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Fig 1: Käthe Kollwitz: Seed Corn Must not be Ground. Galerie St Etienne, New York

Monstrous Mothers and Founding Fathers:

Kristevan Maternality in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman Cycle

A Thesis Submitted in partial requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The role of the mother, her potential failure to be good enough, the structure and performance of family, neglect, and family value and performance have become critical issues in social research and adult fiction in the middle of the twentieth century. These adult preoccupations are to be found in literature specially written for children and young adults and Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman cycle published between 1981 and 1987 is an extended study of the existential and urgent issues of maternal abandonment and the issues it presents for her child protagonists. This thesis is a study of the maternal issues that this sudden act of abandonment creates across the span of the seven novels. The initial focus of the series and this research is the plight of four children who are abandoned by their mentally ill mother and who struggle to process their plight and create a new family and a home. A post Freudian psychoanalytic approach is adopted in this research and this approach is concerned with the earliest maternal issues explored in Klein, Winnicott and Kristeva. The maternal search is accomplished in the opening book — they find a home with an initially unwelcoming grandmother — but the effects of the family dysfunction which initiates the series extend across the remaining six novel of the cycle and are questioned and evaluated in this research. The research will question the function and place of the mother and of family itself and asks if a more elastic idea like Kristevan "maternality" is an issue which the narratives explore. The dysfunctional effects are visible in the life choices and decisions of Dicey Tillerman, the eldest child and the protagonist of the series The research will explore the claim that the Tillerman series demonstrates that family, as a nourishing , sustaining social possibility can be created in liminal and unexpected places and should not be

exclusively identified with the patriarchal family. The research will stress a number of critical theoretical movements that underpin the development of the protagonists across the series: the developmental move from Melanie Klein's first developmental position, the paranoid schizoid to Klein's second position, the depressive and the move from an old and archaic, closed judgmental, bipolar order, described in the research as a "covenant" to a new order, a new "covenant" marked by respect and the practice of open and lateral communication. In the final book Voigt offer a resolution, seen in the sudden decision of Dicey Tillerman to drive to her boyfriend's house and rekindle their apparently foundering relationship but one which, in its result contradicts the radical questioning of family which the narrative of the series was consistently preoccupied by. This decision will be interrogated as will the implications of a sudden and abrupt return to the hegemonic family authored and validated by patriarchy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of a number of people who helped me to make this research possible and bring it to s successful conclusion.

Thank you to my supervisors Dr Maureen O'Connor and Dr Cliona Ó Gallchoir for their support and capacity to ask pertinent and significant questions.

The library at UCC and the Cork Public Library service were of enormous help. The subject of my research, Cynthia Voigt, is relatively unknown in Ireland and the city library service helped to locate essential texts in unusual places across Ireland.

I am very grateful to my son Tadhg for his help in proofreading various drafts and dealing with the technical and typographical issues which arose. His help was essential and is much appreciated.

The expressionist artist Käthe Kollwitz figures in the frontispiece and in a later illustration but she also managed to be a presence across the entire venture. I remember fondly the trips I took with my wife Mairead and my daughter Josephine to the Kollwitz museums in Berlin and Cologne. Josephine also accompanied me to the Prado where we searched out the Black Paintings of Goya, one of which is used as the fourth illustration.

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Máiréad, as a testament to her support and presence at all stages of the work.

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was the century of the child. International conventions and agreements gradually foregrounded an awareness of the right of the child and legally enshrined and codified earlier romantic focus on the child. The League of Nations in 1924 set out a list of aspirations which focused on the child. Later, 1979 was declared the year of the child and the Universal Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified and published in 1992. This historic convention stated the basic and essential rights children were entitled to and the member nations of the United Nations were invited to sign and adopt this convention, which aspired to include all children, and asked the first world to look beyond its own children and be aware of the child in other parts of the world. These developments did not happen without historic pressures. They can be seen as a crescendo to the movements that emerged in the nineteenth century. The writing about childhood from people as disparate as Dickens, Beatrice Webb, and Johan Pestalozzi; the development of a literature specific to childhood and for children, which respected the child's individuality and avoided moral dictats and developments in education and psychology all contributed to a growth of awareness about children and childhood and the adult world's responsibilities. These movements, eventually, in the middle of the twentieth century, experienced a particular child-centred climax in the work of John Bowlby, Margaret Mahler and Donald Winnicott. Phillipe Aries, in his ground-breaking book, *Centuries of Childhood*, published in 1960, gave an academic imprimatur and critical credence to the importance of the study of the child as he or she appears in history.

While these global developments were taking place, children's literature was itself embarking on a significant journey. It moved beyond the golden age which began with Lewis Carroll and Alice and responded to the growing awareness around dysfunction and family breakdown that social research was providing.[1] Children's literature moved deeper into the dark recess that the reality of children in society presented and grappled with family breakdown, disfunction, and the atrocities of the twentieth century. The earlier novels of the golden age did not avoid the darkness that often surrounds children but these explorations were often conducted in allegorical, mythic, and symbolic registers and did not explore their ramifications in social and community life. Alice's fall into Wonderland ends in a safe landing and both Jim Hawkins and Huck Finn experience, and crucially survive, violence and neglect. The Golden Age books are founded often on the belief that a happy ending is possible and to be expected despite the vicissitudes of the journey.

This thesis examines the seven novels of Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman cycle, published between 1981 and 1988. This cycle is initiated by the abandonment of the four Tillerman children, Dicey , who is thirteen and the eldest, James, Sam, and Maybeth Tillerman, by their mentally ill mother, Lisa Tillerman, in a car park far from home. Through the seven novels of the Tillerman cycle, we observe

[1] This issue, and the character of Dicey Tillerman's response, ask if the series of novels this research is concerned with can be read as trauma fiction and can be included under the category Cathy Caruth identified in her 1996 classic, *Unclaimed Experience.* The Tillerman series however, while it includes elements that are found in trauma literature does offer an ultimate resolution or closure.

The young adult "problem novel" is a subgenre in children's literature which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and which deals graphically with a relentless focus and intensity on the angst experienced by their young protagonists. S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1960) is usually regarded as the first problem novel.

them on their fraught journey to find a home. Voigt endows her protagonists with the positive qualities they need to deal with this sudden abandonment but she does not avoid the dark themes that can problematise her children's lives and journey to find family. The protagonists meet trauma, abuse, and serial dangers on the road they travel but these do not overwhelm them. However, the series does not constitute a set of problem novels, a genre which became popular after the Second World War, and one which sees young people deal with overwhelming social and psychological issues.

Cynthia Voigt is a prolific and award-winning writer of fiction for children, adolescents, and young adults. She was born in Boston in 1942, graduated from Smith College in 1963, and trained as a teacher at a Christian Brothers training college. She has written adventure stories, detective novels, science fiction, and picture books for younger children. The seven books that comprise the Tillerman cycle, written between 1981 and 1987, encapsulate the overriding theme of her work, which is the need for her young protagonists to develop and acknowledge their interior world and to reach out and connect with family and the wider world and, when necessary, to "let go". Suzanne Reid, in her study of Voigt, values her works because she "realistically [depicts] the dilemmas of young adults as they dare to experiment with ways to define themselves" (xi). Voigt's seven Tillerman novels vividly illustrate these interests and concerns as they show four children finding a home and becoming part of a functioning, responsive family while simultaneously exploring and cherishing their developing, authentic, true selves.

The abandonment of the four children abruptly ends a bizarre and unexpected road journey, which their mother has instigated, to her Aunt Cilla, a woman the children have never met and who

lives in Bridgeport, in Maryland. The children's father Francis Verricker has long vanished from family life and its associated responsibilities and lingers only as a memory. The opening book in the cycle, *Homecoming*, becomes an extended search, a complicated road trip, for the maternal presence and for the home they need if they are to perform as family and become resourceful subjects. Guided by Dicey, they continue the erratic journey to Bridgeport which their mother initiated. Their search for the maternal concludes in the first book when they find a home, not at Bridgeport, but further down the Chesapeake Bay, with a grandmother, Abigail Tillerman, they did not know existed at the beginning of the narrative. The issues that are contained in the idea of the maternal and of family as an essential and evolving stable space of support, myth, and nourishment, extend and re-echo across the entire series.

Lisa Tillerman is the first mother the series introduces, and she is one of a series of mothers who fail to supply maternal care and who decline to supply the home where family is created, sustained, and performed. Voigt does not describe these mothers as monsters but their performance as mothers is abusive or neglectful — their children experience them as "monstrous" — but these mothers are also victims of a patriarchal society, and of the selfishness and irresponsibility of fathers and partners. This study will read the series through the prism of the many myths which Voigt mentions, suggests, or perhaps unconsciously alludes to. These are an essential part of the series, and explore and reflect family and family relationships, the themes which consistently preoccupy Voigt. The series begins with an act of maternal abandonment but includes fathers who maintain or become the "founding fathers" of closed, attritional, destructive patriarchal systems.

This research will critically examine the novels' representation of family performances, the scripts these are based on and the radical models the author offers to replace the text's dysfunctional and destructive families. The cycle of novels questions the "normality" of the heteronormative family. What is meant by "motherhood"? These novels relocate, and redefine motherhood and pose important questions about motherhood as an institution embedded in the culture and as an essential social performance. Voigt is urging her readers to look at the possibilities of family being discovered in unexpected ways outside of the control and patronage of patriarchal, heteronormative systems. The seven novels offer radical possibilities for reconfiguring family; an alternative and impromptu alliance is formed by the four children as they sit in the car, confused, at the moment of their abandonment. This reconfigured family is held together and energised by the feistiness, the commitment, and vision of Dicey Tillerman, the novels' main protagonist. Voigt describes other social groups, which emerge often at the margins of the narrative, who show a capacity to function and perform as family outside traditional, biologically driven relationships. Such possibilities, in all their power, are disavowed in the concluding book of the series where Voigt returns the narrative and her heroine, Dicey, to a hegemonic patriarchy and traditional family. This abrupt and dramatic move, and its implication for Dicey, will be acknowledged and explored in In the final chapter.

My analysis will focus on the creation of family often in highly inauspicious and socially unwelcoming circumstances, where family is problematized and even seen to be potentially unworkable and socially unacceptable. An act of maternal abandonment is the foundational act which announces the plot and maternity however it is experienced, defined, and performed is consistently explored, questioned, reframed, and challenged across the series and Voigt, in the models she offers

of family, asks that we think outside the traditional heteronormative family template comprised of heterosexual members.

The series was published during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the 40th President of the United States, and the benign "father" of the nation, the successor to the original "founding" fathers. While not specifically referenced, Voigt implies that the years of his presidency (1981-89) are the background for the series. All seven novels were published in this timeframe. The plight of the four children and their earlier status as children of a mentally ill single parent are presented as contrasting, and even conflicting, with the social and economic culture we associate with Reagan's presidency. Amy Benfer, writing about the series in in the *Alan Review* observes:

> Thirty years later, it's striking to realize that the publication dates of these novels — 1981 to 1989 — correspond exactly to the years Ronald Reagan was president. In an era that revered cowboy capitalism and disparaged single mothers, broken homes, and "welfare queens," Cynthia Voigt wrote — and won awards for — novels about poor children, ditched by their unwed mother and saved by two other single women: a thirteen-year-old girl and, eventually, a sixty-something barefoot widow (Benfer np).

Benfer describes the world the Tillermans are exposed to but also celebrates Voigt's intention in drawing our attention to such a family at this moment in modern American history. There are no shortages of markers to contextualise the series. The children listen to popular music and they go to the George Lucas film *Star Wars.* The Vietnam War is a powerful backdrop to the series, and figures in

the fourth book, *The Runner.* The social attitudes to poverty and single parent families that characterise Reagan's presidency and attitudes to race are significant, albeit underlying, issues in the series. These details enrich and bring a sense of social realism to the experience of the Tillerman children, a reconfigured family unit attempting to cope with maternal abandonment in 1980s America.

The series is also enriched by its detailed geographical contexts. The children and their mother embark on a journey from Cape Cod, travelling southwards along the eastern edge of Chesapeake Bay. Their original destination, Bridgeport, is replaced by the town of Crisfield further down the Bay where Abigail Tillerman, the children's grandmother lives. The children visit Annapolis, they cross the Chesapeake Bay and in the second book Dicey Tillerman and her grandmother fly to Boston to be at the dying Lisa Tillerman's bedside. They are close to the places we associate with the founding fathers and the original act of rebellion that led to the creation of the United States. They do not visit Washington or Philadelphia, but they do traverse territory associated with this early masculine, patriarchal, venture. The founding fathers and the values and principles they espoused have nothing to offer the Tillerman children despite the splendour, nobility, and lofty aspirations of their original romantic venture. This founding patriarchal vision offers the series and the children very little. Their experiences are, however, unconsciously enriched by the growing emergence of an awareness of alternative sexualities and the construction of gender in the series, which takes place a decade on from the Stonewall riots. These ambivalence and possibilities are to be found in the series and will be explored throughout this research.

The children are left behind by their mother in a busy shopping mall, far from home and with meagre resources. Through this tumultuous event the central role of Dicey as protagonist is quickly established: the children, under Dicey 's direction, begin to create an embryonic family as they sit in their car, confused by their mother's abrupt departure and waiting for her return. Dicey, in this her moment of "annunciation", desperately needs space to process what is happening and what is being asked of her. She asks James to tell the younger children a fairy tale. They want to hear Hansel and Gretel with the witch and the gingerbread house; a myth that is a symbol of their existential plight. Dicey considers their situation as James intones "once upon a time" and inaugurates the significance and the power of myth across the series.

This moment in the car is the first of the series' many transitional spaces, a phrase associated with the psychiatrist Donald Winnicott. These spaces indicate the internal recognition of movement, change, and challenge, in the external world and they prepare the children, as the original transitional object prepared the infant for the next outward movement of his journey. They cannot stay in the car forever. The transitional moment creates an essential "third" or "in between space" for the human imagination to process and make sense of its experiences. Dicey uses this transitional space to gather herself and focus internally on the decisions she must make and to move to the challenge of a new order which she will accept and be responsible for. She has replaced their mother and she represents the biblical virgin suddenly confronted by an awesome, historic announcement. Dicey will embrace a type of maternity and create a new, temporary, affiliative "home" as they search for a physical place and a person, an adult, who can authorise and supply their new home.

Melissa G Wilson and Kathy Short, in their discussion of award-winning “middle grade” novels, offer two contrasting versions of the “home focussed” myth that they see as informing much of children’s literature. They point out that “children’s literature is rife with the idea of home”. Home has traditionally been a place where “the child protagonist is cared for, loved, and disciplined while waiting to become an adult” (130). They identify what they describe as a new “post-modern” meta-plot — a story associated with the period after the Second World War — which differs radically from the myth that supported the classics of the Golden Age of children’s literature, of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The “modern” myth found in traditional writing for children, and in fairy tales, which informs stories of the Golden Age, sends children on a journey but promises an eventual return home and to the maternal and paternal that initially rejected them. A different version of this home-based myth is suggested and one based in White and Short’s sample based on a data set from novels that won the Newbery Medal and the Book of the Year Award from the Children’s Council of Australia in the years 2003-2007. The post-modern protagonists of these novels, like the Tillermans, “have been caught in the crossfire of the gender, race, class, and culture clashes between adults” (133) in narratives marked by an absence of home. The Tillerman children must be the ones to construct home, family, and the essential maternal (134). The Tillerman’s world is unsafe, unreliable, and dangerous. Home, as Wilson and Short see it in the post-modern myth, is dysfunctional and fails to offer children the reliable, essential nurture they need and this post-modern myth additionally includes the demand that often it is the children who are obliged to observe and absorb the inadequacies of their parents

This distinction, between the modern and postmodern, it can be argued, ultimately breaks down as the Tillerman narrative does reveal the four children finding and co-creating a home. The significance of the designation post-modern, as used by Wilson and Short, lies in what is its capacity as a shorthand term to name and contextualise many issues and themes which children in contemporary fiction witness and experience: abuse, addiction, neglect, parental absence, abandonment, and the role reversals which Voigt highlights across the span of the cycle where children are asked or forced to do what is developmentally inappropriate. The opening pages of *Homecoming* show Dicey Tillerman asked to take on a social reality beyond her emotional capacity. Wilson and Short ask questions which are central to this investigation of Voigt's Tillerman cycle: where is family to be found and how can it be constructed and performed in this bleak, "post-modern", world confronting the Tillermans as they trudge along the road before them?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Criticism of the Tillerman series rarely engages with the compelling issues about family suggested by Wilson and Short and is generally restricted to aspects of the series or is found in passing references and is rarely broad, inclusive, and integrative. This thesis will offer a comprehensive study of the series, as it explores family and family performance, engage with its use of myth and imagery and its willingness to borrow from many cultural areas. It will establish links with examples from children's literature from the post-World War Two era and earlier, from the golden age of children's literature. Two classic children's books from this earlier period, Frances Hodgson Burnett's canonical *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906) are of particular relevance and mirror

many of the themes this research will outline. The issues which surround family in the series propel the narrative forward and give this research its methodology. This thesis will examine all seven books of the series; the existing body of criticism rarely ventures beyond the cycle's first two books, *Homecoming,* and the Newbery Award winning *Dicey's Song*.

Examples of this limited approach to the series include: an early article by James Henke on the mythic in *Homecoming* (1984), written before the entire series was published; articles on the girl as protagonist and Dicey Tillerman's potential to be a role model (Kay E. Vandergrift 1996; Margaret Meek Spencer and Victor Watson 2003); the eccentric grandmother (Marilyn Fain Apseloff 1986); the family the Tillerman siblings co-create with her on the farm at Crisfield (Dorothy Clark 2000, Kay Benfer 2012, Lucy Pearson 2014); and Voigt's capacity to create in her texts a tapestry of references and allusions (Jaime Hylton 2005). This body of criticism rarely engages the Tillerman children's story overall as a developing journey and rarely acknowledges the alternative models of family or "otherness" seen in the narrative as socially radical and transgressive. This research will compensate for this lacuna. It will stress the examples of liminality, seen often in the transgressive family units which Voigt introduces across the series and in doing this extend and expand our appreciation of Voigt's project.

There are exceptions to the limited approaches to the series: articles by Dorothy Clark and Elizabeth Pearson are significant in their stress on family identity and structures. Suzanne Elizabeth Reid's *Presenting Cynthia Voigt*, a broad treatment of Voigt's published output to 1994, is a notable exception. Reid includes a distilled but relevant biography of Voigt and highlights critical reactions to

her published work. Reid devotes a chapter to the Tillerman series with a condensed section on each of the novels that comprise the series (31-50) and she highlights the legacy of music and song which Lisa passed on to her children and, particularly to Maybeth (46). She includes many useful critical observations: she quotes a comment of Kathleen Leverich on the "alarming hostile characteristics of most adults" and describes Melody, Jeff Green's mother, from *A Solitary Blue,* as a "monster" and an "appalling mother-philanthropist". This leads Reid to the important observation that "Voigt's children are forced to become adults early as they are abandoned either physically or emotionally" and she highlights, among the text's gallery of adults, the parents or surrogate parents who model "intelligent concern and a talent for nurturance" (49). Reid explores Voigt's output from a triangulated perspective and uses the terms "reaching out", "holding on" and "letting go" as the points of her critical triangle (31). In her final chapter she claims, that while Voigt is a humanist writer, she is not a feminist. This assessment is correct but it is difficult to accept that a series of texts which deal with mothers and family and their treatment by patriarchy, does not raise issues which invite a feminist reading.

This research will use a psychoanalytic approach. The theories of Julia Kristeva, Melanie Klein, Donal Winnicott and André Green, and their respective perspectives on maternity, and a world that can be described as pre-oedipal, one that exist before the emergence of Freud's Oedipus complex, will form the core methodology. This methodology is reflected in a number of articles which are not strictly part of a psychoanalytic canon, they do not use a psychoanalytic prism, but they discuss and illustrate the themes and issues the methodology will focus on. Marian Apseloff's 1992 article on abandonment as a theme in children's books reflects a contemporary concern with motherhood. Ruth Jenkins' article on the abject in *The Secret Garden*, and Kelly Oliver, Elizabeth Grosz, John Lechte, and

Mary Caputi in their writings on Julia Kristeva are relevant. Martha Westwater's *Giant Despair Meets Hopeful,* is a significant Kristevan study of young adult fiction focusing on work published in the final decades of the twentieth century. She refers once to Dicey in *Homecoming* in her opening chapter, describing her as an example of a heroine "who has gone sometimes mildly, sometimes cruelly, cynical about the parent", a description which this research finds too sweeping and absolute to accept (5). The "cynicism" which Westwater reads is less a moral issue or a defect of personality and more a mode of survival to which the narrative demands Dicey adapt. Later Westwater regrets that Voigt, among other writers, was not included (19).

Naomi Lesley in a 2014 article on the Tillerman novels associates them with an awareness of disability, giftedness, and race. Her starting point is the 1954 judgement of the Supreme Court of the United States, in *Brown v Board of Education,* which outlawed school segregation in states where it was still legal. She suggests that the Tillerman series describes new models of learning communities outside mainstream education which compensate for the failure of education to capitalise on the opportunity created by the 1954 judgment. These potential communities are explored in the alternative or "other" communities and families Voigt describes and this research argues that these very communities and their power to create open and lateral areas of learning are an intrinsic aspect of the radical human vision Voigt represents.[2] Sara Hardstaff in a 2016 article on *Homecoming* and Suzanne Collins' The *Hunger Games* offer studies of orality — and greed — linked to the mythological

[2] School and education are a constant and recurring theme across the series and they are an essential part of all the protagonists lives and Voigt regularly introduces issues which question formal education.

search for utopia or a cornucopia and a preoccupation with the Land of Cockaigne, realised in the gingerbread house. She claims that these two novels, despite their links with traditional folktales, go beyond the abundance that the folktales desire and suggest an ethical and social balance between gluttony and scarcity. A healthy and balanced orality, a respect for sufficiency, is a theme across the Tillerman series both on the journey and in their new home but greed is vividly realised in the character of John Tillerman the original "founding father" in the fourth book of the cycle, *The Runner,* who represents a mindless, driven, all-consuming orality and who is repeatedly described presiding over and dominating dysfunctional family meals. This man epitomises greed. This orality is seen in the narrative in his rapacious greed; it knows no controls or boundaries; it extends beyond the table and negatively includes his family wellbeing. The control he exercises evolves into mindless greed and his family are the immediate target of this greed. It is an example of his boundless power to want and to demand he has assumed. His grandson, James the narrative suggests, has inherited this orality (154). The narrative is obliquely suggesting how dangerous this greed is and how it can undermine and unbalance families.

Two articles, by Jane Messer (2013) and Andrea O'Reilly (2016), examine Lionel Shriver's protagonist Eva in *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003) and offer suggestions about patriarchy and the controls and demands it places on mothers which are central issues in this study of the series. A 2019 article by Justyna Wierzchowska on Lacan's, and Winnicott's theoretical mirrors regrets the lack of interest in American scholarship in Winnicott, in comparison to the industry that surrounds Lacan, and she reviews key Winnicott ideas, including Winnicott's mirror which suggests that the child "sees" herself or is reflected in her mother's face, and is ratified by this encounter. It is an example of

Winnicott's consistent mother-child preoccupation (5). It is arguably a reality the Tillerman children have not experienced. The children struggle to reach and hold the mother's gaze but like the mother highlighted by Kristeva in her article in *Desire in Language* on Bellini's paintings and Michelangelo's sculptures, she often proves unreachable as her deteriorating mental condition reveals in *Homecoming.* Like these madonnas, her preoccupations and gaze are elsewhere.

An article by Kaplan and Rabinowitz claims that Dicey Tillerman and all the characters of the series are heterosexual and that the series is describing an ostensibly heterosexual community (202). This research will argue that this claim is not supported in the series and will suggest that are more pliable and complex approaches to issues of sex, gender, and sexual orientation in the series. Dicey Tillerman is consistently described as androgynous. The ambivalence that surrounds her sexuality and her reluctance to accept her gender invites a queer reading. Queer theory is a post structuralist approach that critiques identities and finds sexual and social ambivalence a fertile, challenging area to explore and critique. While usually associated with sexual and gender identities it is also concerned with identities that question the normative and binary structures and systems that society creates and maintains (Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth, 146 -7). Queer theory disrupts and challenges what society considers normal. It shares with Kristeva's outlaw ethics an urge not only to question and problematise but to disrupt what the law decrees to be unproblematic. The series offers many sites where entrenched values are questioned and their inconsistencies exposed. Dicey's role and her psychological possibilities are deepened and expanded if we see her outside a closed heterosexual binary. A reading which incorporates a queer perspective extends the relational power of the series.

PSYCHOANALYSIS, MATERNALITY AND LINKED ISSUES

Psychoanalysis, despite its association with historical phallocentric preoccupations, and the combination of misogyny and historic patriarchy associated with Freud, and other founding fathers of the discipline, can nonetheless reveal hidden and powerful dynamics, and will provide a central theoretical tool to interrogate the maternal and paternal events that underpin the narrative. Its language will be used to explore and reveal the dynamics that underlie the evolving narrative. The second generation of psychoanalysis moved beyond the oedipal triangle, central to Freud, and focused on what precedes the emergence of the oedipal, when the mother-child dyad is dominant. Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott are two of the key theorists who foreground the preoedipal world. They show a concern with the earliest experiences of nurture, and are focussed on the infant and the mother, who usually supplies this nurture. This cluster of theories is known as object relations and stresses the incorporation into the infant's growing psyche of the "objects" that the infant experiences, including the carer's voice, smell, bodily presence, and the classic good breast. These part-objects are, as Nancy Chodorow states, "in psychoanalytic parlance people, aspects of people or symbols of people" (42). As the child develops, these diverse part objects are internally coalesced into a complete object, critically recognised as the child's primary carer, usually the biological mother. A "good enough" mother, according to Winnicott, is essential if the child is to equip himself with adequate and sustaining objects. And it is she who orchestrates the move from the enclosed early world of infancy, with its absolute dependency on her presence, to an awareness of the external

objects that exist outside the infant's enclosed world and populate the world the child is destined to enter.

The mother espoused and idealised by object relations is absent across the Tillerman series. The Tillerman children have not experienced a mother who is consistent, available, and devoted to her children. *Homecoming* describes the mother's deteriorating performance as woman and mother and suggests the event that took place in the car park did not surprise the two older children, Dicey and James (5). The potential contribution of Klein and Winnicott is significant despite the tendencies of object relations to identify with a good or functioning maternity and essentialise her function. They both focus on the maternal and offer a language that explores maternity and the research will use this as an essential commentary on the protagonist's development.

KLEIN'S DEVELOPMENTAL WORLD

Klein's two developmental positions, the paranoid schizoid, which is experienced at the beginning of life, and the depressive, which Klein saw as emerging during the first year, will be used in this examination. Her focus on the child's need to offer reparation, linked to the experience of the depressive position, and her later writing on envy and gratitude, are discussed .

The paranoid schizoid, described in Klein's 1946 paper, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" describes the earliest phase of infancy where the infant is locked into a terrifying struggle to survive and can only differentiate between the polarities of life and death, survival, and destruction, which the infant integrates as the maternal good breast which nourishes and offers life and the withdrawal

of this source of nourishment which it experiences as a life-threatening, bad breast. The infant separates and splits the good breast from the bad breast, compartmentalises them and regards them as separate persons and reacts to the withdrawal of the good breast by attempting to hurt this bad breast. The infant is locked into a terrifying polarity and feels driven to retaliate against the bad breast. This violent polarity is followed by a growing integration and the emergence of the depressive position with its recognition that these part-objects are really aspects of one person, the mother. New and essential human emotions such as guilt, shame, and the recognition that we can hurt and inflict pain, emerge. The infant experiences these troubling and anxiety producing emotions and it is these emotions which are ultimately the basis for personal life and community. The infant moves beyond the initial split binary of desire and hate and feels ambivalent emotions and experiences the primitive morality which Voigt claimed to see in the infants she studies. The infant feels that it must make retribution for the earlier destruction it was responsible for. The depressive position is the focus of two of Klein's most famous papers, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States", of 1935 and "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" of 1940. Klein's two positions are not stages we pass through but become defining aspects or grounds of our later emotional life and represent emotional "locations" we return to when stressed or pressured. We do not outgrow these positions as in Freud's model we do not leave anality and orality behind us in the past. We repeat the behavioural patterns or scripts we learned in these primal archaic places and this return is seen in Dicey Tillerman as she tries, across the series, to "leave" the road and the journey her mother's abandonment created and grapple with the demands of the new world In Crisfield.

WINNICOTT AND THE MOTHER

Winnicott's focus on the mother's role is arguably excessive and places an inordinate weight on her shoulders. For Chodorow, Winnicott "effuses" that mothering "is an extraordinary condition which is almost like an illness though it is really a sign of health" (85). He expects an enormous dedication from the mother in his articles, books and broadcasts, and while he did not ignore the father and the possibility of other sources of care, his emphasis on the mother diminished the cultural potential of fathers and non-biological carers, and the father in particular is patronised and given no significant emotional place in his child's life.[3] Yet it can be argued he initiated a slow revolution by stressing the mother's role in a real world and how she sees and performs her role in this world. He invites women, and men also, to start a conversation about nurture, care, and responsibility. Alison Stone offers a balanced appraisal of Winnicott; she sees an ambiguity in his legacy and stresses the positive as well as the negative, noting that he invests the mother with real agency (20). This was an essential and liberating progression and focus in a movement and a culture dominated by the Freudian father.

Winnicott offers this research useful themes; the protagonists regularly use his transitional object which, despite its original association with a toy or a favourite blanket evolves into a place or a space, where the protagonists stand apart from the driven momentum of their journey, rest and appraise their progress and prepare for their next evolution. The opening volume of the series offers

[3] In an article Winnicott asks that fathers not "get in the way" of the mother's overriding task.

many examples of this flexible and resourceful idea. Winnicott's idea of the true self, the core of selfhood that our carers must protect from the "impingements" and excessive pressures the real world can impose, and his idea of a "false self", one based on an excess of compromise with the external world, are themes the protagonists reveal.

The relationality which Emily Jeremiah claims is a "key feature of recent feminist thinking about maternity", and illustrated in the writings of Sara Ruddick, Jessica Benjamin, and Judith Butler is important to acknowledge. This research will foreground the fostering and performance of relationship as an essential social experience across the series. "Benjamin challenges traditional psychoanalytic paradigms, which place the mother in the position of object, and posits an 'intersubjective' view of child development" (Jeremiah 12). This stress on relationality can be also discovered and read earlier in Winnicott in his stress on the third space which is an in between stage critically placed between mother and the outside world and which is critically dependent on the carer's encouragement of the transitional object.

The Dead Mother Complex of Andrë Green

The French psychoanalyst André Green, as Janice Doane and Devon Hodges claim, follows Winnicott and, like him, is preoccupied by events that also happen in the real world centred on maternal experience (57). If Winnicott is primarily concerned with exploring and reifying the "good enough mother" and the potential worlds she creates for her child through her presence, and her capacity to encourage play and creativity, Green is concerned with the effects of bad mothering. His clinical concern is motherhood as absence. He explores this theme in his "dead mother complex", a

situation where the mother is too absorbed by her own depression to be present to her child. The mother is not physically dead, but she is emotionally dead to her child and their world which desperately needs her. The child is "drawn towards a deathly deserted universe" (Doane and Hodges, 58). Green's dead mother appears in many guises and personifications across the Tillerman series as she can move beyond absence and withdrawal and reveal a manipulative selfishness and become devouring and cannibalistic, a disturbing aspect which is briefly raised in Dicey 's first contact with her grandmother Gram in *Homecoming* (305).

Julia Kristeva's intense preoccupation with what her translator Leon Roudiez translates as "maternality" in her essay "Stabat Mater", offers a more pliable and resourceful term than maternity and takes us far beyond the realm of the disturbing mother that Green noted in many of his clients. Kristeva's maternality identifies motherhood as an ethical project and offers a theory to explore the complexity and the challenging transgressiveness Voigt's treatment of family offers. Julia Kristeva, who was born in Bulgaria but settled in Paris in the 1960s, is a philosopher who later trained as a psychoanalyst. She offers two concepts, abjection and the already mentioned "ethical" maternity, that potentially reflect both the children's abandonment and the search for maternity, family, and home, a search which began with the children's abandonment in the car and becomes the overriding preoccupation of the Tillerman novels.

KRISTEVAN MATERNALITY

Kristeva describes the idea of abjection in the opening pages of *Pouviers de L'Horror* (1980) — translated in 1982 as *Powers of Horror* — and "ethical" maternity in her 1977 essay "Stabat Mater".

It is important to examine two related Kristevan ideas before these are discussed: her own adaption of the semiotic and the symbolic, which she takes from Lacan, and their potential as an intellectual context for the series. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges see Kristeva extending Lacan with a new emphasis on the maternal (55). The semiotic is characterised by powerful energies that are associated with the maternal. It is irrational and largely unconscious and, while the source of energies and creativity, can lead to breakdown and psychosis. It exists before the symbolic and the emergence of the oedipal and the paternal law which the symbolic introduce; is the source of creativity and poetry and is deeply grounded in the areas of preconscious experience that Kristeva believes the mother both represents and has a privileged access to. The semiotic is very much a maternal world and Kristeva borrows a term from Plato's *Timaeus* and describes it as *chora* or a maternal "container". The symbolic of Lacan is the rational world of language and is presided over by the father and patriarchy. It is characterised by the emergence of language and the rule of his law. It is a linear, logical, rational world of the "consciousness" or awareness we can see in Freud's ego. Entry into this post oedipal world, the symbolic, is essential. The Tillerman children, if they are to survive and enter society, must enter the symbolic order. "The symbolic is language in the standard sense of a rule-governed system employed by a community of speakers to refer to their shared world. The semiotic is a pre-discursive articulation, in the chaotic space of bodily functions, of unconscious drives, and it emerges even before the oedipal phase" (Gary Gutting 244). The Tillermans, while close to the semiotic their mother represents, urgently need to access and enter this "community of speakers" and play their due part in a shared world.

The children on the road create an essential lateral mode of communications and simultaneously continue their ongoing and necessary connection with the maternal that has abandoned them and all that this represents. They experience a strange belated version of Lacan's mirror and his "mirror stage". As described in *Ecrits,* this is a pivotal moment in Lacanian psychoanalysis as it is an anticipation of the symbolic world waiting for the child and a moment where the child is gifted with a glimpse of its future and the possibilities which are waiting (2). The mirror stage is said "to constitute the matrix and first outline of what is to become the ego" (Laplanche and Pontalis 251). Charles Rycroft claims that the "human infant is captivated by its first sight of its own reflection in a mirror" (104). The mirror stage offers the infant a promise of what it may mean to become a subject and beckons the infant forward. The erratic life the Tillermans have shared with their mother that the narrative retrospectively suggests in the opening volume, implies that they have never been allowed to be captivated by their own self-image, they have never met Lacan's mirror nor have they met the mother's face as a reflective container for their continuing questions and preoccupations as Winnicott describes it. The narrative also suggests that their experience of play has been circumscribed by their mother's deteriorating mental condition. They have not experienced the mother described in the opening pages of Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, a sublime example of the mother selflessly dedicated to her children's play, their emerging creativity, and their discovery of self (2). They have instead been exposed to an abject mother.

Kristevan abjection became well known with the publication of the English translation of her 1980 *Pouviers de L'Horror* as *Powers of Horror* in 1982. Imogen Tyler points out "the enormous impact of this concept and Kristeva's text across an immense range of academic disciplines and within wider

spheres of cultural production" (79) and Winifred Menninghaus claims that "an adequate account of the academic career of the abjection paradigm could easily fill a whole book in itself" (393). The reality of abjection is an attempt to grasp the violent move from the semiotic into the rational shape of the symbolic. Arguably the symbolic world exists because of this abjected, expelled world which exists "outside" and continues to threaten its borders. Abjection haunts the symbolic and generates anxiety. Kristeva sees the experience of disgust, unsettlement and ambivalence as powerful expressions of abjection and the opening chapter of *Powers of Horror* reads like an extended and passionate introduction to a literature of disgust and revulsion. Kristeva explores this in phenomenological terms in the language of borderline bodily experiences and processes — vomit, pus, blood, and menstrual fluids — that unsettle, disturb, and disgust us. The corpse is a particularly powerful and unsettling exposure to the abject. These expressive reactions are only a minor human exposure to the unspeakable horror and power of abjection. We are drawn to the abject and equally repulsed by it. We struggle to express our encounter with it in language and rhythms which bring us to boundaries and extreme bodily states which the subject can grasp and react to. The abject is however located outside human history and language and describes an archaic and cathartic moment when the infant was removed from the maternal zone and dispatched to the father, his language, his law, and his symbolic. It is a moment of loss, separation, and horror. It cannot be described: "the abject is the violence of mourning for an object that has always already been lost" (*Powers of Horror* 15).

