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The Individual in the Family: a Critical Introduction to the Novels of Anne Tyler.

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THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE FAMILY:

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVELS OF ANNE TYLER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Stella Ann Nesanovich
B.A., Louisiana State University in New Orleans, 1966
M.A., Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1968
December, 1979

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EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  The Early Novels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II  The Clock Winder</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III  Celestial Navigation</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV  Searching for Caleb</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V  Earthly Possessions</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: An Anne Tyler Checklist, 1959–1978</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

At the age of thirty-eight, the contemporary American writer Anne Tyler has an impressive publishing record. By the end of 1978, she had published seven full-length novels and forty short stories, several of which were later included in prize anthologies. An eighth novel is scheduled to appear in the spring of 1980. All seven of Miss Tyler's novels and most of her short stories are set in the South, primarily in North Carolina, where the novelist grew up, or in Baltimore, where she has lived with her husband and two daughters since 1967. Moreover, since the publication of her first story in 1959, Miss Tyler has shown a continuing interest in the intricacies of family relationships and the growth and concurrent isolation of the individual within a family setting. Repeatedly the novelist focuses on the ability of the individual to adjust to the confinement and isolation of family life and to continue to love in the face of marked conflict with the very people to whom he is related or with whom he has chosen to live. More than merely a vehicle for studying the endurance of human beings in confining, restrictive situations, however, Miss Tyler's fiction also reveals the author's development as a writer: a maturation of both her vision and her skill in the handling of complex and frequently more elusive personalities. The novels move from the early If Morning Ever Comes, a book which focuses on the dilemma of a single character, Ben Joe Hawkes, to Searching for Caleb, a portrait of five generations of the Peck family. In successive works, the main characters are older, their life experiences broader and more comprehensively portrayed. The young law student of If Morning Ever Comes, ten-year-old Simon and his cousin Joan in The Tin Can Tree, the dumpy teenager of A

v

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Slipping-Down Life, and the passive college drop-out and heroine of The Clock Winder, Anne Tyler's fourth novel, yield to more intriguing, mature characters: the reclusive bachelor-artist of Celestial Navigation, the impulsive and intuitive fortune teller, her mechanically-inclined husband, and her restless great uncle in Searching for Caleb, the tolerant and witty housewife of Earthly Possessions.

Despite the large body of Anne Tyler's work, the poignancy and depth of her insight into the universal human condition of family life, and recognition in May, 1977, by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for literary excellence and promise of important work to come, for the most part Miss Tyler has been overlooked by the scholarly community. In fact, to date no major critical study or book-length work has been published on her fiction. In part, the present study undertakes to fill the gap created by this neglect. Following an introduction which provides background on Anne Tyler's life, all seven novels are treated in detail, with major attention given to the last four novels. In addition, materials from several unpublished letters from Anne Tyler to the author and a checklist of Miss Tyler's works as well as critical reviews of her novels and miscellaneous articles have been included.
INTRODUCTION

Although only thirty-seven years old at the time of this writing, the American novelist Anne Tyler has produced a remarkable amount of quality fiction. To date, she has published forty short stories and seven full-length novels. Eight of her stories have appeared in The New Yorker, five in The Southern Review. Two were selected for inclusion in the O. Henry prize volumes for 1969 and 1972, and another in the first edition of the Pushcart Prize anthology published in 1976. "Your Place Is Empty," a story which originally appeared in the November 22, 1977, issue of The New Yorker, was also included in Best American Short Stories 1977, while yet another story from The New Yorker, "The Geologist's Maid," was included in the 1978 anthology edited by Benjamin Forkner and Patrick Samway, Stories of the Modern South. In addition, Miss Tyler's reviews of fiction, fiction-related biographies and essays, as well as photography, art, and children's books, appeared monthly in The National Observer from February, 1975, to that paper's demise in July, 1977. Since July, 1975, she has also intermittently contributed reviews to The New York Times Book Review and, more recently, The Washington Post Book World, The New Republic, and The Detroit News. However, despite the large body of her work, increasingly widespread critical acclaim, and recognition in May, 1977, by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for "literary excellence and promise of important work to come," Miss Tyler has, for the most part, been overlooked by the scholarly community and major critical journals. To date, no important critical study, and certainly no book-length study, of Miss Tyler's fiction has been published. It is the purpose of the present work, therefore, to fill the need for such scholarship by offering a critical introduction and thematic study of the fiction of Ann Tyler.
Born October 25, 1941, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Phyllis Mahon, a social worker, and Lloyd Parry Tyler, a chemist, Anne Tyler was raised in "a series of commune-like arrangements" scattered through Illinois and Pennsylvania. In fact, she was "moved continuously, maybe once or twice a year," from early infancy until she was six, at which time her parents, Quakers who "wished to find some sort of Emersonian" ideal community, "moved to the largest commune, in Celo, North Carolina—a very isolated valley where . . . [the inhabitants] supplied just about everything for . . . [themselves]." When Anne was eleven, the Tyler family "moved to Raleigh and settled into an ordinary middle class existence." It was at Raleigh's Broughton High School that Anne received some of the first encouragement in her writing.

In September, 1958, when she was not quite seventeen years old, Anne Tyler began studies at Duke University as an Angier Duke Scholar. There, via a freshman composition course, she was introduced to Reynolds Price, who was then teaching his first course at the University and who was to become a major source of encouragement and support for Anne's writing career. As she has acknowledged in a recent letter, Reynolds Price's special gift to me was his encouragement, and his enthusiasm about writing in general. He used to sit cross-legged on his desk and in a great gust of boyish zest (he was about 23 at the time) read his own stories aloud to us [the class], and then we'd all rush off to write ourselves. I don't know why, but that method worked far better than any of the more conventional ones. Also, he more or less donated an agent to me when I was a senior, at a time when I didn't even know what an agent was for, and I've been grateful ever afterward for that.

Interestingly, Reynolds Price and Anne Tyler shared, "at the space of several years, . . . the same inspiring high school English teacher, Phyllis Peacock." Both were, moreover, also heavily influenced by the work of Eudora Welty, whom Miss Tyler acknowledges as the major influence.
on her work, a literary influence that might, as she has said, account for "any surface similarity between my [i.e., Anne Tyler's] work and Reynolds's."^15

Although still a senior in high school when she discovered the writings of Eudora Welty, Anne Tyler has acknowledged Miss Welty's style as a true eye-opener in terms of the development of her own writing career.

Having grown up listening to tenant farmers' life stories while handing tobacco, but convinced by various schoolteachers that the only life story worth writing down was Silas Marner's, I was absolutely dumbfounded one day to come upon a sentence in Eudora Welty's "A Wide Net" about how Edna Earle was so slow-witted that she could ponder all day on how the tail of the C got through the loop of the L on the Coca-Cola sign. I realize this would rank rather low on any list of great revelations, but what she was saying to me was that literature could be made out of the ordinary things of life--Coca-Cola signs, and crêpe-de-chine bras, and all those other little objects George Eliot never heard of.^16

It was not, however, Eudora Welty's influence nor Reynolds Price's encouragement alone that fostered Anne Tyler's writing career and talent. Besides meeting Price at Duke University, Anne also majored in Russian and had the experience of helping edit The Archive, the student literary journal and the magazine in which she first published some of her fiction. Studying Russian, she feels, was a major help, for from the Russian writers she learned "a lot of the really obvious techniques and craftsmanship"^17 of fiction. Additionally, Anne's experience with The Archive served as a vehicle for her acquiring some recognition for her writing talent. Three of her stories originally published in The Archive appeared in their entirety in book-length anthologies, two in works devoted to Duke writers and one in a volume on writing. This latter volume praised Miss Tyler's skillful handling of sensuous details and offered her story as an example for imitation by other novice writers.^18 In addition to this recognition,
while still at Duke University, Anne Tyler also received the Anne Flexner Award for creative writing on two occasions, acted in several productions of the Wesley Players, and made Phi Beta Kappa. She graduated from Duke in August, 1961, just three years after entering.

That fall, Anne began studying for the Master's degree in Russian at Columbia University in New York City. There she completed "the coursework for the M.A.," but, as she has stated, "instead of staying to finish my thesis I fell prey to an impulse to go to Camden, Maine, where I swabbed decks on a schooner and proofread the local newspaper to earn my keep for a summer." The summer of 1962, and after that summer, Anne Tyler returned to Durham to work in the Duke University Library as a Russian bibliographer, a position she held for approximately nine months, for during that period, October 12, 1962, to be exact, Miss Tyler met her future husband, Taghi Mohammad Modarressi, who was then "a resident in psychiatry at the Duke hospital" and who "lived in the other half of a house some friends of mine [i.e., Miss Tyler's] lived in." The couple was married on May 3, 1963, at a church which Anne's parents attended in Raleigh. That July, Taghi and Anne moved to Montreal for a period of four years, a period interrupted only by a three-week visit to Iran one year after the marriage.

Prior to the wedding and the move to Montreal, Anne had published her first short story in a national publication. "The Baltimore Birth Certificate" appeared in February, 1963, in the Catholic periodical The Critic. Later that same year, in August and in November, two other stories appeared in major publications, one in Seventeen and one in The Saturday Evening Post. However, it was the appearance of her first novel, If Morning Ever Comes, published in 1964 by Alfred A. Knopf, that brought Anne some
national notice. Although the novel received somewhat mixed reviews in a number of national publications—it was neither panned nor raved about, for the most part—by and large the critics and reviewers recognized a new talent and were able to discern what were to become the major themes of Anne Tyler's fiction: her emphasis on the isolation and loneliness of the individual within a family situation. Notice was also given to her keen insight into character, as well as the subtle yet gentle irony and the sharp eye for characterizing detail which informed her style.

During the period in which she and her Iranian-born husband resided in Montreal, Anne Tyler was not only writing but also working as a librarian at the McGill University Law Library, a position she held until approximately one month before the birth of her first child. October 24, 1965, one day before her mother's twenty-fourth birthday, Tezh, Anne and Taghi's first daughter, was born. That same year, Anne Tyler's second novel, The Tin Can Tree, appeared. A subtle, at times tragicomic portrait of the grief which strikes a family with the death of a six-year-old girl, the novel marked a continuation and development of Miss Tyler's primary concern with family relationships and the strong, often conflicting emotions which serve to isolate individuals within a close circle. Like her first novel, Anne Tyler's The Tin Can Tree received critical recognition in a number of national publications, with more than one reviewer citing the delicacy of the author's handling of her subject matter, her keen insight into the complexities of human personalities, and her fine ear for the resonance of everyday conversation.22

In June, 1967, the Modarressis moved from Montreal to Baltimore, where they still live. Anne's first story for The Southern Review...
was published in the spring, 1965, and her first for The New Yorker in October, 1966. While her short stories continued to appear frequently in national publications between 1965 and 1970, a third novel, entitled A Slipping-Down Life, was not published until January, 1970, first in condensed form for Redbook and later that same year in its entirety for Alfred A. Knopf. Between The Tin Can Tree and A Slipping-Down Life came one other book, Winter Birds, Winter Apples, which remains unpublished at this time. It represented the novelist's "first attempt to try writing at night"—A Slipping-Down Life was her second—"since by then," as she told me, "I had a small baby." Clearly, Miss Tyler was expending a large amount of time and energy raising a family. A second daughter, Mitra, was born November 22, 1967, in Baltimore. Since 1967, however, the Modarressis have had no more children, and other novels have followed A Slipping-Down Life at one and two-year intervals: The Clock Winder, 1972; Celestial Navigation, 1974; Searching for Caleb, 1976; and Earthly Possessions, 1977. Another novel was finished near the end of 1977, but it was "shelved" because, according to Miss Tyler, her "agent . . . [didn't] like it." Significantly, the last four published works are set primarily in Baltimore, Anne Tyler's home since 1967, while the first three clearly reflect the authoress's familiarity with the North Carolina region and are set in that area. One, If Morning Ever Comes, a study of a Columbia University law student's conflicts concerning his family in North Carolina, also reflects Miss Tyler's year in New York.

Most of Anne Tyler's fiction, and clearly all of her novels, are concerned with the intricacies of family relationships and the growth of the individual within family circumstances. For her, "families . . . [are] convenient ways of studying how people adapt and endure when forced to
stay together, . . . how they last, and go on loving and adjust to the absurdities of their confinement." More than merely a vehicle for studying the endurance of human beings within a confining situation, Anne Tyler's treatment of the individual within the family also shows a clearly discernible pattern of development, a maturation of both the author's vision and skill in handling complex and frequently more elusive personalities. We move from the early If Morning Ever Comes, a novel which focuses on the dilemma of a single character, Ben Joe Hawkes, who suffers the loneliness of a young man separated from his family for the first time, to Searching for Caleb, a portrait of five generations of the Peck family, residents of Baltimore's famous Roland Park. In successive works, the main characters are older, their life experiences broader. The young law student of If Morning Ever Comes, ten-year-old Simon and his cousin Joan in The Tin Can Tree, the dumpy teenager of A Slipping Down Life, and the passive college drop-out and heroine of The Clock Winder yield to more complex, intriguing characters: the reclusive bachelor-artist of Celestial Navigation, the impulsive and intuitive fortune teller and her mechanically-inclined husband in Searching for Caleb, the tolerant and witty housewife of Earthly Possessions. Each novel marks a progressive exploration of the maturing individual and his growing consciousness of himself and his interactions with others, not merely his parents and siblings, but also his spouse, his own children, and generations of family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—who precede him. A sense of continuity and family history, an awareness of the ironic contrasts of individuals within a given family, and a keen attention to the paradoxical, often contrary nature of human behavior mark the later
novels and suggest a growth of Anne Tyler's insight into human character while clearly granting her a distinct place among other promising young writers of the modern South.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to offer a critical introduction to the novels of Anne Tyler through focusing primarily on the development of this theme of the individual in the family. The short stories, aside from those few which are germ stories for the early novels, have been omitted for purposes of this current study and must, therefore, remain the subject of later work. I have, however, attempted to cover here each of the seven novels published prior to December, 1978. Because this study is based on the contention that Anne Tyler's works illustrate a development of the theme of the individual within the family, I have chosen to group the three early novels, If Morning Ever Comes, The Tin Can Tree, and A Slipping-Down Life, together in one chapter. All three clearly mark the early stages of Miss Tyler's career as well as the period of her residence in North Carolina. Each of the later works, The Clock Winder, Celestial Navigation, Searching for Caleb, and Earthly Possessions, have been given fuller treatment in separate chapters devoted to each work. This grouping should not, however, be taken to suggest that the common setting of Baltimore distinguishes these works. Rather it is meant to imply the full-scale study these later novels deserve in light of Anne Tyler's development as a serious and important writer of fiction.
CHAPTER I

THE EARLY NOVELS

While an undergraduate at Duke University, Anne Tyler served for a short while as an assistant editor to the school’s literary journal, *The Archive*, most probably during the 1960-1961 school year. Her first story had appeared in that magazine in March, 1959, and was followed by another in October of that same year. "Laura," which Miss Tyler recalls as "the first story I ever tried to write," a response to an assignment in "a freshman English course under Reynolds [Price]," and "The Lights on the River," which came out of the same course, represent not only Miss Tyler's first attempts at writing fiction but also her first portrayal of the individual within a family situation. Interestingly, both stories focus on the consciousness of a child, in one case, a young adolescent, coming to terms with death: in the first story, that of an old lady who resided in "the community" where the child lived; in the second, the deaths of a small girl's father and brother in a boating accident. In both instances, internal conflict arises from the process of accepting death as well as the character's awareness of how her responses differ from those of other members of her family, or, as in "The Lights on the River," those of the child's only remaining relative, her mother. Both stories foreshadow what was to become a major concern of Anne Tyler's later work, her emphasis on the isolation of the individual within the family and the growth of self-awareness and change that both fosters and accompanies that isolation.

Anne Tyler's first novel, *If Morning Ever Comes*, was published in
October, 1964, more than five years after "Laura" and "The Lights on the River" and over three years after a germ story involving the hero of the then unpublished novel had appeared in The Archive. "I Never Saw Morning," a title which suggests that of the later work, appeared originally in the April, 1961, issue of The Archive. It was republished along with "The Saints in Caesar's Household," another Tyler Archive entry, in William Blackburn's Under Twenty-Five, a collection of work by Duke undergraduates. Almost concurrently with the publication of If Morning Ever Comes, another Ben Joe story, "Nobody Answers the Door," appeared in The Antioch Review.

Interestingly, both stories involve incidents suggested by the novel but which occur prior to the time of its opening. Moreover, it is in the novel that Anne Tyler's sense of the continuity of her characters' lives becomes evident.

In "I Never Saw Morning," the earlier of the two stories, the focus is not so much Ben Joe as his girlfriend, Shelley Domer, whose family, very much alive and well in this tale, have been killed in an automobile accident prior to the opening of If Morning Ever Comes. In fact, there are other discrepancies between the early story and the novel, the most notable being Ben Joe's last name. Here it is Hayes rather than Hawkes, he and Shelley are obviously still teenagers, and no reference is made to Ben Joe's large family—the six sisters, mother, and grandmother who live in Sandhill, North Carolina, his hometown in the later work. Here also the setting is Raleigh, and a visitor to Shelley's family, a high-school friend of her mother, is given the name Mrs. Chrisawn, the maiden name of Ben Joe's grandmother in If Morning Ever Comes. Interestingly, the two ladies are strikingly different: the first is a fat, sluggish, and proper woman; the other a spry, outrageously-costumed, seventy-eight-year-old zany. However, the two do share one feature: an ability to talk on
and on, or, as in Gram's case, sing on and on, so loudly that their voices can be heard throughout the households they inhabit, however temporarily. Clearly, then, when Anne Tyler wrote "I Never Saw Morning," she had not permanently fixed the setting nor all of the characters for a later novel. What she does appear to have fixed upon, and what is important to our study of the novel, is the relationship of Ben Joe and Shelley, his somewhat unconscious interest in her, her secret longing for him. In fact, it is the furtive return of Ben Joe and Shelley to the Domer residence after a date that supplies the opening scene for the story.9

A quiet, shy, and girlish teenager with home-making magazine notions of husbands and love,10 Shelley possesses a secret fantasy about herself and Ben Joe that marks her magical attachment to him. Somehow, she likes to think, Ben Joe, "two weeks older than she," was "alive and awake at the exact moment of her birth . . . and maybe . . . [knew], in some unexplainable way, that Shelley Jane Domer at that moment came into being—maybe stopping in the middle of a cry, or smiling his first smile, or suddenly dropping his mother's finger and staring at nothing, his forehead wrinkled for one second of time."11 Wondering if John Chrisawn knew when his wife was born and annoyed at the man for sitting "there like a biscuit on a plate waiting to be eaten"12 while his wife speaks of him as ugly, Shelley reveals her fantasy in an indirect way and, in so doing, speaks the words that give the story its title:

"When you think . . . about poor old John lying in his crib, maybe waking up suddenly or just smiling, the moment you were born, and when you think, I never saw morning but that he saw it too, even when I didn't even know him, . . . then you go and say a damn thing like that."13

Interestingly, Shelley's sudden outspokenness, like her secret fantasy
about Ben Joe and her quiet observation of his brown hands and hair
"blonder than hers," serves to isolate her from those around her, to
shock her family, and to give her at once both a secret power and knowl­
edge as well an experience of loss, a sense that "she had wasted something,
not just a night but something real like money." 

As the girl that Ben Joe Hawkes takes back to New York with him
at the end of If Morning Ever Comes, "his own little piece of Sandhill
transplanted" (p. 265), Shelley is an important character and serves a vital
function in Ben Joe's life. She is, in fact, along with Ben Joe himself,
the major link between the two early stories and the novel. Though the
central character in neither "Nobody Answers the Door" nor If Morning
Ever Comes, she figures in both, and her role in the latter work is
especially important for revealing Ben Joe's relationship with his family.
Indeed, it is Shelley who offers Ben Joe exactly what the Hawkes family
fails to supply. She is more than his "first girl" (p. 91), his piece of
home transplanted to New York, and his future bride. She is, indeed,
his bride-to-be precisely because she is something else, something none
of the Hawkes family is: a good listener.

Most of the Hawkes family women, Ben Joe's six sisters and his mother,
are first introduced in the short story "Nobody Answers the Door." Signi­
ficantly, it is here that the theme of Ben Joe's sense of isolation from his
family is first treated. As the only male in a family of women, Ben Joe
is an alien in his home by virtue of his sex. But his perplexity and
sense of isolation have deeper roots than his sexual difference from his
kin. He is also a worrier by nature, a young man trying desperately to
be understood and to understand himself and his family, to register his
perception of the world on some consciousness other than his own.

The title of the short story, "Nobody Answers the Door," suggests
precisely the nature of the Hawkes women. As Ellen Hawkes, Ben Joe's
mother, comments to a long-distance operator in the story, "'Go ahead,
nobody in this family answers. Not the door, not the phone, not their
names when I call them for supper; and nobody tells me anything.'"16
The sentiments might very well be Ben Joe's. Unresponsiveness, in fact,
is the chief characteristic of the Hawkes women. Each is closed off from
the other members of the family, isolated within herself yet somehow surviv­
ing despite her own emotional secrets and the bickerings and ordeals of
family life. As Ben Joe thinks, "none of them listened, except maybe
Joanne [Ben Joe's older sister] who was gone now. And even she had that
trick of wandering off somewhere in her mind, dodging a person's words
like a bird and staring into space."17

In addition to introducing the Hawkes family and one of the major
themes of If Morning Ever Comes, "Nobody Answers the Door" also provides
the background for an episode in the later work. In fact, the story
centers on two concurrent events: Ben Joe's attempts to convey to his
sister Jenny his bewilderment and curiosity about his being the only name
he recognizes in an unidentified address book he has found and the announce­
ment of Joanne's marriage via a long-distance phone call to her mother.
Although both events lead Ben Joe to recognize his isolation from his
family, only the latter, that is, Joanne's marriage, has a direct bearing
on the plot of If Morning Ever Comes. In that work, the news of Joanne's
return to Sandhill without her husband after a seven-year absence
precipitates Ben Joe's departure from Columbia University and his own
journey home.

Set in a time period when Ben Joe is employed in a bank—we learn
in the novel that there is about a three-year gap between Ben Joe's
graduation from Sandhill College and his attendance at the Columbia University law school—"Nobody Answers the Door" serves, like Anne Tyler's other early stories, as an example of her interest in the frustrations, isolation, and loneliness that are unavoidable at times in most familiar (and familial) relationships. With an irony typical of her later work, she suggests here a parallel between Ben Joe's relationship with his family and the situation of his being the only name he recognizes in that address book he tries to tell Jenny about. In both cases, Ben Joe is isolated from those around him and knowledgeable only of himself. His sisters remain mysteries to him both here and throughout the novel, and the address book he has found contains, besides his own name, only "far-away" addresses and names, "and only one name in each place."18

Significantly, the question of who owns the address book raises another far-away name in Ben Joe's consciousness, that of Shelley Domer. It is she who, as mentioned earlier, provides the link between the two early stories and who, in the novel, will return to Sandhill shortly before Ben Joe's visit, her family having moved to Georgia sometime prior to the novel's opening. In "Nobody Answers the Door," she is a link with time past, the far-away and remote period of Ben Joe's teen years. Like Joanne, Ben Joe's sister who calls long-distance, Shelley here represents the unexpected recall of the past and a lost warmth and closeness that now haunt Ben Joe. Reminding Jenny that Shelley was the girl he went with in high school, the quiet "'one that liked to go for walks,'"19 Ben Joe speaks of Shelley as the one girl who "'never said she even liked me but just by smiling, just with the corners of her mouth, ... could say she loved me better than anyone.'"20

This consciousness of the past, memory's intrusion on the present, and the conflict Ben Joe experiences because of the unresponsiveness
of his family recur in *If Morning Ever Comes.* In that work, moreover, the dilemma is extended; it includes not only the difference between the Hawkes girls and Shelley Domer, but also between Ellen Hawkes and Lili Belle Moseley, a local working-class girl Ben Joe's deceased father had taken up residence with. Leaving his wife and seven children, Phillip Hawkes, a Sandhill doctor, found in Lili Belle what Ben Joe finds in Shelley: openness, understanding, warmth, and love. Moreover, the dilemma created by Phillip's choice of warmth over coldness has repercussions for Ben Joe beyond his own choice of Shelley as his girl. In fact, part of the past Ben Joe must settle when he makes his return trip to Sandhill involves visiting Lili Belle, who has borne a son by Dr. Hawkes and who, ironically, has called her son Phillip, a name that Ben Joe, his father's first son, was denied.

In an interview with Clifford A Ridley in 1972, Anne Tyler commented that she didn't particularly "'like either of my first two books,'" perhaps because "'they seem so bland. Ben Joe,'" she continued, "'is just a likable guy; that's all you can say about him.'" Miss Tyler's comments are, understandably, those of a more mature writer thinking back with some dread on her early works which, at the distance of eight years or so, seem loose, unplanned, and even "bland." But Ben Joe Hawkes is not merely bland. The conflict he faces in the early story, "Nobody Answers the Door," and in the later work, *If Morning Ever Comes,* is one of real emotional pain and psychological turmoil. Miss Tyler underestimates her own insight in his case. Ben Joe's dissociation from his family, his confusion and uncertainty about himself and his future, and the tearing he feels inside as family loyalty wars with the desire for human warmth are real sources of discomfort as well as the foundations for further
growth. Then, too, Ben Joe, like the poor guy who owns the lost
address book, misses "all those people in all those other places."22
When he is away from home, Ben Joe is, in fact, afflicted with a memory
of only the best points about Sandhill and his family. His house remains
in his memory as it did when he was a child: "a giant of a place, with
children playing on the sunlit lawn and yellow flowers growing in two
straight lines along the walk" (p. 255), a changeless place unaffected
by time. In the opening chapter of *If Morning Ever Comes*, Ben Joe leaves
New York City in November out of just such a memory, a longing for what
he has left behind, and a need to know how his family is managing without
him. As in "Nobody Answers the Door," it is a long-distance phone call
about Joanne that sends him on his way home to Sandhill and what he mis­
takenly believes will be a warmer climate.

At twenty-five years old, Ben Joe Hawkes is, at the beginning of *If
Morning Ever Comes*, a confused and unsettled young man. He has been in
New York four months, and although he has chosen to study law because "it
was at least practical," he doesn't like it for "it was all memory work"
(p. 5). In fact, Ben Joe had originally postponed attending law school
for three years, partly because of his sense of responsibility for the
family of women he would leave in Sandhill. Once enrolled, moreover, he
continues to spend a good deal of time worrying about that same family.
Indeed, it is the memory of them that Ben Joe struggles with for much of
the novel. Unable to realize "a thing's happening or a moment's passing"
(p. 263), Ben Joe is also beset with the problem of recognizing change
and growth, either his sister's or his own. Memory's ability to grant
permanence to the past and his family's tendency to avoid discussing any
event which disrupts the normal pattern of their daily lives serve only to
exacerbate Ben Joe's condition. As a consequence, even the death of his
father, six years prior to the novel's opening, lives on in Ben Joe's memory, an unsettling and disturbing change that has not yet been dealt with fully.

Almost surrealistic because of accompanying events, that death took place at Lili Belle Moseley's house three weeks after Phillip Hawkes had returned to his wife. He left behind him a mother, a wife, a mistress, and eight children, seven by his legal wife. Of those eight children, only Ben Joe and little Phillip, Lili Belle's child, are males; only Ben Joe is the legitimate male heir, a boy who took upon himself the role of heading both families when his father passed on. Significantly, it is with his "official" or legitimate family that Ben Joe has difficulties, a colony of women who are—with the exception of Gram and Joanne—remote, cold, and independent. Joanne has, however, been gone from home for some time, Ben Joe's sisters tend to forget his existence the moment he is out of sight, his grandmother is remote because of her age, and Ben Joe's mother, Ellen Hawkes, has resigned herself to uninvolvedness in other's lives, including the lives of her own children and that of her husband before his death. For her, Phillip Hawkes' living with another woman was "his lookout" (p. 117), and her daughter Joanne's separation from her husband and return home are clearly "'none of our [i.e., the family's] affair'" (p. 19). "'If your mother'd said one word,'" Lili Belle tells Ben Joe, "'he'd [Ben Joe's father] have stayed with her, always would have. He was just wanting her to ask him. But she didn't'" (p. 126).

Part of the dilemma Ben Joe faces in this novel is his struggle against the familial traits of reticence and pride. It is, moreover, an old battle for Ben Joe. After his father's death, he had taken upon himself the role of delivering in person each month the bequest of money his father had left for Lili Belle and her son. Unable to resign
himself to his mother's coldness, Ben Joe had, we learn through his return trip home, frequently but secretly visited his father at Lili Belle's, a place where "everyone laughed a lot, and his father ate more than Ben Joe had seen him eat in years" (p. 117). Not surprisingly, Ben Joe's return home also includes a visit to Lili Belle and the unanticipated action of paying a hospital bill for little Phillip who is suffering from pneumonia.

Additionally, it is Ben Joe who expresses the greatest concern over Joanne's separation from her husband and who, in fact, openly protests her dating an old Sandhill beau while she is still married. "'The most amazing things go on in this family,'" Ben Joe yells, "'The most amazing things, that no one else would allow, and this family just keeps on'" (p. 190). Only Ben Joe challenges this family behavior and tries to "'stop one more of those amazing damned things that go on . . . and [that] everyone takes for granted, pretends things are still all right and the world's still right-side up'" (p. 190). It is, indeed, Ben Joe's rejection of the Hawkes family pattern that has led his sisters to label him "Ben Joe the worrier," and it is the same desire to break from the closed-lip attitude of his mother and the unresponsiveness of his sisters that Shelley Domer challenges.

Ben Joe's return to Sandhill involves several quests. As a metaphor for his psychological journey from adolescence to adulthood, this return necessarily involves a re-evaluation of himself as well as his family. But Ben Joe has difficulty recognizing change, sometimes even of realizing his twenty-five years, and his journey home is, in some ways, an attempt to cling to the past and the security that his family offers. His response to Joanne's return is in part evidence of this endeavor, for it was Joanne who represented warmth and security for Ben Joe and who could "pat" away
the "fears swamping" the minds of her younger brother and sisters and help them to "realize everything that had happened" (p. 84). In fact, because Joanne was not present the night Phillip Hawkes died, her return to Sandhill allows Ben Joe an opportunity to discuss that event and hence give it the reality that words and expression of once-hidden feelings can provide. Ironically, Joanne is not the same person that left Sandhill seven years before, and Ben Joe's failure to consider how she might have changed leaves him feeling troubled and strange.

In addition to his difficulty realizing change, Ben Joe is also troubled in his relations with those outside of the family. After he is home one night, he is "heavy and old and tired" (p. 70), and a visit to Shelley, his first girl, does not solve his problem. With Shelley he is afraid, reluctant to kiss her and thus to commit himself again as he did years before, for fear maybe "time would get even more jumbled up in his head than it was already" (p. 105). Only when Shelley confronts him with his thoughtless treatment of her does Ben Joe recognize that in Shelley he has a chance to create a change that he has longed to effect in his family—that "still, unchanging world of women" (p. 199). Unlike his sisters, Shelley listens to Ben Joe, and above all, she is dependent on him and hopeful of his attention. Because she is his "first girl," she is a part of his past that he can retain, a vivid link with his youth and his home. Out of this realization comes Ben Joe's decision to ask Shelley to return to New York with him, in effect, to commit himself fully to another human being outside of his family. In so doing, he becomes the first of a number of Anne Tyler's characters who actively seek to fill a need their families fail to meet and who strive to reject the predictability and restriction of life ordained by their families' behavior.
In "Nobody Answers the Door," Anne Tyler suggests through a memorable image the haunting and mysterious nature of the past's relationship with the present: near the end of the story, Ben Joe notices the names "Lowell" and "Patty" written on the kitchen window pane and made to reappear after many years because of the steam and mist that rise from a boiling pot of coffee. He does not know "whose names they were," nor does he "know if two people had drawn them laughing one Saturday night while they were waiting for the popcorn to pop or if there was only one person and that one silent and thoughtful, waiting maybe for one of the girls to get dressed to go out and tracing those names without knowing he did it." Images from his own past, and from lives other than his own, lives lived outside of his memory and consciousness, haunt Ben Joe throughout It Morning Ever Comes. There are, of course, his own room, "made up of layers, the more recent layers never completely obliterating the earlier ones" (p. 219); Ben Joe's dreams of his childhood and of his father, robust and jocular, retelling his favorite stories; and the family bulletin board where, as in Ben Joe's room, the "years arranged themselves one on top of the other in layers before his eyes" (p. 178) and before which Ben Joe stands confused, feeling "like a stranger" (p. 176), unable to identify who wears contact lens in the family or to explain his sister Tessie's curious note. More significantly, there are images of darkness and night, the unknown element of the past and the future, which haunt Ben Joe in his waking and sleeping hours. Indeed, for Ben Joe, Sandhill and his family form one timeless and haunting image that floats before him when he is "in the middle of being loose and strong and on . . .[his] own" (p. 200). As he tells Shelley, when he is away Sandhill is like "some sunny little island," his family "sort of like a bunch of picnickers in
a nineteenth-century painting, sitting around in the grass with their picnic baskets and their pretty dresses and parasols, and floating past on that island" (pp. 199-200). It is not surprising, therefore, that one point of Ben Joe's sojourn home, indeed, of his sister Joanne's return also, is the dismantling of this idyllic vision, a confrontation with reality that involves a recognition of change.

