

THE EDUCATION OF DICEY TILLERMAN

by

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ABSTRACT

JULIA BARRIER. The Education of Dicey Tillerman. (Under Direction of DR. MARK WEST)

In Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman Cycle, the various novels from Dicey's perspective (*Homecoming*, *Dicey's Song*, and *Seventeen Against The Dealer*) show Dicey's emotional growth, and the lessons she learns. Dicey learns lessons in trusting people close to her, and strangers in the first novel. As the series progresses, Dicey learns how she wishes to define her relationship with femininity. Additionally, Dicey simultaneously forgives Momma and reframes her memory of Momma's femininity into strength. As the series draws to a close, Dicey divides herself from her family, but eventually returns. Upon reentering and restructuring her family to mirror their adult selves, Dicey moves into adulthood. Through experiencing various changes, Dicey learns invaluable lessons that shape her into a good person with a strong sense of self.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Dan Phillips, who first introduced me to these books at the age of ten and Dr. Balaka Basu, who helped me revisit them. My grandfather gave me these books at a difficult time in my life, and since then, I have loved reading. Dr. Basu helped me revisit them and others, and I am eternally grateful that she helped me add new memories with these books to my old ones.

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CHAPTER 1: THE EDUCATION OF DICEY TILLERMAN

In the 1980s, Cynthia Voigt published her series of books which have come to be known as the Tillerman cycle. The books are written from various perspectives, but all centered around different people who either are the Tillerman siblings, (Dicey, James, Maybeth, and Sammy), their friends, or in one case, their deceased uncle prior to his service in Vietnam. The book series begins with the four Tillerman siblings being abandoned by their mother in a parking lot. However, as they make their way on foot to a relative's house, the reader learns a lot of their individual personalities as well as how they interact with each other in such a stressful situation.

The reader follows the four Tillerman children as they grow from young children into adults. Three of the books are told by Dicey, the eldest Tillerman sibling, at different ages. She begins the first book at the age of twelve, is thirteen in the second book, and finally twenty-one in the last novel. Throughout these three different novels, Dicey learns both educational and moral lessons. It is even through the educational lessons that Dicey learns morality as well as human nature. All of these lessons contribute to her personality and relationships with the other characters, specifically her siblings throughout her young adult life. These lessons work to shape Dicey as both an independent and dependent person.

While the three books that this paper will focus on are all written from the perspective of the eldest Tillerman sibling, Dicey, those being *Homecoming* (1980), *Dicey's Song* (1982), and *Seventeen Against the Dealer* (1989), there are four other books in the series that deal with other people who are close to the Tillermans.

The third book in the series is given from the perspective of Jeff, Dicey's then boyfriend. Jeff attempts several times throughout the novel to have a relationship with his estranged mother,

but his efforts cease because of the manipulative tendencies that she possesses. It is through this lens that he better understands and grows to love Dicey.

The fourth book in the series, titled *The Runner* (1985), is from the Tillerman siblings' uncle Bullet's perspective. This book gives the reader a better understanding of the abusive relationship Gram had with her husband while also showing Bullet come to terms with understanding racism with the backdrop of the Vietnam war.

The fifth book in the series, *Come a Stranger* (1986), is about Mina coming to terms with her blackness and learning to love that about herself. The book shows her friendship begin to develop with Dicey.

The sixth book in the series, *Sons From Afar* (1987), is told from the point of view of both James and Sammy. It discusses and follows along in their search for their elusive father who neither of them remember from their childhood. It strengthens their bond as brothers, despite their differences.

Cynthia Voigt has won various awards for some of the books in her Tillerman Cycle. *Homecoming* won the National Book Award. She was awarded the Newbery Medal for *Dicey's Song*, as well as the Newbery Honor Award for *A Solitary Blue*.

In the first novel of her Tillerman Cycle, *Homecoming*, Voigt introduces us to Dicey. We learn that their mother, whom they affectionately refer to as "Momma" wants to take them on a trip to their Great Aunt Cilla's house. However, when Momma leaves them in a mall parking lot, Dicey soon realizes that it will be up to her to ensure that she and her three younger siblings get to their Great Aunt Cilla's house on foot. However, when they arrive and discover that Cilla has long since passed and her daughter, who's religion clouds her judgment, does not necessarily want them all to stay together as a collective unit, they leave to find their mythic Grandmother,

who they have only heard of. Once they arrive at the Grandmother's house, they realize they may not be able to stay due to her not having enough funds to care for them. Their determination to stay is shown through the various odd jobs that the Tillerman children begin to do for their grandmother per Dicey's request. At the conclusion of the novel, the reader learns that Dicey and her younger siblings will get to stay with their grandmother indefinitely.

In the first novel of the series, Dicey begins the story as someone who struggles to care for her siblings and manage money, but she ends the story with successfully keeping the four Tillerman siblings together. She learns lessons such as when to trust someone to help lighten her load of caring for her younger siblings. Dicey learns a lot about human nature as well. This will aid her in learning when to not trust someone. Dicey discovers a lot about the strengths and weaknesses of her younger brothers and sister. This unclouded view of her younger siblings, will aid Dicey in ensuring that all of them are taken care of. This makes me much more equipped to find the best possible home for the four of them to be in together. I hope to analyze the various scenes where Dicey begins to learn these lessons in hopes of better showing how these instances shaped her into becoming a better person as well as a more equipt person to care for herself later in life. These analyses will show greater themes across the three books that will enable me to form a conclusion about Dicey's education.

The second novel in the series is from the perspective of Dicey. The second novel, *Dicey's Song*, published in 1982, picks up where *Homecoming* left off. Dicey and her siblings have begun to live with their grandmother, who they have started to call Gram. In this novel, Dicey begins to learn about herself outside of being a caretaker for her siblings. Dicey is treated by Gram as an adult who can help make decisions about how best to take care of her siblings. However, as the novel draws to a close, Dicey and Gram learn the real whereabouts of her

mother. Dicey and Gram travel to Boston to be with Momma in her final days. At the conclusion of the novel, Gram starts to discuss filing for permanent adoption for the Tillerman children, and they also enjoy their first Christmas as a family.

Dicey learns a lot of different lessons that relate to who she is outside of her siblings, as well as how to step back and let someone else help make the important decisions for all of them. There are various scenes now that the Tillerman family is settled where Dicey becomes interested in her own school work and even begins to make friends. At the beginning of the novel, Dicey is insecure with her own femininity, and one of the major lessons she learns here is that womanness does not equate to weakness. She learns this through various clothes shopping scenes with Gram. Dicey learns when it is appropriate to let someone else make the difficult decisions, just as she did with Gram when Momma was dying. However, one of the most important lessons that Dicey learns is when to jump in and do things for others. This is shown through the different scenes of Christmas shopping.

The final chapter focuses on the last novel written from Dicey's perspective. I would like to begin this chapter by looking at the other scenes from the book where Dicey is shown through the eyes of the other characters and what the other characters see her learning.

The final book in the series that is written from Dicey's perspective is entitled *Seventeen Against The Dealer*, which was published in 1989. The novel begins with Dicey being determined to get her boat building business off of the ground. When an unusual person named Cisco shows up looking for work, Dicey agrees to accept his help. Unbeknownst to Dicey, Cisco is actually her long-lost father. As the novel progresses, Dicey and Cisco develop a working relationship, but Dicey begins to lose touch with her family. Cisco eventually steals Dicey's

earnings. Dicey then solicits the help of her family and Jeff and becomes closer with them than ever.

Through the final book of the series, Dicey learns about when to refrain from trusting someone. She learns from Gram about when to trust someone, and the mistakes that coincide with that, can not be avoided. Additionally I call highlight how Dicey, learning to have interests that are independent of her siblings, did eventually take her to a place where she needed them in the ways that they once needed her. I would like to show this as the ultimate lesson that Dicey could learn throughout the novel.

Final Thoughts:

Through the various books in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle, the reader can more accurately understand the ways that Dicey has grown as a person in her relationships with other people, especially her siblings. Upon closer examination, one should see how Dicey becomes more understanding and accepting of various personalities, particularly those that are different from her own, learns about forgiveness, as well as when to accept and deny help and how to know when it is appropriate to trust another person. It is my hope through portraying this, that the reader will better understand how these lessons end up shaping her personality and sense of self as the books progress, especially in the final book where she is now eight years older and entering adulthood.

CHAPTER 2: DICEY LEARNS ABOUT TRUST IN *HOMEcoming*

After Momma leaves Dicey in charge of her younger siblings, Dicey needs to learn lessons of trust to better care for her brothers and sister. Since the Tillermans do not have enough money to travel from Provincetown to Crisfield on their own, Dicey needs to determine who to trust and how to navigate those situations as they make their journey on foot. Dicey must learn to trust her siblings first, and appreciate their various strengths and weaknesses before she can trust strangers. When Dicey begins to trust her siblings, she learns to rely on them to help her determine others to seek help from. Learning to trust bonds Dicey and her siblings and teaches her that dependence is okay.

Cynthia Voigt begins her series which has affectionately come to be known as the Tillerman cycle, with her first book entitled, *Homecoming*. Despite her being a Young Adult author, Voigt's work does not begin with the traditional day-in-the-life of the main character, who in this case is the eldest Tillerman sibling, Dicey. The story begins with the one and only line we, as readers, will ever hear from their mother Abigail Tillerman, who will be referred to as "Momma" from now on, and she states, "'You be good,' she said. 'You hear me? You little ones mind what Dicey tells you. You hear?'" (Voigt, 3). Voigt intentionally begins the novel with placing all of the responsibility on Dicey. While it adds to her credit as the most capable of the Tillerman children, it also establishes authority that the reader can fairly assume was already in place prior to the start of the novel. Even though the reader does not know Momma as a character yet, and technically never truly will, the children seem familiar with being left in Dicey's care. The younger children, Maybeth and Sammy, immediately obey what Momma says with a simple reply of "Yes, Momma." One can understand and see Dicey as the authoritative sibling amongst the crowd of Tillermans through the nonchalance in language that Momma uses.

Being tasked with this responsibility, and having her younger siblings look to her for support early on, sets Dicey up to be someone who will have a lot to learn once she realizes that Momma is not coming back for them.

As the first chapter of the novel continues to progress and Momma still has not returned, Dicey is tasked with making her very first decision on behalf of the children in this instance. Dicey states, “When everyone had a sandwich, and James had two, Dicey reached a decision. ‘We have to wait here a while more,’” (Voigt, 6). While Dicey did technically make a decision prior to this by having James, Maybeth and Sammy eat there is still a hope that Momma will return as planned and will provide more food for them. In this instance as well the language is important because Dicey does not consult or discuss with the other Tillerman siblings about what to do without Momma. She shoulders this newfound responsibility alone.

This pattern of behavior persists throughout the first chapter especially as Dicey decides on her own that it is best for the Tillerman children to get to Bridgeport to see their infamous and wealthy Aunt Cilla who she believes is sure to help them. Voigt shows this through the line “Now she was swept away with determination to get the kids to Bridgeport,” (Voigt, 8). A more generous and forgiving reader could assume that Voigt is simply highlighting the ways in which Dicey feels responsible for James, Maybeth, and Sammy as the oldest sibling. However the scene shows a fundamental lesson Dicey needs to learn.