The abject forever threatens and disturbs "identity, system, order" (4). It resembles original sin in that it is primal, but, unlike original sin, can never be fully appeased by christening or ritual and cannot be washed away; abjection continues to threaten the human subject. Barbara Creed says,

"abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free — it is always there, beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses" (10). The Tillerman series illustrates the claim of Karen Coats in *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*, that abjection is the particular territory of young adult fiction (290, 292). This population are standing on the edges of individuation and subjectivity yet as they approach adulthood they seem destined to be thwarted, frustrated, and exposed to the experience of being dragged down into the indescribable chaos which Lisa Tillerman's fate epitomised. This research will, in later chapters, describe how abjection appears in all its shape changing power to bewilder, confuse and derail its young victims across the Tillerman series. We begin with a disturbed mother walking away from her children and reliving the primal and archaic moment of separation. The "monstrous" tentacles of this disturbing event stretch far into the narrative and unsettle all the protagonists.

"STABAT MATER"

Kristeva's 1977 essay "Stabat Mater" is of particular relevance to this research as it is concerned with the urgent need for a new discourse on the maternal. It supplies a language and an intellectual base to interrogate the variety and complexity of the families central to the Tillerman series and invites a conversation with Voigt's series. Kristeva's essay was generated by her recent experience of childbirth and her recognition that the Roman Catholic Church's Marian cult, with the demise of religion, has become redundant after thousands of years. In Toril Moi's comment in *The Kristeva Reader* on Kristeva, "there is, then an urgent need for a 'post-virginal' discourse on motherhood" (161). Kristeva's essay is a response to this lacuna. She uses a radical typography, where

the left-hand column explores her recent experience of maternity in a free flowing, emotive language which represents the semiotic and the right-hand column offers the reader a formal academic discussion grounded in and contained by the symbolic order. The typography of the essay itself reminds us of the constant oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic; this suggests the tension and the confusion that for her exists around maternity and that her essay is intent on recognising and describing. The semiotic constantly questions and interrogates the settled academic discourse that appears on the right-hand side of the page. The essay's structural elements contrast and oscillate like the soprano and alto in Pergolesi's famous arrangement of the great hymn which the essay invokes: the twin themes of childbirth as an experienced event and motherhood as a cultural, historical reality, reflected in art and poetry, contrast with each other across the pages. She reveals her desire to explore the historic cultural demise of organized religion's adoption of the maternal myth and place this alongside her own experience of motherhood. Sara Ruddick in the preface to the revised edition of her *Maternal Thinking* offers a comment that reflects Kristeva's attempt to rewrite the myth. Ruddick distinguishes between birthing and mothering, a distinction that can also be read in Kristeva's preoccupation with motherhood or the performance of motherhood as an ethical project or performance and one that does not have to be defined in gendered terms and limited to women. "Maternality" offers a richer and more expansive exploration of the social potential or capacities of mothering in Ruddick's meaning than the term "maternal": "Men do not give birth but there have always been men who mother and men are increasingly engaged in mothering" (xii). Ruddick admits that "the idea of mothering as work still seems to be an important, useful, partial and truth about mothering but in the years since publishing I have recognised some of its deficiencies [. . .] the idea of

"work" does not give adequate weight to the myriad cultural, domestic, and personal relationships that structure anyone's idea of mothering" (xii). The Tillerman series will be read as a response to Kristeva's, and Ruddick's, challenge and a conversation with the range of questions it asks about the maternal.

Mary Caputi correctly claims "Stabat Mater" illustrates "the violent disruptive aspects of the semiotic". But it also embodies, she claims, processes "that embody alterity, difference, and concern for the other" (np). Kristeva's essay explores the cult of the virgin and in suggesting a new ethics, a "herethics", an ethics which is grounded in the experience of "otherness", and which the mother experiences with her child, offers a response to the demise of this cult. Herethics, as Kelly Oliver claims, is an ethical drive which is peculiar to maternity, it is an outlaw ethic, and exists in or works from the edges and margins of society (181). It has a peculiar and constantly changing relationship with the law of the father and manages to be within the law and outside it at the same time.

This is precisely the position the four abandoned Tillerman children find themselves in; far from home and estranged not just from the Saturday shoppers who throng the mall, the scene of their abandonment, but as Dicey quickly realises, from society as well, as they struggle to reconstitute as family after their abandonment. They are outside the law and Lacan's symbolic, but they have no future in this vulnerable liminal position and may be doomed to repeat their mother's descent into despair. It is Dicey who will protect them, move them forward in their strange ethical position until some resolution, some new maternity can be created and a home can be found. They are reflecting the typographical dialogue seen in "Stabat Mater". The Tillerman children come to represent a

semiotic outside society, butting against the order and linearity of the symbolic. They are denied entry, or if they do enter the symbolic that they meet on their journey they are destined, as a family, to be damaged or destroyed.

Voigt, like a conjurer attempts to grapple with this impossible balancing act of respecting and curbing the abjection they are so close to while also creating the structures and the nourishment that family can supply. The opening book, almost at the moment of their abandonment, shows the Tillerman children create an essential family, one that responds to their needs, yet society will not recognise. They exist in a double bind. The sustaining family they struggle to create, the act of "birth" in the parked car, like the birth in Kristeva's essay, "is a heretical gesture of disobeying the law" but is ethical given that "it pushes culture to its limits, forcing it to resist the totalizing claims to truth which characterise the symbolic" (Caputi np). Their desire to enter culture seems impossible; their position as outsiders is reinforced by the society they pass through which consistently displays all they lack in shelter, support, and nourishment. They are the victims of an abject mother — and if we look beyond her, a selfish father — who has not only abandoned them but also abandoned her place in the symbolic. The series consistently shows families and communities reaching a form of truth by expressing a radical and subversive otherness and expanding into the realms of the queer and the contrary.

Kristeva, in her essay on the art of Jacopo Bellini, the Venetian painter, highlights an aspect of the maternal which the Tillerman series consistently presents; the mothers, who like Lisa and two other mothers, Abigail, their grandmother, and Melody Green, Jeff's mother, fail their children. A

fourth mother, their own mother's destructive Aunt Cilla and her legacy, dominates their time in Bridgeport. The maternal dynamics Kristeva reads in Bellini's art is a conflicted, even aggressive expression of motherhood, and she sees in the paintings an ambivalence towards maternity. Bellini introduced a "dead mother", who cruelly plays with her absence and a negative maternal presence also haunts the Tillerman series. Her influence is linked to the consistent nearness of Kristevan abjection. Stephen Bann in a lecture on Kristeva's article describes "the possibility of an absence of the mother [. . .] this leads on to Bellini's need to come to terms with the problematic and threatening relationship of the absence of the mother, which is represented for Kristeva in a remarkable succession of his paintings of the Madonna and Child" (66). Kristeva, in a close reading of the paintings, is adamant about the nature of Bellini's experience of motherhood:

> The mother is absent — the mother has been lost [. . .] let us also behold the distance, if not hostility, separating the bodies of infant and mother in his paintings. Maternal space is there nevertheless — fascinating, attracting and puzzling. But we have no direct access to it. As if there were a maternal function that, unlike Leonardo's paintings [. . .] was merely ineffable jouissance, beyond discourse, beyond narrative, beyond psychology, beyond lived experience and biography — in short beyond figuration. ("Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini" 247)

Kristeva extends this feeling of loss in drawing our attention to the Madonnas of Michelangelo which also reveal a "headless" mother.

> The faces of the Madonnas are turned away, intent on something else that draws their gaze to the side, up above or here in particular but never centres it in the baby [. . .] from the neck up [she] flees the painting, is gripped by something other than its object. And the painter as baby can never reach this elsewhere. (Essay on Bellini 247)

The four Tillerman children have rarely been able to reach this “elsewhere” mother and they are excluded in the very places that the symbolic order has set up to compensate and support them, the state, the church, and the school. I will highlight in later chapters the insidious quality of the abject as experienced in the institutions that should protect and validate them but perversely magnifies their exposure to the abject.



Fig: 2: Giovanni Bellini: Madonna and Child, Bergamo. Accademia Carrara



Fig 3: Michelangelo Buonarotti: The Medici Madonna. Capella Medici, Florence

The Tillermans become outlaws on their journey; the Kristevan ethics the narrative shows them attempting to practice exists on the margins of traditional morality. It is not concerned with submission and, as Oliver points out, leads not just to a new ethics but to a new sociality (185). When the Tillermans experience support it is always from people who exist on a socially designated margin, like the circus community in the first book, *Homecoming*. Kristeva asks in "Stabat Mater" that we listen to actual mothers, something the Marian cult, as it enshrined maternity and rendered it an impossible and unreachable ideal, failed to do (179). The elevation of women which the church authorised in the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, in the Annunciation, and in her Assumption, ratified her role as a mother, but also as a virgin, positioning her outside sexuality and the phallus. She ceased to be a woman and has become irrelevant to real women. This demand that we listen to real mothers and the demand, which concludes "Stabat Mater" that we listen to the music, "all the music" reminds us of the Tillermans who, as they create a maternal function on the road, listen to each other and sing the songs their mother taught them (185).

The Tillerman children in their early negotiations with their grandmother show that communications, as they have learned to explore and practice it, is not the model practiced by their grandmother on her farm. The communication model the Tillerman children follow, is what Kristeva calls in the last paragraph of "Psychoanalysis and the Polis", "the modern version of liberty"; it is a model of interpersonal interaction she will also claim as critical to her understanding and practice of psychoanalysis (319). In the analytic process, two strangers, two subjects in process, the analyst and the analysand, meet on a common ground, and embrace the otherness which the analysand presents. She claims in *In the Beginning Was Love*, that "Psychoanalysis' vital efficacy is inseparable from its

ethical dimension, which is commensurate with love; the speaking being opens up to and reposes in the other" (60-61). In the open system which Kristeva describes and which the children stumble upon as they create a family, "the speaking being" is paradoxically the law and the transgressive at the same time.

Home is the place where this full experience of "the other" as a speaking being that is both ethical and transgressive can thrive. The special and perhaps in-between qualities Kristeva describes as borders are also highlighted by Winnicott in his transitional object which later evolves into what Winnicott calls transitional space, the essential areas where play evolves into creativity and imagination. This is incarnated for the Tillermans when they reach their grandmother's farm and see its bountiful possibilities spread out before them as the mythical promised land which has been designed for them and is awaiting their arrival.

An important concern that has been raised around Kristeva's mother is a tendency to exist outside of culture thus "rendering her silent and powerless" (Emily Jeremiah 23) and, because of this, to depict her as both highly enclosed and verging on a solipsistic monad. These connected observations raise indirectly the important belief that relationality is at the heart of mothering and that "the self can become a self through the incorporation of differently gendered others" (Mielle Chandler 27). Psychoanalysis, Jeremiah claims, is "often problematic for theorists of maternity wishing to avoid essentialism and disempowerment" and she asks the rhetorical question, "so, where to now?" (23). In what is a response to her question she cites a reference to Sara Ruddick from Marianne Hirsch's 1989 "persuasive critique of much feminist psychoanalysis" who sees mothering as work (or

performance). Ruddick, she claims, “contributes significantly to the current and growing awareness of mothering as relational, as constituting complicated, ever-changing relationships” (24). The Tillerman series will be read as a response to Kristeva’s and Ruddick’s challenge and a conversation with the range of questions it asks about the maternal.

Kristeva’s ethics contradicts any tendency to essentialism and places the mother in an ongoing and alive matrix of relationship. Mothering as relational, as a particular form of inter-subjectivity is also at the heart of Winnicott’s theories and espoused by Jessica Benjamin, who sees the child developing through a growing and complex relationship with the mother as subject. Ruddick’s theories ask ethical questions and if we adopt and include the understanding of gender offered by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, who sees gender as a “doing” and sees the maternal relationship as a performance (144), motherhood here becomes an action, and challenges the traditional view of mothering as passive. Chandler uses the term “mother” as designating practices or enactments (32). Chodorow reflects, in her structural analysis of family dynamics, the need for relationship and affective connection and points out the strange bind which sees “the production of feminine personalities oriented towards relational issues and masculine personalities defined in terms of categorical ties and repression of relation” (180). This laying down of what amounts to absent roles for masculinity in families leads to, as Chodorow claims, rejection by men of the feminine qualities of the mother they see in themselves and must, as oedipal creatures, reject (181). Chodorow’s stringent analysis of the psychodynamic implicit in the maternal and paternal is useful in a study of the Tillermans as they struggle to create family that is active and flexible and incorporates the male and female. Chandler, in her reading of Chodorow, claims, that, what she finds radical, indeed mutinous, in Chodorow’s work,

is the assertion that while "we all begin as maternally-identified, that the foundation for maternal qualities is laid in every person who has been mothered and that it lies dormant in all of us, who do not engage in maternal practice, ethics, practices and self-concept" (30).

The Tillerman series is concerned with the potential dormant aspects of maternity that exist outside the biological mother and the traditional source or place of maternity. Kristevan maternity represents a significant ethical and relational possibility and one that is not always confined to the performance of the biological woman. The Tillermans' destiny is to discover a maternality separate from the birthing and biological mother and the cycle offers us examples of this possibility. Jeremiah, while referencing Butler's critique of Kristeva, asks that "we hold on to her [Kristeva's] idea of maternal relationality as an ethical ideal" (27). Kristeva's idea of maternity moves from the site of the mother as an original or an originary, existing before the law, and sees the maternal body embodied in discourse and dialogue and attempting to be a distinguishing moral element. This idea of a discursive maternity appears across Voigt's Tillerman cycle and in the myths, and stories that sustain them, but is revealed in the communication model they bring to the farm and justified in James' claim to his grandmother in *Homecoming* that what she sees as insolence or talking back is an attempt to get at the truth (161).

Kristeva's ethical maternal is a crucial aspect of the methodology this thesis will use. The methodology is equally closely linked to, and grounded, in the recognition and description of a series of transitions or crossings, borders, and margins across the narrative; these are sometimes clearly and sometimes obliquely described. These transitional moves are seen in the various journey the

Tillermans and their friends experience but they are also visible in the theoretical movements or shifts which can be read in the text. The move from Klein's first position to the second, the depressive is of particular developmental importance and will be consistently referenced and the possibilities for change available in the experience of Winnicott's transitional space, which is a place for expressive play, creativity and evolving relationships. They are moves from homelessness and misery to the attainment of home, warmth and security; the oscillation between semiotic elements and traces and the structures of the symbolic are movements regularly seen in the cycle. This reading of the cycle sees a move from an old judgemental, split, and quasi biblical covenant to one that is characterised by lateral questioning and affiliative approaches to human community. This move can also be read as the move from the farm under John Tillerman's repressive control to the one the children create with their grandmother from the moment of their arrival as they waste no time in showing that they are useful and have an economic merit. These intellectual and ethical moves include the one from Lawrence Kohlberg's moral, masculine, vertical system to the feminist ethic of care advocated by his pupil Carol Gilligan. Gilligan's ethics of care offers a more resourceful, reflexive, respectful, and lateral idea of the children's experiences as they search for family and find it on alternative edges rather than the serial and linear moral ladder described in Kohlberg's research and theories. These alternative edges and the open mesh of possibilities that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sees inherent in an individual's sexuality that represent an attempt to view sexuality as complex, relational and not "monolithic" (8), and the consistent transgressive and extreme social position the Tillermans find themselves in, suggest the possibility of a queer reading. The androgyny that Dicey adopts at a seminal moment embodies the atmosphere of "queerness".

The mythic is a powerful resource across the series and is not confined to the myths and case histories that constitute Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalytic language. Voigt introduces a range of explicit myths and fairy tales and, sometimes, myth seems to appear, or be suggested in the narrative, unconsciously. Hansel and Gretel have been introduced and the witch who waits in the woods, and later Daedalus and Icarus, appear; Voigt consistently identifies Dicey with Odysseus as James Henke suggests in an early article. The series is enriched by the unconscious presence of both Oedipus and Orestes who are powerful influences and eventually emerge into the living drama of the narrative. The catalogue of myth and mythic personalities is not confined to the world of classical mythology. Voigt also incorporates and borrows from the bible and suggests a movement across her narrative that evokes a journey from the law of Abraham, a patriarchal law, with its covenant to that of a new logos, a new covenant which the protagonists create and own out of their own resources and experiences. To reach their promised land and celebrate a real agape they cross the Chesapeake Bay, their Red Sea and their journey in *Homecoming* can be read as a paschal journey, a true Passover. This is ratified in James's reference to Handel's *Messiah* in *Sons from Afar.* In this new home they are both rewarded and celebrated in their first Thanksgiving meal; the children finally settle and find a new home in a town called Crisfield.

The myth of home the Tillermans realise for themselves across the series places the need for some sort of concrete maternal presence at its core. Children need the explicit protection and presence of committed and responsive adults if family is to be realised, but most of the adults the Tillermans meet are incapable of performing this function. The biological father and his oedipal function are not ignored by Voigt, and paternity will be explored in a later chapter as will the position

of the oedipal as it relates to the overall maternal but the need for what is a maternity or a maternal presence, that is variable, polymorphic, and sustaining, that will repair and reconstruct their lost home, is what impels the narrative and is never in doubt.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The frame of the Tillerman series and the novels do not unfold in a strict chronological time frame. Voigt plays with time and switches backwards and forwards across the seven books. In two of her novels Voigt moves sideways and away from the core Tillerman story and explores parallel worlds as she focuses on two other young people who experience abjection. In *The Runner,* the fourth book of the series, she makes a radical break and moves her narrative back almost a generation and describes the Tillerman's uncle Samuel (Bullet) and his struggle with his controlling, abusive father, John Tillerman. In *Sons from Afar*, James and Sam Tillerman become preoccupied by the void their long absent father has created and go on a trip to find him; they step outside the narrative with its maternal preoccupation and briefly create a parallel world focussed on paternity and briefly suspend the frame of the linear narrative. They enter a world dominated by oedipal pressures and as the book reveals, the potential of the oedipal to foster violence and destroy. Their return to the farm confirms the intrinsic values of their new family, its grounding in maternality and a radical otherness and the dysfunctional realities of the patriarchal oedipal they are briefly tantalized by.

The regular movement between the semiotic and the symbolic, the insidious presence of the abject, the use of Klein's pre-oedipal developmental language, the themes and energies that surround her two positions, the oscillation between maternal and paternal issues and the myths and stories

which support and energise the cycle of novels are all possibilities for organising and structuring an interrogation of the cycle. These will not be ignored but the overall sequential in the frame which Voigt employs and which is mirrored in their order of publication will be the basis for this study.

The opening chapter of this thesis is a study of *Homecoming*, the first book and the foundational text for the entire series. It is the longest of the seven Tillerman novels and describes their abandonment and the children's arduous road trip to find the mother which was taken abruptly from them and the home they desire and need. Its focus is on Dicey and her siblings and their collective experience on the road. The six books that follows move away from the Tillermans as a group or community and tends to focus on individual characters and extends outwards to include their friends and their uncle Samuel. The title *Homecoming* reflects the double nature of this first volume: it is about both a journey and an arrival, a search and a finding and expresses the desire which energises and drives the narrative towards its resolution. Its concern is the fate of four abandoned children and Dicey, from the opening page, is identified as the core protagonist and the agent who must now assume responsibility. The first volume introduces most, but not all, of the characters who feature in the overall narrative of the series and it stands as a contained, seemingly complete, introduction of the twin themes of abandonment and the need for a home supplied and guaranteed by a functioning maternity. The remainder of the series, as Naomi Lesley claims, adopts a more "individualistic" methodology, "and deals with how the Tillerman children navigate the challenges of family life and school in Crisfield" (52).

The second chapter describes Dicey Tillerman, as she grapples with her new life in Crisfield, trying to reconnect with her youth, and deal with the issues her new life offers her. The momentum of the first chapter, has been replaced by the challenges which arise for Dicey in their new family with their grandmother, in her school and her community. The first book was about the relentless need to survive and to move on as rudimentary family and to search for a desired home; Dicey is now exposed to radically different challenges and these are summarised in the issues of ambivalence, mourning and loss that entry into the depressive position of Klein represent. She has been formed, I will claim, in the binary of Klein's split, early, fraught world and this chapter will examine how she copes with the ambivalences, the regrets and the confusions that the second position, the depressive, presents. This chapter will describe how Kristevan abjection appears as an unsettling reality in the lives of three significant characters: Dicey herself, Mina Smiths, and Jeff Bridges. Dicey's story has been substantially told in *Dicey 's Song* and Voigt, in two books, deals with the contrasting experiences of the abject for Jeff and Mina. These three characters form a community of the abject within the overall narrative and the chapter will explore the contrasting and overlapping experience of the abject the protagonists experience.

Fatherhood is a critical issue across the series and the third chapter will examine the two volumes which focus on oedipal issues, *The Runner* and *Sons from Afar*. Despite the historical gap between these two books — *The Runner* take place at least a decade before the Tillermans arrive at the farm — the chapter will explore how the "paternal debt" is acknowledged and settled across the two books. The paternal abuse and the violence this creates are experienced in T*he Runner* and in *Sons from Afar* and the two books are an encounter with the dark and repressive aspects of Freud's

oedipal. Despite the move away from the maternal which these two books seem absorbed by, they are, in fact grounded in the maternal presence and they both return to the maternal.

The final chapter is a focus on the final volume of the series and returns to Dicey a young woman attempting to start a career as an independent boat builder. She is possessed by a hubristic self-belief and a manic denial that characterise the journey she is embarks on. This novel reverses the expansive momentum of the opening book *Homecoming* where she steadily creates family and a lateral supportive culture. In this final book the structures she created for herself and her family progressively diminish and disintegrate. Her world crumbles around her and the scaffolding that was built around her career, her family, and Jeff, her boyfriend, collapses. The abjection that she adroitly managed and survived in the opening volume enters the narrative without restraint or ambivalence. Voigt creates a resolution to her series which negates the vision of ethical challenge and alterity which consistently propelled the cycle forward. Voigt returns Dicey to the patriarchy and its hegemony in the last chapter of the novel. Kenneth B. Kidd, in a 2011 reference to literature featuring determined and feisty girls, remarks that "the adolescent girl is a fascinating but disturbing figure who must finally be recruited into marriage and motherhood" (157). He also in a further article comments that while they may resist "growing up or marriage [. . .] such character are rehabilitated through heteronormative plots" (126). These comments supports the conclusion of the final book and this chapter will critically examine this resolution that concludes the series, accept its complex ambivalence and attempt to discover a place and a value for Dicey in this new world that Voigt has designed for her and Jeff and integrate this with a holistic examination of Dicey as she has appeared across the series.

The drawing by Käthe Kollwitz which is used as a frontispiece illustrates the foundational issues of the series: the need for four abandoned children to find a person, ideally one who will identify with maternity and become a mother figure, to replace the one who has abruptly abandoned them. The opening volume describes the children finding home with their reluctant grandmother, Gram, and the remaining six describe the world they create with her on her farm at Crisfield. This new family succeeds and nourishes despite is position outside the conventional family. The thesis will argue that the series poses radical and transformative questions about race, gender, and the position of women in American society in this historic period. The series reflects a world dominated by the neo liberal themes of Regan's presidency and the dismantling of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society". The Vietnam war, an essential backdrop to these decades, figures prominently in one of the books. This interrogation of the series will critically examine how family is formed and recognised in the series. It will question how gender is formed and ask if queer reading expand the relevance and the imaginative power of the texts.

CHAPTER ONE:

HOMECOMING: THE ABJECT MOTHER

> The woman put her sad moon-face in at the window. "You be good." she said. "You hear me? You little ones. Mind what Dicey tells you. You hear?" "Yes Momma." They said. "That's all right then." She slung her purse over her shoulder and walked away, her stride made uneven by broken sandal thongs, thin elbows showing through holes in the oversized sweater, her jeans faded and baggy. (9)
>
> - *Homecoming* Cynthia Voigt.

> Houses are omnipresent constructs in our literary tradition, so essential to human identity that the house itself can define a story: *Mansfield Park, Bleak House, The House of the Seven Gables, Howard's End*. "House" and its attendant "home" embrace a complex of experiences, myths, political realities, and desires. Within the house one gains a mythos of origin, one measures one's development, one experiences justice or injustice, healing love or its opposite, and one steps into new social roles, some desired, others imposed. (286-89)
>
> - Susan Naramore Maher. *The Lion and the Unicorn* (2005)

The opening page of Cynthia Voigt's seven Tillerman novels describes a mother abandoning her four children in the car park of a busy shopping mall. The family never go on trips but they are awakened

in the middle of the night by their mother, told to pack essential clothes, and that they are going on a trip to their mother's Aunt Cilla, a woman they have never met and who is known only through the annual Christmas card she sends their mother. This woman lives down the Chesapeake Bay, in Bridgeport, Maryland, a considerable distance from their home. This sudden and unexpected disaster, even at this early stage in the narrative invites a Lacanian reading as the mother, Lisa, seems to be walking away from the symbolic order and is making her four children's entry into the symbolic problematic. The mother, Lisa Tillerman, as she vanishes into the crowd, is walking away from the rationality, the order and dependability the symbolic offers but she is also, in this act of abandonment, making her children's entry into this necessary world hazardous and problematic. The four abandoned children spend a summer wandering along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, dangerously outside the symbolic, searching for a home and finally find one with their grandmother Abigail Tillerman, whose existence they were unaware of at the beginning of the narrative.

Dicey Tillerman sits in the front seat of the car. Her mother invoked her presence and her impending new role, in her injunction to her family which commenced the series, and which serves as an epigraph to this chapter. The narrative implies that the two older children, Dicey and James, sense, but cannot articulate, the maternal despair that motivates this trip south to their Aunt Cilla and that initiates the narrative. The disaster that is visited on the four children is clearly signalled in advance in Voigt's narrative: in recent months she has lost her job as a store checker; essential bills have not been paid and she has ignored letters from the school about their sister Maybeth's learning difficulties. They are about to be evicted from the beach shack they live in. Lisa is an impoverished single mother and

the series is set in the decade of Ronald Reagan's presidency when neoliberal values did not look kindly on single parents.

The Tillerman series illustrates Karen Coats's claim, in *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* that abjection seems to be the territory of young adult fiction (290, 92). Dicey, as she develops in the narrative, is a concrete example of Catherine Martin's observation that the female adolescent has a special relationship with abjection. Martin claims that "the body of the female adolescent is penetrable, growing, developing breasts and hips, and beginning to menstruate" and as it does not "respect borders, positions, rules and instead represents the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" fulfils Kristeva's definition of the abject (6). As the narrative progresses, Dicey regularly refuses to accept the reality of borders and regulations and opts for the in between, the composite and a highly individualised, questioning, queer, position on the edge of the symbolic. Kristevan abjection, although difficult to express and identify, is always associated with an archaic separation from the mother. This chapter will focus on this separation, re-enacted in their abrupt abandonment, and integrate it with the search for, and construction of, the maternal and familial that underlies and energises Voigt's text and which Dicey supervises. These are central and urgent issues, and while they seem resolved in the opening volume, abjection extends across the entire narrative cycle and insists on appearing and reappearing in unexpected, challenging and often insidious ways.

This thesis will argue that the series overall, while highlighting the maternal energies which Dicey recognises as essential for their survival and which the children search for, consistently critiques the paternal family, the family as authorised and constructed by patriarchy and the law of Lacan's symbolic and under the constant control of the "male gaze", as dangerous. This male gaze, the

expression of powerful and entrenched male forces, as Adrienne Rich in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" claims is "not a simple maintenance of authority but a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality, to control of consciousness, which suggests that an enormous potential counterforce is having to be restrained" (208-09).

The families in the series regularly face neglect, abandonment, and violence. Lisa Tillerman is the first of three significant "monstrous" mothers who appear in the cycle: Lisa Tillerman, her mother Abigail, and, in the third novel in the series, *A Solitary Blue*, Melody Green, the mother of Jeff Green, the Tillermans' friend. These mothers, locked into a patriarchal family system, consistently reveal the maternal, and the paternal which underpins them, and which should morally support them, as inadequate and ultimately destructive. The narrative asks that a new model of family be sought, practiced, and cherished, a process which Dicey in a foundational moment, recognises and struggles to initiate in the car park almost at the moment of their abandonment. The opening book is a substantial exploration of this recognition as Dicey struggles to understand their mother's departure and, like the virgin in the story of the annunciation, begins to realise the implications of their situation and the demands of her place and responsibilities in this new order. In an early and significant introduction of the power of myth and story, Dicey asks her brother James to tell the two younger children a fairy tale. He tells them the sublimely appropriate story of the witch and the children lost in the forest. Betty Greenway observes that "Voigt's children not only find themselves in fairy tale situations but they have the qualities of fairy tale heroes and heroines" (127). Angela Carter notes in the introduction to her *Book of Fairy Tales* "fairy tale families are in the main dysfunctional units, in which parents and step-parents, are neglectful to the point of murder and sibling rivalry to the point

of murder is the norm. A profile of a typical European fairy tale family reads like that of a family at risk in a present day inner-city social worker's casebook" (xx). The reality of this appraisal is counter balanced by the fact that fairy tales often offer their protagonists success and as Greenway describes them, give "assurance that we can succeed" (131), a psychological promise that these four children desperately need.

The fairy tale is a formal recognition and a celebration that a new order has arrived and Dicey begins to realise the responsibility she has suddenly acquired. She must continue this journey — turning back is not a possibility — she must protect and shepherd her three siblings and construct a new family. This new family need not be dominated by traditional patriarchal injunctions and Dicey discovers empowering possibilities unknown to her mother and earlier, the woman she has yet to meet, her grandmother.

She does not have to be an automatic prisoner of the institutions, Rich's "counterforce", that have bedevilled Lisa. She may create a different family and explore and practice the "herethics" described by Kristeva in "Stabat Mater"(185). This is an alternative, radical ethic which women seem privileged to practice and which exists on the margins of Lacan's symbolic. She slowly realises that her decision to commit herself to the role of mother has extraordinary and undreamt-of implications; her encounter with the shopping mall's security guard, who treats her as a vandal, and not a vulnerable, lost child, and their first contact with the law after their abandonment, ratifies their "outlaw" situation on the very edge of the law and of the society they must enter. This aggressive encounter signals to Dicey that their situation is threatening, insecure and dangerous; it defines what will be the tone of their peculiar road trip and it tells her that it is time to leave what has become their second womb,

the car, and move on (13). The security man, unknowingly, has become an unexpected midwife and helps to generate their long, hazardous, journey to a new life, and a new home, that the waiting road offers.

Their journey brings them close to the destructive aspects of the maternal semiotic Lisa has exposed them to. Maybeth, the youngest child, illustrates their closeness to this abjection and manages to name the abject which her brother, Samuel, cannot. Their mother is a lost soul:

> Maybeth spoke when Dicey didn't. "Momma's gotten lost. That's what I think."
>
> "How could she get lost?" Sammy asked. "She knew where we were".
>
> "Not lost from us" Maybeth said.
>
> "Lost from who?" Sammy asked.
>
> "Not lost from anyone" Maybeth said.
>
> "Just lost. But we have Dicey to take care of us". (44)

The child, in her semiotic access to a wisdom that the boy cannot reach, amalgamates her abstract sense of her mother's "lostness" with the concrete reality that Dicey will look after them and deliver them from the chaos this "lostness" implies. They are homeless but they are not lost, as Dicey guarantees, and are not blindly falling for ever. Maybeth senses that they are moving in a direction which is leaving their mother and her "lostness" behind and, like Dicey, she appreciates that they face an unknown future.

Led by Dicey, they continue their mother's journey to Bridgeport, but more importantly, see this as a search for a home where a new family can be performed. The physical act of travelling is not random but is endowed with a teleological dimension and purpose. The new family must be "formally"

ratified, established, and integrated into a formal world. The need to keep moving on this new road until they reach a suitable destination and an agent, who will compensate for their maternal void, additionally underlines their fragility and vulnerability as abandoned children. They may follow their mother into her descent to the chaos that is contained and waiting in the semiotic. They may inherit her "lostness", and her incapacity to deal with motherhood, children, and family. They may become victims of the abjection that she seems incapable of resisting. Voigt seems to be illuminating, in her treatment of Lisa and her place in the narrative, what Kristeva says in "Suffering and Horror" about narrative and its relationship with abjection:

> Not until the advent of twentieth-century literature, "abject" literature (the sort that takes off where apocalypse and carnival left off) did one realise that the narrative web is a thin film constantly threatened with bursting [. . .] when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first. If it continues nevertheless, it makes up changes, its linearity is scattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompletion, tangents, and cuts. (141)

The fate of Lisa reveals how thin this film is and how easily it can burst. The journey to this mythical Aunt Cilla proves too much for the children's mother. The abject overwhelms her and makes it impossible for her to distinguish the language, the boundaries, and the limits essential for survival in a world already, and always, constituted by its relation to the abject.

Lisa Tillerman is briefly given a voice, but not allowed to find a vocabulary, or a set of markers, or a story, to express the abjection which is absorbing her and destined to overwhelm her. She can no

longer distinguish between what is inside and outside. Lisa speaks in the narrative once, but this is injunctive and addressed to the children and does not address her own internal world and its issues. Lisa's children struggle to name their unfolding experience of abjection as they meet it on the road, and it is this struggle which protects them from the issues which Kristeva has raised in this quotation. They eventually succeed through "cleverness, resourcefulness, and active innocence", as Greenway claims (128).

Voigt's children become pioneers and path finders and Dicey, in a response to Maybeth's faith in her and in an insight as eloquent as it is simple, quickly appreciates the need for a map to chart their journey through the terrain that lies ahead if they are to reach their mother's original destination. The money Dicey spends on the road map could have been spent on food but the purchase of the map is a recognition of their psychological and social lack of direction. The symbols, contours, and directions which a map offers will help them to find their way into the languages of the symbolic and also reflects the rituals, pointers, devices, and performances that a culture adopts and offers communities to respect and confound abjection. The map will help to guide their journey into a world they can name and feel secure in. The map may be a superficial contact with the symbolic but it offers them some form of introduction and it brings the symbolic nearer. This decision to purchase a map is a powerful, archetypical one. Nicoletta Brazzelli's article on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), where the discovery of the map is central to the entire adventure, validates the importance of the map across the adventure story genre and one which Voigt suggests is not confined to the masculine or colonial adventure stories that originated with Robert Louis Stevenson.

A map alone, significant as it is, even essential to finding their bearing on the road is not a sufficient resource for the situation the Tillerman. It is perhaps too redolent of the masculine tradition and culture that always seem to wish to control. This masculine need to order and direct is responsible for the position the children find themselves in and will destroy the limited equilibrium they establish on the road. They will quickly realise that they must learn new scripts and acquire new skills to survive in this hostile world that demands they practice constant dissimulation. They become outsiders and they learn quickly that the place they occupy and have thrust upon them makes normal discourse dangerous, a reality the incident with the security man dramatically showed. Their increasingly "liminal" or "other" state forces them to become agents of espionage in what has become a dangerous territory they have been "parachuted" into. Dicey allows two teenagers — the "dropouts", Lou, and Edie, they meet at a beach — to believe that she is a boy and this instinct to conceal her identity and her gender is an example of the need she feels to always be ready to confuse the observing world. It marks the recognition of the androgyny that she feels and it is a deception central to the persona the road demands This is an example of the strategy she will constantly practice of the road, a practise of deception she is forced to choreograph and implement across a vast range of emerging, social situations. It is an act that penetrates to her inner being and will have lasting effects on her self-definition and gendered self-appraisal.

The androgyny Dicey accidentally discovers and cultivates, and which seems an essential feature of her liminality across the entire series, is an example of the need their new situation imposes on them. She consistently projects a fluid, or what may be read as a "queer", identity as she suddenly finds herself both a mother and a father and she creates a new and exciting Kristevan maternality.

Voigt implies that special demands are made of Dicey for her new role, but these issues and their consequences are not the direct concern of the opening volume. Instead they are revealed in the second volume, *Dicey 's Song* and again in *Seventeen Against the Dealer*. In the opening novel, Dicey must become a nurturing and responsible adult and, critically, delay, or at times, deny the issue of her own sexuality. Her grandmother recognises this and insists that Dicey in turn recognise her impending adolescence. Dicey must create an alternative community for her siblings and this community is grounded in the queerness which her situation reveals. It is a community of differences, it has potential to be transgressive, it is an exciting space, and, ultimately, this community offers the possibility to limit the risks and dangers their estrangement creates. The queerness she embraces has very little to do with sex and gender and suggests broader existential challenges, landscapes, and options. As the Tillerman series develops the critique this queerness implies extends outwards from the children's plight alone, developing anti-racial and economic dimensions (Halberstam 141).

Marla Harris in her essay on alternative communities and societies in young adult fiction, while never referencing Voigt or the Tillermans, offers insights that reflect and illuminate the four Tillerman children's situation in this new environment and this newly discovered essential "queerness". She quotes from Richard Peck's *Secrets of the Shopping Mall,* which describes, in its eccentric manner, many of the themes and processes that preoccupy Voigt:

> The department store comes to life after hours, as a secret community of teen runaways who claim the store as their home appear [. . .] they have turned the store into a doll-house parody of residential domesticity, sleeping under beds in the bedding department, eating food from the gourmet department, and

> deploying the model living room in the furniture department as gang headquarters. Previously ignored by parents and teachers, they have found a way to couple invisibility with subversion, hiding in plain sight. By day they are dressed-up mannequins who freeze in place, mistaken by both store personnel and customers for inanimate props apparently voiceless and mindless, by night they conduct military operations. (*Secrets of the Shopping Mall* 73)

The Tillermans couple invisibility with subversion. They do not live in a "doll-house parody" of a department store but have created examples of a necessary, hidden, and always changing "residential domesticity" as they move from site to site, from back-lot to back-lot, and establish temporary households. They hide in plain sight, "but they didn't look out of place, or unusual. They looked like kids running a little wild during the summer" (*Homecoming* 254). Voigt's cycle and the urban survival novels cited by Harris, "like their wilderness counterparts, are fundamentally novels of empowerment, in which children [. . .] take on the roles of explorers, legislators and soldiers" (73). The Tillermans, while they "hide in plain sight", find in their feral abjection enormous possibilities and like "the secret community of teen runaways" Peck refers to, come alive, and explore family values, in an internal space like the transformed department store, hidden from the society they are part of. They may not experience jouissance on the road but they are gifted with rare moments of the bucolic.

