

BECOMING A MODERN HERO:

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN CYNTHIA VOIGT'S NOVELS

by

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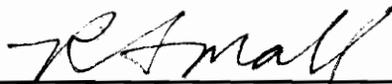
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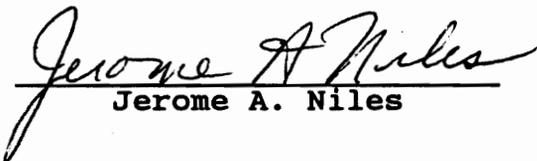
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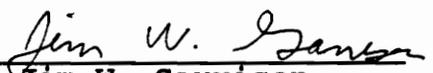
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This Dissertation is Dedicated to

my husband Robin

who pushed and pulled and let me sail

and to

Dr. Robert Small

who took my mother's daffodills and let me bloom.

Thank you.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

"Anybody know anything about this guy S.E. Hinton? I'm gonna teach The Outsiders to my eighth graders next week...and then his Rumblefish. They're part of our classroom series."

I was in the faculty lounge/lunchroom of the high school where I was teaching. As a teacher new to public high school, with a degree in English rather than English Education, I had never read or even heard of this author before. Except for the books I had read with my own children, adolescent literature was a new ocean for me.

"Yeah. There's a book down in the library about her books. The kids will like those books...and 'he's a 'she.'" Immediately I rushed to the school library and found Jay Daly's Presenting S.E. Hinton. I discovered that S.E. Hinton had written her first novel as a teenager as she sat beside her dying father's bedside, and that she had failed the English assignment that started her writing. I hadn't noticed the patterns of imagery in Rumblefish. I found a list of other books she had written.

While I believe that the students "must draw on [their] past experiences with life and language as the raw material out of which to shape the new experience symbolized on the

page" and that "background information often masks much that is irrelevant and distracting" (Rosenblatt, 1983, pp. 26-27), critical literature, used judiciously, can be used to widen the scope of students' reactions to the novels, to add to these readers' responses. In the case of S.E. Hinton's novels, which my students, identified as "poor readers" and "at risk," loved, this "literary" information gave credence to "their kind of novel" as an example of "good literature"; it helped justify their judgment. That Hinton's novels had been analyzed in the same way as the "classics" in their textbooks helped the students to relate their reading of these novels to the types of textual analysis presented as expert knowledge in their English texts. Much of the emotional impact of Rumblefish comes from metaphors and similes relating to the colors red and black. Knowing that Hinton's books were set in a small Midwestern city rather than the stereotyped slums of New York helped my rural students relate the enmity between the Socs and the Greasers in The Outsiders to the frictions between the "preps" and the "rednecks" in our local school. (I admit I learned much about the lives and resentments of these self-avowed "reds" from these classroom conversations.) Critical literature helps students think about their own particular reactions to the novel in relation to broader themes, to the language of metaphor and imagery, and to authorial intent.

Rationale

Although the roots of young adult literature reach back to the nineteenth century, "relatively few scholars have worked with young adult literature " (Donelson & Nilsen, 1989, p.345). In the late 1940's and early 1950's, Dwight Burton, Richard Alm, and Emma Patterson wrote critical articles in English Journal, still an important source of analytic articles and reviews about young adult literature. Since the late sixties when realistic books about adolescents suddenly sprouted with novels such as S.E. Hinton's The Outsiders, Ann Head's Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones, and Vera and Bill Cleaver's Where the Lilies Bloom, scholarly writing about young adult books has bloomed. In Donelson & Nilsen's appendix of books and articles about young adult literature, only two of the twenty critical works date from before 1972. The field of scholarly research about adolescent literature is growing rapidly as evidenced by the increased number of critical articles in the English Journal since 1985, and the growth of two journals wholly devoted to the serious exploration and study of young adult literature, the ALAN Review and SIGNAL.

Donelson and Nilsen classify critiques of young adult literature as personal reactions, annotations, analytic criticism and reviews. Many of the journal articles review several works under the umbrella of a single topic,

discussing how the books could be included in a thematic unit. Others describe methods for teaching particular books. Periodically, the works of a single author or genre are featured in a single issue. These articles generally depend on the personal interpretation of these critics, informed by their knowledge of young adult literature as a genre, their experience with the culture and preferences of adolescents, and their beliefs about the goals of English education.

Other sources of information about young adult literature include the multi-volume sets of mostly biographical data about authors: Something About the Author, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Children's Literature Review, all produced by the Gale Research Company of Detroit, and the recent Speaking for Ourselves published by the National Council of Teachers of English. These series summarize each book's plots, cite quotes from interviews with the author, highlights from book reviews, and cite honors received.

Except for single books about extremely well-known authors of literature for young adults, there are few definitive full-length analyses of these works. Since 1985, the Twayne Publishers of New York and Canada have begun issuing a subsection of their United States Authors Series as a separate series about literature written for young

adults. In the prologue to these books, they describe their mission:

The Young Adult Authors books seek to meet the need for critical studies of fiction for young adults. Each volume examines the life and work of one author, helping both teachers and readers of young adult literature to understand better the writers they have read with such pleasure and fascination.

This new series is advertised as "groundbreaking." Their first volume, written by Patricia J. Campbell in 1988 (editor for this series), was Presenting Robert Cormier. Other authors included in the series are Walter Dean Myers (1990), Sue Ellen Bridgers (1990), William Sleator (1992), Zibby Oneal (1991), and of course, S.E. Hinton (in an updated edition, 1989).

"The best critical writing illuminates my writing to me," claimed Cormier in a speech to the National Council of Teachers of English (November 21, 1992). Critical writing is helpful to teachers if it can broaden and intensify the focus with which they and their students read the novels. Informative critiques provide the reader with facts about the novels and the context in which they were written; thematic critiques explore an individual viewpoint about the relationship of the works to ideological concepts. Both can be useful if they are well written by an individual who

understands the literature and its value for educating young adults.

I chose to write about Cynthia Voigt both because of the widespread appeal of her work to adolescents and because I believe in the relevance of her themes to the lives of my students and myself. As a teacher, I value Cynthia Voigt's works because they exemplify the kind of literature that adolescents seem to want and need. "Our teenagers want to hear about the adult world in all its misery, joys, and temptations. They want the facts straight up. But they also want to learn how to enter that world without being soiled by it" (Vanderstaay, 1992, p. 52). Voigt's works realistically depict the dilemmas of young adults as they dare to experiment with identities separate from their family and social roots, learn what is available to them in the world outside their homes, and decide what is valuable from both. In her nineteen novels, the protagonists struggle in a world in which adults are sometimes unkind or incapable, where plans are thwarted by accident, and where success is not automatic. Voigt's heroes and heroines, however, strive for an ideal world where individuals are able to achieve personal autonomy and authentic relationships; her characters learn to make choices unconstrained by convention and prejudice and to relate to others out of shared affection rather than need. Not only

her themes but her style shows a respect for the way young people think and communicate to each other. Her writing often captures the associative shorthand of informal speech, following the dynamics of the character's relationships rather than the rules of formal grammar.

As a woman, I especially appreciate how Voigt grapples with the issue of gender-defined roles in a non-sexist manner. She defies conventional assumptions about the roles of both males and females to an extent that I find refreshing and necessary. The need for this kind of literature for young adults is summed up in the following critique of young adult literature:

If we believe that literature can make us rethink or resee or reevaluate our ideas about others and ourselves, then the portrayal of male and female roles in adolescent fiction is an important classroom consideration. If adolescent literature provides an environment for young adults to experience vicariously the situations they may someday encounter, to see the results of decisions made by characters, and to evaluate their ideas and behaviors, then how males and females interact in those fictional situations can shape thinking by reinforcing stereotypes or by promoting alternative views (Kelly, 1992, p.154).

As an individual, I respect Voigt's work because it affirms the

"female hero" who seeks the courage to question family and conventional values, who actively strives to learn and define an individual self, but who also finally recognizes the importance of maintaining and nurturing a connection to family and friends. Although Voigt's heroes are mostly adolescent, the cycle of "reaching out, letting go, and holding on" recurs through all age levels. My interest in these themes stems not particularly from memories of my own adolescence but from events occurring in the present. My two children and I are reaching out from our pasts as we go off to school and encounter new possibilities for defining ourselves. While they are following the fairly normal routine of leaving home encumbered only by friendships and memories, I am additionally challenged by the demands of my husband, by my father and sister who need my attention, and by the community where I live, which expects me to return unchanged by my education. Out of respect and fondness for the people in my family and community, I tend to conform; like most of my generation of women, I was trained to want to please. But I am also drawn by the possibilities that may exist for me as an individual beyond the confines of my family and community. I dread missing out on the excitement of living as fully as I can,...and yet the urge to please runs strong and deep in me. Voigt's novels fascinate me because she explores this tension between commitment to self

and concern for pleasing others, capturing the depth and complexity of these emotional and intellectual ties. The span of her work indicates a continuing struggle to deal with the ramifications of these choices in a variety of situations. Like Voigt, I believe that the cycle of questioning, learning, and reaffirming creates the kinds of vital individuals who form a healthy society. Her characters do not indulge in the passive amusements so endemic among our population, nor do they passively accept the status quo; they are problem solvers who actively care about themselves and the world in which they live. I want to understand the conditions that form these kinds of individuals and communicate that to others.

Because I believe that educational research should be accessible and useful to those who might best benefit by it, I will attempt to write in a form and style that might easily communicate the results of my research of Voigt's work to the people who read her books. My analysis of Voigt's works will reflect my particular experiences, my beliefs and habits of reading, my New England roots, my belief that courage is a necessary component of self-development, and my interest in finding patterns of imagery and sound in fiction. While my reading (or any other individual's reading) of Voigt's works may be interesting or even useful to other readers as a source of ideas, many

students and teachers may prefer a more comprehensive critical overview to guide their first reading. The Young Adult Authors Books by Twayne Publishers, widely found in secondary school libraries, offers a model which incorporates such an overview, and I will try to follow their example by including such information.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the novels of Cynthia Voigt from a broad scope of critical perspectives in order to perceive and describe the main patterns of theme, image, and language that exist in her work. To provide a context, I briefly reviewed the critical literature available to readers about this author's work in particular and about young adult novels in general. So that this work might be accessible to the teachers and adolescents who read Voigt's books, I followed the format used by Twayne Publishers, a series widely used in public high school libraries.

Method

Like most first readers of a novel, I approached each of Voigt's works with only a vague impression of the subject matter from the jacket description and a sense that, because this was a novel for young adults, the main characters would prevail and their problems would be solved in the end. My first reading provided a general sense of the plot structure

and the characters' motivations; often I would recognize the underlying themes and imagery only after reflecting about the book as a whole. Thus my first reading provided a sort of cognitive map of the book's features. These impressions are like the initial field notes of an ethnographer who dips him or herself into the context without previous research and absorbs the "gestalt" of the situation.

Before a second reading, I read secondary references: reviews of the novel, relevant interviews, and literature to which Voigt seems to be alluding in her work. This background material informed my more careful reading of the novel and helped me to confirm or discard first impressions. As I read each novel the second time, I also tried to relate it to Voigt's whole body of work, comparing themes and characterizations, trying to find categories and connections among the novels as well as clarify my sense of the particular novel. This analysis is a recursive process, analogous to the open coding process of data in qualitative research (Anselm & Corbin, 1990). The texts I used became dog-eared and dirty as I penciled under phrases I believed might be relevant and folded down the corners of pages that seemed important as I read.

After I had read all the novels at least twice, I made an initial list of connections that I found; this was revised and modified as I continued to reflect on each novel

and its relationship to others. In order to check my review of the "data," I copied out passages from each novel that supported the unifying themes and other categories that I had noticed initially. Often at this point I would notice details that modified my ideas about the direction and extent of Voigt's patterns and themes. My "coding" became more focused, "developing each category in terms of the causal conditions that give rise to it...the context, the action/interactional strategies used to handle, manage, respond to this phenomenon in light of that context, and the consequences of any action/interaction that is taken" (Anselm & Corbin, p.115).

In order to develop a conceptual framework for my budding ideas about Voigt's work, I read references to young adult literature and sources that I thought might be relevant to the types of novels she was writing. These gave me overarching patterns by which to define the underlying themes of Voigt's work; these provided the language I used to articulate the philosophy Voigt espoused in her work. As I wrote the first draft of this project, I found myself rereading each novel to ensure that the details fit into the my overall analysis.

Writing, for me, is a dynamic process---I erase probably half of what I first tap out. Each sentence is a start and scratch process. When I have finished a

paragraph, I erase the repetitions of thought and the persiflage. At the beginning of each writing session, I revise what I have previously written for clarity and grace. Often I rearrange, expand, or delete whole paragraphs or sections. The first draft is full of typographical errors and ellipses of thought; I need time between the first writing and my editing to be able to perceive what a fresh reader might see. This procedure allows time for reflection and often results in what seem like sudden new insights. First readers ask questions that point out the superficiality of my treatment or the complexity of my expression and encourage me to rethink the validity of my ideas. To the extent that the writing process refines ideas and modifies observations, it is an important component of the kinds of research which depend on personal interpretation. As the writer makes new or different connections between ideas, the object of interpretation is seen in a different context and through a different focus. In order to maintain a close connection with Voigt's work and my ongoing interpretations, I skimmed each novel as I edited my first draft.

For me, this literary analysis of Voigt's work has been like gardening. Once the parameters were laid out, the digging, amending, sifting, and waiting for planted ideas to develop has resulted in a crop of new perceptions that have

nourished my growth not only in my thinking about literature, but about the needs of adolescent individuals, about my personal development and about the role of literature in helping individuals define themselves.

Format

Himley (cited in Florio-Ruane, 1985) describes a continuum of social distance between the author and the audience which dictates the amount of detail which will be included. "Exophoric" text, written for an audience with a shared contextual knowledge, lacks information in comparison to "endophoric" referenced texts which, because of the wide social distance between the author and audience, includes the details necessary to fill in the unfamiliar background.

On the one hand, I am writing for teachers with a scholarly interest in adolescent literature and Cynthia Voigt in particular--the readers of such journals as The ALAN Review and SIGNAL, journals published by the National Council of the Teachers of English and by the International Reading Association respectively. These readers can be assumed to have some interest in analyzing the themes and language of Voigt's work in relation to particular issues such as gender and ethnic equity or in discussing classroom applications. On the other hand, as a teacher, my purpose is to elucidate Voigt's work for readers who may be inexperienced and uninterested in academic analysis, who are

looking for a comprehensive introduction to the author and works rather than a particularized analysis or a discussion of the relation of this work to the wider context of adolescent literature. The challenge is to appeal to both kinds of readers. As mentioned before, I am using the Twayne Series format because I believe that the best of their books are both accessible and comprehensive. I aspire to that standard.

Conclusions

The finished document is an analysis of Cynthia Voigt's novels from my particular personal viewpoint informed by the biographical information and critical reaction to her work and by several close readings. An appended chapter suggests ways that her books might be used in the classroom. Cynthia Voigt's stature as a major contributor to the field of young adult literature makes such analysis, if done well, useful to other scholars of young adult literature as well as the many teachers and students who will want to know more about the work of this outstanding novelist. I hope that others may find my efforts even half as thought provoking as the novels themselves.

Chronology

- 1942 Cynthia Irving born 25 February in Boston, Massachusetts.
Ninth Grade: Decides she wants to become a writer.
Graduates from the Dana Hill School.
- 1963 Graduates from Smith College with a B.A.
- 1964 Works as secretary for the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency in New York.
- 1964 Marries first husband and moves to Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- 1965-1967 Teaches high school in Glen Burnie, Maryland.
- 1965-1967 Teaches English at The Key School in Annapolis, Maryland.
- 1968-1969 Department Chair.
- 1971 Daughter Jessica born.
- 1971-1979 Part-time teacher and department chair.
- 1972 Divorces her first husband.
- 1974 Marries Walter Voigt, a teacher of Latin and Greek at The Key School.
- 1975-1976 Writes the first draft of The Callender Papers.
- 1977 Son Peter (nicknamed Duffle) born.
- 1978 Writes Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers.
- 1979 Writes Homcoming.
- 1981 Homecoming published.
Selected as a Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies. Nominated for an American Book Award.
- 1982 Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers is published;
Selected as an American Library Association's Best

- Young Adult Book. Dicey's Song is published.
- 1983 Receives Newbery Award for Dicey's Song. It is also selected an American Library Association Best Children's Book.
- A Solitary Blue (A Newbery Honor Book and ALA Best Young Adult Book), and The Callender Papers are published. Receives The Edgar Allan Poe Award for The Callender Papers.
- 1984 Building Blocks is published.
- 1985 The Runner is published.
- 1985 Jackaroo.
- 1986 Izzy, Willy-Nilly.
- 1986 Come a Stranger.
- 1986 Stories About Rosie, illustrated Dennis Kendrick.
- 1987 Sons from Afar.
- 1988 Tree by Leaf.
- 1989 Seventeen Against the Dealer.
- 1989 Receives the ALAN Award (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents) given by the National Council of Teachers of English for significant contribution to the field of adolescent literature.
- 1990 On Fortune's Wheel, named by the American Library Association as a Best Book for Young Adults.
- 1991 The Vandemark Mummy and Glass Mountain.
- 1992 David and Jonathan and Orfe.

CHAPTER II

Cynthia Voigt: Adventurer Beneath the Surface

"I actually remember very little of my childhood, which makes me think it was quite happy. I suspect it might have been very close to perfect" (Commire, p. 220) writes Cynthia Voigt of her early life, which friends have characterized as normal and dull. Maybe on the outside: "Inside, secretly, invisibly, the right writing of a paragraph or a good telling of a story tastes like an adventure as exciting as any I've heard about, taken part in, or imagined" (Gallo, p. 217).

Becoming A Writer

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on February 25, 1942, to Frederick C. Irving, a corporate executive, and Elise Keeney Irving, Cynthia's family includes an older sister, a younger sister and twin brothers thirteen years younger than she. Cynthia remembers little about her childhood except that she lived in rural southern Connecticut in houses with spacious yards. She started nursery school early with her older sister supposedly to bolster her shy older sister. "When it came time for the nursery school play, however, she was Miss Muffet, and I was the Spider. Later, when we got to dancing school--she was a Sweet pea, and I was a Head of Cabbage" (Commire, p. 221).

Cynthia found young adult literature at her grandmother's house in northern Connecticut with its shelves and shelves of books. There she became acquainted with The Black Stallion and the Nancy Drew and Cherry Ames series. "One day, I pulled The Secret Garden off one of her shelves and read it. This was the first book I found entirely for myself, and I cherished it. There weren't any so-called 'young adult' books when I was growing up. If you were a good reader, once you hit fourth grade, things got a little thin. I started to read adult books, with my mother making sure what I had chosen was not 'too adult.' I read Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Camus and many classics" (Commire, p. 221).

Cynthia followed the paths of her mother and father by attending a private boarding school, Dana Hill School in Wellesley,, Massachusetts. There she experienced a great deal of intellectual as well as physical freedom. "We could go downtown on our own, which in the fifties in a girls boarding school was just this side of licentious. Knowing the school trusted us, I believe, helped us to grow up" (Commire, p. 221).

Although Cynthia decided to become a writer in the ninth grade and wrote some short stories and poems in her high school and college years, nothing she submitted was published. Perhaps this was because she only submitted manuscripts to one publisher before giving up on them.

"What I didn't realize was that you send things to more than one place. I figured that if they were good enough, then everybody would know it; and if somebody said no, that meant they weren't good enough" (Metzger, p. 468).

At Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, Cynthia took creative writing courses but doesn't think she learned much from them. After her graduation from Smith in 1963, she worked for a year in public relations for the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency in New York City. Her boss was a wonderful woman who, at the time, was writing a centennial history and had performed in vaudeville where she danced tap while playing the xylophone blindfolded. Cynthia's neighbors in the tiny Greenwich Village apartment she rented were also characters: "The lady next door owned killer German Shepherds and was in the habit of talking to herself and answering herself while her dogs leapt savagely against her windows. It was a fun year" (Commire, p. 222).

In 1964, Cynthia married and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where, unable to find other work, she spent six months at a Christian Brothers college becoming accredited to teach. Like many other well-educated women of her era, Cynthia had vowed never to teach. The minute she walked into the classroom, however, she knew she had found her niche. From 1965 to 1967, she taught in a public high school in Glen Burnie, Maryland. Three years later, she

joined the faculty at The Key School in Annapolis where she became department chair in 1969 and taught for many years afterward.

During most of her first marriage, which ended amicably with a divorce in 1972, Cynthia did not write much. She thinks that perhaps her inability to write was a symptom of what was wrong with this marriage. Soon after her separation, however, she began to write again:

I was living alone with my daughter, which is in a sense like living alone, because a small child is simply an extension of yourself. Like many women, as soon as I was separated, I found myself washing floors regularly, keeping the house nice, just to prove to myself that I was really okay! I also began writing again. To support us, I worked as a tutor. I kept a regular schedule so that I could have an hour to write at the end of each day (Commire, p. 222).

The stories she has from this period are either lost or hidden in the bottom of a box.

Discovering Young Adult Literature

At The Key School, she was assigned to teach English at the second, fifth, and the seventh grade levels. In preparing for her classes, she discovered that good literature for young adults and juveniles "had the shape of

real books--novels--for kids the age of my students." She began to get ideas for novels for this age group. Two books, recommended by her future mother-in-law who was studying children's literature at the time, particularly inspired her teaching: Louise Fitzhugh's Harriet the Spy and Julia Cunningham's Dorp Dead. Other favorites include Robert O'Brien's Mrs. Frisbee and the Rats of NIMH, Lloyd Alexander's The Book of Three and short stories by Elaine Konigsburg.

In 1974 she married Walter Voigt, a teacher of Latin and Greek at The Key School. It was only after she became pregnant with their son Peter (nicknamed Duffle) in 1977 that she reduced her teaching load and began to write for more than an hour a day. Inspired by the gothics she had read, Cynthia wrote The Callender Papers as an exercise in plotting, which she felt was a weakness of her writing. She didn't submit it for publication until several years later when her daughter, bored, picked it up and read it "standing up--just as she read her beloved Nancy Drew books. ` Gee, I guess The Callender Papers works'" (Commire, p. 224) thought Voigt. After she polished the language and revised the dialogue to differentiate the characters, the book was published by Atheneum in 1983.

When her son was a year old, Voigt wrote the first draft of Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers, based loosely on

her experiences at Smith College. Not factual in any sense, the book is suggestive of the tone and the feeling of being at an exclusive New England college for girls in the early sixties. Like The Callender Papers, this novel was also published by Atheneum several years later after revision of its thematic pattern.

Developing The Tillerman Series

While Voigt was still writing Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers, the idea that began the Tillerman series came to her:

I went to the market and saw a car full of kids left to wait alone in the parking lot. As the electric supermarket doors whooshed open, I asked myself 'What would happen if nobody ever came back for those kids?' I made some jottings in my notebook, and let them stew for a year, the way most of my ideas do (Commire, p. 223).

These notebook jottings grew into a novel twice the size of the final version of Homecoming and the novel grew into six more books about the Tillermans and their friends, a series bound together by the underlying cycle of "holding on, reaching out, and letting go."

In 1981 Homecoming was published. Although Voigt has won many awards since, she considers the acceptance of this manuscript the most important. "After years of working on

my own, I was suddenly encouraged and accepted by others. Awards are ... presents, and while they are intensely satisfying they do not give the same kind of pleasure as being in the middle of a work that is going well" (Commire, p. 225). Nevertheless, Voigt received several wonderful "presents" for her first published book. Homecoming was selected as a Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies by the joint committee of the National Council for Social Studies and the Children's Book Council, and was an American Book Award nominee.

Voigt was still working on Homecoming when she realized that she wasn't finished with the Tillerman family; she started Dacey's Song immediately afterwards. Then she wrote A Solitary Blue to explain the character Jeff and The Runner to tell the story of 'Bullet.' When she submitted Dacey's Song to her editor, she was not at all confident about its worth. "My cover letter read something like: I don't know that you will want this, but I think you will love reading it" (Voigt, "Newbery Medal Acceptance" 1983).

After she had submitted the book, her editor Gail Paris asked her to write an introductory piece for readers who hadn't read Homecoming. Disappointed at losing her "killer first line," Voigt complied and was pleased when she saw that the publisher, by printing the introduction in a different font, had retained the original first line. "I

realized that, though I hadn't said a word, Atheneum (the publisher) knew as well as I did that the first line was important" (Commire, p. 224). Since then, she has relied on the judgement of her publisher for much of her work.

In 1983 Dacey's Song was selected as an American Library Association Best Children's Book and won the prestigious Newbery Medal. Voigt was understandably thrilled. It had taken her over two decades of writing to see her first work published, and now to receive such an honor only two years after her first novels were in print was overwhelming. She described the experience in her Newbery Medal Acceptance speech:

I didn't know good news could pack such a wallop. I didn't know good news could keep you awake into the night, distract you so effectively from all appointed tasks, make it difficult, when you confronted it head on, to breathe properly.

But she was brought back to reality by her young son:

Forty-eight hours after the famous phone call, during which time the house had been reverberating with the words Newbery and Los Angeles, we went out for a family celebration dinner. Duffle [my son] leaned forward to announce to his grandmother the big news: 'We are going to Chicago, because Mommy won the Blueberry Award'.... Duffle keeps my feet on the ground (Voigt,

Hornbook, 1983).

Nineteen eighty-three was a big year for Voigt. Besides receiving the Newbery Award for Dacey's Song, her earlier novel The Callender Papers was published and awarded the Edgar Allan Poe Award, which is given to particularly excellent mysteries. Her next novel, A Solitary Blue was also released that year and named a Newbery Honor Book.

Perhaps because she had been part of a large happy family when she grew up and because she was so close to her own two children, Voigt found it especially difficult to imagine why a woman would leave her children, an important catalyst for both Homecoming and A Solitary Blue. "I don't think it is easy for women to leave their children, and that's one reason why I had to make the mother in Homecoming crazy. There seemed to be no other way that a woman would leave her children." In A Solitary Blue, Voigt writes about the kind of person who is "long on charm, but absolutely false. Melody wants to take care of the entire world, a common human failing--it is so much easier to concern ourselves with other people's problems while our own personal world is neglected and goes to hell" (Commire, p. 224).

Dacey's Song and Homecoming were books that produced other books like "shoots out of a felled tree" as Voigt explained in a commentary in 1983. Just as she wrote A

Solitary Blue to tell Jeff's story, she wrote The Runner in 1985 to explain Gram's story to the children about how Bullet got out of going to a birthday party, and then Seventeen Against the Dealer to clarify the relationship of Jeff and Dicey. Come a Stranger (1986) explores the character development of Mina, a best friend of Dicey, as she comes to terms with the white world's scorn of the black female body. In Sons from Afar Dicey's brothers, James and Sammy, redefine their relationship as they search for news about their father. The Tillerman series, as these books are known, is perhaps Voigt's most popularly renowned achievement, but these were not the only novels she was writing during these years.

Exploring Fate and History

In 1984, Building Blocks was published. This book originated from an incident in Voigt's home:

Her son Peter, who was quite young at the time, frequently played with the large, light-weight cardboard building blocks familiar to most two-year-olds. One night Walter constructed a rather large fortress with them. The next morning when Peter and Cynthia came downstairs, there it was! Peter reacted immediately and crawled into the inviting structure [and Cynthia thought], 'What would happen if...?' (Kauffman, 1985, p. 877).

Brann, the main character in the novel that resulted, falls asleep in the fortress built by his father and travels back into the time of his father's childhood in the Depression years. In this book, Voigt explores not only the effect of parental anxiety on children but also the nature of fate, a subject she would return to in future novels.

