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Cynthia Voigt

Come A Stranger (Tillerman Cycle, 5)

United States (1986)

TAGS: Ancient Greek Dance Dryades





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

General information	
Title of the work	Come A Stranger (Tillerman Cycle, 5)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1986
First Edition Details	Cynthia Voigt, *Come A Stranger*. New York, NY: Atheneum, 1986, 248 pp.
ISBN	9781442428829
Official Website	cynthiavoigt.com (accessed: 25 February, 2020).
Awards	1987 – Judy Lopez Medal
Genre	Fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



Cynthia Voigt , b. 1942
(Author)

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

Source:

Official Website (accessed: 04 September, 2019).

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

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Additional information

Translation	Dutch: *Wilhemina Smiths*, trans. M Slagt-Prins, Querido, 1989. French: *Une Fille Im-pos-sible*, trans. Rose-Marie Vassallo, Flammarion, 1993. German: *Mina, Dicey Tillermans Freundin*, trans. Matthias Duderstadt, Sauerländer, 1989. Swedish: *Minas Kärlek*, trans. Rebecca Alsberg, BTJ, 1989.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	The other titles in the Tillerman Cycle are: *Homecoming* (1981), *Dicey's Song* (1982), *A Solitary Blue*(1983), *The Runner* (1985), *Sons From Afar* (1987) and *Seventeen Against the Dealer* (1989).
Summary	*Come A Stranger* (1986) tells the story of Mina Smiths, who appears elsewhere in the Tillerman series as one of Dicey Tillerman's few friends. The novel starts a couple of years before Mina and Dicey meet, with Mina finding out she has been awarded a scholarship to a prestigious ballet summer camp. She loves her time at the camp, despite being the only black student, and returns to her home in Crisfield, Maryland, interested only in traditionally white cultural fields (classical music, ballet, British literature) and dismissive of black culture. On returning to camp the following summer, Mina's new physical maturity combined with her awareness of the racism around her prevent her from dancing well, and she is sent home early. On her way home, Mina meets Tamer Shipp, who appears in a previous Tillerman book as the friend of Dicey's uncle Bullet. Now a

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reverend like Mina's father, Tamer tells her the story of his friendship with Bullet, who was killed in the Vietnam War, while also helping her to accept and love herself and find joy in her community. Back at school, Mina meets and befriends Dicey, and engineers a meeting between Tamer and Bullet's mother (Dicey's grandmother). The novel ends with Mina meeting a boy her own age and considering a future as a lawyer.

Analysis

A core theme of this novel is the conflict Mina faces between Eurocentric, white-centric culture and her own. Despite her growing appreciation of classical music, dance and literature, Mina's attempts to join in are thwarted by the racism inherent in dominant cultural products and the way they are interpreted by others. For example, in a ballet based on C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books, Mina is cast as a Tarkaan and the evil deity Tash, both part of the Calormene society. Lewis's depictions of the Calormenes draws heavily on stereotypes of the Middle East and has led to accusations of racism and Orientalism. Later in the novel, when playing tennis in an otherwise all-white class, Mina is called "Odile" (*Swan Lake*'s black swan) by her opponent.

Classical motifs appear in the novel as sources of frustrations for Mina. Ancient Greek culture is at first presented as something different from the dominant culture: a peer at dance camp describes how "Isadora Duncan… broke away from classical ballet and went back to the ancient Greeks." (p. 20). Yet as the novel progresses, Mina comes to experience ancient Greek culture as something entwined with the dominant culture that undermines her ability to value black culture and herself: "Mom, didn't you ever think? There are all these myths about gods and goddesses, because the ancient Greeks believed in them, and the Romans, and all we ever had was Brer Rabbit. And the Ananse stories." (p. 47). Greek and Roman culture becomes synonymous with whiteness, reflecting not the historical reality of Greece and Rome, but the use and appropriation of classical culture by white supremacists as 'proof' of racial superiority.

Greek mythology is evoked in a similar way in the novel's recurring tree motif: "In Narnia, Mina would want to be a dryad… she [remembered] that dryads came from Greek mythology. They belonged to the white world… they had so much, they had everything, and they kept reminding her that it wasn't any of it hers." (p. 65). As with Isadora Duncan's 'ancient Greek' dancing, Mina's reception of

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	antiquity and classical mythology is indirect, mediated and filtered through the dominant culture. Trees initially feature as symbols of Mina's comparisons of the external trappings of cultures and communities, her preference for the white-dominated ballet camp and her sense of being trapped in her own body. Later in the novel, trees shift from external to internal symbols of value, as Mina recovers from her experiences at ballet camp and appreciates the love and joy that surrounds her at home: "there was a quiet gladness, deep like a tree and tall in her (p. 114). Trees also reflect Mina's growing awareness of the history of racism, from the "dead stumps" of Louisiana swamps during the time of slavery (p. 105) to the 1930s anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit" (p. 220).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Greek Dance Dryades
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adversity Appearances Christianity Coming of age Conflict Diversity Expectations Family Freedom Friendship Gaining understanding History Homesickness Identity Isolation/loneliness Learning Maturity Names Oppression Race Relationships Religious beliefs Resilience Society Success and failure Values
Further Reading	Lesley, Naomi, *Fictions of Integration: American Children's Literature and the Legacies of Brown v. Board of Education*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2017. Reid, Susan E., *Presenting Cynthia Voigt*, New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1995. Watson, Victor, "The *Tillerman* Series", in Margaret Meek and Victor Watson, eds., *Coming of Age in Children's Literature: Growth and Maturity in the Work of Philippa Pearce, Cynthia Voigt and Jan Mark*, London: Continuum, 2003, 85–124. Zoppa, Linda J., "Color and Class: An Exploration of Responses in Four African-American Coming-of-Age Novels", in Karen Patricia Smith, ed.,

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African-American Voices in Young Adult Literature: Tradition, Transition, Transformation, Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1994,169–192.

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