Ruth Jenkins sees Burnett's *The Secret Garden* as an expression of abjection and an attempt to create an alternative "empowering community". She recognises abjection in Victorian children's fiction, much earlier than its association with the period after 1945, which regards it as in part a response to a nuclear and post-Holocaust world. Despite the gap of seventy years which separates

Burnett's classic from Voigt's cycle, and the different social and economic contexts of the two novels, Burnett could be describing the ethical world the Tillermans inhabit. The resolution of Burnett's narrative is conservative and returns ultimately to the patriarchal. Like Voigt she does create at its heart a radical world which is transgressive and represents an imaginative approach to the law. Burnett and Voigt sharply interrogate prevailing cultural scripts about family and school. Jenkins sees Burnett as simultaneously accepting the dominant script of the society she lived in — one based, Jenkins claims, on the educational theories of Herbert Spencer — while also managing to contradict and subvert its dominant values of male strength and competitiveness by replacing it with an educational model based on the child-centred theories of Friedrich Froebel. Jenkins sees Burnett creating and offering a radical "alternate social model":

> What has been read as capitulation to dominant theories is instead a critique of those very cultural values. In this context, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection provides an important lens through which to reread *The Secret Garden* [. . .] In "The Adolescent Novel," Kristeva suggests that adolescents survive by "maintaining a renewable identity through interactions with another" (8). Offering possibilities for subjectivity that acknowledge the socially abject*, The Secret Garden* enables an imaginative engagement with positions alternative to dominant cultural values — both at the turn of the last century and today — and may explain the novel's continued appeal despite its seemingly conservative vision [. . .] Rather than disavowing the abject, the novel illustrates a world constructively recognising

> abjection; in doing so it offers adolescent readers a means to understand abjection as well as affirmative ways of understanding their value in culture. (429)

This paragraph identifies significant progressive, even radical, values which may be read in Burnett and celebrates its lasting radical relevance and it capacity to acknowledge abjection.

Burnett's 1911 classic *The Secret Garden*, as well as revealing a preoccupation with the existence of abjection, anticipates the foundational novel *Homecoming* of the Tillerman series in other significant ways. Gram's farm at Crisfield in its apparent neglect recalls the abandoned and locked-up garden Mary Lennox discovers at Misselthwaite and illustrates the trope of the abandoned or hidden place that exists in some liminal world. Both Crisfield and Misselthwaite conceal a buried mother and the maternal issues which surround her. The children work to resurrect this mother as Dicey struggles to co-create home, maternality and family with her grandmother when they arrive at Crisfield. Gram, as she rediscovers her thwarted maternity, resembles Susan Sowerby, Dickon's mother in *The Secret Garden*, a truly bountiful earth mother. Maybeth's developmental issues in *Homecoming* mirror Colin's phantom lumps and hypochondria and Jenkins points out the significance of childhood illness and disability as clues to the presence of abjection as Bill Hughes claims in an article on *Disability and Society* (206). Mary Lennox, like Dicey and Dicey 's friend Mina Smiths, illustrates the role of the determined girl as they acknowledge the abject and create strategies to deal with it and simultaneously enhance their developing self.

There are deeper parallels between the two texts; while they are contextualised in Freudian and Lacanian worlds and return to these worlds, ones ruled by the father, they also offer alternative readings. They offer the reader essential feminist readings as women labour to remedy and undo the

damage done by patriarchy. Mary Lennox and Dicey Tillerman are the central protagonists and "organisers" of this work but this strong feminist focus does not exclude the male in the work of healing and mercy. Men, such as Dickon Sowerby and the gardener Ben Weatherstaffe in *The Secret Garden* and James and Sam in *Homecoming,* are included, welcomed, and given significant roles and responsibilities. This represents a healthy, inclusive, and generous vision, one which is grounded in sociability but transcends it.

Dicey consistently recognises that the siblings must maintain their tenuous hold on the symbolic and insists that the law of the father be respected. She forbids them, despite their hunger, to steal or shoplift. The need for these ethical injunctions only indicates how close they are to the void on whose edge they are living. The narrative, as it evolves, establishes Dicey as the children's defence, their only defence, against a descent into a feral, dystopian wildness; she stands between them and the void this represents. They do not experience, or descend into, the barbarity that William Golding explores in his post-World War Two classic, *Lord of the Flies*. The opening novel *Homecoming* reveals that Dicey's presence and resoluteness and the hope of the eventual overarching maternal presence, which the narrative reveals their grandmother will eventually supply, lifts them above a total descent into the fragmentation and the darkness Golding describes and which their mother has served as a dangerous example. This overarching presence, this potential new family, must be identified, discovered, and utilised. Amy Benfer, commenting on the Tillerman series in the *ALAN Review*, observes:

> Her description of the thirteen-year-old girl and the barefoot grandmother saving poor children abandoned by their mother, is not as reductive as it seems. The

> meeting of the child and her grandmother and the co-operation which they ultimately establish reiterate the theme of the alternative or liminal family struggling to survive. (np)

This is also a theme discussed by Dorothy Clark and Lucy Pearson in their reading of *Homecoming* where they see Voigt as offering an alternative model of family. This alternative to the traditional nuclear family is explored in the archetypal and creative conjunction of youth and age and figures prominently in the second volume of the Tillerman series; the grandmother, Abigail, and Dicey do not just realise a new family but also recreate a missing mother-daughter relationship. This creative conjunction is revealed in Michelle Magorian's novel, *Goodnight Mister Tom* where the old man Tom and the wartime evacuee William, who comes to live with him and — who, like the Tillermans, has a dysfunctional mother — evolve, and perform as a nourishing family. This novel was published in 1981, shortly before the Tillerman cycle appeared and illustrates the theme of an alternative "other" family and its capacity for empowerment. Like Voigt, Majorian may reflect a growing awareness of the necessity to compensate for the phenomenon of the failure of the nuclear family. This is also a trope explored in two recent novels by Emma O'Donoghue, *Akin* and *The Treasure,* where the protagonists are outside the heteronormative family and manage to create essential and nourishing bonds.

Lucy Pearson sees the initial struggle in *Homecoming* between the older and younger women, with their contrasting experiences and styles of parenting, supporting the argument that the family Dicey and her siblings are creating offers a vision of a new and aspirational model of family (98). Gram cannot understand why Sam's stubbornness can go unchecked, but this very quality becomes enabling

and positive. Dicey , in refusing to punish Sam for being late for dinner, offers Gram a parable to mull over and be challenged by:

> "He doesn't need to learn to give in and give up. That's what you mean isn't it. The way Sammy is – he's not perfect but he is not bad. Stubbornness isn't bad.
>
> "He fights," she said. "So do I." Dicey answered. "And I'm glad he knows how to." (351)

What Gram reads as conflict and "talking back" James nervously tries to justify: "It's explaining. We're trying to get at the truth," (361).[4] This is a potent claim and illustrates the lateral communication they discover on the road. Its focus on truth and integrity has an ethical dimension and expands our conception of the social:

> "the subject-in-process not only requires a new ethics but also a new sociality" (Kelly Oliver 184). James is implicitly and unconsciously aware that "subjectivity is precarious, contradictory and in process [. . .] subjectivity is constructed in particular social contexts, it is therefore a group affair, the product of myriad social and institutional networks and relationships" (Emily Jeremiah 12).

The Tillermans as they try to create society must act as "normal" children; they are doomed to be forcibly absorbed into the symbolic if they do not project a socially acceptable "normality". Their vulnerability primes them to be ready to run away from danger. Gram in an early moment of their life with her, on their second day at the farm, comments that they "spend a lot of time running away" (327). This is an example of the resourcefulness they discover that they must use which is undreamt

[4] In this observation James the "constant reader" seems to oppose the "banking" system of education of which he is a part of and an example of and illustrates the interrogative and dialogic educational praxis of Ivan Illich and Paulo Frere.

of by those who are secure in Lacan's symbolic. Gram's confusion when they arrive at her farm is understandable: she is being asked not just to embrace a new language, expressed in a new system of relationships, but a daring and problematic commitment to an elastic otherness she has never imagined of and never experienced. Dicey, in confronting her grandmother, grasps the implications of the system that characterised the home they have moved into: she refuses to accept this legacy and lays down a clear marker that all is changed and she is embodying an invitation to the relationality which is at the heart of recent feminist thinking about maternity (Jeremiah 12). The farm at Crisfield may have abandoned an "authorial culture" seen in the abusive and discredited patriarchy but, despite these two strong women, does not become a matriarchy. Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution,* reveals the nuclear family as a potential site of damage and stresses that patriarchy, in "degrading and oppressing its daughters has also, at some less overt level, failed its sons" (78). The distinction between the family as an institution created and maintained by patriarchy and the possibility of performing and experiencing family outside this construction explored by Rich (56), is illustrated across the Tillerman series, and is illustrated in the encounter and the dialogue Dicey and James have with their grandmother when they finally reach her home and convince her of the possibility of initiating an unconventional and alternative family at her farm, the issue of the second half of *Homecoming*.

JOURNEYS AND SPACES

The Tillerman cycle amounts to a succession of journeys, of roads to be travelled and destinations to be reached. This complex journey includes, at its core, two significant transitional

spaces: the time spent at Aunt Cilla's house and their discovery that Aunt Cilla is dead; and the later interval with the circus. Dicey uses these spaces to pause, to step back from the need to move, and to reconnect with and examine her underlying maternal mission and purpose. They offer relief from the daily demands of surviving in the often inhospitable environment of the road. Their ultimate destination dramatically and unexpectedly becomes, not Cilla's house, but the site of the archaic abuse which engulfed their mother and which is the historic backdrop to the entire series, the farm at Crisfield where their grandmother, Abigail Tillerman, lives.

The first transitional space at Cilla's house in Bridgeport forces Dicey to absorb three important realities that have enormous implications for her mission to find a home. Aunt Cilla is dead and Dicey must process and make sense of the family they seem destined to experience with Eunice, Cilla's daughter, which inevitably revolves around her needs and her closed emotional world and its grounding in compliant religiosity. They learn at Bridgeport that their grandmother, Abigail Tillerman, is alive and living farther down the Bay in Crisfield. Their mother has never mentioned this woman. The information that their grandmother is alive is the most important discovery Dicey makes at Aunt Cilla's house; it offers an escape from the reality of life with Eunice. It rekindles the rudimentary sense of an expansive and sacred experience of family that life on the road has created, despite its hardship and risk, and that life in Cilla's house with Eunice seems destined to destroy. Formal religion at Cilla's house is ironically a threat to the sacred space the road has offered and seems destined to destroy it. The discovery of the existence of a grandmother gives energy and psychological curiosity to the plot and Dicey can begin to imagine an escape from the incarceration that Cilla's house implies.

Dicey is curious about this grandmother who their own mother, her daughter, never mentioned. A photo album she discovers at Eunice's house reinforces this curiosity. In a photo of a birthday party, she recognises a young girl who she decides is her grandmother: "The young girl was Abigail. The little girl scowled down at the cake. Her hands were behind her back. Dicey would have bet that her hands were clenched" (168). Dicey recognises something of herself in the girl and is drawn to her. The photograph is an invitation to speculate and imagine; this girl, now a woman, is distant in time and space but becomes a force in her imagination and she responds by wondering at the possibilities this woman may represent and offer her estranged grandchildren.

This scowling girl in the photo album, now a grown woman, is reportedly troubled and even dangerous and is also far away for four children who have already undergone an arduous, heroic journey. This grandmother may, like her sister Cilla, be dead. "Hansel and Gretel" the foundational story James told in the car at the moment of their abandonment, remains a potent presence in the narrative. The grandmother is initially presented as disturbed and dangerous and a person to be avoided; this troubled old woman may symbolically be the witch of the fairy tale. She could be another "monstrous mother", a possibility which is confirmed in the first conversation between her and Dicey — a discussion about eating babies — when they share a can of spaghetti. The existence of their grandmother remains, despite the taint of unsuitability and danger that surrounds her, a fascinating and tantalising option and an escape from the doldrums and the compromises and confusions of living with Eunice. She may be an escape from the dead, airless, world Cilla has created for her daughter and which the narrative suggests the Tillermans seem destined to be sucked into.

The narrative repeatedly suggests that their grandmother is an unsuitable person to offer them a home. Father Joseph, Eunice's friend and spiritual guide, has discovered more disturbing information from the local priest in Crisfield. The Tillerman home was not a happy home, the father was abusive and violent, and the mother was compliant and collusive with his violence:

> Your grandfather seems to have been a stern man. An unbending man. Over-righteous perhaps. Perhaps cruel. Nobody knows anything certain. Your grandmother always let him have his way. Nobody can say what she thought. She never spoke of it. He had his boys do a man's job. From the time they were eight. He used a whip for disobedience. A real whip. He did not tolerate disobedience of any sort. He quarrelled with his neighbours. He was angry – perhaps hate-filled too. She – your grandmother – was apparently the kind of woman who sticks to her husband's rule. She may have thought he was right. Or something else. (211-12)

This lengthy description is important because it is an opening into the reality of family as a Kristevan "chora" or underlying container that Lisa, the children's mother, and her two siblings absorbed growing up in Crisfield and ultimately escaped from. It offers a retrospective sense of the damage she and her siblings experienced under the control of this "founding" father, John Tillerman, but it also points to the future; it swings Dicey 's consciousness around and forces her and the reader to wonder what to expect from her grandmother should she ever meet her and what kind of home and life this grandmother could supply. It suggests the damaged heritage that may be subliminally buried at the farm and awaiting the children, like the dead mother spiritually entombed in the hidden garden Mary Lennox's discovers in *The Secret Garden*, if they approach this woman and her farm and awaken her.

These details overall serve a number of purposes: they create psychological obstacles which the determined Dicey must surmount if she is to reach the farm and this girl/woman she encountered in the photograph; they suggest the quality of the emotional world that may be awaiting them; they are an anticipation of what awaits the reader in the third novel of the series, *The Runner*, when Voigt suspends the narrative of the four abandoned children and brings us back to the children's uncle Samuel and reveals his life on the farm at Crisfield with his mother and his father. The powerful pull of the maternal semiotic draws her to this woman, her grandmother. This woman, despite these unpromising and disturbing reports, may offer the prospect of a home and a maternal that will create the conditions they desperately need. The discovery of Abigail suggests a rudimentary and beckoning sense of a potential space waiting to be discovered and claimed. Dicey contrasts this potentially dangerous prospect with the reality of the life with Cousin Eunice which, she realises, demands that she maintain a complicated, hollow, and probably permanent performance.

She is aware of the effect living in Aunt Cilla's house at Bridgeport can have. Dicey still thought of it as Aunt Cilla's house, and still regretted her lost dream of it. Eunice, who sees them "as a family of my own" and claims that they will have a good mother is angrily and internally rebutted by Dicey when she says, "we already have a good mother" (185). The narrative clearly does not support this claim, but this denial is a response to her frustrations and fears at the prospect of living with Eunice. Dicey has struggled to deal with the enormous challenge of their abandonment; now she meets a second represents the second moral challenge which she must confront.

Dicey can respond with anger, an emotion she recognises Eunice is incapable of, if she is provoked or threatened. "Cousin Eunice wasn't angry at all, just sad sometimes. As if this was the way

her whole life had to be, not getting what she wanted, always giving it up for the sake of someone else" (187). Dicey is indirectly talking about herself and her resources, her processes and self-recognition and self-belief. Dicey , drawing on her inner strength and directing it towards the well-being and the future life of her siblings feels driven to look further into the vastness of the maternality Kristeva approaches in "Stabat Mater" and which Abigail Tillerman at this moment in the narrative distantly suggests and represents. Dicey's plan to visit Crisfield alone is thwarted by James. He reminds Dicey of Stewart's admonition to stay together. Stewart had earlier sheltered them at Annapolis and drove them to Cilla's house. The four children leave Bridgeport for Crisfield on the second leg of their journey. They board a bus which takes them to the wrong side of the Chesapeake Bay and they are forced to cross the Bay from west to east. The money Dicey earned working in a shop is spent, and this error exposes them to one of the most dangerous experiences of the entire venture as Dicey has unwittingly placed them in the power of a sadistic and abusive farmer, Mr. Rudyard, who sees in their vulnerability the possibility of using them as unpaid slave labour.

They are saved by the intervention of Will Hawkins the owner of a circus who offers them shelter. Life at Cilla's house offered the externals of family life, a roof and food, but it put at risk the deeper family values of communication, engagement, and lateral affiliation they have discovered and struggled to create on the road. The circus respects the children's needs and personalities and it becomes a space which gives them the opportunity to play, to work, and experience the stability a real home would offer. The circus offers them, as well as shelter, a place to experience, experiment with, and explore an interiority and an authenticity impossible at Cilla's house. This circus community are themselves images of alterity and otherness and like the Tillermans they move around and subsist

at the edges of Lacan's symbolic. Dicey quickly recognises that the circus is based on the charms of illusion; the tricks are not real, they exist to control the audience's reaction and response and the lion, which appears on the fading poster, if he ever exited, has long vanished. She realises that the circus skilfully employs a repertoire of façades; what the circus does as an art form — as an expression of aesthetic impulse, as a desire to entertain and discover power in mystique — the narrative has shown her doing all summer to preserve her family and to maintain its very existence.

She recognises a kinship with the circus: the children have consistently worked to mask their situation as social outsiders and pretended to be functional and integrated members of the society they move through and are simultaneously estranged from. The circus, at this late stage, as they draw nearer to Crisfield having crossed their Red Sea and escaped a pursuing pharaoh, offers an objective affirmation and a ratification of the summer they have spent and the peculiar and surreal moral world they have created and inhabited:

> That night, the tightrope lady fell off the wire in the same way, and the audience gasped in the same way and applauded with the same enthusiasm when she climbed up the tall ladder. Dicey realised that the fall was part of the act. The fall was as flawless as all the rest of the steps. It was fake. Like the lion on the poster and the glittering costumes that made everyone look beautiful. Like the way everyone laughed at Sammy because they thought he was making mistakes with the dogs, when it was really part of the act. Like the way Maybeth looked like a princess when she circled under the cascading lights of the carousel. Fake. (289)

Dicey does not need to be constantly on guard and watchful. She can put to one side the pressure to always be performing and always creating a "fake" world. The circus allows this, although it too is a fake world, and they are living and working within it in order to step outside the more substantial fake world they have subscribed to and zealously defended all summer. They can be real people here despite the artificiality that surrounds them. They experience an authenticity here that was impossible and unreachable at Cilla's house. They can be themselves without pressure or judgment. The circus offers an experience of Winnicott's true self. It allows Dicey to do what she desperately needs to do: to relax and enter an essential phase of preparation as she readies herself to meet Abigail Tillerman out on her farm and encounter the embedded maternal presences that her access to Kristeva's semiotic tells her must exist there. Here with the circus, she can process her thoughts and emotions, she can observe herself being a Kristevan "subject in process" and she is not preoccupied with the reactive pressure of dealing with Eunice and her overbearing, suffocating, neediness and religiosity and the need to survive the road.

It is appropriate that this community become the children's saviour. The circus offers them a validation: it operates from a liminal, unsettled, and transitory position on the edge of society and community but this validation works in both directions. The children offer to the circus family, in their feral state and in the depth of their abjection, glimpses of a moral vision that transcends the performative, aesthetic impulse that inspires the circus. The Tillermans, in their closeness to the abject, transcend what the circus displays and lead us to a truth that is beyond the imaging of the circus. They have been walking through what they have experienced as a desolate and dehumanised world, a road where, as Dicey claimed "you don't know who to trust". They invite an interrogation

that is relevant in an age when displacement, poverty, famine, and environmental destruction are absorbed into the humdrum and the everyday and sanitised and neatly compartmentalised by news media. This humdrum reminds us of Hannah Arendt's famous description, in her reporting of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, of the "banality of evil". Dicey , away from the daily reality of living under Cousin Eunice's roof, their version of "banality", can discover calmness, and in the new space which this allows her, apprise and make sense of their position. She realises, as Virginia Wolf in her article "The Linear Image: The Road and the River in Juvenile Fiction" implies, that the road, and all it means and implies, must end. The experience of the farmer Mr. Rudyard is a terrifying exposure to the dangers that have been brushed to one side in the movement, as Wolf notes, of the "coming" of the title (43). If they are to grow up "they need the safety, strength and stability of Gram and her farm. They need a roof and a home and if Gram's farm proves unacceptable and they are forced back to Cousin Eunice's, then so be it" (43). This sojourn clearly shows one side of that oscillation between calmness and energy, between rest and work, between the road and whatever destination it brings them to and between the choreographic arrangements of the linear and the circular symbolised in the formal reality of the symbolic and the pre-discursive pressure of the semiotic and its closeness to the abject. The experience of the circus reveals a deeper, underlying current and shows the contrasting realities that are buried in the text and that the title with its double values hints at; these represent the tension that exist between the symbolic and the semiotic, between destinations and journey and the circus offers a peculiar, transitional, space where these can be acknowledged.

They cannot keep travelling and moving for ever. Dicey recognises in the children's contentment, and the stability they enjoy with the circus, that a home, any sort of home, is what they

desperately need. Emily Jeremiah, in a recognition that questions any possibility of reading the cycle as a "Rousseauesque" text, states that "the child seeks recognition, and that recognition must be given by someone who is herself an adult" (12). If they do not meet this person and the possibilities she or he may offer, like the Dutchman in Goethe's poem and Wagner's opera, they will be doomed to travel forever.

Will Hawkins is the first of the catalogue of male characters who consistently support the protagonists; they fill a pragmatic and always temporary role but they suggest the love that Kristeva saw in the "father of prehistory" in "Freud and Love" (242). These men listen, they observe, and they support. Brother Thomas in *A Solitary Blue*, Patrice in *The Runner,* are also examples. They surface throughout the seven novels; they have liminal roles and do not resonate as central characters; they consistently have caring and supportive roles and have a capacity to partly replace the children's absent mother and father. They seem, like the circus and its community to come from outside worlds and return to an unknown place removed from the narrative and the life of the Tillermans. They are males but they elude definition and categorization as does the abjection they seem to be equipped to overcome in their own contained, suppressed, narratives. They are, ultimately, restricted to a limited and often transgressive space which moves to the edges of the narrative.

These men offer support at crucial moments in the narratives. It is Will Hawkins, as therapist, who stands behind the psychic structure that the circus offers the children as support and ratification. He demands nothing of Dicey or the children. Kristeva speaks of the imaginary (and the imagination) as supports that help to guarantee identity: "I think that in the imaginary, maternal continuity is what guarantee's identity [. . .] the imaginary of the work of art, that is really the most extraordinary and

the most unsettling imitation of the mother-child dependence" (*Les Cahiers du GRIF,* 32, 7-23). Will allows them the potential space that Winnicott describes and elaborates in the later chapters of *Playing and Reality* and sees as essential for growth, a space that is available unconditionally. Kristeva addresses her version of this space: "The work of art cuts off natural affiliation, it is patricide and matricide, and it is superbly solitary. But look back-stage, as does the analyst, and you will find dependence, a secret mother on whom the sublimation is constructed" (Les Cahiers du GRIF, 32, 23). Will is the finest therapist in the cycle of books. He shows his therapeutic qualities in the consistent support and understanding he offers while they are at the circus. His significance is that of the attentive analyst and he embodies the selfless transferential love, the "secret" mother that Kristeva discovered in psychoanalysis. Will's presence, and his witness, to borrow the words of Toril Moi, "becomes the indispensable element of the cure, the moment of structuring which intervenes in the imaginary chaos [. . .] the psychoanalytic situation is one in which such love (transference love) is allowed to establish, if only precariously and only to undo itself in the end" (15). When the proper moment arrives, Will drives them to Crisfield and, at Dicey 's request, drops them off, not at the farm, but in the town. Dicey must perform the final stage of her journey on her own. This is the "undoing" as Will's work is complete. Will, in a condensed manner, offers the therapeutic or recovery process that Judith Herman proposes overall in her classic, *Trauma and Recovery*. Dicey eventually recognises that it is time to separate and move on. Martha Westwater states that "through the transference of love in the psychoanalytic process the analysed is enabled to distance herself from the analyst with a renewed identity" (68). This transitional period has offered Dicey a stability and readied her for the next phase in their journey. She is sufficiently "renewed" to move on.

Only Dicey can meet Gram and decide what this woman means for them. Only she can investigate and penetrate the semiotic chaos that this woman may represent. Only she can step forward and represent her family. Only she can respond to the invitation she read in the photograph in Bridgeport and assess the meanings this contains. The days with the circus have allowed the three younger children play and have fun and feel part of the circus community. There they experience a temporary belonging, they learn skills, and they work, but it is not their home. This period in a spiritual desert or an advent allows Dicey to stand back and examine her position. She reaches calmness, she reconsolidates herself and finds an internal space or point which is sustaining and rewarding:

> Dicey slipped out to sit on the metal trailer steps [. . .] Mr Rudyard could have caught the children so easily. Were they just more stupid and helpless than most people? And what about this farm they were going to, their grandmother's farm? When you walked down a road, you could be walking to anything. Anything. What if this grandmother too . . .
>
> Well then, Dicey thought, they would beg to return to Eunice and Dicey would know enough to be grateful, really grateful for someone who took them in and meant to take care of them. Cousin Eunice wasn't perfect, and she wasn't Momma, but they could work things out with Cousin Eunice. If she would. Maybe she wouldn't take them in. Maybe, maybe. (286)

The children are happy and occupied and safe and Dicey relaxes; she reaches a sense that the road is over. They cannot go back to that place and expose themselves again to the potential horror that the

farmer represents; their encounter with Rudyard may not be a unique experience. He has vividly illustrated the dimensions and the depth of their vulnerability but he has to be put aside:

> Contentment was too small a word for what Dicey was feeling. They had food and a warm place to sleep and Dicey had money in her pocket. They were travelling and had purpose and destination, but no conclusion. Dicey had nothing to worry about. Nothing except what lay ahead, in Crisfield, and she didn't want to think about that anymore. She had thought all she could about that. You couldn't know about what lay ahead. How could you know that? How could Dicey expect herself to know what this grandmother would be like? She couldn't; she realised that at last. She would have to wait and see. That part was easy, the waiting and the seeing. (290)

These introspections are an essential preparation for Dicey 's meeting with Gram as witch — or as bad mother or bad breast — that will happen when she reaches the farm and that she will deal with. She becomes Red Riding Hood, to borrow an image suggested by Barbara Creed, and sets off to meet her grandmother/wolf in the depths of the forest where Abigail lives (108). This period of introspection prepares her for her testing encounter with another woman, Abigail Tillerman and simultaneously and more significantly for the emergence of her own adolescence and sexuality which will be noted at the beginning of the next volume in the cycle.

This journey to the farm is neither sentimental nor romantic; Dicey is returning not just to a site of damage and abuse, but to the woman who was, and still is, her own mother's mother. This is a woman who in some symbolic way stands for, or has the capacity to become, her mother. In a relevant

note, Dorothy Westwater reminds her reader that "the return to the semiotic mother may also be destructive and potentially psychotic" (14). Dicey is consciously going to a site of historic damage. Lisa's fate and her rejection of motherhood have already illustrated this claim. We have met the semiotic mother briefly incarnated as a real person earlier in the narrative of *Homecoming*: in chapter two she is the angry old woman who comes out of her house, as they rest in an adjacent lot, and armed with a broom threatens them with the police if they do not move on. This angry old woman, in her craziness in this early moment in the narrative, pushes them onward and forces them to resume their arduous, necessary, journey. This woman is also a midwife; she will not let them rest and demand they continue their journey toward rebirth and ominously and unconsciously prepares us for the mythic Gram waiting for Dicey at Crisfield. Her appearance and her violence are an early anticipation of the struggle Dicey may face when she reaches the farm:

> In the little one-story house next door, a door slammed. They turned their heads to watch as an energetic old woman came out waving a broom over her head and shouting something. She was shouting at them. Dicey couldn't hear the words but she understood the expression of fierce anger on the woman's face. "Get out of here, Get out. Go on! Get! I'm counting to ten and then I'm calling the police. I've had it with you kid's hanging around and taking down clean laundry and dumping it in the dirt. (*Homecomin*g 26-27)

Gram out in her farm at Crisfield may be this violent woman they met on the road.

At Cilla's house the priest had brought them stories of their Gram's deranged behaviour which resonate with this earlier, random encounter on the road, and in Crisfield, when Dicey asks for

directions to the farm she is told by Millie Tiedings, the store owner, that "I wouldn't go out there, she's strange [. . .] We leave her alone. You should too" (297). At this moment their grandmother out in her farm stands for the abject in all its distilled, terrifying, and compulsive reality. Tiedings' injunction concretely continues Eunice's comment that their grandmother is deranged and reinforces the tone of the priest's reported encounter. If this man, who represents the sacred, cannot absorb or confront the abjection Gram offers what chance has a mere girl? Tiedings has known Gram since they went to school but has no access to the semiotic vastness of the chora that, at this moment, encloses Dicey , Lisa, and Gram. Tiedings has not met the girl in the photograph at Cilla's house. The "scowling girl" in the framed photograph, staring out at Dicey, has offered her an invitation and a challenge which she cannot refuse. Her grandmother is waiting for her on her back porch, and she represents a step which, like Carroll's Alice, will bring Dicey through a personal looking glass and into undreamt of worlds.

Dicey finally reaches the farm after a journey from the town that suggests the labyrinthine: it is overgrown, neglected and seems abandoned, even the house sign on the road is broken. This abandoned and overgrown farmland has here replaced the primeval forest of Central Europe, the quintessential setting for the fairy tale.[5] It seems to be the appropriate, almost canonical, place for the abject mother she must meet, to reside:

[5] Dicey 's journey out to the farm echoes both Mary Lennox's experience of the mansion with its many rooms and corridors and, when Mary ventures outside the house, the complicated paths that lead eventually to the sealed off garden, her preordained destination.

> Dicey pushed her way through the long grass to the steps leading to the porch. The grass tickled her knees. Grasshoppers leapt aside to let her pass. The steps were rotting away. The screen door hung from broken hinges. The sun couldn't penetrate the honeysuckle leaves, so the motionless air on the porch was as dark as twilight. (301)

There is no answer to her knocking at the front door and she moves to the back of the house where she sees an old woman sitting on the back-porch steps; this woman knows who Dicey is — Eunice has written to her — and tells her she is unwelcome.

Dicey must deal with maternal rejection a second time but she brings different skills, insights, and capacities to this second rejection; she is not pressured to make immediate decisions and can wait and explore; Dicey is not the girl sitting in the abandoned car thrown into momentary confusion. Dicey's first contact with Gram is a potentially regressive and dangerous move and the conversation about eating babies which marks Dicey's first meal with her grandmother is excessive and unnecessary and veers into cannibalism: "You know what I sometimes think? [. . .] I sometimes think people might be good to eat [. . .] especially babies or children. Do you have brothers and sisters?" (305). The atmosphere of dilapidation and abandonment, the physical description of Gram, her dark history, her eccentricity, and her aggression are enough to suggest her hazardous potential. This reference copper fastens the relevance of the maternal image as potentially devouring; the constitutional fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel, like the tendrils of the honeysuckle which seem to engulf the house, extends deeply into the narrative and our unconscious and suggests the maternal as the devouring witch or the "vagina dentata" Creed sees in the horror film genre (107-09).

Voigt does not develop this gruesome theme of the devouring mother, uncivilised and untamed by the symbolic and raging and ravenous at its border, but it hangs in the air through Gram's aggressive and cannibalistic resonances. The can of spaghetti she initially shares with Dicey is a poor anticipation of the largesse this woman will eventually provide at her scrubbed table when she commits herself to maternality and this new family. In this moment of arrival Dicey observes the kitchen and she notices the table — which in its capacity to seat ten people suggests generosity and sociability — and that despite the honeysuckle which seems to be devouring the rest of the farmhouse the kitchen is bright, homely, and airy. Here, in this essential space, Gram has managed to control the effects of the honeysuckle. Despite the abjection that seems intent on suffocating Gram she has resolutely outwitted it in this room, the kitchen, which will become the stage for the new family to assemble and for her to choreograph its new scripts. The children's act of "usefulness" on their first day at the farm is to start energetically clearing the honeysuckle. This is a decision that while grounded in the practical segues into the sublime and the archetypal. The children reveal a capacity not just to be of economic use but to heal Abigail's fractured persona and be her rescuers; they turn a light on her historic darkness and invite her to begin the process of confronting it and finding the light her life needs.

Gram's kitchen become their cenacle, or "cenaculum", the space where the sacred is contacted, celebrated, and shared. Food, in the world Gram will create with them, is a basic, consistent, and sustaining object and goes far beyond this initial can of spaghetti she shared with Dicey. Maternity as the supplier of nurture is an essential aspect of woman's role under patriarchy and these descriptions seem to continue this compliant role. The arrival of the children has the power

to transform this tradition; they work, and they become an essential part of the nurturing community the new family will become. Nurture across the series always has a lateral, a collaborative quality: Gram becomes a titular and legal mother, she adopts the children and becomes the adult they need to cement and hold their family together but the children are strongly and proportionately invested in the essential family chores; decisions are eventually reached laterally and maternity evolves into a heterodox, consultative, process and becomes a Kristevan other-centred maternality. The ceremony of coming to the table presents food as not just a process of physical nourishment, it represents the place where they meet in a significant, regular, and supportive way. The meals are grounded in Freudian orality but they transcend it. It focalises their lives and brings them together as a human community; The family seem to be in a continuing process of consultation and getting at the truths they need to function.

Dicey quickly sees that this is the home for them, a complex and layered good object and the creative potential space they need and have been searching for all summer. There is enough room for all of them to grow. James' comment, and question, when he arrives is perceptive, "but it's big. Big enough for all of us. Is it near the water?" (316). The wisdom the children have acquired during their summer on the road tells them, despite this initial rejection, that this is their home. They need their grandmother's consent to stay for this living mosaic to be complete. The process that characterises and defines Abigail's acceptance of the children's gift can be broken down into overlapping stages. She is initially a rejective, monstrous mother with disturbing cannibalistic overtones, then despite herself as the days pass and the children work their way into her culture she is a temporary midwife

supervising the final moment of this new birth when she finally accepts the motherhood she desires and yearns for.

At an individual level the farm offers each of the children discovery and sustenance which merges into the spiritual and the archetypal. Dicey discovers the boat wrapped in tarpaulin in the barn and feels driven to restore it, and James, the avid reader, discovers John Tillerman's library of books. The gift of music which the piano promises will transform Maybeth and leads her out of her silence and awkwardness. The farm for Sammy becomes a container for his energies and will redirect, sublimate, and anchor his aggression. Dicey realises they need the consent of their grandmother: "here was the place, with plenty of room and work for them to do and the bay just beyond the marshes, and a sailboat in the barn. She wasn't about to let this grandmother keep them from it." (323). Dicey's proactive determination is an appropriate response to the fear and abjection she has experienced and dealt with all summer. The mosaic Dicey artfully and determinedly assembled in exhaustion, fear and confusion lacks one precious piece, the cooperation of Gram, for its completion. They are in a position of desperate closeness to the aspiration and desire that impelled them forward. They are standing before the sacred that has subliminally beckoned them onwards all summer. Can they enter the sanctum that is tantalizingly within reach? Can they tolerate being frustrated at this late moment? Dicey asks herself the question: "wasn't it worth it, having come such a way, to fight a little harder? A little longer? Being told no twice couldn't be worse than being told no once" (386). Like Mary Lennox, in her struggle with the dark forces that possess Misselthwaite Manor in *The Secret Garden,* there is a struggle between Dicey and the regressive archetype which Gram represents.

This farm, which promises the Tillermans so much, is Gram's home but the children have a moral and spiritual right to live in this house that constitutes their heritage. They feel that they belong there, and their departure is delayed as they demonstrate the capacity to be useful and of economic benefit. Dicey shrewdly identifies this as an issue for a woman as poor as Gram:

> We have to get started on something useful before she wakes up. That way she'll keep us today. But every day we do something that needs to be done so it's worth her while to keep us (331) [. . .] We can't give her a chance to say no [. . .] and we've got to get back to work. (336)

This struggle is symbolically between the new life that Dicey's presence offers and the old destructive scripts that restrict Gram that she must unlearn and move away from. Gram unconsciously accepts a powerful process of learning and each day becomes a new tale to be told; a new myth to be created and experienced and these postpone the dreaded moment of departure. In these moments leading up to Gram's capitulation, Dicey cannot know that Gram needs them as much, or more, than they need her. Dicey does not know that Gram, in her place, in her own semiotic maternal, has been waiting for their arrival, but in her closeness to the semiotic they share, and in the feminine genealogy they are a part of, Dicey is unconsciously aware of this. It energises her persistence. Gram and the four children discover what is waiting for them and what they need. They reveal the claim of Winnicott that the good enough mother supplies the nurture and the presence that the infant needs at that moment and that the infant somehow suggests to the mother what this response should be as Winnicott, mentions in "The Relationship of a Mother to her Baby", in *The Family and Individual Development*, (21-2). Dicey offers Gram a way out of the legacy of attrition and silence that has

afflicted her. She offers her the potential of a new language of wonder and joy she has been denied in her marriage.

