Bois's queer subtext.

Separated by fifteen years (1947-1962), the novels reflect a historical shift from *Balloons'* postwar wish-fulfillment (King) to *Wrinkle's* Cold-War anomie, from Pène du Bois's post-A-bomb "machines that *play*" (Weinstone) to L'Engle's children who play like machines. Each novel's take on the sci-fi genre is distinct and historically situated: *Wrinkle's* science fantasy embraces Einsteinian possibilities, while *Balloons'* steampunk nostalgia recoils from beamed-atom travel, preferring nineteenth-century speculative technologies. Literary mode differs, too. *Wrinkle* simultaneously sketches a cautionary allegory of Soviet totalitarianism and a satire of midcentury American conformity, as confirmed by the 2015 *Wall Street Journal* manuscript fragment. *Balloons*, despite its strong affinity with a satirical Fitzgerald tale, seems destined to be read "straight"—were it not for a queerness that Weinstone locates in Krakatoa's leisure, excess, and "parodic" sartorial splendor.

Ultimately, queerness challenges controlling structures in both novels, as we see through the mentor figure with whom each protagonist wakes up naked. Meg's mental gendering of the ambiguous Aunt Beast—whose maternal-sensual feeding and bathing strengthen her for the final showdown—illuminates gender's role in Meg's own identity and struggle to resist IT's brainwashing. Sherman's "good friend" Mr. F. elucidates Krakatoa's ways between swims and sunbaths, leading San Francisco bachelor Sherman to realize that he threatens the equilibrium of a system built around identical nuclear families. The homoerotic subtext of Pène du Bois's illustrations (especially those featuring the ocean) implies that the Sherman-F. relationship might also disrupt this homogeneity. I hypothesize, however, that the families' very uniformity suggests queerness as a constitutive Krakatoan characteristic.