Jackaroo (1985) is historical fiction, set in a medieval kingdom. The main characters are peasants who struggle daily for physical survival, with little hope of improving their lot except for the sudden reappearances of Jackaroo, a mythical Robin Hood type figure. Voigt calls this her "Zorro book"; indeed, it is full of flaring threats and flashing swords yet also astonishingly realistic in tone and in evoking this historical-mythical setting.

In 1986 Voigt wrote Izzy, Willy-Nilly about how a popular high school cheerleader reacts when she loses a leg as a result of a car accident. In this novel Voigt continues her campaign against mere "niceness," begun in Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers with the characterization of Ann as constrained by her fear of offending anyone...or of even being noticed. After her accident, Izzy, realizing the inadequacy of being "nice" for dealing with many real life situations, becomes a more authentic person.

Voigt's own personality, inextricably bound up with her writing, is anything but "merely nice." When she is not

writing, she tends to make a mess of things and "get very grouchy. It is the writing--the making of something--that helps order her world" (Kauffman, p.876). Her characters are only slightly related to her own personality though she admits that Dicey is the "kind of kid [she] would like to have been and that Gram's the kind of lady she would like to be." She connects to her characters with sharply focused insights into an essential part of their personalities, filling out the flesh and blood as she writes about them in the context of the novel: "You can't pin them down as to who they are, but you can connect with who they are, talk to them and see what they're trying to communicate." Voigt is drawn to her characters, but does not feel that she automatically knows all about them. "I would not be surprised if they'd all come and knock on my door and tell me I've done it all wrong" (Kauffman, 1985, pp. 878-879).

Like her characters, the settings in her books are fictional yet related to actual pieces of own life. Her first books take place at the kind of private New England schools where she was a student. The route the children follow in Homecoming is familiar to anyone who has lived in southern Connecticut; and Crisfield, named after an actual town in Maryland, reflects her life in that part of the state. In a 1986 interview Voigt talked prophetically about the setting of her later novels:

I'd love to have a house in Maine someday. It's so beautiful and quiet, and there are so many stars in the sky. When I see something I like, I always want to try and write it--that makes it mine, you see.... I suppose I'll have to write a book about Maine; perhaps that will make the dream come true (Commire, 1987, p. 225).

In 1986, Stories About Rosie was published, a picture book set in Maine with illustrations by Dennis Kendrick. The heroine of this story is Rosie, the family dog. Soon after, the Voigts, including Rosie, became residents of that northern state.

Tree by Leaf (1988) is a historical novel set in rural Maine just after World War I. Clothilde loves the peninsula which has been willed to her. Her claim to the land she loves is threatened by her family's need for money after her father returns from the war monstrously disfigured and disowned by his wealthy family. Also set in Maine, The Vandemark Mummy (1991), a mystery like The Callender Papers, unfolds at a small college where Dr. Hall, a classicist like Cynthia's husband Walter Voigt, has been hired to teach. Althea's knowledge of classical Greek solves the mystery, and her younger brother Phineas' persistence and courage saves her life.

In On Fortune's Wheel (1990), named by the American

Library Association as a Best Book for Young Adults, Voigt returns to the mythical kingdom described in Jackaroo to tell the story of Birle, the granddaughter of Gwyn and Burl. Feeling unwanted at home, Birle runs away to the southern kingdom, is kidnapped and enslaved, escapes, and enters a life of luxury at the Court. Feeling useless and unfulfilled, she finally returns to the Inn, her grandmother Gwyn's original home, where she can pursue her work and live with her love independently.

In 1989, Cynthia Voigt received the ALAN Award (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents, an assembly of the National Council for Teachers of English), for her significant contribution to the field of adolescent literature. In her speech acknowledging this honor, she demonstrated her talents as an English teacher when she suggested analyzing the thematic patterns in novels by mapping the plot events in each chapter (Monseau & Salvner, p. 33).

Moving Beyond Familiar Ground

Voigt's first book written expressly for adults was published in 1991. Glass Mountain, a light-hearted romance, takes place in the upper echelons of New York society and revolves around the struggle of two people to discern the "real self" underneath the layers of social veneer and convention. This theme reflects the growing process of

Voigt's adolescent characters who learn to look beyond the conventions of their upbringing to see the possibilities of their own self-development.

Just as Voigt explores the romantic possibilities of sophisticated high society with its tightly defined responsibilities to its members and the manners which unite them, she also examines the tragic consequences of delving into the underworld of evil and hatred which separates individuals from each other and which undercuts the ideals of social unity. David and Jonathan (1992) and Orfe (1992) both explore these themes. In an earlier interview Voigt discussed the effect of her life on her writing: "I don't shelter my characters from the world any more than I would keep them from going to the bathroom. The Depression and World War II were experiences that shaped and informed me while I was growing up, just as Vietnam has influenced kids growing up today" (Commire, 1987, p. 225). She brings these influences together in David and Jonathan and explores the long ranging influences of these tragedies on the lives of two friends. Orfe, based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (but reversing the genders of the protagonists), traces the poignant tragedy of a singer who cannot sustain the courage to rise above her knowledge of the world's evils.

Voigt describes herself as someone who continues to

learn rather than someone who already knows:

If I expect myself to be learning, my attitude towards experiences, people, the whole side show, is characterized by questions and curiosity; probably more important, my understanding of who I am, myself, is that I am changing, growing, adding to myself....I don't know about the rest of the adults out there, but it seems to me I spend my time perpetually growing up, with no end in sight to the arduous and uneasy occupation--which strikes me, on the whole, as a good thing, and a beneficial thing (Donelson & Nilsen, 1989, p. 376).

Voigt's recent writing shows a development towards a more profound questioning of the hard questions of modern life. In The Vandemark Mummy, Phineas and Althea live with their father; their mother lives on the other side of the country, pursuing her own career. David and Jonathan deals with the separation of innocent friends when they must face the evils administered by one ethnic group on another. David has been tortured and abandoned in World War II, and Jonathan is tortured in Vietnam; Henry struggles with the guilt of being from a privileged class that does not easily acknowledge the suffering of the Jewish people, the guilt of being a noncombatant in the Vietnam War, and of his attraction to his friend Jonathan. In Orfe, the protagonist does not have

the strength to escape the underworld of drug addiction and sadism. In these later novels Voigt is addressing the influences of individuals made weak by evil on the lives of young people who cannot remain innocent. These are pertinent questions in a world where adolescents and children are not always safely protected by loving families from the knowledge of evil and isolation.

Voigt's adventures seem to be taking her farther away from an orderly surface that once was called "normal." In her later books, in their quest for the "liberation of [their] true, vital, and powerful sel[ves]" (Pearson and Pope, p. viii), her heroes challenge the traditional status quo in hopes of finding new definitions of family and society and order, just as her earlier protagonists, leaving the safety of what they knew, began to explore the world and redefine the the ways they would relate to it. The style of these later works also indicate Voigt's challenge of the traditional way of telling a story to young adults. In the Tillerman series, she presented the same event and the same characters from different points of view. In Orfe, the characters' voices alternate, describing the same events from different points in time as well as from different points of reference. Pearson and Pope describe the motivation and the effect of this style in The Female Hero:

The goal is to reveal the essence of the character

or event. It is analogous to a process developed in consciousness-raising sessions in which one person begins by describing something she experienced and other members describe similar experiences in no particular order. The accumulation of all the individual variations on the experience makes the essence of the experience apparent (p. 217).

Voigt is diving beyond the "normal" presentation of the linear causal plot in her attempt to depict the more fluid patterns of real life where events are a compromise between logical intention and accidental fate and where conversations follow associational lines as well as chronological sequences. She is exploring the frontiers of realism in fiction in order to share her vision of how modern heroes can uncover truths about their world and the people in it so that they may live in mutually beneficial relationships.

CHAPTER III

Looking Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg :Defining the Self.

In a recent autobiographical sketch, Cynthia Voigt writes, "I begin to suspect that it is normal to be, like an iceberg, more than you seem to be, to be not only what you seem to be" (Gallo, p. 218). Her first novels portray young women in the process of defining their own identities by exploring the depths of their ice-bound selves as they step out from the familiar environment of childhood into a world of wider experience and meet people with different lives and values. In both these early novels, as well as in her later works, Voigt describes how her protagonists overcome initial fears of the unknown and learn to judge the value and validity of their experiences with other people. In both works they waver between two basic modes of coping with human experience: do they feel their way instinctively, using their heart to guide them; or is logical thinking the path to understanding?

The Callender Papers

"Think carefully was the guiding principle of my upbringing" (p. 1), says Jean, the main character of The Callender Papers (1983). This principle is embedded in her mind by her Aunt Constance, not a blood relation but the woman who had raised her since the disappearance of her

parents in Jean's infancy. The twelve-year-old girl leaves the school near Boston where she has lived as ward of the headmistress, Constance Wainwright, and spends a summer in the Berkshires organizing the family papers of Mr. Thiel, a stand-offish artist whom she has met only a few times. Jean is pleased that she can provide money for her future education by using her mind, though she is put off by Mr. Thiel's cold and distant nature: "He had a hard face, filled with character... but not attractive and not welcoming" (p. 25). Ten years previously his wife, Irene Callender, had fallen to her death into a deep ravine from a nearby path to the house of her brother, Enoch Callender. Their child had mysteriously disappeared shortly afterwards. A few days after her arrival, Jean meets Enoch Callender, a man who immediately charms her with his sunny disposition, his sky blue eyes and golden hair. In striking contrast to the iciness of Mr. Thiel, Enoch welcomes her, engaging her in lively conversational games, guessing her name and flattering her with his attention. Enoch tells Jean about his sister Irene, who had raised and spoiled him after the death of their mother, and about the fortune he hopes to inherit when the mystery of her death has been cleared. Enoch and his family have splendid dreams about how they will use the money to escape their rural isolation and live elegantly in Paris or New York. Mr. Thiel does not approve

of Jean's fascination with Enoch Callender: "You want to find excuses for him" (p. 62), and she admits that she does. She is attracted to his apparent enthusiasm for life's possibilities which contrasts sharply with the somber emotionally constrained Thiel household, where both Mr. Thiel and his housekeeper, Mrs. Bywall, "seemed to find life unpleasant...; both thought little of their fellow creatures [and] expected the worst" (p. 31).

Jean discovers a lovely waterfall along the path connecting the two family houses, a welcome respite from the twelve boxes of papers she sifts through so carefully and logically. Soon after, however, she is horrified to learn that this waterfall was the site of Irene's death, perhaps not an accident but a murder, motivated by greed for the family fortune. Jean finds it difficult to imagine such a murder, for her limited experience has not introduced her to the possibilities of evil. People had always seemed kind; now she doubts that she has understood the truth about them. That night she has a nightmare:

In dreams I looked over the edge of the ravine to see somebody there, helpless, barely moving. She lifted her head to look at me and I fled, stumbling back to my room at Mr. Thiel's house. Something had followed me there. Something, somebody, tall and dark, wrapped in a cloak (p. 79).

Jean screams, something she has never done before, and wakens to be awkwardly comforted by Mr. Thiel and his housekeeper, Mrs. Bywall.

Frightened by the inexplicable strength of her emotions, she resolves to face her fear by thinking carefully about the facts surrounding Irene's death and the disappearance of the child. Subsequently, her nightmares and her terror of the evil surrounding the family subside as she works diligently, poring through the boxes for clues. She is rewarded by finding references to a will that favors Irene and her child over Enoch and his family; at Irene's death the fortune was to be split between the child and Enoch. Where is this child and what name does the initial "J" signify? Jean cannot think of the answer. Why has Mr. Thiel not traced the child and tried to provide for it? Is it because he knows that the child has already died? But Mr. Thiel, the executor, is not a beneficiary and has no evident motive for murder.

A second incident arouses her fear again. Despite his disapproval of Enoch and his family, Mr. Thiel has permitted Jean to accept an invitation to dine with the Callenders at their home on Sundays. It is after one of these Sundays that Jean becomes dangerously ill with what the doctor suspects is food poisoning. Although Jean finds this illogical, she does not feel safe. She cannot decide whom

to trust: the cold and distant Mr. Thiel, who is rude and overbearing but whose life has been guided by such high-minded and carefully considered moral principles, or Enoch who, despite his profligate ways and professed wish for money, is kind and charming to her and lives with such gracefulness. Who would want to harm her, a mere employee?

Angered by Mr. Thiel's stern manner and his injunction that she stay in the house, Jean runs to Enoch and the waterfall for comfort and release of her pent-up feelings. How can this charming, lovely man be the selfish ingrate that Mr. Thiel describes, backing up his arguments with so much logical evidence? "Things were happening too fast for careful thought" (p.141). Then in a flash of imagination, she realizes that "J" could stand for Jean and that she herself could be the lost child, the heiress Jean Thiel. It makes sense, but "Who was it," Jean asks, "who wanted the Callender fortune badly enough to murder Irene Thiel? Her brother Enoch--but he loved her. Her husband--but he profited most if the child was never identified. Or if the child was dead.... [She] didn't want to be the daughter of a man who, as far as [she] could see had no warm and loving feelings toward his wife and child, who shut them absolutely out of his mind" (p. 163).

Beneath Enoch's charming exterior lies a snake. As Enoch verifies what Jean has already figured out logically,

he describes why she had not seen beneath his facade earlier:

You're not as clever as I had thought. You're remarkably like your mother, intelligent up to a point and then you let your feelings take over. You should guard against that, my dear. (p.165)

But Jean has learned to recognize the importance of the heart as well as the mind in finding the truth about herself. She can use not only the stern logic of her father, Mr. Thiel, but also the imaginative heart of her mother Irene who, in her letters, had expressed such warm love toward her husband and her child. For Irene had not been unintelligent; she had recognized the evil mind beneath the sunny exterior and had been planning a will that would benefit her brother's wife and children. Enoch had been "like a distorting mirror to his children and his wife... like a dark cloud holding them in his shadow" (p. 181). Despite his warm and generous exterior, he had planned to use his money to buy a munitions factory, profiting from war and destruction; although he espouses love for humanity to Jean, he had insisted on prosecuting the humble Mrs. Bywall for the theft of a spoon to pay for medicine for her dying brother, claiming principle as his motive. Now Jean wonders, what is behind the stern exterior of Mr. Thiel:

What I was looking for, precisely, I did not know. I

knew only that I needed some glimpse into Mr. Thiel's heart, into my father's heart. I knew, by then, the external man... but I wanted to see into him, to know whether the true man had been revealed by my mother's words in her affectionate note, or by Mr. Callender's tales of him (p. 178).

Jean goes to Thiel's art studio, and, in the lovely painting of a woman kneeling with her child at the glade by the falls, where "sunlight washed down over them, in benediction" (p. 179), she sees the painter's heart and weeps in admiration.

In exploring her own depths to find her identity, Jean thought she had to choose between the icy principled logic of Mr. Thiel or the sunny playful imagination of Mr. Callender; what she discovers is the value of both the mind and the heart, as long as they are what they seem to be.

Voigt wrote The Callender Papers as an exercise in plotting which she felt was a weakness in her writing. This is a gothic novel based on a dream: "I am prone to gothic dreams... A gothic novel needs a plot. Write this one!" (Senick and Reiff, p. 224). Although "some of the details are historically accurate, and the diction is evocative of the period,...it is not a carefully researched historical piece...[it] is more a product of having read many gothic novels" (Commire, p. 224).

As in most novels of that genre, the characters are more symbolic than full-blown personalities. Jean is a typical Victorian orphan, prim and plucky, who allays her fears of leaving her aunt with logical self-discipline. As she boards the train for her first step of the journey, she sits back "to attempt to think cheerfully" (The Callender Papers, p.13), determined to enjoy her adventure. Her guardian is a standard headmistress of a girl's school in Boston, a stern middle-aged woman, tall and straight with "eyes that seemed to see right to the heart of things" (p. 3) who represents the wise and virtuous adult. Constance Wainwright's school, dedicated to providing a man's education to women, beyond the curriculum of domestic and fine arts usual in that era, had "the reputation of producing suffragettes" (p. 86). Mr. Thiel with typical Victorian righteousness thinks deeply about the principles with which he directs his life and hides his emotions along with his paintings. In contrast, Enoch seems attractively imaginative and expressive, encouraging his impressionable niece Jean to play games and learn to dance, relying on his charm to woo her affection and loyalty so he can grab her inheritance. As Jean wavers between these symbols of principled logic and profligate emotion, she finally learns the truth about her self and the people around her by thinking carefully about the information she garners from

the Callender papers.

Some critics felt that the characters in this novel are unrealistically portrayed. Michelle Slung finds Jean an "unconvincingly juvenile heroine... The sensibility she conveys is a rather middle-aged one" (Book World, 1983, p.14). Ethel Heins agrees: "Jean, so young in years, may strain the reader's credulity with her mature, self-possessed first-person account, which occasionally dips into fairly complex moral, and even philosophical, discussions" (The Horn Book Magazine, 1983, p. 458). McKinley writes that Jean is almost "too stupid to be believed" (Children's Book Review, 1983, p. 128). Yet Voigt's heroine reflects the Victorian era in which the novel is set, an era which discourages immaturity and open displays of emotions, but fosters the maintenance of innocence. The stilted prose in which Jean tells her story reflects the "period primness" (Kirkus Review, 1983, p. 308) of the Victorian era in which the period is set and the classical education she has received at her aunt's school. One of Voigt's strengths is that her characters' personalities are consistent with the environment of their upbringing and the conventions of the historical era in which they live, and this first novel is no exception to her attention to historical tone.

"All that glisters is not gold" (Merchant of Venice, 2.7. 65), and Voigt certainly uses this imagery to

illustrate the theme that appearances can be deceiving. When Jean first meets Mr. Thiel, "he stood waiting in a shadow, a wide hat hiding his eyes" (p. 13). In contrast, Mr. Callender is "a golden man" (p. 22) in a white suit with eyes "of blue as bright as the sky. The sun shone off of his golden hair" (p. 48). For most of the novel, Jean perceives Enoch as warm and sunny and Mr. Thiel as cold and unwelcoming. In the end, however, she sees the shadow behind the gleaming facade of Enoch Callender and the loving glow behind Dan Thiel's cloudy countenance. Unlike many of Voigt's other novels which are set in real places, the geography of this novel while suggestive of the Berkshires in western Massachusetts with its tangled woods, rocky streams and grey boulders, is essentially fictional. In most gothic novels, scenery and weather mirror the intention of the plot, turning gloomy in the face of impending doom. In Voigt's novel, however, the glade where Jean's mother has been murdered is welcoming to Jean; and, on the day when Enoch tries to kill her, the sun is shining, and Jean is enjoying the peacefulness of that same glade. Both the houses of Thiel and Callender are of gray stone and neither is more threatening than the other. It is in the interaction of the characters and in the mind of Jean that Voigt plays out the question of truth versus mere appearance.

Another theme of The Callender Papers is Voigt's belief in the importance of learning for the young heroine. Studying the family documents enables her to question the actions and motivations of other people and to test the nature of the world outside herself in order to develop a self definition. Mr. Thiel and Jean enjoy long discussions about philosophy, exploring the ramifications of the decisions and actions of the family members. She tutors her friend Mac in Latin, building his confidence in his own ability to learn. The melodramatic plot of this novel explicitly favors thought and reflection as a road to self development over blind acceptance of what initially appears to be true.

Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers

In her second novel, Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers (1983), Voigt stresses the importance of human relationships, or the heart, as an equally important component of self development. The title comes from a Carl Sandburg poem, "Cool Tombs," and has "nothing to do with romantic love; neither does this book" (Rosser, p.20). Voigt is describing various attitudes toward life, embodied in each of her characters: the title celebrates their willingness to reach out to new experiences and to each other in order to learn about themselves.

The source for Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers is a

story told to Voigt when, at a dinner with friends, she tried on a pair of thickly lensed glasses and found it difficult to focus. "Knowing the owner was a basketball player, she asked, 'How do you play basketball with these?' He responded, 'No problem.' But he did recall a similar incident in high school where a 'wonderful, dead-eye shot basketball player' got glasses and could no longer play" (Kauffman, p. 877).

The setting is suggestive of Voigt's years at Smith College in New England in the early sixties. Though the events of plot are not based on any actual occurrences of Voigt's college life, the tone and the feelings evoked by the variety of students meeting in an environment "designed to foster independence of mind" (Gallo, p. 217) are similar. The fictional Stanton College is a small girl's school in the northeast that caters to "students of high intellectual caliber and distinct individuality."

In Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers three college roommates explore the depths of their identities by asserting who they seem to be and using their differences to suggest to each other and to themselves alternate paths to try. Like Jean, Ann Gardner is pulled between two types of minds, those of her two roommates at Stanton. Ann is from a conventional upper middle class family, whose life has been highly controlled and ordered. Reserved, polite, and

passive, she shies away from anything or anybody that is different. Unsure of her identity, Ann seeks the safety of conformity to prep school manners, familiar friends with familiar values, and privacy from challenges to her past:

In a strange place, she thought, you are more vulnerable than at any other time. Everything conspires to keep you mentally off balance, ready to alarm. Your face is stiff, expressionless, keeping ready to smile, concealing. You feel, like prying fingers, the glances of strangers sliding over you, seeing the faulty details friends never notice.... And those fingertips reached out at you, touched you to learn what you were" (p. 16).

In the beginning of the novel, she prefers the stance of observer to action and involvement. By the end of the novel, she has faced her fears of what lay beneath the iceberg and is well on the way to defining an identity separate from her family and friends and yet including what is valuable from them.

One of Ann's roommates is Niki Jones whose "long face, jabbing nose and chin" and eyes that "glittered, glared" (p. 1) illustrate her aggressive intelligence. Abrasively honest in expressing her judgments, Niki uses her intellect to challenge appearances and attack discrepancies between what people say and do. Her pessimistic view of humanity

fuels her relentless drive to control situations not by conforming and becoming invisible as Ann does, but by taking charge. During the welcoming assembly for first year students, Niki uses a stage whisper to label the Dean of Students "Munchkin," dispelling the respect that surrounds this paragon of scholarly seriousness. Full of energy and action, Niki spends her time playing sports and games. Her goal is to achieve the grades and the college degrees to "get even for some of the things society does and the law does. Before they blow us all up" (p.168). For her, the means of winning power are less important than the end result; it is not the game that matters but the goal.

The third roommate is Hildy Koenig, tall, blonde, and strong with "a face framed for happy surprises, and...eyes beaming expectation" (p.21) from an isolated farm in North Dakota where she has lived a life reminiscent of pre-Industrial rural America, helping her father and brothers on their chicken farm and living part-time with a neighboring widower to help with his children. Raised at great distance from modern society, fifty miles from the nearest school and an hour away from a church, Hildy seems naive; her speech is stilted, reflecting her lack of opportunity to communicate with many people beyond her family, and her experience is limited to homely activities. But she is profoundly confident in the essential rightness of what she believes

and precisely honest in explaining the extent of the knowledge. "It is the same thing, in the microscope and the telescope. The details differ, but not the essential order" (p. 145). Hildy trusts her intuitive sense of right and wrong but fails to note the evidence of worldly experience.

Voigt characterizes the difference between the girls' minds metaphorically. Niki's mind can be like fire, sudden, "crackling and destructive" (p. 97). A quick erratic learner, she is more interested in the factual certainties of math and science than in probing human motives and ideas. Valuing the facts and things of the material world, she is a pedestrian writer, writing safe correct prose for the sake of a grade rather than to express or explore ideas. In contrast, Hildy is interested in broad spiritual truths. She sees life in large generous patterns, gleams of light against darkened shadows. Her mind, solid and almost unalterable is "like a large forest, too complex, too tough... for garden management; ...what you planted would be altered by the nature of the forest into something other than you had imagined" (p. 94). Ignorant of many facts and details about sophisticated modern life, she is nevertheless perceptive about people and sure about questions of right and wrong. Although she lacks an adequate academic background to succeed, Hildy registers for Astronomy and Biology because she wants to know more of what they offer.

Curious about the contrary extremes of Niki's worldly pragmatism and Hildy's fuzzy idealism, and jealous of the certainty of both of her roommates, Ann is cautious at first:

Niki wore her intelligence like her jeans, close and comfortable. Hildy held hers like a lantern, to illuminate. And Ann? Like a string of real pearls around her neck, in the dark of night on the wrong street, she nervously concealed her mind, her unquiet fingers both cherishing and proud (p. 48).

Ann loves literature, the lovely patterns of imagery, meaning, and sound that words can create. She loves the ideals of excellence that she finds, particularly in classical literature. But at the beginning of the novel she conceals this love, afraid of being teased or envied. Ann's mind was water, "a lake held within controlling banks, sensitive to induced changes, but always with unexpected water-promises.... You could easily see how to improve a lake, although you could not predict what it might give up to you from its unseen depths" (p. 94). She writes carefully, placing "fact atop fact [to build] an impregnable wall" (p. 96). Ann's desire to be invisible has constrained her interactions with other people: she has snubbed square-bodied, square-faced Eloise without finding out that her mind was anything but square and that she could be an

excellent friend to Ann. But her love for traditional literature has inspired emotional release and creative satisfaction also.

As the roommates share their work and cooperate in their learning, Ann begins to assert her intellect, showing Hildy how to use the text to back up her intuitions about the characters' motivations and challenging Niki to work harder to develop and express her opinions. Niki begins to listen to Ann, recognizing the excellent logic of her opinion, and begins to respect Hildy's devotion to her high moral ideals.

It is on the volleyball courts that the differences among the three roommates are played out most dramatically. At first, Ann doesn't play, preferring to sit on the sidelines, observing Hildy and Niki express their contrary personalities.

The game became schizoid: on Hildy's side the ball was gentled, made soft; on Niki's it was energized and pointed. Hildy's team would retrieve and pass it among themselves. If Niki couldn't get to it for the first return, she was always there for a second shot. "Look out!" she would yell at her teammates, who backed away to give her room. Hildy too moved about, although she did not range as far. "I'm behind you," she would say softly (p. 40).

Niki is individual and competitive, while Hildy cares most about cooperating as a team. When Niki suggests that she and Hildy could join the first year team and play together in order to win the tournament, Hildy refuses:

I would not want to play on a team with you.... You are not, now, better than I: although you probably could be. You are much more agile, and your reflexes are quicker. But your emotion interferes with your play and the play of your team (p. 44-5).

Eventually, all three join four other first-year girls to forge a team. Ann agrees to play volleyball for her sport in order to keep peace between her roommates. Hildy, now a part-time coach, inspires the girls to think of themselves as a team. One evening as they continue practicing into the twilight, the girls realize that they can play without looking at each other, simply by sensing the game's pattern and by supporting each other's plays as integral parts of the pattern. Niki shows Ann how to spike, hone her skills, and play more aggressively. The team wins against the other first-year teams, but when they play against the sophomores, they begin to fall apart. "We should win this match, but we cannot if we expect to lose it," advises Hildy, and her confident vision carries them to victory: "the opposing team creaked, cracked, and crumbled" (pp. 98-99).

Though Hildy's communal vision inspires the team, her

eyesight has been the subject of much concern to Niki and Ann. Both have noticed that Hildy holds her books almost next to her nose, but have not been able to convince her to get her eyes examined. Part of the problem, Ann discovers, is that Hildy has only ten dollars to spend for the whole year. Goaded by Niki to act instead of passively giving up, Ann approaches the Dean and suggests that the College pay Hildy for her coaching. Hildy still refuses the examination until Ann blows up in anger after saving Hildy from falling over a waterfall she did not clearly see.

