Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: Orfe by Cynthia Voigt ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/934. Entry version as of November 19, 2026.

Cynthia Voigt

Orfe

United States (1992)

TAGS: Aphrodite Charites Eurydice Graces Hades Icarus Orpheus

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

General information	
Title of the work	Orfe
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1992
First Edition Details	Cynthia Voigt, *Orfe*. New York, NY: Atheneum, 1992, 120 pp.
ISBN	9780006745860
Official Website	cynthiavoigt.com (accessed: January 20, 2020).
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
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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

Summary

Orfe tells the story of a talented singer-song writer and her doomed relationship with Yuri, a recovering drug addict. The novel is narrated by Enny, Orfe's childhood friend and later band manager, and is told in non-linear fragments of Enny's memories. Enny reconnects with Orfe in adulthood and manages her career as she leaves an abusive band behind to forge a music career on her own terms. Joined by three backing singers, nicknamed the Graces, Orfe becomes a success. Meanwhile, her relationship with Yuri deepens after he completes rehab and the two decide to get married. At their wedding, Yuri eats a piece of cake brought by his former "friends", which turns out to have been laced with drugs, then disappears. Orfe and Enny go to find Yuri but cannot bring him back from the drug house. Orfe later dies after a performance in a college gym when the bleachers she is standing on collapse and the crowd stampede. The novel ends with a flashback to Orfe's retelling of the scene in the drug house, in which she relates how Yuri almost made it out, but then turned back.

Analysis

Orfe is a gender-flipped retelling of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, with Yuri's wedding-day "death" and drug addiction representing Eurydice's death and descent into Hades, and Orfe's death mirroring one version of the death of Orpheus at the hands of a frenzied mob. The classical story is reflected in Voigt's characterisation as well as plot: Orfe's music enchants her listeners; meanwhile, Yuri is described as extremely attractive.

Other classical references include the name of the Graces adopted by Orfe's backing singers and band, Grace Phildon, Willie Grace and Raygrace, a clear play on the Graces or Charites of Greek and Roman mythology. These characters represent joy and community as part of a team that continues to perform together after Orfe's death. As Suzanne Reid argues, the inclusion of the Graces transforms Orfe into an Aphrodite-like figure, "a symbol of love, in its fullest sense, including charity" (1995, 93). Orfe includes a song called "Icarus" in her final performance before she dies, the reference to flying too high perhaps a reflection not only of Yuri's addiction but also her own budding fame and the pressures of her central role in the group.

Typically for Voigt's work, *Orfe* combines classical themes with

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	references to contemporary music and fairytale elements, in this case the story of "The Frog Prince", discussed by Orfe and Enny as children. Orfe decides that the frog had no right to make the princess promise, foreshadowing her own acceptance of Yuri's free will and inability to promise not to take drugs again after his wedding-day relapse. Both Reid (1995, 95–97) and Jaime Hylton (2005, 53) further discuss the ways in which the reference to this tale prefigures the importance of facing fears and keeping promises as major themes of the novel.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Charites Eurydice Graces Hades Icarus Orpheus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Death Emotions Friendship Loss Love Names Peers Pop culture references Relationships Romance Soul Violence Youth
Further Reading	Reid, Susan E., *Presenting Cynthia Voigt*, New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1995. Hylton, Jaime, "Exploring the 'Academic Side' of Cynthia Voigt", *The ALAN Review* 33.1 (Fall 2005).

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