One of Anne Tyler's more outstanding talents is her ability to portray characters of almost any age and sex. In _If Morning Ever Comes_, this talent evidences itself in her portrayal of Ben Joe's grandmother, for it is not only Ben Joe who must come to terms with change and actuality. Gram and Joanne are also confronted with similar dilemmas. For Gram, this dilemma involves the painful recognition of aging and approaching death, a recognition made real by the return to Sandhill of Jamie Dower, an old friend of hers who has been gone sixty-eight years. Jamie has returned home to die and, coincidentally, rides the train from New York with Ben Joe, an ironic paralleling of two very different psychological journeys. In fact, it is through Ben Joe that Gram learns of Jamie's return, for it is Ben Joe who walks the eighty-four-year-old former resident of Sandhill to his new abode at the home for the aged. However, unlike Jamie Dower, Ben Joe's grandmother is far from ready to die or retire herself to the old folks' home. Her counter to old age is unpredictability and variety. She orders smoked oysters, minced clams, and pickled artichokes from the grocery and dresses in an outlandish costume that includes "men's black gym shoes that tied around her bare ankles" (p. 56) and luxurious underwear in a variety of colors. When she visits Jamie Dower in the home for the aged, moreover, she kicks up her heels as she leaves the elevator just so the nurse will not mistake her for a patient trying to escape. However, with the visit to Jamie and the word of his death later that
same day, Gram too is made to recognize change: in Sandhill, in herself, and in the behavior of her grandchildren who no longer follow the old etiquette she grew up by. As she says when confronted with Joanne's date the same evening she has learned of Jamie Dower's death, "I am getting old" (p. 188).

On the surface, Anne Tyler's *If Morning Ever Comes* is a simply-structured novel that covers a little less than five and a half days in the life of its hero, Ben Joe Hawkes. Five of these days are spent in his hometown of Sandhill, North Carolina, and one evening on the train ride south from New York City. But, because memory is triggered by an association with place, the book actually covers a lifetime of experiences not just for Ben Joe but his whole family. Indeed, because of the largeness of his family, we are reminded that what he recalls is the recollection of one individual in a family of nine people, including his grandmother, his mother, and his six sisters. The book's focus is, thus, ironically deceptive. Its subject is the commonly-shared experiences of the Hawkes family as well as the very different ways in which they have responded to those experiences, some neither remembering nor having noticed in the first place the very item or event that is paramount in the consciousness of another family member.

This point is well-made not only within the family, but also when Grandmother Hawkes visits Jamie Dower and the two recall their shared youth by presenting different stories, only one or two of which the other vaguely remembers, if at all. For Joanne and Ben Joe, this isolation of the individual within his own consciousness is made clear when the two talk of their father's death and Ben Joe recalls the evening his father died, a time about a year after Joanne's departure. That evening, like many other events, "wasn't mentioned" (p. 85) in the
Hawkes house, nor was the fact that Phillip Hawkes "loved every one of his children" (pp. 85-86). But recollection of the time sets Ben Joe to wondering "what went on behind . . . [the] cool, bright smiles" (p. 86) his sisters wore. "What did they think about before they went to sleep at night?" Living in his house, Ben Joe thinks, is "like watching a man who has been to Africa drink tea in the parlour and make small talk, with all those things known and done behind him that he is not even thinking about" (p. 86). On the surface, there is no consciousness of change. No one acknowledges that amazing things have happened.

For Joanne, one of these amazing things is her marriage. Once a flighty, wild teenager who wore red gypsy dresses and golden bangles on her arm, Joanne suffers from a restlessness similar to Ben Joe's. She has, in fact, not gone beyond "the first-date" phase in her relationships with people. "'I always did like first dates,'" she tells Ben Joe. "'I could first-date anyone—even the people that were on seventh dates with me, or even people that weren't dates at all.'" But "'what was I supposed to do,'" she asks, "'once they loved me?'" (p. 73). The recognition of the commitment and responsibility this love brings, now that she is a married woman with a child of her own, is part of the process of growth Joanne undergoes through her trip home. Such a recognition is also involved in Ben Joe's commitment to Shelley and entails a fear that almost sends him running from his future bride as he boards the train for New York with her in the last chapter of the novel. Indeed, for both Ben Joe and Joanne, a forfeiting of a former image, a younger self, is required. Some of the barriers to the outside world which families establish for survival must also be removed.
In a conversation with Gary, Joanne's husband who has come from Kansas to take her back with him, Ben Joe learns of many of the things about the family Joanne has shared with Gary, many simple details of things Joanne "had noticed in a lifetime," "bits of her mind that none of them [i.e., the family] had even known she had" (p. 241). The revelation sets Ben Joe wondering about the things he will tell Shelley, the "useless thoughts" he will give her, and "the little aimless curled-in-on-themselves things" he is always thinking but doesn't want to share (p. 241). Ironically, then, the conversation with Gary allows Ben Joe to come to a greater awareness of his own separateness at the same time it lets him view Joanne in a way he has not before: to recognize "for the first time" that she is "married" (p. 241), that "the real Joanne" is "seven years older" (p. 247) than when she left home and is no longer in need of Ben Joe's chastising her for her behavior. In a way, then, the outsider Gary has brought a greater knowledge of Joanne to Ben Joe, allowing him to know something of his sister he has been unable to recognize before this point.

On his train ride back to New York, Ben Joe fantasizes about his future, picturing Shelley and a yet unborn son like two white dancing figures at the far end of his mind. They were suspended a minute, still and obedient, before his watching eyes and then they danced off again and he let them go; he knew he had to let them. One part of them was faraway and closed to him, as unreachable as his own sisters, as blank-faced as the white house he was born in. Even his wife and son were that way. Even Ben Joe Hawkes.

(p. 266)

This fantasy and the realization it contains mark the change that Ben Joe has undergone through his journey home. Troubled by what he does not understand in others, he is nonetheless willing now to let it go, to accept the mysterious, hidden portion of himself and others, leave
the past and his family, and move into the future. Thus for Ben Joe Hawkes, the hero of Anne Tyler's first novel, recognition of this unavoidable distance between human beings means that the Hawkes family, even his bride-to-be, will always remain apart from him, just as they are at the beginning of the novel: riding "another kind of train" from that which, both literally and metaphorically, carries him home to Sandhill. Indeed, "with the sound of his own train in his ears," Miss Tyler writes, Ben Joe can't "hear" the "voices" of his family: "he . . . [stands] outside his family windows and . . . [watches] their movements without hearing a single sound" (p. 28).

Anne Tyler has spoken of "the real heroes" in her books as the characters "who manage to endure . . . and who somehow are able to grant other people the privacy of the space around them and still produce warmth." It is these people, she says, who "last, . . . go on loving," and "adjust to the absurdities of their confinement" with one another. Clearly Ben Joe Hawkes and Shelley Domer are such people. Yet for Miss Tyler, the test of their endurance and love comes in the familial experience they share, an experience in which the need for understanding and warmth matches the need for privacy and space for growth. Here the individual shares a number of experiences with his spouse and family while remaining essentially isolated within his own thoughts and memories, retaining always a portion of himself for himself alone. Such an isolation within the family is, of course, strikingly ironic because it exists within the family, an ostensibly intimate group. Moreover, it is the increasingly astute presentation of this irony that marks the development of Anne Tyler's work.

Not surprisingly, then, a similar awareness of the isolation of
individuals in a family setting informs Anne Tyler's second novel, The Tin Can Tree, published in October, 1965, one year after If Morning Ever Comes. Unlike the earlier work, however, The Tin Can Tree focuses on the contrasts among the members of several families, most living in one house. A tripartite dwelling place with "three chimneys . . . jumbled tightly together," that house seems to symbolize the three disparate yet close families that live within. There are, however, more than these three families represented in the novel, mainly because several residents of the three-family house described in the opening of the novel are refugees of other families, families they have fled for lack of the warmth, freedom, and love which Anne Tyler has mentioned as part of the environment generated by the heroes of her books. Moreover, like the house they inhabit—a strange, solitary building rising up "among the weeds" (p. 31)—the individuals within are haphazardly jumbled together, isolated yet dependent on one another for all the love and understanding they are likely to find in their respective lifetimes. Indeed, the one "long tin roof" (p. 6) of the house which covers these people parallels the one major experience of the novel that touches them all: the death and funeral of Janie Rose, the six-year-old daughter of Roy and Lou Pike.

With their ten-year-old son Simon and their niece Joan, a refugee from her parents' home, the Pikes occupy the far right section of the house. As the novel opens, we are with them at the funeral of Janie Rose, who has been killed by a fall from a tractor two days before. Only Joan, Simon, and their neighbor James Green are able to leave the funeral, held at a small family plot on a hill not far from the house. Numb with grief, Lou Pike is silent and withdrawn, and her inability to talk
or return to the normal activity of life after the funeral is indicative of one of the major dilemmas that face all of the characters in the novel: how to ameliorate the loss of love and the grief which Janie Rose's death has brought and to adjust privately and individually to that loss while maintaining their commitments to the other members of the family and community.

The Pikes are not alone in their grief, of course. Among the other residents of the house and those who also suffer the loss of Janie Rose are James Green, a twenty-eight-year-old photographer and bachelor and one of the attendants at the funeral, as well as James's brother Ansel. Ansel is, unfortunately, a victim of anemia who refuses to care for himself and who repeatedly attempts to inflict others with his own sense of guilt and remorse at the death of Janie Rose. Also noteworthy is the fact that James and Ansel, like Joan Pike, are refugees from their own family, though theirs is a much larger group than the two aging parents Joan has left. Like her, however, they too have fled a stifling atmosphere where love cannot grow and have come to form a unique, diverse, yet integral part of the larger, extended Pike family with whom they dwell.

Sharing the house with the Pikes and the Greens—indeed, sandwiched in the middle of these two families—live the Potter sisters, Miss Lucy and Miss Faye. Minor characters in the novel, these two chubby, aging, and reclusive spinsters emerge from their residence only on special occasions and for parties or for their weekly visits to their neighbor Ansel, events marked by the sisters' donning of gloves and handbags as though "they were expecting so much out of ... [their] visit" (p. 174). Miss Tyler never gives us much background on the Potter sisters, save to tell us about their favorite hobbies. How they are related to the Pikes, if at all, and come to share the same house with them remains a
mystery somehow in keeping with the dark, heavily curtained, and tapestry-draped interior of the sisters' house and their frightened, birdlike ways. Mirrored by the haphazard construction of the house in which they live, the Potter sisters, like the Greens, seem inexplicably tied to the Pikes and their lives. However, despite their apparent unrelatedness, they also share the common grief incurred by Janie Rose's death, an experience that leads all the characters in The Tin Can Tree to a greater closeness and interdependence. Indeed, this common grief, including, ironically, the very different ways in which the characters express that grief, offers a kind of shared fate. Despite their various memories and impressions of Janie Rose, the characters in this novel illustrate the need that marks all families, whether blood-related or not. Families, Miss Tyler says in The Tin Can Tree, are groups of people united for survival, people sharing a common experience of life, despite their differences and the essential isolation of one person from another.

The Tin Can Tree is set in Larksville, a small town of dwindling population in the tobacco-growing area of North Carolina. Like If Morning Ever Comes, it is chronologically compact and covers only six days in the lives of the major characters. Those six days are, however, essential to Miss Tyler's study of the effects of grief on this disparate family of people, for they are the six days following Janie Rose's funeral, the time in which we see the contrasting responses emerge most vividly in each of the central figures. Moreover, where in If Morning Ever Comes the death of Dr. Philip Hawkes was an important event, it was, nonetheless, treated retrospectively, a segment of the past which Ben Joe recalls while talking to his sister Joanne. Here, however, death is an immediate experience, something the Pikes, the Greens, and even the reclusive
Potter sisters must deal with directly. Not surprisingly, one of the central themes to emerge in the novel is the ability which most human beings somehow muster in order to survive and endure and somehow go "'on loving . . . [even] after finding out there's such a thing as dying'" (p. 106). It is a trait which Miss Tyler poignantly refers to elsewhere as "the long, slow, desperate courage" it takes to live.29

Paramount among the responses to the death of Janie Rose is that of her mother, the one central figure who does not, at least at first, endure very well. In fact, Lou Pike's first response is to withdraw. An overweight seamstress and dressmaker to many of Larksville's ladies, prior to the death of her six-year-old daughter, Mrs. Pike apparently favored her son Simon over the-unplanned-for Janie. As one of the tobacco tiers Joan works with comments, "'Won't it Simon she used to brag on all the time? Won't it Simon that was spoiled so rotten!'" (p. 100). Since the death of Janie Rose, however, Lou Pike has become incommunicative and limp. Incapable of dressing herself or of leaving her bedroom for more than a few minutes at a time, she has come to neglect all of her household duties as well as the care of Simon. Ironically, it is the favored Simon who is now ignored by his mother and who begins to feel the effects of her guilt over her daughter's death. In Lou Pike's grief-stunned mind, that guilt has been incurred for failure to heed Janie Rose when she mentioned going off to ride a neighbor's tractor, an event which led directly to Janie Rose's death and one which Lou Pike believes she could have prevented had she listened to what her daughter was saying. Moreover, because Mrs. Pike blames herself for her daughter's death, she has become isolated from her family, bed-ridden rather than active. Her adjustment to the loss of Janie Rose is prolonged while her commitment to her family is neglected.
Her son, consequently, grows increasingly bored and restless. Indeed, it
is the effects of Lou Pike's grief on Simon which the novel studies in some
detail. After five days of being omitted from his mother's attention and
affections, convinced that he is doing everything wrong and that there is
no longer a place for him within his family, Simon runs away to a neigh-
boring town, about as far, in fact, as a ten-year-old boy can run by himself.

Significantly, his journey takes him to Caraway, North Carolina, the
home of the Greens, the very family which Ansel and James have fled.
Naturally, it is to the Greens' house that Simon goes, for he knows of no
one else in the town, and his turning to the Greens represents another
ironic comment on the nature of family relationships. Indeed, Simon's
action indicates his acceptance and affirmation as well as his need for
the very family of people James and Ansel have bitterly rejected. Iron-
ically, it is the Greens, the family that failed to fill the needs for
warmth and love which James and Ansel possess, who provide shelter and
attention for the run-away Simon. Not surprisingly, Anne Tyler skillfully
uses this event as a device for briefly reuniting James with his family, a
family he swore he would never return to. Thus it becomes a means of
focusing on the contrasts between James and Simon and their respective
families as well as an effective episode for bringing Lou Pike out of her
daze of grief, self-imposed guilt, and isolation.

The focus of The Tin Can Tree is not, however, Simon nor primarily his
mother. Simon is important because of his relationship with other characters,
and Mrs. Pike—precisely because she has chosen withdrawal as an expression
of grief—remains somewhat in the background of the novel. Rather, the real
focus is more clearly Joan Pike and her relationship and interactions with
the Greens as well as Simon. In fact, it is more Joan's departure on the
Thursday following the funeral of Janie Rose that immediately precipitates Simon's leaving than it is the prolonged isolation of his mother.

As an outsider to the immediate Pike family, Joan is germinal in illustrating the familiar Tyler theme of the isolation of the individual within the family. In fact, she is also an excellent example of the effects of childhood and family experiences on the adult. The daughter of Roy Pike's older brother, Joan is, at age twenty-six, a woman who has "lived in bedrooms all her life," "the way a guest would--keeping her property strictly within the walls of her room, hanging her towel and wash cloth on a bar behind her door" (p. 32). Moreover, although she spends her evenings with James Green and "a little time with the Pikes" (p. 33), Joan still lives in her bedroom, still waiting "for an invitation" from the Pikes to come out. This self-imposed isolation from the other members of the family, this failure to mingle fully and adopt the more casual way of one who feels truly at home in the household where he lives, is not, however, deliberate nor malicious, nor is it, as in the case of Mrs. Pike, a singular response to a tragic event. Rather, for Joan this behavior is a carefully learned habit, a product of her early years and the impersonal treatment she received from her parents. It is, Anne Tyler tells us,"what she was used to; that was all" (p. 32).

An only child born to "already middle-aged parents," Joan grew up without the comfort that sharing provides. Indeed, in her house she was always treated as a guest, "politely, like a visitor who had dropped in unexpectedly" (p. 33). Uncertain of "what they were supposed to do with her," her parents merely "gazed at her uneasily over the tops of their magazines until she retreated to her room" (p. 33). Even her return trip home are marked by formality, by the exchange of gifts "brought
back . . . for each of them" (p. 217) despite the length or brevity of her absence.

Years later, Joan is still retreating, still "a guest" in her uncle's house. Governed by a strong sense of commitment to Simon, one that originally included Janie Rose, Joan stays on after the funeral to make sandwiches and to tend to Simon despite her desire to "walk off," "go find some place to sit alone and think things out" (p. 41). And although she does stay to tend to Simon and help her aunt, Joan is awkward around the family, uncertain of how to comfort her uncle or what exactly to do for her aunt. Ironically, it is Joan on whom everyone depends. Precisely because she lacks a strong sense of family identity, she is practical and detached, and her very lack of involvement lets her see through the selfishness of Mrs. Pike's retreat as well as the delight in pain and guilt which the morose Ansel seems to exhibit. Indeed, because of her emotional restraint and uninvolved ness, Joan becomes the one character in the Pike family capable of packing away Janie Rose's belongings after the funeral. Without a strong sense of guilt, the kind often bred in the early years of childhood by over-zealous parents, Joan is also exempt from the destructive grief that affects both Ansel and Mrs. Pike, a grief that leads them to cling to their feelings and memories of the deceased Janie Rose instead of resuming the difficult task of living and forgetting.

However, Joan's staying on after the funeral, like her periodic flights and returns to the family, is also indicative of a major dilemma in her life: her longing for attachment and family and her inability to realize or actualize that dream. It is a dilemma fostered by her sense of uncertainty and impermanence as well as her awkwardness and isolation from the very people with whom she lives. Indeed, although Joan has
been with her uncle and aunt for four years prior to the novel's opening, characteristically, she had originally "come . . . planning just to stay . . . a week or two" (p. 33). At the Pikes' home, however, things were different than at her parents' house: "there was always something going on, and a full family around the supper table" (p. 33). There were also the children whom Joan, in her walks and play, could pretend "were her own." It was, in fact, the children who "made her change her mind" (p. 33) about finding a place of her own. With them she could play "senseless games, . . . toasting marshmallows over candles and poking spiders in their webs to try and make them spin their names" (p. 33). In effect, with the Pikes, especially with Janie Rose and Simon, Joan is able to live the childhood she was not allowed to have with her middle-aged parents. Thus, despite her desire to escape, to walk off from the Pikes, Joan is truly committed to them, although she is not emotionally explicit in that commitment. What the Pikes offer Joan is more than the guest room her parents provided. It is a system of support, warmth, love, and intimate knowledge, the kind that families supply. Above all else, Simon and Janie Rose, because they are children in need of the attention and love all children require, make Joan feel both needed and loved in turn. She is, thus, inexorably drawn to the Pikes, and her monthly flights are always aborted, as we see in the one she makes after the funeral, by the memory of the children's innocence and loving trust.

Yet another of Joan Pike's roles is to serve as a link between the Pikes and the Greens. Indeed, her commitment to the Pike children is equally matched by her love for James Green. With James, however, as with the others, Joan remains torn between commitment and a desire to flee, between longing for a family of her own and continuing her relationship with James. Although it is James who offers the best possibility
of fulfilling Joan's dream of marriage and family, unlike James, Joan has no siblings, and she is hard-pressed to accept the commitment James has to his brother or to understand why he has not asked her to marry him. The formality of Joan's relationship with her parents and the absence of any sisters or brothers of her own blind her to understanding the kind of devotion and feelings James has for Ansel, a devotion that clearly negates any prospect of his marrying Joan despite his obvious fondness for her and their lengthy courtship. As in other Tyler novels, the individual here is ironically cut off from the very thing he seeks and longs for. The warmth and closeness, and the sense of connectedness a family of her own will provide, elude Joan even as she devotes her life to seeking them. Ironically, it is the very family background out of which she emerges that both leads her to quest for what she has not had while it also denies the fulfillment of her desire. In like fashion, it is the conditions of James's familial ties that prevent him from marrying Joan while his sense of devotion and his anger at his brother war within him.

At the end of The Tin Can Tree, Joan Pike is pictured within a circle of light that sets her apart from the other members of the Pike household. Tyler writes that Joan remains within her own "circular world that she . . .[sits] in alone" (p. 268). While in reality Joan is sitting within this circle of light so that the Potter sisters can make a silhouette of her, symbolically she is outside of the family's magical circle, separated from the others by her single status and her alienation from the sense of family that unites the others. Joan sits within this circle after having run away and returned, like Simon, in an effort to end the pain and confusion she felt at the death of Janie Rose and the prolonged isolation of Mrs. Pike. Paradoxically, the only two people who knew she was gone are
Simon, who pleaded to go with her, and Ansel, who watched her go from his front window. It is, of course, Ansel whom Joan resents in a way that only frustration and familiarity can foster, while it is Simon to whom she feels her strongest commitment. That it is these two figures who notice Joan's departure is particularly significant since they represent the two conflicting forces in her life. Moreover, that Ansel, rather than James, turns out to be the one adult to speak to Joan about her leaving draws considerable attention to the bitter distance between the reality of Joan's life and her desires. Indeed, as if to underscore the irony, it was a confrontation with James over Ansel that precipitated Joan's running away and her effort to return once again to her aging parents.

Once she is on board a bus leaving Larksville, Joan recognizes almost immediately what she has left and what it is that will make her return. Away from the Pikes, she is identity-less, merely "another stranger" (p. 224). Although she has deliberately taken from the Pikes' house every scrap of evidence that she has ever lived there, within Joan's consciousness there are several pictures she cannot erase nor escape, pictures of herself "resting on nothing" (p. 225). Having left her room as a guest would, anonymous and empty of "every stray bobby pin and button" (p. 217), Joan flees the company and support only a family offers; what she goes to is isolation and loneliness, "to years spent reading alone in a little house kept by old people" (p. 224). Moreover, what Joan does not realize until she leaves is the strain under which she has been acting, the immediacy of Janie Rose's death, and the time and distance needed to heal that wound. Additionally, Mrs. Pike's withdrawal and the efforts to get her back to work have also been a strain. Indeed, that withdrawal has not been "fair" to those around her. It has served as a reminder of the loss and represents a failure of will and of commitment to the others in
the family who "want to stop remembering the dead" (p. 105). More importantly, Lou Pike's withdrawal and inaction have kept those others from adjusting, from picking up the pieces of their own lives and going on. They are forced to stare repeatedly out of the back door at the tin can tree which Janie Rose built to her "God" and which, after her death, haunts the household with the rattling of the cans in a funereal wind.

Through her flight from Larksville, Joan Pike is able to gain psychological as well as physical distance from that symbolic tree and to begin the process of coming to terms with Janie Rose's death in her own way. Not until she leaves Larksville does Joan feel the immediacy of that death, and even then she is struck with the unreality of the event, as though it were "something vague and far off," something too "bad" to have happened (p. 227). Seeing Janie's name listed in the obituary column in the Larksville paper, Joan is hit with a sharp sensation in the pit of her stomach "as if she hadn't known of the death until this instant" (p. 227). Her response is to read through the notice twice and then to fold the paper "very carefully" so as to keep the death notices "out of sight" (p. 227) and far from her consciousness, a gesture similar to the way in which she has tried to clean her room at the Pikes' of all traces of her memory and being.

Joan is not, however, successful in her thinking. Try as she might to deliberately shut out thoughts of the Pike children and the death of Janie Rose, she is repeatedly drawn back to the Pikes by the experiences she has shared with them. While the obituaries are out of sight, the memorial notices, like memory itself, are not, and "a sudden picture of all the years of this century, stretching far back in a chain of newsprint that grew yellower and yellower as the years grew older" leads Joan to envision
how it would be when today was yellowed too, years from now, and the Pikes themselves were buried and Simon an old man. Then on the third week in every July he would print his notice: "In Memory of Janie Rose, who passed away just fifty years ago July 13th."

(p. 228)

Only Janie would not change. Frozen in time and memory, she would be remembered always "as someone very small with spectacles, who had lived in a tacked-on bedroom in the back of the house" (p. 228).

Despite her fantasy, Joan is unable to envision the future and what Simon will look like in fifty years. "All she saw was Simon as he was today--hunching his shoulders up, tucking his head down in that uncertain way he had" (p. 228). An encounter with a blind man at a bus stop also leads Joan to remember Simon the way he was during the first year she'd lived . . . [with the Pikes], when he was six and still had to be awakened at night and taken to the bathroom so he wouldn't wet his bed. He had gone obediently, . . . with his eyes closed and the shadows of some dream still flickering across his face."

(p. 231)

Struck by the innocence and tenderness of the scene, Joan decides to return to the Pikes in Larksville, "'to go back,'" as she tells the bus driver, "'where I came from'" (p. 231). Her decision, like her journey, is a repeat performance—she has left the Pikes before, and returned abruptly before too—but "'this time,'" Joan insists to the driver as he laughingly retrieves her luggage, "'it's different'" (p. 232). This time "'where'" she "'came from'" is no longer her parents' home, the place to which she was originally returning, but rather her uncle and aunt's house in Larksville, the place where she has found some warmth and love.

Ironically, as we have already mentioned, even with her return to the Pikes' household, Joan remains to some extent outside of the family structure. She is thus placed apart from the others, the only familyless
female in a room filled with family members: Roy and Lou Pike and their
son, Simon; James and Ansel Green; and the two Potter sisters, Miss Lucy
and Miss Faye. Arriving at the Pikes' house the same evening she has left,
Joan finds a house darkened at one end but alive with music and light at
the other. Since she has been absent all day, she is unaware of Simon's
having run away. The family, significantly, has gathered to celebrate
his return—not Joan's. When someone suggests that a family picture be
taken, it is Joan who offers to take it, an act which at once both denies
her a place within that picture while providing her with an opportunity
none of the others has: a chance to stand outside of the group and see them
as only an outsider can. Significantly too, Mr. Pike counters any objection
from Simon about Joan's absence from the picture by mentioning that Joan
has not gone anywhere; "'she don't mind!'" (p. 271) not being photographed.
Practical and strong, Joan truthfully does not mind, although she has in­
deed been somewhere, made her own sort of journey and adjustments, came
to a greater awareness of her role, and returned to that place where she
is needed and missed most, if only by ten-year-old Simon and the ever­ailing
Ansel. Momentarily removed from the families gathered on that one side of
the house, Joan looks at them through the finder of the camera and sees
each person moving in his characteristic way, "making his own set of
motions": "James bent over Ansel; Mrs. Pike . . . [touching] the top of
Simon's head, and Mr. Pike . . . smiling awkwardly into space" (p. 273).
What she realizes is not only the separateness which the view calls to
mind but also a kind of permanence, one at once both voluntary and en­
forced. While the camera freezes permanently the gestures of these moving
bodies, the figures here will remain the same, "not because of anyone
. . . but because it was what they had chosen, what they would keep a strong
tight hold of":

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Whole years could pass, they could be born and die, they could leave and return, they could marry or live out their separate lives along, and nothing in this finder would change. (p. 273)

As in the reminiscences of each individual, within Joan's or Simon's or Ansel's memory, the figures in the photograph Joan is about to snap remain both static and solitary: "motionless, each clutching separately his glass of wine" (p. 273).

The reference to photography here and its ability to capture fleeting and transient figures recurs throughout The Tin Can Tree and provides a secondary—the first being romantic—link between Joan and James Green, the other major character in the novel. Photography is, first of all, James's occupation. A free-lance photographer, he does family and individual portraits as well as snapshots for the Larksville paper. Significantly, what Ann Tyler hoped to achieve by making James a photographer was to give him "an intelligent occupation . . . , not too artsy or self-conscious, but implying some degree of imagination." What the "methods said, . . . finally, was something that just emerged on its own." The result is "time stilled" and a way of viewing reality as only the person taking the photograph can see it. Given their unique experiences and background, Joan and James, like Charlotte Emory in Earthly Possessions, seek in the photographs they take a mirror of life as they view it. For Joan, that life is fixed, the people she loves and remains with unchanging, and the "glass of the [camera's] finder" (p. 273) a way of seeming to hold the figures in place. For James, photography is just as immortalizing and just as personal, for he carefully separates the work he does for others, the portraits and photographs of scenery and events, from what he seeks to duplicate for himself through film. Indeed, he has "the idea of photographing everyone he knew in the way his mind pictured them when they
weren't around," in an "odd" way, for they were always "doing something without looking at him," "wheeling a wheel-barrow up a hill or hunting under the dining-room table for a spool of thread" (p. 22). For James, photography is a way of capturing life as it is lived, and people as they are, not as they pose, without self-consciousness or the awkwardness that self-consciousness brings. His ideas about life and photography do not, however, make James less of an artist. Often he will wait "a long time" to capture the effect he wants in a photograph, to depict on film the way he sees "people in his mind" (p. 22). Moreover, the pictures he has taken for himself and keeps stored "in his filing cabinet" are nearly identical, Anne Tyler points out, to those "in his mind" (p. 22), thus suggesting James's skill and care in depicting the images he holds in his head as well as his determination to actualize that inner reality.

The contrasts between Joan and James here, in the ways in which they view the figures they photograph, are reminiscent of those between objective and subjective artists: the first selfless and able to capture in his art the reality outside of himself, the other projecting from within his notions of the world without. Significantly, there is yet another view expressed by James's malingering, unforgettable brother. For him, photographs are both "'wonderful'" and guilt-inspiring at the same time, "'very remaining things'" (p. 23) that serve to remind him of the dead as readily as they capture the living. At the same time he is amused by his own portrait among the photographs James shows him shortly after Janie Rose's funeral, he studies other pictures for evidence of the dead child. Characteristically, he is successful in his search for a remnant of the past, and his discovery of Janie's tiny "moon-round face," "no bigger than a little button" (p. 27), in the background of one of James's photographs manages to send Simon, Janie's brother, home in tears.
It is not Simon alone, however, who is angry and distressed with Ansel. With his "dippy little smile" (p. 23) like that of "a child's drawing of a happy man" (p. 15), Ansel is able to evoke both love and anger, guilt as well as resentment in his brother James too. Such contradictory emotions are, of course, common to almost all close relationships, but because Ansel is quite unlike James both in physical appearance as well as personality, it is not surprising that such conflict becomes intensified in the brothers' relationship. Moreover, the fact that Anne Tyler has these strikingly different characters emerge from the same family background is especially significant for purposes of the present study.

The contrast of the individual within the family, one of the central themes of Miss Tyler's work to date, is particularly evident in The Tin Can Tree, and, by studying these contrasts in the midst of a kind of expanded family structure and experience, the novel lets us see more fully the ironical overview of human existence which informs Anne Tyler's fiction.

One aspect of this ironical overview emerges when a character in one of Miss Tyler's fictional families remains committed to a fellow family member even when he has inwardly stopped caring for his relative and has recognized that such commitment prevents growth and change as well as the possibility of another relationship with someone outside of the family. Such is the case with James Green; for him, Ansel represents such a tie. Pale, sickly, broodingly inward where his brother is dark, healthy, and outgoing, Ansel represents the "one, final member of his family that he [James] hadn't yet deserted" (p. 177)—and cannot—for in James's mind, Ansel is often still "that scared small brother who could sit a whole evening without saying a word or raising his eyes from the floor" (p. 204), a child in need of his older brother's continued attention and care. Moreover, although these features are now absent from the pale, talkative, and
self-indulgent Ansel, James remains committed to his brother—bound, as it were, to his own original vision of his sibling.

This commitment is, of course, one which negates any possibility of James's marrying Joan, for he knows, despite any fantasy he may have about their relationship, that "in real life, he could never make Joan and Ansel like each other" (p. 177). However, his choice of brother over wife, of family member over outsider, is not a comfortable one for James, nor does it exempt him from criticism. In fact, he is subjected to criticism from two sides: from Joan, who is rightfully resentful of the James-Ansel relationship because it interferes with her own relationship with James, and from Maisie Hammond, another female outsider, a pale girl who is a cousin in the Hammond clan which James photographs at an annual family reunion, an event that is recorded in one of the novel's early chapters. Overly fond of Ansel, who is resentful and inattentive in turn, Maisie accuses James of neglecting Ansel and of not caring if Ansel's anemia worsens. In effect, she accuses James of treating Ansel the way Ansel treats her: inattentively. Contrarily, Joan argues that James cares too much for Ansel, giving him more attention that his condition warrants. Such attention, Joan feels, only leads Ansel to heighten the frequency of his complaints. Finally, although James is deeply affected by the strength of the two women's views and the vehemence of their attacks, the relationship of the two brothers is invulnerable to change. It is deeply rooted in the past and a shared familial experience that neither of the women knows anything about. In a way clear only to themselves and for reasons they themselves never express, the two brothers are bound to one another despite the differences in their make-up and behavior.

The extent of the two brothers' differences, the exact nature of

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their shared familial experience, as well as the character and make-up of the Green family itself are revealed in the novel through two major events and their consequences: first, the disappearance and return of Ansel, an event which not only precipitates the previously mentioned quarrel between James and Joan but also a conversation between the two brothers highly revealing of their past as well as their varying attitudes toward their distant family; and, secondly, Simon Pike's journey to the Green family home in Caraway, an action which takes James to the town he swore he would never return to, "not for any reason" (p. 242), and the family he has forsaken there. Moreover, while James and Ansel view that family differently, at the same time they share a common bond with them and a nearly equal dislike for their father. Characteristically, Ansel is self-deceptive and exaggerative in his version of the Green family's life, especially in the years following James's departure. Additionally, for him the family provided "a religious atmosphere" (p. 138) that he says he craves, although he makes no attempts to satisfy his longing by returning to Caraway. James, on the other hand, is more honest and blunt in his portrayal of the family. As he tells Simon, Caraway is a desolate and frozen place, a town where the boys all "got tight little Church of God parents" (p. 210). It is James, moreover, who has cleanly and openly admitted his dislike of his family and parents and who, seven years before the novel opens, walked away from them "without a backward wave of . . . [his] hand" (p. 136), not even to return for his mother's funeral.

In his choice of freedom over restriction, of Larksville over Caraway, James has also opted for honesty and vitality over the self-deception and lugubriousness that characterize his brother. Thus, while James speaks honestly to Simon about Caraway, Ansel portrays the town as a magical,
faraway place, a place where "little boys and colored men" go fishing "wearing red-plumed hats" and some have pierced ears like pirates and wear a "gold hoop" (p. 198) through one of their ears. Characteristically, it is Ansel who denounces James for leaving home and especially for not returning for Mrs. Green's funeral. Indeed, he speaks of James's actions as unpardonable while he views himself as someone the family "will cry over in Church and finally forgive, someday" (p. 135). At the same time, Ansel also justifies his own departure by claiming he was "thrown out" by his father, supposedly for drinking and running with a "girl in red pedal pushers" (p. 136). However, while Ansel's stories of Caraway enthrall ten-year-old Simon, James will not tolerate the self-deception and excuses that Ansel offers for himself. As he tells Ansel, "Run out on him [Mr. Green] or don't run, but don't make it easy on yourself; don't tell me he kicked you out" (p. 136).