In the second chapter as the children begin their journey, Dicey again, forces all of the children to wear socks in order to prevent blisters. James, the intellectual of the group, questions the validity of her logic because traveling with socks is much hotter. However, Dicey persists in pushing them all to wear socks so as not to get a blister. Again, another younger Tillerman, questions a decision that Dicey makes. Sammy asks, “what about Momma” (Voigt, 20). To

which Dicey honestly answers that Momma may not be back, However Sammy pushes again to say that they should wait for her to come back. Dicey urges the children forward though.

It is through these scenes, as well as the ones prior to it, that Voigt effectively shows the lack of trust that Dicey has for anyone in her life at all. She does not seem to trust her siblings to aid her in the decisions that first handedly affect them as well. One cannot assume that this is due to Dicey's trust in Momma's decision to leave her in charge either, because Dicey does not even trust Momma in the novel. This is evident through the first chapter when Dicey begins to question her sanity with the line, "I think Momma meant to take us to Bridgeport but-" (Voigt, 11). Dicey, when questioned later on the sanity of their mother by James, changes the subject seemingly in an effort to divert his attention. Dicey has lived with and helped care for her siblings all of her life, however, she does not trust them to make a level-headed decisions in any of these moments, or understand complex situations hence her evading the questions surrounding their Momma's return, and mental wellbeing. In showing the lack of trust that Dicey has, Voigt sets the novel up nicely to foster growth for Dicey as a character in terms of her relationship with her siblings as well as her relationships with other people.

Dicey's mistrust of her siblings comes to a climax as the story progresses. When Sammy refuses to go on, Dicey relents and lets him make the decision on his own to stay behind and wait in hopes of Momma's return. However, she decides this out of pure frustration which is shown through the yelling that occurs in this scene. When the clearly upset, but still stubborn Sammy refuses to follow them, Maybeth reaches out her hand towards him, and he decides to continue. This scene is incredibly complex and displays the different dynamics between the Tillerman siblings including and excluding Dicey. Dicey, the reader learns here, does not have patience for the ways that Sammy handles a situation. Sammy, being six in this novel, would obviously not

handle something as traumatic as the disappearance of their mother in the same way Dicey would since she is twelve at this point.

Despite her clear frustration and lack of understanding or empathy for those around her, Dicey relents her control over her younger siblings in this scene. By letting Sammy choose whether or not to continue with herself, Jame, and Maybeth, Dicey is giving control to Sammy, possibly in hopes that he will make the right decision. One could even venture to say that by doing something in hopes of another person coming to a similar decision, trust is present. Because Dicey was so controlling over the money spent as well as the trip to Great Aunt Cilla's in general, she is somewhat letting go and trusting those around her here. Based on the previous displays of the grasp she holds over her siblings, one can determine that Dicey would not want to leave Sammy either. One can easily read her control over them as a love for them in addition to a lack of trust and desperate desire to keep them together.

However, Dicey begins to learn more about the dynamic of her siblings and knows when to trust them to help her along this journey when she sees Maybeth reach her hand out to Sammy and he automatically accepts it and decides to continue. It is through sitting back and allowing others to take part in helping her in difficult circumstances that Dicey learns more about the dynamic between Maybeth and Sammy, as well as how to help Sammy in the future if the same event were to occur again. This scene opens Dicey up to learning and watching with the intention of understanding more about human nature and the personalities of those in her life. Maybeth's victory in this scene, shows Dicey it is valuable to ask for help especially when it is with someone who is close to you.

It is noteworthy that Dicey begins to let go and understand her youngest siblings, Maybeth and Sammy first. Dicey trusts her two youngest siblings for very different reasons.

Dacey in the scene above, displays a very similar stubbornness to Sammy. She displays her frustration by releasing control and allowing Sammy to decide whether he continues along with them to Aunt Cilla's or not. One could easily make the argument that Sammy displays a distinct and less refined form of stubbornness. As stated earlier, he initially wants all of them to remain in the parking lot because he believes that Momma will return. Voigt revisits this feeling through the scene quoted above. Sammy, by bringing up again that he distrusts Dacey's decisions compared to Momma, shows loyalty to Momma, stubbornness, and a refusal to even attempt to understand the situation at hand. Dacey may subconsciously understand Sammy due to their similarities in personality. This is further shown when Dacey comments throughout the novel on how she, like Sammy, would fight in school. This implies logic behind trusting Sammy to make the same decision that Dacey wanted him to. Thus proving that trusting Sammy to help make decisions prior to anyone else in the novel was the safest and most believable decision on the part of Dacey.

However, in the few lines that follow this calculated confrontation, Dacey decides to trust Maybeth and allow her to help Sammy come to the conclusion that they should all stay together. This relates to the generational aspect that occurs within the novel. Later on in the novel, and continuously throughout the series as a whole, James, as well as Sammy, and Dacey compare Maybeth to Momma. While Maybeth proves herself to be more capable at making productive decisions and more willing to withstand adversity than Momma, she relates to Momma in that she struggles to think things through at the same pace as the rest of the Tillermans. Momma and Maybeth also relate in their love of music and gentle nature. Maybeth is soft spoken and has minimal dialogue throughout the series, but proves to have an innate way of telling a good person from a bad person which is shown later in the novel. Knowing that Maybeth is gentle and

willing to help in any way possible, Dicey entrusts her to encourage Sammy to continue the journey. The logical formation of trust is ingenious on the part of Voigt because she effectively shows another safe option in terms of people Dicey can predict. This implies that Dicey, while becoming educated on human nature and trusting those around her, takes risks that are calculated. She still has not learned to take any sort of leap of faith in terms of trusting people and their ability to help a situation.

Dicey still, however, refuses to trust those who are not close to her. One example of this is through the various chapters that include the character, Eddie, and his girlfriend. The reader learns through a conversation that Dicey overhears that both Eddie and his girlfriend stole money and are running away from home. Eddie prompts Dicey on her name as he states, ““What’s your name kid?” ‘Danny” (Voigt, 56). Dicey goes on to tell her siblings that she makes this decision to ensure that they stay together because traveling with a preteen boy is much safer than traveling with a girl of the same age. In doing so, Dicey shows her refusal to trust people who are unknown to her. This, again, shows Voigt setting up the possibility of further character development on the part of Dicey. In addition to this lie, Dicey also makes the decision in the moment without consulting her younger siblings. Therefore Dicey does not trust them to make decisions as she would and still does not appreciate their individual perspectives on the various situations they all encounter.

As the Tillerman clan continues to stay in the National Park with the company of Eddie and his girlfriend, all but Dicey begin to feel at home. In fact she decided it was time to leave when James hit his head and needed a few days rest. When Sammy steals money he comments on how “it had almost twenty dollars in it” (Voigt, 78). Dicey replies, “you’ve got to do what I tell you. What *I* tell you, not anybody else” (Voigt, 78). It is at this moment again that Dicey

refuses to give up control and allow herself to be open to letting others in to help make decisions. While in this case, one could make the argument that she was right and Sammy should not steal money from someone else, Sammy was simply trying to help which Dicey realizes later on. However as the scene progresses Dicey asks James if he will be okay to travel the next day due to him falling on his head and in reply, he comments, “I’m not sure Dicey (...) I don’t think I should yet” (Voigt, 79). After this response, Dicey listens to James and contemplates staying another day as she says “They had to go. But what if James wasn’t better and it hurt him? Should she wait another day” (Voigt, 79). While this scene may seem miniscule to the overall plot of the novel, it shows Dicey beginning to trust James to help her make decisions.

As the scene continues on, Dicey realizes James was “some brother! He was no more sick than she was” (Voigt 79). However, one could still conclude that this is another point of growth for Dicey because she starts to learn about the tension of knowing when and when not to trust people. Voigt shows this through Dicey, again, taking an unbiased view of the actions and behaviors of her siblings. Without the inclusion of this tension between accepting and rejecting help, Dicey would continue to accept help from her siblings without acknowledging their own limitations and blind spots, in this case, as James served his own self interests. This is interconnected to Dicey’s struggle with trusting James the most out of all of her siblings. James, who is known as the smartest Tillerman, has enough intelligence to manipulate Dicey and remain unpredictable thus forcing Dicey to entrust him in a larger, more blinding way.

This explains why Dicey was at first manipulated into thinking that James was still hurt. Dicey learns an important lesson about how trusting those around her may not always end up in a positive outcome. Due to the predictability of both Maybeth and Sammy’s personalities as shown above, James was the one Tillerman sibling who could teach Dicey this lesson. After learning

about empathy and sympathy despite James lying to her, Dicey's personality changes and she learns to reach out to strangers when she is in need.

Despite the frustrations on the part of Dicey as a result of James lying to her about being hurt, she continues on her educational and literal quest along with James, Maybeth, and Sammy. Upon running out of money in New Haven near the end of their journey to Aunt Cilla's, Dicey reaches out to a stranger, Windy, who takes them in. Windy tries to get information about Dicey and her siblings' journey when he states, 'And you've been walking from Peewauket all this time?' "We stayed in a park once. The little kids can't go very fast.' 'Is that all you want to tell?' 'Please.'" (Voigt, 117). In this simple interaction with Windy, Dicey learns about being able to choose when to relinquish trust or even withhold information due to lack of trust. Windy, at this point in the novel, proves himself to be trustworthy by allowing the Tillerman children to stay with him by taking them out to dinner. In addition to learning about when to withhold information, Dicey learns about how a positive interaction with a person she decides to trust could play out. In addition, since Stewart, Windy's roommate, drives them the rest of the way to Aunt Cilla's from New Haven, Dicey learns that those close to someone trustworthy may be helpful as well. This improves her view of human nature and her willingness to entrust not only her siblings but her secrets to certain people.

Once the children arrive in Provincetown and learn of Aunt Cilla's passing, they are tasked with convincing Cilla's daughter Eunice to keep them. Eunice enlists the help of the members of the church she is largely involved in. Upon exposure to this situation, Dicey applies what she has learned about trusting people to ensure that she stays positive and sets the right example for her siblings with Aunt Cilla and members of the church. In a moment of seeming empowerment, Dicey decides to trust Eunice to take them on as foster children. In addition to

this trusting of Eunice, Dicey applies the lessons she has just learned from Windy and Stewart about trusting those closest to someone trustworthy. However, in a moment of what is seemingly empowerment for Dicey is in actuality, a moment of no power at all. Dicey learned that while staying with Cousin Eunice, her “brain slowed down. Maybe it was trying so hard to please Cousin Eunice that had that effect on her” (Voigt, 166).

In the lines above, one can clearly see that the desperation that Dicey feels to keep Cousin Eunice happy took all of her power away. Since Cousin Eunice had in fact gone to the police, Dicey did not believe she could simply run away with James, Maybeth, and Sammy again, and she wanted to ensure that they stayed together. In this situation, Dicey learns about how quickly her power could disintegrate if she trusted the wrong person. This reinforces the idea of tension between knowing when it is appropriate to trust someone and when it is not. Additionally tension between trusting someone with some information and trusting them with all of the information, is present. Voigt highlights one of the many differences between Windy and Stewart, and Cousin Eunice and the members of her church. Dicey, in this situation, was not given the respect of setting her own boundaries as she was with Windy and Stewart. Eunice ensured that Dicey told the police everything that had happened since their mother went missing. This abruptly stripped Dicey of any secrets she and her siblings had to ensure their safety.

However, Voigt creates an even bigger opportunity for growth and understanding for Dicey through her lack of power that she hints at within the novel. Dicey losing her power in the situation with Cousin Eunice loosely parallels her siblings having no power over the decision to travel to see Eunice in the first place. Much like Eunice, Dicey made all of the decisions and the children were expected to follow along. However, Voigt showcases the moral and emotional

growth that Dicey experiences (which is shown through some of the preceding paragraphs) throughout the rest of the journey to Cousin Eunice's house.

