Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: Seventeen Against the Dealer (Tillerman Cycle, 7) by Cynthia Voigt ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/966. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Cynthia Voigt

Seventeen Against the Dealer (Tillerman Cycle, 7)

United States (1989)

TAGS: Hippocratic Oath Nemesis Sisyphus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Seventeen Against the Dealer (Tillerman Cycle, 7)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America; Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1989
First Edition Details	Cynthia Voigt, *Seventeen Against the Dealer.* New York, NY: Atheneum, 1989, 233 pp.
ISBN	9781442428843
Official Website	cynthiavoigt.com (accessed: March 9, 2020).
Genre	Fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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: *Alles op één kart*, trans. M. Slagt-Prins, Querido, 1990. Finnish: *Vaarallisilla vesillä*, trans. Sirkka Salonen, WSOY, 1991. French: *Dicey Risque Tout*, trans. Rose-Marie Vassallo-Villaneau, Flammarion, 1994. German: *Dicey Tillerman: Bindungen*, trans. Eckart Meissenburg and Matthias Duderstadt, Sauerländer, 1991. Swedish: *Noll gånger insatsen*, transl. Rebecca Alsberg, Bonniers juniorförl, 1990.
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), *Come A Stranger* (1986) and *Sons From Afar*(1987).
Summary	The final novel in the Tillerman series, *Seventeen Against the Dealer*, centres on Dicey, now aged twenty-one. Her brother James and boyfriend Jeff are both away at university, while Dicey has dropped out and started her own boat-building business. Dicey's dedication and hard work are not enough to counteract a lack of experience or capital. After Jeff breaks up with her, and her grandmother Abigail becomes seriously ill with pneumonia, Dicey's attention is brought back to her family. Meanwhile a mysterious drifter and gambler called Cisco (implied to be Dicey's long-lost father, Francis Verricker) squats at Dicey's workshop and helps her

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with her work. Cisco leaves suddenly after stealing a large sum of money from Dicey, the latest in a series of disasters for her business. The novel ends with Dicey and Jeff getting engaged, with Dicey closing the business while still planning to build a boat.

Throughout the series, classical inspirations appear as touchstones, ways of understanding the world and other people. In particular, the recurring references to the myth of Sisyphus reflect tensions about the desire for progress and the search for stability that underscore the whole series. This final novel revisits the theme by juxtaposing Dicey's business ambitions with her personal relationships.

Analysis

The novel's plot centres on Dicey's attempts to make her business work, the obstacles she faces and a realignment of her priorities. The workplace setting dominates the novel and the conversations Dicey has with Cisco while working in this setting are often thought-provoking. In one of their first conversations, Cisco brings up the hypothesis of a second sun in the solar system, named "Nemesis, after the Greek goddess" (Voigt 1989, 101). Dicey understands the word's meaning: "it's the force that brings you down, isn't it? Like doom?" (101) While the novel's readers may see Cisco himself as Dicey's nemesis, he is quick to point out that the goddess is female. In Voigt's *Sons From Afar* (1987), mythology about the Sun is associated with fathers; perhaps the reference to the Sun's hypothetical companion represents mothers and the pull of mothering responsibilities. This fits with Cisco's view that caring responsibilities are a burden: he later asks Dicey if helping care for her siblings is a "waste of [her] own life" (Voigt 1989, 143). Dicey reflects that "she might feel wound around with her family, trapped in some spiderweb of love and responsibility, but most of the time she would look over the years they'd spent together and feel how lucky she was" (p. 143). For Cisco, the pull of responsibility, the force exerted by an unseen sun, is fatal; for Dicey, it is good fortune, "a divinity that shapes our ends", as Jeff says, quoting Shakespeare (p. 66). Although Nemesis the goddess is typically associated with retribution, Cisco is not brought to justice for his treatment of Dicey, while Dicey comes close to losing her family and partner through her obsession with work. Yet while he avoids obvious forms of vengeance, Cisco's ultimate punishment occurs through his continuing estrangement from his family and isolation from society more generally.

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The conversation about Nemesis is the most obvious classical reference in *Seventeen Against the Dealer*, but there are other allusions to Greek myth and history. The strain of Dicey's work is suggestive of the myth of Sisyphus, referenced explicitly elsewhere in the Tillerman series (in *Sons From Afar*, 1987). Dicey's work is often characterised by a sense of circularity and futility: "Sometimes work was all you could do, just put your shoulder to the wheel and push, and keep on pushing. You could barely see the wheel moving, but after a while you could see that you'd gotten somewhere" (Voigt 1989, 127). As Victor Watson writes, Dicey "gives her assent to the circularity of this economic treadmill because she is convinced that she is tougher than the system" (2003, 114). Dicey's realisation by the end of the novel that she has other options does not herald the end of struggle, but a return to working for herself and her family and friends rather than subscribing to a coercive economic system.

Another classical allusion can be found in Voigt's emphasis on medical ethics. Alongside work, health is a major theme of the novel, with Abigail suffering from pneumonia and James planning to train as a doctor. Early in the novel, James defends his decision to take arts courses alongside science at Yale, arguing that "if a doctor has wider knowledge he'll be a better doctor for people – if he knows more about how people think, and are, about human beings, he'll see things in a broader perspective, too, so he can really see people and not just – not just whatever their diseases are" (Voigt 1989, 15). By highlighting the importance of human understanding as well as technical expertise in medicine, Voigt potentially evokes modern rewritings of the Hippocratic Oath, the ancient Greek code of medical ethics (see further Hardstaff 2018).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Hippocratic Oath Nemesis Sisyphus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth	Adversity Coming of age Communication Conflict Expectations Family Gaining understanding Gender expectations/construction Health* Individuality Integrity Intellect Intertextuality Invention Isolation/loneliness Judgement Knowledge Learning Love Maturity Old

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Culture	age (Old people) Parents (and children) Philosophy Relationships Resilience Siblings Social class Society Success and failure Survival

Further Reading

Hardstaff, Sarah, ""With special obligations": Constructions of young adulthood and caregiving in *The Road to Memphis* and *Seventeen Against the Dealer*", in Jutta Ahlbeck, Päivi Lappalainen, Kati Launis and Kirsi Tuohela, eds., *Childhood, Literature and Science: Fragile Subjects*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2018, 141–152.

Hardstaff, Sarah, "Money and the Gift in the Novels of Mildred Taylor and Cynthia Voigt", Barnboken, forthcoming.

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.

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