Dicey shares with her the discovery of the photograph of the angry young girl in Cilla's house and Gram admits in a conversation with Dicey , which is an apologia, that she was angry most of her life but since her husband's death she has become eccentric (368). Dicey unconsciously grasps her grandmother's ambivalence and gives her time to observe and ponder this new destiny. Dicey waits but offers her Gram a deep and respectful witness, one which resembles the witness the good enough mother consistently offers her child. The roles are reversed, Dicey briefly becomes the mother to the confused Abigail and offers her the space she needs to complete this unexpected learning process and recognise her need for the good objects that have arrived at her farm. Miri Rozmarin, in a 2002 article on maternal silence, reads this quality of listening as a maternal potency which opens toward a horizon of otherness that cannot be controlled or anticipated. Dicey, like the mother, is witnessing the unfolding of a story that leaves room for a continuing future which Gram, like Winnicott's child, will experience as her life unfolds (11). Dicey and her Gram are intricately involved in a powerful dialectic of unconscious and spiritual recognition.

The Tillermans do not go to church and have no contact with formal, organised religion but their meals become gatherings endowed with a sacramental quality. Their encounter with organised religion and its institutions in Bridgeport threatened the family's integrity and existence as it threatened the sacred they struggled to create on the road. At Crisfield meals become a real breaking of bread, and a celebration of the family, and have a transitional quality as they allow us to observe and appreciate the processes that are happening subliminally and shaping the family. They are

inclusive and welcoming gatherings and the Thanksgiving dinner in the second volume*, Dicey 's Song*, illustrates this. Maybeth's music teacher, Mr. Lingerle, is invited and brings dessert. The meal at the Tillermans is a vivid example of the inclusive family script that is being enacted on the farm and which the children have spiritually brought to the farm. Gram plays a central role, but each member of the family is fully involved, consulted, and expected to play a part. Friends are welcome and, in this case the guest, Maybeth's music teacher, as well as bringing music and dessert is a part of the conversation and the repartee (151-6)

The Tillerman's meal contrasts sharply and consistently with the meals that are described in the family of John Tillerman in *The Runner* — this family and its culture will be the subject of a later chapter. The Tillerman series can be read as the children's unconscious, almost transferential capacity to redeem and save Gram from the historic family system she has been victimized by but also colluded with. Their arrival which she eventually recognises as an opportunity to expiate the historic abuse she was a part of will amount to a counter transference or response from her to the children's desire for a home. Dicey's first glimpse of her grandmother is a symbol of the barren years after her son's death in Vietnam. She sees a woman sitting and waiting; a figure who suggests Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, in James Henke's reading of the first novel of the cycle.

This woman has many guises and functions. She is introduced in the text as a potential devouring witch, a mythic "vagina dentata", she becomes a temporary refuge and a shelter, and she finally evolves and blossoms into a permanent and nurturing maternal presence and offers them the home they desire and are prepared to work for and be an active and creative part of. She allows herself finally to be flooded with a maternal "jouissance"*,* which she reveals in the opening pages of *Sons from*

Afar, and comes abundantly alive. Her first family was destroyed by her husband and the gift of a second family arrives in her yard. There is however a struggle before the dark side of her personality, and her dark history, is pacified. Abigail Tillerman will embrace the shadow that the children evoke in her which gives herself permission to deal with her legacy but Dicey's tenacity is the necessary trigger in the process.

Gram is a powerful and compelling character. The entire series can be read as the joint enterprise between Dicey and this older woman, as they attempt to create and rebuild a home and a functional family. Gram, who appears in all seven books, is the only character in the series who is given a focus comparable to that given the central protagonist, Dicey Tillerman. Abigail's processes and the movements of her personality are as significant as her granddaughter's. Marilyn Apseloff, in an article published in 1986, discusses three novels all published in 1982 which feature grandparents and detects a new trend in writing about this group. Traditionally grandparents were passive, compliant, and marginal to the text and Apseloff's argument is that they were "ineffectual secondary characters" (80). The grandparents Apseloff discusses in the three novels — *Kept in the Dar*k by Nina Bawden, *Only My Mouth is Smiling* by Jocelyn Riley, and Voigt's *Dicey's Song* — are strong and resourceful. Abigail Tillerman could never be described as passive or ineffectual; she is feisty, determined, and resourceful and her central role as a critical and proactive character is never in doubt. Despite welcoming this refreshing and overall, more realistic depiction of grandparents, Apseloff expresses concerns and she is worried that these new characters will themselves become a stereotype or a trope as the previous generation of grandparents did: "the consistent portrayal of female strength may be creating another stereotype as false as the traditional one" (80). The Tillerman's Gram is a true individual and defies

stereotype. She shows enormous respect for the children's individuality and uniqueness. She does not repeat the performance of her sister, Cilla, in Bridgeport and impinge on and thwart her adopted children's entry into a full subjectivity. She commits herself to her grandchildren at the end of *Homecoming* and both confronts and embraces the abjection, the "thing", the destructive compliance, she has laboured under all her married life. Apseloff admits that Voigt's Gram is "the most individualised grandparent of those discussed here" and that she "radiates strength and vigour" (81).

Homecoming in its later phases, as the children shoehorn themselves into this new environment, is setting the stage for the evolution of a new and exciting paradigm of interfamily communication or, more correctly, of family and it is one based on respect and shared responsibility, as Pearson observes, and not on physical power or traditional or inherited authority. It is not hegemonic. Gram must learn that the family being created will not repeat the family system she experienced with her husband, John Tillerman. Gram, despite her power and her central role in this new family, will not be allowed to replace the failed and destructive patriarchy her husband established with her own version of power, her own matriarchal system. Pearson concurs with Clark's radical and postmodern reading of *Homecoming*: "The novel will ultimately demonstrate that the creation of a successful family unit for the Tillermans depends on this ability to move beyond the traditional model of family rather than their success at replicating it" (98).

Voigt sketches obliquely the grandmother's inner conflict and ambivalence as she looks on at the children she has refused a home to, revealing this ambivalence in her furtive glances at Sam and Maybeth and in her terse silences and hostilities. These are glimpses of her frustrated maternality, and of the pain and the abuse she suffered and still carries within her body. She has suffered rupture

and is split. She struggles to move out of Klein's first position, the paranoid schizoid, and into the depressive position, which despite its shame, confusions and ambivalences allows a movement towards acceptance, reconciliation, and what Klein calls "reparation" (Hinshelwood 412). Her journey out of her legacy of abjection into wholeness needs the presence of these children and they become the indispensable lever she needs if she is to move forward from the abuse she has historically suffered and, arguably, participated in. It is Dicey 's role to be the presence, the witness, that Gram desperately needs to bring this inchoate confusion to a climax or a head, as she does in the last stages of the narrative of *Homecoming*. Gram desperately needs good objects and her hunger, her passion, to reawaken her suppressed and distorted maternity is gradually exposed.

This process is revealed in various ways: she dresses Maybeth's sore tendon; she enrols the children in the local school and insists their education continues until arrangements with Cousin Eunice are organised; and she colludes with the children as they work at postponing their departure. Once she commits herself to the children's welfare, she offers a total and absolute availability and evolves into something she was never allowed to become in her previous incarnation as a mother, a Kleinian good breast. She compensates for the disintegration that characterised the maternal care the four children have received from their mother, Lisa, and heals her own splits and ruptures and the effect of her abusive marriage. The children have the potential, the "capacity "— a favoured term of Winnicott's and used with great effect in his 1958 article on aloneness — to soothe and sustain Gram and become good new objects for her.

Gram is not simply a passive or an inert container for four bedraggled children. Adrienne Rich reminds us in *Of Woman Born*, in dealing with her own "negative associations with male derivation

from female anatomy", that it is essential to use this word "container" with care, otherwise, "the old associations start flooding in, woman is receptive, a receptacle [. . .] woman's place is the 'inner space'; woman's anatomy lays on her an ethical imperative to be maternal in the sense of masochistic – patient, pacific" (97). Rich also notes "in primordial terms the vessel is anything but a passive receptacle: it is *transformative,* active, powerful" (98). Gram has her own troubled history, her own distorted and fraught experience of the semiotic and her own evolving desire to be a subject and deal with her own abjection and shed the inertness that dominated her marriage as Apseloff implies (81). Gram also wishes to be transformed. Gram explores these themes at length with Dicey , in a critical moment of self-revelation in *Homecoming*, and in a conversation already referred to when she explains her initial reasons for not accepting the four children and offering them a home (365-368).

Dicey, who sits in front because she reads the maps, has been assiduous and brought them safely to this precious moment when Gram capitulates and offers them her home. Dicey has not disappointed the trust Maybeth placed in her earlier in the text. She has fulfilled the bizarre and unreasonable responsibility imposed on her in the opening moments of the novel and has steadfastly done this on her own terms. She has gone beyond being a passive reflection of the values and standards her society expects of her. She has instead, like Alice, climbed through a looking glass and engaged the world she found there and a world she has searched for and desired. Dicey has found, what for her, is a potential "land of wonder, a land that can be mapped, not by the flat mirror, but by the curved speculum" (Grosz 131). The Tillermans have finally come home to what in Winnicott's language is a good enough mother. They have found a flexible and responsive maternal presence that is good enough for them that they contribute to and co-create, and that becomes a truly resonating,

multifocal and lateral potential space. Gram guarantees this and her home, which has been transformed into their home, is the proper place for this to be enacted. The moment when Gram surrenders and offers them her shelter does not take place at the table where they eat or in the house or on the farm, instead it takes place in her boat moored at the pier at Crisfield as they prepare to return to the farm. This moment is not marked by signs and portents; Gram, always grounded, wants to get home to take off her shoes.[6] (387-8). As the boat bobs up and down in the lapping waves different themes and associations may surface and float around us: the significance of the boat in the New Testament; the connection this boat has with their uncle Sam, who is the central protagonist of the later novel in the series, *The Runner*; the sail boat Dicey discovers in the barn and commits herself to restoring; the persistent and ambiguous presence the sea has had in her consciousness all through the novel and her success in accepting the challenge of the enormity of the abjection their mother's abandonment presented.

The issues that surround the maternal are not entirely resolved in this first book; the children do find a home and one which they embrace with emotion and energy, but many issues are left unresolved. The mother who abandoned them is still alive and the abject she exposed them to is still encircling them. They create a home with their grandmother and become part of the community of Crisfield but the question of the "monstrous mother", and the long vanished "founding father" who may be alive, are issues which await resolution. This research has utilised several psychoanalytic prisms, all of which are grounded in paternal and maternal myths, that are seen in the story of Orestes, which fascinated Klein, and in the story of Oedipus, as explored by Freud in his long obsession with,

[6] In a later chapter James compares this moment to singing Handel's Alleluia chorus with the school choir.

what is now described as, the Oedipus complex. They raise the relationship of death and culture and the place of sacrifice and immolation. Underneath the totem father another and more primal sacrifice has been made, that of the mother and one which Freud, in focussing on the Oedipal myth, ignored. It may be that another, silenced victim lies under the sacrificed victim that society seems structured around. These issues are remote and esoteric to the four children who have found a home with their grandmother but this buried legacy is encountered in various ways and the series does not avoid the violent fate of the maternal or the paternal. Mary Condren, the feminist theologian, argues that failure to acknowledge "this alternative primal murder has profound implications as it implies an investment in remaining unconscious of the gendered underpinnings of our social order" (383). Voigt consistently acknowledges these buried underpinnings and includes at the heart of her narrative the very myths, or totems, of paternity and maternity which not only underpin and challenge the Tillerman's struggle but are present in society itself and that exist in all our lives.

CHAPTER TWO:

AN ABJECT TRIPTYCH

And they lived happily ever after.

Abjection , when all is said and done, is the other facet of religious, moral, and ideological which rests the sleep of individuals and the breathing spells of societies.

-Kristeva *Powers of Horror* p.209.

The opening novel described the four children find a home with their grandmother, Abigail Tillerman. The six additional novels that comprise the series move away from the collective struggle and instead focus on individual members of the Tillerman family, their friends, and their experience of being part of the community at Crisfield. The first chapter of *Dicey's Song* (1982), the second volume of the Tillerman cycle, opens with the closing line traditionally associated with the fairy tale and suggests that the four Tillerman children can sit securely in the home and the shelter that their grandmother offers them. The new embryonic family was formally initiated by the telling of a fairy tale and, as Gloria Jameson observes, *Homecoming*, and indeed the entire series, is propelled forward by a complex assortment of myth and archetype, Odyssean, Promethean, and Oedipal (3-4). Dicey opens the second book by contradicting the possibility of living happily ever after: "that wasn't the way things went for the Tillermans"(7). This is a reflection of the family's troubled history and her own experience of this family.

This chapter will position Dicey as the central panel of an imagined triptych, framed by two panels which represent the two friends she and the Tillermans make at Crisfield: Jeff Bridges, the hero of *A Solitary Blue,* the fourth book in the series, and Mina Smiths, the focus of *A Stranger from Afar,* the fifth book. They form an "adolescent community" and this chapter will argue that this community experiences and encounters the Kristevan abject in a variety of significant ways. They have access to the systems and the practices that the symbolic has devised to wrest the individual away from abjection but the three narratives show that despite these defences the abject can appear and become an insidious presence. This chapter will describe and explore the abject as it appears in the lives of these three adolescents: Dicey, Jeff Green and Mina Smiths.

Kristeva in her essay "The Adolescent Novel" does not link the adolescent with her theory of abjection which Karen Coats feels is surprising. Coats claims that the exploration of abjection has come to dominate the young adult genre (1999, 220). Dicey, Jeff, and Mina illustrate the claim that the adolescent, because of their position between childhood and adulthood, is in a peculiar relationship with abjection and experiences the difficulties that surround individuation and subjectivity which abjection often implies. The adolescent lives in a precarious in-between world and on strange, porous, borderlands. They are forced to live with a body which is suddenly out of control and unpredictable. They are neither child nor adult; they cannot return to childhood and the adulthood they must reach seems impossible to reach. They are destined to relive the original, archaic, expulsive, violence of the abject.

Kristevan abjection is difficult to define. It represents — and revisits — a long forgotten separation from a desired maternal presence and one which occurred before the emergence of language. The adolescent or young person in their vulnerability and porousness seem to be positioned again at this moment of separation, primed to move forward but held back by the rush of bodily changes. Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* focuses on the bodily zones which constitute the subject's primary connection with the external world and are intrinsic to the subject's ability to engage and communicate with this world. Responding to the abject is a critical task of adolescence and has dominated young adult fiction during the second half of the twentieth century. Kristeva claims abjection, "is a terror that dissembled, a hatred that smiles [. . .] a friend who stabs you" (4). The catalogue of tangled, overlapping metaphors, similes, and images which Kristeva uses in *Powers of Horror* to describe abjection are a verbal attempt to plumb the depths of this unconscious and unreachable state. It is stylistically an expression of the confusion that surrounds the abject.

The school and its community are central to the life of the adolescent and while expected to protect the members from the abject can become sites for it to appear and be experienced. In a 2014 article on the Tillerman novels, Naomi Lesley, while not specifically mentioning Kristeva or the abject, sees all the adolescent actors of the Tillermans series as failed, or she phrases it "disabled", by the school system. Lesley argues that the Tillerman novels "abandon academic achievement as the measure of successful inclusion" (54) and describes the protagonists instead opting for and celebrating an existential and subjective failure. Voigt's characters regularly choose a failure which often places them outside the educational system but do so in a manner that ratifies their individuality and this process often frequently reveals the injustice and the disfunction that characterises the system. The

Tillerman series artfully offers a structure where the patriarchal institutions fail the young protagonists but the protagonists seem to choose failure which ironically reflects and ratifies their spiritual needs. Abjection has nothing to do with the school system but the school community can reflect a resurgence of a relationship with an archaic and prehistoric event that is about expulsion from the mother's body and pushed beyond boundaries and into a margin (Oliver 56). Abjection is "a portable and highly generalizable concept" in Kenneth Kidd's description (175). Abjection always implies a strange discordance between external and internal words and this discordance is frequently revealed in the adolescent's relationship with their growing body and the contexts in which these changes occur. The discordances often contain disturbing implications for the internal self-identity of the protagonist; the abject is neither subject nor object, it exists somewhere between these two poles and because it is indeterminate and outside or at boundaries threatens the adolescent's participation in Lacan's ordered symbolic world and the law which embodies it.

The violence of this primal separation from the maternal is never forgotten and will appear in many guises, a claim that has important theoretical significance for the experience of maternity across the span of the Tillerman novels. Kristeva claims in her monograph on Klein that "just as the myth of Oedipus illuminates Freudian theory, Klein focuses on the myth of Orestes after diagnosing the matricidal fantasy in her clinic and unearthing its underlying logic" (132). As the good breast is repeatedly removed and replaced by the bad breast, emotions and feelings that expose a matricidal fantasy are always possible and implicit in this underlying Kleinian logic. Matricidal issues appear across the Tillerman series; the core protagonists are repeatedly involved in complicated and difficult relationships with mothers and other mother figures. The reality of a missing or unsuitable mother is

a trope in myth, fairy tales, and in children's and young adult fiction and has a double-edged quality as it is revealed in the absence of a true maternal and in the presence of a maternal that is unsuitable, inappropriate, and often destructive. The unstable mother or mother figure must be endured, managed, and dispatched. This may not be expressed as overt matricide but the protagonists in Voigt's cycle show that they can both discard this problematic presence in their lives and as the text reveals, mourn her death and move onwards; dealing with the "dead mother" recognised and described by André Green is often an essential accompaniment to children's fictional adventures. The "happy ending" is rejected by Dicey; she recognises that it creates a false and naïve world dominated by unrealistic certainties and projections. The challenges the protagonists must meet are often dangerous and cannot be appeased by sentimental or unrealistic tropes.

The issue of abandonment and maternal presence and absence which underpins the opening volume is repeated in the third book, *A Solitary Blue* where Jeff Green, the second member of this triptych is also an abandoned child, but the circumstances of Jeff's abandonment differ from those experienced by the Tillermans in the opening volume. The third member of the triptych is the black girl, Mina Smiths, who appears in the fifth book, *A Stranger From Afar* and like Dicey, she experiences rejection in the institutions that the symbolic order has instituted and that are available to "expel" abjection, in her school and in a summer dance academy.

DICEY AND THE ABJECT

The second book of the series places Dicey at its centre and introduces her new life. In *Homecoming* she accepted enormous responsibilities for her siblings. In *Dicey's Song* Gram quickly identifies the

moral issues of boundary and responsibility and offers Dicey a moment of considered empathy: “Gram rewarded her with a sudden smile and spoke briskly. ‘You’re not the only one responsible, girl. You’ve been responsible a long time and done a good job. Take a rest now’” (27). This is an important recognition and connection, but Gram cannot grasp what Dicey has experienced and overcome all summer; Gram has not traversed the same road. Dicey reveals a more insightful and comprehensive insight into her mindset:

> “I’m going out to the barn for a while, if that’s OK,” she said. Nobody answered her. Maybe they didn’t even hear her. She put her glass into the sink and went out.
>
> It was a relief in a way not to have that responsibility. It felt pretty good to be able to do things without worrying about the little kids. And if Sammy was going to be Gram’s favourite, and James was going to do everything right, and Maybeth was going to get caught up in school, so everybody could be proud of her, and with piano lessons too, why should Dicey mind? (*Dicey’s Song* 45)

The passage reflects Dicey’s ambivalent confusions and it shows that Dicey still holds on to and even needs the meanings and responsibilities she had accepted in the carpark in Provincetown. These still define her world. The passage also shows that Dicey’s world offers new challenges: Dicey sees her family position and the script she has internalised questioned and threatened; she has grown into the role of protector and is ambivalent and conflicted as her siblings seem ready to move from her influence. The passage suggests that Dicey is locked into the responsibilities she accepted at the start of the series, but because of her assumption of responsibility and the protection and security this offered them her siblings are in a looser and a more flexible situation. They seem too busy with their

own concerns and their own development to notice her comings and goings. She is too young to grasp that her reactions are signs of her success as an impromptu mother: she has brought them to a situation where their need for her must diminish as they are in a place where they can focus on their own concerns and development. Winnicott acknowledges the complexities of this issue:

> Sometimes an elder sister has to be a mother, with very great responsibilities, at early age, and we can see how this task, well performed, drains away the girl's spontaneity and sense of her own self's rights; these things cannot be avoided. But ordinarily any child will like to be the responsible person *for limited periods of time.*
>
> ("Growth and Development in Immaturity" 31, italics in original)

Dicey will struggle to reclaim and rediscover her "spontaneity and sense of her own self's rights" but the role reversal she experienced on the road will continue to have strange and unexpected consequences which persist across the entire series.

These consequences are seen in the new emotions Dicey experiences and are crystallised in the new and unexpected feelings of ambivalence and confusion: "she was used to seeing trouble and doing something about it [. . .] what Dicey was used to was things being simple, like a song. You sang the words and the melody straight through" (*Homecoming* 17). This insight underlines an important distinction between *Homecoming* and *Dicey's Song.* In the opening novel the direction was clear and urgent: a home had to be found for the children and a permanent shelter that would respect their needs. Dicey did not have what Elizabeth Grosz claims are the arts, religion and socialization as the acceptable method adopted by society to "wrest us away from the abyss of abjection" (77).

Dicey did not have the freedom to enjoy these aesthetic pursuits but the clarity, the directness, and the urgency of her responsibilities on the road were superb defences against abjection; for her, "the song could be sung straight through." There were obvious and recurring dangers, but Dicey "had taken care of them all, sometimes well, sometimes badly. And they had covered the distances" (213). The children have survived an exposure to the road and its challenge but Dicey, in an important admission concedes that she "misses the wildness. She knew she would never have it again" (213). This implies a recognition that childhood must end. This admission conceals the reality of a thirteen-year-old girl forced to be constantly alert and to accept responsibility beyond her capacity. She has found for herself and her siblings a home and shelter with Gram but emotionally she is attached to the road where, among other responses, suspicion became an essential survival tool.

Bessel Van der Kolk's observations about trauma can be applied to Dicey "after trauma the world becomes sharply divided between those who know and those who don't. People who have not shared the traumatic experience cannot be trusted because they have not experienced it" (18). Dicey's comment, "I don't trust anyone" to Lou and Eddie (740), the two teenage runaways they meet in *Homecoming,* confirms this; its pessimism became an essential leitmotiv and a critical resource for survival (74). Dicey's rejection of the happy ending trope reveals that she grasps that she is entering a new world but she does not shed the protective skin she developed on the road. It is an intrinsic part of her survival repertoire. Later, after the burial of Lisa's ashes in *Dicey's Song*, Dicey briefly names and defines the family's grasp of the ambivalences that characterise the depressive position, seen in their complex reactions to their mother's death (220). She does not accept the daily and continuous

work that the depressive position demands, but instead, becomes locked into hubris and Klein's manic defences.

Dicey applies to join a mechanical drawing class in school but the class is only offered to boys and she is instead enrolled in a home economics class. She resents this decision, dislikes the class, and becomes uncooperative and disruptive. At a class fashion show her failure becomes a public one and the apron she creates generates a hilarious response. The laughter in the classroom vindicates her initial resentful reaction to the home economics class. Dicey has demonstrated this resentment and highlights the gendered inequalities of the school system but in a manner which is dysfunctional and puts her outside the community the class should represent and the values it should offer its members. Dicey's experience of the home economics class represents the experience of a general and gendered base regulation which applies across the school and applies to all pupils, but the incident in the English class, and the essay she writes, are of a different order and have personal repercussions for Dicey. These penetrate deeply into Dicey's life and emotions and reveal aspects of her personality and cruelly expose the vulnerability which she struggled to hide on the road. Mr Chappelle, Dicey's English teacher, asks the class to write a character sketch, "about a real character they met, someone they knew" (54-5, 130). Dicey writes, in a coded form, about her mother and exposes and makes public her mother's story. Chappelle decides that Dicey's essay is not original or about a real person and accordingly, fails the stated requirement; he additionally accuses her of deceit and plagiarism. His insensitivity is an attack on Dicey and on the meanings her mother has in her life.

The school should do no harm and should offer its members a positive and creative partnership: John Kornfield and Laurie Prothro link literature and the school as partners in a journey of discovery, a journey the school at Crisfield does not represent. “School, like children’s and young adult literature, should be a realm of possibility — a place in which teachers and students together examine their lived experience and envision ways to enhance their lives” (219). Mina Smiths in her Social Studies class experiences an education which is not about possibility, curiosity, and opportunity. The treatment of Dicey’s essay is described by Stan Evans as “one of the most impressive challenges to teacher authority in adolescent novels” (9-10). It shows that while Dicey has found a home emotionally she still seems attached to the road and she is still doggedly traversing this narrow, exposed, and dangerous position that the road implied.

Dicey deals with the teacher’s insensitivity and crassness by emotionally removing herself from the classroom and “disassociating” herself, a behaviour associated with post-traumatic stress.[7] She returns to the defences that became necessary for survival during the summer trek; these are linked to Klein’s first position and its fear of destruction and are redundant but still capable of being aroused. The classroom experience shows the depth of the abjection which has been waiting for her and its effects on are seen in her performance. The body always remembers, in Babette Rothschild’s telling phrase. Dicey didn’t say a word: “In the first place , her tongue felt like it was frozen solid and her head was a block of ice [. . .] The silence in the room told her what everyone was thinking”. (130-

[7] The incident of the essay a Dicey ’s response suggests trauma fiction and can be included under the category Cathy Caruth identified in *Unclaimed_Experience.* The Tillerman series however while it includes elements that are found in trauma literature does offer an ultimate resolution or closure.

31). The incident returns Dicey to a raw and unprocessed archaic emotion that should have no place in her current life. Dicey's self-fulfilling comment reveals both the divisive polarity at the heart of Klein's first position and the paranoia this can engender; this paranoia is seen in her reaction to her teacher, "Dicey should have known. She should have known this would happen and everyone would believe him" (131). Dicey has internalized a script which tells her that an event of this magnitude is waiting to happen and has been waiting for this predestined and appropriate moment. This event is designed to peel back the defences she has struggled to maintain all her life and which the road crystallized. Chapelle has made real and embodied the problematic emotional tensions she managed to hide on the journey. Now she must pay some of the cost of her performance on the road and meet a moment of real reckoning. Helene Cixous's comment is relevant to Dicey's experience; she is locked into an earlier trauma, the "hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theatre for forgotten scenes, relives the past, bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering" (5). Dicey, like many victims of trauma, is forced to physically re-enact something of the horror they have experienced and not merely remember it. Dicey's response to Mina's questions reveal the depth of the trauma she is experiencing and her need to divert herself from its reality: "In her mind's eye she made a picture; the little boat, she'd have painted it white by then, or maybe yellow — it was out on the Bay beyond Gram's dock and the wind pulled at the sails" (132). Dicey retreats to an imagined internal world far away from the existential pressures of real life and in doing so looks forward to her decision to commit to boats and boat building.

The classroom, and the teacher's insensitivity, create a theatre for the trauma she experienced on the road to return and be relived. Trauma always compulsively re-enacts and is never

about mere recollection. Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* (2015) identifies safety as the first stage in her tripartite healing programme for victims traumatised by abuse and it is followed by what she terms remembrance and mourning and finally by the act of reconnection and re-engagement with the life that the abuse has damaged and interrupted. The therapist must create this initial and essential place of safety (155-74). The therapist must help the victims of abuse to understand that "hyper arousal, intrusion and numbing" are to be expected (157). The English teacher is not a therapist or a counsellor but he has an ethical responsibility to create a safe place for his pupil. Herman offers a clinical observation which the fictional Dicey illustrates, "the patient scrutinises the therapist's every word and gesture, in an attempt to protect herself from the hostile reaction she expects" (139). The alertness which helped Dicey to survive on the road is excessive and unnecessary in her new role as student but as has been noted earlier the trauma of the road in its potential to disturb, and even traumatise, is waiting to enter into her life. Her teacher's behaviour results in a retreat to an inner disassociated world and a mode of coping which the narrative reveals will have later disastrous consequences for Dicey.

Sylvia Fraser, herself the survivor of incest, explains how she evaluated and makes sense of her experience:

> In retrospect I feel about my life the way some people feel about war. If you survive, then it becomes a good war. Danger makes you active, it makes you alert, it forces you to experience and thus to learn. I know now the cost of my life, the real price that has been paid [. . .] if I don't know about half my own life what other

> knowledge can I trust? Yet even here I see a gift, for in place of my narrow, pragmatic world of cause and effect [. . .] I have burst into an infinite world full of wonder. (253)

This assessment also describes the alert and watchful Dicey who has "survived the war"; she has been made "active" and "alert" and she has learned from her experiences but this learning does not extend into the insight, the transcendent gift, which Fraser experiences. Dicey is still confined to a "narrow pragmatic world of cause and effect". She is rarely seen "bursting into an infinite world of wonder". She has survived the war but has become a casualty of the peace.

The myriad of "ghosts" the road produced and which Dicey had to deal with, appease and banish from their presence. They crowd in on her uncertain "I". They come and go at a price. They are also the ghosts that the clinical psychologist Selma Fraiberg, in her ground-breaking 1970 article on family therapy, "Ghosts in the Nursery", describes as surrounding the infant in their nursery. The ghostly evil fairies that may have been carried into the nursery unconsciously by their parents all those years ago are only in a temporary abeyance and are waiting to crowd in on the adult and be her tormentors. These "ghosts" are the legacy of the dysfunctional parenting that are locked into Dicey's history.

The essay prepares Dicey for the journey she takes with Gram to the hospital in Boston where Lisa is waiting to die, and subliminally primes Voigt's young readers for the imminence of death and its reality, and the abjection that Kristeva claims the presence of a corpse can evoke (*Powers of Horror* 3-4). In invoking her mother, Dicey is creating a brief narrative which both acknowledges her mother's

life and her death; but this and all it represents is negated by her teacher's crassness. The essay occupies a dedicated space within the novel, it stands apart from the narrative and allows the semiotic realities which death holds to be revealed but in a form which is safe and has a sacramental aura. Dicey has used the essay to offer her mother a chance to breathe and briefly regain a simulation of the life she has abandoned. The essay offers an opportunity to appreciate the reality of a death about to be experienced and recalls Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" where the semiotic and the formal essay are kept typographically separate but communicate.

The incident in the classroom cannot be described as tragedy yet it shares some of the structures of tragedy: a stage or theatrical space, an audience and a protagonist who attempts to explore their interior world, but Dicey is not possessed by a prophetic morality or a searing, remorseless conscience. The essay is not representative of Dicey as she appears across the narrative: Dicey is not a writer and she never writes again. But in this moment she seems suddenly impelled to experience and confront abjection in the idiom that the class demands which is language. The class essay can represent an extract from a lost journal or diary. Writing journals or diaries is a favoured way for the adolescent or young person to grapple with the abjection they experience in real life as well as in the fictional world. Dicey Tillerman momentarily avails of a literary tradition that uses the first person to discover and reveal a voice that is hidden in the narrative or exists parallel to it in another world. We never see Dicey writing again but in her essay she is briefly a part of a literary tradition and can use its possibilities to explore and ratify her world and find, however briefly, a significant verbal expression of the complicated maternal issues that surround her.

The class essay is a significant text within the series overall. In an act of self-protection and distancing, Dicey refers to Lisa as "Mrs Lisa and describes the despair that motivated the mother's abandonment of her children:

> So, Mrs Lisa did about the only thing left for her to do. She went away into the farthest place she could find [. . .] Her eyes never moved, as if what she was looking at was so far away small that if she looked off for a second it would be gone. (128)

The "farthest place she could find" is an image of the despair that drove Lisa to abandon her children and shows her need to focus on "the away small place" she must reach. This "small place" will be reached when Dicey and Gram gather around her bed and this final fragment of Dicey's essay anticipates the imminent trip to Boston.

The essay exposes her to the abject she has skilfully controlled on the journey to Crisfield. This uncertainty is transformed when Gram asks if her teacher returned her essay; Gram ignores Dicey's initial silence and Dicey rewards her persistence by giving her the essay to read. The exchange this generates helps both to process the event and to create what amounts to a significant opening into Dicey's world: Dicey telephones Mina and thanks her for defending her. Dicey is wary and ambivalent about friendship but the essay confirms her relationship with Mina, and the telephone call to thank Mina for her intervention establishes friendship. Lesley's claim that the young people create alternative communities is vindicated across the series; the schools consistently fail to nourish and the protagonists look elsewhere and outside the school for validation. For Dicey and Mina, school fails to be an enabling space. Dicey and Mina create a bond, but while its site is the school this bond is based

on qualities that the school does not recognise; it is based on asking questions, being disruptive and contrary. The three powerful women of the series, Dicey, Mina, and Gram become an underground feminine force, as each is implicated in the confrontation with the abject. This force is radical and transgressive and works in secrecy within the symbolic and tries to subvert it. Despite the disaster of the English class, Dicey 's attempt to "reach out", in Suzanne Reid's critical language in her study of Cynthia Voigt, her decision to write the essay in the public space the class offers is not wasted (31). She makes a friend.

Dicey is motherless and fatherless; Gram is husbandless and now they are free to move outside oedipal constraints, implied in the presence of men and enter what Elizabeth Grosz describes as the "impossible yet necessary genealogy of women [. . .] in other words a complete reorganisation of the social order" (123). In allowing Gram to read the essay she involves her grandmother in the classroom incident and be a witness to the abjection it represents. She shares with her grandmother her experience of the abject. This and their trip away from the farm deepen their relationship and describes them struggling to reclaim and inhabit the roles of mother and daughter. They transcend this relationship and inhabit a hidden buried feminine dynamic or genealogy which illuminates their evolving radical relationship. The shopping trip and the later journey to Lisa's death bed shows two women reaching out and creating vital bonds away from the farm and the site of early and primal damage. Their trip becomes an opportunity for the two women to move from the places of male presence and historic, abusive, dominion and listen to their own voices. These trips also illuminate and reinforce the potential for the Kristevan alternate feminine ethics she describes in the closing

stages of “Stabat Mater”. These moves away from the farm symbolises the enormous potential that Luce Irigaray sees in the mother-daughter relationship:

> When women want to escape from exploitation, they do not simply destroy a few “prejudices”: they upset the whole set of dominant values – economic, social, moral, sexual. They challenge every theory; every thought, every existing language in that these are monopolised by men only. They question the very foundation of our social and cultural order, the organisation of which has been prescribed by the patriarchal system. (68)

Gram may not disturb the social order or the universe, the “prescribed” social and cultural order — she does not leave her farm and attack the patriarchal systems — but the narrative shows her operating meaningfully and creatively in her own world, through her new family and in her own voice; it shows her attempting to sing the song that Dicey and her siblings have brought to the silent farm. it shows her discovering a voice that was mute and abject and is now free to blossom and engage productively and authentically with her new family and, through them, with the world outside her farm.

Gram’s reading of the essay marks an ascendant role for her: she banishes the earlier monstrous and devouring maternal she embodied in *Homecoming*. She finds a new form of living. We see this new woman reveal and embrace her new role in three significant ways: in the Thanksgiving meal which is a celebration of the family as it is constructed on her farm, in the responsibilities she accepted at Lisa’s deathbed and in the final flourish of the narrative when she retrieves from the attic

the photograph albums. The children's mother was too conflicted to be capable of offering thanksgiving and she had never shared with her children the archaic legacies they deserve to inherit. Gram's presence is a defence against the abject and her expansive role in the novel reflects the replacement of their mother by a more vibrant, and responsible reality; Lisa has become irrelevant and is surplus to the psychological and emotional dynamics of the evolving story. Gram offers her grandchildren enormous therapeutic possibilities. Her home, her presence, and her body hold, heal and assuage.

Gram produces the leather-bound family photograph albums gathering dust in the attic. This gesture connects the children to the essential past they need to access; Gram acts as the archive they have never experienced but need if they are to tap into and make sense of the history and she creates aspects of the maternal they have been deprived of. Lisa was too fragmented to link them with the traditions that have formed them; the children existed outside a family culture, their right to this archive and the freedom to access the material it contains is as vital for their growth, and their place in human society, as food, warmth, and play. Gram recognises this in opening up the secret and hidden spaces of the attic.

