Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: Homecoming (Tillerman Cycle, 1) by Cynthia Voigt ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/833. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Cynthia Voigt

Homecoming (Tillerman Cycle, 1)

United States (1981)

TAGS: Aeolus Circe Homer Lotus Eaters / Lotophagoi Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Penelope Polyphemus Scylla





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Homecoming (Tillerman Cycle, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1981
First Edition Details	Cynthia Voigt, *Homecoming*. New York, NY: Atheneum, 1981, 388 pp.
ISBN	9781442428782
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Sarah F. Layzell, University of Cambridge, sarahlayzellhardstaff@gmail.com
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Creators



Cynthia Voigt , b. 1942
(Author)

Cynthia Voigt is an American author best known for the Tillerman family novels. She is the author of 33 books for children and young people, and two books for adults, spanning a range of genres and audiences. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Voigt graduated from Smith College in 1963 and later became a secondary school English teacher. Her novels have won numerous awards, including the prestigious Newbery Medal for *Dicey's Song* in 1983. The first Tillerman novel, *Homecoming*, was nominated for a National Book Award in 1982.

Source:

Official Website (accessed: 04 September, 2019).

Bio prepared by Sarah Hardstaff, University of Cambridge, sflh2@cam.ac.uk

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Additional information

Adaptations

Homecoming was adapted as a 1996 made-for-television movie, directed by Mark Jean.

Translation

Chinese: *Hui jia*, You shi, 2004.

Dutch: *Onder de blote hemel*, transl. M Slagt-Prins, Querido, 1985.

French: *C'est encore loin, la maison?*, transl. Rose-Marie Vassallo, Flammarion, 1993.

German: *Heimwärts*, transl. Matthias Duderstadt, Bertelsmann, 1992.

Spanish: *Los Tillerman encuentran hogar*, transl. Anna Benet, Noguer y Caralt, 1995.

Swedish: *Den långa vägen hem*, transl. Rose-Marie Nielsen, Bonniers juniorförl, 1983.

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

The other titles in the Tillerman Cycle are:

- *Dicey's Song* (1982),
- *A Solitary Blue* (1983),
- *The Runner* (1985),
- *Come A Stranger* (1986),
- *Sons From Afar* (1987) and
- *Seventeen Against the Dealer* (1989).

Summary

Homecoming tells the story of four siblings – Dicey, James, Maybeth and Sammy Tillerman – who are abandoned by their mother (their father had already abandoned the family some years before). Led by the eldest, Dicey, the children make their way mostly on foot down the east coast of the United States. They come across a range of settings and characters with both realist and archetypal features including: runaway teenagers in the woods, students on a university campus, their bland cousin Eunice and her stifling home, a farmer called

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Rudyard who tries to capture them, and a circus where the children live and work for circus owner Will. Along the journey, the main characteristics of each children are revealed: Dicey's determination, James's intelligence, Maybeth's slow and gentle nature, and Sammy's aggression and charm. Eventually the children arrive at their mother's hometown and must convince their grandmother Abigail that she should let them live with her on her farm in Crisfield, Maryland. As the novel ends, the children have started school and are starting to settle in at their grandmother's home.

Analysis

Homecoming is a story of child abandonment, resilience and relationships that, in typical Voigt style, raises more questions than answers. The four Tillerman children, led by Dicey, must navigate not only the physical space between them and their destination but also the challenges faced by children in an adult-led world, and the tensions between individuals, communities and society.

On the surface, *Homecoming* is a realist novel that explores the survival of the Tillermans in the face of threats such as family separation, hunger and hopelessness. Yet there are also significant overlaps between Voigt's story and three of the most influential stories in Western children's literature: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the "Hansel and Gretel" folktale collected by the Brothers Grimm, and Homer's *Odyssey*.

First, the novel follows a pattern of characters striving to survive after abandonment or exile that has been traced back to *Robinson Crusoe* and gives its name to the 'Robinsonade' genre (see Nikolajeva 2002, 82). Voigt amplifies the connection with *Crusoe* by focusing on mundane details of everyday tasks and trials, as well as emphasising the isolation that the children feel.

Second, *Homecoming* explicitly references the story "Hansel and Gretel" (Voigt 1981, 4), hinting at the children's vulnerability as well as their determination to find their way. Recalling "Hansel and Gretel" also highlights the timelessness of the story – there have always been hungry children and cruel adults. However, Voigt and her characters question the 'good mother'/'bad mother' binary established by the Grimms, both in discussions about the Tillermans' mother and in the portrayal of their grandmother, Abigail. While Abigail has been read as the story's 'witch' (Henke 1985, 48), this reading underplays the

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lasting security that she is able to offer the children.

Finally, *Homecoming*, like many other examples of children's literature with the journey or quest theme, follows patterns found in the *Odyssey*. As well as the novel's main theme of returning home, albeit to a home that belonged to their mother rather than the children themselves, there are also parallels in the story's plot and motifs. The children face many trials and meet both helpers and hinderers along the way, at times becoming stuck in certain places or situations longer than they had intended. Furthermore, there are near-constant references to the sea, despite most of the story taking place on land. The importance of the sea is related to characterisation as much as setting: for example, Dicey's father is a merchant seaman and her greatest desire is to have her own sailboat.

At least one critic has taken a rather more literal view of the overlap between *Homecoming* and the *Odyssey*. James Henke claims that Dicey's name is a stand-in for Odysseus and finds further parallels in encounters with other characters and settings: the security guard whom Dicey outwits (Polyphemus), the teenage runaways at Rockland Park (the Lotus-eaters), Windy (Aeolus), Eunice and Aunt Cilla's house (Scylla), the circus (Circe), and finally, the grandmother whose affection the children must win in a series of tasks (Penelope) (1985, 48-51).

Some of these pairings are less convincing – the children are not harmed or entrapped by the circus in any meaningful way or for a long period of time, for example, weakening the comparison with Circe. However, others are more compelling and may indeed be evident to a young adult reader who is familiar with classics: the Rockland Park teens talk about how they "pluck the lotus" (Voigt 1981, 75), for example, and Windy acts in the role of Aeolus, keeper of the winds, by arranging transport to help the Tillermans hasten their journey. In addition, one of the young children is caught stealing from Windy's roommate, echoing the incident in which Odysseus's crew steal the bag containing rough winds and unwittingly unleash them (see also Henke 1985, 49–50). Overall, *Homecoming*'s classical references go beyond the use of an archetypal plot and add further layers of complexity and intertextuality to this celebrated young adult novel.

Aeolus Circe Homer Lotus Eaters / Lotophagoi Odysseus / Ulysses

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Odyssey Penelope Polyphemus Scylla
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adolescence Adventure Adversity Child, children Coming of age Fairy tale references Freedom Journeys Loss Names Orphans Parents (and children) Relationships Resilience Siblings Social class Society Survival Travel Witch Youth

Further Reading

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