As their time with Cousin Eunice goes on, Dicey learns that the church, where James, Sammy, and Maybeth all attend school finds Sammy "out of control," and James a genius, while Maybeth is regressing due to the lack of intellectual stimulation that she requires. In realizing this, Dicey further understands the effective ways that Eunice has taken away the power that Momma once gave her on the first page of the novel. She no longer has control over the development of her siblings and no longer recognizes the personality traits that she has come to know and love about them throughout the novel. This highlights even further, the tension between trusting and not trusting.

By Voigt showcasing these two completely different situations of trust outside of people Dicey already knew, she effectively brings attention to the differences not only in personality between these characters, but also how Dicey can now rely on her intuition and unbiased view of human nature as a whole. By this I mean, Dicey knew that Windy was a trustworthy person based on how he approached her carefully in the rain, and how he allowed her to remain in charge and in control over her siblings.

Dicey learns these differences as well as what it means for her own social and intuitive development after seeing the consequences of being forced into talking to both members of the church and the local police force. Voigt effectively furthers the life education of Dicey in this situation, by having the consequences affect her siblings whom she has known her whole life, but come to understand much better throughout their journey. In addition to her newfound understanding of situations, this is an effective plot point Voigt uses due to Dicey's established close and protective relationship with her siblings. It is due to her understanding of the situation

and lack of power she now possesses that causes Dicey to gather her siblings and leave Cousin Eunice's house in search of their illusive Grandmother.

In her article entitled, "Economies of Childness in Cynthia Voigt's *Homecoming*," Sarah Hardstaff argues that in addition to the emotional labor that the Tillerman children (especially Dicey) throughout their journey to find a physical home in the novel, the "symbolic economy underlies both the decisions the children make for themselves with regard to their work and survival, and the ways in which they are treated by others" (Hardstaff, n.p.). By this Hardstaff suggests that the ways that the Tillerman children are treated by the people they encounter over the course of the first book, affect their understanding of the adult world and how to go about portraying themselves to future people they encounter. In her article, Hardstaff acknowledges the way that their "childness" is commodified and taken advantage of by those in power. This can be seen in the novel during the scenes involving Cousin Eunice. She clearly uses her religion as a way of suggesting to the children that she is a good person worthy of their respect and gratitude, but she also commodifies them as a way of ensuring her standing within the church is high. As Dicey starts to notice this and questions Eunice about it, she is gaslighted and encouraged to be grateful they have a home. Because of this, in addition to her loss of power Dicey decides to leave along with James, Maybeth, and Sammy. In doing so, Dicey removes herself from the economy Eunice tried to create, and regains some of the power she lost (Hardstaff, n.p.).

As the novel continues, Dicey learns more about when to trust and when not to trust. Upon taking a job as pickers, Dicey encourages James, Maybeth, and Sammy to make the best of the situation despite the senile old man who is in charge. Sammy begins the conversation by stating, "I'd like to kill him and hit him," Sammy said. 'He scares Maybeth.' Maybeth had big tears in her eyes. 'There's the dog,' James said, 'and the man.'" (...) 'He's crazy, Dicey.' 'Bad

crazy,' she agreed" (Voigt, 270). In the quotation above, we see marked improvement in Dicey in comparison to how she viewed her siblings at the beginning of the novel. Sammy, Maybeth, and James all contribute in some way to show Dicey how uncomfortable they are with the situation at hand. In their discussion, Dicey even finds herself agreeing with them.

Through this scene, the reader can clearly see how well the Tillerman clan has begun to function together despite being in high stress situations. This discussion was possible because Dicey better understands her siblings' personalities as well as what they can add to a situation. Had Dicey not observed both the merits and shortcomings of her younger siblings, then it would not have been an agreeable conversation about their comfortability on this random farm. Because of this productive discussion, they do leave and successfully escape the farm together.

In addition to the conversation between her siblings, Dicey becomes more educated on how to step back and let others take control of a situation. Sammy was comfortable enough to stop picking and start the conversation which sparked Dicey's decision to form an escape plan. Meaning, one could theoretically credit Sammy for encouraging this action from Dicey.

This scene works to solidify the dependent bond that the Tillermans have throughout the rest of the book series. While the more lighthearted scenes that usually including song or a discussion of shared childhood memories, help Dicey understand the relationship she has with James, Maybeth and Sammy, there is a distinct difference between understanding a person and trusting them, especially if it requires letting go of some of one's own power over achieving their desired outcome. Dicey no longer looks at them as incapable of making helpful decisions, but rather as equals, despite the age difference. Dicey acknowledges the changes and developments in their various personalities as they age in the rest of the books. The bond that Voigt brings about in this scene begins to encourage Dicey to relinquish control in various instances and

understand that, while her siblings may not handle it in the exact way that she would, it will work out in their favor.

Another example of this is through the scene in the novel where Dicey encourages Sammy to enter the grocery store in search of bread for all of them to eat. Sarah Hardstaff attributes this to her “resourcefulness” in her article. In support of Hardstaff, I would argue that yes, Dicey is resourceful in using the economy of childness to her advantage, because she knew that Sammy, being the youngest, would get the most sympathy and consequently, the most food. However, Hardstaff ignores the dialogue in the scene where Dicey gives Sammy explicit instructions on what to do. In my opinion, this implies that Dicey is both a member of the child economy and removed from it due to her newfound parental role. With this in mind, one could make the argument that Dicey commodifies her siblings in a similar way that Eunice commodified them (Hardstaff, n.p.)

In Suzanne Elizabeth Reid’s chapter, “Reaching Out, Holding On, and Letting Go: Self Development in Cynthia Voigt’s Tillerman Series” in her book, *Presenting Cynthia Voigt*, she comments on the musical relationship between the children. Their primary bond prior to the start of the novel outside of blood relations were the songs that Momma taught them. Reid states, “The folk song “Pretty Polly” which the Tillerman children 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. After, however, the words of another song reign both comfort and a helpful message” (Reid, 33). Reid goes on to highlight the way music can bring the Tillermans together with other people because it is a positive artform that can unite others.

Reid comments on the different ways the Tillerman children view music. Based on Reid's interpretation of the way Dicey understands music, one can see music as another reason Dicey refrains from trusting people. In the example Reid uses, Dicey can quickly catch on to the message of a song and understand its relationship to the person, however, James, on the other hand, uses logic to appreciate the flow of lyrics. Reid gives no explanation for this, but Dicey can deduce meaning in music because of her natural suspicion of people, especially in Reid's example. Reid, on the other hand, attributes it to Dicey's ability to compare people to Momma because of the innate innocence and gentle mannerisms that she sees in Maybeth. While this is a possibility, because the Tillermans often worry that Maybeth will also descend into depression, it is much more likely that Dicey's suspicion of strangers would transfer to her interpretation of people in music.

Through various songs, Momma instilled common memories that the Tillerman children associate with her in a positive way. Reid states, "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" (Reid, 32). Inarguably, these memories associated with their Momma, enable the Tillermans to bond with each other. This relates to Dicey forming relationships with her siblings and trusting them in different instances as the book, and more broadly, the series, because Dicey could acknowledge their shared history, and appreciate her siblings in their own way. This is evident when the Tillermans have different reactions pertaining to how Momma did sing the songs and the meanings of the songs. The differences of opinion further their bond because they avoid their usual conflict. Instead, it fostered a conversation about their interpretation of the song.

After arriving at their Grandmother's farm, Dacey learns they are not welcome. Additionally, Dacey withholds trust and uses her newfound understanding of human nature to manipulate the conversation with her grandmother to her advantage. Voigt comments on Dacey's understanding of human nature as she states, "Dacey could follow her grandmother's thoughts easily now. Now that she knew what the woman was talking about. 'They're waiting for me in town. We've got a place to go.' 'Back to that one?' 'Maybe,' Dacey said" (Voigt, 309).

Through the above lines, one can see that Dacey understands Gram's thought processes. As a result, Dacey moves the conversation in her favor through withholding information. While Dacey pulls this off due to her newfound ability to sit back and observe the behaviors of those around her, she further succeeds because she maintains power when is unsure whether or not to trust someone. Dacey understands the implications of losing her power with Cousin Eunice by giving away the details of their journey prematurely. Consequently, in this situation, she refuses to let herself appear desperate. This is shown through her nonchalant way of telling Gram they did not need to stay with her, when in actuality, the Tillermans had nowhere else to go.

Voigt shows this by creating two extremely similar situations for Dacey to encounter alone. Dacey first talks to Cousin Eunice, who is an unknown relative by herself and allows herself to appear in desperate need of help which enabled Cousin Eunice to easily take advantage of her. In this situation, where Dacey is again, by herself meeting an unknown relative for the first time, she takes a much different approach. She no longer relies on the kind heartedness of a person such as Windy to respect the boundaries she puts in place, she takes control of the conversation and ensures that she protects herself and her younger siblings. Voigt ultimately shows Dacey learning to exist along the line of trust and distrust, and being in control over which she chooses.

Voigt highlights the way that it is not Dicey's fault for portraying her desperation to find a home with Cousin Eunice. In the scenes with Gram, the Tillerman children come up with ways to make her life easier in hopes that she will let them stay. They are immediately aware of the degree of poverty that Gram operates under, and therefore, do everything in their power to help her in hopes that she will adopt them. In another Sarah Hardstaff article entitled, "Money and the Gift of Novels in Mildred Taylor and Cynthia Voigt," she highlights the ways that the children attempt to help Gram "make money, to maximize her utility" (Hardstaff, 7). Hardstaff draws attention to the quotation from *Homecoming* which states, "with a farm, there must be ways of getting money" (Voigt, 378). Hardstaff uses this to draw attention to the way money was used as a status symbol in the novel. This is interconnected with Dicey's attempts to trust others around her as she travels to Grams house over the course of the novel, because there is a class barrier between the Tillermans people with money. The barrier, while always present, gets much more prevalent when Momma leaves. The Tillerman children have trouble grooming themselves and showering because they cannot find the proper facilities which only calls more attention to their lower class status. This would play into the interactions they have with people throughout the novel. If said money was a barrier and affected their interactions with others, then it could have played a role in why Dicey began the novel with trust issues anyway. While she did not plan on any of this happening, Dicey dealt with the lower class status the Tillermans had throughout her time in Provincetown. However, once they operate on a need basis, Dicey adjusts which affects her trust when it comes to other people. This goes to show that Dicey learned all the more about human nature and emotional intelligence throughout *Homecoming*.

As their time with their Grandmother continues, the Tillermans begin to find ways of helping ease the Grandmother's expenses and life in general in hopes that they can stay with her

together. Slowly, Dicey begins to trust the Grandmother, as well as understand and appreciate her stubbornness. Dicey states, “Gram? (...) you should. You should let us live with you.” to which Gram responds “Would that suit you?” (Voigt, 387). Through the quotation above, Dicey knows exactly how to approach the situation with her Grandmother after weeks of delicately encouraging her to let them all stay, she asks in a direct manner that shows she understands the way her Grandmother prefers to communicate.