Hildy's eyes are awful. Nearsighted in one eye and farsighted in the other, she has seen only blurred outlines and shapes without defining outlines; these are normal to her. With her glasses, however, she develops an opposite problem, seeing too clearly the "clutter" of the world. During the next volleyball match, Hildy cannot concentrate. Watching the ball and the faces of the other players, her timing is off. Her grace and her confidence are impaired. Fiercely determined to win, Niki relentlessly threatens and wills the players to compensate for Hildy's new weakness, and they do, but not with any joy. The game with the juniors starts badly, as Ann and the others strain while the juniors play easily and well. Hildy, frustrated at her own inept timing, hurls her glasses into the stands and begins to play with her former grace. Without her glasses, Hildy

is not distracted by details:

It is all soft, smooth, simple. I see what will happen and what has happened. The ball floats to me, like a little cloud. It is still, without glasses. There is no winning, no losing, just the play itself (p. 151).

The freshmen team relaxes and finally wins because they believe they can.

Hildy agrees to compromise, wearing her glasses except for when she plays volleyball. But with her glasses, Hildy increasingly notices petty flaws in people, judging now what she had previously ignored. She sees beyond the shadowy images and gleams of light, and her idealized image of her world is compromised. Her confidence is shaken. She perceives the vainness of Beth, whom she had previously considered "a sulky goddess... who needed to honor herself" (p. 140). With her glasses she also notices that Niki has written a paper based on Ann's ideas about King Lear--not a technical plagiarism, but a borrowed idea nonetheless. She is convinced that Niki has committed a moral wrong. Niki responds that what she has done is legal and that being right is a matter of winning, of having the power to define what is right. With unassailable logic, she accuses Hildy of being as self-serving and as "human" as herself, admirable but no more capable of defining a meaning of life than anyone else. Hildy is unable to accept such an assault

to her innocence. Abandoning her glasses forever, she bikes out on an icy road which she cannot clearly see and is killed by a driver whose sight is also impaired, with alcohol. Tragically, Hildy misses knowing that Niki has rewritten her paper, respecting Hildy's idealistic faith in humanity and trying to make amends for pushing her harsh logical facts into Hildy's mind.

Ann has grown confident in her ability to modify Niki's pessimism. While Niki's characterization of life as meaningless and vile may be true in some cases, it is also true that life, lived well, may have meaning and excellence. Niki has learned to trust Ann's eye for excellence and care about her opinion. Daring to face their fears, Niki and Annie have learned to accept what is valuable in each other, and to accept their new roommate Eloise too. For their four remaining years at Stanton the volleyball team, built by Hildy's vision of cooperative play, remains undefeated.

What had seemed impossible happens. Ann and Niki and the other girls too have learned to explore beneath their iceberg tips and plunge to new depths using both mind and hearts, to define themselves as strong individuals who also work together toward the ideal of a stronger team. Ann recognizes the worth of standing up for her views as well as of loyalty to friends and family. Niki recognizes the importance of striving towards an ideal of excellence as

well as tearing down facades. Perhaps Hildy, had she lived, could have learned to incorporate the faults and failings of her friends into her idealized vision of humanity. Perhaps the warmth of Niki's gesture of respect and devotion and of Ann's invitations to join her family would have melted the hardness of the categorical imperatives which bound her mind. In any case, as the title from Sandburg's poem implies, her love for greater ideals had a lasting impact on her friends and teammates who became winners and that makes Hildy a winner too; like heroes in classical tragedies, her life has made the world a better place. For, as Niki had pointed out, "Winners are right by definition. They have the power to make themselves right" (p.167).

This novel opens with the words, "In 1961, the first hopeful year of John F. Kennedy's presidency, Stanton College opened its doors to the forty-first freshman class" (p. 1). Perhaps Voigt is telling this story as a metaphor for that generation of young people whose idealistic vision of a new era in American history brought them together for awhile to work as a team to try to forge a society that was more inclusive than the past social hierarchies. Like others who were momentarily shocked by the President's death, Ann is confused and distraught for a while by the death of Hildy who had come to symbolize the hope for a better world. But she, like other young people whose vision

of a new harmony was tarnished by the stark realities of death and war, gets back into the game, saddened but wiser. "She knew better than to forget, or want to.... No blind peace" (p. 198). She could face "Niki's vision of the world, chaotic and accidental--brutish... construct[ed] out of cruel facts" because of "that sense of strength and the mystery of human love" which is "Hildy's vision...beyond externals, an armor of faith, the purpose accepted though not known...certain of the answers to questions that are better not asked, wise in [the] unquestioning surrender, sure of direction if not destination" (p. 190).

In this novel and in her later works, Voigt affirms the importance of facing even the harsh and chaotic facts of life, of reaching out towards the truth. But she indicates that stark reality cannot be faced alone; it is also important to hold on to "the ties of need and responsibility and affection, and of blood" (p. 190) that Ann, and Jean too, find in her family and friends, even if their purpose and meaning is not fully understood.

The style of this novel is philosophical and thoughtful. The dialogue is complex, "filled with introspection" (Estes, 1982, p. 950; Rosser, 1983, p.20) and sounds like exceptionally intelligent conversation. Although there is some reference to the characters' impressions of President Kennedy, not much is made of the

historical period except for the portrayal of Ann's family as conservative and family-oriented. The main imagery concerns Hildy's defective sight, and her reluctance to use glasses that force her to perceive the details around her with disturbing clarity.

Some critics find this "heavy going and sluggish,... thick with philosophy" (McKenzie, 1982, p. 88) or melodramatic and excessively theatrical with exaggerated characterizations (Leverich, 1982, p. 28). Because the novel was published immediately after the award winning Dacey's Song, it likely suffers by comparison, and is generally recommended for older adolescents.

The search for identity and self-awareness is central to all her novels, yet personal fulfillment is never achieved without a journey into the mind and heart of others. In the process of defining an individual identity, Voigt's protagonists search for a balance between stretching the mind towards new adventures and retaining what the heart holds dear. Finally, Voigt's works probe the many layers of reality behind what appears to be evident, breaking the ice of fear, of ignorance, and of prejudice to reveal the exciting depths of human possibility.

CHAPTER IV

Reaching Out, Holding On, and Letting Go: Self-Development in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman Series

Cynthia Voigt's series about the Tillerman family begins with four children's search for a home in Homecoming and ends with their entrance into the adult world in Seventeen Against the Dealer. The Tillerman saga traces paths of these children and their friends as they develop the insight, expend the effort, and gather the courage to take the chance to become mature young adults, capable of making choices about the people they will love and the work they will do. In these seven novels, Voigt describes how characters escape from damaged relationships by reaching out of themselves, holding on to the natural strengths of familial bonds, and finally letting go of ties that imprison -- themes, Voigt says, which ran through her mind like a recurrent tune as she was writing the Tillerman story (Commire, #48, p. 223). It is in writing this series that Voigt clarifies her ideas about the cyclical process of her characters' self-development. Throughout the Tillerman saga, Voigt brings these themes of self-discovery and self-development to life with three motifs, which recur in a cyclic rhythm: singing, wood, and sailing. The Tillermans and their friends learn to reach out through the music they

make, hold on through some contact with wood, and let go by sailing out onto the sea. These metaphoric images appear in varying degrees in each of the Tillerman novels.

Homecoming

Homecoming (1981) traces the journey of Dicey and her younger brothers and sister from the Rhode Island shopping mall where they are abandoned by their mother, many miles from their home in Provincetown, Massachusetts, to Crisfield on the eastern shore of Maryland where they find a home with their grandmother. Dicey, age 13 and often mistaken for a boy, is tough, independent, practical, and fiercely loyal to her family. James, age 10, is intelligent both with book-sense and with the common-sense of asking the right questions for the situation. Maybeth, age 9 and a pretty blond, has intuitive knowledge of people, but she thinks and speaks slowly, and is in danger of being labeled "retarded." The youngest, Sammy, age 6, is stubbornly aggressive and enthusiastically cheerful by turns; he is sturdy and physically adept, the natural athlete of the family. The distinct personalities of these Tillerman children unfold as they seek a home and mature throughout the series. Although their mother Liza is no longer capable of caring for her children, the songs she has taught them sustain their hope as they try to survive on their own. Asleep in the parking lot where their mother abandoned them, Dicey, now in charge

as the oldest, wakes to the sound of her youngest sister Maybeth "singing softly, one of Momma's songs, about making her love a baby with no crying" (Homecoming, p.7). Maybeth, mentally slow like their mother but instinctively sensitive to the emotional aura of a situation, recognizes the needs of the children. Practical and earthbound, Dicey is the strength of the family, squarely facing the fact that her mother will not return, feeding her family, and starting to plan their future. But later, after their first day of walking, when life seems impossible, it is again Maybeth who comforts: "It's all right, Dicey.... I'm going to sing" (p.28). When the children seem most defeated and split apart by exhaustion and tension, singing brings them back to each other.

The words of the Tillermans' songs give clues to their story. In her article, "A Newbery Song for Gifted Readers," Eliza Dresang discusses the relevancy of the song-lyrics to the plot in Dicey's Song; and we may extend this thesis to the other novels. The folksong "Pretty Polly," which the Tillerman children also sing in Homecoming, tells the story of a young mother who dies after being deserted by her man. The children do not recognize this song as prophecy and merely feel content in the mutual warmth of making music. Later, however, the words of another song bring both comfort and a helpful message. Stuck on the wrong side of the

Connecticut River, in sight of a bridge that is impossible to walk across, Dicey is lost in despair:

Was this how Momma felt? Was this why Momma ran away? Because she couldn't think of anything more to do and couldn't stand any more to try to take care of her children?.... Sitting around, her head not thinking, not worrying,... a melody came into her head and she sang one of Momma's old, sad songs:

"The water is wide, I cannot get o'er. Neither have I wings to fly.... Give me a boat that will carry two, and two shall row --my love and I" (p. 80).

As the song dispels her worry and allows her to reach out in thought to the others, Dicey becomes receptive to the musical solution of her problem. They "borrow" a rowboat and row across.

Singing is also the way the Tillermans connect to the people they meet, and each song reflects the singer's character and impact on the children's moral development. In Homecoming, the Tillerman children pass time at a beach resort with a couple of vagrant teenagers, Louis and Edie. Edie has an autoharp and plays Pretty Peggy-O. "But this wasn't their song. This song was about William the false lover and how he tricked pretty Peggy-O into running away with him but then murdered her. Edie sang the song quick and cruel, with sharp metallic sounds from her instrument"

(p.57). "You're a good singer," says James, but Louis and Edie don't turn out to be good people, not innocent like Momma. After an evening of lively dancing with Maybeth, Sammy, and James, this furtive couple slips off at the first sign of a police car. Apparently Louis has induced the more innocent Edie to run off with him, suggesting that the song is prophecy. The sinister air of this couple infects the children, for at this park Sammy steals first food and then a wallet, and James exaggerates the effects of a head injury, failing to be honest to Dicey. The vagrants' singing in this seaside resort reflects a moral laxity as the children succumb to easy stolen pleasures and falsehoods. It has been a place of physical rest but also moral danger.

The children learn a contrary lesson when they meet Stewart and Windy at Yale. This time, when James steals money from Windy, rather than excusing it as justifiable as had Louis and Edie, Stewart teaches James the concept of personal integrity. Stewart produces his Dobro, a traditional folk instrument, as Maybeth agrees to sing. Though "Greensleeves" is another song about abandonment in love, the perspective now shifts from the false gaiety of the murderous lover to the righteous sorrow of the one betrayed: "Alas, my love, you do me wrong, to cast me off discourteously" (p.103). Then Stewart teaches Maybeth

another song that will be repeated in Dicey's mind throughout the Tillerman books: "Oft I sing for my friends, When death's dark form I see. / When I reach my journey's end, who will sing for me?" (p.104) The song affirms friendship as a bond that gives solace against the final separation of death. The time spent at Yale is beneficial for the children, and morally instructive for James, who will eventually return as a student.

During their wanderings, Dicey's goal had been Bridgeport, where she hoped to find a home for her sister and brothers with her aunt, the only relative her Momma had ever mentioned. But when they reach the house in Bridgeport, their aunt is dead; only her daughter Eunice remains, and there is no singing. Prim and fearful, Cousin Eunice only superficially goes through the motions of reaching out, either because duty is all she is capable of, or because, at heart, she does not want to have the children live with her. Dicey knows that she must find another place to stay when she sees Maybeth sitting outside the circle of girls on the playground, not doing the one thing that is easy and lovely to her, singing. "It was as if Maybeth wasn't even there, not even to herself" (p. 154). Music is the measure of Maybeth's mental health: "She learns songs fast, music and words. She couldn't be retarded and do that, could she?" (p.152). The Tillerman children leave

Bridgeport, and two days later, Maybeth is humming Stewart's song, "Oft I sing for my friends," reaching out again (p.180).

Wood is a metaphor Voigt uses for the theme of holding on. In an interview in 1983, she described the importance of wood:

"Wood is like water; it's one of those things that is so responsive to humans. It's like a living metaphor. Wood has the grain; it has the color; and it's never quite the same. It can be shaped into many things. You can touch it with your hands and it has a certain warmth to it.... You're in touch with something that's more real and permanent than you are-- although not necessarily more true. It's like standing next to something that's contagiously good" (Metzger and Straub, p.470).

Just as singing is the image and the means of reaching out to dispel alienation of the self, wood is Voigt's metaphor for holding on to the verities of family, home, and fellow humanity. Wood is a natural living substance, traditionally used to symbolize that which is rooted and yet keeps on growing--the family tree, the tree of knowledge that distinguishes humanity from the animal world.

Dacey's first home was in Provincetown on the beach,

nestled among the dunes, but "if you took home to mean where you rested content and never wanted to go anywhere else, Dicey had never had a home...; the ocean made her restless" (Homecoming, p. 85): it was a home without roots. As the children travel, occasionally they find resting places among trees, where they feel more a family than otherwise, but the image of wood does not become strong until they find their home in Crisfield. In Bridgeport the house they found did not prove to be a home. Its plastic artificial surfaces were "shiny clean. The gray linoleum floor gleamed, the refrigerator shone, the windows looking over a tiny yard, were polished. There was a formica-topped table in the center of the room . . ." (Homecoming, p.113). After the police, urged by Eunice, locate their mother Liza in a Boston mental hospital, now catatonic and apparently unconscious of life around her, Dicey hears Eunice discussing plans for their future, plans which threaten to separate the children. Armed with the address of another relative, their grandmother who lives on a farm on the eastern shore of Maryland, the children run away again, this time on a bus to Annapolis. From there they hitch a ride across the bay on a sailboat, and Dicey discovers what she wants to do with her life.

For Dicey, sailing is an image of freedom. The ocean is a road that never ends, always moves (Dicey's Song, p.1).

It is not home, and it makes Dicey restless (Homecoming, p.85). It never freezes, always smashing up the little ridges of ice that formed along its edges (Dicey's Song, p.138), and so it never traps a person. To have a sailboat or to be a sailboat seems a way to let go of the constraints of responsibility and to take chances, to travel without plans which ever way life blows: "A boat could be a home. The perfect home that could move around, a home that didn't close you in or tie you down," thinks Dicey the first time she sails (Homecoming, p.199). After the long summer of reaching out for her family and to her family in order to hold on, "Dicey didn't feel like finding a harbor. She knew she needed one, and they needed one, but she would rather sail along." She realizes, however, that "life isn't really an ocean and she wasn't really a little boat bobbling along on it. There were James and Maybeth and Sammy ..." (pp.199-200).

The children continue walking toward Crisfield. When they stop to earn money by picking tomatoes, the farmer threatens them physically, using a large hungry dog to keep them from continuing their journey. They are saved when Dicey puts the farmer's truck in gear, distracting him from the chase, and when the dog, rather than following them, stops to eat the biscuits they have dropped. When the farmer pursues them the next day, they escape into a circus

tent and in a wonderfully dramatic scene, are rescued by Claire, a tiny dogtrainer who has a way with her whip. Just as the children had made the final leg of their journey to Bridgeport in the car of their savior from Yale, now the owner of the circus drives them to Crisfield.

In contrast to the pristine house in Bridgeport, their future home in Crisfield is faded white clapboard, neglected, with a wooden door. The long table is "made of wood and... scrubbed to a pale, smooth finish" (p.247). The paperwood mulberry tree growing next to the house, with its four trunks held together by strong twisted wires to keep the weight of growing branches from pulling the tree apart, becomes a metaphor for their family and, later, a resting place for their mother (p.257). Here is the home they will "hold on to."

When Dicey discovers a sailboat in the barn of her grandmother's farm, she decides that the boat will be her prize if they can stay, her prize for holding on until the family finds a home (Homecoming, pp.272,302). When Dicey finally does put the boat into the water, it sinks; but she remains calm as she plans the next step. "Dicey doesn't mind, as long as she knows what to do about things," explains Maybeth (Dicey's Song, p.5). Dicey does not know enough yet to be able to let go safely; she still has a lot to learn about reaching out in order to hold on. For now,

working on the boat in the barn, scraping off the old paint and sanding it, offers Dicey respite from the constraints of taking care of her family. She escapes to the barn and begins to relax enough to learn about reaching out.

Dicey's Song

Dicey's Song (1982) is the story of how Dicey reaches out beyond the small circle of her family, finally able to share the responsibility for her sister and brothers with Gram, finally sure enough of her home to reach out, first to Jeff through music, and then to Mina and others with her own medium, writing. Now that some of her responsibilities for her sister and brothers is shared by her grandmother, Dicey becomes aware of her own developing maturity, both physical and emotional. Again, music is the metaphor for "reaching out" for all the characters. Music brings Maybeth to life, and music introduces the first adult friend into the family's life. After Bridgeport, the children finally reach Crisfield and their grandmother, a fierce and independent woman who has chased her own children away. When Dicey finally convinces her to let them stay, they gradually form a family. Gram grudgingly dares to reach out to Mr. Lingerle, the music teacher, first for Maybeth's sake as she swallows her pride and accepts his offer of extra piano lessons, and then also for his sake as she recognizes his need for them. Her insight turns out to be correct, for as

the novels progress, Mr. Lingerle benefits from the family's adventures, just as they benefit from his generous help in times of emergencies.

Dacey tells a friend that she chooses people by their courage and their music (p.154), which, for her, signifies their ability to reach out. Indeed, she meets Jeff by listening to his music; they will eventually marry. After her initial aloofness, she joins him in song, and it is through music that Jeff is introduced into the Tillerman family (pp.142-146). Eventually he brings his guitar to their house and gets Maybeth to sing. James and his new friend Toby overcome their awkwardness by discussing the words to the songs with Jeff, and soon Dacey's new friend, Mina, comes by and adds her alto. This scene illustrates the emergence from the silent desolate Tillermans of the previous generation to the current family, who begin to connect to a network of friends and to each other. Music has helped provide the courage and the confidence to build these bridges.

In the course of their first few months together, Dacey works at the grocery store with Millie, a slow-minded but wise former schoolmate of Abigail Tillerman and, through her, learns some of her grandmother's background. Dacey also suffers the humiliation of being accused of plagiarizing a story she has written about her mother;

Mina's defense of Dicey's honesty cements the beginning of their friendship which spans many years. Sammy worries Dicey because he fights, infuriated by the insulting remarks his schoolmates make about his grandmother--until she comes to the school one day as the Lone Marble Ranger, and wins their respect. Dicey and James and Gram solve their problems by thinking hard, by using their minds to come up with imaginative new possibilities for solutions to their poverty and to the isolation their differences cause them in social situations. The plot of Dicey's Song hangs more on the development of the Tillermans into capable and loving individuals than on any single event.

Soon after Gram signs adoption papers, the family is notified that their mother is dying. Gram and Dicey travel to Boston, and, after her death, bring back her ashes. Their mother's ashes rest in a wooden box chosen by Dicey, crafted by a man whose hands have "cuts like the grains of the different woods" (p.180). Dicey's hands hold the box on the long train ride south from Boston to Crisfield. She is holding on to her memories of her mother as she is holding on to her ashes in the wooden box.

Even as Dicey is clinging to the memories of her life before Crisfield, she is also letting go. Though her hands are wrapped around the wooden box that contain the ashes of her Momma, she feels "as if she were a sailboat and the

sails were furled up now, the mainsail wrapped up around the boom, and she was sitting at anchor. It felt good to come to rest.... But a boat at anchor wasn't planted there, like a tree. Furled sails were just waiting to be raised, when the sailor chose to head out again" (p.187). Later, Dicey will become a builder of boats, a career that symbolizes her combined desires to hold on with wood and to sail free.

A Solitary Blue

A Solitary Blue (1983) also begins with a mother abandoning her progeny, but this mother has money, family, and a mind that is quick and facile; she abandons her only son, seven-year old Jeff, and her professor husband to pursue a succession of charitable causes that seem more important than love and loyalty to particular people. Afraid that he will also lose his father, a professor who devotes himself to academics, Jeff tries so hard to keep from disturbing his schedule that he loses any sense of being a self. Four years after his mother's departure, he spends an enchanted summer with his mother at her homeplace in Charleston, where he is given an identity as "the last in a long line of Boudrault men" (p. 45). Because his mother, aptly named Melody, plays the guitar, Jeff decides to emulate her and spends the ensuing year struggling to learn the instrument (p.42). During that winter, the professor tries to reach out to him by giving him a Martin, a classic

guitar. Jeff appreciates the professor's efforts yet, still enamored by his mother's flashes of warmth, yearns to see her again. The next summer he discovers that, as with most other commitments, she has abandoned music and him again for something new (p.73). Jeff finally expresses his anger toward his mother, but she acts as if this first honest feeling of his is unimportant. Feeling deeply hurt and utterly alone in his world, Jeff gradually learns to row and finally reaches a sea island where he spends a night. There he painfully lets go of his belief in his mother and, by forgetting, finds an opening within himself where he can mentally escape (pp.80-91). Unlike Dicey who wants to build and preserve her boat, Jeff smashes this one so no one else will ever own it. At this point in his life he decides that, rather than risk the pain of rejection again, he will hold on to nothing except this memory, this opening inside him.

In this episode, there seems a strong correlation between the theme of letting go and the symbol of the smashed boat. Back in Baltimore with his father, Jeff buries himself in this island memory to protect himself from further hurt, ignoring school and the rest of life around him. Increasingly concerned about his son's increasing absences from school, both mental and physical, the professor clumsily helps Jeff to overcome his inner fears

and to reach out again. Jeff takes up playing the old wooden guitar again, and discovers that he plays better than his mother, who never practiced enough to gain a lasting skill. It is through his guitar playing that he meets Dicey Tillerman and her family.

The title A Solitary Blue refers to the great blue heron which Jeff first notes on his trip to the sea island outside of Charleston and then again when he and the professor search for a home on the eastern shore. In both places the ungainly heron, although nervous, remains near Jeff, letting him be there too; it represents mutual tolerance of the characters' innermost needs for honest respect.

The Runner

The Runner (1985) reaches back to the 1960's to explain some of Gram's bitterness and reluctance to accept her grandchildren and to trace the source of their mother's failure to thrive. The original Tillermans, Abigail Hackett and her husband John Tillerman, live isolated on a farm with their three children, John Jr., Samuel (Bullet), and Liza. The father walls himself in further with books and ideas, becoming self-righteous and cruelly stern (Homecoming, p.139). Similarly the mother Abigail, immured in a passive sense of duty that keeps her from reaching out (Dicey's Song, p.120-21), has let her children get away from her.

Her eldest son, John, has fled to California, letting go and holding on to nothing; Bullet, buried in anger and hatred, feels boxed in by his family. Liza has reached out and given life through her lovely singing, but is not strong enough to cope with the irresponsible wanderings of the children's father, Francis Verricker, whom she never marries. As the reader learns in Homecoming, she is unable to handle parenthood alone, and abandons her children in a parking lot. The Runner tells the story of Gram's younger son, Sam, called "Bullet," who, like his sister Liza, cannot hold on -- whose father's stern unbending hate and the passive non-resistance of his mother forbids him from "reaching out" and keeps them from "holding on." Long ago, before he left for college, his brother Johnny had built a sailboat and a treehouse, but Bullet's anger makes him a "breaker" (The Runner, pp.13, 106). He smashes the barn door rather than fixing it (p. 95), and he lacks the patience to sand the lovely wood boat, the fourteen-footer, that his employer and mentor, Patrice, is building (p.78).

Bullet tries to dispel some of his anger at his father's dictatorial demands by running. The book realistically portrays both the difficult effort of long-distance running as well as the therapeutic satisfactions it provides. In school he remains aloof from the controversies about the Vietnam draft and the recent integration of the

school, participating only in the cross-country team where he helps lead the school to success. His best friend is Patrice, an oysterman who has emigrated from France. Patrice reconstructs sailboats, lovingly restoring the beauty of the original wood just as he tries to rebuild Bullet, who is buffeted by "the old wind in the old anger" of his father and of his own racial and social prejudices. When Bullet discovers that the friend he admires so much is black, he has to rethink his racial prejudices. Reluctantly he agrees to help train the new runner on the team, an intelligent black student named Tamer Shipp, who is trying to earn a scholarship for college. Bullet comes to respect Tamer's grit and determination, and, although he himself signs up to fight in Vietnam, elicits a promise from Tamer that he will avoid the draft.

Bullet is afraid of being boxed in by his father's stern orders, by fear, or even by his feelings for his sister Liza (p.94). He cannot "reach out" himself and connect; he cannot "hold on" and remain in his home; but he does finally see a way to enable his mother to survive. In blatant defiance of his father's orders, Bullet sits down at the table to eat with his mother and father. When his father protests, "the anger pouring out of [him], blowing all around him: go away, go away" (p.153), Bullet sits firm and calm: "It's her table too" (p.154). His father lets it

go. Bullet wins the battle, holding the remains of his family together if just for an evening:

The table they ate at was made of wood, scrubbed down to smoothness. The joints between the separate boards had been made so close that you could see just a thin pencil line where one piece ended and the next began. The table had been put together the same way that fourteen-footer had, somebody's best work. It was as old as the farmhouse (p. 154).

The table reunites Bullet with his mother, Abigail, in this episode just as it unites Abigail and her grandchildren years later in Dicey's Song. Bullet does his best when running at the next cross-country meet, and his mother slips away from the farm to watch him, to let him know she cares more than she can say (p.165).

On his eighteenth birthday, Bullet drops out of school, enlists, and buys the fourteen-foot sailboat to give it to his mother. The boat that she has been using, the sailboat that her older son Johnny had made long ago, is rotting, uncared for by her husband, who does not sail, and by herself because she lacks the strength to take it out of the water each year. Bullet then dismantles the old sails, scrapes the hull, and carefully stores it in the barn, where Dicey will discover it on her first day in Crisfield. Bullet is not able to work with wood himself, "to hold on"

in his own life, but he can provide the means for his mother. He cannot get her out of her own box, but he can "loosen a board or two for her" (p.174).

Bullet dies in Vietnam. When his mother hears the news, she takes the phone to town and throws it through the plate glass window of the telephone company. Then she strides back to the boat:

What was that song Liza sang? "The water is wide, cannot get o'er," the voice in her head sang, "And neither have I wings to fly. Bring me a boat---" Well she had the boat. And the wide water ran, she knew, around the whole world, ringing it around, the encircling oceans that somehow contained and connected all the lands within (p. 181).

The wood that symbolizes "holding on" can be crafted into a vessel that supports the sailor as he or she "lets go" and, secure in his own humanity, connects with the adventure of humanity at large.