What Ansel attempts to conceal from himself and foist on James is obviously the guilt he feels at his own rebellion and his own dislike for his father, a strict, unyielding man capable of blocking all communication and affection between human beings. Moreover, despite what Ansel says about his family's forgiving him and his own need for the religious atmosphere that family provides, it is not Ansel but James who returns to Caraway. Indeed, we learn from that trip that Ansel has refused even to come to the telephone when his sister called three Christmases before. He has, in fact, remained far more distant and certainly less honest and self-aware than James, the one child who was, according to Ansel, "special" (p. 137) to his parents. Yet, as Ansel sees it, James's actions are all the more reprehensible—clearly more so than his own—precisely because it was James whom the family "liked" (p. 137) and who, regardless, ran away and told them just what he "thought of them" (p. 135).
The return of James to the Green family residence is thus clearly a significant element not only in the development of the plot of *The Tin Can Tree* but also in the familial relationships which serve as subject of the novel. Initiated by the disappearance of Simon Pike, James's return home is also a violation of the promise he made when he left Caraway seven years earlier and vowed never to return. With Mrs. Pike riding silently beside him in his pickup truck, James heads for Caraway and his former home because he knows Simon has gone there under the influence of Ansel's imaginative tales and because he, James, is as much committed to the Pikes and Simon as Joan is. Like Joan too, James has found in the Pike family household the kind of warmth and support his own family failed to give, and, like her, he is willing to sacrifice a part of himself and his bitterness toward his family for that commitment, to forget, as it were, that promise he made long before he knew the Pikes or Joan or was aware of "the existence of Simon" (p. 242).

Significantly, James's return trip is marked by the reappearance of a number of forgotten images and scenes, all of them "worn and familiar looking, as if perhaps without knowing it, he had been dreaming of them nightly" (p. 242). Indeed, through the silent and mysterious workings of memory and time, "even the new things—the brick ranch houses rising boldly out of red clay, the drive-ins and Dairy Queens—seemed familiar, and...[James] glanced at them mildly and without surprise" (p. 242). That the past should resurrect itself from memory is, of course, expected and befitting the nature of James's journey home. That trip is, after all, a memory-evoking ride, a return to the place where James was born and grew up, a place he left in bitterness and anger. Yet it is also an ironic and deceptive return—the changes James has somehow anticipated and
accepted in Caraway are not expected at the Green family home—and the reappearance of so much from the past is particularly significant to the theme of the individual's relationship with his family. Where once he would have been met by "the dog's barking" and "the silhouettes of many people" (p. 245) come to investigate his arrival, now James is met by no one. Indeed, his former home seems deserted now, the "old gray house with a great many gables," suggestive of both the number and the character of the Greens, is but a ghost of a place whose "yard [is] sprinkled with the feather-white skeletons of dandelions" (p. 245). Images of death pervade the description, adding mysterious and gothic qualities to the house. Betrayed by memory, a memory that somehow fails to account for the family's aging, James comes "to the door" of his family's home "in utter silence, with no one noticing" (p. 245). Even "that hard white face" (p. 245) of his father that he expects to see no longer meets him at eye-level. Indeed, it is now only a "small lined face" with "eyes in their pockets of bone" (p. 246), a face "much lower than he [James] had remembered" (p. 245).

Like Ben Joe Hawkes, who in *If Morning Ever Comes* is forced to confront and give up his childhood image of his family and his fantasies of their warmth and dependence on him, so also James, through his own brief journey home, confronts and yields to the changes in himself and those he has left behind: "his father, Claude, and Clara, the one brother and sister still at home" (p. 247). Even his "dislike of his father," that "one complete and pure emotion . . . that alone could send words enough swarming to his mouth" (p. 252), deserts him. What has died here is more that Mrs. Green and the family dog but also James's childhood passion, the exaggerated vision of his father he once held, and even some
of the anger and bitterness with which he rejected his family. Thus his "coming back here," that is, to his family's home, a place which he has somehow imagined "without knowing it," fails to meet his expectations, for he has not, Anne Tyler writes, "imagined standing like this, wordless," struck silent by the image of his aged father, now "a small battered bird" of a man whose "buttonless shirt" folds "gently over his thin chest" and whose "worn leather slippers" search "out the floorboards hesitantly when he walk [s]" (p. 252).

This confrontation between his memories of the past and the reality of the present marks to some extent a redefinition of the relationship James has with his family, especially his father. It is, however, a tentative change. While the fierce and angry rebellion against his Pentecostal father no longer marks James's attitude, old Mr. Green himself remains defiant, capable of raising "a banner in the room—the same as in old days, long and dark and heavy" (p. 256). Now, however, despite his questioning eyes, the old man is "tired," his "children . . . limp, not bothering to answer" (p. 256) the challenge their father raises.

As an element of plot, James's journey home is especially valuable, for it allows us to see the challenge old Mr. Green raises for his children—why, in effect, James and Ansel left home in the first place—while it also gives us a closer look at the Greens themselves apart from Ansel's and James's differing views. Thus it enables us to understand more fully the kind of human relationships possible within that closed and restrictive family. But James's journey also serves another purpose. Like that of Ben Joe Hawkes in If Morning Ever Comes, James's return home not only allows us to see the ironic contrast between members of a particular
family but also the trickery of imagination and memory, the magic only
temporal and spatial distance can perform, and the deceptive ways in
which these faculties combine to both glamorize and immortalize the
people and places we have left behind. Like memory's convergence with
the reality of the present, the novel leads us to the ironic and inevit­
able realization of the discrepancy between James's memories of his
family and that family's actual existence and behavior. Indeed, as Miss
Tyler suggests throughout her novels, family relationships, because they
are the most nearly constant and fixed patterns in most people's lives,
offer a remarkable fertile ground for studying these discrepancies--and
thus, coincidentally, an excellent opportunity both for measuring change
while illustrating its improbability. Fittingly, the image of his father
which James takes with him as he leaves the Green family home once again
is a new one, and, although not altogether different from the childhood
memory James holds of his father, the new image is, at least temporarily,
one less distorted by distance, time, and passion. It is, in fact, the
image of his aging father which an adult man takes with him, for now as
James peers in the rear-view mirror of his truck, he sees

his father . . . standing on the porch, his arms hugging
his chest, his knees bagging, his small white head
strained toward the truck.

(p. 259)

Ironically, as if to reinforce the tentative permanence of this memory,
old Mr. Green remains on the porch, for "as long as James took getting
started," "and when he drove away Mr. Green lifted one arm for a goodbye
and stayed that way until the truck was out of sight" (p. 259). Like
the memory Simon will always hold of Janie Rose—that of a small, be­
spectacled child living in her tacked-on room at the back of the Pike
family house—and the images frozen in the viewfinder of the camera Joan

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Pike holds at the end of the novel, this last view that James has of his father is, Anne Tyler suggests, the image that will remain, the one which James will take with him into the future, for as he drives, he stares "straight ahead, . . . holding that picture in his mind" (p. 259).

The return of James to his family home provides, as we have said, a device for introducing the Green family apart from the memories James and Ansel hold, yet obviously that visit is much affected by these memories. At the same time, the trip is also instrumental in developing the ironic contrast between members of the Green family as well as the discrepancies between memory and reality. More importantly, however, these last episodes of *The Tin Can Tree*, including James's journey home, serve to bring together the many disparate characters and families who appear in the novel. Parallels between characters and families emerge and suggest the repetition of certain kinds of behavior in most close human relationships. At the same time, however, differences render many of these parallels ironic, at once pointing to the contrary and various reasons human beings act as they do. Thus, while Joan's and Simon's running away form parallel actions caused by similar feelings of confusion in response to Janie Rose's death, over a larger span of time, so also do the actions of James and Simon. Simon, however, runs from his family under conditions and for reasons unlike those which motivate either of the adults. Where James's original departure from Caraway was clearly generated over years by defiance and rebelliousness against his parents' rigid teachings, Simon's action is clearly a response to a crisis, a unique situation in which, because of neglect by his mother, he has come to feel both unwanted and unloved. With Joan's departure and her plea for him not to come with her, Simon is left with no one to tend to him,
the only child in a world populated by adults who seek the solace of solitude.

Significantly, as if to reinforce these contrasts and parallels between James and Simon, Anne Tyler has James and Lou Pike find Simon seated in "old Mr. Green's platform rocker" (p. 247), a chair in which, at one time, with "both parents . . . gone, James would sit . . . and rock fiercely, . . . [while] the other children stood around him with wide scared eyes" (p. 252). Just as defiantly as his predecessor, Simon now sits in the "forbidden" property of the old man. He has, symbolically, taken the young James's place, and, indeed, Simon's expression—the very "turn of his head, with his chin pointed upwards and the shock of hair falling back off his forehead"—seems at once both rebellious while it claims the Greens, somehow "marking them as his own" (p. 247). Ironi­cally, the very home and family James and his brother Ansel have come to despise provide a kind of haven for young Simon. What the two brothers have consciously and deliberately rejected as adults, Simon, in his ten-year-old's unself-conscious way, readily accepts and claims as his own. Thus Simon's behavior—his running away, his implicit claim on the Greens as his family, even his use of old Mr. Green's rocking chair—both parallels yet contradicts the actions of James and his brother Ansel, stressing the unique ways in which human beings respond to familial situations.

In many ways, then, The Tin Can Tree clearly marks the expansion of Anne Tyler's treatment of the individual within the family. Here the basic family structure has expanded to include three separate yet inter­dependent families united by a shared experience of grief at the death of a six-year-old girl as well as the disappearance of her brother. The
ironic alliances formed by human relationships, the ways in which seemingly disparate and very different people, whether blood-related or not, find and cling to one another despite disagreements and the trauma of death, even the need for such relationships in the lives of most human beings form the major concerns of Anne Tyler's second novel, *The Tin Can Tree*. The deepening of these themes through a rendering of a number of principal characters indicates, I believe, a maturation of Miss Tyler's skill as a writer as well as her insight into the psychological complexities and dependencies formed by human relationships. Moreover, that such relationships are essentially ironic is paramount to Anne Tyler's view of human character. Even within the individual, discrepancies in memories and conflicting emotions rule. That differences exist within the heart of the family, despite its status as a presumably intimate group, is not surprising although it is clearly ironic.

In her third published novel, *A Slipping-Down Life*, which appeared first in January, 1970, Anne Tyler returned once again to the essentially existential themes of the individual's isolation, his struggle for independence and identity, and the lack of meaningful communication among people living closely together—themes clearly evident in both *The Tin Can Tree* and earlier in *If Morning Ever Comes*. Set in the fictional towns of Pulqua and Farinia, North Carolina, *A Slipping-Down Life* is also the first of Anne Tyler's novels to portray the barrenness of familial relationships in a culture where stereotyped television characters, movie-script relationships, and deafening rock music widen the already enormous gap that separates most human beings from one another. Moreover, unlike Miss Tyler's earlier novels, both of which covered only a few days in the lives of the principal characters, *A Slipping-Down*
Life chronicles one full year in the life of its heroine: a fat, dowdy, and awkward teenage girl named Evie Decker. Originating in "a small newspaper story about a 15-year-old girl in Texas who'd slashed 'Elvis' in her forehead," the novel traces not only Evie's barren interaction with her family—here her father, her only living relative—but also the development and dissolution of her relationship with a local rock singer named Bertram "Drumstrings" Casey. Evie's entanglement with Drum Casey, an involvement which leads eventually to their marriage, is tragically initiated by her carving the name "Casey" in her forehead with a pair of nail scissors. It ends, equally as tragically, with the couple's separation following the death of Evie's father and her discovering Casey in bed with another woman.

In all facets of her life, both at home and at school, Evie Decker is a particularly lonely, isolated figure. Her mother, we learn early in the novel, died giving birth to her only child and was the "last woman in Pulqua County to die of childbed fever." Evie's father, a mathematics teacher at the high school his daughter attends, is described as "a vague, gentle man who assumed that Evie would manage just fine wherever she was" (p. 10). In fact, most of the time, he is oblivious to his daughter's behavior and unsuspecting of her involvement with Drum Casey as well as the loneliness and pain which she faces in growing up. Indeed, one of the most telling points about Evie's relationship with her father is that he never knows about the evenings she spends at the Unicorn, the ironically named roadhouse outside of Pulqua where Drum Casey plays. The fact that she has gone there for several weeks before carving Casey's name in her forehead, and that later she offers to use herself and her disfigured face as a means of drawing crowds for the...
rock singer, totally escapes Mr. Decker's attention. He is unaware of who Drumstrings Casey really is or how well his daughter knows him. When the relationship between Evie and Drum begins to develop into something more than a business arrangement, Sam Decker remains unaware of Evie's involvement. Even when Drum, estranged from his own parents, begins to sleep on the Deckers' front porch, Evie's father knows nothing about his presence. Drum manages to sneak in and out of the house, have his meals there, and spend the daytime watching television with Evie and Clotelia, the black cleaning woman who tends the house during the week, while Sam Decker is off teaching school or running errands, unsuspecting of the relationship that is building in his own front room. Unmindful of most events that take place around him, Mr. Decker treats Evie politely and heeds only those actions of hers which painfully thrust themselves upon him and cannot be overlooked: her disfiguring her face with Casey's name, her failure to return to school, and later her elopement and marriage. Not surprisingly, this last event comes as a total shock to Mr. Decker, leaving him "slumped and hollow-faced" (p. 144), a defeated man who "could have threatened annulment, but . . . didn't" (p. 145).

The enormous psychological distance between Evie and her father is first dramatically portrayed in the novel the night Sam Decker is called to the hospital where Evie is receiving stitches for her self-inflicted wound. Uncertain of what to say to Evie yet genuinely bewildered by her destructive behavior and concerned for her welfare, Mr. Decker makes several shy and powerless efforts to cross "the years of silence" (p. 43) that separate him from his daughter. Ironically, his act of taking her a gift—a satin bedjacket clearly unbecoming her chubby, drab figure—
speaks to Evie as an admonishment and a confirmation of the regret she believes her father must feel for having lost his wife in trade for his daughter. Indeed, Evie has been haunted for years by her father's failure to mention his wife or to say what Evie has "continually expected to hear": "'You are what I traded your mother for, and it was a bad bargain at that!" (p. 42). However, no such admonishment is forthcoming from Sam Decker, nor any questions about where Evie has been or whom she has been with. Instead, his passive efforts to console and direct Evie reveal his failure to face his daughter as she is. Seeking to be kind, he ends up being evasive. He tells Evie, "'You're a sweet-looking girl, after all, and when you lose a, when you're older, boys are going to fall all over themselves for you'" (p. 44). Unable to point honestly to the pounds Evie must lose to be attractive, Mr. Decker stops himself from giving the advice that might be helpful—the words that would, in fact, speak straight to the issue of Evie's discomfort and thus acknowledge it. Instead, half-heartedly trying to encourage hope in his daughter, he vacantly tells her to be patient, to "'just give yourself time'" (p. 44).

Significantly, the gap between father and daughter here, the isolation of one individual from another, is reinforced by vivid contrasts in their physical features—a commonly used method of Miss Tyler's for suggesting the ironic make-up of most families and the separateness that marks the individuals within those families. Here, Mr. Decker is described as "long and bony," "his hair and lashes . . . pale, his eyes set in deep shadowed sockets, his skin sprinkled with large freckles so faint that they seemed to be seeping through a white over-layer" (p. 43). Evie, in contrast, is dark, her hair brown and straight, while her face,
unlike her father’s, is "pudgy and formless, [and] poked itself too far forward" (p. 8). Her shape, like her other physical features, also contrasts sharply with her father’s. Where his forms a "tall black angular silhouette" (p. 41) as he enters Evie’s hospital room, hers is "short and wide" (p. 3), shapeless, and stubby. Indeed, Mr. Decker has passed onto his daughter "nothing but his awkwardness" (p. 43) and his shy, vague, and withdrawn manner. Additionally, no hint is ever given as to whether Evie’s vastly different physical features might be inherited from her deceased mother, and, because Mr. Decker is silent about his wife and maintains that silence until his own death, Evie’s isolation and disconnectedness from any known family member are vividly reinforced, her isolation all the more severe.

Throughout A Slipping-Down Life, it becomes quite clear that Sam Decker fails miserably and pathetically in his roles as parent and teacher. A shy, unobtrusive man, he enters his classroom at Pulqua High School "with his head leading . . . while students whispered and passed notes and ignored him" (p. 41). Moreover, although Sam Decker is never cruel nor malicious in his treatment of his daughter, he has, nonetheless, failed to give her the guidance and attention she needs. Shy and ignorant of Evie, always too "busy doing other things" at home to provide her with any "company" (p. 4), Mr. Decker has mindlessly denied his child the opportunity to learn who she is and, hence, to develop some sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Thus, as her parent, he innocently and unknowingly has a hand in her tragic and disfiguring bid for attention. In addition, his particularly awkward and silent way of relating to his daughter determines to a large extent the nature of the other relationships she establishes: with Violet Hayes,
"her only friend" (p. 3); with Clotelia, the Deckers' maid and Evie's would-be surrogate mother; and, perhaps most importantly, with Bertram "Drumstrings" Casey. In each case, Evie seeks to find the warmth, intimacy, and guidance lacking in her relationship with her father and her isolated family situation. Ironically, she thereby manages to duplicate the distance between herself and her father as well as some of the ironic contrasts that mark their physical and mental make-ups.

Despite her father's lack of strength as a parent, or perhaps because of it, in "her talks with Violet," Evie keeps turning him into "the kind of father who put his foot down" (pp. 10-11), a powerful, assertive man, and someone to be wary of. In truth, Sam Decker is never the kind of parent Evie longs for, and her portrayal of him to her friend serves mainly as a testament to her own strength and imagination. In reality, Mr. Decker is repeatedly inept. When he visits Evie in the hospital, he fails to remember her correct age and, in a kind but ineffectual way, attempts to encourage her to have plastic surgery once her wounds heal. In contrast, Evie is adamant in her desire to let the scars remain. In fact, she sees them as a sign of power. As she tells Violet earlier in the evening, "'I believe this might be the best thing I've ever done. . . . Something out of character. Definite. Not covered by insurance. I'm just sure it will all work out well'" (p. 40). Unaware of what motivated Evie—her desperate longing for Casey's attention—as well as the sense of identity and certainty that she now possesses, Mr. Decker tries to change his daughter's mind, but he is met with rebelliousness. "'It was my face,'" Evie tells him. "'It is. It's my business how it looks!'" (p. 43). Almost too late, Mr. Decker attempts to assert his authority as a parent, but even this
gesture is ineffectual. He foolishly assumes Drumstrings Casey is Evie's boyfriend, not someone who has never heard of her, and bans him "as if . . . [he] were storming the front hedge, bearing flowers and a ladder, begging to be let in" (p. 67). In parting, Sam Decker orders Evie to "tell that Casey boy not to bother coming around again. I won't allow you to see any more of him!" (p. 44). Ironically, in his one authoritative effort as a parent, Mr. Decker unwittingly reveals his ignorance of Evie's real connection with Casey and fails his daughter once again by banning a man who has yet to appear at the Decker home. Even the way Mr. Decker words his "command" reveals his failure as a parent: it is Evie who is "to tell" Casey not to come around again, not Mr. Decker himself.

Nonetheless, Sam Decker's assertion of authority and his foolish mistake regarding Drum Casey momentarily cross the barrier that separates father and daughter, for they bring "small pleased folds . . . to the outer corners of . . . [Evie's] eyes" (p. 44). For a second, he acts as Evie has always wanted him to act and grants her the attention she has not received before. However, for the rest of the novel, Sam and Evie Decker share only occasional meals with no other communication ever really established between them. Mr. Decker never asks Evie if she is seeing Drum again, and thus without any interference from her father, without his knowledge or suspicion, Evie is able to proceed with her life, first staying home and imagining a relationship with Casey and later pursuing it in actuality. Additionally, although her act of self-disfigurement and her consequent refusal to return to school lead Mr. Decker occasionally to ask Evie when she will go back to class, most of the time he "can think of" nothing to say to her (p. 62). With an
earnest effort to be a more concerned parent, he concentrates "solely on Evie" at mealtimes, "as if he had made some sort of resolution" (p. 61), but because he fails to say anything to her, "his premeditated smile" only "burden[s] her mind" (p. 62). Thus, the meals become an awkward, silent time with "every clink of fork against plate sounding as loud and as artificial as a sound effect" (p. 62). When Evie has bloated herself with food and finished "every last mouthful," then she and her father are "free" to "go off to opposite ends of the house and do whatever . . . [keeps] them busy" (p. 62). Only when they are apart from one another are they free from the strain that characterizes their relationship.

With keen insight into the psychology of character, especially of parent-child relationships, Anne Tyler captures the growing silence and distance which mark the involvement of Evie Decker and her father. As in the earlier novels, the relationship of the principal characters is reflected in the description of the house in which they live, here "a leaden, damp-smelling" place with "flowered furniture and lacy figurines [that] had sat so long in their places . . . they seemed to have jelled there, hardening around the edges" (p. 56). Like Evie, the house has gone undisturbed for years and reflects the stale, "leaden," and lifeless relationship she has with her father. Additionally, in contrast to the house in *The Tin Can Tree*, described as a rambling, noisy, and well-lighted place that has enlarged to accommodate the growth of the Pike family, the Decker house is silent and unchanging. Indeed, in this last respect, it foreshadows the cluttered, dark, and gothic structures that Anne Tyler uses to characterize the family relationships in her later novels. Here also, Evie, like the heroines of other Tyler novels—Joan Pike in *The Tin Can Tree*, and, later, Justine
Peck in *Searching for Caleb* and Charlotte Emory in *Earthly Possessions*—
is an only child forced into isolation by the circumstances of her family life, faced with growing up alone in a dark, stifling environment, and burdened with creating an identity of her own without the companionship and aid of siblings or understanding, communicative parents. Put another way, she is faced, on the one hand, with silence and loneliness in a dark and depressing house and, on the other, with involvement in a world outside that house, a world she knows little of and about which she can gain little information. Ironically, she thrusts herself painfully into that world by attempting to reach a man much colder and more distant than her father, and one with whom she replicates the silence, remoteness, and lack of warmth that have marked her life at home.

Significantly, *A Slipping-Down Life* opens with a description of Evie's physical make-up, her life at home and at school, and the loneliness and isolation that enfrase her in both places. Listless and bumbling, "a plump drab girl in a brown sweater that was running to balls at the elbows" (p. 3), Evie, we are told, "walked most places alone," carrying "her books clutched to her chest, rounding her shoulders" (p. 8) in a gesture of submission and hopelessness. "When her classmates met up with her they passed in a hurry, barely noticing her" while "she never spoke to them" (p. 9). Their conversations concern subjects Evie knows nothing about: dates with boys, rock music, and singing groups like the Beatles and the Monkeys. In contrast, Evie "'never was on a date even'" (p. 108) and is totally unmusical.

She listened to marches without beating time, forgot the tune to "The Star-Spangled Banner," and moved soddenly around the high school gym in a bumbling two-step.

(p. 3)
At lunchtime, while "boys from the band played Dixieland in a corner of the cafeteria," "Evie ate on," munching "a sandwich" and oblivious to the "brass notes [that] pierced the air . . . [and] darted past like red and yellow arrows" (p. 3). Even the music she listens to nightly over her "cracked brown portable" radio is meaningless to her: "the only difference she heard . . . was that the words of the pop songs were easier to understand" than those of the "hard rock and soul music" that "tumbled out" of the radio (pp. 4-5). Indeed, this music serves only to fill the "hours of silence" Evie faces at home. Only when she knows the names of persons to whom songs on "Sweetheart Time" are dedicated does she pay "close attention, . . . ferreting out the words with a kind of possessiveness but ignoring the tunes" (p. 4). It is over this radio, moreover, that Evie first hears the voice of Drumstrings Casey, "cool and motionless, like a stone plunked into a pool" (p. 5). The alliance of this totally unmusical, dowdy teenager with the cool, thin rock musician forms one of the most striking ironies of the novel, a testament to the desperate loneliness of the heroine, and evidence of her isolation from almost everyone around her, including herself.

Without any close parental relationship at home or any directives or suggestions from her father, Evie guides her life with what information she can gain from movie and romance magazines, daytime television serials, and the conversations of classmates she overhears at school. Not surprisingly, the imagery of a soundstage recurs in the novel, with Evie's behavior and her expectations of others' behavior, especially of Drum, repeatedly portrayed in terms of a movie or television script.37 The mealtimes of Evie and her father, it will be recalled, were awkward and silent, with "every clink of fork against plate sounding as loud
and as artificial as a sound effect" (p. 62), while Evie's wedding and later her separation from Drum are depicted as scenes in a movie. Indeed, at the wedding nothing "seemed real anyway" (p. 141). "Time was speeding up and slowing down in fits," suggesting the movement of film in a camera, while an argument that takes place between Violet and Drum's accompanist, Dave Elliott, "moved as rapidly as a silent film . . ." (p. 141). Even Evie's carving Casey's name in her forehead is partially viewed as something unreal and movie-like. The "two people" who "supported" Evie as she is led from the restroom hold "her in a professional, movie-like way, each with one hand beneath Evie's elbow and one at the small of her back" (p. 35). Moreover, the scene is replayed in Evie's mind as something that gives her identity and importance. As she tells Violet,

"While I was walking through that crowd with the policeman, I kept thinking of my name: Evie Decker, me. Taking something into my own hands for once. I thought, if I had started acting like this a long time ago my whole life might've been different." (p. 40)

Ironically, it is Drumstrings Casey's name that Evie gives the policeman, not her own, and it is just such impulsive, unplanned actions like the one she is speaking of above that do, indeed, change her life. After a picture of herself with Casey appears in a local newspaper, Evie begins to acquire popular attention and later impulsively decides to offer herself as a publicity gimmick to draw crowds to the Unicorn on Casey's behalf. At school also, she gains notice by getting Casey to drive her to class. She has become, in effect, "like . . . someone [who] has crossed over where the rest of them [i.e., her classmates] haven't been" (p. 61), a kind of mystery girl unavoidably noticeable to those students who have not travelled her bizarre road. Always,
her actions are "spur-of-the-moment" (p. 29). She acts "without allowing herself to think ahead" (p. 27) and thus goes unprepared for the pain and embarrassment she causes herself.

In the face of Evie's view of her new way of acting as a kind of salvation and a means of making her whole life "'different,'" all Violet can answer is, "'Well, that's for sure'" (p. 40). In fact, it is only Violet and Clotelia, the Deckers' maid, who interject any degree of realism into the movie script running in Evie's head. Together, they constitute what is virtually Evie's only source of support and guidance, however indirectly or scornfully given. Moreover, throughout A Slipping-Down Life, Anne Tyler makes it clear that both Violet and Clotelia serve as surrogate mothers of sorts for Evie as she emerges from the shell that encases her. At home, it is clearly Clotelia who serves to remind Evie of her distressful appearance and the pain she is causing Mr. Decker, while during their visits to the Unicorn and later during Evie's growing involvement with Casey, it is Violet who has a dominant role. In fact, it is Violet's willingness to go with Evie to the rock shows as well as her interest in staying that both get and keep Evie there. Together, they attend a special one-night show at a Pulqua movie theatre where they see Drum perform for the first time, and later, when Evie learns more about Drum from another girl at school, it is Violet who begins the weekend journeys to the Unicorn with them.

Overweight and boyfriendless like Evie, Violet is also isolated from her classmates, although she is clearly a more dynamic and appealing character than her friend. Indeed, like the close relationships in other Tyler novels, that of Evie and Violet is one based on mutual need. At the same time, it is clearly paradoxical, for the two girls
contrast sharply in both personality and appearance. Even the degree of their pudginess sets them apart from one another. "An enormously fat girl with teased black hair and a beautiful face," Violet is so overweight that, next to her, Evie "seemed almost thin" (p. 11). Where Violet "always wore brilliant colors as if she hadn't read any advice to the overweight" (p. 11), Evie dresses plainly, "her dowdy clothes . . . [giving] her a matronly look" (p. 83). Her school uniform, which she also wears to the first rock show, consists of oxfords, an "old-fashioned, wide-shouldered" coat that fell "in voluminous uneven folds around her calves" (p. 8), and the brown sweater described earlier. In contrast to her friend, Evie has "long ago stopped expecting anything of her clothes" (p. 8) and is everywhere "lifeless—gray-skinned and dull-haired" (p. 11). Moreover, where Violet is "a huge stately queen" (p. 31) of a girl who remains undaunted, self-confident, and cool despite her size, the difficulty she has climbing over people at the rock shows, and the harrassment and catcalls of the boys, Evie is self-conscious, nervous, and awkward. Characteristically, when the two girls attend their first rock show together, Evie wants to leave almost immediately after arriving, for, as she tells her friend, "I feel like I've made a mistake!" (p. 14). Expectedly, Violet wants to remain and enjoy the concert, something she is capable of, where Evie is not.

Despite these contrasts, Violet and Evie are close friends. Like most teenage girls, they share secret telephone conversations—at least they are secret on Evie's part, for she hides in a closet with the telephone when she talks to Violet—gossip about fellow students and teachers at school, occasional evenings spent at each other's houses, as well as a fascination with Drum's sexual appeal: his "greasy hair,"
"tight pants," and "slinky way" of walking (pp. 16-17). Moreover, as a friend, Violet is an important, if indirect source of support and guidance for Evie. It is, in fact, her casual and unwitting observation about how to gain Drum's attention that appears to precipitate Evie's carving "Casey" in her forehead. Watching a redheaded girl grab Casey and begin to dance with him while he is playing, Violet comments that "'there's how to get his attention. . . . Just give him a yank!'" (p. 34). Minutes later, Evie emerges with "crimson zigzags across her forehead" and "vertical strands of blood" (p. 35) marring her face. She has, in effect, taken her friend's advice and performed what for her is the equivalent of giving Drum "a yank."

Significantly, at the time Evie sits "slumped behind her beer" (p. 32) at the Unicorn, pained by watching the more attractive, more daring girls draw Casey's attention to themselves, Violet is too engrossed in the music and the spectacle of Drum's act to notice her friend. Thus, when Evie disappears into the crowd on her way to the restroom, Violet remains undisturbed, conscious only of the beer in front of her. Ironically, Violet's unawareness of her friend's responses here mirror the same inattentive treatment Evie receives at home. Like Mr. Decker, Violet is too "busy doing other things" (p. 4) to notice Evie, and thus it is only when Evie appears with Casey's name carved backwards on her forehead that Violet notices her and exclaims, "'Evie, what happened?!'" (p. 35). Later, however, in motherly fashion, Violet dutifully accompanies Evie to the hospital, calls Mr. Decker, remembers to get Evie a change of clothes from home, and, in general, serves as a sounding board and support for her friend while the latter talks about how her new behavior will change her life. Months later, it is also
Violet who takes charge of Evie's wedding, helping "most with the arrangements":

she investigated marriage laws, arranged for the blood tests, chauffeured them [Casey and Evie] to the doctor in her mother's convertible.

(p. 136)

Finally, it is Violet who advises Evie to lie about her age in order to get a license and who chauffeurs Evie to "Tar City to apply" for it (p. 136). In the absence of a real mother for Evie, Violet repeatedly performs the functions one expects a mother to fulfill, functions Evie's father either knows nothing about or ineptly fails to provide for.

At the outset of the novel, Evie has already established her friendship with Violet as well as a kind of surrogate family tie with Clotelia. The relationship with Clotelia, however, is clearly neither affectionate nor intimate. At the time the novel opens, Clotelia has worked in the Decker household for four years, yet she has remained "an indifferent stranger kicking dust puffs with the toe of her cream suede high-heeled boot" (pp. 55-56). Like Mr. Decker, she "continually disappointed" Evie (p. 55): where "other people would have turned into members of the family," Clotelia still "carried her purse with her from room to room all day long" (p. 50). Rather than tending the house she is supposed to clean, she spends a good portion of her time reading magazines or watching soap operas on television while "the whole house," as Evie sees it, suffers "from some sort of disdain" (p. 56). As negligent of Evie as she is of her household chores, Clotelia is primarily concerned with the lives of the fictional, easy-to-understand characters on television, not the very real, troubled and troublesome teenager whose house Clotelia is to tend. Indeed, she speaks about these characters "as if they were relatives" (p. 56) and thus grants to them an intimacy
and concern she rarely musters for Evie. However, neither the fictional personages on television nor the Deckers, including Evie's father, escape Clotelia's scorn. When she leaves in the evenings, she rarely says goodbye and often departs with a "slamming [of] the front door" and an "angry" silence that leaves both Evie and her father looking "guilty and awkward" (p. 61). Even the comments she addresses to the unhearing actors on daytime television are filled with anger and scorn. In fact, at one point early in the novel, Clotelia's scornful comments about the television characters can also be taken as an indirect assessment of Evie's own situation:

"I don't know what she doing. That boy don't care two flicks for her. You ever seen her mother? Talk about nosy."

(p. 57)

From that point on, of course, the story changes, as Clotelia relates how the mother of the television character, very much alive, haunts her daughter's life and turns out to have what Evie sees as "'no sense of privacy'" (p. 57), a figure similar to Clotelia in many ways.

With Evie home from the hospital and refusing to return to school for a number of weeks following her self-inflicted "accident," the relationship between herself and Clotelia becomes clear. At its quietest, the two women exchange comments about soap opera characters, such as those given above. More frequently, however, Clotelia is annoyed and angry with the passive and unheedful Evie. Thus, she frequently scolds Evie about her presence at home, her sloppiness, and her destructiveness. Once she bluntly tells Evie that she'd better "'rise off that fat butt of yours'" before "'you bust your skin seams'" (pp. 57-58). Later, when Evie first invites Drum over to talk about the "advantage" (p. 65) of his seeing her, Clotelia openly asks why Evie is acting "'so ignorant'" (p. 66).
It is Clotelia who continually reminds Evie about her father and that it is he Evie is hurting and disobeying in seeing Drum. With the words mothers often use to threaten their children, Clotelia at one point tells Evie, "'I've a good mind to call your daddy'" (p. 67). Ironically, she never does, and Mr. Decker remains ignorant of his daughter's behavior while Clotelia, his maid, and Violet, Evie's friend, serve as the only witnesses as to what Evie is undertaking.