This is the understanding of what Dicey has learned throughout the novel about when to and when not to trust a person. Dicey learns that the ultimate form of trust comes from a positive relationship where she can maintain her power, be herself (stubbornness and all), and appreciate the stability that coincides with earning someone’s trust over time. Dicey now knows where to look for the ideal trusting bond for her and what to make of the tension between reaching out to someone for help and not reaching out at all. Through her experiences prior to arriving at Gram’s house, to her ultimate trust and surrender of anger and resentment towards those she is unsure of whether to trust, Dicey knows that living within and understanding this dichotomy is one of the most valuable lessons she can learn.

CHAPTER 3: DICEY LEARNS TO APPRECIATE FEMALE IDENTITY IN *DICEY'S SONG*

In the second installment of the Tillerman Cycle, *Dicey's Song*, the novel begins with the children living with Gram. Dicey, again, narrates the novel and is thirteen at the time. Having learned lessons about trust and living in the boundary between trusting and distrusting, Dicey now is tasked with other forms of understanding when it comes to self-identity and growing up. Without her Momma, the Tillerman siblings begin the novel living with Gram. Dicey, now thirteen, can no longer live in the gender ambiguity that childhood is steeped in. However, realizing this creates a new challenge that Dicey herself must answer, which is how to understand and define womanhood when, in her mind, it is steeped in frailty and incapability.

Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman Cycle chronicles both the physical and emotional maturation of the Tillerman family after their mother's disappearance at the start of the first novel. Dicey, being the oldest, is forced to take on more of an adult role than her other, younger siblings. In the first book of the series, Dicey poses as a boy named Danny because she feels it will look much better to onlookers if her siblings are traveling with a middle-school-aged boy rather than a girl of the same age. In doing so, Dicey saves herself and the other Tillerman children from being taken advantage of by strangers along their journey to find their new home. However, once Dicey stops posing as Danny and begins physically developing, she decides how to accept and understand womanhood for herself.

Erica Burman and Jackie Stacy's article titled, "The Child and Childhood in Feminist Theory," discusses the ways that the idea of childhood and prepubescent youth has lost gender and femininity. Stacy and Burman argue that this was done as a way to "take the female place away from the table." Consequently, there is no space for young children to connect with their femininity and see the value in it. Dicey is a product of this as well. Burman and Stacy state, "It

is in this complex context that this special issue documents how the child and childhood have recently become key arenas for feminist conceptualization and debate and, beyond this, addresses which feminism and which child informs such theory and practice. In doing so, it not only challenges the gender-free and anti-feminist paradigm of northern childhood studies more generally, but also brings into focus the limits and consequences of feminist engagements with initiatives for children” (Burman, 230). Both Burman and Stacy argue that feminism leaves children out of the equation when adult women fight for equality. How do children understand their femininity if they are left out of the equation? Although the women in Dicey’s life do not partake in the women’s rights movement, they all understand their femininity and she cannot.

Dicey experiences various pubescent milestones in *Dicey’s Song* and she gets the opportunity to grow in new ways, because of her stable home life . However, despite learning, and choosing to trust Gram at the conclusion of the first novel, Dicey now begins to learn and understand her ever-changing and growing body as well as her sexuality when boys begin to play a part in her life. Although not explicitly stated in the novel, one assumes that Dicey explores her femininity through her relationships with the various women and girls in her life, the three most prominent being her mother, Maybeth, and Gram. The reader can clearly see that her mother and Maybeth have very similar embracing relationships with their femininity, but Gram is much more gruff. In seeing these two vastly different types of femininity, Dicey can most accurately make a decision about her own path, whether it is similar to her mother and Maybeth, Gram or a combination of the two.

Dicey first begins to struggle with her femininity at the start of the novel when Gram and the children return from shopping while Dicey has been working on the boat. Gram comes home to find Dicey and Sammy working on the sailboat in the garage to which she replies,

“‘You two are a mess,’ Gram announced, before she even went up the back steps. She looked at Dicey and hesitated, as if deciding whether or not to say what she was thinking. ‘You’re too old to go around half-naked,’ she announced. ‘What do you mean?’ Dicey demanded. ‘I am not,’ Gram was already in the kitchen. ‘Am I, James?’ Dicey asked ‘You know, Dicey,’ he said. His eyes shifting away from hers. At ten he was old enough to be embarrassed” (Voigt, 6).

The above quotation shows Dicey beginning to question her role as a young woman in society. Dicey struggles because she feels most comfortable without her shirt on as she works on the boat, which is her most prized possession at this point, but then realizes that James is embarrassed by her lack of clothing. As a result, Dicey feels guilty about what she is wearing. This is shown through the line “At ten he was old enough to be embarrassed” (Voigt, 6). If James was embarrassed by her lack of clothing, then Dicey must have felt shame at her clinginess to her youth which is rooted in gender ambiguity. This is a result of Dicey posing as Danny in the first novel. Dicey’s mindset in posing as Danny was to ensure that she and her siblings remain safe, because young boys are deemed more capable of caring for their younger sibling than a young girl.

However, the reader must consider where Dicey’s mindset began. Their mother, Dicey’s foremost, female figure in life, and her mental health problems are interconnected to her mindset on femininity. It is heavily implied in the first book that Momma abandons the children because of her own struggles with mental health and her inability to provide for them without the illusive Tillerman father. Obviously, Dicey’s mother’s inability to properly take care of herself and her children would have upset Dicey and possibly play a part in her deciding that young women, or possibly women in general who are feminine are taken less seriously.

The fact that Gram described Dicey as being “a mess” without her clothes on creates a sense of shame within her mindset about her clinging to a traditionally male identity. This specific phrasing, while typical of Gram, is never thoughtless, which the reader learns throughout the series. Gram uses words carefully and with the intention to spark to change when she deems it necessary, and in this case, obviously she deemed it necessary, thus foreshadowing Gram’s venture into getting Dicey to wear a bra later on in the novel.

This scene shows the beginnings of Dicey’s relationship with femininity as it relates to Gram. As stated above, Gram uses her words in order to plant seeds and call attention to things that needed to be changed among the Tillerman children, and Dicey refusing to wear a shirt is Gram’s priority.

Dicey arguing with both Gram and James in the above quotation is noteworthy. Dicey believes that she is still young enough to “pass” as a boy as she did in the previous novel. This is shown through her insistence when she replies that she “is not” too old to “walk around half naked” (Voigt, 6). Dicey even tries to further cement her disagreement with Gram’s philosophy on womanhood here by asking James if he felt she was being inappropriate, but his lack of reply and “shifting eyes” were the mark of his own “embarrassment.”

Dicey clings to her childhood with her refusal to be fully clothed, because most children do this at some point in their youth. However, Dicey takes on the role of the adult in the first novel, by successfully parenting and directing her siblings as they travel many miles to find their home. This a trauma response and a desperate cling to her childhood as Dicey discovers she is no longer choosing adulthood, but rather, adulthood is choosing her. During this part of the novel, Dicey is now at a point where her siblings are taken care of and she could revert back to

the child she may have been prior to Momma abandoning them, but now the noticeably physical maturation of her body makes that desire obsolete.

Abruptly following the lines listed above are ones from Dicey's own perspective where she reflects on the recent and looming changes in her body and descends into womanhood. Voigt states,

"Well, she guessed she did know. She guessed she had noticed when she ripped off her T-shirt that her breasts seemed to be pointing out-maybe. But she had convinced herself that wasn't true. Dicey shrugged. There wasn't much she could do about getting a bosom, but she didn't have to like it" (Voigt, 7).

The above quotation from the novel implies that Dicey initially thought that possibly her breasts were beginning to protrude when she initially takes her shirt off and begins working on the boat, however, she attempts to "convince herself that this wasn't true."

The above lines show a rejection as well as a denial of Dicey's changing body. Prior to these lines, she was advised to wear a shirt to cover her protruding breasts. In this scene, Dicey realizes that her breasts had been developing without her knowledge. This implies that Dicey can relax and she is not as instinctively afraid of being seen as a girl.¹ This is a shock to Dicey because she was concerned about being seen as a girl while she and her siblings were traveling.

Dicey rejects femininity when she states, "There wasn't much she could do about getting a bosom, but she didn't have to like it" (Voigt, 7). Her refusal to enjoy something that most girls partake in shows her rejection and confusion with her identity. Dicey knows that physical maturation is something that will eventually begin, but still rejects a celebration, or an excitement that some girls tend to associate with it. This allows the reader to get a glimpse into the kind of parent that Momma was. Momma was frail and concerned with her own struggles,

consequently, most of what Dicey understands about puberty is the biological changes she will undergo, but not the emotional excitement that can coincide with it. This could be a result of Dicey posing as Danny in the first book as a way to protect her siblings. This switching back and forth between identities makes way for Dicey's internal confusion surrounding how others see her. This relates to Dicey's struggles at the beginning of the book, because she is not able to form a natural relationship with her womanness.

In Jennifer Flaherty's article, *Reviving Ophelia: Reaching Adolescent Girls Through Shakespeare's Doomed Heroine* she discusses the way the text *Reviving Ophelia* (1996) plays a role in reframing the character Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) into a character with agency and one who rejects the idea that she is merely apart of a man's story. This idea of feminism within the female characters in young adult literature is important because it allows young girls to then relate to various characters, their decisions, and their thought processes. While Dicey is filled with agency in every novel written from her perspective, she learns various lessons. Therefore, I would push back against showing complete agency and autonomy in young girls and boys in literature, because in this case, Flaherty's article ignores the lessons that Ophelia must have had to learn in order to become a better person. Dicey both rejects and accepts the idea of trying on feminine clothing because she associates it with frailty. She enjoys herself, and shows agency because she picks out the clothes she is comfortable in within the parameters that Gram sets. However, Voigt is careful to not give Dicey complete agency because it implies that Gram lacks wisdom and authority in this scene (Flaherty, n.p.).

As the novel progresses, Gram takes Dicey into town to have her try on bras and dresses. Dicey objects under the guise of worry about how they will cost, but in reality she becomes

angry with Gram at having “tricked” her into falling in line with the other girls her age. Voigt states,

“‘I went to your school one day,’ Gram said. ‘I saw you,’ Dicey answered. ‘I didn’t see anybody in shorts,’ Gram said. ‘I saw some jeans, lots in skirts and dresses. I kind of liked the way these jumpers looked. They look sturdy.’” (Voigt, 90).

Gram believes that Dicey is not fitting in with the other girls at her school because she dresses differently than they do. Voigt suggests that Dicey is indifferent about this, because she never brings it to Gram’s attention. While some may argue that Dicey worries about money, she has a job in the grocery store at this point and can buy clothing for herself if she saves. While one can see this through the lines that discuss her walking around the house without clothes, it is much more blatant here. It is likely that Dicey simply did not want to dress like the other girls at school because she did not understand her own relationship with femininity the way other girls did. This calls into question the relationship that Dicey would have had with her femininity if Momma cared for and provided for Dicey’s younger siblings in a better way.

The use of the word “sturdy” is vital in understanding the relationship between Gram and her femininity as well as Dicey and her femininity. The dress appeals to Gram because of its sturdiness. This is a direct commentary on Gram’s relationship with her own femininity. Gram is logical and disinterested in being conventionally attractive, and a good example of this is her refusal to wear shoes. This is intentional on the part of Gram as a way to convince Dicey to enjoy the dress since Gram knows Dicey values items that are longer lasting than something temporary and trendy.

Again, Gram is guiding Dicey because she has no one else to guide her in this endeavor. Gram leads Dicey because her mother left them to address her own mental health concerns.