The film critic André Bazin celebrates the photo album as the past "mummified", embalmed, and replaced by an illusion of life (14). The photograph which Dicey sees in Aunt Cilla's house, of the young Abigail at her sister's birthday party, supports this observation and connects Dicey with this mummified past and brings it into a relevant present. In *The Runner* Francis Verricker produces a creased photograph from his wallet when he meets Bullet. But the four Tillermans have never been

allowed to know the people and the events that these albums recall and celebrate. These albums and the images they contain are not, for them, ancient, archaeological, mummified images. The album introduces them to this history, and these people, who they have never heard of before, before a process of mummification is inevitably performed. Their own mother had excluded from the family conversation the people who are alive in the children's genes and she has not supplied them with the stories and myths they need and that are part of their inheritance and had failed to allow them to experience the support, the continuity, and the security which the past can offer. Gram does not have to find these images and stories in lost, underground, archaeological levels, or strata; they come from above, the attic, and have been protectively overhanging the children since they arrived at the farm.

JEFF GREEN

Jeff Green is the central character of the third book of the series, *A Solitary Blue*. The novel opens, as in *Homecoming*, with the abandonment of a child by his mother, Melody. Jeff arrives home from school to find a note from his mother telling him that she is leaving her family to start a new life looking after needy people. She offers this rationalisation to escape from her marriage. Jeff is not abandoned in an anonymous car park like the Tillermans and he does not have to face a journey down an inhospitable highway and experience new, strange, territories; his abandonment takes place in his home and his abjection becomes progressively experienced as loneliness, isolation, and a traumatic emotional imprisonment. It leads to a mental breakdown. Jeff's father, the professor, is aloof and too preoccupied with his academic interests to be aware of his child. The parallels with the Tillermans situation in *Homecoming* include the experience of role reversal: Jeff struggles to continue his

mother's domestic tasks; he becomes a homemaker and maintains the culture that revolves around his father's needs; he prepares the professor's meals and ensures that he can retire to his study and not be disturbed. Jeff struggles to maintain the domestic culture that Melody abandoned. This domestic scenario is an example of the postmodern myth, referred to in the introduction, which describes the distinction between child and adult collapsing and the contrasting, and the distinct zones of parent and child confused. The critical ethical distinctions that boundaries must create vanish (Wilson and Short 133).

The letter Melody has left behind contradict Winnicott's descriptions of maternity grounded in the "assumption that the mother is always in service to the infant," as Doane and Devon Hodges describe it (60). It reveals that he has not been the centre of her world or the focus of her reveries and preoccupations in the ideal and idealising version of maternal care that Winnicott sketched. Winnicott, in "The Relationship of a Mother to her Baby", describes the place the child should have in their mother's reveries: "the feeling that he has been a steadfast internal object in her unconscious" and that she possessed the ability to "drain interest from herself onto her baby", has been an illusion she has abruptly destroyed (21). Martha Nussbaum, in her introduction to the selection of Winnicott's essays in *The Family and Individual Development,* offers a description of motherhood which is significantly absent in the biological mothers Voigt's series offers: "Mothers are usually 'good enough'. Mothers are preoccupied with their infant early on, and attend to their needs well, enabling the self to develop gradually and to express itself" (xvii). Melody is a living contradiction of all that Winnicott advocated and encouraged across his career. In "The Theory of the Infant Parent Relationship" he expresses the core of the extraordinary bond essential between mother and child. He envisages a

close and essential communion between mother and child, forming a vital, if temporary, unit eventually tempered by external reality. How can Jeff experience the essential and inevitable disengagement away from this unit and become an individual, which all children must experience, if this unity has never existed? How can he move, as he must, beyond the power of the mother and find an individual life and voice if he has never been contained and held in in these vital early moments by that primal power? The mother, in Winnicott's theory, becomes a magician and conjures a world which is an illusion and a temporary, but essential, hallucination.

The opening chapter reveals that Jeff is the child of a failed, silent, arid marriage (12, 16, 17) and his father's return from work at the university offers Jeff no comfort as the marriage has historically offered no comfort to husband and wife. His father is now the remaining adult carer and should re-establish family and support his child, but he is self-preoccupied and emotionally cut off from his son, as he has been from his wife. Jeff's mother Melody, unlike Lisa Tillerman, does not disappear from Jeff's story, but becomes his living tormentor, making recurring incursions into his life. The summer holidays he spends at Melody's grandmother's house in Charleston, South Carolina are a painful and tense contrast between her protestations of love and her actual maternal performance which is grotesquely inadequate and always seems to be grounded in selfishness and narcissism.

This is clearly seen when Jeff travels south. She is not at the airport to meet him and he waits for hours before she arrives, "after the first couple of days, Jeff didn't see so much of his mother, unless she took him to a meeting or to help with stuffing envelopes or distributing posters. But her presence marked the day for him" (73). He makes do with the company of his great-grandmother,

Gambo, and the old ladies who keep her company. As a solitary walker, he explores Charleston and sees the blue heron that becomes his leitmotif. The heron reminds him of his isolation and loneliness but also the strength, determination, and individuality he has the capacity to discover and develop. The heron fascinates him and offers him, even at this stage in his life, what it is possible to read as a brief, belated, experience of Lacan's mirror stage and suggests a developmental landscape which awaits him. The heron in its dignity, composure and determination suggests a living arc that spreads out before him and like the photo of Gram Dicey discovered offers an invitation to a world beyond the one they are experiencing. The heron suggests other worlds and horizons beyond his father's aloof, self-preoccupation and his mother's serial need to manipulate.

Melody exchanges the return air ticket his father has given him for a cheaper, long distance, bus ticket and fails to give him money for food on the journey. There is an embarrassing scene at the bus station when Jeff is met by his father and his new friend, Brother Thomas:

> An uncomfortable silence occupied them. Jeff looked at Brother Thomas, who was staring at the professor, and the man's brown eyes looked surprised, but he didn't say anything. Jeff knew he had said something wrong; he'd forgotten the rules of the house. He couldn't be sure what was wrong about it, except that something was. But he wasn't going to tell on Melody. (88)

The rules he has internalized are his reaction to Melody's selfishness and her power to abuse and manipulate. He has internalised the narcissistic dynamic she has created and ensnared him in and his life is a response to her demands. The two men silently see-through Jeff's embarrassed attempts to

shield Melody. The uncomfortable silence, the surprise, and the interchange of glances all reveal an awareness that Jeff is desperate to hide. Bell hooks tells us:

> Like many victims who were verbally and/or physically abused as children, I spent a lot of time [. . .] trying to cling to the memory of good and delicious moments in which I had known care [. . .] usually it requires some therapeutic intervention, whether through literature that teaches and enlightens us or therapy, before many of us can begin to critically examine childhood experiences and acknowledge the ways in which they have had an impact on our adult behaviour. (8)

Jeff will turn to music as therapy but must also experience illness and a breakdown before he can acknowledge the impact of his childhood experiences and banish the fantasies he has constructed around Melody. These fantasies – that he is her loyal knight – are a projection of Melody's power to corrupt and abuse and extend her monstrous capacities:

> He would be Melody's knight, here in their scruffy little house. Like old fashioned knights who loved their ladies — sometimes without seeing them for years. But the knights were always faithful no matter what [. . .] He would, he decided, write to Melody every month, at the beginning. So, she would know about him, about how he was faithful. If he made his letters interesting enough she might answer. If she didn't answer that did not mean she had forgotten him. If she forgot him that was just because he was easy to forget. (92)

Melody is an example of what André Green's has identified in "The Dead Mother" as the dead mother complex, a psychic state which describes a mother who while physically alive, manages through an emotional absence to be a dead presence in her child's life (14). Green's theory expands the language of maternal absence and illustrates clinically the mothers Kristeva saw in the paintings by Bellini and the madonnas of Michelangelo mentioned earlier.

Jeff becomes, in Judith Plotz's description in her article on the "disappearance of childhood", "a ghost in his own life" and he "desperately adjusts his actions to the expectation of adults" (76). Melody is more than the depressed and self-preoccupied absence or void that Green saw embedded and deeply hidden in the analysis of many of his clients and one they cannot compensate for; rather, she becomes an insidious and sophisticated example of what Green describes as a living "imago". Green's clinical dead mother is absent through maternal depression but in the novel, Melody has moved from depression to active, manipulative wilfulness and her selfishness transforms her into the monstrous. Green discovered a woman who cannot be destroyed and who insists on appearing and re-appearing in her child's life with, in Jeff's case, disastrous consequences. Melody blunts the boundaries that separate child from adult; she describes Jeff's difficult birth and the pain it caused her and is unsparing in her inappropriate details; she additionally tells him that she wanted a girl (150). Her boyfriend Max, the potential drug baron, expands this dark maternal story: "I don't know why anybody has kids in this world [. . .] It wasn't if she wanted to have a kid or get married, but abortions were illegal then" (117). His life becomes progressively decentred and he survives by denying himself and hollowing out his interior reality and values.

The arrival of Brother Thomas — the professor's new friend — becomes a catalyst for Jeff and his father. He will facilitate the transformation of the house, which relentlessly focuses on the professor's needs, to a home where a functional relationship is possible. The Brother and the professor create a new unit and Jeff now finds himself a part of a new and radical family, and one not based on the traditional heteronormative structure. This new family is a positive and enabling experience: Brother Thomas nourishes and introduces a feeling for colour into an environment that had seemed etched in rigid black and white. He creates a therapeutic presence and relationship, like Gram does for her grandchildren; he talks to Jeff; he cooks and he always brings a bottle of wine. The Brother's critical function is to become an observer of the life Jeff is living with his father. He generates a new alternative family which mirrors that established on the farm at Crisfield. He is the critical presence which like Gram on the farm make home, family and maternality possible. He is an antidote to the abjection which surrounds Jeff and is located in Melody. This new community is as radical an experience as that formed by Gram and the Tillermans on the farm: it reinforces and deepens the theme of the alternative Kristevan maternality and confirms that family is not inevitably connected to the embedded patriarchal of Freud's oedipal complex. Jeff can now see beyond the emotional horizons laid down by his mother and redefine himself outside her parameters. The new family shows that the experiment conducted by the Tillermans on the road was not an isolated once-off event; both communities show that they can exist without the presence of the hegemonic father and the abject mother.

Brother Thomas reads the culture of the house and plays a Socratic role. The professor begins to understand and admit the serious limitations of his paternal role. Like Gram who discovered

maternity the Professor discover a new paternity. Brother Thomas, like Gram in the Tillerman household, is associated with food and a generous respect for orality; he converts their meals into celebrations. He offers a glimpse of the maternality the Tillermans and Jeff historically lack. Brother Thomas is a member of a religious community but he places his religious calling to one side and offers father and son the essential scaffolding necessary to grow away from their bleak existence in Baltimore and move to a place of new potentialities and capacities in Crisfield.

A queer reading of the relationship between the professor and the brother is a radical and even an exciting possibility as it puts us definitely outside the patriarchy and its heterosexual hegemony but this is not an issue in the overall shape of the story. *A Solitary Blue* depicts a family where Jeff has two fathers and is now nurtured by the vibrant relationship of his father and the brother Thomas. The series does not depict or suggest a same sex couple but importantly for the development of Voigt's narrative with its critical concern with family performance, the indicators of a nourishing, and functioning family grow out of this friendship. The Professor and Jeff decide to leave Baltimore and move to a house down the Chesapeake Bay near Crisfield and Jeff meets Dicey and the Tillermans. This move is an external object, a Kleinian part-object, and reflects the internal changes happening within the family dynamics and which affect both father and son.

Jeff himself must enter and experience the "newness" of his own personal depressive position and the new Kleinian objects he encounters in Crisfield and he must separate from the "dead" mother and the toxic space, the dead world, that Melody incarnates and drags him into. He must create a definitive separation: he must perform a spiritual act of matricide. He performs this in a variety of

ways: in his growing appreciation of his father and in the easier bonds they establish; in the new life he creates when they move to Crisfield, and in his new friendships. These changes and these new objects allow him to welcome and process a new, essential, and surprising emotion and one which counterbalances Kleinian envy; he experiences gratitude. Melody, however, still stalks him and like Green's "hydra-headed monster" she insists on reappearing in his life. The emotions he now experiences allow him to move outside the frame she has created for him and which she has been assiduous in maintaining; he is prepared for the next and definitive phase in his life. As Green explains, it is "because she is a thousand-headed hydra whom one believes one has beheaded with each blow, whereas in fact only one of its heads has been struck off. Where then is the beast's neck?" (158). It is the neck which must be severed; Jeff must now become Orestes and symbolically cut off the monster's head.

Melody claims to have changed but Jeff knows she is lying. But it is her self-pity that moves Jeff: "Jeff didn't think he could stand it. It hurt him to feel so sorry for her" (276). This recognition of her moral pathos is a definitive moment in his separation from Melody. The Tillermans were a part of the ritual which acknowledged their mother's death; they formally delivered her ashes to a proper place and were part of a healing ceremony. In telling Melody that he will not live with her Jeff removes himself from her life and her control. He performs a more active and expressed form of matricide which lacks the healing protocols and the presiding, overarching presence Gram supplied for the Tillermans, "I don't want to live with you. Not all the time, not for the summer, not for a week. Not ever. It's my decision. Not his. It's what I want." (278). This heroic Oresteian moment, grounded as it is in myth, is not the text's conclusion. Jeff, the Tillermans and Mina Smiths, and perhaps the Professor,

are off to see *Star Wars*; an everyday event appears between the mythic moments which consistently ground so much of the narrative (311).[8] Jeff has no healing processional ritual or rubric to ameliorate the act of matricide but this excursion, which is socially inclusive, compensates Jeff for this lack. It illustrates the Kristevan quote which appeared at the start of this chapter which highlighted the place of society and culture in responding to the abject. It is also Jeff's attempt to be an agent in his own life. Jeff's motif, the solitary blue of the title recurs, significantly changed, and expanded in its implications for Jeff: the solitary herons are solitary hunters, but they nest in colonies.

WILHELMINA (MINA) SMITHS

Mina Smiths is the protagonist of *A Stranger from Afar* and the third member of the imaginary abject triptych. She is black and is a member of a functional, supportive family. Her parents are invested in their children; her father is a pastor and a leader of his community; her mother is dedicated to her marriage, her family, and their community. What Mina does share with Jeff and Dicey is a talent that should equip her to deal with the abject: classical dancing is her way of escape from abjection, as the restoration of the boat becomes for Dicey and music becomes for Jeff. She also experiences a difficult relationship with aspects of the educational system and an imposed role reversal when an adult entrusts her with his secret memories.

9 This trip confronts abjection and reveals jouissance but it also holds a reference to the theme of the distant, concealed or "dark" or "founding father"; the film *Star Wars* contains another ambivalent and questionable "founding" father in the character of Darth Vader.

Mina represents the most complete and extensive example of the "artful failure" in the Tillerman series that Lesley reads in the educational systems (55). She illustrates the problematic nature of education experienced in the school system encountered by the young protagonists. Mina's relationship with formal education is compounded by her colour. She is about to return to a summer dance camp, the "only black girl" and a scholarship holder (53). She appears to be the poorest child in the group as the others seem to "know more" and come from affluent east coast backgrounds (35). She is so involved with her art that her position as the only black girl in the group has not entered her consciousness.

Mina's school teacher, Mrs Parker, feels that Mina is a "debilitating influence" in the class. Mina is acting as the class clown, but this is a mask to hide the tension between her self-image as a black girl and the effects of her exposure to the world of classical dance with its connotations of middle-class white privilege. Her desire to perform as a classical dancer distorts her sense of her black culture and heritage. She listens to music by white composers, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Brahms, and does not read the books recommended by Mrs Parker, which appear to deal substantially with black experiences, and history. Mina reveals the insidious and destabilizing influences of the white culture her interest in dance has exposed her to; it is causing her to demote and even deny the culture that is an expression of her racial inheritance and she runs the risk of finding herself in an abjected position where she may have no innate culture to support her. The teacher also wants to draw her mother's attention to Mina's developing body. Mina asks herself why she is black, a comment that parallels Jeff's diminishment of himself in the face of Melody's abuse. Mina has not the social skills or the sophistication to realize that she is absorbing the racial values of the group who make up the

summer camp and that it is slowly eviscerating her connection to her culture. Her comment to her mother, “the thing is, Mom, except for slavery, nothing ever happened to black people” reveals how insidious and overwhelming this experience is. Her friend Kat pointedly tells her that unknown to herself, she is becoming a snob (73).

The felt and distressing dissonances and the traumatic gaps that often reveal the presence of the abject are awaiting in the attitudes and practices she experiences when she returns to the dance camp the following summer She notes subtle difference on her return, changes in the atmosphere that surrounds her and she notes that the other girls treat her differently:

> When they talked nobody asked her questions. She asked them questions and they answered as if they were the interesting ones and it was only natural that she should want to know more about them and they shouldn’t be interested in knowing out anything about her [. . .] there were also some things that never got mentioned, as if they weren’t visible. Like anything to do with black skin. (88)

This season Mina is given a single room on her own; the other girls offer friendship but do not seem to consider Mina as a roommate. She begins to process the messages she is receiving from the course and grasps that the group are expecting her to function as if she is white or if she wished she were (90). This is a vital insight as it primes her for the events at the course which rapidly emerge and she becomes aware of the dynamic she is a part of. Mina, unlike Jeff in his relationship with Melody, can quickly see through the deception, making her ashamed of herself and angry.

The realisation that her "classes aren't going right" troubles her. The mirrors in the dance studio reflect "her blackness back and back, among the whiteness of the other girls" (86). Miss Maddinton, the instructor, invites her to examine tapes of her performance and these are compared with the tapes of her original audition. "'You've grown uncoordinated' Miss Maddinton said. "you're too far behind the rest of the class. And falling behind every day"' (98). There can be only one outcome: she must leave:

> I'm not saying it's your fault. There's nothing you can do about it. This just happens with singers as well as dancers at puberty. Nobody can really predict how a body will develop over the years of change. Your people develop earlier, which is why it's happened to you this year. (99)

Mina retorts that it because she is black but Miss Maddinton responds as if she knew she would say that. Miss Maddinton's comment "your people" opens up both the racism implicit in the course and the relative scarcity of black dancers in the corps of classical ballet and the culture that sanctions this as Miss Maddinton concedes when she admits that "you don't see many black ballerinas"(99). Margo Henderson in *Negroland: A Memoir,* reminds us "in the world of classic ballet, for instance, black dancers are often considered not quite right, their bodies more suited to folklore dance which is driven more by 'biology than by art'" (qtd by Colin Grant in his *Guardian* review of the memoir). The concern that surrounds black dancers are not confined to the twentieth century: the *Guardian* of January 2021, reprints a December 2020 report which claims a black dancer at the Statsballet Berlin, was asked to "whiten up".

Derek Hook describes a dissonance seen in the "the schema of occupying a black body in a given historico-racial schema" offering "a means of conceptualizing the brutal psychological effect of racism" (2). Mina illustrates this schema. Hook points out that "racism never loses it localization in the body" (2). Hook's 2006 article is a lengthy and detailed analysis of the inadequacies of a discourse analysis to fully grasp the implications of racism in its "bodily, affective and pre-symbolic dimensions" (1). He quotes Franz Fanon's stress on the black body in his book *Black Skin White Masks* where Fanon describes the violent physicality of racism's colonial forms. "Fanon's writing mimics the 'bodylines' of racism, reminding us that however advanced its forms, racism never loses its localization in the body" (2). Hook suggests that psychoanalysis may offer an awareness that applied psychology fails to give, but not the psychoanalysis embodied in the classic "other ego" psychoanalytic paradigms as these do not address the socially symbolic. Hook believes that Kristeva's theory of the abject offer a language where the fear and the hate that are often deeply embedded in racism can be symbolically encountered and acknowledged. Mina is briefly allowed to move in a privileged white space remote from her own culture, and one she is destined to leave. Dicey, uses her discovery of androgyny to compensate for the "gaps" she experiences on the road but unlike Mina and her connection with ballet androgyny will become deeply embedded in her evolving persona. Mina briefly plays with a role culturally and biologically separate from her own culture and one ultimately at odds with the her body. Mina is briefly allowed to move in the privileged circle of classical Ballet but she is not allowed to interrogate or critique its procedures and protocols. Miss Maddinton, in telling her that it is her growing black body which is betraying her, confirms Hook's argument. The white schema which Hunt describes quickly reacts and disposes of her and her problematic body. Miss Maddinton concedes that

the idea of having a token black girl on the course has not worked despite the attraction of federal funding. Mina, on her return home, grasps the reality that the scholarship award had nothing to do with her ability to dance, “that she was just a way for the camp to get money from the federal government, which it used to train the real dancers”(163). Dicey never reaches an insight of this momentum. The hidden racism around Mina last year has come into full view (99). But Mina had also been wrong about her friends there, “about them liking her. She remembered walking into her single room and the teeth cut into her heart.” (163). The *corps de ballet* will stay uniform, symmetrical, and white.

Mina attempts to deal with the hurt but it is her failure to see behind the façade of the course and grasp what Derek Hook would later calls the underlying “pre-discursive racism“, the racism that lies under discourse, theory, and language, that hurts her the most. Mina looks forward to returning to school and the seventh grade and on the first day back “sat in her seventh-grade classroom like a storm about to explode across the sky”. The experience of the dance school she determinedly puts behind her and decides that she knows where she is heading, “so far to the top that nobody would come close even to her heels” (166).

In her junior high school social studies class her teacher demands a strict and unbending conformity with the learning protocols he is maintaining; “there was only one particular set of words that made an answer right” (133). Mina decides to become contrary and repeatedly ask questions about race and the place of race in the history he teaches. Her teacher ignores Mina but this makes her more determined to confront his rigidity and excessive formality. Her mother suggest that he feels threatened by her but Mina decides to be true to what she feels is appropriate and proper. She

receives from him a C grade and a written comment on her report card that she is disruptive. The C is her only grade that is not an A. She gives an example of the questioning and the critical values that should hallmark a utopian system of education and not the compliance that is expected. Mina's response to the C grade is to laugh; it is the reward which this dystopian system offers her because she paradoxically is displaying what a school should create and foster. She did not absorb the message that her C grade is designed to communicate. Her programme of resistance has worked and she has "got to" her teacher. Lesley claims that the urge to create alternative sites of achievement for young people, while a creative act, can lead to risk and danger; the student is putting herself beyond the reach of the affirmation which the school community should supply.

Earlier in the novel Mina met a new character, Tamer Schipps, a relief pastor in her church. She becomes infatuated with him and while this experience energises her it contains dangers, as she is a child, and he is a married adult. His wife Alice is needy and does not seem to offer him companionship or listen to his needs; the pastor turns to Mina and shares his deep secrets with her. Tamer is an adult in a powerful position in their community, he uses Mina as a confidant and for the third significant time in the Tillerman series, roles are confused and overlapping. Mina's mother senses her daughter's feelings for Tamer but, in her desire to help Tamer's family, she forces her daughter to help this needy woman and be involved with their family. Mina's mother, Ramona is not a "monstrous mother", but her sense of her communal responsibility distorts her maternal perceptions and blunts the moral vision which should inform her responsibilities and which should be an essential aspect of her relationship with her daughter. Ramona lacks Gram's discernment. In Dicey *'s Song,* Gram would not have forced Dicey into a compromising situation and would have exercised an intelligent and

ethically driven understanding of boundaries which Mina's mother does not display. The narrative never describes Mina and her mother mirroring the relationship which earlier we had seen Dicey reaching out to experience with her grandmother.

The relationship between a young girl (Mina) and the adult (Tamer) in a powerful role is not questioned, nor is its potential for abuse acknowledged by Voigt. Tamer is replacing her father's central role as pastor in the community and in her life but while it is excessive to see him as being *in loco parentis*, his functions do overlap with those of her absent father, a reality which makes more problematic and more complex his responsibilities and his relationship with Mina. Earlier in the series, in *Homecoming*, the threat posed by the farmer Rudyard was acknowledged, and the children's escape was described as a dangerous but necessary and brief adventure. That is not possible in this subplot: the friendship between Mina and Tamer involves a continuing, unequal, and unbalanced relationship expressed in emotional sharing and dependency and is of a different order from the Tillerman's graphic but brief experience with the farmer Rudyard. Tamer can never be read as having a therapeutic role in the series, unlike Gram, Will Hastings, and Brother Thomas.

Mina is affected by one story from Tamer's past, his encounter with a white fellow student and track runner named Samuel Tillerman (Lisa Tillerman's younger brother). Samuel and his historic home life are a central focus of the next chapter. Mina hears the name Tillerman when Dicey 's name is called out in class at the start of the eighth grade and wonders if this new girl is a relative of Samuel's (227). They become friends and this friendship is cemented when Mina speaks up for Dicey in her moment of abjection in the classroom. Mina invites the Tillermans to church on Tamer's last day in

Crisfield. This encounter at the church exposes the legacy of unspoken and unresolved grief both Tamer and Gram have carried around Samuel. Despite her questionable motivation, Mina created for Tamer and for Abigail what can be read as a moment of grace; she has created what is described, in the language of trauma, as a form of "closure". Later the text shows her reclaiming her body and simultaneously rediscovering her capacity for dance as a natural and grace filled thing to do, in a moment of jouissance and gratitude: "She just wanted to dance just for a few minutes, because sometimes there was nothing but dancing to say what you really felt (320).

This chapter has examined the threats that abjection has created for the three members of the triptych and its invariable effects on their attempt to become subjects. The abjection implies that they must reactivate and relive a moment of expulsion and exclusion from a desired state, a moment of a prediscursive and archaic crisis which was constituted in an early experience of expulsion from the maternal presence. This expulsion is always linked to the maternal and the early prediscursive issues that surround the mother and early archaic issues are reactivated. The three members of the triptych experience abjection differently; Jeff and Dicey reexperience this expulsion as maternal abandonment, rejection and the disintegration of home and family. Mina's journey is not as existentially complex in its maternal dimension as Dicey's and Jeff's and she does not have to experience and confront a "monstrous" mother but in a moment of insightful discernment decides that she will not follow her mother's maternal script. This may be read as rejection of her mother's values and choices and a determination to move beyond them.

This chapter argues that the abject and what it represents in the life of the adolescent — the collapse between subject and object or self and other — is consistently relived and explored in the experiences of the three significant protagonists. Dicey, Mina and jeff reveal the problematic way the adolescence can experience the collapse that Kenneth Kidd sees as implicit in "the process of expulsion that allows the subject to set up clear boundaries and establish stable identity" (175). This expulsion is always linked to the maternal and the early prediscursive issues that surround the mother and early archaic issues are reactivated. The three protagonist I have discussed do illustrate a classic and problematic position of confusion and risk and they live on borderlands connected to but outside society. Each character is expected to take on adult commitments and responsibilities outside their competence; they experience significant role reversal. They experience the abjection that can occur as individuals but also act and emerge as abject figures within their community, seen in their relationship with school and experienced in the series as a dystopian relationship with patriarchal education; they must experience an education which falls short of its utopian ideal. The protagonists instead must and do create alternative communities which struggle to compensate for the lack they experience in their role as members of an abject community.

CHAPTER THREE:

A JOURNEY INTO THE OEDIPAL

"I mean we don't even know what colour his eyes were. Or are."

"Whose?"

"Our father's"

"What does the colour of eyes matter?

"Come on James" Sammy turned to him.

"How can we be orphans? We had Momma.

And – cripes – we've got mothers coming out of our ears, between Gram and Dicey and even Maybeth."

- Sons from Afar

Motherhood and the search for a Kristevan maternality have been the focus of my discussion of the first three books of the Tillerman series: the mother as neglectful, destructive, and devouring has consistently dominated this discussion of the narrative and the bad breast of Klein and the dead mother of André Green have been present in the lives of the protagonists. This interpretation has recognised the need to reach out and recreate the nurturing or good breast of Klein and the dedicated mother of Winnicott and find the person who can perform these functions and the home where this can be practiced. This is often found in a place outside the usual site — the family authorised and

valorised by patriarchy — where motherhood is expected to be performed by the biological mother. Instead the series has consistently shown the protagonists finding nourishment outside the patriarchal family. Voigt does not ignore the father and his presence, and places a father, or more correctly the experience of the paternal, at the centre of two of her novels. Both *The Runner* (the fourth in the series, 1985) and *Sons from Afar* (the sixth, 1987) step back from the mother and examine closely the place of the father in the lives of Voigt's protagonists. This chapter will claim that these two books amount to a dramatic insertion of the pressures, energies, and issues which we associate with Freud's Oedipus complex, as described in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), and how the Tillerman series examines the paternal as it is experienced by Voigt's protagonists. This chapter will argue that the Tillerman series conducts a sustained critique of fatherhood as instituted at the heart of the Freudian and Lacanian worlds. This is more than an examination of the individual fathers the series offers and the chapter will argue that the two books radically interrogate the role of the father in the series.

John Tillerman, the four Tillerman children's grandfather and the founding patriarch of the series, is dead when they reach Gram's farm but *The Runner* returns to him and his family, describes his style of parenting, and the family culture he presided over, and focuses on the triangular relationship he has with his wife Abigail and his son, Samuel, known in the narrative as Bullet. The family is dominated by John Tillerman's need to hurt, control and destroy. Two of his three children, Lisa, and Johnny have already fled and his son, Samuel, remains a vulnerable and damaged survivor. *The Runner* is characterised by the closed repressive system that operates on the farm, which is controlled by John Tillerman, and with which his wife, in her silence and compliance, colludes. *The Runner* seems more ascetic, and more enclosed, than the second oedipal text, *Sons from Afar*; its focus

is exclusively the story of Bullet and his internal world. Bullet's escape from this system is cross country running, at which he excels and his school coach suggests he has international potential; but while it offers a release, it only returns to the place he started from and reinforces the sense that he cannot escape a destructive destiny. *Sons from Afar* describes the trip James and Sam make to find Francis Verricker, the father they never knew but whose absence has marked their lives. The narrative's focus is on two growing boys who are not weighed down by the presence of a sadistic and controlling father as Bullet is. *Sons from Afar* follows James and Sam as they go on another road trip, leaving the maternal home with Gram to find their father, but instead of meeting their actual father and experiencing a positive and functional paternity, they eventually encounter his toxic legacy and his traces in a seedy bar in the docklands of Baltimore.

James Tillerman is prompted to find his father by his discovery of Johann Mendel's theories of genetic reproduction and his curiosity to learn more about his genetic inheritance. This decision conceals emotions which are eventually exposed, and James finally discovers and admits a deeper sense of his feelings for his father that was inaccessible at the start of the narrative (228). Sam's decision to go along and keep his brother company is described as sibling loyalty but it also contains deeper needs. Sam's comment that "we have mothers coming out of our ears" may be no more than the exasperation of an adolescent boy frustrated by the presence of so many women in his life. It may also conceal an unconscious cry from this boy who is aware that his aggression, his need to fight and assert himself, needs to be complemented by the presence of a man who will confront him. If he has reached out for this ideal and notional father then he is doomed to experience disappointment. This father has never existed and is an illusion. James, the older brother, does not have this difficulty, his

class work, his intellectual curiosity, and the books he reads seem to control and absorb oedipal issues and his energies and his emerging testosterone. The journey will result for both boys in a violent confrontation with their paternal legacy and a return to the maternality they are temporarily moving away from.

Sam's realistic, grounded, comment that he only wants to meet his father so he can hurt him is his reaction to his father's treatment of his mother, and her family (15). This is a more real and rooted justification than his brother's theoretical rationalizations. The two boys become briefly unconscious participants in Freud's "primal horde" and seem to symbolically repeat that theoretical founding violence where the sons seek out and destroy the possessive and domineering father that Freud, in the fourth chapter of *Totem and Taboo*, claimed to read in Darwin. Freud claimed that this archaic murder lies at the base of social order and its results are perpetuated in his idea of the superego, the internalised moral voice of his psychoanalytic theory, and an essential part of the resolution of the Oedipal complex. The patricide, which is carried out by the sons, this symbolic and mythic death of the father, becomes, in these two Tillerman books, a necessity and replaces the symbolic matricide we met earlier through Lisa's death in *Dicey 's Song* (201). The absence of Dicey and Maybeth from this adventure reinforces Voigt's intention to structure and describe it in classic Freudian terms as a male adventure and experience. James and Sam and earlier, Bullet, in his doomed struggle with his father, transcend the oedipal, and make the paternal, as they have experienced it, personally and socially irrelevant.

The narrative describes many fathers; Francis Verricker, the children's father, is surreptitiously present from the very beginning and in *A Solitary Blue* the narrative introduces the professor, Jeff Green's father, who is initially a distant, unaware father, but who discovers both fatherhood and his son. John Tillerman is the founding father of the entire series and initiate the idea of fatherhood as repressive, legalistic, and incapable of offering the care that the child must have and that in Winnicott's theory the child receives from the good enough mother. This includes the men the protagonists encounter and who perform as caring responsive fathers should. They briefly but importantly show that they have the resources and the capacity to reach the maternal ethic described by Kristeva in " Stabat Mater". They can and do practice maternality. Will Hawkins in *Homecoming* and Brother Thomas in *A Solitary Blue* and Patrice in *The Runner*; are examples of a potent male capacity for presence and availability and the insightful tact that should constitute both the maternal and the paternal. Repeatedly the narrative blurs the traditional distinctions between maternity and paternity and accepts the broader value of Kristevan maternality. Despite this chapter's focus on the Freudian paternal the cycle shows that fatherhood need not be literally identified with that described by Freud in the theory of the Oedipus complex; the presence of these men and their performance and values invite us to imagine paternity outside biological frames and question family outside Freud's prism. They may also be representing Kristeva's father of prehistory described in "Freud and Love" (Moi 239, Kristeva 244-5) a man who exists before the archaic separation of the child from the mother and infuses love at this moment of trauma, as the child leaves his mother to be dominated by the father of the Oedipus complex. The narrative describes other fathers, the Rev. Smiths, Mina's father, and Tamer Schipps, Bullet's partner in running, now returned to Crisfield with his family, as a

temporary pastor. A father appears almost at the end of *Sons from Afar*, the stepfather of Colin who Sam enlists to help him to fish on the bay. This stepfather contrasts with Colin's natural father who is neglectful and indifferent and with Sam's own father. This stepfather, in his paternal role is briefly mentioned, but he returns as the English teacher in *Sons from Afar*, yet it is possible to read him as the most complete and responsive father in the narrative. The story of the mythic father Dedalus, another good father, is told in the narrative of *Sons from Afar.* The two novels are set years apart and constitute a developmental line; I will argue that they form an integrated complete narrative within the overall series and one which radically questions paternity. *The Runner* seems concerned with escaping the book's damaged father; Bullet is drafted and is killed in Vietnam and buried there; a continent and an ocean away from this patriarchal home on the Bay. *Sons from Afar* describes a different directional movement; the two boys consciously search for their father, leave their new home, and draw near to his traces, to meet and confront him.

This research will include the father in a conversation with maternity that is inspired by the essay "Stabat Mater". The chapter will return to Dorothy Clarke's reading of *Homecoming* and ask if her identification of Voigt as a radical critic of the heteronormative family includes a treatment of the father. While the focus will be on the father and the dynamics he creates with his sons, the role of the mother will be acknowledged as it is in both novels: they both end in a return to the mother, and grounded in Kristevan maternality. This chapter will argue that despite the focus on the father, motherhood, in the two books discussed in this chapter, is identified as a central and essential social reality.

Kleinian language will be used in this examination and the two novels will be read as a move from her first position, the paranoid schizoid, into the achievement of the second, the depressive, and a move which has a capacity to acknowledge, and transform the Kristevan abject. This is a Kleinian move from the rigidity of a split world where the subject is constantly exposed to a fear of destruction and the need to survive and defend themselves. This is the atmosphere that dominates the world of *The Runner*, one dominated by the divided and attritional energies of the patriarchal world demonstrated in John Tillerman. this research will argue that the series reveals the move to a new world where collaborative values and respect are recognised and appreciated and made possible. In what amounts to a post-Christian reading Bullet's death has a sacrificial quality and creates what is a spiritual legacy; his two nephews continue the task he initiated and confront the patriarchal remnants that remain. James and Sam become "sons from afar" to use the phrase from Isaiah (43:6) which supplies the title of the second oedipal text. They are "sons from afar" as I will argue, in their decision to reach their long vanished, distanced, and absent father but perhaps more significantly their arrival at the farm, in an illustration of the pervasive theme of finding home, demands that their grandmother struggle to recognise and establish and finally celebrate the maternal their presence implies. They become her second family and they are physically, emotionally, and symbolically sons and daughters from "the ends of the earth". The narrative overall reveals a distrust of organised, formal religion but Voigt uses the images and the language of a world formed in Christian symbolism. This distrust can be extended to the patriarchy and the founding fathers who underpin this formal system. We can project this distrust onto the definitive founding father, the eternal lawgiver and provider, God the Father, and question his relevance and his place in the aspirations of our protagonists.