Although Clotelia's comments about Evie are often quite insightful and humorous because of their exaggerative quality, Clotelia herself is never truly affectionate nor compassionate with Evie. Her motives are frequently selfish and designed primarily to get Evie out of the house and thus out of Clotelia's own way. Moreover, her concern with the "relatives" she has made through television, and hence is able to keep successfully at a distance, indicates the degree to which Clotelia also remains distant and isolated from the Decker family. Television has, in fact, replaced close familial ties for Evie as well as Clotelia, and any sense of belonging and loyalty, which in another age or family a servant might have felt, is noticeably lacking in the Decker household. Although Clotelia's remarks are serviceably honest and accurate—her assessment of Drum Casey as "'that trash'" (p. 67) is especially astute—those comments are also scornful and painfully blunt. Thus, they do nothing to encourage self-confidence in Evie, nor do they express any tenderness. When Evie calls Clotelia the night Mr. Decker has died, Clotelia comes quickly, but she does none of the things a mother might do to console Evie: no hugs or pats on the shoulder are forthcoming. In fact, Evie is told she looks "'like trash'" and within minutes is reminded of the "'silver-backed mirror in the guest room'" which Mr. Decker
"always said he would will" to Clotelia (p. 201). With her blunt manner, Clotelia remains somewhat distant from Evie, and her presence, although clearly preferable to the "deep, growing silence" (p. 200) that fills the Decker household, quickly banishes the possibility of true intimacy. In effect, Clotelia is "not like . . . [a] mother at all" (p. 203), and the fact that she, like Violet Hayes, is one of the only sources of guidance and support for Evie is a markedly ironic and poignant commentary on the barren and isolated world in which the heroine must live.

This distance between Evie and Clotelia, like that between Evie and her real parent, is one that is reinforced in the novel by vivid contrasts in both the appearances and personalities of the two women. Here, in addition, Clotelia's manner is doubly significant, for her behavior contrasts not only with Evie's but also with Mr. Decker's. A flamboyant and exotic woman who wears her hair in a bush, Clotelia often appears at work dressed in "ski pants and an African cape" (p. 55). Her earrings, "as big as slave bands," flash "knives of light across the walls" of the Deckers' house (p. 56) and thus appear to mirror the scorn and anger which Clotelia herself possesses. The night Mr. Decker dies, Clotelia arrives "wearing a long, striped robe, like one of the three wise men" (p. 100), a description clearly suggestive of the role she plays in Evie's life. Her "head . . . is wrapped in a silk turban" and "darts of gold dangled from her ears" (p. 200). Evie, in contrast, is drab and unkempt, as she is for most of the novel. Her hair is uncombed and unwashed. For weeks following the carving of Casey's name in her forehead, she wanders around the house in a faded, soiled bathrobe and gray, once-white, matted slippers. Her hair too is matted
with dried blood. Moreover, where Evie, like her father, is quiet and unassertive, her comments about the soap opera characters mild both in content and manner, Clotelia is outspoken and aggressive. She ceaselessly relates to Evie how annoyed she is with her job and her charges and frequently repeats the conversations between herself and her boyfriend Brewster about the misery of her work as well as the trouble that "that Evie" (p. 57) is causing her. Indeed, it is in this last respect that Clotelia differs most from Mr. Decker. Her open and honest annoyance with Evie forms a preferable if painful contrast to his "controlled" (p. 61) behavior with his daughter. Where Sam Decker is groping and awkward with Evie and reveals his annoyance "only in the way he fidgeted with a fork or drank water in deep, hasty gulps" (p. 61), Clotelia is flippant and frank about how Evie is "driving ... [her] crazy" (p. 57). Yet it is to Clotelia that Evie is drawn, for it is only Clotelia who provides the girl with a mother substitute and the kind of acknowledgement and authority she longs for. Although Clotelia is not Evie's mother, not even at times a very good surrogate, she speaks to Evie directly, where Mr. Decker does not, and thus she provides Evie with the kind of essential recognition—however negative and cruel—against which she can assert and, hence, identify herself.

With Drum Casey, as with Clotelia and with Mr. Decker, Evie establishes yet another somewhat distant, ironical relationship. The fact that Evie is totally unmusical and yet manages to align herself professionally and later romantically with a rock musician has already been mentioned. The starkly paradoxical and ironic nature of this arrangement is readily apparent, but what is also evident in the Evie-Drum relationship is Evie's unselfish devotion to Casey: her willingness
to sacrifice herself to what is essentially an empty and futile arrangement and a proud, incommunicative, and self-centered man. Denied the warmth and attention ordinarily provided by a mother as well as any close ties with her father, Evie is repeatedly drawn to identify with the loneliness and desperation that mark Drumstrings Casey's life. However, rather than responding to Evie's attempts to be intimate, Drum at first ignores her. Later, too, after his accompanist Dave Elliott has taken Evie up on her offer of herself as a publicity gimmick, Drum openly and bluntly expresses his repulsion. He tells both Evie and Dave, "'I don't approve. I never will approve. It [a general reference to both Evie's looks, especially her forehead, as well as her appearing at the Unicorn on Casey's behalf] makes me sick!'" (p. 81). Only after Drum is thrown out of his parents' house by his father and needs a place to stay does he turn to Evie, and, even then, it is clearly with no sense of appreciation or true interest in Evie herself.

It is early in the novel—in fact, in the opening pages—that Evie first hears Casey's voice over the radio and begins shortly afterwards to notice the loneliness and lack of direction that mark her own life—features also clearly evident in Casey's life and reflected in the comments he makes on the radio. At the time Drum appears on the radio, he is being interviewed over Evie's favorite nighttime program, "Sweetheart Time," by an aged disc jockey named Herbert. Unlike Herbert, however, Drum sounds cool and remote. Where Herbert falters and sounds "sad and bewildered" though "no more bewildered than Evie" (p. 4), Drum's voice is "cool and motionless, like a stone plunked into a pool" (p. 5). His responses to Herbert's questions are frequently blunt and disinterested. When Herbert greets Drum with a friendly "it's an honor to have you
with us, Mr. Drumstrings" (p. 5), a comment clearly designed to get the interview going, Casey says nothing. Only a noticeable silence and static can be heard. Then, when Drum is asked if he is a "'native North Carolinian,'" he announces, "'Not for long, I won't be'" (p. 5). He nervously taps his fingers during the interview, creating "a series of tiny explosions" (p. 7) over the air, and repeatedly reveals his impatience and annoyance with Herbert's questions. Once Drum does begin to talk, he bluntly reveals his determination to escape Farinia, his hometown, and his family. His ambition is to go to the "'city, some city,'" although, as he says, "'It ain't quite clear yet,'" "'cut records and play night clubs'" (p. 5). Music and success are, in effect, Drum's way out of the life in Farinia he obviously finds constricting and lonely. As he tells Herbert,

"If I once wiggle out of here I'm never coming back again not even for Christmas. If my family gets to missing me, they can come to where I'm at, I'll buy them a house with white telephones and a swimming pool."

(p. 5-6)

Ill-educated and poor, Drum Casey is, in Anne Tyler's words, "'the direct inheritance of all the days on the tobacco farm,'" a reference to the period in her teens when Miss Tyler, like her heroine Joan Pike, spent summers tying tobacco in North Carolina. Moreover, like the singer Elvis Presley, whose teenage fan provided the germ story for A Slipping-Down Life, Drum believes material success will provide what is lacking in his life, and he is willing to give his family the luxuries they may wish, though not, clearly, his company.

From his first introduction in the novel, the interview with Herbert over the radio, Drumstrings Casey, Like Evie's father, is associated with awkward periods of silence. When he first appears on stage at
the rock show in Pulqua and later at the Unicorn, he does so in an atmosphere of gloom, cold, and isolation. In both places, when Drum performs, he slides "onto the platform as silently and as easily as some dark fish" (p. 26). As he sings he moves in his own "small circle" (p. 23) and seems always to be isolated within a "separate, motionless circle of air" (p. 26) that keeps him removed from his audience and those who would approach him. When he walks from the platform past Evie, he does so "in an envelope of cold air . . . as if he had just come in from a winter night" (p. 28). Even Drum's style of performing sets him apart: frequently he will stop in the middle of a song, slow the music, and speak out. Yet the words Drum says, although they successfully silence the audience, make no sense and leave everyone, especially Evie, baffled.

Like his style of performing and his demeanor, the places where Drum appears are also associated with coldness and isolation. The theatre in Pulqua where Evie first sees him perform emits "a cavernous chill . . . in spite of the heavy velvet window curtains" (p. 12) while "the wooden stage with its electric amplifiers looked like a roomful of refrigerators" (pp. 12-13). Fittingly, Evie and Violet sit through this first performance with their coats on while Casey slides "coolly on" (p. 14), only stopping occasionally in the middle of a song to speak out in the manner that has become his unique style. The Unicorn too is the picture of desolation: "a gray windowless rectangle on a lonesome highway with darkness closing in all around it" (p. 22). Inside, "the smell of beer . . . [gives] the place a cold feeling" (p. 23), while the deafening noise of rock music prevents Evie and Violet from hearing one another or understanding the words of the songs.
that are played. Significantly, Evie is told about the Unicorn by a trashy tenant-farmer's daughter named Fay-Jean Lindsay, the only girl at Pulqua High School besides Violet who responds to Evie's talk about Drum Casey. At the Unicorn, Fay-Jean quickly disappears "to huddle in dark cars with boys who only showed up once" (p. 31) while Evie, upon arriving for the first time, symbolically follows her new friend "through darkness, past rows of long tables and seated couples" (p. 23).

It is clear from these descriptions that Anne Tyler wishes to suggest the lack of warmth, the emptiness, and the hopelessness that mark not only Evie's infatuation with Drumstrings Casey but also the tawdry local rock scene and the "flimsy and temporary" (p. 23) relationships that develop in places like the Unicorn. However, despite the ominous signs suggested by the environment in which Drum appears, his cool and distant manner, and her own unmusical nature, Evie pursues the relationship with Drum, largely because it gives her a sense of identity and a place to go to fill the empty hours she would otherwise face at home. Thus, although she is uncomfortable at the Unicorn, Evie trudges nervously along with Violet and Fay-Jean. Once there, however, she sits "slumped behind her beer, chewing her thumb and scowling" (p. 32). As Drum plays, moreover, she studies "the faces of other customers" and laments the fact that she "could never have anything for herself without a lot of other people butting in and certain to win in the end" (p. 32). Evie has made no positive move to get Casey for herself, although her interest in him has provided a new interest in herself, a consciousness of her appearance. "She planned ahead for evenings, rinsed her hair in malt vinegar and mourned a broken fingernail" (p. 32), almost as though her new attention to her appearance created a special relationship between herself and Casey.
Despite her inability to understand the music she hears at the Unicorn, Evie is attracted to Casey largely because of his style of playing. Indeed, it is this style, "that talking out of his that made the difference" (p. 33). It makes Evie want "to answer" and allows her to identify for once with those "girls who scream on the Ed Sullivan Show" (p. 16). Thus, it lessens the isolation Evie feels and provides her with an interest besides her own awkward self-consciousness.

"While . . . [Drum] spoke, Evie held very still, but afterwards, with her eyes wandering," she questions what it is that makes Drum "'do like that!'" and whether he is "'saying something underneath it'" or "'speaking in code'" (p. 33).

Throughout Evie's entire one-year relationship with Drum, including the period of her marriage, and until the very end of the novel, the words Casey says in the middle of his songs remain meaningless. Even after Evie is living with Drum as his wife, sharing "a tarpaper shack on the outskirts of Pulqua" (p. 144) with him, she fails to "understand what that speaking out was about" (p. 152)—why, indeed, Drum does it or what the words might possibly mean. Thus, as the relationship between Evie and Drum degenerates, Drum's music begins to leave Evie's ears "with a cottonwool feeling, and his speaking out . . . [becomes] harder to understand with every show" (pp. 174-175). Only at the close of the novel, that is, after Evie has left Drum, do those words become comprehensible. Playing to a silent, nodding audience, Drum speaks for once about the "letters" on Evie's forehead—letters which appeared backwards because Evie supposedly carved them while looking in a restroom mirror. Drum asks, "'But the letters was cut backwards. Would you explain?!'" while, ironically, "the only person who could have answered him was not present" (p. 214).
In an important way, then, Evie is cut off from Drum, much as she is from her father. A central aspect of Drum's personality escapes Evie's comprehension. She understands neither the kind of music he plays nor the thought process that leads him to toss together disconnected lyrics on varied subjects in a manner that at once distances him from both her and his audience. Significantly, this isolation of Drum with Evie is evident from their first encounters, not only in the images of coldness associated with Drum but also in the lack of personal interaction that characterizes their meetings. At the Unicorn, for instance, while Drum sings and dances within his "separate, motionless circle of air" (p. 26), Evie is physically and psychologically separated from him. The platform on which Drum plays physically separates him from everyone else while the songs he sings, the inaudible words, and the strange manner he has of speaking out all serve to isolate him from Evie psychologically. The "proud cold envelope of air" (p. 92) which always travels with him serves as a barrier to all those who, like Evie, do not dare to "'just give him a yank'" (p. 34). Ironically, in the cold and noisy atmosphere of the Unicorn, Evie, like Drum, is also isolated: a fat, dateless, and lonely teenager amid a crowd of couples. Only after Evie impulsively snaps Drum's picture in the middle of a song does he momentarily turn his cool attention and gaze toward her, but when Casey passes her table, he stops only to learn if Evie is "'from some newspaper'" (p. 28). His interest is clearly in finding his way out of Pulqua and Farinia through publicity and stardom.

Later also, when Evie uses the more dramatic gesture of self-disfigurement to capture Drum's indifferent attention, he, for the most part, ignores her. Indeed, except for the promptings of Drum's musical
accompanist, Dave Elliott, an ambitious young man who notifies the local newspaper, Evie's act is overlooked. However, like Evie, Drum seems uncertain of himself, and his coolness only a mask for that uncertainty. When he appears with Dave and a photographer from the Pulqua Times, he hides behind dark "sunglasses made of silvery black that mirrored Evie perfectly and turned his own face, what you could see of it, into something as hard and as opaque as the glasses themselves" (p. 48).

Indeed, Drum seems almost a parody of the rock stars he would emulate: an Elvis Presley look-alike who comes dressed in "black denim and . . . high leather boots" (p. 48). Even up close, Drum "seemed filmed by cold air" (p. 49), and the "swing in his walk created silences between his steps" (p. 47). While he and Evie are being photographed, however, Drum, despite his coolness, is unable to look at Evie's forehead and thus stares "fixedly at the bottom half of . . . [her] face" (p. 48). Evie, in turn, focuses "her eyes upon a drawer-pull for as long as she felt Casey watching" (p. 48). Only when Drum removes his dark glasses for the photograph is she able to see that "after all," he had "the narrow brown eyes that . . . [she] expected, so straight-edged that each seemed formed from a pair of parallel lines" (p. 48).

Here and elsewhere in A Slipping-Down Life, Anne Tyler suggests the psychological make-up, the contrasts, and the similarities between her characters through a detailed attention to gesture and mannerism. The fear, shyness, and uncertainty, for example, that characterize both Drum and Evie are captured here in the two teenagers' inability to look directly at one another while they are being photographed. However, despite this underlying similarity and identification between the two, Drum is very different from Evie. Proud, cool, slender, and musical,
at nineteen, he is exceedingly pessimistic, a high school drop-out who believes education is unimportant, and an idler who is interested primarily in his own rise to fame and subsequent escape from isolation. Fittingly, the phrase from which the novel takes its title is Drum's. Talking to Evie toward the end of the novel about the downward turn in his affairs, he says, "I ain't but nineteen years old and already leading a slipping-down life'" (p. 170), expressing a pessimism about life and the outcome to his affairs that is constant in the novel. Indeed, even at the time Drum asks Evie to marry him, he does so because "things are just petering out all around" (p. 130) and Evie offers some possibility for change. In fact, she has been good luck for Casey, drawing crowds to the Unicorn and allowing him to sleep on her front porch when he hasn't a home. Yet once Drum's fame begins to decline, the crowds at the Unicorn fall off, and the curiosity about the girl who disfigured her face for a rock singer subsides, the relationship with Evie also begins to slide. It becomes increasingly difficult and burdensome for both Evie and Drum, while Drum himself becomes less active in writing music and clearly more open and cruel in his handling of Evie. At one point he even announces before a large crowd of people that Evie's scar ring her face would have been "a lot more sacrifice if she'd been prettier to begin with" (p. 181).

But Drum's cruelty, his selfishness, and his pride are evident earlier in the novel, long before he and Evie marry. It is apparent in his coolness and pride regarding Evie's appearances at the Unicorn, in his nonchalance when he is being photographed with Evie in her hospital room, and, later, when he proposes marriage. In this last episode, moreover, it is apparent that Casey's goal is to provide himself with a
home and a boost to his career. As he tells Evie, "Here I am with no
home. And my career's at a standstill, we could get our pictures in
the paper!" (p. 130). He does, nevertheless, admit that he likes Evie,
although in the same breath he says,

"I don't know what you got to lose. You must like me some
or you wouldn't have, you know, cut the letters. You
wouldn't hang around me all the time."

(p. 130)

Despite his cruel attitude, however, Drum, like Evie, is "a part
of a family," "someone's son," although Evie is "stunned ... to think
of Drum Casey" in this way when she first calls him at his parents'
home in Farinia (p. 66). Like Evie, he feels distant from his family,
especially his father. While the Casey family, unlike the Deckers, con­
sists of what Drum refers to as "a parcel of brothers and her and
him!" (p. 89)—that is, his parents—"none of them's musical!" (p. 88).
In fact, it is only Drum's mother who has pushed her son and is interested
in his musical future, mainly because she believes "deep down ... he
has a wonderful career in front of him" (p. 96). Drum's father, in
contrast, feels his son is "lazy" and believes he is wasting his time
"spinning out his days plucking music" instead of "pumping gas" (p.
96) at Mr. Casey's station. Moreover, Obed Casey, whose very name
suggests his lower-class status, is "nothing like Drum" in appearance.
Where Drum's face is "a smooth olive color [and gives] ... off a glow
across the cheekbones and down the bridge of his nose" (p. 26), his
father's is "sharpboned and whiskery" (p. 154). Where Drum's eyes are
brown and narrow, "so straight-edged that each seemed formed from a
pair of parallel lines" (p. 48), Mr. Casey's are "very round [and]
bright" (p. 154). Not surprisingly, when Drum is arrested in Tar City
for getting in a fight at a nightclub where he is performing, it is
his father who throws him out for having "disgraced" (p. 111) the family.
When he returns home after being released from jail, even his mother,
who usually takes her son's side, no longer does. An overweight, anxious,
and usually warm woman who is closer in her make-up to Evie than she
is to either her angry husband or cool, proud son, Mrs. Casey tells Drum,
"You have killed my soul" and destroyed "my faith in you" (p. 112).
Rejected by his family and too proud to set things "right," as his
mother suggests, by "mak[ing] up the money and apologiz[ing] and get-
ing . . . a steady job" (p. 112), Drum turns to Evie, and as he tells
his new confidante, when his mother told him that sometimes she felt like
he "won't even amount to a hill of beans," "something crack[ed], the
final floorboard I was resting on" (p. 113).

"I don't know what my daddy has against me, but he never
will listen to reason, not for one second. Never asks my
side of nothing. Oh, well, him I'm used to. But Mom?"
(p. 112)

As a substitute, Drum finds Evie Decker, a girl that, prior to his need-
ing her, he barely spoke to and frequently and openly rejected.

Unlike Casey, Evie is willing to go "against her own nature even"
(p. 88) to be friendly and pleasing. Indeed, so motivated by a longing
for love and attention is Evie that she is often not only self-sacrificing
in her schemes to help Casey, but also self-destructive and self-de-
feating. On Casey's behalf, she is willing to invent gimmicks to raise
his popularity even after her marriage and even when those gimmicks,
frequently helped along by Dave Elliott, are clearly disapproved of by
Drum. Such is the case with Evie's last publicity gimmick, a scheme,
like the others, ostensibly designed to aid Drum's fading popularity and
help keep the young couple's marriage financially afloat. According to
the plan which Evie and Dave invent, Drum is to be kidnapped by his
friends and safely stowed away so that news of the kidnapping can attract
the attention of the local paper and radio station. Theoretically, once
Violet, Fay-Jean, and Dave have tied, gagged, and carted Drum away.
Evie will call the police. In turn, Drum, supposedly kidnapped by
zealous fans but actually locked away in the Elliott's toolshed, will
be released, although only after the police have notified the local media.
A telephone call reporting that Evie's father has had a heart attack and
has been taken to a hospital interferes with Evie's performing her role
in the kidnapping. Only later that night, after her father has died and
Evie returns to the Decker house in Pulqua, is she able to contact some­
one about Casey. However, rather than calling the police, something she
"can't bother" about "right now" (p. 200), Evie calls the Elliotts
and, unable to reach Drum, delivers a brusk and mysterious message to
Dave's younger brother.

"Give him [i.e., Drum] a message, then."
"Say my father died. Say I'm sorry but I can't bother
sending the police after him right now and I'll see
him in the morning."

(p. 200)

However, the next morning when Evie herself returns to the shack which
she and Drum share, she finds him in bed with Fay-Jean. Characteris­
tically, Drum defends himself by turning the tables on Evie and angrily
asking what she is doing home, where she has been, and whether or not
she thinks she "'can just stay away all night and then pop back in
again'" (p. 208). Even the trashy Fay-Jean excuses herself by saying,
"'You were away, after all'" (p. 208).

Through much of the novel, as this episode would indicate, Evie is
a character to be taken advantage of, a shy and withdrawn creature who appears thankful for any amount of attention she can get from Casey. However, as the relationship between the two develops and Evie sees more and more of Casey, she grows increasingly independent and self-confident, despite her continuing efforts to help Casey's career. In fact, by the end of the novel, Evie is quite capable of walking out on Casey—of ending, in other words, their marriage of a few months and her part in the "slipping-down life" they lead together.

Even earlier, there are signs of Evie's changing. When Drum is invited to play in Tar City and tells Evie and his mother that he is tired of looking at Evie's "'face night after night'" (p. 103), Evie responds by bluntly telling Casey that he is "'a cold and self-centered person'" whose "'music is boring . . . [and] repetitious'" (p. 104). Later, too, during the period when Drum sleeps on the Deckers' front porch, Evie, given more time with Casey than she has ever had before, begins to notice unpleasant and new things about him.

Sometimes, watching him sprawled in her house, she felt an unpleasant sense of surprise hit her. There were things about him that kept startling her each time she noticed them: the bony, scraped look of his wrists, the nicotine stain on his middle finger, the straggling hairs that edged his sideburns. He was sunk into the couch cushions as if he were permanent. If her father walked in right now, what would Drum do? Raise his hand no more than an inch, probably say, "Hey" and let the hand drop again.

(p. 123)

Struck by Casey's nonchalance and easy, distasteful manner, Evie bluntly asks, "'Drum Casey, what do you want out of me?'" "'Why are you hanging around here?'" (p. 124). Proud and resentful of being questioned, Drum, of course, storms off, though not permanently. He is back later to sleep
on the porch again and, the next day, to ask Evie to marry him and provide him with the home he lacks. Although Evie passively agrees to the marriage with a characteristic, "'Oh, well. Why not?'" (p. 131), she has successfully begun to assert herself with Casey and to develop an indifference to the attention he gives her. As Clotelia observes in her usual way of talking to the television rather than to Evie, "'I don't see you running after him'" (p. 125). Fittingly, Evie's response indicates the change that is beginning to take place in her view of herself and of Casey, as she answers Clotelia by saying, "'I didn't know if I wanted to'" (p. 125). No longer the gutless, withdrawn teenager whose own image is blanked out before her mirror by the name "Casey," Evie emerges here and elsewhere in the novel as a younger version of the female figure common to Ann Tyler's fiction: the strong, helpful, resourceful, and independent woman on whom men are frequently dependent.

Interestingly, in an interview which appeared in *The National Observer* in 1972, Anne Tyler spoke about *A Slipping-Down Life* as the only one of her novels at that time which she liked, possibly "'because it's the one book . . . in which the characters . . . change.'" The other novels, she continued, exhibit "'an utter lack of faith in change'" something, Miss Tyler says, "'I don't think most people are capable of.'" Very clearly, Evie Deckar is one of those characters who change. Confronted with an insular and limited familial experience, Evie literally lashes out to find her way in a world outside of her father's house and the limited experiences she has had there. Despite the fact that her actions are disfiguring and frequently tragic in their outcome, Evie does take "something into . . .[her] own hands for once" (p. 40)
and thus precipitates a cycle of change in her life. Moreover, during the brief period of her marriage to Casey, while Drum's life slides downward, Evie grows more independent and determined to make ends meet and keep her husband employed. When Drum is reduced to one night at the Unicorn and later fired altogether, Evie still tries to think of publicity gimmicks for his benefit, but also, "without even planning it" (p. 164), she takes a part-time job in the evenings at the Pulqua public library, a position her father had suggested in the hope of finding Drum, rather than his own daughter, a reliable job and a steady source of income. Although Drum is "against the idea" of Evie's working because he is too proud to "fall back on" (p. 163) anyone, especially his wife, in a manner reminiscent of Evie's father, he never asks questions about why Evie is late coming home every evening. Indeed, Drum begins to resemble Evie's father more and more, keeping quiet even when he picks Evie up from the library. Then, as with her father, Evie begins to develop "a let-down feeling," although she is clearly relieved that things go "so easy" (p. 166).

In other ways, also, the relationship between Evie and Drum begins to resemble that of Evie and her father. Besides the periods of silence, there is the house in which they live, a place every bit as desolate as the Unicorn and as symbolic of the relationship of the two people who live there at the Decker home. Here, the "tarpaper shack" which Evie and Drum rent for "twenty-four dollars a month" is at first "blank, waiting for Evie to make her mark" (p. 144), and, indeed, at first, both Evie and Drum care for the house. Evie plasters "the papery walls with posters" (p. 144) while Drum spends "time installing can openers, toothbrush holders, and towel rods" (p. 146). Later, however, the house becomes as disheveled as Evie and Drum's relationship: "a jumble" with
"a half-finished game of idiot's delight on a footstool, a heap of paper airplanes made by Drum on an idle day, five empty beer cans and an ash tray full of cigarette butts and chewing-gum wrappers and the metal tabs from the beer cans" (p. 207). On the last morning Evie visits the house, moreover, it has taken on the wintry feeling and appearance so often associated with Drum and the emptiness and desolation of places like the Unicorn. As Evie drives up to the house, it is deep winter, one year after the opening of the novel. "Not a sign of green" (p. 204) is evident on the trees, while the sky is "a stark gray-white, arching over treeless billows of parched land and dwarfing the house and the single bush that grew by the door" (p. 206). Fittingly, the house in which Evie has lived with Drum is once more "blank" with "squares of gray . . . reflected off the windowpanes" (p. 206). Like the dusty, damp, and undisturbed house in which Evie grew up and to which she will return, the house she has shared with Drum is also lifeless, barren, and "damp" (p. 207)—a mirror of the sterile relationship between the two people who used to live there. With the decline of their relationship, Evie's growing discontent, the couple's poverty, Drum's joblessness, and Evie's independence, the house becomes a fitting symbol of the absence of love, their isolation from one another, and the coldness that mark the lives of Evie and Drum.

Like her father, moreover, Drum becomes more distant with Evie as their marital relationship declines, while, at the same time, he assumes more of the duties her father once performed. When Evie misses school, for example, it is now Drum who has to write the notes explaining her absences, although "to have her husband write them seemed a mockery" (p. 169) somehow. Likewise, as in the days following her self-disfigurement and refusal to return to school, a period when Evie's
father would burden her mind with his "premeditated smile" (p. 62), Drum
too has begun to burden her, his "voice tugg[ing] at the hem of Evie's
mind, so that she almost forgot how it had been in the old days when he
never talked at all" (p. 170).

We have spent some time discussing the character of Drum Casey and
his relationship with Evie primarily because A Slipping-Down Life is the
first of Anne Tyler's novels to trace the evolution of a romantic relation­
ship from its beginnings to marriage and beyond. While If Morning Ever
Comes and The Tin Can Tree also study significant male-female involve­
ments, neither looks at these relationships beyond marriage. Joan Pike
and James Green in The Tin Can Tree, for example, never marry, and Joan,
it will be recalled, returns at the end of the novel to a house filled
with families while she remains the only single female in their midst.
Likewise, in If Morning Ever Comes, we do not have any view of Ben Joe
and Shelley Domer after their marriage. While Ben Joe returns to New
York from North Carolina with Shelley at the end of the novel, they have
not yet married, and the dream Ben Joe has about his wife and his son
which closes the book is a view of the distance between human beings
projected into some time in the future. The closest look at marital
relationships that we get in the early novels of Anne Tyler before A
Slipping-Down Life is a view of Lou and Roy Pike, clearly minor characters
in The Tin Can Tree, and one of Dr. and Mrs. Hawkes in If Morning Ever
Comes. However, what we learn about these relationships is, for the
most part, limited. Because the Pikes, for example, are minor char­
acters, we never get a close view of their relationship. Moreover, with
the Hawkes, all that we know of the relationship of Ben Joe's parents
is what is told to us retrospectively through the eyes of Ben Joe or
the omniscient narrator, with the involvement of Dr. Hawkes and his mistress, Lili Belle Moseley, providing us with the major clue to the distance and coldness that marked the Hawkes marriage.

An important point here is that marital relationships in Anne Tyler's novels, like other family relationships—at least as we see them in these three early books and especially in *A Slipping-Down Life*—are not exempt from the paradoxical contrasts and the unavoidable conflicts and distances that also mark the relationships of parents and children and sisters and brothers. In Anne Tyler's novels, all close human relationships and alliances, whether blood-related or not, are marked by these distance-creating differences. The individual is thus always and ultimately alone in Miss Tyler's fiction, despite whatever comfort he derives from family relations and friendships. Indeed, it is his uniqueness, his peculiar set of experiences and the memories that go with those experiences that clearly separate him from others and keep part of him, as Ben Joe Hawkes believes, "faraway and closed, . . . unreachable, . . . [and] blank-faced" (p. 266).

Fittingly, at the end of *A Slipping-Down Life*, Evie Decker, having undergone a similar journey of growth as Ben Joe, including the loss of her father, returns home to her father's house. With her father dead and no living relatives, not even a husband to comfort her, Evie is truly isolated from other human beings—the only living member of the Decker family. She notices a "smiling" photograph of her mother, a woman whom Evie never knew and who is "remembered now by no living person" (p. 200). Even the house in which Evie will soon take up residence again is ominously silent. As Evie wanders "through the rooms," it quiets down, but, symbolic of what is left of the Decker
family, the house also seems to be dying: "Beneath the surface noises of clocks and motors there was a deep, growing silence that layered in from the walls, making . . . [Evie] feel clumsy and out of place" (p. 200).

For a short while, it appears that this scene represents the first of its kind in Anne Tyler's fiction: one in which the individual's essential isolation from others is clearly captured in the loss of all relatives and the house in which he will live. But Anne Tyler has protested that she is "not the least bit pessimistic as a writer."

I never intended any of my characters to stagnate, certainly—it's just that I want to see how people can maneuver and grow within the small space that is the average life.40

Families, it will be recalled, are for Miss Tyler "convenient ways of studying how people adapt and endure when forced to stay together,"41 and, thus, Evie Decker is provided with a future family at the end of A Slipping-Down Life even while her father's generation vanishes. Evie, in fact, is pregnant, although she never tells either Drum or her father about her pregnancy. Her return to her father's house at the end of the novel becomes a symbolic gesture indicating her reunion in some way with the idea of family, if not with any actual family yet, while it also mirrors her permanent separation from her father and the mother whom she never knew. The blood-line, apparently severed by Mr. Decker's death and Drum's refusal to live with Evie in her father's house, will continue anyway. Indeed, it seems almost as inevitable as the continuing need of human beings to live in various kinds of families and alliances.

A Slipping-Down Life, then, like Anne Tyler's other early novels, is primarily concerned with studying the growth of the individual in the family. As one of those "small space[s]" Miss Tyler has written of
in her letter, Evie Decker's limited and lonely family life allows the novelist to study how Evie grows and develops despite the bleak and stifling atmosphere, the lack of understanding, and the isolation that characterize her life. Thus, like Anne Tyler's first two novels, *A Slipping-Down Life* concerns itself with the drabness, the details of day-to-day existence, and the loneliness of lives lived against the backdrop of family relationships—what Miss Tyler calls "the small space that is the average life." As before, we see the principal characters interacting with the members of their families, and thus we understand more fully the background that has helped form the actions that the novel chronicles. Moreover, like the earlier works, *A Slipping-Down Life* is told from an omniscient point of view and is set in the rural areas and small towns of North Carolina, a region with which the young Miss Tyler was comfortably familiar. Later, the novelist would move away from this area, both in reality and in fiction, just as she would begin to explore the first-person chronicle as a method of story telling.