Burman and Stacy address this in their section on feminist children who were raised in traumatic and/or violent environments. The article states,

“While discussions of affect often remain rather abstract, there are specific effects attributed to and associated with children, reiterated in the Enlightenment binary between innocence and experience, which is heavily traversed by the signifier ‘sex- uality’. In particular, accounts of childhood more recently have come to signify less the lost link to an idyllic past than a preoccupation with the question of violence and trauma” (Burman, 234).

This idea of trauma in children is interconnected with femininity. This is evident in the scene where all of the children are singing the gospel song. They all have different interpretations for how to sing the song their Momma sang to them which is then associated with their trauma. Maybeth, who is the most like Momma, sings the song as she did. Dicey, however, is unsure of how to sing this song. This shows Dicey’s trauma relating to her mother, and shows her confusion as it relates to identity. Dicey, unlike Maybeth, rejects Momma. Maybeth, has a distinct understanding of good and evil like Momma, and both girls are gentler than Dicey. Dicey cannot allow herself to sing the song like Momma, because she is different from Momma and cannot think like Momma. Dicey concerns herself with problems that she deems much more serious and concrete. Dicey is not interested in thinking like Momma to understand how she saw any given song

As the novel moves on, Gram takes Dicey on a shopping trip to the local mall, where she tries on a dress. Voigt states,

“Dicey looked in the mirrors. The dark brown of the dress was like the soil in Gram’s garden, where Sammy had turned it over. The heavy-soft fabric hung close to her body.

Her bosom showed a little, and the belt at her waist made her look curved. She looked unfamiliar to herself, the kind of plain that was really fancy. She stood, biting her lip, looking at the girl in the mirror” (Voigt, 91).

To her own surprise, Dicey tries on a dress. She even enjoys it. This is shown through the line ”she looked unfamiliar to herself.” Prior to this scene in the novel, Dicey consistently describes herself as plain and even implies that her face was not conventionally attractive. However, Dicey rejects this idea when she describes herself as looking “unfamiliar,” because the plainness would have been familiar to her.

Dicey describing herself as “the kind of plain that was really fancy” is noteworthy, because it is one of the first instances in the novel where Dicey likes her looks and sees herself as more attractive. She still refers to herself as “plain,” but she acknowledges that in plainness, there is beauty.

The dress being brown is significant. Nature plays a big part in Dicey’s own identity because she is often found as a character spending time outside. The brownness of the dress plays into that, meaning it was more likely that Dicey would have enjoyed the dress. This is shown through the line “The dark brown of the dress was like the soil in Gram’s garden, where Sammy had turned it over” (Voigt, 91). Dicey likes the dress later in the scene when Gram asks for her opinion.

It is important to note that Dicey’s first experience with picking out feminine clothing is with Gram. This makes Gram a sort of model for her femininity. Gram guides Dicey, along with the sales ladies through the bra section as well as the teen clothing section to find the best pieces for her. This could give reasoning for why Dicey models her womanhood after Gram by the end of the novel. Both Dicey and Gram are already similar so it would make even more sense for

Dicey to base her femininity off of Gram. Dicey grew to trust Gram's opinion at the conclusion of the first book when she understood Gram's thought processes which aided Dicey in convincing Gram to allow herself and her siblings to stay. Both are economically sound, gruff, and abrupt. Both of which can be attributed to trauma.

This discussion of feminist norms cannot be disconnected from literature associated with femininity and activities that are thought of as "traditionally feminine.". This idea of womanhood is interconnected with education when students venture into both Middle and High Schools because not only, are they put in Sex Education courses, other courses and subjects are deemed "too girly" for boys to want to partake in and the classes that are male-dominated are often described as "too physically demanding" or "too complicated" for women . This is especially shown in *Dicey's Song* because Dicey has an ever-increasing problem with schoolwork that is divided and gendered in favor of those who are "girlier" than she is.

Multiple scenes in the novel outline Dicey refusing to conform to the norms of femininity. This is especially shown through the scene where Dicey is accused of cheating and refuses to argue in favor of her innocence and honesty in front of a class who does not believe her. It is shown in the novel when Dicey is forced to take Home-Ec like all of the other girls in school do while the boys are allowed to take Woodshop. Dicey, who wants to build boats for a living, is unsure of how a class like Home-Ec would help with something like that.

In her dissertation, "Limitation, Subversion, and Agency: Gendered Spaces in the Works Margaret Mahy, Cynthia Voigt, and Diana Wynne Jones." Elizabeth Pearce, outlines the ways that the domestic sphere can be confining to women and young women which explains why Dicey abjects all forms of femininity. This article follows the gendered space of the domestic sphere in Cynthia Voigt novels. It goes on to argue that when women and young women only

have access to the domestic sphere it is in a way restricting them, but if they choose to live within the confines of the domestic sphere, then their lives are not confined. This implies that Dicey rejecting the Home-Ec classes at first and then being forcefully enrolled in them contributes to her feelings on the suffocating nature of domesticity. If Dicey chose to enroll in Home-Ec, she would not feel stripped of power and agency.

Dicey's friend Mina is conventionally intelligent and more feminine so she helps Dicey in school situations and social situations. However, Dicey does not conform to this idea of moving into traditionally feminine activities. The most obvious example of this is that school is not important to her. Gram believes Dicey does not fit in with the other girls at school simply because she "wears shorts." However, other fundamental aspects of her personality that are not traditionally feminine i.e. her lack of sociability with the other students, contribute. Dicey rejecting femininity is tied to the trauma she associates with Momma who was the most traditionally feminine person in Dicey's life other than Maybeth. This shows the increasingly problematic relationship that Dicey has with "girly things."

Mina and Dicey solidified their friendship through the scene where Mr. Chapelle accused Dicey of cheating on the essay prompt he assigned. Mina and Dicey earn the two highest grades in class and seem to understand each other on a new level. Mina's essay, on herself from a third person perspective was something Dicey immediately caught on to by saying "the only person who could know all that about Mina, was Mina" (Voigt, 137). When Mr. Chapelle reads Dicey's essay written on Momma aloud, he blatantly accuses her of cheating. However, Mina does not believe this and questions Dicey in a lawyer-like fashion in front of the class to prove it was her. The scene ends with everyone, including Mr. Chapelle realizing it is Dicey's own work.

It is noteworthy Dicey writes her essay on Momma. Dicey writes about Momma to better understand her point of view and motives. However, the assignment ultimately contributes to the complicated feelings that Dicey has with Momma because Mr. Chappelle accuses her of cheating along with the rest of the class. This invalidating situation causes Dicey to become quiet in class and refrain from speaking, which is sensible considering both the teacher and other students do not trust her intelligence. In this scene Dicey attempts to make peace with her trauma after Momma abandoned her, but ultimately fails.

On the subject of femininity, Mina is yet another example of a positive female role model in her life due to her distinct nature when Dicey compares her to the other girls she encounters at school. Mina cares about school and only seems interested in learning, but she was also liked by those around her. This contributes to a new lesson Dicey learns which is that standing out is not the same as being isolated. Seeing Mina in this category allows Dicey to form a friendship with both Mina and Jeff, and as the novel progresses, she begins to like and flirt with Jeff in a romantic way.

Immediately following Dicey's decision to trust Mina as a friend she begins to trust Jeff. However, this level of trust with Jeff begins to turn into a romantic connection. After several conversations after school between both Jeff and Dicey, he discovers that she works at the grocery store with Milie. After this discovery, Jeff becomes a more frequent visitor to the grocery store. As he walks her from school to the store, Jeff initiates a conversation with Dicey,

“‘I want to ask you something-’ (...) ‘There’s a dance st school,’ Dicye nodded; she had seen the posters. ‘Will you go with me?’ (...) ‘You haven’t said,’ he prodded her. ‘But I can’t do that,’ (...) ‘I really am too young’” (Voigt, 191). In this scene of the novel, Jeff completely shocks Dicey when he asks her to the school dance, and she rules out going immediately. Despite

her immediate negative response to the question Jeff proposes, Dicey allows herself to admit to feelings she has about Jeff within her internal monologue. Dicey comments that she “liked when he got angry when she was unfriendly. She didn’t know why she liked it, but it made her want to explain” (Voigt, 191). Dicey even admitting a fraction of her feelings for Jeff is both a level of trust and her beginning to acknowledge that maturing has its advantages such as enjoying a romantic partner. This is one of the first times in the novel thus far that Dicey sees potential in growing up, even subconsciously.

As the scene continues, Dicey even finds herself both planning for the future in a simple way with Jeff and enjoying flirting. After explaining that she’s too young to attend the dance with Jeff, he replies, “‘But, next you’ll be in ninth grade,’ he said. ‘I think so.’ ‘And I’ll be in eleventh.’ ‘You’d know more about that than I would.’ ‘Ninth graders are much older than eighth graders.’ ‘Are they?’ Dicey asked. This was a pretty stupid conversation, but she was enjoying it. ‘I’m going to ask you again next year,’ he said. ‘Okay,’ Dicey answered” (Voigt, 191-192).

In this playful conversation, Jeff admits his intentions to continue pursuing Dicey, because eventually, she will be old enough to go to the school dance with him. Dicey even understands that he will ask again and that she may want to go next year. This is obvious through her agreement to what Jeff says. In typical Dicey fashion she even acknowledges that the conversation itself is “stupid, but she was enjoying it.” In the novel above, Dicey both starts to look forward to being older and maturing more, which can be equated to her femininity, but she enjoys flirting with a boy. In this scene, Dicey begins to subconsciously recognize that to Jeff, she is desirable, and this contributes to her relationship with her physically maturing body, because she starts to enjoy the things that other girls in her age-group enjoy.

Jennifer Flaherty's article on feminism and agency within young female characters works well in conversation with the above lines. It is important to note that in the scene above Voigt gives Dicey the power in the situation to say no to Jeff. When Jeff asks her, she does not simply get excited and decide that she would love to go on a date with him. Instead, Dicey says she is not yet old enough to go. In this way, Voigt is both giving Dicey agency and control over the situation while also playing on traditional gender norms. Dicey is quite analytical in conversation with Jeff, whereas he tends to lead with emotions. A prime example of this is him playing guitar and liking poetry. In conjunction with Flaherty's argument Dicey, like Ophelia in *Reviving Ophelia*, feels uncomfortable being a side character in Jeff's story for love. Dicey wants the relationship on her own terms. In addition to the arguments above, the reversal of gender norms contributes to Dicey's relationship with womanhood and sexuality. In her romantic relationships with men, it is clear based on the above interaction, that Dicey prefers to be a more active player and decision-maker, like males typically are.

In Marilyn Chandler McEntyre's article, "Friends in Need: Illness and Friendship in Adolescent Fiction," she discusses how integral friendship can be for young adults in this pivotal point in their lives. While McEntyre uses the example from another novel by Voigt, *Izzy Willy Nilly* where physical injury helps cement a friendship, the underlying argument in her article plays on other hardships that friends may endure. With this framework in mind, it makes sense why Dicey chooses to trust both Mina and Jeff. Mina helps Dicey when she was accused of cheating in class and faced hardship with her, and Jeff comforts Dicey when she realized she was failing home-ec (Voigt, 162). Both characters were the first people that Dicey explains her journey to Crisfield to (McEntyre. n.p.).