Come A Stranger

Ten years later, Come A Stranger (1986) explains how Wilhemina (Mina) Smiths has come to terms with being a black minority in a white society. She is proud and ambitious after a summer at an exclusive ballet school in New England where she had earned a scholarship, learning more about

music, dance, and the world outside Crisfield than she knew existed. Music has enabled her to "reach out" of her rural black family-centered world. After that first summer, she is even a little scornful of the cultural limitations of Crisfield and lives in anticipation of the next summer when she can return to the magic of ballet. The music stops, however, when she realizes that the camp needed her only as a representative of the black race and that, in this second summer, she is no longer welcome as an equal. During the previous winter, her body has matured into the curves indigenous to her family and some of her race so that she no longer fits into the traditional white world of ballet and is asked to leave. She is devastated. Needing something to hold onto, she turns to wood: "She wanted to put her palms up against the bark of the trees, to feel how strong and solid the trees were..., to get back in touch with those things that didn't look at her and see just the outside Mina" (p.49).

After she returns home, her new friendship with Tamer Shipp, now finished school and a young minister, helps her learn to accept herself and her people as strong and beautiful: "The faces were all the colors of wood, seasoned and stained, oak and pecan, maple and pine" (p.74). This is a world she will hold on to. She understands the image of the tree that bleeds, the punishment in Dante's Hell for

those who despised their own bodies enough to kill themselves (p.75). She finally accepts herself as she is, knowing the strength of her mind and her courage to learn, holding on to what and whom she has, and using these strengths to reach out in new directions.

Sons From Afar

In Sons From Afar (1987), James also feels like a stranger. More intellectual than his classmates, he tries to hide his true nature in order to fit in; as a result, however, he feels dishonest and cowardly and confused about who he really is. Driven by these questions and hoping that his father's identity will help him define his own, James ropes his brother Sammy into a quest for facts about the father he barely remembers and Sammy has never known. The search carries them first to Cambridge, Maryland, to a third grade teacher who remembers their father, Francis Verricker, as bright and intelligent, mischievous but a natural leader. The high school principal remembers their father differently, recalling a cheating trouble maker whom he enjoyed throwing out of school. Finally, the boys' quest leads them to a seedy bar in Baltimore where some merchant seamen identify their father as a man who reneges on his promises and debts, a fun-loving man with no staying power. The seamen take out their frustration at Verricker on James and Sammy with curses, insults, and finally fists. Purged

of their own anger by this dangerous brawl, Sammy and James return to Crisfield, fearing that they may have inherited Verricker's inability to do anything right for long. Yet within the context of their family and with the help of their newfound friendships, both learn to play out their strengths and become better men than the father who lost his way. The imagery in this book centers on stars, the moon, and exploring, as the boys work out their definitions of fatherhood; stars are distant pinpricks of light, that Sammy would like to explore (p. 10), looking constant like James' hopeful image of fathers: "always there, they don't change" (p. 13). Dicey knows, however, that the stars that had made their light millions of years ago "already were burning with new light" (Dicey's Song, p.1982). She has no desire to renew the memory of the father who had abandoned them so long ago. And before she died, her moonfaced mother has lain in a hospital bed, her face "flat and empty, so far away, as if it hung miles above the earth and could not be bothered by anything happening on the little planet below" (Homecoming, p. 163). Like the stars which seem so near and yet actually are so far away, their relationship to their father and mother sheds only a faint light on who they might become.

In Sons from Afar, music again acts as a metaphor for reaching out of oneself. When Maybeth reaches out to her

schoolmates as a member of the chorus, James is afraid to join because he thinks it would emphasize his image as a "dork" (p.17). Only when he learns to accept himself and gains the courage to be himself does he decide to join the singing group. He and Sammy sing together, partly to watch over Maybeth (pp.213-14). The words of the songs in Homecoming and Dicey's Song tell the story of Liza, the mother of Dicey, James, Sammy, and Maybeth and the only daughter of Gram. In Sons From Afar, the song from Shakespeare's The Tempest, "Full fathom five thy father lies" is perhaps the real news about their father, either literally or figuratively: "Of his bones are coral made... Nothing of him but doth change" (p.46). The mystery of their father's character and his whereabouts is never solved for the Tillermans. In The Runner he is introduced as a figure who plays music on the jukebox and gets people to have fun for a time, but he does not join in himself nor does he commit himself to others. For his children, he is forever absent.

Singing and music not only reach out, but they invite others to join in. Liza and her youngest daughter, Maybeth, are naturally generous; Dicey and the other children learn to join in the music and the world. Their success contrasts with those who cannot sing. Although their father can make music happen, he doesn't have the character to sing.

Bullet, Liza's youngest brother, was unable to carry a tune. Too consumed by hatred and anger for his father who built walls rather than music, Bullet would not or could not reach out of himself and was thus destroyed.

Seventeen Against the Dealer

In Seventeen Against the Dealer (1989), the last book of the Tillerman series, Dicey has tried a year at college but finds this conventional road to financial independence lacking. She wants to support herself by building sailboats. To Dicey, building sailboats is a metaphor for a balance between responsibility and independence. Before she arrived at Crisfield, Dicey has her first experience sailing: "Boat, waves, water and wind: through the wood she felt them working for her. She was not directing, but accompanying them, turning them to her use.... It wasn't power she felt, guiding the tiller, but purpose" (Homecoming p.201). Now she is an adult and her sister and brothers seem safe. James is a student at Yale, Sammy and Maybeth are in high school with friends and activities of their own, and Gram seems to be getting along without her. So Dicey throws herself into developing a business, making her own paths without signs. Metaphorically, she learns the risks of sailing without a chart, discovering by painful experience, the need for insurance, written contracts, and financial savvy. Her ignorance about common business

practices leads to her financial failure, as does her misplaced trust in the drifter Cisco Kidd, who may, unbeknownst to Dicey, be her father. He asks a lot of curious questions and then absconds with the money that he may feel is rightly his (Robertson, 1992, p. 397).

So involved does she become in the quagmire of business that she almost forgets to hold on to her family and to Jeff whom she has promised to marry. At the end, she finds that the cycle of reaching out, holding on, and letting go is never completed; "She wasn't finished learning" and she wouldn't be until, in Gram's words she was "older than dead" (p.170). Letting go is dangerous, "But never building [a sailboat], that would be a real failure" (p.172).

In Homecoming, Dicey learned to hold on, to keep her family together, to find a home and hold on to it. In Dicey's Song, Dicey and her family can afford to reach out, to learn how to trust and include others in their lives. By the time of Seventeen Against the Dealer, Dicey's family is strong enough to let her take the risk of letting go. Sammy keeps her from ignoring Maybeth, and Maybeth keeps Gram from succumbing to her pride and sickness. Dicey's family can now afford to give her "the chance to take a chance." And Dicey has "the eye to recognize it...the hand, to reach out and hold onto it. And the heart... or wherever courage came from (p.181)." With Jeff, who first reached out to her with

song, and the larch wood she has had the courage to hold on to, she has the freedom to build a sailboat. "She'd probably make mistakes, but her mistakes would tell her what she needed to learn." She can afford to do a little letting go.

Critical Perspectives

Critics almost universally praise the Voigt's Tillerman novels, especially for their distinctive characterizations, even of the minor characters, which remain consistent throughout the series. Behrman represents the general consensus: "Voigt permits readers to know her characters in a way they rarely know people in real life" (1984, p. 184). Dicey and Gram are often singled out as particularly memorable (Beetz and Niemeyer, 1990, p. 338-9).

Voigt is accused of stereotyping in The Runner and Come a Stranger (Nelms, Nelms, and Horton, 1985, p. 84; Sutton, 1986, p.40; Goodin, 1985, p.16); however, these books merely portray in "meticulously authentic" detail the racism that existed in that part of the country in the sixties. Voigt declares, "These are American books and it's part of American life. I raised a few questions about it. What do we really think? What would we really do?" (Interview by Bennett, p. 13). Her characterizations of both African Americans include a wide variety of individuals: the runner Tamer Shipp who, though already married at twenty, plans to

attend college (and succeeds); the French-born Patrice, who played a part in the French resistance movement against the Nazis; the kindly owner of the circus who protects Dicey and her siblings from an evil tomato planter; the intelligent natural leader, Mina; and a host of more minor characters. Expressions of racism range from the honestly felt opinions of Bullet, who has not experienced or thought about the implications of his prejudice, to the mean-spirited but educated rationale of the mistress of the ballet camp for not retaining Mina after she has grown.

Voigt's characterizations are so inclusive that readers may recognize some uncomfortable realities of our society. Kathleen Leverich (1981, p.370) remarks on the "alarmingly hostile characterizations of most adults" in her New York Times review of Homecoming, and this theme is reiterated in a review of A Solitary Blue, where the mother Melody is a "monster" (Rohmann, 1983, p. 140), an "appalling mother-philanthropist" (Langton, 1983, p. 34) who steals Jeff's childhood by insisting on remaining irresponsible and self-centered herself (Plotz, 1988). Indeed Voigt's children must become adults early as they are abandoned either physically or emotionally by incompetent parents or threatened by selfish adults who place their own gain above their concern for children. Realistic fiction portrays the world as it really is for many children previously ignored

in literature for young adults. Moreover, Voigt's gallery of adults includes an equal number of parents or surrogate parents who model intelligent concern and talent for nurturance: Patrice in The Runner does more for Bullet than both of his parents; Brother Thomas in A Solitary Blue guides Jeff's father to show the care he really feels; Gram, determined to succeed with her second batch of charges, shows a depth of caring and a width of wisdom that any parent would envy. Most critics find Voigt's portrayals of both adults and children in the Tillerman series a realistic and intriguing mixture of self-centeredness and self-denial and of strengths and weaknesses.

Voigt has a strong sense of place; her settings, particularly the marshes and water scenes, offer comfort to the characters as they seek to develop inner strength. On the long trip to Bridgeport, Dicey takes the children from busy Route 1 toward the shore whenever they need rest and relief. Eight years later, while she is trying to build boats for a living, it is still the quiet rural roads and marshes that inspire Dicey's best thinking. When the characters must travel into urban settings, they are oppressed by the concrete, the trash, and the closed-in feelings of city life, whether it be New Haven, Bridgeport, Baltimore, or Annapolis.

Several critics see parallels to the mythic adventures

of Odysseus in the first two books of the series (Jameson, 1986, p. 3; Robertson, 1988, p. 83). James Henke, in a fairly lengthy analysis of Homecoming (1985, pp. 45-52) also finds numerous allusions in the plot to the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel," the story that James tells his siblings as Dicey is trying to figure out a plan after her mother has abandoned them. Dicey's Song, which won the coveted Newbery Award in 1983, is generally recognized as more cohesive and fully realized than its predecessor, Homecoming (Sutherland, 1982, p.38; Wilms, 1982, p. 50). Both books are recommended as "classics" or "collectibles" in a number of critical sources about young adult novels: Seventeen Against the Dealer was selected as a Booklist Young Adult Editors' Choice in 1989. A Solitary Blue is another favorite of critics who appreciate the delicately precise portrait of Jeff's pain and the eventual realization of inner strength in both himself and his father (Jobe, 1983, p. 1025; Langton, 1983, p. 34).

The length and complexity of some of the novels concerns some critics (Colwell, 1984, p. 147; Kaye, 1981, p. 160; Stein , 1982, p. 55) who feel that young adults who are only average readers may find the stories dull and difficult to read (Sutton, 1986,p.40). Others chide Voigt for stretching the readers' credulity in resolving her plots (Klockner, 1981, p. 439;) or using her characters to preach

her views (Twichell, 1986, p.749). Yet these criticisms are tempered with recognition of how Voigt's digressions and surprises add to the thought-provoking nature of her books.

In her Newbery Acceptance, Voigt describes "A stunning book [as one which] engages the imagination, sets to work the intelligence, and fills the spirit" (The Horn Book Magazine, August 1983, p. 404). The Tillerman books are complicated and full of hard facts of life, but they fill the spirit with the wisdom and courage of their characters.

CHAPTER V

Learning to Live: Ways of Knowing

For Cynthia Voigt, the key to defining an independent self is the ability to learn, to develop strengths and to gain adequate knowledge about the context in which he or she lives. The ability and the patience and the chance to know what choices are possible are prerequisites for constructing an individual identity strong and capable enough to survive and support partnership with other human beings, to "protect and border and greet each other." Voigt believes that this maturity is important not just for relationships between males and females but for relationships between young adults and their families and even for the relationship of young people with their emerging selves. Individuals cannot be autonomous and authentic until they jell their own identities, accepting their limitations and working toward dreams appropriate to their strengths, and the catalyst for this is learning. Coming to know oneself, especially in relationship to one's world and to others, is a major theme in the novels following the Tillerman series. In Women's Ways of Knowing, (Belenky, Clinchy, Blythe, & Goldberger; 1986), the authors posit five ways that women (and perhaps also men) learn.

(1) Silence: a position in which women experience

themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority;

(2) Received knowledge: a perspective from which women conceive themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own;

(3) Subjective knowledge: a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited;

(4) Procedural knowledge: a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge;

(5) Constructed knowledge: a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing (p. 15).

These are a useful tool for understanding the various ways of learning about themselves and their world. Although the title of the study by Belenky and her cohorts indicates that these are steps in the ways that women learn, all of Voigt's main characters can be said to pass through these steps in their quest to form workable identities and solve the dilemmas that block that quest. Her protagonists begin as obedient and uncritical, silent or inarticulate about their

own reactions to life and people around them. A major step towards growth is their realization that they can express opinions and ideas that are different from the expectations or conventions of the context in which they live. Although these ideas are often adopted wholesale from another authority, this first experience of assertion is essential to the process of defining a separate identity. Voigt describes this first step in her novel about a "nice girl" who inadvertently becomes unconventional.

Izzy, Willy-Nilly

In Izzy, Willy-Nilly (1986), Izzy Lingard, a pretty fifteen-year old cheerleader, enjoys high school, and concerns herself with popularity, prettiness, and parties. Like Anne at the beginning of Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers, she is content living according to the upper-middle class values of her family and friends and does not spend much time reflecting on them. When she is invited to a party by a senior, Marco, she gladly accepts because she hopes to attract the attention of Tony Marcel, the boy she really admires. On the way home from the party, Marco, drunk from too many beers, passes out and they crash into an elm. When Izzy awakes in the hospital, she has lost part of one leg and is now "crippled." To please her parents and to appease her friends, she acts like the "nice girl" she is, cheerful and brave. She acts according to the knowledge she

has "received" from her family.

But inside, she has a vision of a miniature Izzy, a doll-like creature that mirrors her subjective emotions, the grief and sorrow she really feels, and also the anger and hurt. She keeps these separate, trying to please her friends and family by appearing as normal as possible during the day but weeping at night, privately. Her public self goes through the motions of acquiescing to the steps of recovery while her inner self, kept private, rebels and expresses her anger and her fear of the stares she will inevitably receive when she returns to school.

While she recovers, Rosamunde, unpopular in high school because of her forthright intelligence and her different values, imposes her friendship on Izzy. She shocks Izzy and her mother with her practical realism. But her probing questions force Isobel to reflect on her situation, the refusal of her friends to accept her as part of their group now that she is physically different and the narrowness of her family's values. Before her accident, Izzy had been content with her superficial knowledge of her world and the people around her; now she is willing to see beneath the surfaces. Her friendship with Rosamunde has given her the courage to face reality and search for viable solutions. "You're a good person to be around, you know?" she tells Rosamunde. "You sort of make me think about things and get

me doing things. I was pretty stupid, I think, about people, before--' 'Well, experience broadens us--or what's the good of it, right?'" answers her new friend, expressing Voigt's conviction that reflecting and knowing about life is vital to personal growth.

With Rosamunde's help, Izzy has the courage to face the new experiences of being different in school, a girl on crutches without a leg. Now Izzy thinks about people's responses to her and reacts authentically, knowing people as they are beneath their social veneer, and relishing the reactions of authentic people to her person who reflects on the deeper meanings of their interactions. In this novel, Voigt is reiterating the theme of her early books where characters come to know themselves by moving beyond their first received impressions and self-centered subjective impressions and reaching out toward new experiences to learn more about themselves and their world. Like Mina in Come a Stranger, Izzy's first experiences in accepting the limitations of having a different kind of body in our society are painful but ultimately lead to a recognition of her more important strengths.

In Voigt's novels, children are often more capable than the adults around them because they are willing to expend more effort and imagination in trying to find solutions to life's obstacles and less likely to accept the status quo.

In Building Blocks (1984) and in Tree by Leaf, (1988), the young protagonists rescue their families from their overwhelming passivity. They question the knowledge received from authoritarian figures like parents and interpret its validity according to their subjective experience. Voigt explores this reliance on authoritarian knowledge in the two following books.

Building Blocks

Building Blocks (1984), opens with another argument between Brann's outspoken energetic mother and the quiet rather passive father he despises. His mother wants to sell a farm they have recently inherited to pay for the law school where she has recently been accepted. His father refuses, passively blaming their financial problems on fate. Disgusted at his passivity, Kevin asks, "What does that mean, it's fate?" His father mumbles a response: "Fate? It's what has to happen and you can't fight it" (p. 30).

Exhausted by his father's hopelessness, Brann wanders into his father's basement workshop and crawls into a fortress built of oak blocks. These blocks are from his father, handed down from his own childhood. When Brann awakens from the deep sleep he has fallen into, he finds himself in Kevin's room, the overly responsible, undersized boy that turns out to be his father as a boy. Kevin is the oldest son of a construction worker, made gruff and harsh by

his experiences staving off poverty in the days of the 1930s Depression. As Brann, now trapped in the past, follows the boy who will become his father through his days, he begins to understand why his father is so timid and cautious; every mistake Kevin makes as the caretaker of his brothers and sisters is harshly castigated; he receives the blame for all the faults of his sisters and brothers from parents too overworked and fearful to be gentle. But Brann is still impatient with his father's passive acceptance of his situation. When Kevin will not or can not stop his twin siblings from torturing the frogs, Kevin defends himself: "It's fate." "Fate, my left foot" (p. 43), Brann says. He knew he was angry like his mother got when his father used that expression.

In an effort to elicit some sense of adventure from his father, Brann rashly convinces Kevin to explore an underground cave, promising him respect and friendship. When Brann becomes hopelessly lost, he thinks about the nature of his plight and tries to fathom the best response to life:

"It's fate. And you had to grab fate if you were worth anything. 'That's the hard truth,' he said to himself, 'you hear?' If you have to grab fate then you grab it, like Arthur grabbed Excalibur to take the sword out of the stone. Because he must have grabbed Excalibur

the same way, at the end, to throw it back into the water, the hilt hard and heavy in his hand, and both of them were fate" (p. 68).

This thought keeps him brave, but he can't find an exit until Kevin appears. It is Kevin's caution and his thoughtful attention to detail that saves them.

Brann begins to see the value of these traits in his father. When he finally returns to his present day life, he thinks about his family can solve their dilemma. Realizing that his father's drawings might have monetary value that would allow his mother to follow her dream of graduate school, he convinces his father to suggest a compromise to his mother. Brann suggests, "Tell her it's fate".... 'Fate isn't what either of us thought it was,' Brann said to himself, the idea going off inside of him like a sparkler. Fate wasn't a smothering pillow, and it wasn't a steel sword blade. Fate was possibilities, all the possibilities, even the impossible ones" (p. 120). This compromise will allow his mother to attend law school and his father to retain the farm he has loved so dearly as a child.

How does Brann become so wise about his family's fate and the possibilities that might exist? Perhaps Brann's journey to his father's boyhood is a metaphor for his willingness to imagine the reason's for his father's passivity, a loving desire to understand the man whose

weakness threatens his own sense of family security. Voigt explores the same mysterious access to seeing and understanding in Tree by Leaf (1988).

Tree by Leaf

Set in rural Maine right after World War I, Tree by Leaf tells the story of Clothilde, age thirteen, discouraged by the changes in her mother when her handsome father, Benjamin Speer, returns from World War I with his face horridly disfigured by a war injury. The son of a wealthy manufacturer of electric carriages, he had married a Catholic orphan and been dismissed from Yale. His father has allowed the family to live with them but treated them like social outcasts. When Benjamin decides to join the cavalry, taking his magnificent horse Bucephalus, his wife and children have been banished to Speer Point in Maine, an old estate which has been deeded to Clothilde by an aunt of the same name. During the first years of war, his wife had managed the farm with hard work, living on garden produce and mussels and clams gathered from the sea. However, now Benjamin has returned. Broken in spirit and ashamed of his disfiguration, he hides in the old boathouse and lives like an animal, not eating the food they bring him or keeping clean. Clothilde's mother has stopped performing the daily chores, playing the role of a lady of leisure, leaving the responsibilities of raising her youngest daughter, Deidre,

and managing the household to Clothilde and their servant, Lou. Nate, Clothilde's older brother abdicates his responsibility, running off to his wealthy grandfather who has offered to raise him as a gentleman and heir to the factory which his father has refused to inherit. Distraught and confused about how to manage this sudden responsibility, Clothilde hears a Voice, a Voice whom she thinks may be God. It seems to promise her that Nate will not go off on a cruise with his friends, that Lou will be able to escape from her father who hits in her when he has been drinking, and that Speer Point is not hers. After her encounter with this mysterious Voice, Clothilde is able to see the land around her with amazing clarity. She sees each leaf in detail and understands that, as the leaf grows, so grows the tree. The next day, a thick fog envelops the land. Lou's father is lost at sea; Lou has escaped her father's abuse but at a cost that horrifies Clothilde--Lou's father has died at sea. She finds that Nate has used the excuse of a cruise to escape to their grandfather's house, and that her parents are thinking of selling Speer Point to support them. With her new clarity of vision, she begins to understand the adults around her. She discovers that her mother has ceased to manage the household in order to play the part of the gentlewoman that she thinks her husband will love again. And she discovers that her father has considerable artistic

talent that can be marketed. In understanding the truths of their situation and facing reality as it is, the family succeeds beyond any of their wildest dreams; Clothilde's ability to reflect deeply on the nature of people and the possibilities in their situations eventually enables her to become a renowned psychologist; the family sells the lumber from the land to finance her education. She sees that her sister's greed is a need for affection and is able to guide her toward a more satisfactory life, a life in which she breeds dogs that satisfy her need for undivided affection. Eventually Clothilde bequeaths the land to a young relative she has only met once, but whom she has perceived has the same stubborn independence as herself.

In this novel, Voigt's young hero seems to develop insight beyond the adults in her life by the same kind of magic that enabled Brann to understand the motivations of his father and mother. This insight seems to be "received" from some supernatural force; it is knowledge that enables her to see but not always to understand. Both Brann and Clothilde question the knowledge they "receive" and, finding it inadequate, invent their own personal explanations. They seem to intuit solutions where the whole family can work together in a partnership which supports the dreams of all the members. In ensuing novels, Voigt explores the importance of using procedural knowledge to challenge fate.

In Jackaroo (1985) and On Fortune's Wheel (1990), Voigt's heroes are able to succeed only because they have attained procedural knowledge, despite the limitations of their historical context.

Jackaroo

In the medieval setting of Jackaroo, the peasants, especially the women, are silenced by fear and suspicion. They gossip and tell each other the old stories, but halfway doubt the truth of all that they hear. Gwyn is different because she asks questions and imagines the feelings of others. While snowbound, she and the young Lordling trade stories and information about their different lives, and Gwyn finds the costume of the mythical Jackaroo; her knowledge is based on rumors which she believes to have some truthful authority. On her return from the cottage where she and the young Lordling have been trapped by the snow, the elder Lord mistakenly believes that she has failed to bring his son home alive and threatens her with his sword; afraid, her parents fail to defend her. The Lordling returns just in time and she is released, but she has lost trust in both her family and the omniscience of those that rule the land: "She had never understood how alone she was. She had never understood anything" (Jackaroo, p. 129). The elderly Lord sees that a permanent change has taken place in her: "The irony of it is that now you will never trust me,

and now you can trust me for anything" (p. 130). From now on, Gwyn will not receive the words she hears as necessarily true, but as wearing masks. For her as for other subjective knowers, "Truth is no longer conceived as absolute and singular but multiple and infinite" (Belenky, et al., p. 62-63). For the most part, Gwyn learns from reflecting on what she hears and sees, questioning the meanings behind even the words of the Lords, trying to see behind the mask. Gwyn does not learn to think beyond the subjective level. Without access to formal learning or even books, she has no way of developing a measure of objectivity or even conceiving of the difference between what she hears and what she experiences. She will always believe that words, even her own, wear masks: "She could hear in her imagination how she would tell the tales [of her exploits], and how they would change in the telling" (p. 288).

Similarly, Dicey, in Seventeen Against the Dealer, shows impressive achievements as a subjective knower who can trust her own instincts, and she moves even further than Gwyn into the broader and more complex level of "procedural knowing," for she attempts the ambitious career of boatbuilding entirely on her own. Though Dicey has been exposed to formal education, having completed two years of college, she finds traditional knowledge irrelevant to her goal of building boats. Early in her life she had been

abandoned by both father and mother, and "the system" of state and school authority failed to provide adequate support for her or her siblings. Since she and her family do not fit the conventional social definitions, she is distrustful of "received knowledge." As a subjective knower, she trusts her intuitions and feelings more than institutional authorities or booklore. Her priorities are work and gut-feeling: "Dicey wished she had the energy to think about everything she was hearing and seeing.... She had the feeling that she knew what her life was for" (Voigt, 1989, p. 15). Ironically, her brother James and her fiance Jeff, similarly betrayed by parent figures in their youth, find comfort in "received knowledge"; they concur with the opinion of a professor: "He really believes that literature is important... because if people read and feel and think, they live better lives" (Voigt, 1989, p. 18). In spite of her hard work and faith in her "felt" instincts, Dicey fails at business because her scope of knowing is too narrow. She works and plans without asking questions or seeking information from other people. Like other women who have reason to distrust higher authority, Dicey looks only to her experiences for truth. In an attempt to control the unpredictable and fragile world she perceives, Dicey works harder and plans. After the theft of her tools, Dicey writes down all the figures and makes her decision to work

on Claude's boats looking at the numbers and balancing the time and the money (p. 53). Planning and budgeting time and money are the procedures Dicey tries to use to objectify her experience, to reify the control she feels she must have. In the end, Dicey's business fails because she has been too proud to ask for advice and too busy to pay attention. She has failed because she has not reached beyond the subjective level of knowledge. Like Gwyn, Dicey has been unable to imagine a new way of living that brings together her need for love and her love of independence and freedom. In the next novel, Voigt's heroine succeeds in construct her own compromises using both her sense of the importance of holding on to traditional ties and her courage in practicing new skills.

On Fortune's Wheel

In On Fortune's Wheel the heroine gradually achieves the highest levels of knowledge. From the same silent society as Gwyn, Birle has secretly learned to read. After her first fearful apprehension of the illegal burden, she receives the knowledge gladly and is attracted to learning, first from the few stories she reads and then from Orien with whom she travels. Quickly recognizing the inadequacy of her knowledge, she humbly puts her trust in first Orien and then her master Joaquim. Under the tutelage of Joaquim, she learns the powers of herbs for healing and the power

structure of the city. Like Gwyn, she feels betrayed when her master is too afraid to defend her against the unwelcome advances of Corbel, the evil prince of the city. Birle now trusts her own experiences as equally valid as the knowledge received from her master and his books. She becomes enthusiastic about learning and practicing her skills of writing and healer. At this stage she becomes a procedural learner, combining her experiential learning and her received knowledge systematically to strengthen her power in the city among the people and to use her status as a slave of the Prince's house to search for Orien. After she rescues Orien and returns him to health, they return to the court, to a life of luxury far beyond her childhood dreams and knowledge. But here again she feels silenced by her lack of sophistication and by the feminine role she is expected to play. Rather than be subordinated to Orien's identity and surrender her separate self for the sake of her love for him, Birle moves to the fifth mode of knowing: relinquishing the life of easy security and comfort, she chooses a new life where she can construct her own self-definitions. In her new role as herbal healer and manager of a farm, she values both the "feminine" subjective knowledge of her personal particular experiences and the "masculine" objective information garnered from texts and teachers. In inventing her new role she has integrated both

traditions of learning so that the knowledge she constructs may be inclusive and informed by a wide variety of sources.