Despite its similarities with the other early novels, *A Slipping-Down Life*, as its title suggests, is by and large a more depressing novel than Miss Tyler's other early works. Not surprisingly, Anne Tyler herself has spoken of it as "'a different kind of book,'" one that she felt "'somehow braver'" in writing. Where at the end of *The Tin Can Tree* Joan Pike returns to a house full of people, Evie returns to an empty family home to confront her fate as the only living member of her family. Where Ben Joe Hawkes departs Sandhill with a future bride at the end of *If Morning Ever Comes*, Evie leaves her husband after finding him in bed with another woman. In a measurable way, then, this
novel sustains, as the earlier books did not, a concentration on the increasingly lonely life of one character and a sense of a whole lifetime passed in silence and separation from others. Clearly, also, *A Slipping-Down Life* marks a change, if not an uplifting one, in Anne Tyler's treatment of the individual in the family. The family unit here, as we have discussed, is smaller than those of the earlier books, and the lives and relationships of the central characters, as we have attempted to show, are especially isolated and lacking in communication and commitment to others. Interaction between characters in *A Slipping-Down Life* is almost always marked by a balance of deafening noise and growing silence. The bursts of music at the Unicorn, made louder by electric amplifiers, and the talk of the characters on "the soap operas [that] toil . . . on, one after the other" (p. 56) at the Decker house prevent Evie from communicating with both Violet and Clotelia, the two mother-figures in her life, while, ironically, the scenes when she is alone with her father or with Drum are punctuated with awkward periods of silence.

Overall, *A Slipping-Down Life* is a more mature work, one that indicates a development in Anne Tyler's ability to handle character over a much longer time scheme than the earlier books attempted—to show, in fact, how character develops and changes as a result of experience. As in the earlier books, the central concern is the portrayal of character, and here that portrayal indicates a toughening of the writer's attitude toward her characters, a movement away from the earlier, milder figures, such as Ben Joe Hawkes and Joan Pike, toward the more boldly-drawn, gothic, and semi-grotesque figures of the later works. In this last regard, Evie's act of self-mutilation, an act which she
vengefully tells Drum in the final scene was not her own, serves to heighten both the heroine's desperation and her loneliness while it clearly places *A Slipping-Down Life* within the tradition of the grotesque common to much Southern fiction. Southern literature, as Anne Tyler herself has observed, is full of "'freaks,'" "'dwarfs, hunchbacks, petrified men—terrifying, violent, almost bloody people,'" and, in her own way, Evie Decker becomes one of these people: fat, dowdy, terribly lonely, with the name of a small-town rock singer carved backwards in her forehead.

Like the families that she writes about, the novels of Anne Tyler, it might be said, also serve as a "convenient way" of studying the human behavior that most fascinates the novelist and, thus, of revealing the writer's major concerns. In all of Anne Tyler's early novels, for example, her interest in the individual in the family and her view of human beings as essentially isolated and estranged from one another despite their deep-lying need for others and their alliance in family structures to meet this need are clearly evident. Evident also in these early works is a tendency to illustrate the distances between human beings through an attention to the diverse make-up, the differences in personalities and experiences, of the individuals within a family. Out of this diversity, of course, emerges a dominant Tyler theme: the struggle of the individual to move beyond the family in which he was raised toward a more caring and warm relationship—to find, in effect, a fulfillment of those needs which his family may have failed to meet. That he discovers in his search the unavoidability of distance and conflict in all human relationships lends support to what we have attempted to establish here. Repeatedly, the early novels involve the struggle of youthful
characters to move away from their families and the isolation they know only to find themselves separated, in one form or another, from those with whom they have established new relationships. Additionally, in each of these three novels, the central characters make at least one journey home—or, as in the case of Joan Pike and her parents, several attempted journeys home. Each time, moreover, the principal characters face a confrontation with not only the families they have left but also, and more importantly, with the changes that have been wrought by aging and death. Suggestive of the psychological journey the individual has made away from his family and of the essential distance which has always separated him from them, the return home serves to evoke memory, and thus to force a confrontation between memory and the reality of change. Looked at in this way, the study of the individual in the family common to Anne Tyler's early novels is also "a convenient way" of treating what the novelist has referred to as her "obsession with time," a concern not only with the individual in the family and the unavoidable loneliness of most humans, but also with the effect of time and the inescapable transience of life.
CHAPTER II

THE CLOCK WINDER

In April, 1972, Alfred A. Knopf published Anne Tyler's fourth novel and what was, at the time, her most expanded work: a book covering not only one year in the lives of the principal characters, as A Slipping-Down Life had, but an entire decade. Indeed, it was a novel that, unlike the earlier books, explored at length the intense interaction among a large cast of characters and one which granted to each major figure at least one chapter centered in his consciousness. Originally submitted to the publisher under the title The Button Mender, The Clock Winder, as the novel came to be called, covers the decade of 1960 to 1970 and focuses on the relationship to Elizabeth Abbott, a Baptist minister's daughter from Ellington, North Carolina, with the eccentric and varied characters who make up the eight-member Emerson clan of Baltimore's Roland Park: Mrs. Pamela Emerson, the family's head and, at the opening of the novel, the recently widowed and extremely lonely woman who hires Elizabeth as her "handyman"; Andrew and Timothy, Mrs. Emerson's oldest and most obviously neurotic children and her only set of twins; Matthew, the only quiet member of the family and the one who was closest to his father; Mary, Margaret, and Melissa, the three daughters the Emerson marriage produced; and, finally, Peter, the youngest Emerson and the one who, because he came "at the tail end of the family, five years after Melissa," remains an outsider to his own family.

Into the disordered and varied lives of this large, diverse, remote, and crisis-prone family, Elizabeth Abbott interjects a note of
both practicality and humor, elements totally lacking in the Emersons. In fact, it is the growing involvement of Elizabeth with the Emersons during her initial eight-month stay in 1960, her return home to her own family in Ellington, North Carolina, following the suicide of Timothy, and her reunion with the Emersons in 1965 and eventual marriage to Matthew that form the basic plot line of *The Clock Winder*. The nature and extent of Elizabeth's relationship with the Emersons, despite her status as an employee, the contrasts and distance between herself and the members of both her real family as well as the surrogate Baltimore family that adopts her as one of its own, and her own special attraction and need for the kind of involvement which the Emersons offer clearly place Anne Tyler's fourth novel within the thematic tradition we have discussed thus far in our study. Indeed, *The Clock Winder* marks a continuation of Miss Tyler's concern with the individual in the family and another stage in her treatment of the complex and ironic nature of most familial relationships. That the Emersons provide for Elizabeth what her own family has failed to give and yet, despite their need for her and her involvement with them, contrast sharply with her in a variety of ways—alternately and individually both accepting and rejecting her and criticizing, as real families are prone to do, those aspects of her personality and behavior most unlike their own—suggests once again the paradoxical nature of most close relationships and the unavoidability of conflict and isolation in all types of family relationships.

At the beginning of *The Clock Winder*, Elizabeth Abbott, the heroine of the novel, is twenty-two years old and a drifter, a young woman who has dropped out of college supposedly to earn "'money for . . . [her] senior year!'" but who also readily admits that her "'grades were rotten'" and that she will probably "'never get back'" (p. 13). A good-natured,
calm, broadly smiling girl who does most things, as Mrs. Emerson observes, "in . . . a roundabout way" (p. 12), Elizabeth is easily "sidetracked" (p. 11), primarily because she "'never turn[s] down an invitation'" (p. 65). In contrast to most of the Emersons as well as her own family, she is a girl without "any fixed destinations in her life" (p. 11), the kind of imperturbable character who finds work by scanning bulletin boards and taking whatever odd job may be offered to her. In fact, Elizabeth happens into Mrs. Emerson's life in just such a typically unplanned for way. On her way to a job as "a mother's helper," a position she saw advertised on "'a bulletin board in a thrift shop'" (p. 13), Elizabeth stops to offer help to Mrs. Emerson, a skinny, fragile woman who has impulsively fired her handyman and gardener of twenty-five years moments before Elizabeth appears and who is, in the opening pages of the novel, trying to prove her independence by single-handedly moving the summer furniture indoors before the fall sets in. To Mrs. Emerson, a woman "used to being taken care of" (p. 8), Elizabeth is a godsend, the human equivalent of the two aces turned up in a symbolic game of solitaire played moments before Elizabeth arrives on the scene. Where Pamela Emerson is awkward and strained trying to move the large number of odd and clumsy porch chairs she owns--first snagging her stockings on branches and briars in the yard and ultimately catching her high-heeled shoe in the ground and falling--Elizabeth capably scoops up the furniture, "hoisting up two chairs at once . . . and swinging through the side yard with them" (p. 11) without a comment. Neither the clumsiness of the furniture she carries nor the distance down the sloping side yard to the Emersons' garage seems to bother her, and within minutes, the furniture stored, Elizabeth is offered a job by Mrs. Emerson.
Prior to this encounter with Mrs. Emerson in the last summer of 1960, Elizabeth Abbott had until May of that year lived at home and attended Sandhill College, a small fictional North Carolina school whose name suggests a link with Ben Joe Hawkes' hometown and the setting of *If Morning Ever Comes*. Since May, however, Elizabeth, like Ben Joe, has gone north, wandering "through various northern cities, stuffing envelopes, proofreading textbooks, and substituting for mailmen" (p. 70) in order to earn enough money to survive. Ironically, as competent and capable as Elizabeth appears to Mrs. Emerson in the beginning of the novel, her history on these various jobs relates a tale of failure. She has, in fact, been "fired from every one" (p. 70), largely because she repeatedly bungled her work, sending "a thousand empty envelopes" out "by mistake" and letting "horrendous errors slip by her in the textbooks" (p. 70). Even her job as a mailman, "her favorite," proved a failure because she "consistently" gave "everybody the wrong letters" (p. 70).

Elizabeth's relationship with her family, we learn, has also been problematic and strained. To them she always been both a disappointment and a failure. Unlike her only sibling, her younger sister Polly, a girl who has done exactly what her father and the members of the Ellington community expect of a female, Elizabeth has been ""a trial!"" (p. 63). Through a letter from her mother, a successful expository device used to provide background on the laconic Elizabeth, we learn not only about Elizabeth's unexpected departure from Ellington but also of the strained relation between her and her father. A Baptist minister by profession, the Reverend Abbott is, nonetheless, remarkably "proud," a man who is unwilling to forgive his daughter for her transgressions and one who conveys to his wife that it is "up" to Elizabeth "to write
first and take back all . . . [she] said" (p. 38). The hints of an argument which clearly preceded Elizabeth's abrupt departure from Ellington are partly explained by a conversation between Elizabeth and Timothy and, later, her return trip home—both episodes which give us insight into the isolation of Elizabeth from her family despite their blood ties. Indeed, it becomes quite clear during her sojourn home that to the Reverend Abbott, Elizabeth (or Liz, as her family calls her) is the walking embodiment of the deadly sins of "slothfulness," "aimlessness," and "slobbishness" (p. 147), sins the minister feels compelled to catalogue for his daughter during their infrequent talks together. So disgusted and bewildered is Mr. Abbott with his wayward child that he buries "his face in his hands" (p. 157) even in her presence. An inveterate chain-smoker of Camel cigarettes which she frequently lights by striking "a kitchen match on the arm of her chair" (p. 157), Elizabeth smells of tobacco and wood shavings and distresses the Reverend Abbott not only with her smoking and general lack of Christian virtues but also with her belief in reincarnation, unquestionably the source of the father-daughter argument that preceded Elizabeth's departure in May, 1960, and clearly, as Timothy Emerson tells her, something "You just thought . . . up to irk your father" (p. 63).

However, Elizabeth's sins against her family are greater and more long-lived than either her smoking or her belief in reincarnation, an idea she comes to not only to bedevil her father and, as she says, "the old ladies" who "tell me I shall pass this way but once" (p. 63). Philosophically, Elizabeth is the antithesis of her father, a kind and caring girl who avoids ever changing "someone else's affairs around" (p. 63)—what is, in effect, the goal of her father's ministry. Always
stunned by "brief glimpses" of the changes a revival had in her high school chum, Sue Ellen, Elizabeth has, we are told, never taken her father's "words at face value" (p. 149). She has seen too often the "tender and knowing" smile (p. 149) on his face mask a disregard for the kinds of temporary hysteria and life-disturbing changes he has created in others' lives. Unlike her father, Elizabeth has steered away from what she sees as permanent damage done to people, "damage you can't repair" (p. 225), by god-fearing and frighteningly serious religious conviction. As a consequence, she possesses far more genuine concern for others than her father and remains playful and frustratingly nonserious with those who, like her father and Pamela and Timothy Emerson, would have her direct her life toward serious ends and in a more purposeful way.

Her belief in reincarnation, a theory that, according to Elizabeth, allows "'You . . . [to] stop getting so wrought up about things once you know it's not your last chance'" (p. 62), becomes, in light of her other goals and characteristics, much more than a rebellious act against her father. It is more likely a playful mask for Elizabeth's genuine and at times distressing concern that she may cause some permanent harm to someone.

As we have suggested, Elizabeth, unlike her sister Polly, is also a failure with her family because she has not done what is expected of her—indeed, what is expected of every girl in Ellington: marry and settle down, as Polly has, and produce a baby in the allotted nine months after her wedding. As the Reverend Abbott tells his older daughter during an interview following her return from Baltimore,

"We've [the family] been waiting twenty-three years for you to straighten out a little. Isn't it time you shaped up? Don't you think you're past the stage
for teenage rebellion? It's just not becoming. Why, I would expect you to be married and starting a family by now."

(pp. 155-157)

But Elizabeth, unlike Polly, whose wedding she used as a means of escaping her family, has "brought no boys back with her" to her parents' home, "except... once" (p. 153): a "'State College student'" who "'got arrested for robbing laundromats'" (p. 63). Open and trusting where the "Christian" community of Ellington is not, Elizabeth repeatedly takes up with strangers, much to the dismay of both her family and, later, Pamela and Timothy Emerson. Even Elizabeth's sudden departure from her family and Ellington, an event recorded in Mrs. Abbott's letter to her daughter, finds Elizabeth guilty of violating the xenophobic restrictions that characterize most families. Instead of going "by bus like ordinary people," Mrs. Abbott writes, Elizabeth has chosen to hitch a ride "with just a wedding guest that none of our side knew" (p. 36).

Alienated from her family by what they would consider her rebelliousness, Elizabeth rejects the familiar and the ordinary on which restrictive family relationships like the Abbotts are built. She refuses to marry Dommie Whitehall, a hometown boy who is her mother's choice, even after getting all the way to the altar with him, and earlier, out of "sheer devilment," brews wine in "Reverend Abbott's basement," even going so far as to get a "special government permit, just so she would know that the parsonage was a licensed brewery even if no one else ever did" (p. 154). Indeed, as Elizabeth tells Matthew Emerson following her return to the Emersons in Baltimore, "'I always did want a little more sinful family than the one I've got'" (p. 277), and, quite appropriately, the Emersons provide that family.
Of all of the members of her own family, it is only to her mother that Elizabeth bears any resemblance. "An older, heavier Elizabeth" (p. 220) in appearance, Mrs. Abbott has passed onto her daughter a love of "wood and stone" (p. 147), her "cheerful and matter-of-fact" (p. 146) manner, and a fondness for the "old Victorian frame parsonage" in which the family lived before the "church ladies . . . had arranged to have a brick ranch-house built" (p. 147) for the Reverend Abbott and his family. From her mother, Elizabeth has acquired her skill and enjoyment for working with objects and the sense of fun that comes from doing simple things like "outwitting the bucking hot water heater and the back screen door that . . . [is] forever sticking shut" (p. 148). However, unlike Mrs. Abbott, Elizabeth is largely unconcerned with what others think of her. Always clad in jeans and a workshirt, she has not only failed to marry; she has also taken up the unladylike habits of wood-carving and cigarette-smoking. Where Mrs. Abbott is "the perfect minister's wife," a woman who is able to balance her "underneath" side of "bustle and practicality" with a surface serenity and calm (p. 146)—and, consequently, fits quite well into the role expected of her—Elizabeth is "the minister's ne'er-do-well daughter who," unlike her mother, "lay in bed till eleven and then had no better occupation than walking the dog" (p. 148). Mrs. Abbott sits "serenely beneath" her husband's "pulpit on Sundays and . . . [offers] the proper sympathy in the proper soft, hesitant voice" (p. 146); Elizabeth never attends church at all and is particularly blunt in her conversation, frequently throwing a whole interchange "out of rhythm" (p. 161) by her directness. Indeed, while her mother prepares funeral meals far in advance of need, freezing them for months, and would, "if she could [,) have deep-frozen her sympathy ahead of time too" (p. 164),
Elizabeth makes no plans for the future. She acts instead on impulse and takes whatever invitation comes her way. Expectedly, it is Elizabeth who misses the old parsonage in which the family used to live, a house remarkably similar to the Emerson home, while Mrs. Alcott, although she occasionally stops "to throw a baffled look at the stove that timed its own meals" and her "new streamlined kitchen," bluntly dismisses the idea of moving back. In a characteristic blend of practical housewife and minister's dutiful mate, she asks Elizabeth, "'What would the congregation think?'" and adds, "'Besides, they're tearing it down'" (p. 148).

To Elizabeth, however, duty to the congregation is not a consideration. To her, there is "nothing . . . comfortable" about the new, characterless ranch-house in which her family lives nor about her family's way of life nor the environment of Ellington. A maverick in her family, she is fond of trees and old neighborhoods, two things Ellington fails to supply, and contrasts sharply with both her father and her sister. Significantly, the Reverend Abbott is "subject to drafts" (p. 147), has asthma, and, consequently, finds his new home a delight, where Elizabeth is healthy and strong and clearly prefers the comfort of older houses, like the parsonage or the Emersons' house, to her parents' current home and similar "modern" places. Not surprisingly, Elizabeth's "general presence" during her stay at home begins to disrupt the "entire household" (p. 156), a household fond of order and regularity. As her father tells her,

"Week after week you rise late and lie around the house all day, your appearance is disorderly and your habits are slovenly, you go nowhere, you see no friends, you stay up till all hours . . . so you can rise late the next day . . . . I never saw anyone live the way you do."

(p. 156)

Unlike her sister Polly, moreover, Elizabeth lacks the proper feminine
traits to gain her father's approval. Tall and lanky where Polly is "smaller" (p. 152) and cute, Elizabeth wears "no trace of make-up" (p. 11), having discovered as a teenager that "she would never look anything but garish" in it (p. 157). Never a tomboy, "she had dreamed of being rescued from fire or water by some young man" like other young girls, but, unlike her sister, who "had been Queen of May Day" in high school, Elizabeth had been an "awkward," "sullen," and "self-conscious" teenager (p. 157). Thus while Polly's "heart-shaped face" is framed by a "tousle of yellow curls like a frilled nightcap" (p. 152), Elizabeth's "dark yellow hair" hangs "straight to her shoulder" (p. 10), her uniform dress of dungarees, moccasins, and white shirt contrasting sharply with the neat, "immaculate" and acceptable "flower-sprigged shirtdress" (p. 152) which Polly wears. And, finally, where Polly dutifully brought her future husband Carl home to her family to be entertained with Cokes and Fritos in the family's recreation room, Elizabeth had "never used" the room (p. 153). "It affected her the way New Year's parties did: you were supposed to have fun there, you were pressured into it, and the obligation [like the pressures from her family] weighted her spirits down" (p. 153).

Although she is clearly an outcast and a "trial" to her family, a person who, as she tells Timothy Emerson "'break[s] things more than fix[es] them'" (p. 64), paradoxically, with the Emersons Elizabeth is exactly the opposite. Where in Ellington nothing she did was pleasing or right, "in this house [i.e., the Emersons'] everything she touched seemed to work out fine" (p. 38). Her position as Mrs. Emerson's helpmate, companion, and chauffeur allows her to be free for the first time from the mistakes and fumblings that followed her in "the old days" (p. 38) and characterized her behavior at every turn. Indeed, since
"the day Elizabeth first climbed" Mrs. Emerson's "porch steps, a born fumbler and crasher and dropper of precious objects, she had possessed miraculous repairing powers," while Mrs. Emerson, "who had maybe never broken a thing in her life, for all Elizabeth knew," "had obligingly presented her with a faster and faster stream of disasters in need of attention": "first shutters and faucets and doorknobs", then following Mrs. Emerson's trip to the doctor and his warning about restricting her diet, "human beings" (p. 79) as well. Ironically, where in her own family Elizabeth's "'general presence'" disrupted "'an entire household'" and presented a burden and a distraction to her orderly relatives, with the Emersons, particularly with Pamela Emerson, she is a useful and much needed addition to both the house and the family, someone, in fact, that Mrs. Emerson comes to see "'as another daughter'" (p. 85).

This ironic reversal of roles evidenced by Elizabeth's change from bumbler to skillful repairer of objects suggests a common theme in Anne Tyler's novels: the limitations imposed by families—by, to use Miss Tyler's own words, "the absurdities of their confinement" together—and the freedom associated with escape from that confinement. A theme suggested by the limitations which other Tyler characters—including Ben Joe Hawkes, Joan Pike, James Green, and Evie Decker—experience with their respective families, this conflict between freedom and confinement and the dilemma of restriction which the individual faces within his own family are perhaps nowhere more amply illustrated in Miss Tyler's novels than in The Clock Winder, where not only Elizabeth but also each of Mrs. Emerson's seven children suffers to some extent as a consequence of their mother's demanding manner and her restrictive labeling of their behavior. What we witness is not only Elizabeth's bumbling and her father's repeated cataloguing of her moral failings, but also Mrs. Emerson's nagging at
her children and their pressured response to be as she expects them to be. Indeed, Mrs. Emerson, Elizabeth observes, has "a way of summing up each child in a single word, putting a finger squarely on his flaw. Margaret was moody, Andrew unbalanced, Melissa high-strung" (p. 33). However, since "in Mrs. Emerson's eyes anything to do with nerves was a sign of intelligence," "the flaws" she delineates in her children become "virtues" (p. 33), suggesting a reason for holding onto them. Thus, while "other people's children were steady and happy and ordinary," "Mrs. Emerson's were not" (p. 33). They remain "special" (p. 33) and constricted.

To Timothy Emerson, a young man pressured by medical school and profoundly affected by his mother's enormous expectations of him and her foolish belief that twins somehow have "to split a single share of intelligence" (p. 60), the problem is clearly a serious one. Her personality-determining labels, expectations, and nagging become fatally binding. Significantly, it is Timothy who "voices" this conflict of parent and child most clearly in his thinking. As he lies half-drunk on the floor at a party he attends with Elizabeth a few months before his suicide, he imagined a federal law ordering everybody to switch parents at a certain age. Then butter-fingered Elizabeth, her family's cross, could come sustain his mother forever and mend all her possessions, and he could go south and live a happy thoughtless life assisting Reverend Abbott at Sunday vespers. There would be a gigantic migration of children across the country, all cutting the old tangled threads and picking up new ones when they found the right niche, free forever of other people's notions about them. (p. 71)

Pathetically, for Timothy, a young man who has "spent too long assuming she [his mother] was right" (p. 60) in her judgments to ever challenge her, freedom from the pressures he feels comes only in fantasy, and ultimately death.
Ironically, it is just such freedom from "other people's notions" that allows Elizabeth to be successful with Mrs. Emerson, even while she is, as a consequence, frustratingly footloose, noncommitted, and "aimless" (p. 85) in the eyes of her employer and Timothy Emerson. Unlike Timothy, a young man who "felt an obligation to hear songs through to the end, even if he didn't like them," "finished books that bored him, and had never in his life walked out on a movie" (p. 61), Elizabeth is able to walk away from the situations that entrap her, including her own wedding. Freedom from the family with whom she has been a perennial failure also entails a freedom to decide for herself "where to go and when to sleep and what to do with her days," "or not to decide, which was even better" (p. 38). For Elizabeth, life with Mrs. Emerson allows her to "become a grownup" for the first time, to have a room that is "no one's but her own," and to "leave ... when she wanted or stay forever" (p. 38). Where Timothy Emerson, still held captive by his mother's expectations of him, can only fantasize about the freedom that comes from genuinely escaping family, Elizabeth has found it. Even Mrs. Emerson's nagging about Elizabeth's appearance and her dependence on her employee as a companion do not drive Elizabeth away. Only the self-imposed deadline of "the first mistake," a mistake that comes with Elizabeth's attempt to prevent Timothy's suicide, drives her back to her family and away from Mrs. Emerson, "the one person who leaned on her" and who temporarily relieved her of the prescribed role of family "bumbler" (p. 87).

From the opening of The Clock Winder, it is clear that Elizabeth and Mrs. Emerson are complementary and compatible figures despite a large number of striking contrasts that effectively prevent them from understanding one another. During Elizabeth's initial eight-month stay in
Baltimore, for example, the lives of the two women are said "to fit together as neatly as puzzle pieces. Even the tone of their voices was habit, . . . Mrs. Emerson's scolding, Elizabeth's flip and unperturbed" (p. 78). Besides the obvious differences in age, dress, and, as indicated above, tone of voice, Elizabeth and Mrs. Emerson are also opposites in personality and attitude toward life. In fact, the same kinds of ironic contrasts that mark the family relationships in the novels of Anne Tyler we have examined thus far are also apparent in The Clock Winder. Here, however, the special dependency of Mrs. Emerson on Elizabeth makes these differences particularly ironical.

The only link between Ellington, North Carolina, a " parched and bleak" (p. 151) farmland area, and Baltimore, with its heavily industrial center and its wooded residential sections like Roland Park, Elizabeth Abbott is a character who combines humor, practicality, unconventionality, a fondness for simple things "without machinery" (p. 24), and an inexplicable attraction for complex and helpless people. Symbolically, she is the bridge between two ways of life: the middle-class existence of simple, religious people like her parents and her sister Polly and the more intense, extraordinary and crisis-prone existence of the wealthy Mrs. Emerson and her seven children, most of whom turn to Elizabeth for help or advice at some point in the novel. Like the novelist who created her, Elizabeth places "great value on stoicism" and is particularly reluctant "to invade anyone else's privacy," especially by attempting to "'change . . . [his] affairs around"' (p. 63). Tall, capable, "a lanky, awkward, flat-chested girl" (p. 22) always clad in jeans, Elizabeth counters her employer's helplessness and nervousness with self-reliance and calm. When Mrs. Emerson is shrill and troubled, Elizabeth is playful, to such

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a degree that at one point, Mrs. Emerson tells her, "'Sometimes . . .
I feel you are making fun of me, Elizabeth'" (p. 78). The difference that
marks the two women is that which marks someone who "was used to being
taken care of," who "had passed almost without a jolt from the hands of
her father to the hands of her husband" (p. 8), and who has not, there­
fore, learned to fend for herself, and one who, although she has always
been the "black sheep" (p. 148) in her own family, likes "to picture her­
self coming to people's rescue" (p. 259) and has developed the capacity
and capability to do so. The kind of person who spends her life caring
for others, not merely mending houses but also lives, Elizabeth, unlike
Mrs. Emerson's children, all of whom seem to "work at moving away" (p.
18) from their mother, is fond of her employer and admires her, despite
the differences between them. From the beginning of the novel when Eliza­
beth first appears and offers to help Mrs. Emerson, it is obvious that
her role will include caring for her employer and filling the enormous
emptiness of her life. In their first encounter, for example, Elizabeth
not only moves the awkward lawn and porch furniture Mrs. Emerson has been
struggling with, but also serves as a sounding board for the older woman
as she complains of the loneliness of her life since her children have
grown and moved away and her husband has died. Years later, also,
Elizabeth returns to Baltimore and the Emerson household only because
Mrs. Emerson needs her care after suffering a stroke. Indeed, Elizabeth
is the only person Mrs. Emerson asks for, and the only one who will come.
On short notice, Elizabeth takes "a leave of absence from her job" and
flies "to Baltimore when she had never planned on seeing it again" (p. 259).

This obvious attachment of Elizabeth and Mrs. Emerson to one
another contrasts sharply with the relationships they have with their
own respective families and is balanced, as suggested earlier, by a number of striking differences. Where Mrs. Emerson "had a compulsion to fill all silences" and later winced "over what she had spilled out to a stranger" (p. 18)—including, in the beginning of the novel, Elizabeth—Elizabeth herself is laconic and thus able to be the person Mrs. Emerson has been looking for, "someone . . . [to] stay still and listen" (p. 18). In contrast to her employer, who is given to wringing her hands in bewilderment and "tying herself into knots over plans and judgments and decisions" (p. 43), Elizabeth appears imperturbable, so much so, in fact, that she frustrates and irritates Mrs. Emerson, just as she did her own father, by failing to "make any distinctions in . . . [her] life" (p. 85) or any plans for the future. As a consequence, Elizabeth is continually being badgered by Mrs. Emerson with a series of questions relating to her plans and intentions, especially the meaning of her dating both Matthew and Timothy, two of Mrs. Emerson's sons, during the same time period. "What are you going to do, in the end?" Mrs. Emerson asks Elizabeth. "What will you make of your life?" (pp. 33-34), "How do I know that you won't go wandering off with someone tomorrow and leave me to cope on my own?" (p. 85), and "Are you playing off one brother against another? Lately you've seen so much of Matthew, but you still go out with Timothy. Why is that?" (pp. 83-84). To almost all of these questions, Elizabeth's response is fundamentally the same: she goes where she is asked and makes no commitments for the future. As she tells Timothy Emerson shortly after meeting him, "I always go where I'm asked. . . . It's a challenge" (p. 42). "I never turn down an invitation" (p. 65). Thus Elizabeth inversely complements Mrs. Emerson's "tight rein" (p. 16) on her life and her insistence on "plans neatly made, routes clearly marked" (p. 34) by supplying
a looseness and noncommitment that is particularly irritating to those who, like her father, Mrs. Emerson herself, and Timothy, want her to settle down.

Besides these contrasts in character and attitude between Elizabeth and Mrs. Emerson, other more noticeable and obvious differences appear. Reflecting her easy and casual approach to almost everything that crops up, Elizabeth is always dressed in "what Mrs. Emerson called her uniform—moccasins, dungarees, and a white shirt" (p. 25), while Mrs. Emerson herself "owned no slacks" (p. 7). Indeed, she is forever attired, it seems, in "a dyed-to-match sweater and skirt and a string of pearls" (p. 30). Even at the time of Timothy's death and the funeral that follows, she remains unbroken, continuing "to wear her matched skirts and sweaters . . . her string of pearls, her high-heeled shoes, and her bracelet with the names of all of her children dangling on gold discs" (p. 10). In contrast to Elizabeth, who is unadorned except for a wristwatch she wears everywhere and who starts out to a party with Timothy attired in "huge rubber boots" and jeans (p. 53), Mrs. Emerson "dressed up for everything, even breakfast" (p. 7). Yet Elizabeth finds Mrs. Emerson admirable precisely because, as she tells Matthew, despite the "small life she has, she still dresses up every day and holds her stomach in" (p. 110). With her hair dyed to cover the gray that has begun to appear and her face "carefully made up" (p. 3), Mrs. Emerson has a hedge against old age as well as any satisfaction her children might gain from seeing their mother as "a broken old lady" (p. 7). Once a Roland Park debutante who has lost some of her youthful prettiness and has begun to fall "into separate pieces" (p. 6), Mrs. Emerson can, nonetheless, still proudly hold "out smooth white hands with polished nails" (p. 7) to her visiting children.
and strangers. However, where those hands are clearly suggestive of an absence of work in Mrs. Emerson's life, Elizabeth's indicate the opposite, for they are "square and brown, b-dly cared for, the nails clipped-looking and the knuckles scraped" (p. 16). Unlike Mrs. Emerson's, moreover, they are clearly competent and "comforting to watch" "as they locate . . . [a] screw and fit . . . it into . . . a chair" (p. 16).

Interestingly, among Elizabeth's many jobs in the Emerson household is the particularly symbolic one of clock winder, a role which Mr. Emerson filled before his death and one which gives the novel its title. The Emerson household, we are told early in the novel, is "full of clocks, one to a room—eight-day pendulum clocks that struck the hour and half-hour" (p. 7). However, while the striking of the clocks was "beautifully synchronized [before Mr. Emerson's death], . . . the winding was not. Some were due to be wound one day, some another. Only . . . [Mr. Emerson] had understood the system. (If there was a system)" (pp. 7-8). When Elizabeth begins work for Mrs. Emerson, she quickly, and without preplanning or deliberation, assumes the task of winding the clocks. Where Mrs. Emerson had sat worrying over "the meaning of these endless rooms of clocks, efficiently going about their business," and had pondered how to wind them so as to avoid "overtight mainsprings," Elizabeth absentmindedly winds them as Mr. Emerson had done: "on his way to other places," synchronizing "their striking apparently without effort, without even mentioning it" (p. 8). Like the other practical and unconscious aspects of living for which Elizabeth assumes responsibility, the symbolic task of keeping the "tick, pause, tock" pulse (p. 8) of the Emerson household going also falls to her hands, and she effortlessly and competently
accepts the role of clock winder as she does the others, without the nagging doubt and puzzlement of her employer.

The constricting anxiety Mrs. Emerson creates for herself over practical matters also carries over to her relationship with her children. With them, as she is with Elizabeth to some extent, Mrs. Emerson is forever questioning and scolding, meddling and worrying. The result is an unbreachable distance between parent and children, an isolation of Mrs. Emerson from most everyone, but especially from the very people with whom she seeks to be close. Even though the Emerson children are all grown and have moved away, Mrs. Emerson continues to stalk them with telephone calls and letters, dictating the latter into a tape recorder and filling her missives with more of the same kinds of nagging questions and remonstrances that characterize her exchanges with Elizabeth. "I'm not any ordinary mother-in-law," she writes one daughter, and "the last thing I want is to offend that husband of yours," "but would you be able to use my old fur coat?" (p. 35). To another she says, "Why don't you write? It's not that I care for my own sake, I just think you'd wonder if I were dead or alive" (p. 87). With Andrew, clearly her most "unbalanced" child, she nags about visits, presumably forbidden by his psychiatrist:

"Andrew, I understand about Thanksgiving but on Christmas I set my foot down. . . . I'm not thinking of myself, you understand. I'm managing quite well. But Christmas is a family holiday, you need your family. Tell your doctor that."

(p. 35)

Awaking at night "to hear the tape-recorder voice" of Mrs. Emerson carrying these messages, even imperturbable Elizabeth "lay in bed raging at Mrs. Emerson and her children, . . . [at] all those imagined ears putting up with such a loss of dignity" (p. 87). Typical of the reminders that
Mrs. Emerson chides her children with these tape-recorded messages consistently profess the speaker's own selflessness and self-sufficiency while pleading with the children for contact and arguing for the obligation they should feel toward family.