To accurately examine Dicey in the second novel of the Tillerman cycle, we must first engage with a simple analysis of her within the first novel, *Homecoming*. In the article, “Economies of Childness in Cynthia Voigt’s *Homecoming*” written by Sarah Hardstaff outlines the various ways in which economies of the first novel affect Dicey in the later books of the series which relates to her aversion to effeminating. Hardstaff states, “In the Tillerman novels, Voigt constructs an overarching sense of childness whereby children may be knowing and experienced, but are still in need of a safe home, and not just any home, but one in which their individual needs, wants and attributes are respected” (Hardstaff, n.p.). Sarah Hardatff expertly shows the ways in which the need for a home and stability cause the children to be unfocused on fulfilling their other needs. This could give reason for why Dicey was unable to naturally develop her femininity along with puberty. She had to pose as Danny for the safety of her siblings and in doing so, could not form a healthy relationship with her gender identity. Dicey clings to the gender ambiguity of childhood and needed the guidance that Gram could offer (Hardstaff, n.p.).

Through these simple moments with Gram, Dicey begins to understand where she feels most herself, and accepts that what she loves is beautiful in the plainness and not in spite of it. Through shopping for a jumper and a bra Dicey accepts the harsh reality that her femininity is okay.

However Dicey does not truly accept all aspects of her femininity until she finally goes along with Gram to visit her mother, as Momma dies. Gram and Dicey travel into Boston to visit Momma in a mental hospital where they find her unresponsive and unable to communicate with those around her. After she dies, Gram and Dicey hug during which Dicey notices, “how strong Gram’s arms were, and how strong were her own. Strong and warm” (Voigt, 221). In noticing

this small detail about the physical similarities between them both, Dicey sees the beauty in the strength both she and Gram share. They both have experienced trauma and loss, but have grown. Finally, Dicey understands that being a woman like Gram might not be so bad or worthy of resistance after all.

After Dicey and Gram break their embrace they agree to take Momma home one last time. However, it is Gram in the moments on the train ride home who teaches Dicey the beauty of her Momma as well. Gram states, “‘Tillermans have that kind of courage,’ ‘We have brave spirits. Think about it, girl. Except for your Momma, she had a brave heart, for trusting people, for loving them. For all the good it did her, I wish I knew.’ ‘I have some hope for you, too. You, and all of you. But why they use hearts for love, I don’t know.’ ‘It’s where you feel things,’ Dicey said, remembering, feeling” (Voigt, 231). In this conversation with Gram, Dicey truly understands and appreciates her Momma for her heart and kindness despite the internalized anger and trauma she felt when she was abandoned. Dicey now appreciates the femininity that she has chosen for herself, and the femininity in her mother that she hated and resented for such a long time. In this moment Dicey “remembers” and “feels” which not only gives her a better understanding of her own femininity, but also allows her to take some of her mother’s relationship with womanhood with her as well.

In Carol Lautenbach’s article, “Follow the Leaders in Newbery Tales,” she makes the point that one of the most important lessons in the novel that Dicey learns was to accept that life itself is difficult to make sense of logically. In this sense, Lautenbach’s argument has a lot of merit, because in the novel, *Dicey’s Song*, Dicey grew most through the life lessons that she mastered that related to her emotional development. Dicey’s physical maturation is the subject of this paper, but it is more so how Dicey emotionally learns to accept her changing body and the

trauma she associates with it, as well as begin to look forward and see how femininity and young adulthood hold promise. Without this level of hope, eventual appreciation for Momma, and growth in terms of her willingness to trust those around her, Dicey would have had a much less compelling and interesting story. The emotional development and life lessons associated with it, are one of the foundational reasons that Dicey is a relatable and likable character to the reader.

Suzanne Elizabeth Reid comments on the theme of human connection and its importance within *Dicey's Song*, specifically in her article, "Reaching Out, Holding On, and Letting Go" in the book, *Presenting Cynthia Voigt* (1995). In her section on *Dicey's Song*, Reid concludes that Voigt's theme of reaching out and letting go culminates in the death of Momma because now Dicey must let go of Momma and continue on with her new life in Crisfield. However, I would push back against this criticism because Dicey will not ever forget Momma, despite forgiving her. Gram's final challenge to Dicey was for her to emulate Momma when she could as a way of both remembering her, and bettering Dicey as a person. In doing this, Dicey does not "let go" of Momma at all, she vows to do something greater and become Momma in all of the positive aspects while still maintaining her core values. Therefore, while Dicey physically lets go of Momma, she never forgets who she is because as she now enters into young adulthood, Dicey applies some of Momma's own femininity and womanhood to her own personality.

Dicey's development as a woman throughout this coming-of-age novel shows the complicated relationship that some young girls have with aging as well as coming into their bodies. Dicey's difficulty with this is eventually something she accepts and enjoys a bit, however, she is first shamed by Gram and her brother. This shaming causes Dicey to accept that her body is changing. Her acceptance gives her a much more positive experience as the shopping trip between her and Gram progresses, because Dicey learns she can define femininity for

herself. In doing so, Dicey is able to better formulate her own identity and relationship within the Tillerman family, because she no longer has to feel like a patriarch.

Dicey begins to apply the lessons of trust she earns for strangers and her family to the people around her in the novel which contributes to her healing and understanding of femininity. When Dicey makes the decision to trust Mina, she learns that being just like the other girls her age is undesirable, and she can be a girl like Mina who emulates a similar strength to Gram, which Dicey inarguably begins to possess herself. Even moreso, when Dicey decides to trust Jeff, she begins to feel romantic feelings for someone else, and discovers advantages to getting older. Therefore, both characters do have a lasting effect on Dicey's relationship with womanhood and maturing.

However, as the conclusion of the novel draws near, and Dicey and Gram travel to visit her mother on her deathbed, Dicey truly understands how the femininity that Gram has is a strength. Even though Dicey has resented her mother throughout the first two books in the series, Dicey learns from Gram how to love and appreciate her mother, because the difference in Momma was her ability to show kindness and love to others. Therefore, Gram's final challenge and hope for Dicey as well as the other children is to carry both that strength that they all have along with the ability to love that Momma did so well. Now Momma is both "gone and home" (Voigt, 242).

The most vital and life-changing lesson that Dicey learns throughout the course of this novel is to appreciate those around her and herself. Dicey's understanding of femininity can be used as a lens to see her growing understanding of the women around her. Dicey repeatedly judged Momma throughout this novel as well as the first novel because of Momma's decision to leave them in Dicey's care. Consequently, Dicey does not want to become the type of woman

that she sees Momma as, which explains why she rejects anything feminine. However, with Gram's guidance, Dicey understands how femininity is strength and important to show and appreciate. When Dicey finally defines her own form of femininity where she feels most comfortable she can then compare said femininity to Gram who guided her and encouraged Dicey's development in the novel through bra and dress shopping especially. Even after Dicey learns this lesson, Gram has one final lesson for her as well. Dicey must now learn to appreciate and acknowledge the strength it took for Momma to unconditionally love and trust those around her which Gram explains to Dicey with ease. However, in these final moments, Gram challenges Dicey and explains that she hopes Dicey can emulate this as she starts to enter young adulthood.

CHAPTER 4: DICEY LEARNS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY IN *SEVENTEEN AGAINST THE DEALER*

As Dickey enters adulthood, she decides how to balance family, her boyfriend, and her boat-building business. Despite the strong relationship Dickey and her family had in the previous Voigt novels, their relationship begins to deteriorate as Dickey focuses more and more on her boat-building job and achieving work success and less time with her family and boyfriend. Once Dickey realizes that she is rapidly losing touch with the people around her, she begins to focus on reentering the family. In order to achieve this and adulthood with her family in mind, Dickey needs to redefine her relationship with her family and boyfriend. This chapter outlines the ways that Dickey first shows growth from the first two novels on account of nine years passing since then, how Cisco gains and abuses her trust, how Dickey loses sight of her family, and how Dickey eventually understands the importance of family, friends, and her boyfriend at the conclusion of the novel as she reconnects and discovers how much they can in fact help her.

The final installment of the Tillerman Cycle is entitled, *Seventeen Against the Dealer* (1989). In this novel, Dickey is now twenty-one years old and has recently dropped out of college in order to pursue her boat-building business. The novel begins with Dickey and Jeff who have now been dating for quite some time and are thinking of eventually marrying.

It is noticeable at the start of the novel that Dickey applies and maintains an understanding of the lessons she learned while caring for her sibling as they traveled in search of a home in *Homecoming*. Dickey values the opinions of her siblings greatly. She understands and supports them for who they are without expecting them to gravitate towards her own ways of processing and understanding information. In addition to appreciating the diversity of her three younger

siblings, she talks to them with trust and ease. While this could be attributed to how well she knows them, regardless, the shift in the way that Dicey speaks to others is noticeable.

The beginning of the novel shows an apparent change and maturation in Dicey and how she approaches situations. While she is still analytical and numbers-oriented, she tends to lead a bit more with her feelings than she did in the majority of *Dicey's Song*, when she was thirteen years old. As a result, Dicey is more in-touch with both Jeff and her family.

His gray eyes watched her, had been watching her; she was glad to see him. 'You're early,' she said.

'Actually,' Jeff told her, 'I'm late. I thought you'd prefer that.'

'Actually,' she mimicked him, 'you're right.' She stretched her arms up high over her head, stretched the muscles along her back, then walked down the shop to turn off the lights" (Voigt, 3).

This section in the novel shows Dicey's comfortability as a character, because of her willingness to accept and understand others. Dicey is more at peace with her femininity than she was in *Dicey's Song*. Her ease with various situations is evident in the sentences above with the lines "She stretched her arms up high over her head, stretched the muscles along her back, then walked down the shop to turn off the lights" (Voigt, 3).

After the holidays are over in the Tillerman household, Dicey learns of a potential deal to make twelve dinghy boats in exchange for fifty dollars per boat from a man in town, Claude (Voigt, 38). Dicey agrees, after in typically Dicey fashion, carefully pondering the cost of the wood with the payment she should receive per boat. However as the novel progresses, someone breaks into Dicey's workshop, and steals her tools. "Something crunched under her feet. When she got the light turned on, she saw glass all over the cement floor by the door. Someone had

punched a hole through the glass or had been hit with a rock or brick (...) Why would someone do this?” (Voigt 47).

In the quotation above, Dicey questions why someone would specifically target her shop, and the break-in sparks change in Dicey resulting in her seeing the urgency of working and finishing the boats she promised Claude. Voigt effectively foreshadows this by Dicey clinging to factual information to make sense of what had happened around her. After she finally takes in what was stolen and the damage to her workshop, Dicey then questions why someone would “do this?” Dicey allows herself to feel anger and sadness about the break-in only after she accesses the damage. This is a stark contrast to earlier in the novel when she is happy to see Jeff, and leads more with emotions.

Dicey first shows a resurgence of her attention to money when she replaces her stolen tools, because she spends “around \$600 in a day” (Voigt 68). Even though Jeff did offer to help Dicey pay for the tools, she pridefully says no. Dicey justifies spending the money by continuously reminding herself that in order to do the work she has agreed to for Claude, she must replace her tools. Dicey’s thoughts calm her, and they solidify her connection with work that divides her from her loved ones.

In James Henke’s article, *Dicey, Odysseus and Hansel and Gretel: The Lost Children in Voigt’s Homecoming*, he likens the theme of being lost and without a home to a trope that dates back to both the stories of Hansel and Gretel and Odysseus. While Henke’s article focuses on the literal sense that Dicey and her younger siblings are lost in the first novel of the series, *Homecoming*, in my opinion, Voigt shows Dicey’s figurative absence in this novel, through her detachment from her family. When her shop is broken into, Dicey not only loses her shop and precious tools that she worked hard to accumulate, she also loses her sense of comfort and safety

with her loved ones. Being emotionally lost and straying from the people one holds dear, shows why Dicey makes mistakes throughout the novel. The scene above is the first instance where Dicey feels disjointed from people she's close to, and gives a reason why she disengages with her loved ones until the end of the novel (Henke, n.p.)