On Fortune's Wheel is a feminist romance, a feminist wish-fulfilment for adolescents. At the outset Birle is rescued by a handsome prince from her stepmother who treats her like a servant and a father too distant and weak to care. But she finds that even the handsome Orien cannot rescue her from the harsher cruelties of evil in the wider world. She must learn to rescue herself, not with physical beauty but with strength and skill and courage. In the end she has it all on her own terms. In Birle, even more than in Gwyn or Dicey, Voigt embodies the feminist who wants to do her own work as well as to love. Having outgrown her adolescent dreams of a life without labor, Birle is rewarded with her daughter Lyss and with her own farm. But this is also a romance where hero and heroine are reunited:

Orien stood before her with their life in his hands to give her, and Birle--as contrary as Nan said--could only think of herself. What of her own life? What of her own work?.... Must she give that up?

Birle could have laughed at herself. She had gone beyond a place where the world could tell her must. Aye, and they both had. Whatever Orien's work, she would grow the herbs and prepare the medicines, she would be herself and his wife too,

and the mother to Lyss and whatever other children they had. She would be each of these, in the same way that Orien would be each of his puppets....Her life was in her own hands. (p. 287).

Voigt's heroines live as individuals with physical, mental, and moral integrity, wise in knowing the importance of balancing along the continuums of work and love, of social justice and personal connectedness, as Gwyn learns in her forays as Jackaroo, as Dicey learns through her venture into business, and as Birle learns in her struggles with both enslavement and idle luxury.

Voigt honors two kinds of knowledge--both the "instinctual" knowledge of people that comes from paying attention to interrelationships, and the intellectual knowledge that comes from studying the written word. Generally, knowledge of people, called "instinctual" because its logic has not been articulated, is either "received" or subjective. When the source of this knowledge is family or social tradition, it is validated by the authority of these institutions. When individuals question the validity of this authority, they begin to rely on their own experiences and observations to validate their ideas. To the degree that each person's experience is limited, this kind of knowledge is narrow and often inadequate in new situations. Procedural knowledge which included academic knowledge

widens personal experience, providing a range of vicarious experiences and authoritarian interpretations. For Voigt as well as Belenky et al., using academic procedures to extend and deepen personal experiences and prejudices is the key to becoming an independent authority, able to construct one's own values and to create one's own interpretations of experience. But academic knowledge without personal experience can also be used as a wall that blocks and limits; Bullet's father lived this way and destroyed his family and his farm. On the other hand, Dicey failed in business because she failed to follow procedures to learn about the world beyond her personal experience. For Voigt, individuals grow as they learn to balance and apply 'intuitive' knowledge of people and the social rules they create with the 'intellectual' apprehension of information and skills that enable accomplishment and conversation within the social world.

The Vandemark Mummy

In The Vandemark Mummy (1991), the mystery is solved and a life is saved by both the experiential or subjective knowledge of Phineas Hall and the procedural scholarship of his sister, Althea. Phineas, twelve, and Althea, fifteen, arrive in a college town in Maine with their professor father, who has finally received a position where he can teach in his own field. Phineas is socially adept, an

attractive young man who makes friends easily. Althea, shyer, following her father's footsteps, studies classical Greek as well as other ancient mythologies that define "Western culture," preferring to read rather than to mix with others. Their mother has taken a prestigious position on the other side of the country in Portland, Oregon. They are barely settled into their routine when collection of Egyptian artifacts arrives, including a mummy with a lovely face painted on the wrappings and some sort of writing visible on the feet. Professor Hall is put in charge of the collection, much to the chagrin of his colleague, the ambitious Dr. Simard, called "Rugman" by his students. Ken Simard hangs around, helping with the unwrapping and volunteering background information, especially when the press is around. When Althea notes that the writing on the mummy's feet looks like Greek, perhaps poetry, this self-avowed expert undermines her suggestion, asserting the authority of his maturity and of his formal education. When the mummy is kidnaped and her feet smashed, it is the unquestioning trust of Simard's authority that keeps anyone from imagining what turns out to be the truth, and it is Althea's trust in Dr. Simard's character as a scholar that prevents her from seeing him as a dangerous criminal. The minds of Althea and the others are thus silenced by Dr. Simard's apparent authority. When Althea started to trust

her own observations and experiences, informed by her study of Greek poetry and her knowledge of scholarship, she solves the mystery. But, thinking like a scholar about unknitting the truth, she forgets to consider how Simard the person might react to her suspicions and foolishly confronts him alone with her solution. "That was dumb. Because it was a criminal case. I thought [the mystery] out, but I wasn't thinking [about the crime]" (p. 184). The scholarly Althea leaves a message to her brother in a code, although there was no practical reason not to communicate directly. This academic impulse also puts her in danger.

In contrast to his sister, Phineas is efficient and straightforward, relying on his experience with people to form his judgements. However, his mistrust in his own abilities to understand keep him from recognizing the importance of his own comprehension. "I'm just a kid," he says again and again. But his mind registers more than he admits. After a day of struggling to figure out where Althea has disappeared to, he wakes up in the middle of the night: "he knew where he might find Althea. He didn't know how he knew..., didn't care where the idea had come from" (p. 161). When he is outside the library, he uses his knowledge about himself and his usual habits of thinking to carefully systemize his search; his persistence pays off and he finds his sister.

Voigt gives credibility and value to both the instinctual type of thinking, that seems magic and illogical because it is based on unarticulated observations and the more consciously logical systematic study of a situation. Both Phineas and Althea are successful because they finally construct new ideas by admitting the authority of both types of knowledge. In this sense, The Vandemark Mummy harkens back to Voigt's earliest novels where Ann in Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers and Jean in The Callender Papers use both types of knowledge to learn from their new experiences and to define their identities, finally learning to trust the impulses of their hearts along with the clarity of their minds.

CHAPTER VI

Daring to Live: Courage

In these last novels Voigt illustrates the great courage it takes to live authentically. To live wholly and honestly, to live passionately rather than merely to exist, leaves one open to pain as well as to joy; the etymology of the word "passionate" traces its roots to patior, to endure or suffer, and from pateo, to be open. A major theme of David and Jonathan (1992) is that choosing to be open includes acknowledging and suffering the guilt of humanity's evil as well as knowing and enjoying its goodness. In Glass Mountain Voigt explores how individuals hide their fear of being open with masks and false appearances. Orfe can lead her friends and listeners into joy but she cannot dispel the world's pains for them; individuals must experience their own angers and anguish as well as their own loves. In all three novels, the successful protagonists, or heroes, find courage to face life honestly by reaching out to a relationship which strengthens them: Henry commits himself to helping Jonathan resist David's cynicism, Alexis asks Gregor for one weekend together, and Enny and Orfe and the three Graces make music as an integral group, all contributing according to their talents. Voigt is illustrating that individuals who live passionately are

heroes, liberating themselves from the constraints of fear by reaching outside of their self-centered worlds, to connect with other heroes in a mutually supportive relationship.

David and Jonathan

With its brooding tone and the philosophical character of its major characters, David and Jonathan might be called Voigt's Hamlet; the plot centers on the decision of Henry, the narrator, "to be or not to be." Henry Chapin Marr, fifteen years old in 1958 when this story begins, thinks of himself as rather plodding and repressed, cautious about living and loving. His mother and father, living in an inherited home on Cape Cod, are quiet and refined, conventional blue-blooded New Englanders. Although his father has been a conscientious objector during World War II, Henry plans to become a soldier and tries to practice the stoicism he believes he will need. Jonathan Nafiche is his best friend. He is Jewish with a mercurial mind and temperament, laughing and light where Henry is cautious and somber. Henry's house, hidden behind scrub pines, is quiet, barren of noise and color and clutter; the Nafiche home lies above their restaurant, full of talk and the stray people they collect. Mrs. Nafiche had "speaking eyes.... Her features were too heavy and irregular for beauty, her mouth too full, her eyebrows dark and uneven; and she was the most

beautiful woman Henry had ever seen" (p. 46). His own mother had the balanced features of the Chapins and was tall, thin, and tidy.

One of the "strays" that comes to live with the Nafiches is David, a distant cousin who miraculously survived the Nazi occupation, but not without suffering great psychological damage. Now he is twenty; at fourteen, he had been found by an American patrol, weighing only sixty-six pounds. The Nafiche family will try to provide a refuge for David, who is still suicidal even after years of expensive therapy. When Henry first meets David, he is fascinated by his physical beauty and the look in his eyes:

[David's] eyes darkened by hope, the face alight with it--Henry couldn't imagine what David had seen to give rise to such a feeling...and he couldn't understand his own response, a desire to be worth hoping much of which matched the intensity of David's eyes.... David's hope-filled eyes made time measureless. Henry stepped back (p.80).

That night Henry dreams of David and ejaculates. "Just briefly, he let himself remember--and his whole body grew warm, like water flowing over it, the water like fingers--before he made himself forget" (p.83). This fascination, manifested physically, along with other signs, makes Henry realize that he may be attracted more to males than females,

a type of love not easily admitted in the 1950s when this novel takes place. This and David's constant reminders of humanity's evil side, the human capacity for harming and hating and murdering, makes Henry want to avoid David. David repulses Henry; he is always jabbing and poking into Henry's private world, asking questions that probe into uncomfortable thoughts, challenging Henry to act more courageously than he feels. When Henry bludgeons a cat in order to put it out of its misery after it has been fatally injured by David's careless driving, it is David that forces the connection between killing animals and Jews. Henry vomits, "as if he could rid himself of the whole experience, and David, too. As if he could rid himself of himself, and what he'd done.., he had always used to like himself" (p.103). David, and the dream he has had about him, was "the most ungovernable...passionate feeling he'd ever felt.., and except that it was Jon, Henry would have turned his back on anything to do with David" (p.121). If Henry wanted to see Jon, he had to see David too and he didn't want to see David.... Anyone who made you have the kind of dream Henry had had about David, even if it was only once-- that was creepy.... Then he had to remember that David was Jewish.... When Henry remembered, he felt so sorry for David it made him feel sick"(p. 107).

However, Henry cannot leave Jon now; David's insistence

on reminding them of humanity's capacity for evil is wearing Jon down, eroding his former ebullient optimism and love of life. David's presence makes the question of how to acknowledge human evil impossible to ignore. Like Jonathan and his family, Voigt is asking "How can a Jew live in this world and remain a Jew?" or, for that manner, "how can anyone who believes in the humanistic code of mutual respect reconcile the existence of such horrid torture?" But one night Henry becomes so tired of facing the questions that David presses on him that he cancels his plans to visit them at the restaurant the next day. That night David is missing; he has rowed out into the ocean and killed himself. Henry has failed his friend Jon by avoiding him and avoiding the pain that is part of his life.

"I think, Jon said, `that if we'd loved him we could have saved him'... I couldn't, I didn't even like him. Except as a symbol..., As a symbol, of course, he had to die" (194). Henry, too, has not found the strength to love someone who is such a victim, who reminds him of his own propensities toward hate and destruction. "And I think...that I'm glad David finally did it," says Jon. Henry answers "But Jon...`There's no reason why you shouldn't be glad.... David was going after you" (p. 222). Jon responds that, like Saul, the father of Jonathan in the Bible story who also loved David, God mourns all those who

die, even if they seem to be enemies. "But Jon, you have to be glad he's dead, because you're human... if you don't honor that feeling too, then you're trying to be God. You can't try to be God without choosing death, as a human" (p.225).

Jon remembers the scripture: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: Therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (p.152). When you choose life, "you're choosing all the--terrible--things, the worst you can imagine.... But that's only part of it. You're also choosing to celebrate" (p. 154). Living is recognizing and accepting the possibilities of both great love and great pain. But, because living wholly and authentically is the only way to affirm hope, to limit the damages, it is preferable to mere existence; for Voigt, it is the morally righteous answer to the questions posed above.

In 1967, twenty years after David's death, Captain Henry Marr, surgeon, moves along the beds in a military hospital in Vietnam. He spies Jonathan Nafiche, with severe head wounds. He has been a POW, cruelly tortured, but until the end able to show spirit and humor to his fellow inmates, inspiring them to live. It has been the memory of David and

his survival of David that has gotten him through. Jon has chosen life though he has come to learn that "choosing life is like choosing...to have your liver taken out daily by an unskilled eagle. Or perpetual crucifixion" (p.224).

Choosing to participate as best one can in the struggle to provide all humans with the choice whether to live or die, to be good or evil, is all we as free humans can do, Voigt seems to imply.

Jon's persistence in loving and living has made him a hero. Now he faces an operation to remove a piece of shrapnel embedded in his brain. Henry agrees to undertake the difficult operation, although he dreads the choices he must make. In the end, Henry saves Jon's mind--but in the process severs the optic nerve. With the same courage that it had taken to kill the cat long ago, Henry has been able to limit the damage. Henry, still careful and constrained, will also choose to live his life, making choices that may be painful but which do "limit the damage." Admitting his love for Jon, he decides to go back to Boston to live and work, keeping "close but not too close" (p.248), not denying his love for Jon but not letting it get in the way of Jon's choices either.

Glass Mountain

In Shakespearean tragedies, "at the end, the world of the play is made better, even though the individual

is...lost" (Seventeen Against the Dealer, p. 18). If David and Jonathan is Voigt's Hamlet, posing the question "To be or not to be," and ending with a world that sees the truth more clearly, a Glass Mountain (1991) is her Twelfth Night, asking who to be and testing the validity of that truth. "We are none of us what we seem...except for those of us who are exactly what we seem" (Glass Mountain, p. 1), thinks Gregor, the narrator and hero of this comedy of errors and misguided deception. In this novel, Voigt explores the extent to which superficial appearances attract romantic attention and how it deepens into more sincere love; if we are initially attracted to the appearance of an individual, and the role he or she seems to play in society, will we love the real person underneath? How much of us is unique-- and how much of who we are includes our social status? Like Voigt's first two novels, Glass Mountain is about that first step of establishing an identity separate from family expectations and social traditions..., that first step of defining an individual self in the context of a society which tends to define people by the social roles they appear to play. And like Orien, the prince in A Fortune's Wheel, this novel's protagonist Gregor attracts love by the very attributes of good breeding and noble manners that he is trying to hide; yet when each hero finds himself demoted to servant status, he finds that he is still loved; he knows

that he is truly and wholly loved.

In this novel about how appearances reflect at least our social selves, the self we have decided to present in society, Voigt uses clothes and jewelry to describe her characters and their relationship to each other. At thirty-three Gregor is on the prowl, stalking the dens of upper-crust Manhattan to find a suitable woman to marry, a woman who is "moneyed." It is Valentine's Day, but his prey, one woman with "entirely lovely" hair and another with emerald earrings that "swing in the light," elude him. What he does find is Alexis, dining alone in an expensive restaurant, a little tipsy on champagne, and dressed in the clothes of "a tall, stylishly thin woman, most certainly a woman of experience" (p. 13). Unfortunately Alexis is short and plump.

When Gregor pursues her, not out of interest--she seems too young and plain--but to protect her from the dangers of New York until the effects of the champagne wear off, he finds that she is twenty-nine, well-educated and mentally mature. She is also an innocent, lacking both social experience and self-knowledge. Her clothes, all wrong for her body, are the result of a morning spent to "be remade.... This is the new me.... Obviously I want to change my life" (p. 21). Alexis lacks not only experience with honest "real" relationships but also the courage to

know her inner self. Skittish and suspicious of any man who might befriend her because of her wealth, she refuses to give her name or tell her story. However, as the afternoon progresses, she recognizes a certain honor in Gregor and gives him her address: "You're a prince, whoever you are, a prince in prince's clothing" (p.23).

Perhaps. However, in the next chapter, readers see Gregor in another role; he is a butler, "prematurely stuffy ...and unoppressively avuncular" (p. 31), a perfect stereotype. His employer is Mr. Theo Mondleigh, a cheerful ladies' man who is enjoying his youth. His father is after him to settle down and to marry "Pruny" Rawlings, the only daughter of a respectable and wealthy Connecticut family. "The Rawlings are serious gardeners...and Pruny is their prize begonia. Or prize potato, that's more like her" (p. 43), says Theo, who feels choked by his family's pressure to marry her. He is attracted to more glamorous types.

Gregor does his own courting. Although he knows only her address, he decides to pursue the awkward but obviously moneyed woman he has rescued. She accepts his invitation to several concerts and then a performance of Twelfth Night. He knows so little about her, only that "someone strong-willed could persuade her,...that she was oddly immature, and she dressed without any sense of style, without any style of her own, that she felt insufficient to the world she lived

in...and that there was money, real money" (p. 95).
Eventually he discovers her first name, but only that.
Pursuing her carefully and persistently, his goal is
marriage rather than love. For he is becoming charmed by
the complexity of her mind:

Alexis shook out her mind like some women shake
out their hair, to display its bright tumbling
qualities, to attract.... Most women are less
reluctant to show you their breasts than their
minds, and I may know why. Alexis had not such
qualms of modesty (p. 99-100).

Alexis enjoys her times with Gregor. She shares his tastes
and his intelligence, and she thinks she recognizes him as a
member of her own class. "People like us...the leisure
class,...even though you do a Man-of-Mystery act, you strike
me as the same. Different--but the same." Although she is
still suspicious of his motives, she feels as if she can
safely be herself, as long as she conceals the identity of
her family. They kiss. She cautions that there is a man,
another commitment, but they continue to spend time
together, happy. Gregor doesn't know her full name, and
she, of course, has no idea that he is a butler.

Meanwhile, Gregor's employer dates all kinds of women.
"Mr. Theo's affiliation might have been Episcopalian, but
his tastes were catholic" (p. 67). There is the husky voice

who calls him "Mr. Bear" and the ash-blond Holly, a red-head and a curly-haired brunette, Muffy who is fluffy (p.67) --all this in-between dutiful dull weekends with Pruny, to please his family. Events come to a head on April first, appropriately called All Fool's Day here. Gregor sees a figure seated on the stoop--for a moment he thinks it might be Alexis, but it is Theo's younger sister Sarah, just arriving home from a Swiss school, unannounced. Then Theo enters with 16-year-old Carlie draped over his shoulder. In bursts Brad Wycliffe, in furious pursuit of his sister Carlie and thoroughly disgusted with her consort, Theo Mondleigh. In a comic flurry of romance and deception, Sarah, disguising her connection to Theo by claiming to be Gregor's sister, falls in love with Brad, Theo swears off women and decides to propose to "Pruny," and Gregor asks Alexis to think about marrying him. Sarah and Brad run off and get married, and "Pruny" accepts Theo's proposal with a surprising (to Theo) lack of excitement: "I guess we'd better" (p. 152). Gregor can hardly stay calm in his eagerness to hear Alexis' answer. He busies himself with preparations for Theo's wedding and the rehearsal dinner.

If this were a mere romance, the lovers would unite and all would be well. But this is romantic comedy and the trick is to unravel the knots of deception. For Gregor, the comic catch is that "Pruny" turns out to be his Alexis.

When she sees him in his role as Theo's butler, she immediately assumes that Gregor has deceived her so that he might use her to ascend the social ladder. For Alexis and her family, it is unthinkable that she would consort with a servant. Alexis is trapped by her conventional family and Gregor is trapped in his role of the butler. Plans for Theo's wedding to Alexis proceed.

But first, in an extraordinary burst of courage, Alexis asks Gregor if they could spend a weekend together--as lovers--so she can know herself, and can learn to love, as an adult. Gregor finally agrees. On Memorial Weekend, they fly to Pittsburgh, Gregor's original home, and spend time talking, loving, and plumbing the depths of themselves as a couple. They are wonderfully happy; their relationship is perfect on a personal level.

But Alexis cannot conceive of breaking the rules of social hierarchy. She will marry Theo; at least she knows he is not marrying her for her money. It is on her honeymoon that Alexis finally learns to identify her own needs, separate from those of her family, and gains the courage to be herself despite their desires; symbolically, she also finds her own style, a way of dressing and wearing her hair that admits and celebrates the features that are unique to her. Because she had dared to reach out beyond her conventional background and explore her own heart, even

if for just a weekend, she is able to realize that her marriage to Theo is not real love and real life--that what she experienced with Gregor is more than sex and friendship. It is the kind of love that is real; the kind of love in which two people are able to communicate beyond the conventional niceties. Courageously she breaks off her marriage to Teddy Mondleigh and returns to Gregor. In her new clothes, and with her new knowledge about herself, she looks "plump and delicious, like a peach" (p.268). To Gregor she looks like herself, "not naked, but the way [she] looks naked." Alexis wants Gregor to stop pretending to be what he isn't, to accept his own identity, which she assumes is that of a butler, a member of the servant class. She is willing to live his life, entering domestic service as his partner. "No," says Gregor. "It would be a waste of your mind, your abilities". They must start out as equals, she insists; "No more sham life. The real one for the two of us" (p. 272).

If they are to start out with no pretense, Gregor must doff one more disguise. He takes Alexis to his home, a palatial manor outside of Pittsburgh and reveals his whole name. He is Gregory Reikel, the heir to a mining company with far more money than she or Theo. He is indeed a prince, a hero who has dared leave the safety of his home and learn to live in the world on his own terms. He has

dared to take on a whole new social identity so that he can find someone who is not marrying him for his money, and he has found Alexis. But it is only because she too has dared to leave the safety of her conventional family and to risk marrying a man she loves despite his lower social status that he has not lost her. They are now equals ... in courage as well as in social background and will live happily ever after.

As in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, where the final dissolution of the hero's disguise brings happiness to all, the other lovers are also reunited with their rightful partners. Brad, despite his anger at Sarah's deception and his hurt pride, uses the excuse of her pregnancy to come fetch her, and she is delighted to return. Even Theo is reunited with his mistress, who really does love her "Mr. Bear." But as in Shakespeare's play, this story leaves some questions unanswered. Would Alexis have been able to love Gregor if he had not been born into wealth and privilege? She is relieved to hear that, in fact, he is her social equal..., perhaps even wealthier than she. Has Gregor been fair to Alexis in his double deception? He could have saved her and himself much pain if he had revealed his true identity before her marriage to Theo. Voigt seems to be implying that only after Alexis has renounced her loyalty to her parents and the conventions of her childhood is she

worthy of "the prince." Perhaps only after Alexis has discovered the courage in herself to leave Theo and disappoint her parents' expectations can Gregor believe that she loves Gregor for himself. But does not Gregor's "self" include his moneyed background? Would Brad have found the courage to return to Sarah if she had not been pregnant? Twelfth Night leaves the viewer with the same bittersweet view of love and humanity and the deceptions it employs as does Glass Mountain. For in Twelfth Night, there is also much falling in love with appearances, much play-acting and artifice.

Besides images of clothes and cosmetics, Voigt uses allusions to the arts--drama, music, and painting--as metaphors for the artifice that her characters use to present themselves to each other. Like an artist, Gregor has conceived his quest for a marriageable woman with careful consciousness. In the beginning of the novel as he is ready to put his scheme into action, he cannot conceive how to include the picture of his family background:

No matter how I moved, I couldn't bring the third staircase into the portrait [of myself]. Degas might have brought all the background in by distorting the point of view, Rembrandt might have suggested it in the shadowy darkness behind the illuminated figure, but only Picasso in his

cubist period could have painted the portrait truly (p. 1-2).

Gregor imitates Picasso by presenting himself to Alexis in abstract images that are truthful but without shading or details, that portray the truth about who he is, not as embedded in a conventional context, but in the sum total of the pieces of him she sees. It is a truth that demands persistence and imagination to perceive.

At the showing of Jordan Bradshaw's paintings, where Gregor begins to appreciate the depth of Alexis' mind, the paintings they observe, though ordinary and traditional at first glance, contain an intensity and depth of color unusual in watercolors. And when he makes love to her, he finds a "Renaissance forehead" (p. 226) beneath the hairdo and a Renoir or Titian body beneath the dumpy clothes. The plays they see together, the concerts they hear together, the paintings they appreciate together--these all elicit conversations which display their inner selves to each other and skirt the issues of business, wealth, and social status. Art lets them discover each other unencumbered by social symbols of identity.

The title of Glass Mountain is borrowed from a short story by Donald Barthelme which depicts a foolish hero who climbs an urban glass mountain with no help but from "plumber's friends," as he calls the rubber plungers that

help him to adhere to the slick vertical surfaces. At the top he approaches "the symbol, with its layers of meaning, but when [he] touched it, it changed into only a beautiful princess" (Barthelme, p. 65) whom he throws down the mountain to his acquaintances. Gregor thinks he is pursuing aristocratic wealth, a woman with the manners and money that make her suitable for an upper class marriage. But he finds a real woman instead. What Gregor really wants and needs is a woman's trust in the self that does not depend on symbols of wealth and power; and, in the end, Alexis offers that to him with great courage and sacrifice. They are both rewarded with a future in which their relationship is founded in trust of themselves as individuals as well as in their love for each other. They have both met the tests of "print[ing] their own personal currency" (Bellow, Epigraph to Glass Mountain), and are then able to write their own mutual story.

Perhaps, as Alexis points out to Gregor after they watch a production of Twelfth Night, the audience accepts the deception of the female-male twins, Viola and Sebastian, because they "want the story" (Glass Mountain, p. 61); they want the romantic plot to conclude happily for all and the world to be in peace and harmony. Similarly, it seems that Alexis, sensing the true prince beneath Gregor's butler clothes, has asked him for that fateful Memorial Day weekend

because she too wanted their story to end as a romance.

Orfe

"At the end of Twelfth Night, when the duke finally falls in love with Viola, you wanted that to happen.... It was what would happen in a well-ordered universe, so you believe it.... The whole play argues that love is irrational. You can't rely on it" (Seventeen Against the Dealer, p. 17-18). The world of Orfe is anything but well-ordered, and love is not to be relied upon. Despite the loss of two individuals, the world of the play (or, in this case, novel) is made better by the songs and lessons that remain. This novel has the larger scope of tragedy.

Compared to Voigt's previous novels with their down-to-earth and pragmatic tone, Orfe is dreamy and mystical, conveying its themes through allusion and suggestion more than by direct example. Usually Voigt's characters are steeped in specific family contexts and live in vividly realistic places. Henry and Jonathan's Cape Cod is visible to readers, and the Manhattan of Glass Mountain is very specific, but Orfe and Enny seem to have no histories nor identifiable roots, and the novel's scenery is generic.

The plot is an amalgam of three stories: the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (including the legendary relation of Orpheus to the three Graces), a modern saga of the rock-music world, and the fairy tale, "The Frog Prince." What

communicate the complexity of living and loving in a world full of people without the courage to do either. She interweaves these stories to persuade her readers that reaching out beyond self-centeredness is worth the pain, that loving is the way to fully live:

If a thought is intricate and difficult to follow, it needs to be fastened to a transparent image from which it may derive a borrowed simplicity. On the other hand, if an idea is plain there is an advantage in tracing it through a rich design which may help to disguise its bareness (Wind, p. 27).

Voigt's message is simple with complex connotations. Her themes of self-fulfillment through courageous outreach and the support of loving friends are interwoven into a five-chapter format that mixes the chronology of the plot to emphasize the development of the character's consciousness. "Never has Voigt's writing been more poetic and more deeply resonant," writes Diane Roback in an early review (Publisher's Weekly, Sept. 14, 1992). The language of this novel is intricately patterned, using repetition and alliteration to mirror the mythic nature of the story, and the imagery of light and fire and darkness colors these shapes with a richness that even the most superficial reader appreciates.