The effect of this constant nagging and remonstrating is frequently, as I have suggested, the opposite of what Mrs. Emerson desires. Instead of providing their mother with company in her old age, the Emerson children stay away as much as possible. When confronted with telephone calls that prohibit silence, they are often angry and annoyed, argue futilely with their mother and feel guilty afterwards. Moreover, with Melissa and Andrew living in New York, Mary in Dayton, Ohio, Margaret in Chicago, and Peter—who also spends some time fighting in the Viet Nam war—in New Jersey, the task of visiting Mrs. Emerson falls to the only two nearby children: Matthew and Timothy. However, only Matthew visits his mother with any regularity, frequently driving into Baltimore on weekends when he can get away from the small newspaper he helps edit. Timothy, although he attends medical school in the city—presumably Johns Hopkins—stays away as much as possible. When he does come home at Thanksgiving, the conflict between him and his mother becomes obvious. Unable to ignore her complaining, he swells in anger, "growing pinker and stonier but not answering back" (p. 50) even when she accuses him of abandoning her on purpose and conspiring with Elizabeth. Discovering that Elizabeth has not killed a live Thanksgiving turkey as requested but has instead replaced it with a store-bought bird, Mrs. Emerson attacks Timothy with,

"This was your idea, wasn't it. Elizabeth never did such a thing before. I always felt I could rely on her. Now I don't know, I just don't know. It isn't enough that you leave me all along yourself, you have to drive everyone else off too. Isn't that it? Isn't that what you're hoping for?"

(p. 50)
Here and elsewhere in Anne Tyler's novels, family life is depicted as fraught with contradictions and problems. People are tied together by blood but resent the inescapable expectations of others that family ties bring with them. Others, such as Mrs. Emerson, suffer from painful loneliness, all the while driving from her the very people on whom she depends. Even with Elizabeth, Mrs. Emerson's nagging and scolding eventually create problems. When she tries to draw Elizabeth into the family quarrels and troubles, first by worrying over her own health and the fat-restricting diet the doctor has placed her on, then by asking Elizabeth to give up her free weekend to stay in Baltimore and serve as "a buffer" (p. 82) between Andrew and herself, Elizabeth rebels. Indeed, when Mrs. Emerson comments that she thinks of Elizabeth "as another daughter" for whom she has genuine "concern," Elizabeth responds bitterly: "I'm already somebody's daughter . . . Once is enough!" (p. 85). Unlike a daughter, Elizabeth has the freedom to sever her relationship with Mrs. Emerson or "stay forever, fixing things" (p. 38). A blurring of the dividing line between employee and child, however, threatens this freedom, while the "raking up . . . [of] disasters" (p. 98) and problems like Mrs. Emerson's and those Timothy burdens her with—his demand for attention and commitment, his insistence that Elizabeth break a date with Matthew and be with him, his confession about cheating on an examination and getting caught, and, finally, his threat to shoot himself and the fulfillment of that threat— all serve to destroy Elizabeth's imperturbability and nonchalance, and with them, her self-confidence in the "miraculous repairing powers" (p. 79) she had acquired while working for Mrs. Emerson.
Significantly, after the suicide, an event for which she sees "herself as . . . [the] culprit" (p. 111), Elizabeth is changed and rejects all family involvement. "Pale and stony-faced" (p. 111) with the policemen who question her about the death, she no longer wants "to be relied on" (p. 109) in the Emerson household. Instead, "her caretaking . . . descended to the most literal kind: errand-running, lawn-sprinkling, lugging down more toys for Mary's" (p. 108) baby. Unlike Mrs. Emerson, who, although distressed, remains unbroken, Elizabeth wanders bewilderedly "through crowded rooms winding clocks or carrying table leaves, her face set and distant" (p. 108). "With the others present she looked . . . out of place, like an ordinary stranger who had stumbled into the midst of a family in mourning," and, as testament to that confusion, Matthew finds her "at twelve o'clock one night . . . on a stepladder in the pantry, changing lightbulbs" (p. 108). All of her skill and competency are passed onto Matthew, the one Emerson most like Elizabeth herself. Instead of Elizabeth, it is Matthew now who "made the funeral arrangements, brought his mother endless cups of tea that he had brewed himself, met his brother and sisters at the airport and carted them home, answering their questions as he drove" (p. 107). Of all of the Emerson children, Matthew is the only one left in Baltimore at the time of Timothy's death and the only one who is also capable of taking over the practical management of affairs and the caring that were once Elizabeth's domain.

Years later, however, when Mrs. Emerson suffers a stroke, Elizabeth returns to care for her former employer when Matthew is no longer able to and must return to work. When she returns to nurse Mrs. Emerson back to health, Elizabeth is once more her competent and reliable self, the figure she was before Timothy's suicide. She listens carefully to what
Mrs. Emerson tries to say and interrupts as soon as she gets "the gist of a sentence," thus sparing "Mrs. Emerson the humiliation of long delays or having words supplied for her" (p. 265). Indeed, "the first thing Elizabeth" does "with Mrs. Emerson" is "teach her how to play chess," a game that gives "her an excuse to sit silent for long periods of time without feeling self-conscious about it" (p. 258). Encouraging the older woman to rest while also building her self-confidence and preventing the loss of dignity and pride, Elizabeth makes a perfect nurse. But besides caring for Mrs. Emerson, she also resumes the tasks of house repairing and clock winding, doing the latter while Mrs. Emerson sleeps. Fittingly, it is Elizabeth, not any of the Emerson children, who speaks specifically about caring. In an effort to comfort Mrs. Emerson one night during her convalescence, Elizabeth touches explicitly on the kinds of unquestioning and unselfish acts that parents perform for their children, the same kind in some ways which Elizabeth performs. Acknowledging the selfless service that the now "small, worn-out old lady" (p. 261) Mrs. Emerson at one time gave to her children and evoking some idea of what it is that irrevocably ties families together, Elizabeth starts out by telling Mrs. Emerson about how she came to her last job, a position teaching crafts at a reform school in Virginia.

"Well," she said finally, "I'll tell you how I happened to start working at the school. I was leaning out the window of this crafts shop where I used to sell things, watching a parade go by. There were people crammed on both sidewalks, mothers with babies and little children, fathers with children on their shoulders. And suddenly I was so surprised by them. Isn't it amazing how hard people work to raise their children? Human beings are born so helpless, and stay helpless so long. For every grownup you see, you know there must have been at least one person who had the patience to lug them around, and feed them, and walk them nights and keep them out of danger
for years and years, without a break. Teaching them how to fit into civilization and how to talk back and forth with other people, taking them to zoos and parades and educational events, telling them nursery rhymes and word-of-mouth fairy tales. Isn't that surprising? People you wouldn't trust your purse with five minutes, maybe, but still they put in years and years of time tending their children along and they don't even make a fuss about it. Even if it's a criminal they turn out, or some other kind of failure—still, he managed to get grown, didn't he? Isn't that something?"

(pp. 273-274)

Significantly, it is during this period in which Elizabeth is caring for Mrs. Emerson that she is symbolically made a member of the Emerson family. For one thing, she is literally given a new name: first by Mrs. Emerson, whose efforts to say "Elizabeth" following her stroke only yield "Gillespie," a name that changes Elizabeth into a "new person," "someone effective and managerial who was summoned by her last name" (p. 271); and later, by Matthew, who marries Elizabeth and gives her a new last name, replacing the "Abbott" with "Emerson" and supplying the more interesting family Elizabeth had always sought. The "Gillespie," moreover, is "contagious," with Mary using the name too (p. 271) and later everyone. In fact, it becomes the name by which Elizabeth is known for the rest of the novel.

But besides her renaming, Elizabeth is also given a "blood" baptism by Andrew, Timothy Emerson's "unbalanced" twin and the only Emerson to hold her responsible for his brother's death. Of all of the Emersons, he is the one who objects to Elizabeth's caring for his mother, and thus he remains out of sight at the Emerson house, avoiding Elizabeth as much as possible—as much, in fact, as Elizabeth avoids him. Of all of the Emersons, it is Andrew whom Elizabeth feels has somehow "summed her up. He was afraid to leave his family in her hands. He alone, of all the Emersons, knew that she was the kind of person who went through life causing clatter.
and spills and permanent damage" (p. 264). Under years of psychiatric care, Andrew remains a menacing presence until he shoots Elizabeth in the arm, thereby freeing both himself and Elizabeth of any debt owed for Timothy's death, teaching her that there is "nothing" one "can do [that] will change a bullet in its course" (p. 281), and marking her initiation into the eccentric Emerson family appropriately, albeit violently complete.

In light of the physical and psychological distance that separates Elizabeth from her own family and the Emerson children from one another and their mother, it is both surprising and ironic that any degree of intimacy is established in the course of the novel. It is one of the characteristics of family life, at least as it is presented in Anne Tyler's fiction, that intimacy within supposedly close relationships is almost never possible. Distance separates even those who work hardest at closeness. Expressions of love and concern, such as those which are implied by Elizabeth's speech on parental care, are rare, and, for the most part, months, sometimes years of separation pass before parent and child or sister and brother are reunited, usually for only a short period of time. In *The Clock Winder*, the Emerson children gather only for funerals or during a crisis, such as Mrs. Emerson's stroke. Even then, Peter is not always present. While Elizabeth establishes a close relationship with Mrs. Emerson, she does so only after severing ties with her own parents or after being separated from her employer for over two years. Additionally, although Mrs. Emerson thinks of Elizabeth "as another daughter" without whose aid she could not survive, not all of her children agree. Mary and Melissa, for example, are never close to Elizabeth and seem resentful of their mother's relationship with her employee. Andrew,
another "special" Emerson child and the most obviously neurotic of the lot avoids visiting his mother for months and remains distrustful of Elizabeth until after he shoots her. Indeed, of all of the Emerson children, only Timothy, Matthew, and Margaret are ever close to Elizabeth or establish any kind of communication with her. Ironically, however, while both Timothy and Matthew become romantically involved with Elizabeth, the brothers themselves remain distant from one another and are clearly antithetical in appearance and personality—kin that have somehow, as is often the case in Anne Tyler's novels, sprung from the same unlikely source. Additionally, while Margaret maintains a correspondence with Elizabeth and travels to Ellington to attend her "aborted" wedding to Dommie Whitehall—providing thereby an eye witness for the mishap—she has little to say to Melissa although the two ride together from New York to Raleigh and back.

Finally, the youngest Emerson, Peter, is so distant from everyone in his family that he returns to Baltimore seldom and makes, as a consequence, only two appearances in the novel: once at the time of Timothy's death when he comes home from college to attend the funeral, an event that occurs barely midway in the novel, and later, in 1970, when he stops by briefly on his way back to New Jersey. A few hours' pause that takes up the final pages of the novel and allows Peter to introduce his un-Emerson-like Georgia-born bride of a few months to his distant and disapproving mother, this last visit skillfully serves to provide a closing view of the Emersons: Mrs. Emerson five years after her stroke, much the same as she was in the opening of the novel; Andrew, "mellowed" (p. 296) and living at home again; and Elizabeth, "a broad golden madonna" (p. 309), married to Matthew, with two children of their own. However, Peter's return,
although allowing a last glimpse of the Emersons before the novel closes, in no way lessens the distance that separates the youngest member of the family from his mother and siblings. Nor, for that matter, does it depict the Emersons, with the exception of Andrew, as changed in any way. Mrs. Emerson is still dependent on "Gillespie" and in no way noticeably closer to either of the two sons who live with her.

Besides this obvious distance between the living members of the Emerson family whom we meet in *The Clock Winder*, it becomes apparent that there was also a barrier between Mr. Emerson and his family. Indeed, of all of the Emerson children, only Matthew is described as "closest to his father" (p. 58). In fact, he is the only one who appears to have thought about his father at any length and to have recognized his complexity. For Timothy, Billy Emerson was "a forgettable man" (p. 58) whose "only talent . . . was making money," a commodity that, according to Mrs. Emerson, "is essential . . . but not important" (p. 59). Additionally, neither Melissa, Mary, nor Margaret—the three Emerson girls—nor Andrew nor Peter is ever mentioned as thinking of or remembering their father, while Mrs. Emerson, when she is finally given an appropriate opportunity in the final chapter of the novel to comment on her marriage, speaks of her husband as distant from her, a man who, as her family had said, was clearly "'not . . . [her] type!'" (p. 308). "'Oh, we got along,'" she says, "'But there was so much—we were so far apart. Never understood each other!'" (p. 309). For the most part, Billy Emerson was "an unnoticeable sort of man" (p. 8) who seems to have functioned primarily as a source of money for his wife, money he offered as solace "whenever she was sad" (p. 10). A man whom "only strangers considered . . . important," "he had come up from nothing, from nowhere, married a Roland Park debutante and made a
fortune in real estate—a line of work so beneath notice that no one had ever thought of suggesting it for his sons, least of all Mr. Emerson himself" (p. 58). Proclaiming himself "a simple man at heart," Billy Emerson, Matthew recalls, had "nothing simple about him. Every quality he had was struggling with another its exact opposite." "If he rocked . . . contentedly here [at Matthew's house in the country], in the city he was a whirlwind" (pp. 121-122), a practical business man who knew how to "rise in the world" (p. 122) and "liked to see every last thing put to use" (p. 120). In response to his advice about how to succeed, "his children cringed" and "momentarily . . . hated him" (p. 122). Unlike them, he was born an outsider to Roland Park and wanted desperately to make a place for himself in the world it represented. "He mourned for weeks when Mary refused to be a debutante, and he joined the country club on his own and played golf every Sunday although he hated it" (p. 122). As Matthew sees his father, he was not the "simple man" he said he was, but one "made up of layers you could peel off like onion skins": "the innermost layer (garage mechanic's son, dreaming of a purple Cadillac) could pop up at any time" (p. 122). Complex like his wife, but without her taste and upbringing, Mr. Emerson retreated from his family into business and died, as Elizabeth thinks, in Mrs. Emerson's flowery bedroom—"almost the only Emerson to do things without a fuss" (p. 38).

But if distance characterized Mr. Emerson's relationship with his wife and his children, so also does it characterize the relationship of Mrs. Emerson and her children. Billy Emerson held no special right to that separateness. Appropriately, in the final chapter of the novel, Pamela Emerson talks briefly not only about her husband who has been
dead ten years, but also about the qualities and behavior of her children that have kept them apart. Confronted with P. J., Peter's bride of a few months and clearly a girl not on the same class level with Roland Park families, Mrs. Emerson proclaims her disappointment in her children:

"I have five married children now. Five. And six weddings between them. Do you know how many I was invited to? One, just one. Mary's. Not Melissa's, not Matthew's, not Margaret's two. Just secrets! Scandals! Elopements! I can't understand it."

(p. 305)

To Mrs. Emerson, all of her children are "pure Emerson," with no Carter in them, despite the fact that she and her husband had both "thought" they "would take after . . . [her] side" (p. 309). Instead, as she tells her three sons, "'You're all like Billy's brothers, separate and silent and with failure just built into you!'" (p. 309).

Some of the reasons for Mrs. Emerson's attitude toward "Billy's brothers," men whom Andrew refers to as "'rednecks'" (p. 309), can quite clearly be found in the influence of her family and her upbringing. Always well-cared for, Pamela Emerson has lived her life in Roland Park, an upper class neighborhood of Baltimore that serves as the setting not only for The Clock Winder, the first of Anne Tyler's novels to be set outside of North Carolina and the only one which bridges these strikingly different areas, but also for Searching for Caleb, a novel which appeared in April, 1976. A neighborhood where "people stayed out of sight" and where only an occasional "lone maid with a shopping bag, heading toward the bus stop" (p. 291) could be seen, Roland Park is, according to Miss Tyler, an area that "is still, today, almost exactly the way it was in Caleb's time [ca. 1900]—huge gloomy houses, great concern over bloodlines and those upstarts who don't wear gloves." While "nowadays," she
continues, "to be truthful, it's more a question of whether or not you carry one of those Nantucket handbags with the scrimshaw whale on the lid," "the insularity" of the "upper class" in Roland Park is still apparent. Unlike Ellington, where "treeless" flat "fields" "speckled" with "white farmhouses," "each . . .[with] its protective circling of henhouses and pigsties, barns and tobacco barns, toolsheds and white washed fences" fill the distance "as far as the eye could see" (p. 148), Roland Park is set with trees, downward sloping yards, "slanting . . . as steeply as a mountainside" (p. 9), and three-storied houses like the Emacers: a huge, "hooded and silent, . . . brown shingleboard monstrosity . . . backed by woods" and characterized by the ubiquitous "wrap-around veranda" (p. 3).

Moreover, for Anne Tyler, a novelist fascinated with time and its effects, Roland Park with its Victorian houses represents a step into the past of a century ago: a place where "the doctor . . . [still] makes house calls, sometimes bringing along his daughter so he can show off his new grandbaby. The men in Roland Park," Miss Tyler continues, "doff their Panamas in a courtly manner when meeting you on the sidewalk, just as if you were wearing a hoopskirt instead of cut-offs." It is this "time-machine aspect" of Roland Park, the novelist has admitted, "that has given . . .[it] entry into . . . [her] novels," although she has clearly used some of the insularity and snobbishness of the area's residents to characterize Pamela Carter Emerson. "Secure in her sealed weightless bubble floating through time" (p. 300), Mrs. Emerson manages to remain true to her Roland Park, Carter upbringing until the very end of The Clock Winder, despite her closeness to the unpretentious Elizabeth and the distance that upbringing has created between herself and her husband and even most of her children. Out of touch with most of what goes on outside of her
church and bridge club circles, Mrs. Emerson kept writing to her son in Viet Nam "to ask if he had visited any tourist sights" and whether he "could . . . bring home some sort of native craft to solve her Christmas problems" (p. 300). During the 1960's, a decade of "upheaval of every kind—assassinations [and] riots," Mrs. Emerson remained oblivious to change, apparently ignorant of national events and "not once" referring to them in her letters to Peter (p. 299).

In this complex novel of family life, it would be possible to talk about each of the individual Emersons at length as well as their relationship with one another and their mother. However, enough, I believe, has been said to indicate how The Clock Winder paints a new and more mature and complex portrait of family life and the essential isolation of the individual within the family. Significantly, the novel indicates a development of Anne Tyler's skill in other ways. Here, as in the earlier books, for example, the house in which Mrs. Emerson lives is skillfully described so as to suggest its function as a symbol of the family that once lived there. As the novel opens, the house sits "hooded and silent" (p. 3). Like its sole inhabitant's view of her life now that her children are gone, "the house had outlived its usefulness" and only one floor of it is used. "The uppermost windows" are "shuttered," and the veranda remains "empty even when neighbors' porches filled up with children and dogs and drop-in visitors" (p. 3), a clue to the loneliness of Mrs. Emerson's life. Even the color of the porch floor, a "shiny gray," is made to match Mrs. Emerson's "shimmery gray dress" (p. 3), suggesting a deliberate careful paralleling of the house's condition with Mrs. Emerson's. Just as Mrs. Emerson adorns herself with jewelry and make-up and dyes her hair, so also does she attempt to dress up the aging house. She sets "antique crystal vases over the scars on the dining room buffet and . . . [lays]
more and more Persian carpets over the worn spots on the floors" (p. 29), attempting to hide the house's years in much the same way she attempts to hide her own.

Significantly, by the end of the novel, the Emerson house is once again full of life—literally, in fact, surrounded by it too, as a plague of seventeen-year locusts, threatening but powerful life symbols, menaces the inhabitants with every crack of a screen door and every un-stopped chimney. With Andrew back at home, Matthew and Elizabeth wed and living there with their two children, George and Jenny, the house is alive again and not so silent. Indeed, in direct contrast to the silence that is suggested by the opening description of the Emerson house, the closing scene pictures Peter and P. J. journeying "up the walk" amid "a clattering sound, like millions of enormous metal zippers stickily opening and shutting. It rose from every bush" (p. 292). Additionally, Anne Tyler goes on to speak of the sound as linked to another major symbol in the novel, that of the clocks that fill the Emerson home. As Peter continues up the walks, the sound of the locusts, or "cicadas, in point of fact," is "so steady and monotonous that it could pass unnoticed," we are told, "like a clock's ticking" (p. 292)—like the passage of seventeen years that the locusts' appearance suggests.

Besides this increased and more subtle use of symbolism, The Clock Winder also introduces a more skillful handling of point of view than Miss Tyler's earlier novels exhibited. Where the earlier books largely employed an omniscient point of view which focused on one major character—the notable exception is The Tin Can Tree where both Joan Pike and James Green alternately serve as centers of consciousness for the limited third-person focus—here the point of view shifts from
chapter to chapter, from Mrs. Emerson, whose thoughts and observations inform the first chapter, to Elizabeth, then to Timothy, Elizabeth again, Matthew, Elizabeth, and so on, with Margaret, as witness to Elizabeth's incomplete wedding in Ellington, as the focus of one chapter and Peter, the young stranger to the Emerson family, providing the focus for the last. The result of this new handling of point of view is that readers are given an intimate view of all of the Emersons except Andrew, Melissa, and Mary—although Andrew has his say, so to speak, in one anonymous chapter in which letters of exchange between Elizabeth and Alvareen, Mrs. Emerson's maid, and Elizabeth and Margaret are duplicated along with Andrew's threatening, unanswered notes to Elizabeth. In effect, what Anne Tyler accomplishes in The Clock Winder is a complete portrait of the varied and contrasting characters who make up the Emerson family and its "adopted" mother, Elizabeth Abbott. As a consequence, although Anne Tyler uses the limited third-person point of view here, as she had in earlier novels, by shifting from one major character or center of consciousness to another, she is able to capture the contrasting personalities of a number of characters within the novel and, in effect, to rely less on physical contrasts and more on the unique, internal experiences of the individual to suggest her theme. In one remarkable chapter, the reader is able to witness the succession of disconnected thoughts, the confusion of physical sensations, and the temporal disorder that accompany Mrs. Emerson's stroke. Combined with the expanded time scheme of ten years in the lives of the principal characters, this new handling of point of view in The Clock Winder allows for a far fuller development of character than the earlier novels provided.

The Clock Winder, then, marks a new stage in Anne Tyler's writing,
not only because it presents a more mature and complex portrait of the individual in the family, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it suggests a definite maturation of the artist's skill as a writer. Miss Tyler's ability to capture character and the cadences of everyday speech in dialogue, a skill she shares with her mentor Eudora Welty, is evident here as it was in the earlier books, but also there is that far more subtle development, the infusion of small, character-detailing symbols that capture the ambivalence and complexity of human relationships and make them come alive. A bridge between the early novels of Anne Tyler and the later works, *The Clock Winder* blends the two principal settings of Miss Tyler's fiction—the urban and industrial Baltimore with the parched agricultural landscape of North Carolina where Miss Tyler grew up—and marks a return to the large, bickering family the novelist created in *If Morning Ever Comes*, the kind of "huge Southern family" to which Miss Tyler, like her heroine Elizabeth Abbott, is drawn.
CHAPTER III

CELESTIAL NAVIGATION

During a panel discussion held for several days at Duke University in November, 1974, approximately eight months after the publication of her fifth novel, Celestial Navigation, Anne Tyler spoke at length about her personal methods of working as well as her overall view of the artistic process, especially as she presented it in her new novel. Besides commenting on her reasons for writing, her focus on character rather than plot, and the recurring theme of isolation in her fiction, Miss Tyler also spoke briefly about the differences in setting between her first three novels and her later books. Questioned by one panelist about a comment made on a previous evening, Anne Tyler explained what she meant by saying she "'could no longer write a Southern novel, or a novel with Southern characters.'"¹ At the time of the Duke panel discussion, she had lived in Montreal for four years and in Baltimore for nearly eight, a total of almost twelve years away from the South, and, as she explained to the other panelists and the audience, "'I don't feel that I'm really in touch with North Carolina anymore. This is the first time I've been back in years.'"² Then, referring to her method of composing by ear and beginning her novels with "'the voices of characters,'"³ Miss Tyler went on to explain that the people of North Carolina "'may be speaking differently, there may be little changes here and there I just don't know about.'"⁴ With even small changes in the diction, the mannerisms, or the thinking of the people of the area, the novelist's characterizations might fail to ring true or fall short in capturing accurately the details of day-to-day existence so much a part of her fictional world. To write

118
about an area she had not lived in for years "'would be presumptuous,'" according to Miss Tyler, "'unless I came back for a month . . . and really got into it.'" 5

Set almost exclusively in a seedy Baltimore boarding house "smack in the middle of the city on a narrow busy street,"6 Celestial Navigation is the first of Anne Tyler's novels to take place entirely outside of North Carolina—something The Clock Winder, her fourth published book, accomplished only in part. Significantly, Celestial Navigation also marks an intensification of the restrictions and isolation that characterize the lives of the novel's principal figures, even in the midst of what might be deemed an expanded family of people. The hero, for example, is more intensely withdrawn and isolated than any previous Tyler character, and the lives of the other characters "more private," as one narrator says, "than I had ever thought it possible to be" (p. 140). But besides these changes, there are also alterations in the make-up and kinds of familial relationships Anne Tyler treats here and in her use of point of view. Celestial Navigation is the first of Miss Tyler's novels to be told even partly in the first person, and it is also the first to study in depth the interactions, background, and individual responses of several members of three very different, separate families: the blood-related owners of the boarding house, Jeremy Pauling and her mother, and Jeremy's two older sisters, Amanda and Laura, both of whom live in Richmond at the time the novel opens; a second group created by the relationship of Jeremy with a young boarder named Mary Tell, her child by a first marriage, and the five out-of-wedlock children she bears Jeremy; and, finally, the larger, surrogate family of strangers, the boarders, both young and old,
who rent rooms from the Paulings and share their lives in a remote yet very real way. Through the use of multiple, shifting points of view—alternate chapters beginning with the first are narrated in the first person by important female figures in Jeremy Pauling's life, while those chapters focusing on Jeremy himself are told in the limited third-person point of view—Celestial Navigation provides insight into the familial backgrounds and individual thoughts of five different characters, isolated from one another despite the fact that all of them live in the same household, most at concurrent times and in what are ostensibly various types of intimate, familial arrangements. Families, as Miss Tyler's first four books clearly illustrated, are primarily groups of strangers, whether blood-related or not, who happen to share the same household and frequently the same experiences and events but who rarely, if ever, communicate across the distance that defines their solitary, private existences.

At the time of its publication, Celestial Navigation was Anne Tyler's most expanded treatment of the isolation of the individual in the family. It covered a period of thirteen years in the life of the central figure, Jeremy Pauling, marking the time span between the fall, 1960, when Jeremy is thirty-eight years old and his mother has just died, and the spring, 1973, two years after his commonlaw wife Mary Tell has departed with her children. During this thirteen-year period, almost all of the external action takes place within the Pauling house: "one of those thin dark three-storey Baltimore rowhouses" with "a clutter of leaded panes and straggly ivy and grayish lace curtains dragging their bottoms behind the black screens" (p. 5). Like its inhabitants—the
various boarders, Jeremy, and his mother—the house is old and privately enclosed. The neighborhood in which it exists is "running down" (p. 5) and shows no signs of urban renewal. As Amanda, Jeremy's oldest sister and fittingly the opening narrator of the novel, comments, "Most places had split into apartments and gone over to colored and beatniks, and a few were even boarded up, with city notices plastered across the doors" (p. 5). Surrounded by images of decay—abandoned and condemned houses, "yellowy-brown weeds . . . growing in the cracks" of the sidewalk (p. 5), a "dead rambling rosebush that had woven itself into everything" (p. 6) in the front yard—the boarding house is an appropriate dwelling for the disparate family of people who live there. Like the neighborhood in which it exists, the Pauling house, with its private and separate rooms for boarders, is also an appropriate symbol for the disintegration of the single family itself. In fact, as Amanda points out in the opening of the novel, the rooms in the Pauling household that once belonged to her and her sister Laura have long been turned over to "strangers" (p. 29). Even "at Christmas and Easter," the house exists "in an altered state," with a stranger's "hats stacked in our closet and her dresses shoved to the back of it." "Oh, this house had closed over our leavetaking like water," Amanda comments; "not a trace of us remained" (p. 29). Originally a single-family home where only Amanda and her family lived, the Pauling residence now houses a variety of isolated, unrelated boarders, mostly older people who have themselves severed their family connections or who have no family left and have thus come to live out their days in the solitude and privacy of rented rooms.

Such very clearly is the case with Miss Vinton, one of the novel's narrators and an aged spinster who works in a bookstore and cares for
Jeremy long after all of the other boarders have died or gone; with Mrs. Jarrett, an elegant widow who dons hats and gloves for most occasions and who always eats "in the dining room with everything just right, dishes set on . . . linen placemats and a matching napkin in her lap" (p. 115); and with Mr. Somerset, a fractious old man who shuffles about in slippers, an undershirt, and pants attached to suspenders he is frequently pausing "to hitch . . . up" (p. 12). However, besides these older people and the fact that the house is, as Mr. Somerset protests, predominantly "'an older person's house!'" (p. 49), closed and shuttered to the outside world, there is always at least one young person in the house, usually a medical student. At the time the novel opens, there is a young man named Howard who annoys Mr. Somerset with his late hours and whistling. Then, shortly after Mrs. Pauling's death, Mary Tell rents what was once Mrs. Pauling's bedroom, while later, to replace Howard, there is another medical student and after him, a young woman named Olivia: a hip seventeen-year-old runaway whom Mary Tell rescues from the streets and who, in turn, serves as a narrator for a chapter following Mary's departure while briefly attempting to take Mary's place with Jeremy. At the same time, despite their widely contrasting appearances, ages, and backgrounds, these disparate, isolated boarders quite frequently exhibit a concern and tolerance for one another. In fact, they respect the privacy of the house's other inhabitants in a way that blood-related families often neglect. As Mildred Vinton, the novel's spokesman for the boarders and one of its most insightful narrators, comments,

if you want my opinion, our whole society would be better off living in boarding houses. I mean even families, even married couples. Everyone should have
his single room with a door that locks, and then a larger room downstairs where people can mingle or not as they please.

(p. 141)

Such an arrangement, according to Miss Vinton, is very clearly preferable to the unavoidable sharing that takes place in many households, for it provides the privacy and solitude of the unmarried life with the comfort and joy of living with others and sharing their growth and accomplishments.

For the most part, however, Celestial Navigation is not primarily the story of these boarders but of Jeremy Pauling and his relationship with the world outside of his secluded third-floor studio and bedroom and the various members of his household. Significantly, Jeremy, like the grotesque Evie Decker in A Slipping-Down Life whom he most resembles, is one of Miss Tyler's "totally imaginary" characters with "a basis in reality." As the novelist has acknowledged in a recent letter,

I was once supposed to supervise the library training of a very pale, pudgy, frightened man who had just been released from a mental hospital, and I was disturbed because no matter how gently I spoke to him, he was overwhelmed and would back off, stammering. He only lasted a day and then vanished forever, but five years of thinking about him produced Jeremy.8

An artist by profession, Jeremy Pauling is, in fact, so pathologically shy and reclusive, so frightened and withdrawn, that he has literally isolated himself from others, "like a man marooned on an island" (p. 100), by not only working and sleeping alone in his third-floor room but by failing to speak to others and by refusing for years to travel beyond the one inner-city block on which he lives. "Pale and doughy and overweight, pear-shaped, wide-hipped," with toes that turn "out when he walks," thinning hair, and "nearly colorless," "puffy," and "lashless" eyes (pp. 14-15), he is clearly one of the most physically grotesque and mentally
disturbed characters in Anne Tyler's fiction. Curiously, he is also one character to whom Miss Tyler has given a good bit of her own artistic vision. He is, first of all, her only portrait of the artist, and she has "sneakily donated" to him what she calls "little pieces of" herself, particularly "my habit of seeing the slits in the screws of the electrical outlet but not the room as a whole." Indeed, at the Duke panel discussion mentioned earlier, Miss Tyler made it clear that she often "feel[ed] like Jeremy about putting things out" and shares with him a tremendous creative need for privacy. While Jeremy has very clearly "carried" this need "too far," Miss Tyler pointed out that, like him, she feels "used up" when she is "working hard." "I'm getting depleted all the time and then between I have to fill in by having a lot of experiences," she continued.

"And I also share with him the feeling that whatever you produce is like olives out of a bottle, that you don't have any choice. If someone were to say, Well I don't like this novel and we won't publish it, I still wouldn't feel that it had been wasted because I had no choice. It had to come before the next thing came. It seems to be a progression that's expected."11

Fittingly, Jeremy's vision of the world is described in the novel as a fragmented one, while his artistic concerns, like his creator's, are the ordinary, "smallest and most unnoticed scenes on earth" (p. 145). Dreadfully afraid of performing even everyday tasks like "using the phone, answering the doorbell, opening mail, leaving his house, and making purchases" (p. 86), Jeremy is dislocated, often autistic, and absorbed in a world of color, form, and light. His aesthetic perception and vision of that world, moreover, function "only in detail. Piece by piece." "He had tried looking at the whole of things," we are told, "but it never worked out" (p. 45). Indeed, Anne Tyler writes that Jeremy sees all of
life in a series of flashes, startling moments so brief that they could arrest a motion in mid-air. Like photographs, they were handed to him at unexpected times, introduced by a neutral voice: Here is where you are now. Take a look. Between flashes, he sank into darkness. He drifted in a daze, studying what he had seen. Wondering if he had seen it. Forgetting finally, what it was that he was wondering about, and floating off into numbness again.

(p. 43)

Even as a child, he saw only the details of a room. When he was seven he made a drawing of his mother's parlor. Long slashes for walls and ceiling, curves for furniture, a single scribbled rose denoting the wallpaper pattern. And then, in the baseboard, a tiny electrical socket, its screws neatly bisected by microscopic slits.