Despite being upset about having to replace her tools, Dicey begins to build boats. When a man, Cisco, stumbles into her shop one day asking for work, Dicey replies no. While Dicey is unaware of this, Voigt heavily implies Cisco to be the illusive father of the Tillerman children who emotionally and financially neglected both Dicey and her siblings as well as their Momma. Cisco begins the conversation by asking to speak to Dicey's boss, and after she informs Cisco that she is in fact in charge, he answers, "I should have guessed. It's the bosses who work on Sundays isn't it" (Voigt, 79). In the quotation and summation of the scene above, it is clear that Dicey herself is beginning to spend time away from her family, because it is a Sunday.

Cisco criticizes Dicey for her refusal to take shortcuts on painting the dinghies. "Just because he told you to put on three (coats of paint)? He won't notice if it's only two. Trust me, miss, he'd never know the difference" (Voigt, 79). In this simple interaction between Cisco and Dicey, Voigt implies Dicey's communication habits. Cisco only speaks to Dicey about the boats, because he realizes her focus on work is so severe, that this is the only way to engage in conversation.

In the following days, Cisco continues to show up and help Dicey with her work. As a result, she begins to trust Cisco. This is especially evident when they discuss contracts and she looks to Cisco for business advice. The dentist in town has an overdue account with Dicey and he refuses to pay on it, however, Cisco promptly calls and demands they pay Dicey. Cisco states, "I'm calling from Tillerman's Boatyard where you have an overdue account,' Cisco said. He

listened. ‘That’s as may be,’ he said, ‘but it is still and overdue account. So that, if the check isn’t in our hands in two days, we’ll be putting your boat back in the water.’ Cisco’s light voice was cool, unconcerned and oddly threatening” (Voigt, 102). In this scene, Dicey learns that Cisco is someone she wants on her side, because he did her a big favor and got someone to pay her back. It is noteworthy that the trust that cements between Dicey and Cisco is on the basis of him helping her with her business. However, through scenes with Cisco, there is less interaction between Dicey and her younger siblings. Because of the established relationship both at the beginning of this novel, as well as throughout the other novels written from Dicey’s perspective, the reader notices their absence in both her thoughts and her conversations. Most of Dicey’s days center around work and conversations she has with Cisco.

It is only when Cisco disappears in the middle of the novel for an indefinite amount of time that Dicey remembers those who are around her. On a day at home, Dicey discovers that Gram is still battling a mysterious illness that she had at the beginning of the novel. Dicey suggests Maybeth, “should stay home from school,” (Voigt, 138). Sammy then makes a case for his own willingness to miss a day of school on account of how Maybeth “likes school,” and Sammy, “has this algebra test,” (Voigt, 138). However Dicey immediately says no to Sammy because, “if I were sick, it’s Maybeth I’d want to have staying around,” (Voigt, 138). However rather than stopping the conversation, Dicey goes on to say, “so don’t bother arguing. When I was getting better, that’s when I’d want you,” (138). It is seemingly a touching moment on the part of Dicey because she acknowledges the things she loves about her siblings as well as how they would be advantageous in different situations for her, however they notice her absence. Sammy replies, “‘I don’t know where you get off, coming in and giving orders. You haven’t paid

attention to anything for months, and now you show up for once and start deciding things-' 'If I were you, Sammy, I'd use my energy studying for a test, not trying to get out of it'" (138).

This theme of being lost in Henke's article is applicable here, because Dicey searches outside of her family for comfort and belonging when she is adrift. Thus far in the series, one of the foundational relationships for Dicey is the one between her and her younger siblings, James, Maybeth, and Sammy. However, due to her weakening sense of belonging amongst the Tillermans, Dicey finds belonging with Cisco (Henke, n.p.). Consequently, she discovers she does not know and understand her sibling as she once did. Additionally, Dicey is unaware of how sick Gram is due to absences from familial things like evening dinners in favor of her job. Therefore, Sammy's anger surprises Dicey.

In addition to Sammy being angry at Dicey for her inattentiveness to the Tillerman household, the underlying anger concerning her refusal to relinquish control over her siblings, despite her primarily working on her boat-building business with Cisco at this point in the novel is present. Sammy has begun to make more decisions concerning himself, Maybeth and Gram, however, when Dicey returns home she then reappoints herself as the individual decider, seemingly ignoring Sammy's authority. In addition to her continuous absences thus far in the novel, she holds onto the authority she once had over her siblings and resists acknowledging the different ways they can be helpful.

A prime example of this would be through the ways that Sammy most likely would have been more than willing to call the town dentist in order to get Dicey's money. However, Dicey did not tell Sammy that this was going on. In addition to Dicey clinging to the authority she has at home, she is refusing to tell her siblings important details of her life because she is embarrassed. Since Dicey does not want help from her siblings with her business, a new

disconnect between Dicey and the rest of the Tillerman family cements. The detachment and lack of trust is quite similar to the first novel, *Homecoming*. Yet, the major difference is that Dicey does not trust her siblings in their young adult years in a much less dire situation. This would make the annoyance on the part of Sammy much more valid and understandable.

As the novel continues to progress, Dicey realizes the neglect that she has put her siblings through. When she returns home to find Maybeth still needs help studying in order to pass history and graduate highschool Dicey begins to work with her. Dicey quickly discovers Maybeth has been attempting her work the same way all semester and needs to reframe her learning practices. As Dicey teaches Maybeth to frame history like preparing to bake or cook a recipe, she learns how to help Maybeth pass her class (Voigt, 167). Despite the frustration that Dicey has felt in the past learning with Maybeth, she understands and appreciates her sister much more now, and can thus help her learn more effectively. This small victory shows a level of trust between both Dicey and Maybeth that gives Dicey a bit of an entrance back into the lives of her siblings.

It is important to note that Dicey chose Maybeth first to make an effort with and show how sorry she was about her behavior over the past few months. Maybeth, as established in the first two books of the series, is by far the most loving and forgiving. Maybeth is also the most stable in terms of her emotions and reactions to things over time. Maybeth's forgiveness and ability to love those around her has not faltered since the reader is first introduced to her at the beginning of the series. Thus showing why Dicey would have chosen Maybeth first, because Dicey knew how Maybeth would react to her olive branch. In addition to the comfort and predictability of Maybeth's emotions and kindness, she will speak in favor of Dicey around James and Sammy in order to garner support for Dicey. It is clear that Sammy is angry at Dicey,

but Maybeth would be someone who would speak positively about her while in Sammy's presence.

However, despite the sweet moment between Dicey and Maybeth, her re-entry in Jeff's life will not be quite as simple. When Dicey calls Jeff, she realizes that he is out at the "midwestern dance" with a date. In her reaction to hearing that Jeff is out with another girl Dicey states, "If Jeff did, it wouldn't be messing around, because Jeff wasn't that way. So if he did, it was serious, and Dicey had lost him. If she'd lost him, she knew who was responsible" (Voigt, 169). Dicey acknowledges that she has rarely been communicating with Jeff in the past few months. This sequence of events marks growth in Dicey from the beginning of the novel, because, once again she is taking responsibility for her actions. Dicey even goes as far as to call Jeff again to inform him that Gram was feeling better, but he was out of town when she called, thus ending the conversation quickly.

Dicey finds herself able to rekindle her relationship with the youngest Tillerman sibling, Sammy. Dicey and Sammy communicate after Dicey begins to make a point to stay home and care for Gram after she is diagnosed with pneumonia. Sammy starts to share with Dicey the dreams he has for when he grows up. "I'll be a tennis pro, or coach, or something. That would be okay. Or I could be a farmer here, I could work the farm, because farmers don't make much money, but they almost always make enough for food and shelter. I really like growing things" (Voigt, 183). To which Dicey replies, "You've got it all worked out" (Voigt, 183).

In this moment between Dicey and Sammy a bond between them is present. Sammy is sharing something personal about the life he envisions for himself one day, and Dicey is in support of his dreams, despite her surprise. While Dicey does not go on to share her own dreams, or even problems, that she is experiencing, the reader can clearly see a newfound appreciation

for her youngest sibling who has grown and developed a lot without her constant presence.

Despite the sadness that Dicey may feel for having missed Sammy coming to these conclusions about his future, she is proud that he is growing up.

As Dicey cares for Gram while she heals from pneumonia they begin to reconnect and resume their relationship. After Dicey shares that Jeff no longer wants to marry her, Gram replies, “Whoever does know about these things? It’s so hard to love someone-” (Voigt, 194). In this moment between Dicey and Gram, they do begin to reconnect and Dicey is starting to trust Gram to give her advice on life again. This moment between the two of them is noteworthy because it, again, cements the parental relationship that Gram has with Dicey and shows that Dicey wants the help of those around her in order to navigate life. This moment is important, because Dicey is sharing her personal insecurity about Jeff leaving her. This scene shows Dicey’s ability to regain the vulnerability she once had with Gram, which foreshadows a vulnerable scene with Jeff. Additionally Dicey finally allows herself to publicly grieve the relationship she had with Jeff. Dicey begins to understand here that loving those around herself, like Momma did is more difficult than it seems, because people are unique and unpredictable which deems logic irrelevant.

In the article, “Edging Toward Bethlehem: Rewriting the Myth of Childhood in Voigt’s *Homecoming*” by Dorothy Clark, she discusses the emergence in literature of various familial structures and their prominence. While this is especially evident in the novel she analyzes, *Homecoming*, the idea of unique Tillerman family structure is not truly appreciated by Dicey until she returns to her family. Dicey appreciates her family much more fully when she again reaches out for help at the conclusion of the novel. By pushing them away, and again returning to

them, Dicey understands the value that each of the Tillermans and Jeff have on her life as well as their unique abilities to influence her in a positive way (Clark, n.p.).

However, Dicey's willingness to trust those around her above her family does not go unpunished. In the final scene between her and Cisco, Dicey asks him to deposit the check she received from Claude for the boats she finished. Dicey asks because she cannot leave Gram alone in the house as she is still healing. Cisco replies, "If you want me to. Sure" (Voigt, 205). In this big moment of trust between the two Dicey gives the money that she desperately needs to help pay the bills in the Tillerman household. For Dicey to give Cisco the money she's earned is important especially considering how money-minded Dicey has been since the very first book where she managed finances for herself and her younger siblings. However the next day, when Dicey needs to make a withdrawal from her account she lacks the funds. The bank teller explains to Dicey that the man (Cisco), "said you had or have it in cash. You're supposed to write 'For Deposit Only'" (Voigt, 209).

Despite this upsetting situation, Dicey attempts to reach out to her family for help first. Dicey explains the situation and concludes with "All in all, I've been pretty stupid" (Voigt, 216). However the Tillermans rally around her in various ways, Gram replies "That's your side of it." Maybeth apologizes for her sister's situation and gives her a hug, and Sammy was angry with Cisco. The Tillermans are once again a strong familial unit, because Dicey starts to rely on them for their help again. Maybeth, Sammy, and Gram forgive Dicey for the way she treated them throughout the novel which is shown through their unbridled support of her.

As the conversation progresses, Dicey is still upset and concludes that she "shouldn't have trusted" and "should've known better," (Voigt, 217). In this moment, Dicey attempts to

revert back to feeling like those around cannot be trusted. However, in her infinite wisdom Gram replies, “Don’t fool yourself, girl. It’s not your failure. It’s his.” (Voigt, 217).