THE RUNNER

The Runner is the fourth novel in the Tillerman series and is set at least a decade before the events of the other six novels; its focus is on Samuel Tillerman and the life he is living on the farm at Crisfield, with his father and mother. This novel gives us the backstory to the events that are revealed in *Homecoming* and acts as an essential prequel to the entire series. The novel begins with a demonstration of John Tillerman's need to control and dominate, and the brutal techniques he applies to establish control; they are illustrated in a manner, a pattern, which is repeated throughout the narrative and which gives it an overarching, destructive dynamic. This scene is an insight into the nature of John Tillerman, the family culture he orchestrates and the reaction it induces in Bullet, a reaction he extends to other figures of authority:

> Bullet just looked at him but the old guy never looked at you, never looked you in the eye. Mostly Bullet didn't answer his father. *I don't have to listen to this,* he said inside his head, at his father's face*. As long as I do my work, that's what you're entitled to and I work my tail off.* The cold eyes had gone down to the other end of the table, where Bullet's mother sat. She never said anything, she never did anymore. (10)

Bullet copes with his father by retreating into his own world. His dialogue with his father is an internal one which borders on the schizoid as these conversations are exclusively inside his head. This is the pattern he has learned from watching how his mother and older siblings coped: this is the effect of being "boxed in" and increasingly he is retreating into an interior world which is divorced from the

outer one. This style of communication is laid down at the very beginning and persists for the entire novel. It is an intrinsically destructive pattern and we see it effect other dimensions of his life: he does not engage with academic life and values and his connection with the school community is superficial and his role at school is that of the aloof, cynical observer.

John Tillerman's emotional greed, his need to dominate and constantly wield "power over" his family is reflected in his orality. He appears in the novel presiding at the dinner table and these meals in the Tillerman house are described as emotional skirmishes, occasions of aggressive attrition held in an atmosphere of morose and loaded silence; the novel opens with a dysfunctional family meal that illustrates this culture. The father brutally commandeering a vastly disproportionate amount of the emotional energy and space and power available to the family; his family witness his brutal, absolute behaviours and they assent to this performance. Their role is one of compliance and total mute obedience. John Tillerman is re-enacting the primal envy that Klein spoke of in the final phase of her life's work, in *Envy and Gratitude,* when she contrasted envy with the life enhancing gratitude we have seen in Jeff Greens' response to his new life and described envy as a destructive impulse that exists from the very beginning of life. We have already encountered Klein's gratitude In Jeff Green's reaction In *A Solitary Blue*, The basic sense of adequate feeding, and of being met and acknowledged by another, generates gratitude; John Tillerman exists in a world where gratitude is an unknown, an inaccessible feeling and the emotional contentment or fullness that accompanies it is unattainable. He has never been sated by a good breast. He has never met the imaginative and dedicated maternal presence that would lead him out of the destructive envy that characterises and dominates him.

John Tillerman is an abusive father: he is the primal and malign patriarch of the series, and he is the founding father, the perverse Abraham; his genes, his name and his influence permeate the cycle of novels. John Tillerman is dead when the children reach the farm in *Homecoming* but he haunts it and we see his legacy in the dilapidation and the honeysuckle which is suffocating the farmhouse (301). In the second oedipal novel, *Sons from Afar,* James and Sam, at the climax of their oedipal journey, encounter the Chief, the head of the seamen's union, in a bar on the docklands of Baltimore; he is another vengeful and attritional patriarch, and is their grandfather reincarnated and continues John Tillerman's aggression. John Tillerman's legacy exists in the dilapidation that hangs in the air at Crisfield and in the emotional history the farm contains which Dicey senses on her arrival. She notices, when she enters the barn for the first time — a place of darkness, dust, and scuttling noises — the rough way the broken door has been repaired: fixing the door is a living legacy of one of Bullet's last confrontations with his father.

Bullet is a dedicated runner; he constantly runs to escape from his father and his law. He exists to run and his existence is channelled and given a meaning through athletics, his "run was cross country [. . .] he'd never lost a cross country race, never even came close to losing [. . .] he'd been state champion for two years." (36-7). His running replaces and sublimates sexuality. He ran because it was what he did, what he was. He didn't run to win races or to beat anybody. He ran because his body was built for it" (103). If running generates him and expands him physically and spiritually, then the experience of family and his controlling father diminishes and negates him. If his running and the precision, the discipline, the order, and sense of linearity it suggests, establishes his entry into the

symbolic then the family he lives with leads instead, not to equilibrium and balance, but to collapse and his ultimate and inevitable destruction.

Bullet's running is both linear and circular; it suggests, in its dedicated and formal structure, the symbolic but in its suppressed emotions we can glimpse the presence of the semiotic: running for Bullet is a raw, primal experience and draws on energies and impulses that are outside the symbolic. His running may be read as a moment of healing and therapy and a reaction to the controlling, abusive culture of his home as it offers a temporary and energy charged release and a brief but vital experience of jouissance:

> Rain or sleet made no difference to him. He'd be out there in his shorts, t shirt and sneakers [. . .] Bullet didn't have to train like this to win the races, but that wasn't what he was after anyway, just winning the races. He had to train to keep getting better to be as good as he could. And he was really good. (14)

Bullet's running expresses his talent and validates his gifts and his humanity but if his running is an attempt to create an escape it is doomed: the cross country racing he has opted for follows a circular path and returns in on itself as his nightly run always returns him to the farm and his father's power. His running illustrates his talents and his gifts as their talent do for Dicey, Jeff and Mina and they connects him with the maternal semiotic where creativity is located. These gifts open up expressive, creative possibilities and vistas that the school, education and the church does not offer; the simple or uncomplicated discharge of these gifts are in various ways compromised by the masculine symbolic. Bullet's running not only return him to the place of his father's abuse but illustrates his isolation and

his hubris and returns him to all that he is trying to avoid and escape. If his running elevates and endows him with a brief heroism it also contains an obsession that is inherently destructive.

Running is not Bullet's only release from his father's domination. He works for Patrice, a boat builder and the coffee, the bread rolls, the conversation, all suggest a connection, a validation and a nourishment that is lacking in his real home and in the school community (44-50). Patrice suggests both a maternal and a paternal presence in Bullet's life; his history in the French resistance and his imprisonment and torture describes him as an "other" and describe at the radical ethical otherness Kristevan sees as the heart of her maternality and explored in "Stabat Mater". He offers Bullet a relationship, and a validation which is impossible to find in his home and is one of the of liminal men who offer insight, support, and a transgressive presence across the span of the narrative. His presence, too in its difference, place him outside the heteronormative and supports a queer reading. The place of these men is however temporary and transitional but in its existential relevance powerful. This relationship with Patrice offers an example of a male bonding or connection and Patrice is one of this population of supportive males who appear and disappear in the narrative and who live in marginal worlds apart from and parallel to the ostensibly heterosexual world which all the central protagonists seem to inhabit. These men bring to the narrative the possibility of reading the series outside a rigid heterosexual world; they allude to alternative readings and they suggest that gendered relationships need not be confined to the binary heterosexual. Their sexual direction is left open, fluid, and undeclared and this creates a flexible space at the heart of the narrative. At critical moments they appear as adults and supply an adult presence and guidance which the young protagonists urgently need and which the established formal societal agencies fail to offer. They are rescuers, enablers,

exemplars, and suppliers, when needed, of nourishment and agape but they also disappear when their temporal function is completed.

Bullet's mother seems incapable of supplying maternal nourishment for her children: she sits and watches and never comments as her children are progressively driven away: this mother radically contrasts with the mother the arrival of the four children challenged and finally inspired and led into a new maternity in *Homecoming* and who, *in Dicey's Song* rediscovers and practices maternality. The mother we meet in *The Runner* collapses into silence and copes with the environment created by her husband by retreating into a watchful and desperate position of disengagement. Her eyes are always watching and observing, and she avoids any verbal conflict with her husband (121). She averts her gaze and copes by adopting a defensive, stoic presence and her status as victim is enhanced by tacit silence. Silence, in her case, does seem to give consent; an admission she conceded to Dicey in her apologia and moment of essential truth telling, in *Homecoming* (364-365). She tries to explain the experience of living with her husband's destruction and its implications for her own family and for the four Tillerman children: she has failed her own three children and is haunted by her failure. Does her history prevent her from even considering a second maternity? Can she commit herself to her grandchildren and risk repeating this failure again? The narrative does show one break in her overall bleak performative style in *The Runner*: she travels to the big meet at Fredericksburg where the school team are running, and Bullet sees her briefly in the crowd at the finish of his winning race. She does not wait but he knows she has travelled to see and support him. (205). It is possible to step back from this abusive system the father creates and read the Tillerman series as the four children's unconscious, almost transferential capacity, and mission to redeem and save their Gram from the historic system

she has been victimized by but also colluded with. Their arrival, which she eventually recognises as an opportunity to expiate this historic abuse and which *Homecoming* has described, will figuratively amount to a counter transference or response from her to the children's desire for a home and a glimpse into the capacity for love their arrival offers her.

The novel progresses to its inevitable destructive ending: Bullet's death in Vietnam and the official telephone call ends a phase of her life. A vast distance separates Abigail from Bullet's death and his grave in Vietnam, yet she may seem for ever to be seated at the foot of his cross. We may envisage and enhance the ending as a pieta; not the mannered version by Michelangelo in the Vatican but that of Käthe Kollwitz in Berlin.

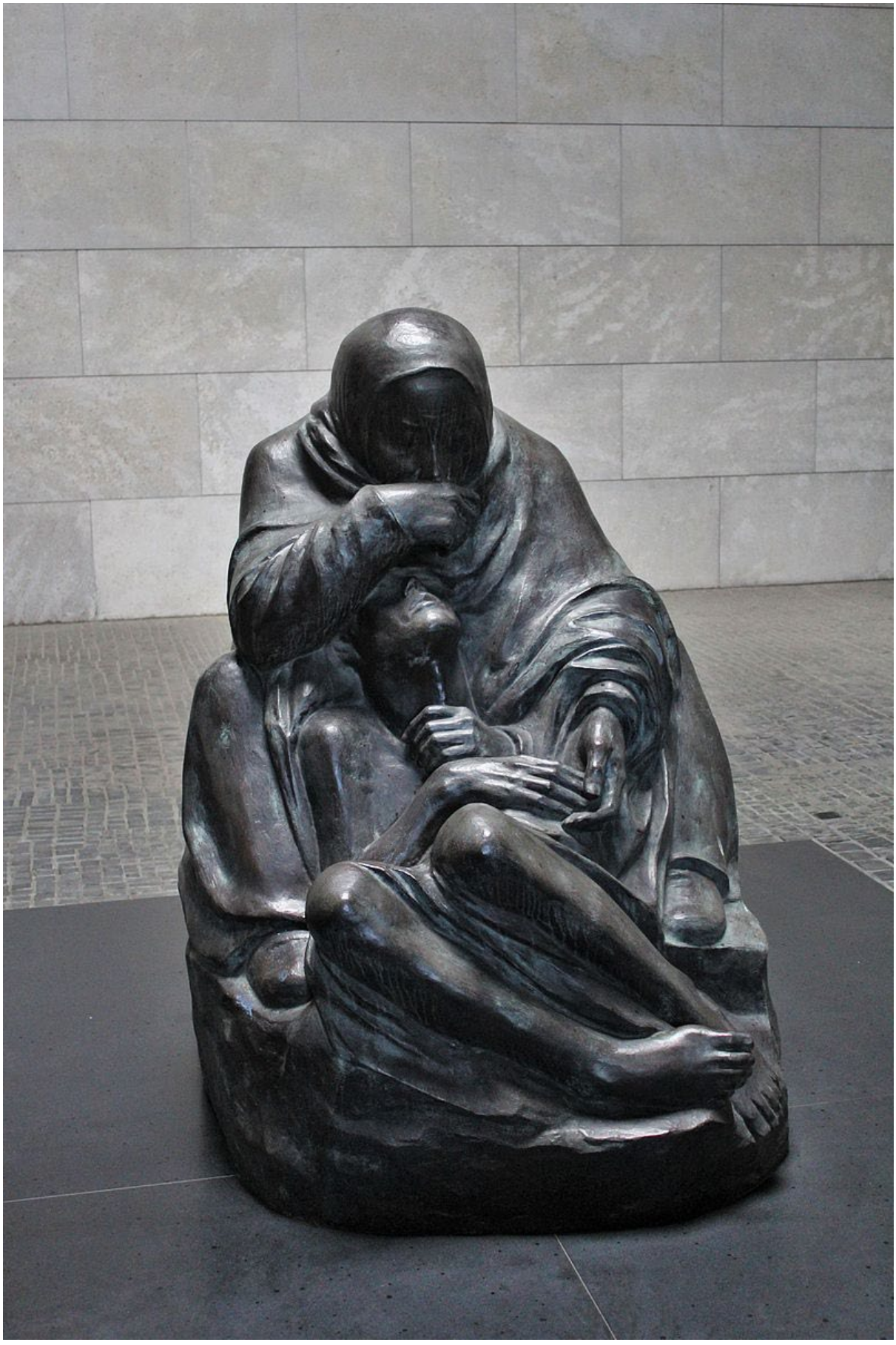


Fig. 4: Käthe Kollwitz: Pieta — Mother with her Dead Son. Berlin

The Runner ends with an intense, unsparing, focus on Abigail and is an important emotional link with the Tillerman's initial and hostile encounter with her in *Homecoming*. In an act which perversely returns us to the birth of her children she brutally cuts the cord that has brought her the news of Bullet's death and she sends the phone crashing through the window of the phone office (221-222). She is placing herself outside society and rejecting maternity and this perverse act establishes and defines her as a mad woman and to be avoided. It also reflects a culture that dictates that the mother exists to offer up her son on the patriarchal altars; her defiant gesture implies she is part of a tradition that goes back to the women of Athens and Sparta. This symbolic act of brutally cutting the telephone cord supports the ambivalence, the resistance, she experiences in responding to the children who arrive at her farm in *Homecoming* and which she shares with Dicey (364-68). She may also, as Jacqueline Rose sees Mary in Colm Toibin's novella *The Testament of Mary,* be walking away from her son's crucifixion and refusing her role described in "Stabat Mater" She refuse this canonical tableau, the predestined role of the afflicted mother and is "undoing centuries of glorified maternal pain" (14).

The loss of her three children will be ameliorated for Abigail in the act of accepting and gathering her four grandchildren around her, "my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth" in the language of Isaiah and in bringing Lisa's ashes home. The narrative cycle overall has revealed that it is life and not despair, as Martha Westwater reads in her Kristevan inspired study of adolescent fiction, that is waiting for Gram in the marsh grasses and at the end of the pier. Gram's stoic patience and determination to survive is rewarded: the sense the ending offered us on her returning to the farm after her encounter with the telephone office, of a return to the wintery kingdom

she has co-created and helped to perpetuate, is a false one. It will not always be winter on the farm and a thaw is destined to come and spring and light will embrace her, as the children in tearing down the honeysuckle allow light into the house and the narrative shows that, even late in her life, she is capable of integrating the good objects that her newly arrived grandchildren symbolise. As the *Runner* ends, she seems forever to be locked into the despair that is an image of her immersion in Klein's paranoid-schizoid. It is these children who will lead her out of the bleak, split and cold world her husband has created and help her to move from Klein's paranoid schizoid into the achievement of the depressive position. Her suffering acts as a transitional pace between Bullet's death and the children's arrival. Her grandchildren, like the children in Oscar Wilde's story, "The Selfish Giant", bring spring into the garden (31). They ensure that It will not always be winter there, where "the North Wind and the Hail and the Frost and the Snow danced about through the trees" (28). As she returns to the farm from Crisfield on the boat Bullet left her, it is a song of Lisa that she tries to recall and Lisa's voice that comes to her above the noise of the motor, the Scottish / Irish ballad "The Water is Wide" or "O Waly Waly" in the English folk song tradition, a ballad that is grounded in romantic betrayal, pain, and abjection. It returns us to Lisa's history but simultaneously manages to jump ahead and prefigures the children who are the carriers of song. This stress on Abigail reflects the underlying dynamic of the series; Abigail must now wait for the new life to arrive at the farm.

The novel moves beyond Bullet and in its focus on Gram anticipates the new family that will be formed on the farm: the series shows the children finding a suitable home and recreating maternity and family, but the tone of this novel is reactive and regressive; it exposes them, however obliquely and distantly, to the darker materials which are a dimension of their lives and new home. However,

the life of Bullet is not hermetically sealed within this book: his influence leaches out and affects other people; Bullet's life extends outside the frame of this novel and his mission to destroy the patriarchy that his father embodies is continued by his nephews in *Sons from Afar.* He influences the young, black man, Tamer Schipps, another runner, who will appear in the fifth novel *A Strange from Afar*, and Bullet appears in the photo albums brought down from the attic in Dicey 's Song and in his mother's memories. Despite the novel's bleakness, and the doomed aura that surrounds Bullet, there are other powerful, spiritual, even redemptive elements to be harvested from Bullet's short life. They are his relationship with Patrice, the boat-builder, his reaction to his encounter with Verricker and the effect the photograph Verricker produces has on him, his recognition of the beauty and the sexuality of the girl runner he notices and his contact with Tamer Schipps.

Working for Patrice and sharing coffee with him, as discussed earlier, gives Bullet a social outlet and a compensation for what is lacking at home and his decision to buy a boat with an engine from Patrice, create a legacy he leaves his mother. The novel is silent about Bullet's sexuality and there is no sense of any sexual relationships with the classmates he spends time in the school canteen with. He projects a hard and a dry, unflinching asceticism and he seems removed or banished from the sexuality we would expect him as an adolescent to be preoccupied by. He is waiting for the bus home from the meet at Fredricksburg when he notices a girl athlete. "She caught his eye first by the stillness of her waiting. She held his eye by her slender height and the proud way she moved into position. He only knew her beauty hit him like an explosion" (210). The description seems objective and meditative, but the word "explosion" suggests a moment of libido. The moment has no prologue or follow up; it stands alone as a momentary surge of libido and suggests an aspect of Bullet's persona distinct from

his male connections and the isolation of his running. This attempt to offer us "another" aspect of Bullet is not convincing. The incident does not integrate itself into the material of the text with any conviction or relevance. It briefly distracts us from the strong sense the narrative offers us of libido sublimated and displaced in Bullet's relentless, obsessive, almost onanistic running and from the driven intensity of the life or the calling Bullet has been forced to choose.

Voigt ensures that Dicey is not forgotten and Dicey makes a brief appearance in *The Runner* when Francis Verricker produces a creased photograph of an infant and shows it to Bullet when they accidentally meet in a roadhouse "It was a photograph of a kid, a little kid [. . .] It was like the kid was looking at Bullet and could see him" (119). This exposes Bullet to a vulnerable and unexpected place and forces him to experience emotions he has long buried; it generates his violent attack on Verricker's girl-friend's flashy car. The description of the impoverished life Lisa and her children are forced to live on Cape Cod – described in *Homecoming* (4-7) is contradicted by the self-serving and false description of his family which Verricker feeds Bullet (119-21). Bullet's reaction is grounded in his feelings about his own father and expresses an oedipal rage he shares across the generations with his nephews. This rage is buried in the narrative but emerges in *Sons from Afar* as a cross-generational legacy, when Sam and James, as they process their oedipal journeys discover a wish to hurt or kill their father (15, 228).

Bullet's relationship with Tamer Shipps's is of another order and has been initiated in chapter four when the coach asked him to look after the tall black runner. It is an example of a latent altruism that Bullet accidentally tumble upon. Tamer is older than the other students, is married and has a child. "See how he goes" is the coach's demand when he asks Bullet to run with Tamer. Bullet's own

relation with the coach has been formed in his relationship with his own father as it expresses the oedipal hostility which his father engenders and his initial relations with Tamer are grounded in racism and contempt:

> Bullet didn't say anything. "OK," he said now. "I read you, Whitey, just tell me what to do." He held his hand out. Bullet didn't take it to shake. The Negro acted if nothing had happened. The Negro approached Bullet, near the start. "Name's Tamer. Tamer Schipps. He tells me I should run cross country." (38)

Their first two-mile run together characterises their tense, hostile and silent relationship.

Bullet and Tamer have one final encounter before Bullet leaves for Vietnam and this dominates Tamer's memories of Bullet and one he eventually shares with Mina Smiths. This memory moves beyond Kristeva's linear and cyclical modes, entering the monumental time she describes in "Women's Time" and becomes for Tamer a part of the eternal place where myths and legends are enshrined (englobed) (189-192) . Monumental time for Kristeva, "has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits" (191). Bullet occupies an eternal and unresolved space in Tamer's personal psychic frieze. In *Stranger from Afar* the meeting at the church Mina engineers between Tamer and the Tillermans becomes a powerful experience of reconciliation and represents a recognition of the reality of these "englobed" experience that Kristeva refers to in

"Women's Time.[9] It is a meeting that while grounded in pain, loss, and regret arches beyond these emotions, transforms them and create healing.

Bullet and Tamer never become friends or companions. We do not see them "hang out" together. We see a grudging respect emerge but one laced with competitiveness and frustration. Bullet does not give Tamer an easy time and they circle each other with suspicion and alertness; they both watch and observe. Yet Bullet, despite the history of the bad objects he is forced to experience in his father's abuse and in his mother's silent collusion, is shown, in the narrative's penultimate stages, capable of creating good objects. The coach wants Bullet to take a place in the relay team, but he never runs on track. Bullet's response is eccentric and unexpected; he strikes a deal with Tamer, he will join the relay team but there is a cost, "If you'll give me your word to stay out of Vietnam" [. . .] Have another kid. Stay in school. Be a teacher. Get religion, whatever it takes. That one's not your war" (212). Tamer Schipps agrees and Bullet runs in the relay.

Kristeva in *Black Sun* offers a disturbing metaphor I will use to explore the death of Bullet and his grave in Vietnam. She refers to Holbein's painting of *The Dead Christ* in Basel. This horizontal and elongated painting breaks with many conventions that surround the iconography of the dead Christ and the canon it is a part of. Kristeva correctly describes it as "a disturbing picture" (107). The painting is a bleak depiction of an abandoned figure isolated in his stone tomb and o the supporting cast who usually make up this tableau that surrounds the dead Christ on his cross or his entombment are absent. The bleakness of the picture, the isolation of the Christ figure and the intensity of the suffering

[9] "Women Time" P 189.

he has experienced suggest Bullet's distant violent death and the impersonal funeral he probably experienced and the military ceremony thousands of miles from home. The painting depicts a man, who apart from the stigmata on the right hand that faces the viewer has none of the attributes that we associate with the dead Christ. The body is brutalised and in the early stage of putrefaction, the face, often depicted as a peace and transfigured, is disturbed. The gaunt, emaciated body is gaunt suggests the son abandoned by his powerful father (Eloi, Eloi. Lama sabachtami, My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?). The painting depicts a secular Christ stripped of all pretentions to divinity: there is no sense of resurrection, of transcendence or redemption about this body and no sense of a stone waiting to be rolled back. This image, and the death it describes are as meaningless as Bullet's in Vietnam. It radically interrogates the language of male privilege and male power consistently embodied in the imagery and language of biblical kingship and lordship. The painting comment on the father who has abandoned him on.

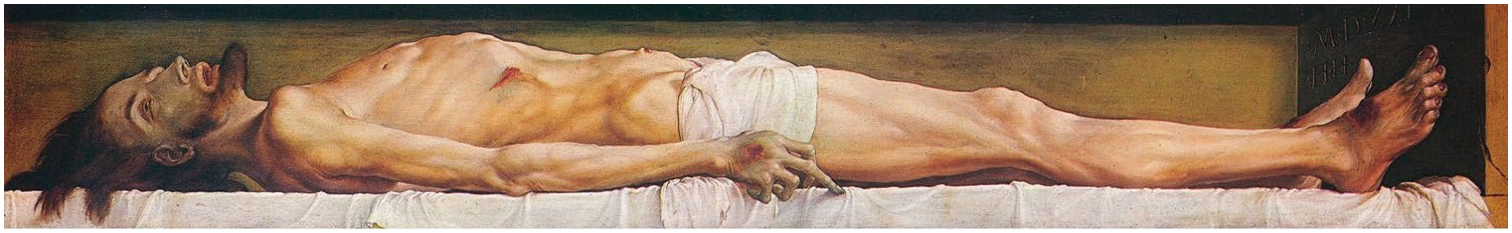


Fig. 5: Hans Holbein the Younger: The Body of the Dead Christ in his Tomb

The story of Bullet is not completed by the nihilism of this far-off death. He confronts this senseless, eternal, paternal, power, and he lives on in his altruism which extends outward. Bullet gifts his mother with a boat with a motor engine to allow her to safely navigate the headland and make her shopping trips and he has a powerful and enabling role in the life of Tamer Schipps, who appears as a grown man in the next and fifth novel, *A Stranger from Afar*. He overcomes the racism that dominated his initial engagement with Tamer. Bullet's photograph in the photo albums brought down from the attic in *Dicey's Song* and is the subject of the story Gram shares with her grandchildren as *Dicey's Song* concludes.

Bullet's life, as was his sister Lisa's, seems doomed: they are casualties of their father's unresolved and profound damage. They, like the absent brother, Johnny, are driven from their home and into a world they have not been prepared for and their future seems reactive and driven and not controlled by voluntary choice and agency. John Tillerman represents another Kristevan semiotic chora that lurks at the farm, and that is only remotely suggested. This invisible chora is a cauldron of negativity and supressed attritional damage and is indirectly seen in his crude orality and greed and in his need to destroy; his marriage and his children are the obvious, primary targets. Bullet's death strips his father of relevance as there is no longer a child to box in. Like Uranus in the Black Paintings by Goya (see Fig. 6) he has devoured his children. The "death" of John Tillerman is a moral and spiritual one and takes place within the dynamics of the mythic but it can only be achieved by a sacrificial victim and echoes both the destruction of the old covenant and Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son which is the foundational moment of this covenant. Bullet in the final moments of the fourth book — and of his life — become this victim. He destroys this covenant and this hegemonic power it insists on

maintaining as his death makes it irrelevant. John Tillerman the founding father vanishes from the series.

Bullet finds what can only be described as his humanity and offers it to another. Bullet confronts his own humanity and transcends and humanises the aggressive egoism he has consistently expressed. The world that created Bullet does not allow the word friendship and its resonances to surface and its affects are not available to him. Friendship in its usual connotations is not part of the emotional life he has experienced and been formed by and he lacks the language to easily transcend this. He creates a powerful and lasting connection with Tamer and he overcomes his racism and manages to be a lifelong influence and presence and one the older man carries for the rest of his life. He is a pivotal enabler in Tamer's life.



Fig 6: Francisco Goya: Uranus — The Black Paintings

GOLGOTHA

We can imagine Lisa and Bullet, in a post-Christian reading or a secular reading inspired by biblical themes and language, experiencing a private Golgotha but Bullet, unlike Lisa, manages to mark and invest his *via dolorosa* with enormous altruism. The moral impulse Bullet demonstrates in the final pages leaves his father in his twisted sensibility, far behind; Bullet's death strips his father of relevance, there is no longer a child to box in. The "death" of his father is a moral and spiritual one and takes place within the dynamics of the mythic. If his father in the role of Abraham creates a perverse judgemental world, characterised by hatred, anger and Kleinian envy then Bullet in the final moments of the book — and of his life — destroys this covenant and creates a space for a new and generous, affiliative world to emerge and to replace it. In a series of books, which, as has been noted earlier, resists being identified with or influenced by formal religion there is an ambivalence in the texts; we do not have to accept the emergence of a new Covenant exemplified in the New Testament and the gospel but a judgmental world is rendered irrelevant and a transcendent world arrives on the farm. The Christian imagery of light is invoked in the children's first task at the farm; they allow light to penetrate into their grandmother s home.

The novel ends in despair and hopelessness but Bullet's death need not be read as a waste as it can be invested with sacrificial and redemptive overtones. This, when we remember how his father, as Voigt describes him, haunted and possessed the farm, is an exceptional achievement and Voigt how the and the children on their arrival contradict and defy the destruction John tillerman has created. something that manages to be simultaneously an experience of Kristevan abjection and human

transcendence. They waste no time in demonstrating that their presence can transform their grandmother's life. Bullet, despite the sordid waste of his life in Vietnam, reveals the human spirit transcendent. The narrative, despite the inexorable energetic hubris of Bullet's running, manages to vision for us a spiritual moment. The final moment of the novel when we see Gram bizarrely sever the telephone cord is a false ending. John Tillerman is still alive but is made irrelevant and powerless.

SONS FROM AFAR

The sixth novel of the series begins with an exploration of Gram's feelings as she reflects on the new life she is living with her adopted grandchildren. It is an extended reflection on the jouissance the children have brought into her life. She is busy at the sink: Dicey is away at college, James and Sam are busy down at the pier and Marybeth is practicing at the piano. When Gram stops rinsing and sluicing the dishes, she hears the notes of the music but as the narrative develops the novel becomes suddenly and unexpectedly an explicit oedipal experience as the boys go on a search for their father. This lengthy reverie seems surprising and the shift from Gram's processes to the two adolescent boys is sudden and offers no sense of transition. The opening may suggest an extended meditation on the new life and the new values that now represent the home life of the Tillermans but the two parts do not segue into each other. At the end of *The Runner,* we saw a desolate Gram return to the farm as she faced the remainder of her life and becomes the grieving mother of the "Stabat Mater". This new Gram is now deeply invested and absorbed in her new family. The ruptured mother facing loss and vanishing from the narrative who concluded *The Runner*, and the resurrected mother busy with the chores that symbolise her new family are sandwiched between the two oedipal struggle and the focus

of this chapter is James and Sam's continuation of the task which Bullet's death initiated. This sudden transition in its abruptness is stark. The two boys leave the security and comfort of their new home to search for an unknown father. They abandon Dicey's achievement in finding and creating home. The seductive mirage of a father which leads them away from the farm will soon evolve into a frightening and life-threatening encounter with brutality.

The novel leaves the actual father to one side and instead focuses on his legacies and the traces of their father which James and Sam grapple with. The Tillerman women are excluded from this search for the paternal and the core oedipal task and processes are confined to the males. Verricker, the father, does not appear in the text and remains in a borderland but he saturates the narrative, and as his sons draw closer to Al's Bar in Baltimore, where they are directed to discover information about their father, he becomes more dangerous. The two boys, as the narrative progressively reveals, are allowing themselves to move within the circle of this malignity and in their curiosity and naivety they are allowing him a validity and power in their lives. They struggle with their oedipal legacy which is one of abject deprivation, and they come dangerously near the burning sun that is their father's violence; but this struggle ultimately strengthens their position in the symbolic. They must seek out and experience and confront their father's legacy in all its potent patriarchal embodiment in the novel's climax in the docklands of Baltimore. They have never experienced a father and they must enter the void the paternal absence designed for them and fill this void with a new capacity to perform as sons, brothers, and men. John Tillerman, the founding father, is not forgotten: a special place is reserved for him and he appears once more incarnated as the Chief, the leader of the Seaman's Union.

James once again becomes the storyteller, as he did in the car in *Homecoming* and tells himself and his brother a story which is a moral comment on their oedipal situation. The fairy tale, "Hansel and Gretel" launched their journey in *Homecoming* and suggested their initial plight and vulnerability, however, here James tells the story of Daedalus and his son Icarus (11-13). Dicey's' journey to the overgrown farm in *Homecoming* suggests a labyrinthine journey and evokes Daedalus

the builder of the original labyrinth. The story of Daedalus seems to fall outside the energies of Freud's fascination with the Oedipal myth as it contains nothing of Freud's male negativity, but it resonates with the series overall with a deep negative capacity. The myth is the story of a father who cares for his child and does all he can to protect him. Daedalus has fashioned wings of feather and wax and warns Icarus as they fly away from their island prison to fly low and avoid the sun as its heat will melt his wings. The son ignores his father's advice, he flies upwards, his wings melt, and he plummets into the sea and drowns. The myth deals with a person significantly absent from the series and instead, a destructive fatherhood is waiting to be explosively confronted when they meet the chief in Baltimore. Ironically, one of the rare, good fathers of the text, Rev. Smiths, Mina's father, drives them on the first stage of their journey and the mention of Daedalus at the beginning of the novel is balanced by the mention of another good father, Colin's stepfather, in the second last chapter.

They reach the bar and experience the climactic moment of their trip; the seamen's chief, when they identify themselves as Francis Verricker's sons looks for revenge for the crimes their father has committed (222-229). We are brought back in the chief's sense of a blinded justice to the environment that marked the farm while John Tillerman was alive. The chief incarnates their

grandfather and shows no respect for their innocence. They experience the crude, attritional justice of the old covenant their grandfather represented and against which Bullet fought and they meet again and re-experience the destructive and life-threatening morass of Klein's split early world. Their presence as Verricker's sons generates a violent and explosive melee and exposes the violence that is buried at the bar. The boys escape from the bar injured and scarred but alive. The two boys now bear on their bodies the final and definitive legacy of Verricker's paternity. The melee in the bar that their presence creates and the sirens that signal the arrival of the police, suggest that this patriarchal hegemony has imploded. The task which Bullet initiated by his sacrificial death in Vietnam has been continued and concluded by his nephews. The wounds they suffer in the bar externalise the internal damage they, and their family, have carried all their lives. James and Sam have not only exposed their traces of the damage their father caused, but the scene in the bar may also lead to the destruction of the patriarchy started by John Tillerman and perpetrated into the boy's time by the chief.

The novel does not end in the alley the boys retreat to; they return home, their wounds are treated by Dr. Landros, a woman doctor, and they are collected by Gram (237-38). We are again in the presence of the female maternal and the excursion into the paternal ratifies the belief that paternity is dangerous and needs to be anchored in an entity like Kristeva's ethical maternal. The boys escape, but it is the maternal, embodied in their grandmother and a woman doctor they turn to for the healing and the recognition they now need. The fantasy, which the boys may have unconsciously desired and reached out for, to live in a family with a functioning father and mother is an illusion and lacks foundations. This myth, if it had any value or substance, crumbles in the alley.

These moments of pain and deliverance in the alley suggest that Lisa must not be blamed for her abandonment of her children and the haphazard life she offered them. The causes are elsewhere; they must be traced back to the partners and fathers who created and maintained the system that primed her for the despair that conditioned her decisions. The presence of maternal abuse in the series must not distract us from the reality that is linked to absent, indifferent, and abusive fathers. The two Tillerman books that this chapter is based on reveal this: paternal abuse is a reality at the heart of the Tillerman cycle; the father revealed in the oedipal that the series explores is dangerous and damaging. Lisa in escaping from her abusive father and the farm found herself trapped by another man, Francis Verricker, as malign as her father. Dicey in the essay she wrote about her mother, which is central to the narrative of *Dicey 's Song,* expresses respect and compassion and avoids blame or judgment, and makes no reference to the father, quietly but implicitly reinforces this. James and Sam resume their lives and despite their journey's apparent failure it allows them to create a sustaining version of fatherhood in their own budding but different masculinities and one which transcends and dispenses with their natural father, Verricker.

THE POST-OEDIPAL WORLD

The narrative does not end with the scene in the alley where the two boys absorb the horror they have escaped from and processes the effects the journey has on their evolving lives. James has allowed himself to be used by one of the school jocks, Andy Arnold, and is supplying him with essays and notes for the French Literature course they are registered for; Arnold needs the grades these give him to ensure an athletic scholarship. When Arnold approaches James in the school canteen he knows what

he is being asked to do and he cannot ignore the unequal and abusive reality of this relationship: he has no illusions about his collusion and he has no right to accuse Arnold of cheating when he is the enabler and facilitator of the abuse:

> James knew what he was being asked but he didn't dare name it to Andy [. . .] Or maybe he thought James has been happily going along with it all year. Which he sort of had, James realised, admitted, almost choking on a wave of self-disgust that broke right up in his face [. . .] he wasn't any better and maybe he was even worse. (106-107)

James cannot deny or suppress the self-disgust he feels. He had admitted before the oedipal journey that he "feels lost and helpless and confused" (20). He feels an outsider in his school community and in his own family and seemed to be priming himself for his unequal and abusive relationship with Arnold. James confronts the abjection that this relationship reveals, but James must experience and enter the oedipal horror they experience in Al's Bar before he reaches this enrichment and capacity (240-42). The trip to Baltimore forces him to recalibrate his perception of his father and his brother, and as they lie bruised in the alley, they are new sons and new brothers and he is a new man. James must experience and undergo this oedipal experience before he has the confidence to confront Arnold and the relic of his father that this man and this relationship embody.

The depth and ramifications of this abject relationship James is colluding with is illustrated in the incident of the chocolate cake Maybeth has baked (106-07). Arnold, in passing his desk, casually picks up and eats the portion of cake which James has been looking forward to. Arnold then disposes

of James as he does the paper the cake was wrapped in. Arnold is a predatory male and the despoilment of the cake must in some symbolic way represent the potential "despoilment" of James' sister and earlier, in the world that existed before the series, his mother by her partner. The cake and its fate succinctly represent the misogynistic attitudes men like Arnold represent; he is continuing the selfishness Verricker represents and reveals the patriarchy as domineering, aggressive and grotesquely disrespectful of women and those who are socially defined as "different".

The relationship between James and Andy Arnold is essentially and relentlessly functional and predatory: Arnold takes, and James gives. James is the unlucky prey and shows his self-disgust in the violent way he crumples the paper that wrapped the chocolate cake. "It could be worse, he thought, almost amused. He could have other classes with Andy!" (107). As he trudged up the path to the farmhouse in the rain, he has a moment of illumination about his collusion with this abject thing that he is possessed by: he feels the rain flattening him and dragging him down to the abyss that his collusion represents (108-9). The abjection James feels is different from that experienced by Dicey and Mina where their gifts are the target, yet in its insidiousness and its capacity to penetrate to a shifting, vulnerable core it is similar: the crisis of abjection James feels is not so much about the copying of his work but about the self-disgust this collusion poses for him and the shame it reveals. Much earlier in the narrative Voigt has described James outside the aura of this abuse and we return to Handel's *Messiah* where, as he sings the Halleluiah chorus in the school choir he relives the moment Gram announced they could live with her. He can only express this moment by imagining it as "the whole school singing the chorus from the *Messiah*. It was that kind of feeling" (22-23).