(p. 45)

When he makes an effort to widen "his eyes" and "take in" the world he inhabits—the whole of his studio, for example, with its "chilly white air below the skylight" and its "bare yellow plaster" walls and "splintered floors"—"the angles of the walls" race "toward each other" and collide. "Gigantic hollow space loomed over him, echoing. The brightness made his lids ache" (p. 45). Maddeningly distracted and physically grotesque, Jeremy Pauling is a most unlikely hero for a novel, yet it is the story of his growth as an artist—even within the confines of his restricted and reclusive existence—the development of his ten-year romantic involvement with the beautiful Mary Tell, and the manifestation of his long-hidden heroic spirit in the form of one courageous undertaking that constitute both the highlights and the principal concerns of Celestial Navigation.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Jeremy is described by his oldest sister as "a thirty-year-old bachelor who never did leave home" (p. 3) and "never was anything" (p. 14). "He is always himself," she complains. "That's what's wrong with him" (p. 13). He contains "no surprises."
He will never go on a drinking spree, or commit any crimes, or be found living under an alias in some far-distant city.

(p. 10)

Indeed, to Amanda, his only blood relation to narrate any portion of the novel, Jeremy is an unpardonable weakling who has been spoiled by his mother and his sister Laura and who, consequently, spent his entire thirty-eight years "living off Mother" (p. 18), taking "everything for granted" (p. 19), and wasting time, money, and energy on artistic "pieces" (p. 23) his oldest sister never "could . . . see the point of" (p. 24). "Long ago," Amanda comments, "we gave up expecting very much of him" (p. 3). "All of his eye for detail" has gone "into cutting and pasting. There is none left over for real life" (p. 24). So pale and peculiar-looking that "people have asked . . . if he is an albino" (pp. 14-15), Jeremy, at least as his sister depicts him, even dresses in a manner that serves only to accentuate his grotesqueness and immaturity:

- baggy slacks that start just below his armpits;
- mole-colored cardigan strained across his stomach and buttoning only in the middle, exposing a yellowed fishnet undershirt top and bottom, and tiny round-toed saddle oxfords. Saddle oxfords? For a man?

(p. 15)

Throughout the opening chapter of *Celestial Navigation*, Amanda characterizes her brother in just such a disparaging manner. To her, his fears and inhibitions are a form of willfulness and strength, his earliest artistic development largely a continuation of nothing more than a childhood tendency to cut and paste exaggerated by his mother's overzealous responses and encouragement. "Mother," according to Amanda, thought Jeremy "was a genius" simply because "he happened to be artistic" (p. 17) and, as a consequence, spoiled him and gave him "the best of her
food and the whole of her attention" (p. 17). To Amanda, however, Jeremy's talents are nothing more than this drive to paste things together. . . . He started off at Mother's feet, dressing paper dolls, and in grade school he moved up to scrapbooks. Other boys play baseball; he made scrapbooks. One for famous people and another for foreign places and another for postcards. (Photos of hotels, mostly, with X's on minute little windows twelve stories up. . . .) Mother thought they were wonderful, naturally, but as far as I could see they were just more of the same. More cutting and more pasting. Little people made of triangles of wrapping paper and diamonds of silk. No definite outlines to them. Something like those puzzles they have in children's magazines—find seven animals in the branches of this bush. (pp. 23-24)

Clearly resentful of the attention and affection her little brother received, Amanda speaks bitterly about her mother's "selling off half her ground rents" in order to send Jeremy to "the finest art school in Baltimore" (p. 18) while she and her sister Laura "were always expected to make our own way in this world" (p. 19). Expectedly, Amanda views Jeremy's "pieces" (p. 23) as useless. They are "not pictures," she points out, "not even regular collages, not that intricate, mosaic-like way he does them" (p. 23), and Jeremy, despite his expensive art school training, still has what to his practical-minded sister is "no way to make a living" (p. 18). "Every now and then some poor failure of a pupil might ring the doorbell," she comments,

        girls mostly, anemic stringy-haired girls that scared him half to death. But they never lasted long. It seemed all they had to do was get a whiff of his studio to know that he was a bigger failure than they would ever be.

        (p. 18)

In the interest of fairness, Amanda reluctantly admits that her brother "has sold some of his work for money, but not much" (p. 18). To her, he
has always lacked "the good sense to switch from painting" (p. 19) to some more practical, lucrative trade, as his friend and gallery agent and dealer, Brian O'Donnell, has done. Harboring a lifelong resentment and frustration with her brother, Amanda Pauling can speak only bitterly of him. She confesses at one point,

I . . . sometimes wondered if he isn't a little bit retarded. Some sort of selective, unclassified retardation that no medical book has yet put its finger on.

"He failed math," she continues,

he failed public speaking (of course), he went through eighth grade twice but he happened to be artistic so Mother thought he was a genius.

(p. 17)

Even at art school, Jeremy, according to his sister, was still a failure. Sickly and reclusive, "he would come home halfway through the morning and crawl into bed" (p. 18). He

couldn't stand the pressure. Scared of the other students. Stomach was bothering him. He lost one whole semester over something that might or might not have been mononucleosis. (In those days we called it glandular fever.) And even in good health, he rarely went to class.

(p. 18)

Clearly unlike her brother in temperament, Amanda asks in exasperation, "What can you say to someone like that?" (p. 18).

Dowdy, old-maidish, and bitter, Amanda Pauling, as the first narrator of Celestial Navigation, not only critically assesses and characterizes her brother Jeremy and his relationships with the other members of the Pauling family—including his mother and his other sister, Laura—but she is also responsible for presenting most of the Pauling family history, including a brief portrait of the long-vanished Mr. Pauling. Rigidly authoritarian, practical, and disciplined, Amanda sees not only Jeremy
as the woeful creature his name suggests, but also the entire Pauling family as an appalling lot. Mr. Pauling, for example, is mentioned as "a building contractor" who was clearly "a cut" below his wife, and although Amanda speaks of having "admired" him "quite a bit" at one time, she mentions few of his good points and focuses instead on his having deserted the family in 1926, "thirty-four years ago" (p. 30) at the time the novel opens. He "went out for a breath of air one evening," Amanda reports,

and never came back. Sent us a postcard from New York City two weeks later: "I said I needed air, didn't I?"

(p. 30)

Commenting on her mother's "dim-witted" response, Amanda hastens to point out that Mrs. Pauling— an inert, spiritless, and "stagnant" kind of person (p. 6), meek and reclusive like her son— "never to my knowledge shed a tear" over her husband's departure,

not even a year and a half after that when he was killed in an auto accident and the insurance company notified her by mail.

(p. 30)

"Look on her nightstand!" Amanda comments in pointing to a photograph of her father that has remained in its original position for thirty-four years or more:

there he . . . \(\text{is}\) big and dashing in an old-fashioned collar and a villain's pencil-line mustache.

(p. 30)

Indeed, to Amanda's dismay, even the few personal possessions her father left behind him have stayed where they were: "his brushes on the bureau and his shaving mug in the bathroom" (p. 30). Not surprisingly, to Amanda, Mrs. Pauling looks quite "natural" laid out at the funeral home. And "why
not," Amanda asks, "when she went through life looking dead?" (p. 8) and "caused no changes" (p. 6) in the world around her.

Described by her oldest daughter as "a storeowner's daughter born to be pretty and frail and useless—which, Lord knows, she was" (p. 30), Mrs. Pauling is clearly seen as "the root of all . . . [Jeremy's] troubles" (p. 17). "While she was expecting Jeremy," Amanda reports,

she curled more and more inside herself until she was only a kind of circular hollow taking in nourishment and asking for afghans. In all other situations Mother was a receiver, requesting and expecting even from her own daughters without ever giving anything out, but she spoiled Jeremy from the moment he was born.

(p. 17)

A woman characterized by her daughter as having "room for only one person at a time, and that one the youngest and smallest and weakest," Mrs. Pauling, according to Amanda, kept Jeremy home from school for weeks at a time if he so much as complained of a stomach ache, which he was forever doing; read to him for hours while he sat wrapped in a comforter . . . although she never felt quite up to reading to us girls.

(p. 17)

"She preferred him over everyone" (p. 17), Amanda points out:

She . . . loved him more. And next to him, Laura. The pretty one, who in those days was only slightly plump and had hair that was really and truly golden. Me last of all.

(p. 31)

A study in lifelong sibling resentment and envy, Amanda depicts even her sister Laura, with whom she shares an apartment in Richmond, as a woman who "always did pamper" (p. 16) and protect Jeremy, who is disgustingly self-indulgent and plump, and who, "just because she was married once upon a time," "thinks she is . . . an authority" "qualified to speak

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about life" (p. 31). "Well," Amanda sarcastically points out, she was only married a year and never had children, and her husband was no more than a boy anyway. A hemophiliac. Died from a scratch he got opening a Campbell's soup can. How does that make her so worldly wise?

(p. 31)

In her blunt, ironical, and at times distorted and cruel family portrait, Amanda omits no one, not even herself. She is able, moreover, to capture not only a number of the Pauling family flaws but, at the same time, several of their inherently conflicting personality traits: her own strength, discipline, and practicality in contrast to her mother's, Jeremy's, and Laura's weaknesses, their self-indulgence, passivity, and sensitivity; Mr. Pauling's villainous abandonment of the family and dashing good looks in contrast to Amanda's own fortitude and dowdiness and her brother's grotesque appearance and enclosed, frightened existence. Perhaps most importantly, however, Amanda also captures the loneliness and disappointment that have marred her own life, the intimacy and warmth that she believes have been denied to her. Near the end of the opening chapter, she summarizes her eventless, strongly disciplined, and isolated life in contrast to what she mistakenly thinks are the easier lives of her sister and Jeremy. Contemplating the immeasurable loss she has suffered—not of her mother, whose funeral she has returned to Baltimore to attend, but of her suitcase, stolen from Jeremy's front porch while she and Laura went to the funeral home—Amanda thinks about the thieves and how they may view her belongings. At forty-six, she recognizes that her clothing might be seen as items "some old biddy" would wear. She comments:

I know what I am. I am not blind. I have never had a marriage proposal or a love affair or an adventure, never any experience more interesting
than patrolling the aisles of my Latin class looking for crib sheets and ponies—an old maid schoolteacher. There are a thousand jokes about the likes of me. None of them are funny. I have seen people sum me up and dismiss me right while I was talking to them, as if what I am came through more clearly than any words I might choose to say. I see their eyes lose focus and settle elsewhere. Do they think that I don't realize? I suspected all along that I would never get what comes to others so easily. I have been bypassed, something has been held back from me. And the worst part is that I know it.

(p. 41)

Isolated from others by her own unsympathetic attitudes and harsh judgments, Amanda, although "not a cruel woman" (p. 40), fails to see beyond her own life, to recognize, in effect, that the loneliness and isolation she feels are shared by the brother and sister she looks down upon.

Throughout Celestial Navigation, as in Anne Tyler's other novels, the theme of the individual's isolation within the family is presented with remarkable insight and sensitivity. Coupled with it for the first time, however, is also the notion of this loneliness and isolation as part of the artistic process. Here the growth of Jeremy as an artist and the evolution of his art—in fact, the entire creative process—are intricately and inseparably bound up with the relationship of the artist to his family. As first Amanda Pauling's and later Mildred Vinton's narrative sections indicate, Jeremy is dependent upon family, despite his distance from them, for both practical support as well as encouragement of his artistic endeavors. Where Mrs. Pauling, Jeremy's mother, provides the early encouragement for his artistic abilities to develop as well as the financial backing for his art school lessons, Mary, his commonlaw wife and the mother of his five children, supplies the appropriate marital care as well as the emotional and physical contact that unquestionably
lead to Jeremy's art "physically, literally" growing up (p. 144). In fact, concurrent with Mary's first moving into the Pauling household and renting the downstairs front bedroom that formerly belonged to Mrs. Pauling comes a significant change in Jeremy's "pieces": as a sign of his new experience and infatuation with the beautiful new boarder, Jeremy literally begins to incorporate real objects into his work—"thumbtacks and washers and bits of string and wood, separating the blur of colored paper" (p. 144) that constituted the whole of his art before Mary Tell's arrival. Later, his work changes even more, emerging eventually from the abstract, "intricate, mosaic-like" "pieces" (p. 23) Amanda first describes to increasingly complex, representational art and sculpture.

From her first appearance in the novel, Mary Tell is quite obviously very different from Jeremy. Where he is a bachelor who has spent all of his thirty-eight years in one place—secluded, for the most part, with his mother in a house that, as Miss Vinton observes, might as well "have had a curtain of cobwebs across" the "front door" (p. 140)—Mary has already been married six years, borne one child, and abandoned not only her parents, who died one year after her elopement at sixteen, but also her first husband, Guy Tell, and their home in a town some distance from Baltimore. At twenty-two—her age at the time she first appears with her small daughter, Darcy, and her current lover, John Harris, the man for whom she left her husband—Mary has, in effect, already had three different homes and two families in contrast to Jeremy's one, and she has also quite obviously experienced far more than Jeremy, sixteen years her elder, has possibly ever conceived of. "Separated by years and years" (p. 215), Mary and Jeremy are, in effect, an
unlikely, paradoxical couple: two people with vastly different backgrounds and perceptions of the world in which they live.

The only child of middle-aged parents, "Baptists" whom she describes as having been deeply "religious" (p. 63), Mary Darcy Tell serves as the narrator of two chapters in Celestial Navigation, one marking the spring, 1961, shortly after she has begun living in the Pauling boarding house, and another relating the events of the spring and summer, 1971, ten years later. While the first chapter provides Mary's own familial history and background, the last relates her view of her relationship with Jeremy as well as the dissolution of that alliance, for it is during the latter period that Mary leaves Jeremy, taking with her only what she and her six children—the oldest by her first marriage and five by Jeremy—can carry.

During the course of her first narrative section, Mary reveals that, at one time, she, like Jeremy, was a shy, protected girl who was "very close" to her parents, "especially . . . her mother" (p. 63). Unlike Jeremy, however, Mary rebelled against the restrictions of her family's existence. She points out,

I just turned out not to be a believer, that's all. But I continued to go to church with my parents. I sat folding my program into a fan, feeling chafed inside by some irritation that extended even to the starchy smell of my mother's best dress and the way my father kept tugging his shirt cuffs down when he didn't need to.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

What bothered me was not my parents or even their way of living, but the fact that it seemed to be the only way open to me. I would grow up, of course, and go to college and marry and have children, but those were not changes so much as additions. I would still be traveling their single narrow life. There was no hope for any other.

(pp. 63-64)
Restless and gifted with an unquenchable thirst for life lacking in both her parents and in Jeremy, Mary possesses a strong desire not only to escape the restrictive, closed life of her parents but also "to keep trying different lives out, cheating on the rule that you can only lead just one" (p. 69). 12 "Wide-hipped," tall, expansive, "full of life, with not enough people to pour it into" (p. 76), she longingly watches people walking by outside her window and wants to climb into every single one of them and be carried off to some new and foreign existence. I pictured myself descending from the sky, all wheeling arms and legs, to sink invisibly into their heads and ride home with them, to see how they arranged their furniture and who their friends were, what they fought about, what made them cry, where they went for fun and what they ate for breakfast and how they got to sleep at night and what they dreamed of. And having found out, I would leave; on to the next one. (pp. 76-77)

Unlike Jeremy, who clings to one way of life and throws nothing away, not even the dust and scraps of material that clutter his studio floor, Mary thrives on change, including trading one way of life for another. As she says shortly after having left Guy Tell and moving into the Pauling household,

I picture tossing my life like a set of dice, gambling it, wasting it. I have always enjoyed throwing things away. (p. 69)

Nonetheless, for all of her adventurous spirit, Mary Tell is clearly tied down by her financial and physical dependence on the men in her life and by her own prodigious proclivity for childbearing. To make up for her lonely childhood and the absence of sisters and brothers in her life, she has "'promised'" herself "'at least a dozen children,'" yet clearly, as she confesses to Miss Vinton,
"every new baby is another rope, tying me down like a tent. I don't have the option to leave any more. I'm forced to depend on him [i.e., Jeremy]. He's not dependable." (p. 142)

Physically productive where Jeremy is artistically creative, open where he is withdrawn, Mary is absorbed in the here-and-now, her fears and worries "complete to the last detail" and all of them tied to her children:

Was Abbie's tonsillectomy really necessary, when anesthesia could backfire and kill you? Should Edward have had a tetanus shot for that cat bite? (p. 168)

"Motherhood," as she announces early in the novel, "is what I was made for, and pregnancy is my natural state" (p. 69). "I was meant to have babies" (p. 70).

Jeremy, in contrast, is not only beset by "nameless fears and dreads" (p. 168), but he is also equally baffled and wearied by the very children Mary is so absorbed in. Indeed, to him, all of them are "miniature Marys": "brown-headed and dark-eyed" (p. 157), fearless and jaunty like their mother. But besides the fact that Jeremy can "find no physical resemblance to himself" (p. 158) in his children, he is also unable to "understand them" (p. 157). He even had trouble talking to them. All he could do was watch: drink them in with such speechless, open-mouthed amazement that he was accused of being off in a daze. Mary watched too, but for different reasons. She was checking for danger and germs and mischief; she was their armed guard. What Jeremy was doing was committing them to memory, preparing for some moment far in the future when he could sit down alone and finally figure them out. (p. 157)

Overall, Jeremy, as Miss Vinton observes, is "a very special man, . . .
a genius," where Mary is "an everyday kind of woman" (p. 143), given to
creating "doodles" on "the telephone pad" that— unlike Jeremy's complex,
abstract, and "mosaic-like" art— are "minute line drawings of steam irons
and tricycles and Mixmasters" (p. 144). Indeed, where Mary is clearly
earthbound, Jeremy sails through life by "celestial navigation" (p. 146).

"He sees from a distance at all times," Miss Vinton points out,
without trying, even trying not to. It is his condi-
tion. He lives at a distance. He makes pictures
the way other men make maps— setting down the few
fixed points that he knows, hoping they will guide
him as he goes floating through this unfamiliar
planet. He keeps his eyes on the horizon while his
hands work blind.

(p. 145)

From its inception, the relationship of Mary and Jeremy is quite
obviously an unusual and paradoxical alliance, "as odd for Mary," Miss
Vinton observes, "as distant from her main road, as it was for Jeremy"
(p. 144). For one thing, Mary is at first both frightened and repulsed
by Jeremy's grotesque appearance and withdrawn manner. As she comments
early in the novel,

the man who owns this boarding house is very odd,
and at first I was afraid of him. He reminded me
of a slug. You see people like that in the news-
paper all the time, caught molesting children or
exhibiting themselves on picnic grounds or shooting
into crowds; there is something curled and lifeless
and out of touch about them.

(p. 61)

Even later, after she begins to trust Jeremy with Darcy and to recognize
that "he wouldn't harm a fly" (p. 61), she is still doubtful of his moti-
vation in bringing her flowers and at one point accuses him of trying to
hold something over her because she is behind in her room rent. Abandoned
by her lover, John Harris, Mary has "no money, no home, no family to
return to, not even a high school degree to get a job with," and she is understandably reluctant to entrust herself and her daughter to yet another man whom she hardly knows (p. 73).

During this period in which Mary is suspicious of Jeremy and somewhat frightened by his odd behavior, Jeremy himself is both infatuated with and ideally envisions her as some "old-time heroine in one of the Victorian novels his mother used to read to him" (p. 88), an image that is built both on his earliest impressions of Mary as "an illustration in an old-fashioned novel" (p. 51) and on her turning to him for comfort shortly after she has learned that John Harris will not, as promised, divorce his wife. Given a natural imaginative bent and a long-nourished shyness, Jeremy nightly goes "over and over that moment when" Mary "put her arms around him," and it is during these imaginings that she becomes to him someone "who had come in desperation, with no one else to turn to" (p. 88).

Significantly, Jeremy persists in retaining this idealized notion of Mary as a helpless, noble creature in need of his support long after her one moment of weakness has passed. Striving to conquer his own fears one by one in order to appear to Mary as a strong, competent, and authoritative figure, he secretly and carefully plans the steps in his courtship of her, all the while continuing to imagine her to be the kind of person she is not. Moreover, through most of these early stages of their relationship, Jeremy, especially "uneasy" around "beautiful women," is unable "to raise his eyes" to Mary and, consequently, receives almost all of his "impressions of her from sidelong glances--brown hair worn in a bun, oval face, scoop-necked dress" (p. 51). The result is both a fragmentary
version of the real Mary as well as a composite portrait more imagined than real. In fact, Jeremy's vision of Mary is so far removed from her reality that "away from her, he never could remember" the color of her eyes nor the details of her features. Instead, he envisions her as a figure in a work of art, "in black-and-white,"

like a steel engraving, with fine cross-hatching shading her face and some vague rich cloak tumbling from her shoulders.

(p. 89)

In this artistic rendering, Mary's "clearest feature was her forehead—a pale oval," and it is this feature that suggests to him what he imagines to be her "purity and tranquility," primarily because these qualities are associated with "a wide ivory brow" in the "novels his mother read to him" (p. 89). The reality of Mary's buoyant, adventurous, and energetic self is not clear to him until years after their "marriage" is consummated and his once reclusive life as an artist has been invaded by the clutter and noise of five children and their bustling, protective mother.

Throughout Celestial Navigation, Jeremy Pauling is depicted as being far removed from Mary Tell in spirit if not in actuality. He knows little about her: nothing about her former marriage and husband, except that she was married before and has been unsuccessful in getting a divorce, and nothing about her family history or origins. Even at the time of his proposal, the real Mary eludes him by revealing only that she cannot accept because of her previous marriage. As a consequence, long after Mary has agreed to the arrangement of a "pretend" marriage because of the promise of security and "more children" (p. 125), Jeremy puzzles over what she is actually like and is forced daily to deal with the conflict and discrepancies between his idealized vision of her and her real presence.
and behavior. Where early in the relationship, the difference seems "slight" and involves primarily Jeremy's dealing with the disappointment and awe he experiences when he recognizes that Mary's skin has a denser look and the planes of her face were flatter...[and] her manner of moving...more purposeful (pp. 98-99)

than his vision allows, later, ten years after their "marriage," Jeremy must face the fact that he does not "know anything" (p. 174) about his wife. She is only superficially the tranquil heroine he has for years envisioned her to be and "might be full of discontent" or "be planning some new love affair far away from him" (p. 174). For years he has constructed mental scenes in which she would worry over her children and "would come to him, on the edge of tears, asking what he thought was wrong" (p. 172), only later to discover the real Mary's self-sufficiency. Imagining himself arranging "cushions around her" after the birth of each child and building for her "a nest of love and safety," Jeremy repeatedly discovers that "Mary made her own nest" (p. 172). Even her pregnancies come to appear as

entirely her own undertakings. It was she who discovered and announced them, took her calcium tablets, disappeared behind those closed swinging doors at the hospital to give birth.

(p. 158)

All the while Jeremy "read and memorized all the forms of support that he might offer" her, "none of that advice...[came] in handy" (p. 172). In effect, Mary is not at all the helpless heroine "come in desperation" (p. 88) that Jeremy has envisioned her to be, and the discrepancy between this idealization and reality is as much a factor in the dissolution of their marriage as are the numerous differences that keep them essentially
isolated from one another.

Mary, unlike the "old-time heroines" (p. 88) Jeremy dreams about, does everything for herself and appears overall to have no need for Jeremy. Unlike him, she possesses "a rich lode of intuition" (p. 177), calm, self-sufficiency, ease with her children, and confidence. As Jeremy comes to realize late in the relationship, "the difference between him/self and Mary" essentially is that

he saw virtue in acceptance of everything, small and large, while Mary saw virtue in the refusal to accept. She was always ready to do battle against the tiniest infringement.

(pp. 179-180)

In fact, "his acceptance and her defiance," his passivity and her energetic activity and enthusiasm, "made up a perfect whole, with neither more right than the other" (p. 180). Haunted by Yeatsian images of change—"cones rising in a tower, the base of one resting on the point of another in a particularly jarring way" (p. 167)—and "a fear of hell" (p. 168), Jeremy, unlike Mary, suffers from insomnia, all the while marveling at her remarkable strength amid vulnerability. For, as Jeremy sees her, she is always

more vulnerable than any man /i/ the deepest pieces of herself were in . . . /her/ children and every day they scattered in sixty different directions and faced a thousand untold perils; yet she sailed through the night without so much as a prayer. There was no way he could ever hope to match her.

(p. 168)

Significantly, despite the many differences in their personalities and background, during the ten-year period in which Mary and Jeremy are together, there are a large number of notable changes in both Jeremy and his art. Overall, he is much more in touch with the outside world as a
result of having sired his own family. As Miss Vinton observes, over the years, Jeremy has learned to go beyond the familiar city block he previously restricted himself to. "Presumably," she comments,

he had to go off this block for his wedding, and then there were those trips to the hospital and three years ago he went to Darcy's school to see her play a flower in Red Riding Hood's forest. (She gave Red Riding Hood a warning in a silvery little voice . . . "Be careful, little girl, remember what your mother told you." Jeremy walked seven blocks to hear that and applauded all alone the minute she said her line.)

(p. 143)

Observing Jeremy's art after the first five years he and Mary are together, Miss Vinton also notices, that

over the years Jeremy's pieces have grown up. I mean physically, literally. They have doubled in size, and they are so deeply textured that they are almost sculptures. Ordinary objects are crowded into them—Dixie cups and bus tickets and his children's shoelaces, still recognizable.

(pp. 144-145)

As the novel progresses and Jeremy's experiences broaden—almost totally as a result of his expanded familial contacts—Jeremy abandons his early abstract pieces altogether and begins not only to incorporate actual objects into his work but to represent human beings as well. Like the novelist who created him, Jeremy builds his art from "the ordinary things of life" while choosing for his subjects what Miss Vinton calls "the smallest and most unnoticed scenes on earth": "a man with a rake, a woman ironing a shirt, a child strapping on a roller skate" (p. 145)—all scenes suggestive of the day-to-day domestic life Jeremy leads. However, because these figures are hidden in larger structures, they are, as Miss Vinton observes, "bare of details" (p. 145). "Their features" are "gone" and, like all of Jeremy's work, they give
the effect . . . of distance. Moments that you just witnessed are suspended forever while you yourself recede from them with every breath you take. The moments grow smaller, and yet clearer. You see sorrow in them you had never before suspected.

(p. 145)

Overall, after Mary and Jeremy begin sharing the same bed and pretending to be married, Jeremy's art becomes increasingly representational and three-dimensional. It evolves, as Miss Vinton observes, from the early "mosaic-like" collages which he is making at the opening of the novel to "almost sculptures" by the time Edward, the fourth child, is born. Eventually, of course, Jeremy does actually begin making statues and sculptures, and, as he does, his work becomes increasingly reflective of his own emotional and psychological responses to his family. After nearly ten years with Mary and the birth of his fifth child, Jeremy feels extremely crowded by his family, especially by the noise his children make and the ceaseless string of mundane concerns Mary brings to his attention. When she announces that Guy has finally divorced her and she and Jeremy may at last be legitimately married, Jeremy feels invaded, "as if she had suddenly entered into some hidden fantasy of his--named, out loud, a product of his most private imagination" (p. 173). His studio is disturbed by her presence, while more and more he begins to see his own children as

some new type of boarder, just louder and more troublesome. They were not entirely of this house, they were visitors from the outside world. When he was most deeply absorbed in his work, children came seeping up the stairs like the rising waters of a flood, and their noise--strong clangs and hoots and the unbearable pitch of their quarrels--would soak into him slowly, at first unnoticed, then so exasperating that he would fling down his scissors and throw open the door and stand there trembling. "Why are you doing this to me?"
he would ask. "Why must you make this noise? Why do you keep, why do you—"

(pp. 158-159)

Not surprisingly, during this period, Jeremy's art begins to express the frustration and crowdedness he feels with his family. At one point when he is building a statue, Jeremy is literally "waist-high" in "a circle of tin children" (p. 153), while later, he creates a statue of "a man pushing a wheelbarrow, webbed around with strings and pulleys and chains and weights" (p. 233)—a work clearly suggestive of the strong pull of Mary and the children during the periods when he tries to work alone in his studio. That pull is even described as "a string pulling him, some strong piece of twine pulling him away from the picture in his head" (p. 154), and although Jeremy builds his statue "mostly \( \sqrt{0.5} \) plaster," "nearly every material in the world" is in it, "as if... \( \sqrt{he} \) had thrown it together in some kind of frenzy" (p. 233). Once Mary announces that she is at last free to marry and that she will "make all the arrangements" (p. 175) for the wedding, Jeremy withdraws from the entire family by locking himself in his studio and working feverishly on a piece that very clearly suggests the internal conflict the artist himself is unable to verbalize. During this period Jeremy, locked in his studio like a "prisoner in some confined and airless place" (p. 179), manages to forget his scheduled wedding day—an oversight that leads to Mary's departure with her children—and even, in fact, breaks his own work pace by going "straight from one piece to the next" (p. 179). He begins work on a piece clearly suggestive of the freedom he himself longs for: "a statue of Brian," his gallery agent, to be made in "wood because it was slowest and took the most patience," as Jeremy has observed him from his third-
floor studio, leaving the house after talking to Mary, "rounding the corner—a man half running, glad to be gone" (p. 181). Longing for solitude and escape from his family, to "be childless, wifeless, friendless—all alone, like that silent golden period between his mother's death and Mary's arrival" (p. 170), Jeremy chooses the figure of Brian "because it seemed to him the most solitary. No dogs, brooms, tricycles, or children accompanied him" (p. 181). In effect, the statue represents a figure free of the clutter and fetters and disturbances of family life Jeremy longs to escape.

It is clear from this discussion that, in large measure, Celestial Navigation is concerned not only with the conflict and contrasts inherent in familial life, but also with the special difficulties the artist—by nature, a private, solitary individual—faces in living within a family setting. Once Mary and the children leave him, Jeremy is like an old man who sees the last of the guests to the door and returns, stretching, and yawning, to an empty room only to discover that he has forgotten what it is he has "been waiting to do" (p. 189). Additionally, the absence of family has, as we might expect, a jarring effect on Jeremy's work. Where before, he "always finished everything he started" (p. 228), now he abandons the half-finished statue of Brian he has been working on and begins work on an odd cubbyholed structure that Olivia describes as looking like a wooden soft drink crate, only bigger, standing on end. A set of compartments, and in each compartment a different collection of objects. Like an advertisement showing a cross-section of a busy household.

However, in Jeremy's piece, there were no people. Only the
feeling of people—of full lives suddenly interrupted, belongings still bearing the imprint of their vanished owners. Dark squares upstairs full of toys, paper scraps, a plastic doll bed lying on its side as if some burst of exuberance had flung it there and then passed on, leaving such a vacancy it could make you cry.

(p. 246)

Clearly a miniature representation of the abandoned house in which Jeremy now lives, the sculpture also symbolizes Jeremy's own inner emptiness and "the echoing, internal silence" (p. 252) that haunt him after Mary has taken her children and gone. To compensate for the loss, he turns to his art as a "lame" hunter might if he were forced to stay "home with the women and children and . . . draw pictures to comfort himself" (p. 232). As a palliative for the troubled inner state of the artist—the "'last happy'" specimen of whom, he tells Olivia, was "'a caveman, coming back from the hunt and dashing off a picture of it on a stone wall'" (p. 231)—Jeremy begins making "an imaginary family" (pp. 249-250): a series of statues of his children, beginning with Darcy, Mary's child by her first husband. The statues, moreover, are not, as one might suspect, merely models of "the people" the artist "had seen in real life," but attempts to make "new ones" (p. 249), to fashion from plastic materials a silent family that might substitute for the real family the artist has lost contact with.

Art, of course, is only a partial substitute for family, even for the reclusive Jeremy Pauling, and without human contact, Jeremy's art fails: "Lines came out knotty, angles awkward, flat planes lumpy and uneven" (p. 249). Although "he had heard that suffering made great art, . . . in his case all it made was parched, measly, stunted lumps far below his usual standard" (p. 250). Separated from others by the
acute differentness of his vision, the pathologically shy and withdrawn manner partly engendered by his absorption in a world of color, line, and form, and his special need as an artist for privacy and solitude, Jeremy is always essentially isolated from the expanded family with whom he lives. Yet after the departure of Mary and the children, the very real human contacts and the physical and emotional supports he needs in order to work are removed, and only Miss Vinton remains to care for him and offer him support and kindness, while even she, "protecting his concentration" with her silence, is distant from him and sees only "the seamless exterior" of the man.

Sculptor at Work. She never guessed at the cracks inside, the stray thoughts, tangents of memory, hours of idleness, days spent leafing through old magazines or practicing square knots on a length of red twine

(p. 250)

that constitute the activities of the real Jeremy. Fittingly, at the end of the novel, it is this distant, unrelated boarder who stays on to care for Jeremy long after Mary is gone and the other older boarders have died or moved away. Offering Jeremy an "arm for support" as they walk, Miss Vinton and her charge appear from the outside like statues themselves: "like two clay ducks"—"an elderly couple, together no doubt for centuries, arriving at the end of their dusty and unremarkable lives" (p. 276).

It is obvious from what has been said that Celestial Navigation is not an ordinary family portrait, not even for a writer like Anne Tyler, who repeatedly focuses on the isolation of the individual within the family. From the earliest portraits—Amanda's, Miss Vinton's, Mary's, and Jeremy's—the novel repeatedly focuses on what are essentially reclusive, solitary, private characters despite what appears as their
propensity to live in familial arrangements and even, indeed, propagate themselves through children and the creation of more family members. Even Mary, with her strong drive for motherhood, longs for the freedom associated only with the solitary life—the freedom to choose new and different life styles—and remains essentially isolated from both her first husband, Guy, and Jeremy, largely because she fails to talk about herself or her past.

In keeping with this isolation of the individual in the family, moreover, Anne Tyler has allowed most of her characters to tell their own stories and to reveal thereby the uniqueness of their lives and views, as well as the very misunderstandings and differences that keep them apart from others. Fittingly, only Jeremy—artistic, silent, and withdrawn—is dealt with in the third person, a method of narration that suggests both his extreme distance from others as well as his difficulty with verbalization. Jeremy is not, after all, a character who talks very much. Art is his medium of expression, and it is only this reticence to speak about himself that he shares with his wife Mary. Most of his other characteristics—his love and understanding of art, his need for privacy and solitude—he shares more with the distant family of boarders, especially with Miss Vinton, than with Mary. Interestingly, it is the gregarious Mary Tell who first speaks about what is obviously one of the novel's central themes: the unavoidable isolation of the individual regardless of his life circumstances. Thinking over her own life with her parents and later with first Guy Tell and then John Harris, she speaks of how "no change in your life, however great, . . . can keep you from being in the end what you were in the beginning: lost and lonely" (p. 85),
observing the world from a limited, isolated point in time.