Gram explains that Dicey should not be embarrassed to tell her family about failures, because they always support her. Dicey sees the support that her family gives her in a difficult moment. Sammy is angry, and Maybeth simply hugs her. By being vulnerable and telling her family about her problems, Dicey is relinquishing control and accepting that all of the Tillerman siblings are now adults, who can help her.

Dicey then finished the boats for Claude without the help of Cisco at all. After finishing the task at hand and accepting the help of Maybeth to pay the phone bill, Dicey finally decided to try one last time to earn back the trust of Jeff. Upon seeing Jeff, Dicey states, “I’ll give up (..) I promise, I will. I don’t have to be a boatbuilder” (Voigt, 228). Dicey realizes in Jeff’s absence the depth of her love for him, and no longer wants to wait to get married. Jeff rejects her idea. However, Jeff acknowledges that he knows how Dicey’s mind works, and appreciates her for who she is. After understanding that she needs Jeff’s help, Dicey re-enters his life.

As Dicey reconciles with Jeff, he explains to her that the break-up “would have been both of us losing. It’s never just one, winning or losing, it would have been both our faults” (Voigt, 231). After they both agreed to marry, Dicey learns, while she may feel the situation was completely her fault, it was not in fact solely something that she caused. Any conflict has two sides, and from Jeff’s perspective, they both would have been hurt had Dicey decided to leave Jeff and stop contacting him. Both of them need each other. Dicey understands that isolating herself hurts other people too. By Dicey explaining her situation with her workshop, she lets herself once be vulnerable with Jeff, which culminates in her accepting his proposal and committing herself to him for life.

In Suzanne Elizabeth Reid's book, *Presenting Cynthia Voigt* (1995), her article titled, "Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg: Defining The Self," she comments on two different Voigt novels outside of the Tillerman Cycle where the search for a self identity is a common theme. Additionally, *Seventeen Against the Dealer* explores this theme as Dicey leaves and then re-enters her family. In *Dicey's Song*, Dicey begins to discover her identity in conjunction with femininity and her changing body. However, Dicey still has yet to discover who she is and where her purpose in life lies. Arguably, Dicey attempts to find this in working on boat-building and a business in Crisfield. Once she discovers the importance of her family, friends, and boyfriend, Dicey learns that her self-identity is rooted in those who love her. This culminates with her offer to completely walk away from her dream of boat-building in favor of marrying Jeff. In his outright refusal to allow her to give that up, Jeff shows Dicey that she can have both, and that her life's purpose is rooted and towing the line between her dream job and the people she loves. This offers a conclusion to the theme of Dicey being lost among her loved ones. Dicey now has gotten the forgiveness of those who she cares the most for, and no longer feels adrift.

Henke's notion of lost children relates specifically to having a physical home and place to live. However, in this novel, the theme of home is much deeper than that. Home for Dicey at this point in her life is rooted in her family and other loved ones. Eventually, Dicey will marry Jeff and move out of Gram's house, but the connection between the Tillermans is so strong that Dicey will always feel home. In addition to her connection with the Tillermans, Dicey is also deeply connected to Jeff and will be at home with him wherever they end up, because they do love each other. Therefore, while Henke makes a valid point on how physically lost children are a common trope, and one the Tillerman children experience in *Homecoming*, the theme of being

lost is not unique to that novel in the series. Dicey, in losing connection with her loved ones, is lost in this novel, but is ultimately found because she reaches out for both help and forgiveness.

Reid's article, she touches on how Voigt's characters typically find their own identity and purpose through self exploration and seeing the others around them. This is especially shown in the final novel of the series, because Dicey understands her own shortcomings. Dicey's inability to solve problems completely on her own, but stubbornness to do so in this book, proves that she cannot be her best self without her family around to help and balance her in various ways. An example of this is Jeff leading more with his heart while Dicey thinks more logically about various situations they encounter. However, in the conclusion of the novel, Dicey acknowledges how her family aids her as well as how her sense of self is interconnected to the things she's learned and grown to appreciate about her loved ones. Additionally, after learning about her loved ones who are alive and currently in her life, Dicey finally cements their adult relationship and a new familial structure.

Therefore, the book, *Seventeen Against The Dealer*, allows Dicey to learn new lessons that will carry her forward in life. In this novel, Dicey slowly begins to lose the connection between herself and her family that was solidified in the first novel in the series especially as they traveled to Crisfield on foot together, as well as her relationships with both Jeff and Gram which began to develop and solidify at the conclusion of the second novel in the series where the Tillerman children all begin to settle down in Crisfield together as a family. By admitting she needs help, allowing herself to receive help from her loved ones, and letting her heart fully open and commit to Jeff, Dicey learns that self-worth and identity is interconnected with the people she loves.

Dacey realizes that her family which was once so youthful has aged dramatically and she should allow herself to learn from those around her, because they have new lessons from their own life experiences to teach her. Sammy and Maybeth are now nearing highschool graduation and will begin to have their own lives outside of the Tillerman family, and Gram is getting older and sickness is more common now for her. Because of this, Dacey learns to value the time with her family despite the work hours she will lose. Dacey understands that those around her need her company just as she needs theirs. The people who love Dacey will grieve the loss of her company just as much as she grows to miss being around those who are important to her. This was a very fitting ending to both the novel and series, because Dacey finds her own life outside of caring for her siblings without losing them completely. At this moment, it makes complete sense for Voigt to conclude the series with Jeff and Dacey marrying because she finally cemented her adult relationships with James, Maybeth, Sammy, Gram, and Jeff.

CHAPTER 5: DICEY LEARNS ABOUT COPING WITH LIFE'S CHANGES IN THE TILLERMAN CYCLE

Through the three different books from Dickey's perspective in the Tillerman Cycle, the reader follows both her physical and emotional maturation and Dickey's coping with changes. While these changes vary in the three novels because Dickey is growing up, each change is fundamental to Dickey entering adulthood at the conclusion of the series.

In analyzing the three books of the Tillerman cycle Dickey narrates, (*Homecoming*, *Dickey's Song*, and *Seventeen Against The Dealer*), the reader can clearly see a pattern in all of the lessons that Dickey learns. In the first novel, Dickey, after being left with her siblings and minimal money to support them, is tasked with taking them on a journey by foot from somewhere in Connecticut where Momma abandoned them to Bridgeport where their Great Aunt Cilla lives and then finally to Crisfield where they settle and make a home for themselves. Despite living with her siblings her entire life, Dickey distrusts anyone else's decisions. Dickey often finds herself incredibly frustrated at their unwillingness and sometimes, outright refusal to cooperate with what she believes to be the only correct decision to be made at a given time. In addition to not trusting her siblings and continuously pointing out their flaws, Dickey is skeptical of strangers.

In various scenes in the novel, *Homecoming*, Dickey trusts and sees the value in her siblings' various strengths one-by-one. Dickey ultimately realizes that she can share in both the burden and responsibility of their journey. Various scenes in the novel all show where James, Maybeth, and Sammy are valuable in unique ways with getting the Tillermans to a place where they feel comfortable and can thrive as one family. Dickey appreciates the various personalities of

her younger siblings, and enjoys life with them despite their difficult situation. She no longer only sees the ways their personalities can hinder the journey and timeline that she put in place.

After Dicey learns to accept and trust the people closest to her, she learns that she must ask for help from those around her too. Upon meeting various people Dicey finally learns about the gray area when it comes to trust. However, learning this helps Dicey begin to delineate when it is okay to trust people. This aids her making the most trusting decision yet at the conclusion of the novel, which is to allow Gram to make a loving home for all of the Tillerman children.

In the second novel, *Dicey's Song*, Dicey is beginning to develop and reach physical maturation. Dicey rejects this, due to the fact that the most prominent woman in her life was Momma, who abandoned Dicey and her siblings. Dicey refuses to wear a bra or a dress at the beginning of the novel. However, when Gram takes her shopping Dicey begins to see the beauty in her new feminine body. Dicey realizes she does not have to be as feminine as Maybeth or Momma and wear gaudy dresses with bows, but that her femininity can be seen as a strength.

Dicey accomplishes this through picking out plain clothes, and eventually growing to see the beauty in the plainness. The theme of femininity is shown through Dicey's newfound relationship with Mina. Mina and Dicey grow to trust each other, and Dicey begins to understand that Mina, while seemingly fits in with other girls, has more depth, because she likes to learn, and has especially unique ways of looking at things.

Dicey grows in her relationship with femininity when she develops a relationship with Jeff. Dicey first saw Jeff as a friend and someone who intrigued her, but when he asks her to the dance and she declines, she enjoys the playful flirting that follows. This contributes to her new relationship with her changing body and growing up in general, because Dicey begins to look forward to the day where she feels like she is old enough to date Jeff.

However when Momma is dying and both Dicey and Gram travel to Boston to say a final goodbye, Dicey realizes that despite having become a woman and trusting those around her, she is not a weak person. Gram herself is a woman and Dicey believes that Gram is a strong person. Upon realizing this, Gram points out the ways that Momma was strong too. Momma loved other people. Gram ends with a challenge to Dicey to learn to do that as well. However, despite not knowing how to do this yet, Dicey is finally able to appreciate Momma for what she was without anger or malice anymore. In this moment, Dicey can heal from the anger that she has unknowingly internalized towards Momma.

Voigt effectively uses Dicey's refusal to give into femininity and her changing body as a metaphor for the anger that Dicey holds for her mother. However, upon accepting her own role with her physical maturation and how she wishes to express that, Dicey appreciates both herself and Gram as well as Momma who was completely different from either of them. This allows for Dicey to not only physically bury Momma, but also bury her anger and allow herself to grieve in a healthy and productive way.

Finally in, *Seventeen Against The Dealer*, Dicey begins to cement her adult relationship with the Tillermans and Jeff. The novel begins with Dicey showing her appreciation for her siblings and boyfriend Jeff. However, after her shop is broken into, Dicey focuses more on work. When Cisco offers to help Dicey with her boat-building business, they bond. Cisco later betrays her trust by stealing money that she desperately needed and had earned.

In conjunction with the developing relationship between Dicey and Cisco, Dicey is losing trust and appreciation for the people closest to her (Jeff, James, Maybeth, Sammy, and Gram). When she realizes this and feels especially disconnected to the people around her, one-by-one

Dacey attempts to regain their trust. Upon understanding their importance and value, Dacey then explains that Cisco stole her money and allows them to help her.

Dacey now, once again appreciates her siblings for who they are and receives help. This cements the new relationship the Tillermans will have as they all enter adulthood. After finally learning this, Dacey will enter adulthood, start her career, and marry Jeff, while simultaneously understanding how to maintain the relationships with the people around her.

These various lessons in life allow the reader to see the growth that Dacey has had throughout the three novels that are written from her perspective. These lessons engage and encourage the reader to understand her emotional journey as well as journeys of their own. Like Dacey, all children will have to learn lessons in life as they grow and change. However, through this universal theme that Voigt expertly employs, her books can maintain relevance and understanding amongst their audience. In doing this through the guise of sibling, parental, grandparent, romantic, and platonic relationships, readers can relate to Dacey in various ways as they age along with her.

These life lessons are instrumental in understanding the growth that Dacey experienced as a person in each of the three novels, due to her emotional and physical development. Voigt's novels show how some of the most important lessons are not those taught in school, but rather those that make us good people.

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