James bandaged like an athlete by Dr. Andros confronts Arnold and breaks his control by using his superior intellectual gifts: the example of his younger brother has helped to prime him for this task. Sam would have reacted aggressively to Arnold. James' reaction of disgust to Arnold and to his father, Verricker is understandable but is replaced by another version of male supremacy and control. The novel ends in an almost mock-heroic moment: the two boys continue the theme of repulsion at the predatory male but convert it into a decision to take their sister, Maybeth to a prom and commit themselves to her protection from men like her father and Arnold. This may be a benign and caring aspect of the masculine and a rejection of the predatory and the abusive, but it remains a masculine position and is grounded in the ownership of male power and control. It is not influenced by their sister's views on their decision: she is not consulted and there are, it seems, at this moment, clear limits to the social realities of the lateral communications James and Sam discovered on the road. Jeff Hearn and Michael Kimmel in their 2006 article on masculinities highlight an important moral reality:

> Feminism has demonstrated many theoretical and practical lessons for men [. . .] One is that the understanding of gender relations has to involve attention to questions of power. Another is that to transform gender relations, and specifically men's continued dominance of much of social life, means changes not only in what women do and are but also in what men do and are. (Hearn and Kimmel 55)

Jeff and Sam, while they are on a road of discovery, have not yet fully grasped the implication of consistently exploring and exposing the dynamics revealed in the gendered relationships they are part

of and in the unconscious power their male position allow them to feel they are entitled to. The quotation by Hearn and Kimmel is a precautionary social and ethical warning. The two boys show a readiness to change but this readiness is circumscribed by attitudes which they have yet to recognise and process. They are still attached to and captivated by acceptance of a type of male dominance of which they are unaware. They are still beholden to a vertical system of gender relations and perceptions which the ethical maternal, Kristeva's new radical "law" implodes and they unconsciously reveal the difficulties men experience in recognising and shedding hegemonic values. James and Sam, as they struggle with their oedipal legacies are still part of the dysfunctional genealogy their father and grandfather represent. Their education is incomplete: they are still unconsciously continuing the patriarchy and its pervasive "founding "qualities and resisting the imaginative option and the maternality at the heart of this research.

In another comment on this sibling dynamic , Kristeva, in "The Adolescent Novel" mentions Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and speaks of "the father and guilt, of brothers and the homosexuality *between* them and always *through* the intermediary of the father – figure who remains the pivot of desire" (original italics, 20). Voigt in stressing the sons relationship with the paternal and their need to confront patriarchy is consistently ensuring that we experience the problematic issues patriarchy creates for maternity: this need to deal with the patriarchal legacy is illustrated in the wish of the brothers to find for their sister a man, a beau, a gentleman caller, who is not their father but who, in his maleness and desirability, is deemed to be appropriate and appeals to them, a sublimation of an imaginary adolescent homosexuality.

James and Sam subvert Freud's original oedipal complex; they insert themselves into the very depth of its dynamic and potential for violence. The melee at Al's Bar allows them to accept its effect on their male bodies; they become its bruised victims. They do this as males and they accept in their lives and bodies the strange stipulations and realities that Freud saw — and decreed — as the oedipal corporal experience the girl must experience; passivity, helplessness, lack and a destiny dominated by the patriarchal phallus. The female struggles to define herself in a world where her body is characterised by a primal want and lack; in Freud's original hegemonic world the girl will spend her life in submission and expected to be conscious of her castrated state. These three men, as earlier Bullet had accepted a move into this destructive binary, symbolically accept a form of castration and a gendered transfiguration — a psychic feminisation — a lack which they allow to be deeply engraved as suffering on their young bodies. This implies the brutal acceptance of the very psychic want or lack which is traditionally associated with women and the domination which Freud decreed for women. The three men subversively experience what it means to be "anchored in the hearts of the dominated", as Jessica Benjamin claims (5).

Sam's experiences after the trip are not as dramatic, or as angst ridden as his brother and they are mediated by his innate qualities. Sam empathises with Colin, who will help him on the boat for the summer and who has also known a distant and neglecting father. On their first day on the bay Sam and his new friend talk about their families (257-259). Sam discovers that Colin had a neglectful father but is in a secure, blended relationship with his mother and her second partner; he has acquired a real father, his version of Dedalus. Colin's revelations expose his own father's abuses and his mother's unhappiness, but they also reflect core aspects of the Tillerman history; Colin's natural father made

his mother cry and never visits his son. Sam as he listens to Colin's raw memories experiences his own hurt at the feelings these memories excavate for him, "it hurt him to love momma and to wonder if his father had been different, if she didn't need to go crazy and die. If there had been someone there taking care of her instead of someone needing to be taken care of" (259). The telling of these different stories is itself an acceptance of oedipal issues and challenges. The two friends have all summer on the bay, as they consolidate their friendship, to name and heal the traces of this Kristevan chora that is an essential part of their background. Sam has the recent catharsis of his trip to Baltimore to learn from, to empower and strengthen him and Colin has a nurturing family, a secure base, where he is cherished and loved, to return to every day.

The use of movement between Klein's two positions, the schizoid, and the depressive shows all the significant protagonists move more deeply into the depressive position, Klein's essential destination: a moral as well as a tragic journey. It indirectly reflects the stress Kristeva places on the essential ethical aspects of her maternality. James and Sam have finally confronted their father's dangerous oedipal legacy and any remaining paternal debt has been paid. James reaches and owns a real and truthful oedipal emotion: "he could kill his father for what he'd done to them" which goes far beyond hi earlier rationalisations (228). Both James and Sam have returned, in the novel's violent climax at Al's Bar, to Klein's first position and meet again that primal violence and disintegration possible back there and experience the extreme emotions possible in that position. They also reveal that they can process these emotions and move beyond them.

The approach to the dockside bar anticipated what is awaiting them and suggests the potential nemesis it offers: the bar is on a street of temporary rooming houses and surrounded by small restaurants that "looked too dirty to want to eat in", there are no trees just a concrete pavement and battered cars. The air is chilly and James guessed that the street must be a place where transient people lived, "nothing – not houses, cars or business – looked taken care of [. . .] he didn't let his eyes look down the occasional narrow alley that lay dark between two buildings". In an important observation James notice that there are no children playing on the streets outside (208-209). He is afraid. This is not a place for the child and the unwary but this danger and threat has existed across the series. In the world created in *Homecoming* Dicey would have steered them from these streets and avoided Al's Bar and its beckoning pink neon sign, as her quick response saved them from the predatory farmer, Rudyard (272-275). Dicey is away at college but, were she present, she would have distorted and disrupted the essential oedipal nature of the trip as it is one the two boys must commit themselves to and experience. The one character who defends them in the bar when they identify themselves and provoke the chief's anger may be a casualty of the violence that James and Sam narrowly escape from. The chief in quoting the bible, "the sins of the father shall be visited upon the sons. Until the seventh generation" offers a comment on the retributive and unforgiving nature of this law he shares with their grandfather which they have exposed themselves to (224). This blind, rigid, polarised law must be experienced and processed before there is any possibility of entering the depressive position where a more flexible and a more variable approach to moral issues can be experienced. In making their journey and confronting the chief and his righteousness, the violence they provoke may have, progressed the work Bullet initiated almost a generation ago.

The two books, *The Runner* and *Sons from Afar* are suffused with aggression and live on the edges of violence: the oedipal is a maelstrom of powerful and unreconciled emotions we struggle to name and integrate and is, as Freud saw it, the essential laboratory where so much emotional experiences is first met and processed. In *The Runner* the violence is mainly confined to the verbal and Bullet's violent death in distant Vietnam: we see it in the father's dictats and Bullet's silent, resentful, responses. The communications between mother and son are edgy and much is left unsaid and unreconciled. There is an early death when Bullet accidentally shoots Lisa's dog. These suppressed layers find a climactic expression in Bullet's death in Vietnam, but this happens thousands of miles away from Crisfield and is indirectly dealt with in the narrative. The second book also represses this violence until its climax, and we see the two boys forced to access a realistic and grounded feeling about their father.

Freud's "primal scene", the child's imaginary recollection of his parents' intercourse, and which Hinshelwood claims is the earliest and most primitive phantasm of the oedipal situation may be invoked here (242). The primal scene usually depicts the male as aggressive and violent (Laplanche and Pontalis 335) and this aspect of the scene fuels the two boys' latent, unconscious anger. The existence of predatory males across the Tillerman series expresses this buried aspect of the oedipal. Klein's adaption of the primal scene in her idea of the "combined parental figure", (1926, 1932) where the parents are phantasised by the child as involved in a permanent and exclusive coitus, exposes a vast range of inchoate, inexpressible emotions which suggests the projections and introjections that James, Sam and the earlier Samuel, struggle with and that are underlying the oedipal journeys they all embark on. The movements that the journeys imply is given a theoretical formula by Donald Meltzer

where he saw the struggle towards sexuality and creativity as a struggle to move beyond the part-object represented by "the combined parental figure" and to reconstruct it as a complete and more realistic whole object. This of course will only happen when the depressive position is reached and where "Internally such a realistic parental intercourse forms an internal object — or felt to be the fount — of personal creativity: sexual, intellectual and aesthetic" (243). Meltzer describes an overarching moral vision which illuminates the new life and the new objects emerging for James and Sam. We saw these new objects expressed and positively acknowledged in Sam's reactions to Colin's family. Meira Likierman expands the possibilities of the depressive position by including "the addition of responsibility to the typical range of depressive emotions" and admits that this expansion of the implications of Klein's depressive "has been broadly accepted, and it has the effect of tilting the concept from a definition in terms of anxiety and suffering to a definition which accentuated moral achievement" (116). Bullet and his nephews have initiated and been participants in a moral journey within the overall narrative and they have revealed the moral and personal possibilities it implies. Voigt has earlier identified and described an important example of the achievement of the emotions of the depressive stage when the children and Gram experience and process the complex ambivalences their mother's death and funeral generate in *Dicey 's Song* (220).

The narrative shows both boys create good new objects and move away from the oedipal and leave their father in whatever place he resides, alive or dead. They have carved out a new place for themselves. The interest James showed in Mendel and his genetic theories was the ostensible cause of the journey to confront their father but we can, with their father symbolically dispatched, and their mission completed and now returned to the maternal family they are committed to, revisit Mendel's

theoretical model. Dicey reminds us of Abigail but she also has her father's shrewdness and Maybeth has inherited her mother's beauty, sensitivity and musicality but her diffidence and her innocence make her vulnerable. Sam has inherited his father's aggression, canniness, and social charm and like his uncle Sam, he "plays to his own rules" (*The Runner* 49). James has inherited his grandfather's brains, his intellectual curiosity and his voracity and orality. The two boys transcend their genetic legacy and their achievement is not to do with mourning or regretting their father but with celebrating what they find within themselves. The narrative overall shows all four children accepting this inheritance, integrating it, and forming what are becoming individual personalities. These inherited qualities were born into a culture of despair and nurtured in want and deprivation. The children were exposed to aggression and abuse. They experienced abandonment. They and their uncle before them inherited a harsh and unforgiving covenant and an old law. The Tillerman's journey to the farm and the shelter offered by their grandmother brought them to a different place and offered them the space where a new law, a new covenant, expressed in a new and radical ethical consciousness, could be realised.

CHAPTER FOUR:

SEVENTEEN AGAINST THE DEALER

> It struck her all at once that dealing with other human beings was an awful lot of work.
>
> - Anne Tyler, *Back When We Were Grownups. p 16*

> Just as triumphant self-discovery is the goal of the male *Bildungsroman*, anxious self-denial Bronte suggests, is the ultimate product of a female education. What Catherine, or any girl must learn, is that she does not know her own name, and therefore cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be.
>
> - Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* p 275

> I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped [. . .] I abandoned it and framed a humbler application. For change, stimulus. That petition too seemed swept up into vague space. “Then I cried”, half desperate, “grant me, at least, a new servitude.”
>
> -Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* p 87

The seventh book of the Tillerman series places Dicey Tillerman, now a young woman, at its centre and describes her preoccupation with three concerns: her career as a boat builder, her relationship with her boyfriend, Jeff Green, and her family at Crisfield. These three areas of her life are intertwined with each other and become the substantial, intricate, dynamic of this final novel. This chapter interrogates the final novel’s exploration of the difficulties Dicey experiences in her relationship and

the implications these have for the final resolution of the series. The difficulties and challenges she has to overcome are all grounded in her past and its scripts and impact deeply on her attempts to be the self she desires and struggles to be. Dicey is back on the narrow ridge her history and the abjection she must deal force her to traverse. The events of the final book are conditioned and influenced by her history, the bizarre demands imposed on her in the opening page of the first novel, and the inevitable relational conflicts and ambivalence her problematic past engendered in her life and across the series. The final book of the series contrasts sharply with the opening volume: the vision and imagination that propelled her forwards in *Homecoming* is here replaced by a progressively restrictive and punishing set of events revealed in the presence of the overarching founding father and the monstrous mother who appear for a final, climactic, confrontation.

This final book is also marked by the arrival of a new character, the Cisco Kid, who is initially part of the population of "enabling" older men, who appear across the cycle; like Will Hawkins, Brother Thomas, and Patrice, he seems to be a rescuer and an enabler. He may even be or substitute for the good, functional father she and her siblings have never experienced. This expectation is dashed and his true nature and the damage he conceals will be revealed. The Cisco Kid become Dicey 's nemesis, but he has been present in the selfishness of Francis Verricker's legacy and in the earlier, destructive founding father we met in *The Runner*; he brings this legacy to a devastating climax. He represents any residual oedipal remnant that the two oedipal books, the subject of the last chapter, failed to extinguish.

Dicey is a consistently strong protagonist and her success in finding a home for her family and her potential function as a role model for girls has been focused on by many critics. This is an important

claim but as this chapter will argue, in this final book it become difficult to sustain. Mary Lou Maples and Bette Dean Newman claim that Dicey is an appropriate role model for adolescent readers and displays traits that are desirable in human self-worth. Kay Vandergrift describes her as "one of the most popular heroines of contemporary young adult literature" (np) and her final comment on Dicey , that she "moves out of a lonely silence into a song of celebration with family and friends", is a condensed, lyrical summary of her place in the series but it fail to express the depth and the complexity of the series. Elizabeth Pearce is more restrained in her appreciation of Dicey and while she does not describe her as a role model, she explores the gender issues she represents and adjusts to, in her role as mother and family organiser (136). Dicey "continually struggles to define herself as an individual and a member of a family" (136) and she constantly searches for a home and a carer who will care for them and who they can also care for. In a comment which relates to Voigt's target audience, Pearce feels that Dicey exhibits "this struggle between independence and dependence [. . .] one of the central conflicts of adolescence" (138). C. J. Town in her 2004 study of adolescent heroines, *The New Southern Girl,* while over-zealously placing Dicey in an explicit southern context, stresses her capacity to reconcile the challenges she faces (163). Victor Watson correctly claims that "Dicey remains the centre. The series begins with her and returns to her at the end" (536). This comment stresses her crucial importance throughout the series.

Dicey at the centre of Voigt's series is "living the abject" in her own way and fashion: the characteristics she reveals and the choices she makes bring us closer to the reality she is trying to create for herself in the difficult circumstances her story has created, and these choices involve, as the series reveals, a complex relationship with abjection. She is clearly not a conventional or an average

heroine and the series describes possible ways of living authentically which may expand the horizons and the permissions and the recognitions, the young reader is searching for. She has many of the typical features of YA protagonists: defiance, eccentricity, determination, and a capacity, in Trites' phrase, "to disturb the universe". She also demonstrates the "contrariness", of Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, a quality which was essential for that protagonist. Mary Lennox, like Dicey , would not have survived if she had not embraced and cultivated this innate, and for Burnett's heroine, vital contrariness, and "queerness". Further back in the golden age canon there are affinities with Alice who questions everything she meets in Carroll's Wonderland. Dicey and many of the characters we meet in children's literature create secret places and processes, which regularly exist in defiance of the society that surrounds them, and it is in these places that their essential needs are often met and encouraged. The Tillermans and their grandmother create a radical and transgressive family in Crisfield and attempt to construct a family life marked by a respect for "otherness" but the final novel abruptly contradicts this apparently central message and suddenly describes a return to the patriarchal and the hegemonic.

DICEY'S PROGRESS ACROSS THE CYCLE

The first volume described Dicey 's fascination with the sea and boats and revealed an important insight into her true self and the world she tries to create for herself. She has always lived near the sea but her first experience of sailing is when two boys, Tom, and Jerry, offered to sail them across the bay in *Homecoming*. This moment of transcendence and spiritual awakening in *Homecoming* simultaneously creates a shifting but powerful image of the home they are seeking. "She had never

sailed in Provincetown. They had never been asked" (*Homecomin*g 300). This moment is a new experience. It provokes in her a meditative calm, a calm that integrates her experiences and her yearnings, and shows her reaching a deep personal, spiritual, recognition:

> Dicey wished she could stop breathing and give herself entirely over to the movement and the being still. Maybe she could learn to sail. Maybe she could go to sea, somehow. A boat could be a home [. . .] Everyone who was born was cast onto the sea. Winds could blow them in all directions. Tides would rise and turn, in their own rhythm. And the boats – they just went along as best they could, trying to find a harbour. (301)

Dicey imagines or fantasies about never needing a harbour and drifting forever but she is confronted by the reality that her family needs a home and realizes that the fantasy is a moment of escapism; the Tillermans must find a safe harbour and a secure anchorage, and that responsibility lies on her shoulders. The transcendence this passage revealed must be put to one side; at this moment she was content to "sit still and silent" (*Homecoming* 301). "As long as I'm near the water, she thought, that'll be enough." She reminds herself that she must think of James, Samuel, and Maybeth (302) but when they finally reach the farm, in *Homecoming,* its proximity to the sea, and the discovery of her long-vanished uncle Johnny's boat stored away in the barn in its tarpaulin shroud, validates her fantasy about boats and convinces her that the farm is the place where home, and a new life, might be established. The discovery of the boat and the joy of restoring it is a reward for her unsparing dedication and commitment to family; in this final novel the early fantasies about the sea are

converted into a career decision. Dicey decides to become a boat builder and rents a workshop, and while it seems to be the realization of her dream, it is fraught with risk and the possibility of misfortune. So certain is she that she will survive in this all-male world that she has blinded herself to the concealed historic and archetypal realities that surround her decision. In *Dicey's Song* the family transport Johnny's boat down to Gram's pier to launch and test its seaworthiness but in what may be an omen of her choice of career the boat sinks into the waters of Chesapeake Bay (8).

Dicey , however, exults in the knowledge that nobody had done what she plans to do, to start her own boatyard from nothing:

> At least nobody in Crisfield, or Annapolis, or points between, had done it. Boatyards were inherited, father to son, or bought out. Nobody just started one. But nobody had had done a lot of what she had done in her life [. . .] Just because nobody had done something, did not mean that Dicey couldn't. (9)

This comment may conceal behind its optimism a dark reality; it may be an expression of a hubristic sense of omnipotence. She does not seem to acknowledge or question the implications of her decision to be a boat builder. In her failure to grasp or respect the traditional, restrictive nature of the profession she has chosen she may be revealing a hubristic, Kleinian manic defence. The manic defences as described by Klein are a set of behavioural responses to the awkward and troubling emotions which the depressive position can create; they are grounded in denial but the feeling of omnipotence is one Klein particularly recognised. Dicey's refusal to accept the difficulties her career choice implies and her dismissal of them as irrelevant to her is an example of omnipotence.

Dicey's response, "just because nobody had done something, didn't mean that Dicey couldn't" (9) in its dismissive denial is naïve and fails to grasp the nature and consequence of her decision. Dicey ignores the reality that she is entering into an area of gendered, complicated skills and practices: a tradition historically and exclusively associated with and populated by men, a "closed" male trade, one with enormous possibilities for misogyny and one that can be traced back to the original aggressive colonial founding fathers. The children's journey south ironically coincidentally traverses many of the places associated with this early colonial adventure.

The abject she experienced at school has not gone away and returns to torment her: her workshop is broken into, and all her hard earned and diligently restored tools are gone. Some of her tools because of their age and the care she has taken to restore them are literally irreplaceable: she has on her tight budget to take on the difficult task of quickly and expensively replacing them. Dicey also realises belatedly that she has no insurance; she was not aware of the need for insurance and did not know how to obtain it. She shows how unprepared she is for the essential skills she must practice and her naivety and the effects of her hubris are dramatically revealed. The Cisco Kid, who arrives unexpectedly at her workshop, initially seems, in the timing of his arrival, to be a potential mentor and a saviour and offers the possibility not just of working with her but of compensating for her business ignorance. In an excess of fantasy, he could become a belated good father and compensate for her missing paternal legacy. Cisco is not a "founding father" but he embodies and continues many of the qualities of corrosive and destructive masculinity this research has identified with these primal, constitutional men; his function in this final book is to continue their mission and bring it to a devastating conclusion. The critic Suzanne Reid suggests, in a significant insight, that he may be

Verricker the father, returned to complete his paternal mission (47). This comment places Cisco in the category of the damaging and destructive father. Cisco's edgy cynical presence occupies a significant space at the heart of this final novel and he compensates for the silence that surrounds Dicey in her solitary workshop; he is a consummate talker and expands – and enriches – the novel's texture with quotations, references, and examples of his personal and idiosyncratic wisdom. "The man's talk was like constant rain, the word falling and falling" and Dicey admit that he enjoys his talk (142). The distrust she intuitively feels about him is well grounded as he will become her nemesis: "His face was made for mocking, a clever, mocking face" (108). Dicey never invites him to meet her family out at the farm and she informs us that she didn't mention her "odd itinerant worker at home" (141). He is kept apart from this place of grace and healing: he never sits at Gram's scrubbed table and he never receives her hospitality; the integrity of the home, and the family is maintained. Cisco is confined to two places; the workshop – and briefly – the bank where he makes his potential for damage real. Cisco offers to work for free in the workshop on his own terms and while he irritates and provokes, she cannot refuse. Cisco's comment to Dicey that she is uneducated (126) or as he, at an earlier moment in their relationship, phrases it, "you obviously aren't being educated" is judgemental (112). The comment becomes self-fulfilling and disturbingly prophetic as Dicey does not seem prepared or "educated" for the demands which her career choice require. Her formation has created for her an erratic position where denial and subterfuge were essential and never allowed her to cultivate and explore other social possibilities. Cisco, as well as being an expression or a re-entry into the text of the malign qualities of the founding father has other functions: he briefly suggests the possibility, rare in

the text, of becoming a good father and, he allows us to imagine, however briefly, the possibility of a sentimental, happy ending a possibility Dicey in *Dicey 's Song* has earlier and emphatically denied.

The Cisco Kid shares with Patrice in *The Runner* and Will Hawkins in *Homecoming* an undefined sexuality: he expands the possibility of a "queer" reading. His response to Dicey's interrogation when she asks him why he never married suggests a void which he seldom explores, and which may fuel his endless wandering. The seven texts overall may represent an absolute heteronormative world, but they also includes characters who are not ostensibly heterosexual, and who question this absolute hegemonic perception. Questions that hover around sexual identity and "queer" readings are possible and suggest a transgressive option which remains undefined, unnamed, and unexplored. They create subliminally a flexible and resourceful addition to the experience of relationship which the series represents. They bring us closer to an ungendered and polymorphic semiotic which Kristeva sees as contained in the chora. They suggest an imaginative range of possible ways of living and being in the world which must extend the areas of speculative questioning the series offers the young people Voigt was writing for, and which may both confirm and affirm the issues that arise for them.

Cisco could be a *deus ex machina* come to magically resolve and heal some of the problems which Dicey creates for herself; he is equipped to compensate for her deficiencies but In the callous selfishness he will reveal, he embodies the damaging masculinity we read in the constitutional term, the "founding father". Cisco may not be Verricker, or to go father back, John Tillerman, but he is a negative and destructive aspect of the trope of the founding father: he is lawless, an opportunist and becomes a source of enormous and definitive damage for Dicey. The tapestry of language, images,

and allusion Cisco weaves in the workshop lacks an ethical theme and his function overall is to be part of a male continuum that includes her English teacher, Arnold the athlete, her father and further back, her grandfather, and becomes an agent or an embodiment of the destructive patriarchy that surrounds the Tillermans and always threatens them and which they struggle to escape. He underscores the necessity to move away from the patriarchy enshrined in the oedipal and seek out the earlier prediscursive states that are to be found in the archaic maternal and that maternality attempts to reach, evoke, and humanize. He completes Verricker's and John Tillerman's destructive paternal performance. His ultimate action in vanishing with Dicey 's money — she fails to counter-sign a cheque she asks him to lodge at the bank — takes her to the edge of destruction and forces a profound and traumatic evaluation of her life, her destiny, and all her aspirations.

The final book in the series revisits the hegemonic father of the Freudian oedipal in the presence of Cisco but the archaic and foundational search to create the maternality and the home, which Dicey committed to in the car park, is also obliquely raised in this final chapter and we return to Dicey's discharge of her primal and imposed role as an impromptu mother. The earlier establishment of their home with Gram did not conclude Dicey's mission or her commitment. Dicey's obsession with her work forces her to becomes an "absent mother" and she is not present for her family when Gram becomes ill. James is away at college and Dicey has been grindingly absorbed and preoccupied by her workshop. Her family needs her, but she is emotionally absent: Gram is too stubborn and too strong willed for Sammy and Maybeth to cope with and Dicey recognises almost too late that she "might have lost Gram, who'd have neglected herself into the grave if Sammy and Maybeth hadn't been around to prod Dicey into action" (287). Sammy's earlier angry reaction, when

she begins to establish the order and the shape that the family needs to cope with Gram's condition, is understandable: "I don't know where you get off, coming in and giving orders. You haven't paid any attention to anything for months and you show up for once and start making decisions" (183). The comment is his frightened and stressed reaction to the fear of losing his Gram, but it also reflects his attempt to make sense of the void Dicey's obsession with her work has created. This obsession as this research has pointed out, can is grounded in her father's neglect and the historic damage he inflicted on his family and is embedded deeply into the fabric of Dicey 's personality. Voigt offers a solution which stabilises the family: Dr Landros is called, despite Gram's protests, and organises an X ray and tells them that Gram does not need to be hospitalised.

Gram recovers but Dicey was absent when her family critically needed her. She repeats her mother's performance: she has "abandoned" her family, expanded to include Gram, when they needed her presence. She has neglected the girl she was drawn to in the photograph she discovered in Cilla's house and the semiotic underground relationship she has with this woman. This girl creates for Dicey a definitive and irreversible looking glass moment and she reached across the generations that separate them and offered Dicey a special invitation: she beckoned her forward and offered both hope and mystery. Dicey knew that this was a pivotal moment in her life and one which transcends her commitment to her siblings: she must meet this girl and go through the looking glass she offers. In doing this she embarks on the journey suggested by Grosz in her evaluation of Irigaray's vision for women, "she steps beyond her role as the reflective other for man. She goes through the looking glass [. . .] the binary polarisations in which only man's primacy is reflected" (Grosz 131). This girl is their Gram and their legal mother, but Dicey 's relationship with this woman transcends the ties of biology

and kinship. They are not just joined in a new maternality; they are involved in a primal feminine bonding and are spiritual sisters. They are an expression of this latent underground genealogy which struggles to exist despite the controls and scripts of the patriarchal. The workshop has negated this powerful relationship.

Gram's illness reveals once more the legacy of abuse Dicey has been exposed to and its potential to appear in her life and pervert and thwart. It is excessive to see Dicey as a monstrous mother; she is not Lisa or Melody or Abigail staying silent as her first family was destroyed, but in this moment, we are briefly allowed a glimpse of maternity embodied as a destructive absence and she has become a lesser variant of André Green's dead mother. Dicey is physically present to her family and the farm is still the home she returns to every evening but her feelings and her gaze, like the maternal focus Kristeva identified in Michelangelo's marble madonnas, are elsewhere.

In an evocation of the linked themes of home and subjectivity that underpin the entire series, Gram, as she recovers from her pneumonia, decides that she is strong enough to read and asks that *David Copperfield* be brought out from John Tillerman's substantial library (*Seventeen* 261). Gram convalesces and reads *David Copperfield* lying on the sofa in the living room surrounded by her precious family and its life: she does not retire to her bedroom and its associations with a deathbed. The opening lines of Dickens's classic reveal the search for the authentic and rewarding personal worth and agency that home supports: "whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by someone else, these pages must show". Gram moves to the margins. In asking for *David Copperfield* Gram has validated this theme of life to be lived as an authentic project

but also the importance of a commitment to a true self. This is a theme, and a desire Dicey has consistently addressed and illustrated in her central place in the narrative.

Gram's health is no longer an issue and the family is stabilized; now the narrative can focus on Dicey's relationship with her boyfriend, one of her essential props, and indirectly prepares us for the conclusion which the final novel and the series will offer. Jeff is away at college and has been substantially absent for the narrative of the final book, but this absence and Dicey 's consistent failure to contact him has been stressed in the narrative. When Jeff asked her to marry him in the first chapter of the final novel, she reminded herself that her plan is business first, then marriage, but this order does not diminish the emotional place she claims for him in her life. He is the man she wants to be with; he is as much a part of her life as Gram or James or Sammy or Maybeth:

> Jeff Green, since the time she first met him — over eight years ago now — had got woven into her life so thoroughly that, she thought picturing it — the warp threads and the woof threads, all the colours and the intricate design — if he weren't in it [. . .] everything would look entirely different, and feel different, too. Even the texture wouldn't be what it was without Jeff. (*Seventeen* 14)

Her behaviour does not support this ornate, theoretical rhapsody: she is too tired to commit, too tired to keep up contact with Jeff, even too tired to telephone him. In the struggle between her obsessive wish to build her boats and her love for him it seems he will be the loser. Her failure to contact him reinforces the ambivalence that her treatment of him at the start of the novel suggested and this ambivalence does not sit comfortably with this rhapsodic prose. We are instead consistently

presented with her obsession with the workshop, its masculine connotations, and her underlying reluctance to identify as female. (225).

At the start of *Seventeen Against the Dealer, Dicey* explores the sensual hold boat building has on her and incorporates this into a clear statement of her intentions:

> The boats she wanted to build were wooden ones. She wanted to build a boat with a carved rudder to guide it by and the long-varnished tiller under your hand. Not plywood, either. Dicey Tillerman had an idea about a slender soft bellied boat, built out of planks of wood fitted together so close it was as if they'd grown that way, sturdy enough for heavy winds but light enough so the slightest breeze would fill the sails and move it across the water. (8)

This description with its living, concrete, vibrant language contrasts with the glamourized, romanticized language she uses to explain Jeff's place in her life and which she may have absorbed and borrowed from magazines. Jeff is not romantically heroic in the sense that is described in contemporary pulp fiction. Jeff was forced to act as homemaker and caretaker for his father, to fill the void his mother, Melody, left behind and he needed to be reliable, dependable, available, and servile. He seems to be quintessentially homebound, and he is consistently experienced as dependable and mundane; he allowed himself to be the passive recipient of Melody's exploitation and never demurred at her serial manipulation until late in the narrative. Jeff never seems to recognise that he has powerful archetypal competition for the hand of his maiden: he is not scripted to compete with the exhilaration, the excitement, and the drama which the boat promises, and which is continued and sublimated in

Dicey's work. Jeff is different from the issues represented by the boats, "Jeff understood. He never asked Dicey to be anything other than what she was: he never had" (*Seventeen* 93). Jeff suggests a constant, compliant understanding.

The boats and boat building represent a different order and are removed from the passivity that Jeff represents. The fascination with boats offers Dicey a place to sublimate and safely explore and experience energies and libido that she does not associate with Jeff or perhaps even expect from him, and these energies make irrational and domineering demands that she cannot resist. In this compartmentalized aspect of her life her workshop is a private and closeted place apart and separate from her conventional relationship with Jeff and with the life she shares with her family and returns to every day. The workshop is not a dedicated secret place, but Dicey's need for secrecy that was formed on the road, is continued here but in a contained, reduced, and exclusive fashion. Cisco's arrival and his "paternal" role guarantees that the workshop will become a doomed place. This movement and polarity between the workshop and the rest of her life suggests the oscillation between semiotic and symbolic that the typography revealed Kristeva utilized in "Stabat Mater".

The original boat seen in darkness in the barn is a mysterious shape, but it is protuberant, and tumescent and it suggests a presence that may be a sign of an erotic promise as Dicey allows its presence to enter her being, to possess her and to penetrate her with its moods and atmosphere. In its organic and sensual possibilities, it suggests an encounter outside language and the rational. She becomes enthralled by the challenge to restore it. The claims by Deborah Caplan and Roberta Rabinowitz are important, and relevant: "Dicey's boat business plays the role of a lover in her life.

Boats are what she dreams about and describes with an unusual affection" (203). The intense and consistent focus on boats – the imaginative attraction they hold even before her discovery of the boat in the barn, "the unusual affection" – and the central and obsessive part they come to play in her life eloquently vindicates this claim. The boat in the barn and later the commitment to her workshop are the hallowed place where she encounters and entertains her secret lover and meets the mysterious and exhilarating jouissance of a deep, sustaining, and private romance. This capacity for jouissance is hidden behind the narrative of this final novel; always seductively present but only visible when it can implode and vanish. The boats are also paradoxically a transcendent place where a true life emerges and is cultivated and is the place she needed to be; this place obliquely suggests vast areas of an alternative life, and an alternative Dicey, which are not explored across the narrative. These possibilities are not seen in the life she shares with Jeff. The boat and the boatbuilding may suggest transcendence and development but they can equally be an escape and a refuge from the insufferable demand that the monstrous maternal has imposed on her. These issues and her obsession with her boats significantly represent a denial of her relationship with Jeff.

Dicey 's obsession with the boat is a factor in her rewriting of the traditional fairy tale; gender roles are reversed and she is the active protagonist and her compliant and undemanding boyfriend become the maiden asleep and waiting to be aroused. It is Dicey who at her nadir moment of despair drives out to Jeff's house in an attempt to rekindle something of the life that is disintegrating around her. It is her second solitary journey. The androgyny she embodies here reversed the archetypal role of prince and maiden; these roles are confused and ambiguous; the boats seem to simultaneously represent a prince and a princess. These archetypal preoccupations blind Dicey to the transformations

necessary in the move from her commitment to her siblings which dominated her adolescence, to the experience and the performance of an adult commitment and the realities of living among adults. She seems to be ill equipped for the realities of a reflexive adult to adult relationship. The boundary or limit of her appreciation of the language of sensuality and closeness is expressed in her claim that she knows how to avoid pregnancy and which is the only explicit statement she can make about her relationship with Jeff. The final novel shows her consistently, and ominously, avoiding him and finding shelter and a retreat in her workshop. She had earlier, in Dicey*'s Song*, found an escape from the teacher's crassness by dreaming about sailing.

Dicey when she rings his apartment and speaks to his roommate, is told that he is away up the coast looking at graduate schools: "she hadn't realised how accustomed she was to knowing where he probably was, at any given moment of the day" (257). He has not included her in his plans and seems to be redefining his connection with her; his role as one of the three supports in her life that she listed at the start of the final volume now seem in jeopardy. The text uses a powerful image to describe her as she processes these realisations which sits appropriately alongside the theme of home, the major theme that energizes the series, "there was an echoing hollowness inside her – it was in her chest, her stomach, an empty hollowness locked inside her rib cage. Like an empty house." (258). The symbolic house, that Dicey sought for and struggled to create, the vibrant beckoning destination that led her on and the living monument to the maternality she created, teeming with life, people, and colour, is gradually becoming empty, cold, and grey.

Dicey has replaced one project, that of finding a home for her family, with another, boatbuilding, but in Cisco's betrayal her business crashes. The projects, around which her life is built, are disintegrating. Dicey is drawing near to the abyss which consumed her mother, and she seems to be repeating and reengaging with her mother's despair. The hubristic exhilaration Dicey was possessed by in the opening pages of the final volume is replaced by a darkness and a flatness which evokes the original anguish of primal separation so critical to Kristeva's theory of abjection and which their abandonment evoked. Once again, as she was in the opening chapter of *Homecoming,* she is faced with the task of finding a way out of her situation but unlike the moment of the original abandonment this can be traced back to the learnings she felt it necessary to absorb and implement all those years ago.

Dicey in some manner, is doomed to repeat her mother's performance: this woman's disintegration remains her emotional primer and the source of a core learning and represents the rule book which creates her, and which she unconsciously follows. The disasters which threaten to engulf Dicey in the final book can be traced back to the effect of her hubristic single-mindedness and self-belief, but more importantly they are located in the underlying circumstances, the patriarchal script, which dominated her mother and forced and encouraged these qualities to blossom and in a perverse irony which has been noted it seems that once again the reactive attitudes that helped her to survive on the road in *Homecoming* do not transfer into other dimensions of life. She is still grounded in a world which revolves around binaries and absolutes and the fear and risks of the road. The children needed to survive in the bleak circumstances their experience of maternity and paternity imposed on them and to be always watchful.