The names of the main characters underscore the

allusions to the Orphic myth. Orfe, an extraordinarily talented singer and writer of rock songs, refers to the ancient bard Orpheus whose songs enchanted his followers into frenzied "cleansing of the soul...a communion with the Beyond" (Wind, p. 3). Although not divine himself, Orpheus was famed among both gods and humans for music that was irresistible. In Voigt's novel the young schoolgirl Orfe simply seems different; her classmates call her "The Creature from Outer Space" and shun her, except when she sings. Orfe does not want to be ordinary; she wants to be famous. "I want to sing so everyone hears me. I want...to write a song that's so true...a song like fire, like ice" (Orfe, p. 8). Unconcerned with the conventional values of her schoolmates, she does not seem to care if her peers talk to her, nor does she follow the rules of their games. In fact, like her namesake, she uses her talent to transcend order:

[Red Rover] was a game of team spirit and individual achievement, of loyalty to your captain and hope for your own heroism.... The geometry of line and moving dot that was red rover Orfe could at any time turn into chaos. Because where she sang, people gathered around her, and when she sang, the rules seemed impotent (p. 12).

Enny, the narrator of the novel, seems to represent

"anyone"--an ordinary soul for whom "it was enough just to get through every day" (p. 8) --an ordinariness that contrasts with Orfe's ambition and charismatic appeal; or perhaps "Enny" alludes to the the faithful servant Henry of Grimm's "The Frog Prince."

With carrotty red curls, Orfe, though "only just barely not unattractive" (p. 23), is described as the kind of person that made people want to look at and keep on looking, whereas Enny is not described at all. There are hints to suggest that Enny may be black--she especially mourns the bodies of blacks who are buried in Vietnam--or maybe she is sympathetic to the plight of all victims. At any rate, in the beginning of the novel, Enny seems to be a social nonentity, a timid girl who does care about the approval of her peers, so much that "she didn't dare disagree with them, except by having Orfe for [her] friend" (p. 10). She likes the order of mazes rather than the creativity of paper dolls, and she doesn't even think about what she would like to be in the future.

Bound by her timidity and her automatic respect for the rules, she is taunted to tears by a group of boys in her class who name horrible deeds of torture and hate, driving Enny to weep for the pain in the world. Orfe is frustrated by her passive acceptance: "You act like you're nothing, some absolute nothing.... But you act as if, if you can't

be one particular way, you're nothing. As if there was one way you had to be--" and defines her specialness: "You're more like me than anyone I ever met before....It's ordinary to be self-centered.... Maybe you're the one who's extraordinary" (p. 16). Orfe routs the boys by vomiting on them, but soon they are back....It was "as if what Orfe did wasn't worth anything" (p. 19). Enny dares to be angry and it feels good. She hits Rab with her lunch box and is banished to sit alone in the hall for the afternoon. Unrepentant, she sat alone "feeling glad. Feeling as if I had been shut up in a little closet, but now I had broken down the walls and broken myself free" (p. 19). The boys soon cease to bother her.

Voigt may also be playing a scholarly joke with the name Enny; it may allude to the Roman scholar Ennius who is cited in Panofsky's Studies of Iconology, a standard text for classical academics like her husband and which Voigt may have used for her research. "Flagiti principium est nudare inter cives corpora" (Panofsky, p.155n), which means "The rule of the martyr is to be nude among the people," may be the source for Orfe describing herself as a person who "wears [herself] naked" (Orfe, p. 23). "Orfe would bow her head and her eyes would fill up with what she was feeling so that when she raised her face...whatever she was feeling was loosed, full force, out of her eyes. When she did that, it

was impossible to misunderstand Orfe. When she raised her face and loosed her glance, what she meant was clearer than words spoken aloud" (p. 6).

Orfe is a nude martyr in the medieval sense of nuditas virtualis, "a symbol of innocence (preferably innocence acquired through confession)" (Panofsky, p. 156). When Enny, now in college, meets Orfe years later, Orfe is singing on the street. "The song floated like light. Both particle and wave, if light, the song seemed unlike anything else in the sensual world" (Orfe, p. 21). The music made Enny feel "embraced, empowered ...enchanted, humbled, made into nothing. Exalted...released from the prison of [her]self" (p. 32). But Orfe is also performing with a hard-core music band, "Jack and the Jackets," and what draws the crowd is when Orfe vomits, responding to a litany of newspaper headlines, a list of the world horrors. "Current Events" is the title, and "It makes me sick" is the chorus. When Jack sings the words, "he pushes the words into [her] stomach, they ride in the music" (p. 35) and Orfe "can't help swallowing them, and feeling them" (p. 37). When Orfe vomits, the audience feels released, satisfied...,as if she's taken the pain of living in a hate-filled world into herself and then expelled it for them. Jack says the audience needs it and Orfe complies.

Furious at this waste of talent and Orfe's submission

to a crowd, Enny agrees to become her manager and help her form a band of her own. They hire three back-up players. First Enny finds Grace Phildon, a pudgy black single mother, pleasantly easy-going and agreeable. Orfe introduces Willie Grace, also black but aggressively defensive: "all sharp angles of elbow and chin and hips, ...the corners of her mind and tongue as sharp as bones". Raygrace, who becomes a "grace" on the spot, changing his name to convince the others to accept him, is a "little apple of a guy" (p. 53) and white, but willing to please and desperate to join.

Orfe may also be a symbol of love, in its fullest sense, including charity--like the nude figure of Aphrodite attended by the three Graces. These vulgarized down-home "Graces" are a comic parody of the mythical trio who adorn classical legend, and who were extensively allegorized as Beauty, Chastity, and Desire in Greek and Roman art (see Wind; Panofsky). Beauty is the quality that initiates the process of love; Chastity (or true and committed affection) refines the love into something more conscious and demanding, and Desire (or Love) inspires the consummation of the process. In Orfe's band, Grace Phildon is the first "grace," lovely in her gentle motherliness; Willie Grace with her acid tongue, chastizes, keeping everyone honest and "up front." The third "grace," Raygrace, tracks down the band himself because of his desire to join. Willie Grace

and Raygrace do end up living and loving together at the end of the novel, but the symbolism carried to this extreme seems farfetched. Voigt is toying with classical iconography, using it allusively and with a sense of humor rather than adopting it slavishly.

The mythical Orpheus, distraught after his lovely wife Eurydice dies from a serpent bite, follows her into Hades. Enchanting the gods of the Underworld, he receives permission to lead Eurydice back to life under the condition that he resists looking back at her during the journey. Almost at the edge of the Underworld, overcome by his desire and love for her, he looks back and Eurydice returns to the world of the Dead. In Voigt's novel, Orfe falls in love with Yuri, dark eyed, dark haired with curls that "hung like the tendrils of grape vines" (p. 78). When Yuri meets Orfe, he is fried on drugs. But he recognizes her as someone "like a flame like fire to burn you clean. He'd seen women like that before, ...but never one that scorched him. Orfe scorched him" (p. 66). Yuri immediately leaves the house where he has lived, full of drugs and drugged friends, and goes through detox. Afterwards, he gets a job and starts school, and cleans up his life before he approaches her again. Their relationship progresses slowly and carefully. But Orfe is gleaming with love, writing two kinds of songs. Some were for immediate performance, "foot-lifting, hip-

hinging, arm-pulling music, for dancing" (p. 59), but the others were songs that "told [her] what she should have known all along" (p. 82), which was the truth. These songs she called "Yuri's Dreams," and these were the songs that eventually got recorded by her and the Graces and made music history. When Enny worried about Orfe burning herself out somehow, she finds that Orfe "wasn't burning herself out or burning herself up--she was on fire" (p. 58).

Enny sees that Orfe is for Yuri and Yuri is for Orfe: "I know that Orfe and Yuri radiated a sense of loving that I can still warm my hands at, if I close my eyes and remember" (p. 20) and she agrees to walk before them at their wedding. After their vows, comes the parade of people from the house where Yuri used to live, bearing a cake. Enny sees a "silver knife blade flash, saw a square of cake in Yuri's hands, saw him eating" (p. 97) before he disappears, his pupils expanded and his eyes darkened "like a baby." The frosting has been drugged, and Yuri is led back to the house of spaced-out friends who choose a painless death-like existence rather than life. Later that night, Orfe follows him to the house, which "smelled of garbage and dope. Stale urine, stale sweat, stale sex...like being underwater, among the drowned...like the house of death" (p. 117). Playing her music, "every song [she] knew and some [she] hadn't written until right then," she almost has him. He is

walking down the hall with girls "hanging on to him...or hanging off one another, like a human chain" and holding on to her hand. But when someone calls out "It hurts, man," Yuri turns back. Orfe can give him her faith in him, but she cannot give him faith in himself.

Soon after, Orfe dies, like her namesake while making her music in a crowd. The mythical Orpheus is torn apart by women who are driven to frenzy by his music. Orfe dies during a concert, singing a new song with no words, a calling song. This is not one of "Yuri's Dreams":

The crowd came closer, darker.... Orfe called out from the top row of the bleachers...and all the dark crowd seemed to wait for what would happen next, as she sang. All the dark crowd seemed unable to wait, and it pressed in (p. 115).

The Graces become irrelevant and impotent, "losing their hold on the music...swallowed up.... The bleachers under Orfe collapsed. She fell into them, as if into an open mouth" (p. 115). Orfe has moved beyond the realm of where the Graces can offer support; she falls into the black hole left by Yuri's inability to return to sobriety and to his life with her. After the funeral, Enny and the Graces go on with their lives, performing and sending Orfe's part of the royalties for "Yuri's Dreams" to Yuri's account. As far as Enny knows, Yuri never recovers.

While the plot of Orfe is closely aligned to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Voigt uses the fairy tale "The Frog Prince" to elucidate the main theme of the novel. In Grimms' version, a young princess is playing with her golden ball in the garden near a well. When the ball rolls into the well, the princess starts to weep. "What will you give me if I fetch up your ball" asks a frog, "stretching his thick ugly head out of the water?" The princess offers him even the golden crown that she wears but the frog would have none of it. "If thou wouldst love me, and have me for thy companion and play-fellow...and sleep in thy little bed,...I would fetch thee thy golden ball again." The princess agrees, impatiently and impetuously, but, when her lovely ball, symbolizing a fully realized life, is retrieved, she ignores the frog and tries to leave him behind. When the frog follows her home and actually climbs in her bed, she feels "beside herself with rage, and picking him up, she threw him with all her strength against the wall...But as he fell, he ceased to be a frog, and became all at once a prince with beautiful kind eyes" (Grimm and Grimm, p.190). The two marry and are carried off to his father's kingdom accompanied by the faithful Henry, the servant of the faithful prince, who has been obliged to wear three iron bands over his heart to contain his sorrow at his master's plight. The bands break, one by one, and now Henry is

"relieved and happy," like his master and his new bride.

The young Orfe and Enny discuss the story. "'He was a frog, and that's slimy and cold,' Orfe said. 'I wouldn't want any frog sleeping on my pillow...'" (p. 9). Bettelheim in his interpretation of fairy tales thinks that the frog's transformation symbolizes the developmental process of the child "from a lower to a higher state of being" (Bettelheim, p. 289), especially the sexual development. Most young children, like Orfe and Enny, find the idea of intimacy, both physical as well emotional rather repulsive. This fear is a normal mode of self-protection against premature experiences.

"If I make a promise, I ought to keep it," says Enny, constrained by social principles and propriety. Acutely conscious of the possibilities of pain and cruelty, Enny is reluctant to grasp the messier parts of life, to engage in the joys and pains of living fully.

And she shouldn't have thrown him against the wall... Just---thrown him, like that. I could imagine how that would feel, to fly helpless through the air and slam into the wall. I wondered if you would feel your skin splitting and your bones being smashed. I wondered how it would feel to have someone hate you that much (Orfe, p. 9).

Bettelheim interprets this part of the story as the decision

to overcome fear and to enter fully and independently into relationships with others:

In a way this story tells that to be able to love, a person first has to be able to feel; even if the feelings are negative, that is better than not feeling... [A]t the end she asserts her independence in going against [her father's] orders. As she thus becomes herself, so does the frog; it turns into a prince (Bettelheim, p. 288).

Orfe's goal is to live fully, to grapple with life and create truths of her own, to love:

But it's not about the frog, it's about the ball, the way the ball is perfect. If I had a golden ball and it was perfect, I'd promise anything to get it back.... He couldn't have turned into a prince if it wasn't for the golden ball Enny. The perfect thing" (Orfe, p. 10).

In the first chapter, Orfe shows Enny how to assert herself against the boys who taunt her; Enny literally splits the skin of Rab by throwing her lunchbox at him, breaking herself free from her emotional repression and timidity. In the second chapter, it is Orfe who needs help. She is following the orders of the bandleader Jack, who, denying her talent, encourages her to vomit to fulfill the needs of

the audience. Enny, dressed in her "interview suit," helps Orfe form her own band, facing down Jack as well as other professionals in the music band. Yuri "splits his skin" by undergoing rehab and rejecting Smiley's invitation to return to the house. For a while, Yuri and Orfe seem to have "the perfect thing," a love which lets them both assert their talents independently, each supporting the other with love and faith. But when Yuri is poisoned with the drugged frosting on their wedding day, it falls apart. Orfe follows him to the house to try to save him, but it is another world: "It was like being underwater." Yuri turns back, failing to emerge from this "house of death" because "somebody tells him that it hurts.... What kind of fools are they if they think life is never going to hurt. If they think they can be safe and never hurt and still be alive?" (p. 120), asks Orfe. "Can you imagine it?" Like the frog in Stevie Smith's poem, "The Frog Prince," Yuri is content to withdraw into the "enchantment" of drugs and vicarious experience, content to let others bear the pain of true love and life:

I can be happy until you come
But I cannot be heavenly,
Only disenchanting people
Can be heavenly (Smith, p. 88).

"The Frog Prince," in Bettelheim's interpretation,

implies that maturity and the ability to become intimate with others happens once and forever. Voigt, however, believes that character development is an ongoing process, necessitating many acts of courage to break out of former definitions of self. In this novel, Voigt is portraying the power of a friend's faith--or love--to provide that courage. Just as Orfe gave Enny courage to make that first step, to express her anger at Rab and the others, Enny gives courage to Orfe to form her own band and, finally, despite her great fear and distress, to go to the house to save Yuri. Voigt dedicates this novel to her husband Walter "because it's a love story," a love story about Orfe and Yuri, but more, about Orfe and Enny whose faith in each other enable each to live and love. "Can you imagine [a life without pain]?" asks Orfe. "Yes" says Enny. Like Yuri, she struggles, to live fully and independently, to keep faith in herself. But while he never does go on with his life, she does. In the split second before she dies, Orfe sends a message to Enny, "Don't be afraid" (p. 115). Enny understands. "Love stories aren't about how they end" (p. 116).

Does this book work for readers who do not know the myth of Orpheus or the fairy tale about the frog prince? For some adolescent readers, the poetic texture of the language is enough. "I like it because it sounds like the way I talk and write and think.... I read it twice" (Cati

Coulthard, interview, December, 1992). The story line is a collection of vignettes, arranged to mirror free association of thought rather than strict chronology. The narrator Enny is remembering the sequence of her thoughts about Orfe rather than the sequence of events. Each word or image leads into another subject:

"We played endless games of cribbage...leapfrogging our markers around the tracks. He was a frog, and that's slimy and cold..." (p. 9).

Yuri is introduced in the same way. Enny is describing how she became Orfe's manager,...and all of a sudden the name Yuri pops up.

"Orfe never lost patience, never lost hope, never lost faith in me.... I finally asked her about Yuri and she told me" (p. 40).

The book is arranged in five chapters, each chronicling a step in the characters' relationships, and each referring forward or back to Yuri and Orfe's wedding day. The first chapter establishes Orfe and Enny's friendship. The second chapter lays out the whole plot, tracing the sequence of events from the time Orfe meets Yuri to the time after she dies and the "Graces are music history" (p. 64). In the third chapter, Voigt describes in depth how Orfe and Yuri loved each other. The fourth chapter is the story of their wedding day when Yuri disappears and Orfe's subsequent

death. The fifth chapter is a mere three-page coda, Enny recalling a conversation in which Orfe recognizes the worth of Enny's supportive friendship and wonders that some people would prefer avoiding pain to living. It briefly restates the theme from "The Frog Prince" that has been played out in the plot of Orpheus and Eurydice. Although this book is about the pain of deeply felt love and the yearning to be released from that pain, it is also an affirmation of how loving friends give support and strength. Even those adolescents who do not recognize all the allusions to mythology and legend will recognize ties to their own experience in this universal story.

"In this bravura effort [Voigt] harnesses the strength of the myth to advance her own imaginative vision," writes Diane Roback in her highly favorable review (September 14, 1992, p. 125). Orfe is neither a retelling of the myth, nor of the fairy tale, but a powerful allegory using images from both to illustrate themes common in Voigt's work: self-development does take courage and effort, and is necessary for lasting and satisfying love.... "Don't be afraid." Voigt invents a new story to renovate the powerful messages of the traditional legends. This is a novel that stretches both the imaginative and logical faculties of the mind, each pulling at the other to form a more complete understanding of a message that is more than logical. Myths are invented

to preserve the mysteries of important truths, and, as Roback indicates in her review, in writing *Orfe*, Voigt may be more of a maker of new myths than a preserver of old ones.

CHAPTER VII

Voigt's Essential Ideas: A Thematic Overview

For Cynthia Voigt, the main advantage of writing books is that she can start a unique conversation with her readers: "One bases one's life on certain essential ideas about [its] nature and purpose..., but seldom do these essential ideas, which in fact govern choices and actions, receive direct attention" (Newbery Acceptance Speech, 1983). In her novels, Voigt pays deep and direct attention to many ideas through the mouths and minds of her characters who reflect on the implications of what they read, hear, and experience. Insofar as her protagonists mirror her own values, it is evident that this author values thoughtfulness and curiosity as vital to personal development and that Cynthia Voigt the teacher is still reaching out to her readers/students, urging them to think about these ideas which govern choices and action.

Voigt believes that men and women should be able to develop their potentials unconstrained by conventional assumptions about who they should be. Her novels deal with the struggles of young women and men to achieve individuality in the context of the social world in which they live, and they portray this ageless quest on a more profound level than most books written for young adults.

Her protagonists overcome their fear of the unknown and, realizing their separateness as individual identities, independent from and yet also responsive to their family or historical situations. Either by accident or by choice, Voigt's heroes "reach out" from the closed circle of familiar assumptions and values to the realm of other possibilities. As they explore these challenging options, learning what is possible, they also learn to "hold on" to what is valuable, especially from family roots. Finally Voigt's characters struggle with "letting go," balancing the extent of self-fulfilment with responsibility to others as they respond to the possibilities that fate provides. At the end of Seventeen Against the Dealer, the last of the Tillerman series, Dicey sums up what individuals need in order to fulfill their potentials:

Then she understood--it wasn't guarantees she needed, or any of them needed, but chances, chances to take. Just the chance to take a chance. And the eye to recognize it, she added. The hand, to reach out and hold onto it--that too. And the heart, or the stomach, or wherever courage came from (p. 209).

These are some of Voigt's essential ideas.

Stepping Beyond Conventional Roles

The search for self identity is a traditional theme in

literature, but until the last century, most protagonists who left home to make an independent quest were white middle-class males. Traditionally, female characters defined their identities as lovers, wives, mothers, or sisters who waited on and served the male adventurer. Their roles were dependent on the fate of the male hero, more passive than the male who actively shaped his own destiny. Characters from lower class backgrounds were often "rescued" by marriage to a handsome prince or by suddenly discovering a connection to wealth or aristocracy. Voigt's novels follow a trend in literature for young adults beginning with works like Louisa May Alcott's Little Women (1868) in which female protagonists make choices that recognize the possibility of an active and autonomous identity (Murphy, 1990), depending more on their skill and abilities to work than on romance.

In 1970, a study titled Sexism in Children's Books examined a thousand general trade books that had received either an award or official recognition for excellence. The study found that only a fifth presented a positive image of women. Most depicted situations in which girls had to choose between femininity and strength, or between love and a professional career, as if no compromise could be reached. The two hundred exceptions were deemed acceptable as nonsexist because they "illustrate the blossoming of a

female individual without any concern for conformity" (Castro, 1990, p. 238).

Non-sexist literature, however, is not just a matter of portraying girls who are non-conformist. It is literature that reflects the complex totality of individual humans rather than fostering the stereotypical assumptions people make when they generalize from superficial observation. The editors of A Guide to Non-sexist Children's Books, published in 1987, write:

The subject matter of the last decade has given way to the more complex observations of struggle, growth, and change that are the constants of real life. The books included in the Guide might be best characterized as role-free; many are about strong women and forthright young girls, but others are about thoughtful boys or troubled young people of either sex who, through experience and thoughtful observation, learn how to solve their problems independently (Wilms and Cooper, 1987, p.ix).

Of the 600 titles cited as non-sexist from all the books for children and young adults published between 1976 and 1985, three of Voigt's novels were chosen: Homecoming, Dacey's Song, and A Solitary Blue.

Voigt has identified herself as more humanist than

feminist: "I believe there are real differences between the sexes, but we are all human beings and so have a lot in common; it seems to me that shared humanity is crucial in storytelling" (Commire, v.48, p.224). Yet she feels that "women and girls need to be careful about believing what they are told about themselves" (Bennett, p. 13). Much of what is shared in her books centers on the struggles of her characters to form individual identities in a world where conventional roles prove inadequate to cope with unusual circumstances. The heroines of her books, and also the heroes, act from the identities they are inventing for themselves rather than reacting from conventional perspectives. This tendency is central to most feminist philosophies, which demand at least a choice of behavior among the possible social roles, a "blossoming of a female individual without any concern for conformity" (Castro, p. 238). Voigt's definition of "humanism" incorporates the precepts of "feminism" and applies them with a broader brush: her characters are non-sexist because they act and react as complex individuals rather than as gender-based stereotypes.

The Feminist Press, founded in 1970 to produce and foster literature for older children and young adults, proposed five criteria for nonsexist literature which provide a useful framework to discuss the characteristic

inclusiveness of Voigt's novels, a tendency to allow her protagonists a wide range of possibilities.

1. Girls are active protagonists.

Voigt's heroines are not only active but leaders, demonstrating great courage, intelligence, and physical stamina to overcome a variety of obstacles. In Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers (1982), which includes no major male characters, Ann, Niki, and Hildy become stronger individuals and bond into a working team like the protagonists of traditionally male sports novels, without the romance and gossip competition of many "female" novels. The same kind of cooperative teamwork is evident in Orfe (1992), when Orfe, the three Graces (one of them male), and Enny form a rock group. In various novels of the Tillerman series, Dicey is clearly the leader of her family, making the necessary decisions to lead them to a safe home. The heroines of Voigt's two mysteries, The Callender Papers (1983) and The Vandemark Mummy (1991), both find solutions by studying texts that have mystified adults. Gwyn, of Jackaroo (1985), performs all the deeds of a typical swashbuckler hero, with all of the swagger too. Birle in On Fortune's Wheel (1990) rescues her prince from imprisonment and nurses him back to health. Even Izzy of Izzy, Willy Nilly (1986) and Alexis of Glass Mountain (1991), who begin the novels as obedient daughters, learn to make their own

decisions.

2. Boys express a wide range of emotions.

Perhaps the only flat single-sided male in Voigt's novels is Rudyard, the unrelievedly evil tomato farmer who threatens the children in Homecoming. In A Solitary Blue, the angry Bullet has many characteristics of the conventional "tough guy," protecting himself from further rejection with scornful silence, physical self-discipline and outbursts of violence; yet Voigt also shows the tender hopes he has for his mother. Readers of the Tillerman series see James and Sammy pass through a number of emotional steps as they mature. Fearful and self-conscious as a boy, James develops into an intellectually courageous young man. Sammy is, by turns, exuberant, stubborn, impatient, and thoughtful; a sturdy worker and athlete, he is perhaps the person that his Uncle Bullet could have been, had he been nurtured by a loving family. Voigt's male characters also include the fastidious and glamorous Gregor in Glass Mountain; the intellectually brilliant Jonathan and his more cautious friend Henry of David and Jonathan; the faithful hired man, Burl, of Jackaroo, who is more sensitive than Gwyn first realizes; and Orien, the prince of On Fortune's Wheel, who gives up his rights to royal leisure in order to live simply and independently. In her depiction of each of these males, Voigt portrays a range of emotions and

motivations so that each becomes memorable as an individual personality.

3. Boys and girls engage in noncompetitive friendships.

Away from her familiar home and afraid for her physical safety, Jean Callender is comforted by her friendship with Oliver McWilliams, a friendship based on mutual respect and not an ounce of romance. Oliver tells Jean the history of her family, and she, in turn, tutors him in Latin. This exchange of strengths is typical of mutually supportive relationships Voigt portrays between male and female friends and siblings. Dicey depends on James to help her think out solutions, and, in turn, James helps Maybeth figure out how to improve her reading. Dicey's friendship with Jeff grows into the best kind of romantic partnership, rooted on the kind of care where each encourages the other to develop individual strengths. In contrast, Gregor of Glass Mountain, playing the traditional role of the predatory male in his pursuit of the mysterious Alexis, fails to catch her; their relationship works only after he stops pursuing her and they become friends.

4. Children relate to adults.

In many novels for young adults, female heroes find guidance and support from adults in their lives, but in Voigt's stories, adults often prove inadequate and unresponsive to their children's needs. In A Solitary Blue

(1983), The Runner (1985), and Sons from Afar (1987), parts of the Tillerman series, Voigt portrays male characters who unsuccessfully seek help and support from their parents as they develop their own identities. More often, though, Voigt's children relate to adult characters in helpful partnerships. After she has given Dicey a much needed respite, Gram insists that she share again the responsibilities for figuring out what is best for their family. Bullet learns wisdom from his employer and mentor, Patrice, just as Althea of The Vandemark Mummy (1991) learns about classical culture from her father, who shares his knowledge and assumes that she can understand. Brann of Building Blocks (1984) and Clothilde of Tree by Leaf (1988) virtually direct their families toward brighter futures. Through these relationships, Voigt indicates her great respect for the capacities of children to understand and contribute to the adult world.

5. The literature deals with various patterns of living and unusual themes such as single parenthood, divorce, extended family, multiracial families, adoption, handicaps, death, and nontraditional careers.

Like most other writers of young adult literature since the 1960's, Voigt recognizes that childhood as a time of innocence and safety is a fiction available only to a privileged few. Her novels deal with the hard facts of single parenthood (The Vandemark Mummy and A Solitary Blue),

divorce (A Solitary Blue), extended family (Homecoming), racial prejudice (Come a Stranger, The Runner), adoption (Homecoming), handicaps (Izzy, Willy Nilly, Tree by Leaf), death (Dacey's Song, David and Jonathan) and nontraditional careers (Seventeen Against the Dealer). She faces these hard facts straight on, probing in detail the difficult implications that can arise out of these circumstances. As single parents, the professor fathers in The Vandemark Mummy and A Solitary Blue both suffer excruciating guilt when their children are endangered; Cousin Eunice and then Gram struggle with financial and emotional burdens when four young children suddenly intrude into their lives. As an African American, Mina faces the rejection of her fellow dancers at the ballet camp; and, as a white, Bullet wrestles with his own habits of prejudicial thinking. Izzy learns to live without a leg and Clothilde, without her father's smile. The Tillermans accept their mother's death, and Henry and Jonathan grope toward understanding of David's suicide. Each of these characters faces serious obstacles and responds with varying degrees of understanding and capacity for growth. Yet Voigt implies that, regardless of the limitations of fate, all people have strengths and should be given the opportunity to respond to the accidents of their lives with choices that develop these strengths. What is necessary is not just the chance to reach beyond

conventional options but also the opportunity to learn the comparative value of these possibilities.

The Eye to Discern: The Importance of Questioning

Traditionally, fictional literature has emphasized the physical appearance of its protagonists as symbolic of their moral values: readers who were familiar with the conventional signals of their culture could predict the moral tenor of main characters, particularly of female protagonists, from the author's physical descriptions (Wolf, 1991). Either the heroine is idealized as perfect in both body and spirit, or she is stereotypically cast into the pretty/plain dichotomy where heroines who do not embody current standards of beauty are portrayed as "undervalued, unglamorous, but animated" (Wolf, p. 60) and are unusually virtuous. Voigt's characterizations of her protagonists stem mostly from what goes on in their minds, either as revealed through dialogue or in direct exposition; it is evident that she values the inner qualities of people more than their outward appearances. When she does describe physical appearances, she is more apt to focus on the physical attractions of her male protagonists. While readers know that Dicey never gets tired of looking at Jeff, "beautiful, inside and out" (Voigt, 1989, p.11) and that Burl has a dark beard, dark eyes, and olive complexion" (Voigt, 1985, p.248), there is little celebration of the

female characters' physical beauty. We know only that Dicey is tough and wiry, dressing in boys' clothes to build boats and that Gwyn is strong and sturdy. What is most important to Voigt is the character of the person underneath the superficial appearance. Although Alexis is initially attracted to Gregor because he appears to be the kind of wealthy upper-class gentleman she needs to satisfy her parents, it is, ironically, only after she learns to appreciate the basic character revealed in his guise as butler, that she comes to love him and dares to make a lasting commitment--and then discovers that he is, indeed, more suitable to her station in life than she ever expected.

Like many adolescents, Voigt's characters find that their first attractions are superficial and end in disappointment. Jean is attracted to the playful Mr. Callender; Jeff to lovely Melody; Mina, to the world of ballet; Gwyn, to the role of the Jackaroo; and Birle, to a life of royal ease. But Jean and Jeff and Mina find that facile grace and brilliant surfaces can hide a cruel self-centeredness that excludes real emotional commitment. Gwyn's costume constrains her from finding her real strengths, and Birle finds that a life without work is boring.

Some of Voigt's characters look for parents, especially those who are absent, to help in their search for an

identity. But absent parents prove inadequate; they provide no magic answer. Children cannot adopt the identities of their parents as their own. Nothing can substitute for each individual's struggle to learn about his or her social context and to develop skills necessary to grow into an autonomous adult able to make choices.

Voigt believes that this growth is fueled by thoughtful intelligence, the willingness to dig beyond the easy answers and to comprehend the complexity of people and their environments. Success comes not from luck or fate, but by stretching the imagination toward new possibilities and by learning new skills. Several of her characters are scholars, using academic skills to ferret out answers to their questions: Ann Gardner studies the classical canon of Western tradition; Jean Thiel pores over family documents; Dicey's brother James thinks about the things he hears and reads; and Jonathan can quote the Talmud with ease. Gwyn and Birle defy the law of their medieval world to learn to read, and that knowledge saves their lives. The academic side of Voigt is evident not only in her favorable portrayal of characters with curious minds but also in her many literary allusions ranging from Shakespeare's plays and The Odyssey to fairy tales like Hansel and Gretel and the Frog Prince.

While her respect for the kind of traditional knowledge

found in books and schools is evident, she also pays homage to the more intuitive analysis of experience and people, which is characteristic of Maybeth, Gram, Brann, Burl, and Clothilde. Hildy teaches Ann to look for the best in people; Maybeth is wise though she expresses her insights in simple language; and Clothilde learns from listening and watching the people and landscape of rural Maine. For Voigt, the essential idea is to develop whatever mental skills are available to solve the problems at hand, actively studying experience as well as texts to construct new ideas for defining solutions. Learning and thinking are the way her characters perceive what to let go and what to hold onto.

The Hand to Reach Out: The Importance of Commitment

Identity achievement occurs after "significant occupational and ideological questioning" and subsequent commitment, claims a recent psychologist of adolescent development (McAdams, 1988, p.42). Voigt's heroes and heroines succeed when they are open to learning the ideas and practicing the skills that will shape their futures and when they demonstrate the persistence and tenacity to make and keep commitments.

In modern Western society, individuals are defined by what they do (work) and how they relate to others (love). The concept of work as a main source of individual

fulfilment and self-actualization is historically recent (Rohrlich, 1980), and it is a concept that Voigt illustrates repeatedly in the development of her protagonists. They reflect the virtues of self-reliance and social responsibility, virtues of the pre-Industrial Age when children were "economically functional" (Douglas, p. 52), just as they are becoming again in the late twentieth century. Voigt's protagonists are hard workers. Dicey and her brothers and sister finally win their grandmother's grudging acceptance into her home by working hard around her farm, proving their diligence and usefulness. James and Sammy help with finances by crabbing one summer, until James gets a job in a doctor's office, one more suited to his non-athletic nature in a doctor's office. Maybeth spends many long hours struggling with her schoolwork as well as practicing the piano and cooking. Gwyn and Clothilde perform endless chores for their families, and Henry works for Jonathan's father in their restaurant. The characters in Voigt's novels who avoid commitment to work prove disloyal in personal relationships, incapable of maturity as partners or as parents. Enoch Callender, dressed in his white suits, spends his days imagining the future away; his wife's money already spent, he expects to be supported by an inheritance that is not legally his. His greed for free money and his avoidance of work are the root of the fear he

engenders. Melody claims to leave her son and husband in order to help alleviate the poverty of the world; yet her "work" is haphazard and ineffective because she flits from cause to cause and fails to face the world and herself honestly. Francis Verricker, the faraway father of the Tillerman children, is characterized as a master of avoiding work and failing to pay debts. All these characters are brilliantly charming and immediately attractive but eventually prove untrustworthy. In Orfe, Yuri and his drummer friend are talented musicians; but, lacking the will to practice, to work through the pain and effort of daily life, they sink into the deathlike world of drugs. Voigt's theme in all these books is that commitment is necessary for growth, whether it be to the work of learning or the work of loving friends and family.

In Voigt's novels, the characters who choose their work enjoy it. Dicey finds peace in sanding the sailboat in the barn after she has led her family to Crisfield. After his muscles harden, Jeff finds the hard work of crabbing therapeutic. Even when Birle is separated from her beloved Orient and miserably enslaved, she finds benefit in the never-ending toil. At first it is a way of distracting her mind and of forgetting; but later, as she becomes more adept, she appreciates the "pleasure of a task her own hands had done, and done well" (On Fortune's Wheel, p. 173). Yet

Voigt does not romanticize work. The Tillerman children grow unbearably hot and itchy as they pull down the honeysuckle vines from their grandmother's house. Jean Thiel's back, eyes, and spirit hurt as she sorts what seem like endless pages of family letters and papers. Dicey, Clothilde, Gwyn, and Birle all express a rebellious resentment against the constraints of their daily responsibilities and chores.

Sometimes it is not the commitment to work but to the relationships that detract from work that are irksome. In Homecoming, Dicey is annoyed when Sammy wants to talk while she repairs her sailboat, and later, in Seventeen Against the Dealer, when she is trying to start her own boat-building business, she forgets to pay equal attention to Jeff and the rest of her family until she realizes that she risks losing them. Jeff's father, the professor, has let his work shield him from the desperate need of his son for reassurance and human care. Birle is almost sorry to see her husband Orien appear after she has established herself on her farm where she plans to grow herbs and prepare medicines, but then she realizes that they can both perform their independent work together.

Voigt explores the complications of making and keeping commitments to both family and career in Building Blocks, where Brann's mother and father finally compromise so that

both can pursue their chosen work and remain together as a family. In The Vandemark Mummy, Phineas and Althea live with their father near Portland, Maine, while their mother pursues a lucrative position on the other side of the country in Portland, Oregon. While this decision seems to work temporarily, it causes hardship and loneliness for all members of the family; at the end of the book, Voigt makes no clear pronouncement on the longterm future of the family's relationships to each other.

However, Voigt's protagonists are not martyrs suffering with sweet passivity; they are whole personalities who use their brains to figure out what is important to them and how they can achieve a balance of commitments between relationships and work. It is not necessary nor even virtuous for her heroes to sacrifice themselves to others. By thinking hard to imagine alternate possibilities and making choices without the constraints of convention, they achieve self-sufficiency without entrapping themselves or others. Voigt recognizes that it often takes great courage for developing individuals to overcome their initial fear of moving beyond the limiting assumptions of conventional society and to make binding commitments, but this courage is necessary for satisfactory self-fulfillment.

The Heart or the Stomach to Be: The Necessity for Courage

"The dragon to be slain is the monster of the status

quo: Holdfast, the keeper of the past," says Joseph Campbell in his book about literary and mythic heroes (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 337). For Voigt the real dragon is the fear of change, the fear of meeting new experiences head on and learning from them. In Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers (1982), Ann prefers being by herself to any contact with strangers where she must struggle to "fit in"; only after she dares to ally herself with individuals who are socially different, exploring values that distinguish her from her upper middle-class family, does she become comfortable with herself as a valid human being, capable of reaching out to new ideas and experiences. For Voigt, the conventional "nice" girl seems inauthentic, an immature and unexplored self, unwilling to take the risks necessary to learn. She addresses this issue again in Izzy, Willy-Nilly (1986) when Isobel ironically becomes a more whole person after losing her leg, making her "different" but capable of authentic relationships with the very people she had previously admired only from afar. She gathers the courage from her newfound friends to admit her fears and her anger, confronting her friends and herself with truths that disturb their smooth social surface. Similarly in Glass Mountain (1991) Alexis fears disappointing her parents' expectation that she perpetuate their upper middle class traditions by marrying a suitable man. Only after Alexis dares flout the

conventions of her parents' social world can she make a commitment based on the truth of her own needs and feelings.

In these instances, Ann, Isobel, and Alexis choose to emerge from the muffling protection of their families to explore different values and options. For other protagonists, circumstances allow little room to choose. Dicey's courage, after her mother abandons her and her siblings, is more a determination find a new home for her family than a choice she could make. Clothilde too is at first driven by her sister and mother's need for sustenance. Gwyn's courageous decision to don the mask of Jackaroo is fueled by her horror at the injustices of her society and her desire to right the wrongs she sees. Because these characters perceive a need for someone to lead, they undertake adventures that demand the kind of courage that is the dogged persistence to continue, the decision to carry through a commitment for the sake of others. This courage, motivated by a strong sense of caring for others, is an important component of Voigt's vision of the way the world should be.

In Building Blocks, Brann learns that his father has this kind of courage, once he is given the first bit of encouragement. Like Dicey, who, after finding a home, must wait until she tries college to start her own adventure, Brann finds that courage can mean patience as well as

persistence. Phineas must call upon reserves of this kind when he is searching the library basement for his missing sister, Althea. It is brave persistence that helps Henry remain loyal to Jonathan despite David's efforts to separate them. This type of courage is not particularly splashy nor evident to others, yet it is a sign and source of tremendous strength, especially when practiced over a long period of time.

Voigt illustrates the insidious danger of fear most explicitly in Orfe when Yuri, Orfe's lover and new husband, retreats into the drug world where he and his friends can avoid facing the painful realities of the real world but also the love and glory of real relationships. As a child, Enny had shrunk in teary fright from the litany of terrors that her schoolmates used to taunt her; her new friendship with Orfe gives her the courage to express her rage and assert herself as more than just another victim. With this fear gone, she can join Orfe in her career to sing so anyone can understand and join in: "Don't be afraid," signals Orfe as she dies. For Voigt, overcoming the fear of exploring new options is essential to becoming a fully alive individual.

Putting It All Together

For Voigt, these essential elements of self-realization are not separate chronological steps but interrelated parts

of a recursive cycle. Courage to reach out is, in part, derived from holding on to a nurturing relationship with family and friends. Letting go is the ability to take a chance, fueled by new skills and insights to move toward new possibilities yet ballasted by old strengths and roots. Though Dicey gradually lets go of her responsibilities for raising her siblings, she remains a part of the family, recognizing the ability of Maybeth and Sammy to let her know when she is needed to help them care for Gram. Jonathan lets go of his guilt over David's suicide yet retains his memory of the suffering that he represents. This memory gives him the strength necessary to endure his own suffering as a war prisoner in Vietnam. Both know that they will have a chance to reach out again to new opportunities, made stronger and wiser by each new experience, knowing more clearly what to hold on to, whom to reach out for, when to let go again. The cycle should never end: Voigt has declared "learning, not knowing, is what it's about" (Donelson and Nilsen, p. 376).

In Voigt's work, the nexus of characters and events is how the reader learns her essential ideas. Her view of life is a broadly humanist one, respecting the possibilities in all humans who have the courage to explore, the humility to listen to other ideas, the wisdom to value responsibilities to family and friends, and the energy to work for a personal

dream. None of Voigt's heroes is a martyr. Unlike traditional morality which, especially for women, teaches selflessness, Voigt's ideal is self-definition, an independence based on the acknowledged support of loving relationships which do not seek to limit or dominate the other. "You have to let people be who they are," says Sammy in Sons from Afar (p. 80), and "You can only be what you are" (p. 95). These simple insights are hard-won, achieved with the help of courage, education, experience, and support. These are Voigt's essential ideas.

CHAPTER VIII

Becoming A Modern Hero

In The Female Hero (1981), Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope describe the archetypical journey of the hero as a psychological journey in which the modern hero, male or female, "slays the inner dragon [of fear] and wins the treasure"-- a treasure which consists of the liberation of one's "vital, and powerful self" (p. viii)--and then returns home to "discover or create" various forms of community. Like Carl Jung, these authors describe the journey of the modern hero as "dramatizing the human being's inner development toward maturity and psychological wholeness" (p. 3). In her novels, Voigt explores this kind of heroic journey.

For traditional fictional heroes, this quest is often told in terms of conquering evil enemies outside of themselves or sacrificing themselves for the sake of others, thus gaining either political or moral power over their peers. Voigt's young protagonists are more like the female heroes described by Pearson and Pope:

The fact that the female hero does not martyr herself for others and that she undergoes the journey for her own benefit absolutely violates female sex-role conditioning which teaches a

woman to be selfless. Because the hero does not give up her life for others, she has no reason to entrap them, make them feel guilty, or dominate them. When she refuses to sacrifice her own self to others, she becomes more rather than less able to aid others in their search for fulfillment. (p. 14-15)

Voigt's characters succeed when they recognize their own needs to develop individual dreams and insist on their own rights to grow. Dicey retains her dream of building sailboats even though her grandmother would prefer her to attend college and even though she could help her family financially if she pursued other careers. Jeff in A Solitary Blue is saved from self-abnegation when he expresses anger toward his mother's domination and then lets himself develop at his own pace. In Seventeen Against the Dealer Jeff encourages Dicey to follow her dream but he also insists that the gifts he gives her will represent his own tastes; both will bring what they are to the relationship rather than what they think the other wants. Birle abandons the luxurious but passive life of the court where her husband is prince so that she can develop and practice her own skill with herbs. Clothilde forces her parents to stop depending on her and her inheritance, insisting that they become responsible members of the family again. Enny becomes a viable individual when she finally

refuses to accept the abusive torments of her classmates who try to heap reminders of the world's sufferings on her; she visibly grows when she expresses her own anger.

But Voigt's "heroes" are more than individuals who excel in strength and confidence. In becoming whole people they learn the value of their family and friends and, consequently remain enmeshed in social responsibilities. Male or female, they share their wisdom and their resources to help others around them grow. They return from their quest for self-definition confident of their abilities and knowing what is valuable to them. Self-fulfillment includes love as well as work and she portrays the dilemmas of people drawn in both directions.

The realistic hero compromises when necessary to achieve as much happiness as possible within her cultural context, but she also works when she can for social change. (The Female Hero, p. 229).

In Jackaroo, Gwyn, who tries to right the injustices of her society as a benign outlaw, finds that acting alone and from outside the social codes is not beneficial nor even possible. Just when Dicey's failing business puts added pressures on her in Seventeen Against the Dealer, she realizes that she is needed by her family and her fiance Jeff; paradoxically she discovers that she needs them too. Birle in On Fortune's Wheel realizes that she can pursue her

dreams in partnership with Orien instead of alone and apart from him. In the modern family depicted in The Vandemark Mummy, Phineas and Althea Hall discover that allowing each member of the family to pursue his or her individual fulfillment is not always easy when their parents live on separate sides of the United States to follow separate careers, but it isn't impossible either. For Voigt, the balance between family responsibility and self-development is possible when each member of the family cooperates to give each a chance. The rewards of warmth and support make the difficulties worth the effort.

Voigt herself is a modern hero. A teacher, despite her earliest protestations, she uses her novels to show her readers how to be heroes, modern heroes who, while becoming confident in their own strengths and wisdom, would rather share than dominate. They recognize the values of relationships as well as their own achievements. Through her novels, Voigt tries to engage the minds of her young readers in questioning, in searching for truths, in beginning their own quest.

As indicated in interviews and illustrated in her writing, she believes that the desire to learn and the courage to deal with those truths are crucial keys to living a full life. Voigt teaches this lesson through the themes and plots of her novels which show her characters succeeding

when they use their minds to explore a variety of options to resolve problematic situations in their own life. Again and again, her characters grow when they accept the challenge of reaching out to new experiences and facing truths, no matter how uncomfortable or frightening they might be. "Don't be afraid," says Voigt through Orfe. She is encouraging her readers to look for truths and to dare to face them unflinchingly, for the effort of learning is rewarded by a love of life. Orfe's husband Yuri and his friends cannot face painful truths and thus cannot bear to live without the drugs that deaden their senses and their abilities to relate to those around them. "The continual struggle to uncover truth is the antidote to ennui and alienation, for truth is the basis of all true sharing between people...the mystery and joy of true friendship is the honest sharing of two souls (The Female Hero, p. 244). Through the examples of her characters, Voigt is teaching the value of finding and facing truths, of daring to extend outward towards new experiences and new knowledge.

Voigt also teaches by illustrating the workings of an inquiring mind in her writing. She thinks about Shakespeare through the mind of James in Seventeen Against the Dealer and of Alexis in Glass Mountain. She wonders what it would like to live in another historical era in Jackaroo, On Fortune's Wheel, and Tree by Leaf. In Building Blocks, she

points out that rivers can become less polluted in time when proper environmental corrections are made, and she philosophically ponders the implications of what looks like unchangeable fate. Throughout her fiction, Voigt scatters a variety of intellectual exercises and explorations which lead her readers through a series of logical and imaginative steps.

Voigt's earlier novels contain academic conversations that would be appropriate in classrooms of students preparing to attend college, but by the time she finished the Tillerman series, her writing incorporates knowledge in language that is closer to that of many other adolescent readers. Like other teachers who now design their instructional strategies to begin from within the realm of student knowledge and emanate outward rather than the traditional model of teaching from the exalted status of the teacher's knowledge, Voigt writes from within her characters' minds. Her style changes from book to book to adapt to the characterizations. While Victorian Jean reminds herself to think carefully and logically, Gwyn living in a feudal kingdom mentally watches for signs of danger and quickly judges. The conformist Izzy is aware of people's first reactions to her, much like Henry whose intuitive sensitivity contrasts with Jonathan's brilliantly logical thought. In Orfe, Voigt's young characters speak

the language of the unacademic, the fluid rhythm of personal conversation rather than the logical patterns of scholarship. In her later novels, Voigt alludes to masterpieces of art, music, and literature; yet these are closely embedded in the plot and format of her stories rather than inserted as conversational asides. Her teaching has become more integrated into her fictions and every-day life into her fictions.

In my own quest to define myself, I find that, like Voigt, I prefer learning which occurs in the context of a story. As a person who appreciates both the neatness of logical analysis and the complexity of intuitive insight, I find the traditional memorization of isolated facts difficult without a connecting pattern that relates in some way to my experience. I am striving to change my teaching so that it becomes more embedded in the language and stories of my students' lives. I want to share what I have learned through reading and analyzing Voigt's novels and through my experiences in the classroom with other teachers and students in ways that relate to their experiences. I hope to learn more from their responses; my goal is start conversations about the essential ideas in Voigt's novels and about the way she illustrates truths that are difficult to discuss except in fictional metaphors. I want to examine these ideas from as wide a scope as possible. I decided to

describe some teaching strategies (see Appendix) because I wanted to think about these novels from the perspective of a classroom teacher as well as from the perspectives of a reader and a literary scholar. In this way, my research includes more of what I, given my particular experiences and education, can see.

After my two year sojourn as a full-time graduate student at Virginia Tech, I spent this year at home, practicing what I have learned, sifting through my new experiences, holding on to what is valuable at home while preparing to sail out again. Each time a student/teacher/individual reaches out, he or she stretches a little further or deeper toward truth; returning home provides a chance to strengthen the roots in preparation for the next spurt of growth. The modern hero is a stronger self because he or she has integrated the lessons that others teach into his or her own thoughts, participating more and more profoundly in a larger conversation.

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APPENDIX

Teaching Cynthia Voigt's Novels in the Classroom:
Strategies for Increasing Comprehension

Teaching Cynthia Voigt's Novels in the Classroom: Strategies for Increasing Comprehension

Numerous young adults read Cynthia Voigt's novels on their own and thoroughly enjoy them, enjoying the stories and characters, and comprehending the underlying messages to varying degrees. However Voigt's body of work is unified by her ethic of the importance of learning to value work and love; her characters become modern "heroes" when they reach out towards new experiences and learn to balance their newfound skills and insights with their responsibilities to the people whom they love. Many students will understand her complex characters and profound themes more easily and thoroughly if they are encouraged to interact with the text in a variety of ways. Vacca and Vacca suggest that an instructional sequence which includes activities before, during, and after reading will engage students in a participatory and purposeful learning process. Prereading activities establish a goal, expand the reader's background knowledge, and provide direction. Reader-text interactions during reading will "prompt an active response to reading," and postreading activities will "reinforce and extend ideas from the text" (p. 69).

Although these strategies are described as if presented to a whole class of students, they could just as easily be

suggested for an individual student or small group of independent readers. Because Voigt's novels often deal with deeply personal themes, a compatible group of peers may enjoy sharing their reactions and ideas in a more protective environment than the whole classroom. Most of these strategies are as suitable for such a group as for the individual reader or for the class in general.

1. Prereading:

The purpose of prereading activities is to make students' minds ready for the material in the text. These activities should remind students of related knowledge they can connect with the text, provide new knowledge if necessary, and arouse curiosity. Prereading strategies should strive to provide an informational context for the text without overwhelming the student with too many new facts. They should motivate the student to want to learn more.

2. Support During Reading:

While students are reading, they can be guided to notice and connect facts and details that are most relevant to the main themes of the text. Interrupting the reading at crucial points with intermittent questions will encourage students to reflect on the significance of the details they are reading. They can keep track of the novel's flow by periodically summarizing what has happened in the pages they

have read and predicting what might happen in the text to follow. By charting textual patterns such as cause and effect, comparison/contrast, and chronologies, readers increase their comprehension of these relationships or "story grammars" that are so common in our culture.

3. Extending and Applying New Knowledge:

Students remember information that they connect to previous knowledge or reiterate by translating into different formats. For example, students might compose comic strips, summaries, posters, or "rap" versions. By articulating their responses to the text, readers become more conscious of their own thoughts and able to share them in conversation to extend the scope of their ideas.

Application to Voigt's Novels

Cynthia Voigt's novels are valuable resources for the classroom because they deal realistically with serious social problems yet contain few explicit references to sex and violence. Voigt is the rare author who can dramatize psychological struggles; her novels deal with the kinds of insecurities and universal questions that face most adolescents and yet she puts them in unusual and exciting contexts.

Perhaps the novels most used in the classroom at present are Homecoming and the Newbery Award winning sequel, Dacey's Song and Izzy, Willy Nilly. All three of these have

appeared in advertisements for commercially written teaching guides, which generally provide some background information about the author and ask for one to two sentence responses to the characters and the situations in the novels. What follows here are suggestions for broader teaching strategies to enhance comprehension of each of Voigt's novels.

The Tillerman Series

Voigt's treatment of the Tillerman family in the seven novels of this series mimics life in that readers meet relatives by chance, first by hearing brief references to an individual and gradually piecing together a more complete story from a network of information like a three dimensional puzzle. Voigt even includes the same plot incident in different novels so the reader experiences it from viewpoints of different characters. Readers of Homecoming and Dacey's Song often become interested in the characters' lives and read the other five books, A Solitary Blue, Sons From Afar, Come a Stranger, The Runner, and Seventeen Against the Dealer. Thus it seems wise to introduce these books with an overview of how all the characters in the series relate to each other:

Abigail Tillerman=m=John Tillerman

John, Jr. Liza =Francis Verricker Samuel (Bullet)

This pre-reading exercise clarifies early references to these relatives in Homecoming and especially Dacey's Song without intruding with too much extraneous information. During reading, especially if students are reading different novels of the series, they can gather clues about the personalities of each character and pool their impressions into a collective description. After reading, students may want to discuss the influences each may have had on the personal development of the others.

Another element that remains constant throughout the Tillerman books is the thematic cycle of "reaching out," "holding on," and "letting go" for the process of self-development and the imagery of wood, water, and music which represents these steps. Students may enjoy tracing these and other images which aid in the affective comprehension of themes as well as prodding the reader's logic. Voigt's use of imagery is subtle and allusive rather than allegorical; readers who expect to find obvious patterns will be disappointed, but looking for meaningful images will enrich the reading experience.

Homecoming, the first of the Tillerman series, has been recommended by reluctant young adult readers as well as by teachers (Miller, p. 1101). Because the novel opens with a

dramatic scene when the four children find that they have been abandoned at a shopping mall, readers have no trouble beginning this book. Arousing curiosity is not a problem. Dicey narrates the story with simple vocabulary and clear, direct language that are easy for most readers to understand. One prereading exercise that would be useful for most readers would be a geographical map of Dicey's travels. Voigt's descriptions of the setting clearly and accurately delineate the geography of the children's trip from Cape Cod to Crisfield on the eastern shore of Maryland. During their reading, students can trace the children's route, summarizing Voigt's descriptions by collecting adjectives and/or drawing pictures of the places where the children remain for a period. This exercise will give readers a reason to attend to the descriptive details and emphasize the correlations between the settings and the development of the characters.

"The book is all about survival and money and how the world is not organized to make daily living easy for children on their own. Every meal, every supermarket bill is carefully logged, just as topography of the journey is meticulously charted" (Hoffman, p. 181). Students who keep track of the practical details of how the children ate and slept and obtained money for travel will end up with an astonishing list of problems that homeless people face

daily. How would this story have been different if the children had been abandoned in the winter or in another part of the country? Ask a few students to contact local agencies that homeless children might use and ask about the consequences of seeking help.

At least one critic, James Henke (Children's Literature In Education, 1985), has compared the children's trip to Odyssey. Students who have read a version of the Homer's epic might enjoy comparing their perceptions of the novel's plot structure with Henke's. Henke also finds several allusions to "Hansel and Gretel" in the novel, which students might be challenged to find after they have read the novel.

Dacey's younger sister and brothers react to their changing circumstances by doing things outside their normal range of behavior. Readers can practice "putting themselves in others' shoes" in order to become sensitive to behavioral changes in other people by keeping diaries while they are reading, imagining the thoughts and feelings of the characters besides Dacey, who is the narrator of the story. Students who keep diaries from the viewpoint of Sammy, James, or Maybeth will be motivated to check their predictions by reading the rest of the Tillerman series where the stories of these characters continue.