This early monolithic struggle between, at its most defined and extreme, life and death, has evolved into a series of more ordinary challenges. Dicey grounded and formed in the road, and now an adult, is fighting battles that are long over; the road has led her to a nourishing home and the essential adult, her Gram, to help her care for her family and they no longer need the defensiveness, the secrecy and the paranoia that was essential at the beginning of their journey. Dicey now realizes that the scaffolding that supports her life is disintegrating around her and she turns to Jeff, the last of her three props. She embarks on another journey in what is a reversal of *Snow White* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. She has created a home but the refrain from the bluegrass hymn Gram and the children sing seems to describe her new position, "I can't feel at home in this world anymore" (293). Dicey knows who is missing from her life and recognises how badly she treated Jeff.

This decision and this journey, which in its combination of despair and hope mirror her earlier and long walk from the town to Gram's farm in *Homecoming* and leads to the final novel's definitive conclusion. In the second last chapter where Dicey has a moment of insight; she explores the existential "mistakes" she has made and uses Gram as sounding board, "She was twenty-one years old, and she hadn't finished learning. She was this old and she'd just understood that growing up didn't mean that you had things answered, settled" (286). This significant apologia invites an appraisal of Dicey as protagonist and heroine before she embarks on what will become a life changing and definitive journey and a journey that directly lead to the fate that Voigt has decided for her. Dicey, at the centre of the series, consistently explores, questions, and offers striking imaginative possibilities. These include the text's exploration of Dicey 's sexuality. Dicey suggests a range of possible ways of living and being in the world which she shares with many of the significant males who appear in the

narrative and this extends the areas of speculative questioning the series offers the young people Voigt was writing for, and which may both confirm and affirm the issues that arise for them and the questions they ask. The situations, and the complex, existential moments where sexuality itself is discovered and explored are a force in adolescent and young adult literature.

Dicey is shown denying or delaying the choices she must make about her sexuality and gender. She is happiest being a tomboy and in the first volume, *Homecoming*, in a moment that substantially defined the reactive, secretive tone of much of the first novel, is mistaken for a boy by the security man in the car park (*Homecoming* 13). This becomes a consistent confusion across the series which she accepts and cultivates. She accepts this mistake at that moment as it supports and underline what will become her necessary and essential script about secrecy and dissimulation. Dicey succinctly and pragmatically appreciates the strategic value of this maxim "It's safer to be a boy than a girl [. . .] people leave boys alone more" (*Homecoming* 53). Will Hastings, the great protector, initially thinks she is a boy, when he offers her the shelter of the circus at their moment of danger. Jeff Bridges in Dicey *'s Song*. Commit the same error. Dicey is not interested in boys or dating; she will not go to a dance with Jeff, and Gram and Mina conspire to get her to dress appropriately for his graduation in *Come A Stranger*:

> Dicey bit her lip. She only came because Jeff wanted her to. She'd only got dressed up because Mina and Mrs Tillerman had told her she had to and found a pattern that they thought would suit and picked out a fabric Dicey thought wasn't too bad [. . .] Mina and Maybeth had forced Dicey to put on a touch of Mina's lipstick. (307)

Dicey must bite her lip and suppress her resistance before she allows Mina and Maybeth transform her into, what is for her, the bizarre role of a fairy tale princess. It briefly evokes the transformation of Cinderella in Disney's film version. In the early moments of the second volume, *Dicey 's Song,* Gram is determined to make Dicey accept her impending adolescence and her womanhood and insists she cover her upper body and wear a tee shirt (*Dicey's Song* 12). Dicey later decides on a career in boatbuilding which, by her own admission, is an area traditionally populated men, a closed and gendered reality she accepts but stridently dismisses as irrelevant to her.

Sara Gleeson-White, in discussing the grotesque in Carson McCullers, offers insights on the female adolescent, which we can apply to Dicey, and which expand the versatility of her role:

> The female adolescent is perhaps even more grotesque than her adult counterpart, for not only is she female, but also she is in that liminal state between childhood and adulthood [. . .] between masculine and feminine gender identifications. The fact that the girls are on the threshold and so 'unfixed,' means that they promise new configurations of human beings in terms of becoming and so resist the strictures of limits. (111)

Dicey and her friend Mina Smiths are intent on offering new configurations and resist the strictures that they encounter. Mina's body develops too rapidly and ensures she will never be included in the *corps de ballet* and Dicey can be perceived as either a boy or a girl, a possibility highlighted by the illustrations on the covers of many editions of the first two books of the Tillerman series. This resistance Gleeson-White sees in McCullers' south with its circumscribed racial and gender roles, and

against which McCullers set up tropes of freakishness, gigantism, and flight to describe recalcitrant adolescence. Gleeson-White offers the suggestion that McCullers' portraits of grotesque adolescence challenge the very notion of female limits, and this is clearly seen in Dicey who consistently places herself outside a conventional feminine world.

Dicey has strong affinities with Frankie, in McCullers' *Member of the Wedding* (1946), and Mike in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940)who "most obviously resists the feminine world of the fairy-like southern belle through their overt tomboy behaviour and appearance and, of course through their use of masculine names" (114). Dicey too welcomes and desires, a hybrid figure neither wholly masculine nor wholly feminine (116). The issue of gender identity does not have to be answered or phrased in exclusive either-or, "monolithic" terms and our understanding of Dicey is enriched if we look for definitions of sexual performance that are more pliable than the polarizing and the either-or.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Tales of the Avunculate*, says that "queer" can refer to the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and expressions of meanings and queerness exists "whenever the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made or can't be made to signify monolithically" (8). As the family out on the farm seems to be denying social expectations and controls and forging a special familial path, Dicey too is "becoming" in her own way. She too experiences and embodies, according to Gleeson-White Bakhtin's grotesque: she must be transgressive because she has been forced to challenge "normative forms of representation and behaviour; it disturbs because it lives the abject and will not rest; it is always in a state of becoming. The carnival grotesque, then, is a strategy of resistance" as Gleeson-White claims

(110). The grotesque resists and refuses "the constraints of the classical body with its accompanying poetics of closure, coherence and stasis" as Gleeson-White also claims (110). Dicey , from the opening scene in the carpark in *Homecoming,* has consciously chosen a place of refusal, denial, otherness and emphatic difference and liminality. She escapes from the law represented by the over-zealous security man and the punitive and judgemental values he represents. *S*he consistently reveals the need for flight — a trait their grandmother notes in *Homecoming*. This need for flight includes her attitude to culture and its agencies and organizations; she resists the institutions that normalize and regulate behaviour. In *Homecoming,* at a dangerous moment in her flight, Dicey found vital succour and rest for her charges and herself with a circus, a site where difference, subversion and the grotesque are often sought out and celebrated.

Dicey's determination and the qualities of resistance her role demands suggest that she has strong claims to be accepted as a role model, but the final resolution and the destination of the final novel, where Dicey meekly seeks out and embraces the heteronormative family, challenges this perception. The catalogue of positive criticism outlined at the start of this chapter which illustrates Dicey 's qualities ignore this final resolution. Does the conclusion terminate her practice of asking questions and interrogating her world? At a nadir, Dicey , as she witnesses her three supports, work, family, and Jeff, collapse around her, embarks on another journey, into an unknown and enclosing darkness; she must search out her lover and the man she claims she loves and the person she needs to be with. In this daunting project she embarks on she does not have to cut through a thicket of thorns to reach and rescue her prince, her "sleeping beauty", but she is surrounded by her doubts, her guilt, and her fears that she has lost him, and she must deal with them. Dicey is suddenly, and with

little warning, is plunged into Klein's depressive position and realises, in a belated insight, and a final vindication of Cisco's claim that she is uneducated, the truth of the maxim, "maybe you had to work as hard at people as anything else and she owes Jeff an apology" (297). She drives to his house and walks into the kitchen, and in a moment which parallels and reverses their encounter at the beginning of the final novel, when she was too preoccupied to notice him, "He sat at the table, looking out of the window [. . .] dreaming so deep about something that he hadn't even heard her come in" (297).

Dicey offers herself to Jeff in an act of sudden and unexpected capitulation; she will marry him on his terms. But he demurs at this gift. She wanted things to be done her way which reflected her liminal situation. Now she is challenged to adjust to new and contradictory messages that it seems she is not primed or "educated", in Cisco's earlier insight, to deal with. She struggles with the confusions she now experiences. She will not allow the old pattern she learned on the road to destroy her love for Jeff. He welcomes her confusions. But if he was right all along does the converse hold true, that she was wrong, and if so, what are its implications for Dicey, for her journey, for her family and for the readers who have followed her over the span of the seven books? This patriarchal reading of her situation denies the enormous validity, the necessity and relevance of what has formed her and helped her to survive: using a binary structure where she was wrong, and Jeff was right is itself controlling and labelling. It is returning us to the structured world the Tillermans from the opening fled from but paradoxically needed to enter. The Tillerman series has repeatedly shown that binary and defensive attitudes, like the trope of the happy endings, are ineffective and unsatisfactory; exclusive binaries inhibit and obstruct the performance of the essential heterogeneous nature of the

resourceful maternal ethic Kristeva suggests in “Stabat Mater”, an aspiration which the Tillermans unconsciously, in their world, seem intent on realizing.

This capitulation, and the resolution of the series sits uneasily alongside a claim that Dicey is a valuable and important image or symbol of independent and resourceful womanhood, a role model, as it shows a woman so desperate that everything that has helped to create her identity can be jettisoned. It is difficult to regard marriage with Jeff in the new circumstances that are now engulfing Dicey as a psychological sequel to the values she has struggled to achieve across the series. If Dicey in driving to Jeff is initially seen to be rescuing and claiming him, and doing this on her terms, now her role is suddenly reversed and the old processes return, where the heroines, in passive docility, seem to wait for the prince to rescue them, validate them and restore them to life and inscribe his language and his values on the tabula rasa they offer. These virginal maidens have hollowed themselves of all value and desire except one, the primal wish for the prince to arrive and carry them off to his kingdom where it must seem his values, his rules and his scripts will prevail.

Dicey at this moment reminds us of the “certain feminine masochism” described by Kristeva in “Stabat Mater” (172) as an essential aspect of the now exhausted maternal images she recognises at the heart of western culture and seen in Luke’s’ gospel; the virgin of the annunciation who utters the defining and compliant “fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum” (be it done unto me according to thy word), as her answer to the angel’s message and also in the mother who, in the Christmas representation of the nativity, kneels in silent awe, before her newly born son and god. Kristeva’s description of her as a “Madonna of humility and at the same time a devoted, fond mother “(171-2)

are essential aspects of this now redundant maternal. This exhaustion is not confined to the allegorical that Kristeva saw and questioned in the historic and redundant image of maternity: Dicey who has accepted the challenge of a maternal role, is herself not merely exhausted but devastated and hollowed out by the enormity of the sacrifice she, like the virgin, accepted and experienced. The implications of her role and the hostility that her destiny has offered her are revealed across the series. Her mother and her grandmother have also been damaged, in different ways, by the hegemonic and absolute scripts that they were powerless to resist and negotiate with.

Dicey has reached a place where all her options are exhausted, and she fumbles to find meaning and purpose. Now she turns to her relationship with Jeff for a way forward and an escape from the chaos she is engulfed by. But this position is not consistent with her role across the series and the performative qualities she has revealed. The ending which Voigt creates for Dicey seems to contradict the ethical maternal which is always determined to subvert the monolithic, the exclusive and the absolute and find ethical positions which cherish otherness, difference, and alternatives. The ending negates and cuts short the reflexive possibility of continually asking questions of the text and allowing the text itself to ask questions. The ending implies that queer or contrary interpretation are foreclosed. It is assuming that Dicey has no further questions to ask and offers a solid monolithic and impenetrable response to all her questions. The ending is stark and emphatic and clearly and unambivalently tells us that the patriarchy must triumph. Dicey may be offered a quality of adolescent latitude, she may be briefly allowed to function as a tomboy, but this permission is conditioned and framed by the demand that she and her sisters finally submit to the script their fathers have designed for them.

Jeff accepts her proposal and he offers to look for a graduate school near the coast where she can pursue courses in boat design and boat building. It is Jeff who displays moral vision and an exceptional altruism at this nadir moment. It is Jeff who seems to rise meaningfully to the challenge of the crisis Dicey is experiencing. But we must not be confused by these admirable qualities. Her work in the male world she has chosen is rendered obsolete and irrelevant; her attempt to enter and succeed in this world is culturally and historically impossible; the cycle appeared forty year ago in the eighties of the last century. Jeff's altruism and generosity, while valuable, are an expression of the male and imply an acceptance of his implicit hegemony. Gram was reduced to silence by her husband's serial abuse in the life she shared with him; Dicey is now to be reduced to silence by Jeff's kindness? The hegemonic patriarchy has triumphed and Dicey seems incapable, unlike her brothers, of moving forward and reaching fully the challenge of the depressive position. Her career and her investment in her workshop were an illusion and a temporary, disposable, distraction from her destiny as wife and companion to Jeff. The feminine story which she has crafted with diligence and energy is no longer hers; it seems to have found its preordained place and been absorbed into and colonised by a voracious, waiting, masculine world.

Mina's relationship with her boyfriend Dexter comments obliquely on Dicey and Jeff and their relationship. Mina reflects that her mother at her age was married and pregnant, yet she has another year before she graduates and that will be followed by three years at law school (47); she is not going to repeat her mother's choices (47). Mina feels that Dexter resents her educational and personal ideas, that he wants her to choose between him and the law. Or rather "between him and me [. . .] so I won't. I think I'll aim to do the best I can for myself" (*Seventeen* 47). She feels he is being arrogant and

manipulative. The template Dexter wants for her is exclusively a product of his needs and his selfishness. In *Come a Stranger* Dexter tells her that he plans to do medicine and teasingly tells her that she will make a good doctor's wife. Her response is immediate, "Yeah, but will you make a good lawyer's husband?" (*Come a Stranger* 319). Mina's emphatic rhetoric about how her sense of personal worth fits into relationships casts an indirect light on Dicey and Jeff. Jeff always looks for Dicey's good but the partnership he offers Dicey is a fundamentally unequal one. It is based on Dicey's despair: her world is disintegrating, the values she struggled to realise become hollow and Jeff is her final and only chance.

Jeff, unlike the Dexter Mina describes, is characterised by altruism and generosity, and consistently and steadfastly seeks Dicey's good. As a carer his language is the one he has forged for himself and has been absorbed by since his abandonment by his mother. The resolution and the phrasing of this issue, which Dicey accepts, is couched, and expressed in his language. It may be a language of connection and affiliation and not one of judgement and differentiation, it may represent an entry into a superior moral order, it may suggest an "ethic of care", but it is his language and not hers. "'I think'. He said, his eyes so deep with gladness it could have frightened her if she hadn't been so glad herself. 'You owe it to yourself to build your boat." "Yes" Dicey agreed"' (304). Generous and altruistic as this is, we must remember who has now emerged as the vector of essential decision making and who is offering this gift: the moral centre has perceptibly shifted and the roles that were fluid and porous are now becoming fixed and absolute. Jeff is repeating the gendered and moral limitations James and Sam revealed when they decided at the conclusion of *Sons from Afar* to protect their unsuspecting sister from predatory males. Jeff may offer a flexible, gentle masculinity and an

unconventional and radical one, but he represents and embodies the paternal order Voigt has questioned and critiqued across the cycle. Jeff's masculinity may be deeply infused and spiritually enhanced by contact with an entity like Jung's anima, but he is a man and this structuring, this resolution which concludes this series does advantage and privilege the male. The critical triumph is his, even if we can argue that he would resent and refuse that phrasing: Jeff and Dicey decide to marry in June when Jeff has graduated (301).

The Tillerman series ends with a new variant of the Dicey we have followed across the narrative, but one compromised by capitulations to the word of the father. In this we are returning to a mode of storytelling that antedates the postmodern as it seems to soothe and embrace us in the traditional sense of story where home, a patriarchal one, was always waiting for the hero or heroine to return to, as McGavran extravagantly claims:

> Girls, head south; come home where it's warm; give into the patriarchal system that shelters you but simultaneously grips your bodies and minds in a vice of domesticity; find meaning in home, family, and what the feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow has defined as the reproduction of mothering (McGavran 137).

Dicey may not necessarily be accepting a life of domesticity and finding her life meaning in a home and family controlled by the patriarchy, and she may not be consciously desiring a "new servitude" as Jane Eyre is prepared to accept, in chapter ten of Bronte's novel (87), but she is putting to one side her implicit "capacities" and the powerful sense of agency and self-authorship she has manifested across the series and is handing them over to Jeff. The Tillerman series is an example of fictional

endings, where female strengths and the "Wonderlands" and the "Terabithias" (Terabithia is the name of the imaginary land the two children create in Kätherine Patterson's 1977 children's classic *Bridge to Terabithia*) they create are dismantled. Dicey as her story ends is placed in a position which avoids both the second wave of feminism which it is possible to see in Mina and her choices and her own mother's life choices, and the catatonic collapse seen in Lisa's life: Dicey avoids the contrasting "excesses" of Mina and Lisa.

Dicey and Jeff are adults who were forced as children to cross over into inappropriate adult roles and assume responsibilities beyond their readiness or competence. They were exploited by the adults who were responsible for them and by the society they were a part of. They were betrayed socially and ethically. Dicey was forced to take responsibility for her siblings and function as a parent. Jeff was obliged to care take of his father and found himself in his summer trips revisiting his mother Melody's neediness and her exploitations and risked being retraumatised. He does eventually show a capacity to reject her and find stability, and gratitude, with his father and Brother Thomas in the unit they create, but the lasting cost of these early experiences, or the damage they generate, is a speculation outside the narrative. Jeff suffers a physical breakdown and in the second volume we have seen Dicey pay an inordinate emotional price when she is accused by the English teacher of plagiarism and dishonesty.

Jeff and Dicey lived and were essentially formed, in a world where they were expected to care for others and were less familiar with a language where their own needs can be identified and responsibly accessed. The series concludes as Dicey and Jeff decide to get married but their shared history of coping with abandonment and focussing on other people's needs, their immersion in what

can only be described in the jargon of their decade, the eighties, as co-dependency, brings a clear note of caution into any appraisal of their future together. The serious issue of role reversal and its consequences is a recurring aspect of the treatment of family in the series; Dicey and her boyfriend and now husband to be, Jeff, were denied a childhood. This childhood was sucked into and absorbed by the needs of others. This raises the issue of incomplete and inadequate development and questions how the protagonists discover and reach individuation and author their own story. The final chapter of the final book in the Tillerman series offers Dicey and Jeff a traditional happy ending but does not limit our capacity to ask questions. These questions undermine the conventional ending. The conclusion ignores the protagonist's critical experience of abandonment, the trauma the two protagonists have experienced and survived and their unusual experience of growing up.

The resolution Voigt offers Dicey contrasts sharply with many of the realities and values which the Tillermans forged on the road and brought to the farm. The Tillermans out on the farm are far from perfect; they are poor and struggle and work hard to supply food for the table and meet their essential needs. They lack a mother and a father, and their titular and legal head is their grandmother, Abigail: they avoid rigid, inherited, and conventional templates and are a different family and problematize polarities but they are alive and functioning. The members listen to each other, they consult, and each person's voice and participation is valued and seen to be so. Aspirations are respected and supported. The kitchen and living room become warm and welcoming places to gather where they meet to nourish and recharge themselves. This family seems to possess a human and social magnetism as their friends enjoy gathering here and leave this environment enhanced and show a desire to return. Gram's second family showed that it can function at this level without the

expectations and demands of heteronormativity and without the suspicion, the condemnation or contempt that its quality of patent "otherness" often receives. Gram's new family and the maternality it embodies does not lay down binaries or function within a series of binaries: husband wife; male female; gay straight, where one element may be institutionally subjugated to the other. The text reveals people who seem to consistently work at creating and recreating family. Gram is the legal head of the family, in a nod to the symbolic order they are now a part of, but power seems to be consistently experienced and processed in lateral and respectful ways. They are a group who deconstruct rigid binaries and offer a glimpse of a new discourse and a new conversation on the meaning of family, and a conversation which shies away from absolutes and seems dedicated to asking questions. Kidd (1998) claims that "what is often most interesting about literary texts, after all, is not how they fit certain categories but how they complicate and/or evade them"(115). Dicey and Jeff are returning us to the hegemonic patriarchal but they have participated for much of their lives in an urgent conversation about family and have worked at the margins and edges close to the Kristevan ethical. Their lives have "evaded" and "avoided" the imposed, scripted categories. Despite the closed and restrictive nature of the ending the narrative produces and which returns us to a binary they have lived in a world of exploration and relational variety for significant periods of their lives and formation.

Kristeva in "Stabat Mater" invited her reader to listen to the music, all the music. As the series concludes we meet a Dicey whose vitalities are diminished and who becomes ultimately a silent agent and seems side-lined in her own life and robbed of the pulsing musical rhythms, and the song we had earlier associated with her. "You sang the words and the melody straight through" (*Homecoming* 17) is no longer a possibility. That clarity and directness has vanished. The ending contradicts all Dicey had

earlier epitomized and reached for and she is asked to pay an enormous price for the life she now accepts. The energies and talents she revealed are now funnelled into the compliant role of companion and wife to her husband. The children had brought songs and music into Gram's life and home, they had "brought her home with music" and music was an essential accompaniment to their journey to the home where their mother's legacy of music originated and where she learned her songs, but the music of this final volume has become jarring, and its tones are no longer mellifluous.

CONCLUSION

In this reading of the seven novels of the Tillerman cycle I have highlighted two interlocking themes; the possibility of a maternal performance outside the traditional patriarchal family and the capacity of children to themselves create or co-create new families, new worlds, new lands, even new languages, parallel to the dominant patriarchal worlds which surround them and from which they emerge. In Voigt's series this second theme of an alternative community is a stage in the Tillerman's children's urgent need to find what the research has identified as Kristevan "maternality"; they search for an adequate mother to replace the mother who has abandoned them in the opening pages; on their road journey they explore and they lay down the structures and the values which they expect family to express and ratify and they eventually share this aspiration with their grandmother in the new home she offers them. The methodology of this thesis is an investigation of the radical families described in the narrative and shows that these alternatives to the hegemonic and heteronormative family are not experimental social possibilities but can succeed, sustain and nourish their members in the real world Voigt describe. The road they traverse, the theatre for this essential experimental social process, despite its dangers and its bleakness has a destination and offers them moments of joy and satisfaction.

Another theme, a third, can be read in the series and one seen in the fate which the author often inscribes in the text at a significant and often conclusive moment. This theme contradicts, redacts, and confuses the core message of enablement and capacity that has been central to the narrative; it is a counterforce of enormous power and often determines the conclusion. This theme is

clearly seen in the Tillerman series when Dicey Tillerman meekly accepts the inevitability of her place in the hegemonic patriarchal order, despite the questioning and the progressive and radical movement that characterised the series and that are grounded in her performance. The progressive movement in the seven texts is linked to and dependent on the presence of strong and capable women, who often perform a Kristevan maternality. The series includes Dicey Tillerman, Mina Smiths, and Abigail Tillerman, women asserting themselves and doing this in a manner which is often transgressive and deviates from the patriarchal scripts society expects and ultimately demands they conform to.

The final book relentlessly and progressively reveals tells Dicey Tillerman that her dream of becoming a professional boat builder is ended; she must retreat from the male world she has attempted to enter and she finds herself in the image her uncle Bullet used to describe his earlier family life, devastatingly "boxed in". Dicey decides to reclaim her foundering relationship with her boyfriend, Jeff Green, and commit herself to a conventional and heteronormative relationship. This resolution concludes the series and sits uneasily alongside the transgressive readings which I identify with the herethics suggested by Kristeva in "Stabat Mater." This ends the desire to create and experience family outside the patronage of the heteronormative. When they decide to marry, Jeff promises Dicey that she will build her boat but this promise, despite its altruism and compassion, is couched in his language, reflects his sensibilities, exists at his behest and is dependent on his generosity (*Seventeen* 303-04). Dicey's true self will now be compromised by values that exist outside her own persona. These values are grounded in Jeff. She opts for a solution, which in its safety and security contradicts all that has gone before and all that she has experienced: the road, the wildness,

the risks, the need to question, and, at the beginning of the series, the confusing experience of the responsibility of an initially unwelcome but exciting and challenging maternality. Dicey seems unaware of the implications and the meanings that are contained in her drive to Jeff's house and what they may mean for the rest of her life; she does not pause to examine her life in a total and integrated way and fails to grasp that her decision is reactive and may be masking an unacknowledged despair. She does not look beyond the existential crisis she is experiencing. She lacks the insight she had access to in the opening volume and we see the results of the naïve, hubristic, attitudes she displayed in the opening of the final novel.

This dichotomy at the heart of the cycle resembles that described by Claudia Marquis in an article on Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (114). Marquis distinguishes between reading Burnett's text as satisfactory and the moments when it becomes unsatisfactory. The entry of Colin Craven into the garden – the "whinging, self-pitying, autocratic, spoiled brat" – as Adrian Gunther describes him, (165), seems to introduce a general diminishment of Burnett's interest in Mary Lennox as Mary is silenced and pushed aside: the boy triumphs, he wins the race, and the novel suddenly and dramatically becomes a novel about a boy. Dicey does not seem to be aware that her decision may imply that in the new life she will share with Jeff her role as decision maker, influencer and indeed, subject will be diminished. A male narrative is privileged. Dicey does not understand or realise that the values she has struggled to realise across the narrative, like those epitomized by Mary Lennox, will be compromised and devalued in her new life. Her resolute questioning will become irrelevant.

This distinction, the contrast, between an enabled world which tries to operate independently of the symbolic and draws on Kristeva's chora and a world which demand the child's return to the dominance of the symbolic order and the male, paternal law can be seen in many children's books. A creative and energized world is replaced by the symbolic embodied in patriarchy. This tension at the heart of Burnett's classic was noted at the end of the twentieth century: Anna Krugovoy Silver (193-203) Elizabeth Keyser (1-13), U.C. Knoepflmacher (14-31) and Claudia Marquis (113-14) have all under various headings and approaches, noted. Linda Parsons offers a different approach to this tension in Burnett's novel which may have a theoretical relevance to the Tillermans. She sees Burnett's novel in platonic terms, removing it from an existential world and sees Mary Lennox triumph in the archetypal and symbolic values hidden in the text and which the garden reveals. Parson ignores the economic and existential values clearly displayed in the triumphant return to the house by father and son as they reclaim their feudal powers. Parsons' rationalisation cannot be applied to the Tillerman cycle; the Tillerman children grapple with real existential threats and challenges: they live in a real world which is unsparingly described by Voigt in clear economic and social terms.

Voigt's series is enhanced by the inclusion of specific and realistic social and cultural markers: the Vietnam war is in the background and provides the cause of Bullet's death in *The Runner,* and while the Reagan presidency is not explicitly referenced the books were written and published during the eight years of his term. Lisa Tillerman is a victim of Reaganite "trickle-down" economics and the series implicitly acknowledges the dismantling of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society". As they move south the children experience real emotions grounded in their existential reality. The legendary film *Star Wars* of 1977 is referenced, popular music places the book in its time, Bettelheim's classic *The*

Uses of Enchantment, which James mentions in *Sons from Afar*, was published in 1976, and the songs Jeff plays on New Year's Day in the living room of the farm, in the series' final book, are by Woody Guthrie and Roberta Flack. Recognisable urban environments are referenced and traversed, and a map of the colonial east coast of the United States is at times an essential aid for the reader, as it was for Dicey, earlier, in *Homecoming.* The archetypal and mythic realities which Voigt introduces enrich and expand the series' symbolic potential, but the reality of the Tillerman's deprived existence on the road is consistently represented as are Dicey Tillerman's attempts to manage and control these experiences.

This study of the series has stressed the issue of gender across the cycle and found opportunities for a queer reading. The androgyny associated with Dicey has been noted and she herself says, in a comment in *Homecoming* referenced earlier and which amounts to a motif across the series, "it is safer to be a boy, people leave boys alone" (53). This need to encourage people to think she was a boy was a crucial survival skill in the opening novel but as the series progresses and they settle at Crisfield this pragmatic blurring of sexual difference should have become unnecessary and dispensable but instead becomes part of her culture and a lasting, underlying reality which informs her performance. It evolves into an unconscious ,unspecified, recognition which acquires a permanent external shape. Gram insists Dicey acknowledges her changing body in *Dicey's Song,* and when Jeff takes her to a prom Gram and her sister demand she wears a frock; at school she applies unsuccessfully to join a woodwork class – and discovers that the class is confined to boys – and later withdraws from college and decides to become a boat builder, a trade dominated by men. Dicey is intent on interrogating gender.

Deborah Kaplan and Rebecca Rabinowitz claim in an article on queer readings of children's fiction that in *Homecoming* "heterosexuality is never in doubt [. . .] no other options are possible in the world" (201). This is an important claim and this thesis has consistently attempted to test and explore this claim's limits. The latent relational and sexual possibilities that the series reveals express a radical otherness and suggest it is possible to offer a reading that is not circumscribed by or defined by heterosexuality and heterosexual scripts.. The sexual ambiguity of many of the characters expands the narrative and point to relational gendered possibilities outside the heterosexual. The series consistently exists on the edge of a rich inclusivity. These inclusive relationships can be read as a Kristevan "chora" outside and before sexuality and they underpin and support the narrative; they include men who often embody Kristeva's good father; they come from a semiotic or a Freudian polymorphic realm, and their existence contrasts with the symbolic. Voigt is not formally or explicitly identifying with or offering support to what Kenneth Kidd in a 1998 article describes as "our gay children" and she is not in the closing decades of the twentieth century formally affirming same-sex love (147).[10] She is however acknowledging that identity and family are partly hidden ideological conventions that structure our personal lives. The series reveals the subject in process at the heart of Kristeva's world and seems to be inherently about questioning and the dialogic. The text both invites and resists queer readings, but this tension extends the elasticity of Voigt's narrative and its implications for theorising family.

[10] Kidd claims that Jack Donovan's, *I'll Get it There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969) was the first young adult novel to address homosexuality.

Family does not always thrive in the oedipal system, as my chapter about the oedipal in the narrative explored. The narrative describes the oedipal as dangerous and the family it establishes is often problematic and a place to escape from, as the children regularly do. The series moves away from rigid or straight readings and suggests variety, diversity, and a commitment to an otherness. Dicey's androgyny is at the centre of the narrative and represents the abject which appears at the border and boundaries of the symbolic. The children on the road occupied a liminal position at the edge of society, like the circus that recues them and later in their new family are part of a transgressive and physically remote position which underlines their resourcefulness and creativity but also their possibility of threatening the order of the symbolic.

Dicey spearheads the radical recalibration of family power and dynamics at the core of the series; she challenges Gram's authority and is a witness to Gram's attempt to grasp and process what is happening in the new values and the possibility of "horizontal " relationships that the children bring to her farm. Dicey understood that the implications of living in Aunt Cilla's house at Bridgeport would have been profoundly destructive of family as she has tried, and repeatedly struggled, to realise. Dicey also indirectly continues the work of Bullet, who, in what amounts to a sacrificial death, dismantled the violent patriarchal edifice that his father established and rendered it ineffectual and meaningless and allowed the children, when they arrive, to co-create with their grandmother a new family which represents a new human order or covenant.

Voigt offers a critique of the traditional family across the series but she does not avoid or exclude describing and incorporating family values that the conservative institutions that regulate

society and uphold the symbolic would approve of. The Tillermans, despite their "otherness" are not dysfunctional or anti-social and they consistently mirror traditional and expected family conventions and concerns: they gather regularly and formally around the kitchen table, they rate education, and educational performance highly, they work to achieve their goals, songs and music are an intrinsic part of their communal family culture and they are an open, porous, community. They listen to each other, they are aware, and are socially alert and responsive. If we have expected a consistently radical process to energise and complete the entire series, the conclusion is a deeply unsatisfactory experience. Despite this abrupt and sudden conclusion, the energy of the moral vision at the heart of Voigt's narratives remains and the implications of these values for family contradict and question the ending's conservatism.

Dicey is a determined and resourceful heroine but in the final resolution of the series she is reduced to silence and moves to the periphery of the world she has occupied and seems destined in her relationship with Jeff to become an observer and not a central agent in her life. Jeff is making the critical decisions. We see her respond with appreciation and gratitude when Jeff promised her that she will build her boat. This resolution of the series undermines her role model status as her independence questioning is compromised. Like Mary Lennox and Phil in Nesbit's *The Railway Children,* she is destined to become a subtext in a patriarchal endeavour. Dicey's decision to seek out the man she claims to love is a response to the abjection which has threatened the basis of her very being and it is her attempt to find individuation but it happens as the supports and the scaffolding of her life are collapsing. Dicey' decision does not emerge organically or "naturally" from the heart of the narrative and it does not flow from the inner momentum of the life and the struggle the narrative has

described; it is a reaction to the new, fraught situation she finds herself in. She has spent most of the final volume steadfastly avoiding or postponing contact with her boyfriend; she reaches out to Jeff only when he is the last surviving element of her plan. This final journey is an act of desperation and an ultimate and a bizarre final response to all her questioning.

This thesis has consistently focused on Kristevan maternality, which often emerges in unusual, transgressive, and even "queer" places. Charlotte Beyer argues that "critical work on decolonising mothers and motherhood is pertinent for 21st century feminists" since "popular constructions of mothering and motherhood remain stubbornly normative"(4). Despite the conservative ending, the seven novels contribute to a conversation about motherhood and its relationship with feminism. They question the normative heterosexual and flirt with liminal and queer readings. The novels separate the experience and practice of mothering from the identity of the mother and from women, a possibility suggested in Kristeva's "maternality." The cycle offers many examples of this maternality and illustrates the move suggested by Emily Jeremiah from an essentialist to a post structuralist approach to motherhood (22). Dicey is critically involved with this attempt to redefine motherhood. The opening novel shows her attempting to be a complex, responsive, resourceful maternal presence for herself and her siblings.

This research identifies two powerful iconic mothers in the seven texts. They are the unitary mother of Winnicott, which Dicey and her siblings have hardly ever experienced but which snatches of song have tantalizingly promised and briefly allowed them to glimpse, and the divided and ruptured mother of Kristeva who is linked to the power and energy of her semiotic but who veers close to the

abject. Winnicott's mother is a rare presence across the Tillerman series, but she appears elsewhere and briefly in the mother of Nesbit's *The Railway Children,* who is always ready "to play with the children and read to them" (2). This mother, like Lisa Tillerman, becomes conflicted and absent but this absence allows the railway children, as the Tillerman children do in their late twentieth century world, to discover abilities and values and to make productive relationships in the community that the railway offers. The road and later, the world of Crisfield, is the Tillerman's version of the railway valley.

Kristeva's suffering and ruptured mother emerge from the semiotic and may threaten and intimidate, but she supplies energies and creativity and is needed as she is linked to the "chora" Kristeva sees existing beneath language and culture. If Winnicott idealises motherhood as a temporary, if essential, convergence of mother and infant, and in doing so, strips the mother of much of her agency and subjectivity, Kristeva alternatively sees maternity located in the preverbal, pre-discursive semiotic and a strain, an edge and a site of fragmentation that brings us to boundaries and divergences, energies and imaginings which must be accommodated and confronted if we are to move forward. Dicey has spent the narrative awkwardly wedged between these extremes, searching for the adequate and ideally, good enough mother she and her siblings have lacked. Dicey struggles to supply family but is confronted by the constant presence of the mother who abandoned them and whose absence is central to the dynamics of the opening novel.

In the conclusion to the series Dicey rejects both these potential maternal spaces and all their possibilities. She selects and reaches for an undefined role and a future which will exist outside and beyond the narrative and which the narrative does not explore. Dicey is implicitly rejecting the

patriarchal maternal and the alternative she has attempted to realize over the series; Dicey opts for a heterosexual relationship with Jeff which contradicts the energies that the series describes. Kelly Oliver in discussing Kristeva's "imaginary father" in *Reading Kristeva* offers a Kristevan approach to this final decision: Dicey may be finding in Jeff what her grandmother and her mother never experienced and what has been absent across the seven texts; the safety and goodness of the benign father that Kristeva in *Tales of Love* (1983) claimed to see present at the moment when the child leaves the archaic maternal and is enlisted into the patriarchy. Oliver feels that Kristeva is asking her reader to go back to a site before both the oedipal and the earliest maternal to the first possible images of life; conception itself and its moment of jouissance. The fantasy of the imaginary father is a "fantasy of reunion with the mother's body"(79). Oliver suggests that "this identification with the imaginary father is an identification with a fantasy of one's own conception"(79). In removing herself from the maternal presences Dicey has searched for across the series she may, in turning to Jeff be reaching the jouissance that characterises the primal scene; she may be imaginatively dispensing with the Lacanian father of the law and the earlier abject mother who has dominated her life. This may be the place that imaginatively holds and contains her and now ratifies the yearning she has experienced all her life and offers her a new place to operate from.

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