Dacey's Song continues the story of Homecoming yet can

be read independently. For those readers who have read Homecoming, a prereading activity to help students practice the skill of making inferences is to ask them to predict how each of the four children and their grandmother will adjust to a new school in a small town as Dicey begins to mature physically, as James' realizes his intellectual talents, as Maybeth struggles academically, and as Sammy copes with his temper. In this exercise as in the previous one, students are thinking about the possible motivations of someone outside of themselves--a practice which can lead to greater sensitivity and tolerance to others who are different from themselves. Dicey's Song is listed in an annotated bibliography of fiction that portrays persons with disabilities (Robertson, 1992) because of its fully drawn portrait of Maybeth, who has so much difficulty reading yet displays remarkable musical talents. Dicey tries to comprehend her learning difficulties by comparing her to Millie, the butcher who can't read enough to complete inventories, and James tries to design a reading program to help his sister. Students who wish to better understand learning disabilities might try to translate a passage in a foreign language or to write with the opposite hand than they usually use in order to feel the frustration. Some students may interview an educator experienced in teaching students with learning differences and compare their new

knowledge with Voigt's description of Maybeth's progress.

In this novel, the main imagery centers on the sailboat that Dicey is trying to repair, the tree in the front yard that finally shelters their mother's ashes, and the songs that help them to reach out to their friends. Students may list instances of these images and compare their ideas about the feelings and qualities they represent with other readers. In what ways does each of the Tillermans reach out, hold on, and let go? What does Gram do to help this process?

At the end of the novel, the stories of the characters are just beginning: they have just been introduced. Ask students to predict the character development of the Tillermans and their friends Jeff and Mina in five years. Volunteers can read the novels in the rest of the series and report which predictions proved accurate.

Come a Stranger fills in the background for Mina Smiths and explains her self-consciousness about the racism of her school. Students might prepare for this portrayal of a country girl rejected by the sophisticated world of ballet she had come to love by imagining themselves in her place. Before they read, ask them to talk with a partner and then write about an incident where they were the "different one." Ask them to describe in detail how they reacted. Alternatively, ask students to write about their experiences

with racism and their ideas about how our society could change to reduce the harm that racist attitudes incur. Second, ask students to imagine that they are of another race; how would this change their lives? After the students write a page or two, ask for volunteers to share their answers.

During reading, ask the students to note the passages that reveal the author's views on racism. Ask students to state the reasons for their agreement or disagreement. After reading, ask students to pretend that Mina attends their school. How would she fit in? How would each student relate to her before she was rejected from the ballet camp and after?

Another issue in this novel is the relationship of young people to adults. Mina, like many young women, develops a crush on the sympathetic young man who listens to her so closely. Tamer Shipp handles this situation with sensitivity that permits the relationship to continue in a beneficial way. Ask students to write a description of Mina from Tamer Shipp's point of view, and then from his wife's point of view. Another adult, the English teacher Mr. Chappelle, is not so sympathetic to the lives and thoughts of his students. How could Mr. Chappelle handle his suspicions about plagiarism differently to retain his students' respect?

The Runner also deals with the problem of racism, but from the viewpoint of the white protagonist who feels that he has a right to his own prejudices as long as he causes no harm. One critic claims that it abounds with stereotypes:

Voigt has made a fine art of stereotyping. Set in 1967 in the shadow of the war in Vietnam, its characters will be familiar to readers of young adolescent fiction: the angry young man; an emotionless, tyrannical father; a brow-beaten mother; ineffectual teachers; a bumbling but good-hearted track coach; and a wordy, autocratic school administrator....jocks, racist thugs, the wimps who stay home with asthma attacks when trouble breaks out; silent, seething blacks; and brash self-centered young intellectuals (Nelms, Nelms, and Horton, p. 84).

But Voigt has simply adopted the perspective of the main character Bullet, who thinks in stereotypes. The book thus reflects how he sees the people who surround him. The following prereading exercise helps students experience stereotyping and prejudice:

Label each student on his or her back with a common stereotype (like the ones mentioned above) written on sticky-paper. When all the students have a different label, ask them to mingle and treat the others according to how they are labeled. When

students guess what their own label is, they can sit down...or continue reacting to the other students until everyone has guessed how they were labeled. (Reid, 1992).

Lines from A.E. Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" frame the novel and foreshadow Bullet's death in Viet Nam. Thus a brief study of this poem could be used to introduce the novel. Housman's "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries," is discussed by Bullet's English teacher, Mr. Walker. One experienced teacher (Chumbley-Lora, 1988, p. 84) suggests comparing The Runner with Alan Sillitoe's The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (in its text form or as a film) and the film Chariots of Fire since both explore the motivations of young boys who work out their problems through running as a sport.

Sons From Afar traces the quest of Bullet's nephews James and Sammy to find information about their father, Francis Verricker, who is described a generation earlier in The Runner. Students might enjoy reading this description before they read Sons from Afar to get a sense of the man who ran away from his four children. Another useful pre-reading activity to encourage students to think about the effect of fathers on their children would be to brainstorm definitions for different types of fathers; this reflection can be followed by discussion of the extent that parents

affect their children's behavior. Most older students enjoy this opportunity to think about their own situations.

During reading, students can discuss the ways in which James conforms to the dominant culture of his high school and ascertain why conforming does not make him feel more accepted. Sammy's conclusions at the end of the novel, "You have to let people be who they are" (p. 80) and "You can only be what you are" (p. 95) present an basis for discussion about the extent to which these solutions are possible and why some people have trouble knowing these simple but difficult truths.

A Solitary Blue also centers around the development of a boy who feels unloved and abandoned. Students who have read The Runner, Homecoming, or Sons from Afar can compare and contrast the three family situations of these characters, who were all abandoned by their parents, taking into account the different degrees of loss each character feels, the ways that they react, and the final results. As a prereading exercise, students who have read the other Tillerman series can predict what Jeff's background might be like and guess why he is so attracted to Dicey and her family.

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults suggests several topics for discussion and papers about Jeff's relationship with his family and the effect of the setting

on his ability to heal (Beetz, p. 1256). During reading, students may select incidents that notably affect Jeff's self-development, both detrimentally and beneficially, and chart his progress toward becoming an individual able to reach out to others for the personal contact he needs.

Jeff's mother, Melody, has been described as a type "like Mrs. Jellaby [from Charles Dickens' Bleak House] who took such a charitable interest in far-away Borrioboola-Gha that she failed to notice when her own wretched children were falling down the stairs" (Langton, p. 34). After reading, students can discuss Melody as an example of a woman whose interests are divided between her child and her desire to make an impact on the world. Students might also compare the mother of Phineas and Althea Hall in The Vandemark Mummy, who leaves her children in the care of her father to pursue a career on the other side of the United States. Would readers feel different about Melody if she was successful at her pursuits...or if she was a male? Is Jeff's father just as wrong when he abandons his son emotionally by burying himself in his work? These questions may start a discussion about the difficulty of balancing family responsibilities with the need to pursue self-development through work.

Students interested in this conflict will be motivated to read Seventeen Against the Dealer where Dicey struggles

with finding this balance between work and family. She has the opportunity to follow her dream but lacks the necessary experience and know-how to make it work: she is betting herself against the world. At seventeen years old, she finds that she is still too young to "beat the dealer" without more help. To introduce this notion, teachers can ask students to describe one of their main goals or dreams and then delineate the kinds of experience and education that they think will be necessary to succeed. Dicey finds that hard work and planning for the expected are not enough; she needs to think of the "what-ifs" and imagine solutions to the unexpected. Students may return to this introductory exercise after they have read the novel and consider revising their own plans.

At least one critic believes that Cisco Kidd is actually Dicey's father (Robertson, p. 397). Students who have read other novels from the Tillerman series can compare the evidence for and against this idea and come to a consensus. More important is his effect on Dicey's ideas about her responsibilities to her family.

For students who have read the six other novels in the series, the question of whether this novel supplies a satisfactory ending to the story will help to them reflect on the development of each of the Tillerman children as well as to articulate their expectations about how a story

"should" end. Where do their expectations about satisfactory endings come from? Are their expectations more congruent with real life or with other pieces of fiction? Students who read many romances may have different "story grammars" in mind than students who are not frequent readers or who read other genres.

Beyond the "Nice Girl"

In Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers, Izzy, Willy Nilly, and Glass Mountain, Voigt portrays the growth of her main character from the traditional "nice girl" who is more motivated to obey the conventions of her parents and social set than to explore new experiences. These protagonists seek to please others rather than to develop into autonomous individuals. In Voigt's novels, her heroines succeed when they overcome their initial reluctance to explore and make their own decisions about what is valuable.

The first of these, Tell Me If the Lovers Are Losers begins in 1961 and mentions John F. Kennedy as a symbol of the hope for excellence. A review of Kennedy's impact on young people as a precursor of a new age in American history will help students understand Voigt's metaphor for the impact of Hildy on her teammates. Students may also need to review the stereotype of the 1950's middle class conformist in order to understand Ann's fear of being different and her snobbish behavior toward Eloise.

During reading, students may keep track of the differences between Niki, Hildy, and Ann in terms of their appearance, their study habits, and the way they speak and interact with other students. This comparison will help them analyze Voigt's thematic use of the three girls as types, each symbolizing a philosophically different approach to life.

Izzy, Willy Nilly illustrates the limitations of being "just a nice girl." It is one of the few books which describes high school from the viewpoint of a disabled person (Thomson, p. 26). One way to introduce this book is to ask students to describe in writing a day at school as if they suddenly became disabled. Ask them to imagine how their families would adjust their lives and how each of their friends would react. Keep these sketches to revise after reading the novel. Another way to introduce the novel is to ask students to brainstorm a definition of "nice" and then discuss the benefits and limitations of that label. In most societies, "nice" is synonymous with obedient, conventional, and unquestioning. During their reading of the novel, ask the students to comment on whether Izzy's actions and reactions seem realistic according to their own experiences.

Izzy, Willy Nilly is "more than a book about a girl learning to live without a leg. It is a book about a girl

learning to live" (Campbell, Wilson Library Bulletin, p. 49). Students can sum up their reactions to the novel by expressing their opinions about this comment by a well-respected critic. They can also comment on the newfound assertiveness of Izzy, debating whether assertiveness is an admirable quality in everyone, especially in people with disabilities.

Glass Mountain is classified as an adult novel but might be enjoyed by older or more sophisticated adolescents, especially those who are familiar with Shakespeare's Twelfth Night...or with Manhattan high society. This is a story of Alexis who is still a "nice girl" at thirty, still trying to please her parents by conforming to the conventions of their narrow slice of society. Although intellectually brilliant, she is not adept at judging the reality behind superficial appearances; even her own appearance does not match who she really is. Introduce this novel by reviewing the plot of Twelfth Night, which focuses on this kind of confusion between appearance and reality, and asking the students to react to Gregor after the first chapter where he dons his disguise. During the novel, note the allusions to art, cooking, and music; this is a sensual novel, a novel of superfice and art rather than mundane reality. Like Twelfth Night, it is a romantic comedy. After reading the novel, compare the very short and mysterious story of the same name

by Donald Barthelme (City Life, 1970), a cynical version of the fairy tale quest for a princess by a very modern prince.

Two Mysteries

Voigt's two mysteries are both solved by serious young girls who use scholarship to find important clues, and both raise the question of women's right, though from two different ends of an historical spectrum. In The Callender Papers, Jean is the ward of Miss Wainwright, who runs a school that produces suffragettes. Jean has been taught to use her mind and studies the Callender family papers to ascertain a motive for murder. Young students may need a review of late Victorian social history to properly enjoy Jean's pleasure in Mr. Callender's sense of fun: pictures of that era will convey the stereotypes of the "bluestocking" mistress of a school for suffragettes, the dandy in the white suit who plays croquet, and the self-righteously moral gentleman, Mr. Thiel. This novel hinges on Jean discovering her own identity while determining whether to trust the gleaming Enoch Callender or the grim Mr. Thiel. Students may enjoy predicting the answers to Jean's suspicions at the end of each chapter. The end of the novel wraps up the loose ends in a satisfyingly neat and melodramatic fashion; some students might enjoy writing an alternative ending, blaming the murder on Mr. Thiel.

The Vandemark Mummy hinges on Althea's knowledge of the

Greek poet Sappho. Although it is not absolutely necessary for enjoying the mystery, some introduction to the historical use of mummies as well as to the reputation of the Greek poet Sappho might be helpful. Like Jean, Phineas and Althea have been raised to respect the right of women to pursue careers: their mother is living two thousand miles away in order to pursue her career. Voigt portrays a range of emotional reactions by Mr. Hall and his children but leaves the question of the family's future up in the air. Ask students to discuss their reactions to this long-distance marriage and predict what will happen after reading the novel.

Four Histories

The rights of women are central to three of Voigt's historical novels. Jackaroo and On Fortune's Wheel are set in a mythical kingdom of the late middle ages where every young girl is expected to marry or live a socially marginal life. Peasant women are further disempowered by the edict against reading. Introduce this novel by asking students to describe how their lives would be different if only those in power could read. An interesting discussion of the rationale for compulsory education could ensue.

Voigt is an excellent chronicler of the daily details that make her characters' lives so real. By describing a day in their own lives as if they lived in the time of Gwyn

and Birle, students can step into the shoes of another time, vicariously tasting, smelling, and feeling the lives of their own ancestors. To extend this writing or discussion exercise to a multi-cultural experience, students can research the cultural realities of other traditions than the northern European land described by Voigt. Though texts like Ribbons of Time (which simultaneously trace the histories of politics, education, fine arts, technology, and travel) are helpful for this type of exercise, students should also be encouraged to use their imagination. What could a Chinese sailor teach these people about tools and transportation? What could a trader from Africa introduce to this culture? Voigt's newest novel, The Wings of the Falcon (released in September, 1993), is set this same medieval period.

Of Fortune's Wheel ends with Birle's decision to work as an herbalist on the land that originally been given to Gwyn many years ago. How will her fate be different than Gwyn's? Describe Orien, Birle, and their daughter Lyss ten years later.

Tree by Leaf takes place in 1920 Maine where twelve-year-old Clothilde feels that she is suddenly in charge of her family when her father, returning from World War I embittered by his disfigured face, hides in a shed away from the family. Her brother deserts the family to live with his

wealthy grandfather, and her mother retreats from necessary chores into a dreamy world of fine clothes and embroidery. Clothilde must take over the adult responsibilities of caring for her sister and providing food, yet she faces losing her inherited title because, as a girl, she has no legal rights. Students may compare this situation to other scenes in Voigt's books where the protagonists are abandoned by adults who fail to act responsibly.

This novel will be most enjoyed by students who like to ponder the meaning of life. One commentary (Fiction for Younger Readers, p. 119) suggests that some students may want to explore the concept of "the Voice" by comparing this novel with Aiken's The Moon's Revenge (Knopf, 1987) and Bill Brittain's The Wish Giver (Harper & Row, 1983). This topic is briefly but comprehensively covered by Frances Bradburn's June, 1988, column, "Middle Books" (Wilson Library Bulletin) in which she discusses this novel's theme of lacking control over life.

Other exercises could exploit the visual nature of this novel, which "is told primarily through descriptions of the setting.... The descriptions of the Maine seacoast and forest are glorious in their detail; the solid landscape forms the base above which the story drifts like fog" (Watson, 1988, p. 363). As in Glass Mountain and The Callender Papers, these vivid descriptions lend themselves

to student illustrations to summarize the steps of the plot and character development.

In Building Blocks, Brann travels back in time to a small town in Pennsylvania during the Depression where his father lived as a small boy, experiencing the historical past as well as his father's psychological past. Students can begin this novel by listing what they know about their parents' childhood and try to imagine their early personalities.

As in many of Voigt's novels, a major theme is the tension between an individual's control of his or her life and "fate" or accident. This novel, simpler than the others, might be discussed as a precursor to the more complex works.

Like Clothilde, in Tree by Leaf, Brann leads his family to reassess their options; in both books the child proves more courageous and wiser than adults. Students who have read both books might analyze the factors that prevent the adults from perceiving alternative courses of action. This analysis might spur an interesting discussion of the motivations of people who become homeless or cannot seem to cope with ordinary life. Some of the characters in both these novels seem unexcusably unpleasant, and yet, when a reader considers their backgrounds and the emotional deprivations they have suffered, their personalities become

explainable. Voigt's characters are realistically complex, their history evident in their present actions.

New Translations of Old Myths

David and Jonathan and Orfe are two novels that require the ability to stick to a complicated argument and some prior literary knowledge. Rewarding but difficult, they are suitable for mature or persistent readers who are willing and able to unravel allusive threads from a tightly woven complex pattern.

The title of David and Jonathan refers to the biblical friendship of a Hebrew prince and a young shepherd, but the allusion is loose: the father figure who agonizes over the competition between his two charges is God, not Jonathan's biological parent, and David is irretrievably warped by the torture he has suffered from the Nazi invasion. Although knowing the Old Testament story of David and Jonathan adds contextual understanding of the story, Voigt illustrates and explains outright her most important themes with intense scenes and philosophical conversations about the ultimate meaning of life and death. Students can be introduced to this book by reviewing their own ideas about the ultimate responsibility for good and evil and thinking about man's capacity for inflicting suffering on others.

This story about the implications of the Holocaust is framed by Jonathan's experiences in Vietnam. The two

experiences are connected by the narrator Henry who feels peripheral to both wars and to life in general. Because his father was a conscientious objector and because his family is privileged and Protestant, he feels comparatively detached from the anguish of the Jewish victims of World War II; because he is a medical doctor and did not directly participate in the Vietnam fighting, he feels as if he is only on the sidelines of this war. What is his responsibility for the suffering inherent in both wars? Can he only "limit the damage," and is that enough? These are the unanswerable questions that Voigt raises and that students might want to share with others who are reading the book. This is a difficult book which "offers no short cuts or easy solutions... But its account of maturation is subtle and acute, alert to the pains but no means deaf to the laughter. It deserves the close attention of [older] students" (Hollindale, p.33).

Orfe is less philosophically somber but artistically more complex. The title, the names of the characters, and the plot are based on the Greek myth of Orpheus which students would do well to review before reading the novel. Although Voigt adheres closely to the main outlines of the mythic story, she seems deliberately to flout tradition in her details. Her "Orpheus" is a female rock singer with very real failings, and her "three Graces" are anything but

the ethereally lovely symbols for art and beauty of the classical translations. Enny, the narrator and business manager, gathers strength of character to go on from her friendship with the very human Orfe; the development of her character is explained in allusions to the fairy tale "The Frog Prince," which students should also review before reading.

Because the story is told in flashbacks and in a loosely conversational style, students will probably enjoy reading it twice, first skimming to ascertain the flow of the story and then rereading to enjoy the texture. Voigt plays with language in this book more than in her previous novels, linking conversational phrases with intuitive rather than logical associations, successfully capturing the intense soul-searching talk that happens between serious friends. During a second reading, students can collect phrases they find meaningful and compose "found" poetry or song lyrics. Ask students to act as publishers and rearrange the passages chronologically. What do they think of the results

This is a novel to be read in private and discussed in retrospect. After students have had time to reflect on the themes, they might enjoy sharing their opinions about Voigt's portrayal of the drug scene or of her treatment of Orfe's death. Some students might not wish to share their

reactions with the class at large, and their privacy should be respected. Orphe is a strong experience but, like Voigt's other novels, an optimistic one, affirming the joy of learning and loving, even in the face of hardship and death.

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EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT

- Instructor in Summer Scholars Program June 1993
Emory & Henry College
Will teach Creative Writing and Adolescent Literature courses to high-school age students selected for a week long educational experience. Will mentor two secondary teachers for Masters' Level course.
- Instructor-Supervisor of Student Teachers (Sec.)
Emory & Henry College 1992-93
Taught Methods courses; supervise secondary student teachers in high and middle school settings. Organized 8 interactive seminars for students and public school teachers.
- Supervisor of Student Teachers (Elem.)
Virginia Tech University 1991-92
Supervised 18 student teachers in Roanoke County schools (elem. and middle) and organized monthly seminars.
- High School Teacher; grant writer
Abingdon High School 1988-90
Taught English and Reading (grades 8-12) wrote three grants (writing project, & two anti-drug grants) which were funded.
- Associate Director of Development
Emory & Henry College 1987-88
Researched & wrote educational grant proposals; compiled prospect data & wrote one-page biographies; researched scholarship histories & composed files; researched & wrote stewardship correspondence for Development Office.
- Developmental Specialist
Virginia Highlands Community College 1979-87
Designed & administered academic intervention programs for over 100 students each year. Taught Basic English, Basic Math, & Study Skills. Administered tutor program, & collected statistics for about 150 students annually.

Suzanne S. Reid

College Instructor (part-time) 1973-91
Taught college English courses (Composition, English Lit., American Lit., Children's Lit.) for the following institutions: Bristol College (1973), Virginia Intermont College (1973-77), Emory & Henry College (1985, 1991), Virginia Highlands Community College (1975, 1986-87).

Early Teaching Experiences

Taught Science (Grades K-5), Reading(5), Latin(7,8)
Sullins Academy, Bristol, Va. 1977-79
Right-To-Read Aide, Homebound Teacher, Basic Skills (CETA)
Bristol, Virginia Schools 1971-75
Taught English (Grades 9-11), Yearbook Supervisor
Nelson County, Va. 1968-70

EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION

St. Lawrence University
B.A. (English, Hist/Govt Minor) 1967

University of Virginia
M.A. (English) 1968

Va. Teacher Certification (English)
University of Virginia 1969

Va. Teacher Certification (Latin)
King College, Bristol 1980

Computer courses:
Intro. to Computer Science (VHCC, 1983); LOGO (U.Va., 1984), Instructional Procedures (VPI, 1984)

Virginia Tech University
Ph.D.in Education 1993
Curriculum and Instruction: English Education with
an emphasis in Reading

PUBLICATIONS

Two articles for The Handbook: A Reference Manual for Personnel Working with Handicapped Students (Virginia Community College System, 1982).

"Images of Music, Wood, and Sailing in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman Stories: 'Reaching Out, Holding On, and Letting Go,'" in The ALAN Review, 19 (1991): 10-14.

Sharpe, R. & Reid, S. "Exit Slips: Why Use Them?" Virginia English Bulletin. v.42, no.1 (Spring, 1992): 111-3.

Review of Stories Lives Tell" by Witherell, C. & Noddings, N. Virginia English Bulletin, v.42, no.1 (Spring, 1992): 121-3.

"Feminist Issues in Cynthia Voigt's Novels," Signal, v.17, no.1 (Fall, 1992): 6-10.

Garrison, J. & Reid, S. "Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge" by S. Ball, Qualitative Studies in Education, 1992.

Review of Wild Animals, Gentle Women by Margery Facklam, in Novels for Young Adults, Salem Press, to be published in 1993.

Review of Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution by Elizabeth Evans, in Novels for Young Adults, Salem Press, to be published in 1993.

Presenting Cynthia Voigt. Twayne Publishers as part of their United States Authors Series: Young Adult Series, Publication pending: Expected Date-1994.

PAPERS PRESENTED

"Making Math Easy: Fighting Math Anxiety," at Seventh Annual Developmental Studies Conference, Germana Comm. College (1983).

"Adding It All Up: Teaching Basic Math Skills," at VAEOPP Conference, Wytheville Community College (1983).

"Accommodations for L.D. Students at the College Level," at VACLD, Virginia Intermont College (1984).

"Using Computers with Developmental Students," at five-college in-service workshop, Mountain Empire Comm. College (1984).

"Environmental Projects for Schools," at Virginia Student Council Association Conference, Winchester, Va (1990).

"Planting Ideas and Protecting the Environment" (PIPE), at Virginia Education Association (VEA), Roanoke, VA (1990).

"Feminist Viewpoints in Adolescent Literature," at Virginia Association of Teachers of English (VATE), Alexandria, VA (1992).

"Collaborative Research in Teacher Education: Using Dialogue Journals in Research" at Eastern Educational Research Association (EERA), Clearwater, FL (1993).

"Improving Reading Comprehension is So Easy, But We Make it So Hard" at National Teachers of English (NCTE), Richmond, VA (1993)

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Conducted Inservice Workshop for all teachers of Marion High School with Barbara Cross: "Interdisciplinary Teaming", 1993.

Completed Southwest Virginia Writing Project, Radford, 1992.

Completed Toastmaster's Program: Competent Toastmaster (1991-2).

Wrote & received VEA Grant for environmental writing project (1989-90); two grants for Abingdon H.S. Drug Program (1990) totalling \$2,800.

Organized S.E.E. conference ("Parenting the Gifted Child"), Emory & Henry College, for Washington Co. students & parents (1988).

Instructor for SAT Prep. Course (GENL 009): 31 students (1987).

Designed and directed a writing pilot program at Va. Highlands Community College, involving 20 faculty in developing student writing in courses across the curriculum; wrap-up workshop served as springboard to implement Writing Center (1986).

Organized annual VHCC Winter Talent Show (1984-87). Managed "Steps to Success," a series of VHCC luncheon meetings for students & members of the local business community (1985).

Magnum S. Reid

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Phi Kappa Phi (Virginia Tech) (1993).

Phi Delta Kappa (Southwest Virginia) (1992).

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (1988-Present).

Assembly on Literature of Adolescents (ALAN).

Assembly on Literature and Culture of Appalachia (ALCA).

Appointed to 1993 National Commission on English Education and English Studies (CEE) to implement NCTE policies.

Virginia Association of Teachers of English (VATE) (1991-

Virginia Education Association (1988-Present).

Student Virginia Education Association (SVEA) (1992-3)

Mentor for Minority Affairs Task Force; E & H College (1993)

Appalachian Highlands Sierra Club (1991-Present, President 1993)

Audubon Society, Annual Area Canvass (1980-Present).

Abingdon Highlands Festival Board (1977-81, 1989-Present).

Supporters of Educational Excellence (Publicity Chairman, 1988).

Meadowview School PTA President (1984-85).

Emory United Methodist Church: Youth Coordinator (1987, 1988); Church School Coordinator (1984, 1985); Adult Education Coordinator (1982); Church Board of Trustees (1985-88); Nominating Committee (1991).

VAEOPP (Va Assoc of Equal Opportunity Programs Personnel), nominated for Board of Directors, 1986.

Advocacy Award Nominee, 1981 (Year of Disabled Persons, Mount Rogers Planning District).

Advisory Council to Projects with Industry (1980-85).

Crisis Center Board (1972-75; President 1974).

BECOMING A MODERN HERO:
THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN CYNTHIA VOIGT'S NOVELS

by

Suzanne Elizabeth Reid

(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study is to explore the novels of a highly respected author of young adult literature and to summarize the plots, analyze the themes, and examine the motivations of the characters in a format that would be accessible and useful to the classroom teachers and students who read her novels. The bulk of the document will follow the format of the Twayne Series of Young Adult Writers, a serial publication of biographical information, plot summary, and critical commentary that is standard in many school libraries.

Cynthia Voigt's novels are both popular with teachers and students and well-acclaimed by literary critics and scholars of young adult literature. The first chapter outlines Voigt's professional career and the events in her life that affected her writing. The four chapters that follow treat individual novels grouped as they relate to themes of defining a self, balancing commitment to self and family, learning to recognize and value individual differences, and finding the courage to challenge socially conventional expectations. The sixth chapter summarizes Voigt's philosophy of personal development as it is reflected in her writing, and the last chapter suggest strategies which could be applied to Voigt's novels in the

classroom.

Throughout the analyses of Voigt's novels, critical opinions and scholarly commentary have been summarized to provide a perspective that is informed by a variety of sources of information about this author's work in particular and about young adult novels in general.