For Jeremy Pauling, the hero of *Celestial Navigation*, this basic and final isolation of which Mary speaks early in the novel is brought about not only without regard for the changes he has undergone but also at his own hands and despite his heroic efforts to put an end to it. Months after Mary's departure, Jeremy has made no attempt to contact her. During this period, his work is half-hearted and stunted, his concentration broken, while his dreams are haunted by visions of work, all aimed at "some single solution" (p. 250) unknown to the artist himself. Recognizing at last that he had idealized Mary and "loved her for the wrong qualities, the ones that were least important or that perhaps she did not even possess" (p. 251), Jeremy views his "errors of aimlessness and passivity" (pp. 251-252) with a longing "to undertake some metaphysical task," purge himself by "some pilgrimage" and "find just one heroic undertaking that he could aim his life toward" (p. 251). In November following Mary's departure, Jeremy, a man for whom even everyday tasks were "a series of hurdles that he had been tripping over for decades with the end nowhere in sight" (p. 87), sets out across Baltimore with a backpack, a lunch, and store-bought surprises for his children. His "heroic undertaking" takes him on his first journey in months away from his familiar Baltimore block and his only voyage to the outlying areas of the city in an attempt to re-establish contact with Mary and bring her and the children home again.

The impact of his family on Jeremy is, of course, the same at the boatyard where Mary is living as it was at his own boarding house. He feels crowded and saddened by his children, whose shabby appearance
appalls him, and oppressed by Mary's overprotectiveness and self-assurance. As a consequence, he works feverishly to help winterize her cabin, "to surround her with efficiency and authority" (p. 268), all the while suggesting by his actions that clearly Mary and children are to stay in the cabin that at first they had taken only as a temporary residence. Angered by Mary's insistence that he also not take the children on a dinghy with him in order to air the sails of Brian's ketch, Jeremy literally and symbolically sails off alone, without his family. He tells them, in fact, to "'Get away!'" from him (p. 272) and moves out into the water of the river

alone, with no more ill effects than the loss of his golf cap to the black greasy water and the tingling echo of fear in the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet.

(p. 274)

Thematically and imagistically, the scene is a summation of much that Celestial Navigation implies regarding the essential isolation of the individual from the family—indeed, about the freedom that comes with solitude and escape from family. For Jeremy, in fact, this escape into solitude amounts to his being able to "breathe freely again" (p. 274). With only partial awareness of the family he has left on the shore in this, the last familial scene in the novel, Jeremy turns "his back" on his children and wife and pretends "they were gone" (p. 274). As a consequence, he is engulfed by a feeling of total isolation that is accompanied by independence and assurance as well as a freedom from the fear and worry that have plagued him all of his life. He is even described as being "beyond worry," for the boat he symbolically and literally rides on seems "securely moored" even though it, like Jeremy himself, moves
erratically, scudding "around its mooring in wider and faster circles . . . while" the children on shore piped it on its journey with tin whistles" (p. 274), the very surprises Jeremy himself brought them.

As suggested above, this final scene represents much more than Jeremy's recognition of his independence from family and his assertion of self, although these are clearly important, climactic developments in the novel. It is also the symbolic and imagistic summation of the novel. References to sailing and water recur throughout Celestial Navigation, supplying the novel with both a title as well as a central unifying pattern of imagery. Significantly, it is Brian O'Donnell—the owner of the ketch on which Jeremy finally sails away from his family and also the owner of the gallery where Jeremy's art, his own special navigational source, is exhibited and sold—who first brings the phrase "celestial navigation" to the reader's attention. Speaking of his new boat, Brian comments that he intends to "'eat what'" he catches and to "'sail by celestial navigation'" (p. 145), while Miss Vinton, clearly the novel's most astutely observant narrator, silently comments to Jeremy,

you too sail by celestial navigation and it is far more celestial than Brian's. (p. 146)

Besides this scene, however, there are numerous other references to water and sailing throughout the novel, all of which form a unified, coherent pattern of imagery that grants insight into both the principal characters as well as the novel's central themes. Early in Celestial Navigation, for example, Anne Tyler refers to Jeremy as "a man marooned on an island" (p. 100) and to the darkness which he observes about himself as "some deep substance in which" all of the members of his household seem to be
swimming, "intent upon keeping their heads free, their chins straining upward" (p. 53). While this passage clearly suggests the efforts of Jeremy's boarders not only to survive but to retain their freedom and privacy, later it is Jeremy himself who feels drowned, first by his own children and then by Mary. Indeed, it will be recalled that his children seep up "the stairs" to his studio "like the rising waters of a flood," their "noise" eventually soaking into Jeremy until he explodes (pp. 158-159). Mary, in contrast, remains calm with them, her smooth voice rising above theirs "like a ship in waves" (p. 176), sailing peacefully on, even though she herself also speaks metaphorically of having "flooded" Jeremy, of having "washed him several feet distant from me" (p. 214) during the last years of their relationship together.

What Anne Tyler presents in Celestial Navigation is clearly much more than a family portrait delineating the various ways in which the individual members of one household are isolated from one another. Rather, the book is a skillful and masterful poetic portrait of the artist, of his special creative needs for privacy and solitude, and of the isolated individuals who draw together in a boarding-house arrangement. In all of her novels, Anne Tyler treats the theme of the individual's isolation from those with whom he lives. In Celestial Navigation she triumphs in presenting this isolation as a special need of certain types of people. In the closed, decaying boarding house that is the novel's principal setting, the paradox of family life emerges perhaps more clearly than elsewhere: the need for "love, or understanding, or feeling needed" (p. 140), for intimacy and sharing requires an equivalent respect for the privacy and solitude of others. As Miss Vinton comments midway through the novel, for "a good life," there is a price, and that "price is silence" (p. 141).
CHAPTER IV

SEARCHING FOR CALEB

Following the publication of the sensitive and skillfully written *Celestial Navigation*, Anne Tyler began to acquire increasing national recognition as a young writer of talent and promise. Aiding this recognition was the fact that, in February, 1975, she became a monthly reviewer for *The National Observer*, a position she held until that paper's demise in July, 1977. By that time, however, Miss Tyler's sixth published novel, *Searching for Caleb*, had appeared, and her reputation as a writer had grown considerably. Subsequently, when *The National Observer* folded, Anne Tyler immediately became a regular reviewer for *The New York Times Book Review* and later, following the publication of her seventh novel, *Earthly Possessions*, for *The Washington Post*. At present, her reviews continue to appear regularly in both *The New York Times Book Review* and *The Washington Post* as well as intermittently in other notable publications, including *The New Republic*.

Published in January, 1976, *Searching for Caleb*, then, marks something of a turning point in the novelist's career. It came at a period when she was gaining increasing national attention through her reviews and, on its own, brought her recognition from other writers of national note. In fact, most reviewers of the book found it to be Anne Tyler's most humorous, delightful, and, to date, fully realized study of the individual in the family. In a *New York Times Book Review* article on the novel, Katha Pollitt spoke of Miss Tyler as occupying, "among our better contemporary novelists, . . . a somewhat lonely place, polishing brighter and brighter a craft many novelists no longer deem essential to their
purpose: the unfolding of character through brilliantly imaged and absolutely accurate detail. Likewise, in a three-page review in The New Yorker devoted entirely to Searching for Caleb, John Updike praised Miss Tyler by noting her "subtle psychologizing," her ability to use "details" that "pull from our minds recognition of our lives," and for her rare "gift of coherence—of tipping observations in a direction, and of keeping track of what she has set down." Recognizing that Searching for Caleb grows "out of her Anne Tyler's fascination with families—brotherly men and auntly women, with weak sisters and mama's boys, with stay-at-homes and runaways," Updike further spoke of the novel as "lovely," "funny and lyric and true-seeming, exquisite in its details and ambitious in its design." "This writer," he concluded, "is not merely good, she is wickedly good."

A combined family history book and detective story, Searching for Caleb is all of the things John Updike points to: exquisitely detailed, humorous, lyrical, ambitious, and, above all, centrally concerned, as all of Miss Tyler's novels to date have been, with the life and growth of the individual within the family. In fact, as a family history book, Searching for Caleb traces the growth and interactions of one large, dichotomous, and extremely long-lived family, the Pecks of Baltimore, through five generations: from the period of the family's founding in the early 1880's by one Justin Montague Peck—"a sharp-eyed, humorless man who became very rich importing coffee, sugar, and guano during the last quarter of the nineteenth century"—through 1973, the year in which the novel opens and the elusive Caleb of the title finally reappears. Indeed, Searching for Caleb covers a total of one hundred years of family history,
for it moves backward in time for several chapters following the opening scenes in order to trace the history of the Pecks and to relate how Caleb Peck, Justin's second son, disappeared quietly one day "in the spring of 1912" (p. 62), sixty-one years before the novel opens, and thus became the object of a prolonged though delayed search by his elderly half-brother and a great-niece he has never seen. This delayed search for Caleb by Daniel Peck, his half-brother and the ninety-two-year-old patriarch of the Peck family at the time the novel opens; the history and interrelationships of the Pecks, including not only Daniel and Caleb but also Daniel's progeny in Baltimore's respectable Roland Park; and, above all, the restless lives of two of Daniel's grandchildren, Justine and Duncan Peck, inheritors of their great-uncle Caleb's nomadic spirit, constitute the focus of the plot in Searching for Caleb as well as the vehicles by which Anne Tyler captures the "exquisite," "brilliantly imagined" details of the lives she evokes and the extremely varied and contradictory personalities of the individual members of the family she has created.

Significantly, Miss Tyler portrays the Peck family in Searching for Caleb as markedly homogeneous in appearance while, like her other fictional families, it is split internally by strong contrasts in character. Most of the Pecks are, for example, almost identical in appearance: their eyes are intensely blue, their hair yellow, and they are all said to talk alike. Even Justine and her grandfather, Daniel Peck, separated by over fifty years in age and innumerable differences in thinking and behavior, are described in the opening page of the novel as possessing "identical, peaky white faces" (p. 3). From Justin Montague Peck to the present, the
Pecks have also all inherited sound teeth and

a heart murmur of such obviousness that they had been
excused from even the mildest sports, the women
cautioned against childbirth and the men saved from
combat and long marches and the violence of travel
by the unique, hollow stutter in their chests.

(p. 72)

Additionally, with the exception of Justine, Daniel's grandchild, all of
the Pecks have been raised in Baltimore, and, for the most part, they have
remained there, unquestioning the roles and the values assigned to them
by the family. Thus they are "identical" in far more than their physical
make-up. By and large, they are almost all staid, orderly, obedient, and,
like the gentleman who sired their bloodline, "humorless." Residents of
Roland Park since "the fall of 1905" when Justin Montague Peck moved
his family there to live on the land he had purchased and in the "two
large" identical "houses" he had had built---"houses set side by side,
with almost no space between them, although great stretches of land lay
all about" in anticipation of "the great many descendants" (p. 57)
Justin desired---the Pecks have remained committed to their family name
and identity to such a degree that they are excessively uniform and
clannish. Traditional, unfalteringly upper-middle-class, the males in
the family, with the exception of the modern-day Duncan Peck, all drive
black Fords, replicas of the first "black Model T" (p. 58) bought by
Daniel in 1908, and all attend "the University" (p. 81) to study law in
order to take a position in the firm of Peck and Sons established by
Daniel Peck immediately after his oldest son, Justin II, had completed
his degree and was able to join his father in the practice of law. The
Peck women likewise are almost identical, with even the wives of Daniel's
sons chosen for their unthreatening ways. All blood-related Peck women
are, of course, educated also—the older generation at home, Justine and her female cousins at a girls' junior college near the family home. More importantly, however, all of the Peck women have "excellent manners" (p. 76). Indeed, the entire family is bred to impeccable manners: they promptly send polite but meaningless thank-you notes on cream-colored stationery to anyone whom they have visited, however briefly, and avoid crying and other emotional displays at all times. Above all, however, the Pecks—male and female alike—are bred to stay together, and they do—all five generations of them, except, that is, the few renegades, the true individuals in the family, who have attempted to reject the uniformity and regularity of life with the family, especially their insistence on restraint and respectability and their clannish insularity.

Not surprisingly, Anne Tyler depicts the Peck family as exhibiting a marked dichotomy in character almost from its very beginnings. The split between the restrained and humorless members of the family and their nomadic, joyfully spirited, and, hence, somewhat disreputable kin is acknowledged early in the novel by the stately Daniel Peck. As he observes while speaking with Mrs. Tabor, the widow of one of Caleb's schoolmates, whom Daniel has sought out in an effort to locate his long-absent brother,

"Our family is very close knit, a fine family, we have always stuck together, but I don't know, periodically some . . . explorer sets out on his own."

(p. 13)

The first such explorer is, of course, Caleb himself, the half-brother Daniel last "saw . . . in nineteen twelve" (p. 13). However, sharp contrasts in character emerge in the Peck family even before Caleb is born. In fact, the family's founding father, the financially successful but
socially obscure Justin Montague Peck, had two wives, two sharply contrasting women, each of whom bore him a son and became thereby the mothers of the remarkably different Daniel and Caleb Peck.

Justin's first wife and the mother of the even-tempered and obedient Daniel was one Sarah Cantleigh about whom little was known. "The sixteen-year-old daughter of another importer," she died "giving birth to Daniel" "only nine months after . . . her wedding" (p. 51). What remains of her is, therefore, primarily contained in her son, the sole Peck through whom the line descends, and a "wedding portrait" that "still looms in a Baltimore dining room": a picture of a child-faced girl with a look of reluctance, of hanging back, which is accentuated by the dress style of the day with its backward-swept lines and the flounce at the rear of the skirt.

(p. 51)

When Justin Montague Peck remarries shortly after the death of the "child-faced" and reluctant-looking Sarah, he makes certain, so the family history goes, to wed himself with "stronger stock--a German cutler's daughter named Laura Baum," the woman who becomes in many ways directly responsible for instilling in successive generations of Pecks an insistence on respectability and refined manners and the one to rescue young "Daniel from the old freedwoman who had been tending him" (p. 51). "A sallow, straight-backed woman who wore her hair in a knot" (p. 51), Laura Baum was both "energetic and upright" (p. 61) throughout her life. From the first days of her marriage to Justin, moreover,

it was clear that she made an excellent mother for little Daniel. She taught him to read and cipher when he was only three years old, and she made certain that his manners were impeccable.

(p. 51)
From her, Daniel learned to compose his polite, cream-colored cards of thanks "on the carriage ride home" (p. 150) from visits—a habit he maintains even as an old man and one that he successively passes on to his children and grandchildren. Like all Pecks after him, moreover, Daniel learned at an early age to "dislike foreignness" (p. 6), although, ironically, he learned this trait, as he had all the others, from Laura Baum, a woman with a foreign background of her own. However, Laura was the first woman to marry into the Peck family who did what all those after her were expected to do: reject their own families for the Pecks. Following the suggestion of Justin "that she stop taking Daniel with her on visits to her father," Laura "instantly" ceased "her own visits" also, "although Justin had not asked that of her in so many words" (p. 51). Then, forgetting her father, "an undignified little man given to practical jokes" who "was very obviously a foreigner" (p. 51), Laura set about instilling in young Daniel a pride in family she herself obviously lacked. Indeed, she is reported to have frequently reminded him to do precisely what she herself was avoiding: that is, "remember . . . to live up to . . . the family's name," although Laura "never explained what she meant" and appears at the time to have provided only moments of glee for servants who "broke into hissing laughter on the kitchen stairs and asked each other in whispers, "What family? What name? Peck?"" (p. 51).

Significantly, Laura Baum, unlike her predecessor Sarah Cantleigh, was an especially ageless and long-lived woman, and, therefore, her influence was pervasive. Although she never had her portrait painted, as Sarah had, she "lived long enough to be known personally by Meg, her great-great-step-grandchild" (p. 51)—the neat and unlikely daughter of
Justine and Duncan Peck. Outlasting her husband by forty-six years, Laura, in fact, was the first Peck to live past ninety, a trait replicated in both her stepson Daniel and in Caleb Peck, the "silent, musical" (p. 152), and wayward child born to her in 1885. Moreover, although Laura Baum had no other direct descendants from her marriage with Justin—she suffered several miscarriages after Caleb, for which her husband never forgave her, and her only son was both nomadic and childless himself—it is she who, because of her longevity and the strength of her influence on Daniel, passed onto succeeding generations of Pecks a number of their distinctive family traits. In the recounting of family history, it is Laura Baum, Justin's second wife and the mother of Caleb Peck, who seems to be most responsible for inculcating in Daniel the family pride and reserve that recur in most all of the Pecks that come after him.

Ironically, the first Peck to openly challenge this family pride and the reserve and restraint that go with it is Laura's own son, Caleb. Born five years after Daniel, Caleb resembles the Pecks and his obedient half-brother primarily in his coloring:

He was blond like his half-brother, but his tilted brown eyes must have snuck in from the Baum side of the family.

(p. 52)

As if to chide Laura for her total and sudden dismissal of her father, Caleb had

his Grandpa Baum's delight in noise and crowds. Even as a baby, being wheeled along in his caramel-colored wicker carriage, he would go into fits of glee at the sight of passing strangers.

(p. 52)

Additionally, to the dismay of his parents,
he liked anything musical—church-bells, hurdy-gurdies, the chants of the street vendors selling hot cakes. When he was a little older he took to the streets himself, riding an iron velocipede with a carpeted seat.

(p. 52)

Unlike his half-brother Daniel, who always "obeyed instructions" and never strayed from "the sidewalk in front" of the family home where he had been told to stay,

Caleb would sooner or later be tugged southward by the fire bell or the gathering of a crowd, or, of course, the sound of a street musician. He followed the blind harpist and the banjoist, the walking piano that cranked out Italian tunes and the lady who sang "The Pardon Came Too Late."

(p. 52)

Even as a child, Caleb, in fact, disturbed the family and sent relatives and servants searching for him, although it was always only after he had been missing for a while that "someone would think to ask, 'Where's Caleb?'" (p. 52), thus foreshadowing the late-life search of Daniel Peck. Then

his mother came out on the front steps, a fan of creases rising between her eyebrows. "Daniel, have you seen Caleb?" And search parties would be sent down all the streets running toward the harbor. Only everybody soon learned: if you wanted to find Caleb, hold still a minute and listen. Whenever you heard distant music somewhere in the town, maybe so faint you thought you imagined it, so thin you blamed the whistling of the streetcar wires, then you could find Caleb straddling his little velocipede, speechless with joy, his appleseed eyes dancing.

(p. 52)

In other ways, moreover, Caleb Peck was different from his half-brother and his parents. On holidays, for example, when the Pecks had "formal visitors"—"Justin's business associates and their wives, along with their starched, ruffled children"—while Daniel listened intently to the family's critical remarks following the guests' departure,
"memorizing their words," "Caleb hung out the window to hear an Irish tenor sing 'Just a Lock of Hair for Mother'" (p. 53). Thus he never fell victim to the family's critical views and their rigid judgments of those outside of the family: the gentlemen with "the ... inferior brand of cigars," the children whose manners were poor, and the wives, with their "regrettable overuse of Pompeian Bloom rouge" (p. 53). Later, when his "tall, cool, reflective" brother "planned to study law" and Caleb himself was to "take over the importing business" (p. 53), he once again strays from his family, this time in his lack of decorum and reserve. Coming from classes at the Salter Academy, for example,

he could be waylaid by any passing stranger, he fell willingly into conversation with all sorts of riffraff. He had no discrimination. And he still followed organ grinders. With his pocket money he bought tawdry musical instruments, everything from pennywhistles to a cheap violin sold him by a sailor; he could make music out of anything. He played these instruments not only in his room but outdoors as well, if he wasn't caught and stopped. More than once he was mistakenly showered with coins from someone's window.

(p. 53)

Not surprisingly, when Laura, Caleb's mother, heard of these occasions, she is said to have grown "dark in the face" and to have ordered her son "to remember his name" (p. 53)—precisely the same injunction of family pride she successfully used to control any wayward impulse in the obedient Daniel—if, that is, he ever had any.

For Caleb, however, the power of this injunction is negligible: music exercises at least twice the control. Indeed, "in all accounts of Caleb Peck," we are told late in the novel, "one thing" recurs.

He was a musical man. To his family that was only a detail, like the color of his eyes or his tendency to wear a Panama hat just a little past the season. But to Caleb

(p. 232)
music was clearly something more. In fact, it proves ultimately to be not only, as we have already seen, the source of contrast between Caleb and the other Pecks, who for years tolerate his differentness and shrug off the "reckless, made-up tunes"—"the disreputable, colored kind of music"—he spilled out "on the massive piano" (p. 53) in his mother's parlor. It is also the principal clue to Caleb's discovery late in the novel and the direct cause of a permanent break between Caleb and his parents, including his father's physical decline. Touring the warehouse and office from which he is to operate his father's business, Caleb so enrages his father with the announcement that "he would prefer to be a musician" (p. 54) that the older man suffers a stroke. After all, in Justin's view, "no young man would ever seriously" consider music as an occupation—"music was for women! For parlors!" (p. 54). So angry and bitter is Justin at Caleb's announcement, so odious and alien is his son's desire to be a musician, that at first the old man feels "nauseated" at the very "sight of . . . Caleb's intense brown eyes" (p. 54), those remnants of the Baum side of the family. Later, also, paralyzed and bedridden for the rest of his life as a result of the stroke that follows Caleb's announcement, Justin remains incapable of ever forgiving his son or of ever acknowledging his presence. Even Laura Baum tells Caleb immediately following the incident, "'You have killed your half of your father'" (p. 55).

Clearly, then, Caleb's personality and desires run contrary to those of his parents, and his musical interests and attraction to strangers and excitement prove the source of the first overt conflict within the Peck family. However, although Caleb's "waywardness" finds embodiment in other
Pecks and becomes a family trait in its own right later, at the time he
announces his interest in being a musician, Caleb is the first individual
in the Peck family to reject the family's dull, joyless existence and
their desire for middle-class respectability. He is also the first delib-
erately to seek what the family fails to provide—a colorful, varied,
imaginative existence. Thus, Caleb is the first family renegade and turn-
coat, so to speak, and he is smitten by the consequences of his announce-
ment as well as his mother's bitter comment. On the Monday following his
father's stroke, Caleb Peck "started work" (p. 55) at his father's
office, just as Justin Peck had planned.

After his father's apoplectic seizure—an event that takes place in
1903, the year "Caleb graduated from the Salter Academy" (p. 53)—
Justin's second son remains with the family for nine more years, working
conscientiously behind his father's large roll-top desk and adequately
handling the import business as his father had desired. Even after "the
Great Fire," which took place in February, 1904, and "burned out the heart
of Baltimore, sweeping away every tall building in the city and most major
businesses, including Justin Peck's" (p. 56), Caleb loyally stays on. He
smells of "smoke from the city... moves in a deep, tired daze" (p. 56), and grows increasingly "quieter every year," but he manages to
rebuild "his father's warehouse, bigger and better than before" and even
buys "a brand new roll-top desk with twice as many cubbyholes" (p. 58).
Then, dutifully, every Friday night, he comes to "the foot of the bed"
where Justin lies, "whitening and shriveling like a beached fish," in
order to summarize "the week's business in a gentle, even voice" (p. 55).
Despite Caleb's efforts, however, through all of the nine years in which
he remains to handle the import business, Justin never forgives his son nor acknowledges his presence. Now as physically rigid and unbending as he had always been in his conduct and affairs, he ignores Caleb and stares at the wall, "pretending not to hear" (p. 55) his son's "gentle" voice.

During this period when Caleb Peck first distresses his father to the point of causing a seizure and then diligently works to make up for his transgression, his half-brother Daniel has all along obeyed his parents, listened to their opinions and guidance, and memorized "their words" (p. 53). Unlike Caleb, therefore, he has never caused Justin or Laura any anger or disappointment. He seems, in fact, to have lacked the imagination to have done so. Where Caleb was always restless and disobedient, wandering away from home even as a child, Daniel, as mentioned earlier, "obeyed instructions" and stayed "on the front steps" (p. 52) of his residence. As a young man, he dutifully

finished his courses at the University in record time and . . . prepared himself further for his law career by working at the office of Norris & Wiggen, a fine old respectable law firm. He lived at home and often relieved Laura at his father's sickbed, reading aloud to him from the newspaper or Laura's enormous Bible.

(p. 55)

Later, when he courts a spirited young girl--one "Margaret Rose Bell . . . who had come to spend the winter with her cousins, the Edmund Bells"--Anne Tyler suggests Daniel does so with an eye to fulfilling his father's plans "to have a great many descendants" (p. 57). In fact, it is primarily through the intercession of his father--through the purchase of "land . . . in Roland Park" and the hiring of "master builders . . . to supervise the construction of two large houses" there--that Daniel is able to marry
Margaret Rose earlier than expected, even before he could "buy and furnish a house by himself" as was "customarily" the practice for a young man "before he would take a wife" (p. 57).

At the time of her courtship and marriage to Daniel Peck, Margaret Rose Bell, "a Washington girl," is "not yet eighteen years old" (p. 57). Vibrant and playful, she is precisely what Justin seeks for his son, largely because, in Justin's view, she "would be certain to provide descendants" (p. 57). And, to the delight of the older man, Margaret Rose does provide those descendants, six of them in fact.

Why, by the fall of 1905, when Justin Peck's golden oak and wine-colored household set off on a caravan of wagons to Roland Park, Margaret Rose was already holding a baby in her lap and expecting another.

(pp. 57-58)

In 1905, Justin II, the future father of Duncan Peck, is born; "in 1906 Sarah, in 1907 Daniel Jr., in 1908 Marcus, in 1909 Laura May, in 1910 Caroline" (p. 60), the future mother of Justine.

However, in the history of the Peck family, which Searching for Caleb records in detail, the story of Daniel Peck's marriage to Margaret Rose Bell of Washington is of primary importance not only because Margaret Rose bears Daniel six children, thus providing the descendants Justin required. Rather, it is also significant in delineating the character of Daniel Peck—particularly the reserved, stern, and unbending manner he learned from Justin and Laura—and in testifying further to the conflict generated within the Peck family by the presence of a few spirited, joyful individuals like Caleb and Margaret Rose, who happen to be born or, as in this case, marry into the predominantly dull, unimaginative, and conservative Peck clan.
From the earliest days of their marriage, in fact, it is evident that Margaret Rose is quite different from her reserved husband.

A small, vivid girl who generally wore dresses of soft material like flower petals, . . . at any moment of the day she could be seen running up and down the stairs, or flinging open windows to watch some excitement in the streets, or darting into Justin's room to see if he needed anything.

(p. 57)

Her husband, on the other hand, spends large amounts of his time at his new law office, a walnut-paneled suite of rooms with an oil portrait of his father over the mantel.

(p. 58)

Additionally, while the ebullient Margaret Rose spends her time in laughter and conversation, sharing with Caleb "a few old jokes" (p. 58) or delighting Justin with a kiss on the top of his head, Daniel, always serious and well-disciplined, plans for the future. As his house was filling up with children, and his practice was swelling, . . . he already had it in the back of his mind to become a judge someday while his sons carried on with the law firm. When he came home evenings, and Margaret ran up in her rustling, flowery dress to fling her arms around him, he would be remote and sometimes annoyed. His head was still crowded with torts and claims and statutes. He would set her gently aside and continue toward his study in the rear of the house.

(pp. 59-60)

At other times, moreover, when Margaret Rose would be desperate "for someone to talk to" and would invite "her cousins and her girlfriends" (p. 60) for tea, Daniel would be disapproving. Like his parents, but unlike his gentle half-brother Caleb, he did not care for strangers. He was extremely clannish and severe in his judgments of those outside of his family—including the "undisciplined, frivolous, giggling" (p. 60) Bells, Margaret Rose's family.
And nowadays when he came in from a hard day's work he would be sure to find some unknown lady sitting on his leather chair, or a spectacular feather hat on the dining room buffet beneath Sarah Cantleigh's portrait, and once even the brass paperweight moved to the other side of his blotter, when everyone knew that his desk was forbidden territory.

(p. 60)

Typically Peck in his sentiments and views, Daniel, above all, strongly "expected his home to be a refuge from the outside world" (p. 60), which obviously it was not with Margaret Rose and her guests about.

Unlike his brother Caleb, whom Margaret Rose is able to draw out in conversation, Daniel grows increasingly annoyed with his wife until a split in their relationship is inevitable. As the family history goes, Margaret Rose "left home" in 1911 following an argument with Daniel over her taking the children to Washington on the train for her mother's birthday. Daniel didn't think she ought to. After all, she was a Peck now. What did she want with the Bells?

(p. 60)

Then, when Margaret willfully told her husband "she would go anyway," Daniel pointed out that she was her own mistress, certainly, as everyone in his family had noticed more than once, but the children were his. And sure enough, there sat Daniel's children in a little bundle staring up at her, all Peck, blue Peck eyes and hair that matched their skin, solemn measuring Peck expressions, not a trace of Margaret Rose. She could go, Daniel said, but she couldn't take the children. And he expected her back on Saturday evening, as there was church to attend Sunday morning.

(p. 60)

Not surprisingly, Margaret Rose does not return from Washington as Daniel had told her to. In fact, she dies in Washington the next year, a victim in a boarding house fire, without ever seeing her husband or children again. In the feud between Margaret Rose and Daniel Peck, it is clearly the Peck side that wins.
Characteristically, Daniel Peck never speaks of his wife's departure. When she does not return on the Saturday evening he expected her, he makes "no inquiries" (p. 61). Even when a letter arrives from her father the first Wednesday following her departure, he reads it "in silence," then goes up to his room. When he came down again nothing at all was said about it. In a month the children stopped asking for their mother. The baby stopped crying and the older ones went back to their nursery rhymes. Only Caleb seemed to remember Margaret Rose.

Later, also, when Caleb asks Daniel "point blank" "why he didn't go after" Margaret Rose, Daniel looks "straight through" (p. 61) his brother in a manner similar to the treatment Justin had given his son for years. Likewise, when another letter from Washington arrives "in the winter of 1912," Daniel unemotionally tells his children that "Margaret Rose had been killed in a fire" and that "they were to pray for her to be forgiven" (p. 63). The only sign of the effect of this death is an inexplicable restlessness in Daniel, something uncharacteristic of him, in fact. Otherwise, he remained basically unaffected by "all that had happened," including, in 1912, the death of Justin and the disappearance of Caleb, although sometimes, late at night, he would take the Ford and drive aimlessly over the moonlit roads, often ending up in the old section of the city where he had no business any more, and knew no one, and heard nothing but the faint, musical whistling of the streetcar wires in the dark sky overhead.

In the story of Margaret Rose's departure and the break-up of her marriage to Daniel, the role of Caleb Peck demands attention. In his outspokenness about her leaving, he is the only member of the family to express what he feels and to acknowledge the fact that Margaret has gone.
Indeed, he is the only Peck at the time to challenge the clannish, secretive, and unforgiving character of the Peck family. When his efforts to move Daniel fail, he even went to Justin, who certainly loved Margaret Rose too and used to wait every day for the fluttering of her petal skirts against the banister. Now Justin merely closed his eyes and pretended not to hear. "But why?" Caleb asked him. "Don't you care? Life is not the same here when Maggie Rose is gone."

In all the accounts of family history, told by all the aunts and uncles and upstairs maids, that was the only direct quotation of Caleb's that was ever handed down. Two generations later it was to ring in Justine's ears like poetry, taking on more depth and meaning than Caleb had probably intended. But Justin was not moved at all, and he kept his eyes shut very tightly and waited for his son to leave.

(p. 61)

And, indeed, Caleb does leave. In fact, his words about "Maggie Rose" are almost the last anyone hears from him— that is, until 1973. As the family history goes,

On Saturday afternoon in the spring of 1912, Daniel was standing at the bay window watching Justin Two ride his bicycle. It was a heavy black iron one, hard for Two to manage, but he had just got the hang of it and he teetered proudly down the driveway. From out of nowhere, Daniel saw a small, clear picture of Caleb on his velocipede merrily pedaling after a flutist on a sidewalk in old Baltimore. The memory was so distinct that he left his house and crossed the yard to his mother's and climbed the stairway to Caleb's room. But Caleb was not there. Nor was he in the kitchen, where he most often ate his meals; nor anywhere else in the house, nor outdoors in the stable. And the Ford was parked in the side yard; he wouldn't be downtown. Daniel felt uneasy. He asked the others—the children and Laura. They didn't know. In fact, the last time anyone could remember for sure he had been walking off down the driveway three days earlier, carrying his fiddle. The children saw him go. "Goodbye now," he called to them. "Goodbye, Uncle Caleb."

(p. 62)

Only Laura Baum had noticed her son's growing,
long, unbreakable silences, the likes of which she had not seen before and would not again until the days of Caleb's great-nephew Duncan, as yet unborn and unthought of. She tried to shame him into more normal behavior. "Where is your common courtesy? At least think of the family." But he would only wander off, not hearing, and sometimes he would not reappear for days.
(p. 62)

Thus, Caleb Peck, the only Peck of his generation with any genuine love of life, imagination, and feeling—in many ways, the only true individual in the Peck family of his time—"appeared to be dimming and wearing through, almost transparent," until "the music" he was forced to play "in the stable" because of his father's bitterness "thinned and shredded until you almost couldn't hear it" and Caleb Peck himself disappeared quietly that day "in the spring of 1912" (p. 62), not to be seen or heard of again by any member of the Peck family until 1973, the year in which the present-day action of Searching for Caleb takes place.

As the novel opens, the search for the missing Caleb has been under­way for fourteen years. The opening scene takes the reader on one of many journeys initiated by Daniel Peck and his granddaughter Justine—a family vagabond named, ironically, after her great-grandfather, the stern Justin Montague Peck—in order to find some clue to the whereabouts of the missing Caleb. Here, Daniel and Justine, referred to through the opening pages of the novel only as "the fortune teller and her grand­father," head "to New York on an Amtrak train" (p. 3) in hope of questioning the widow of one of Caleb's former classmates at the Salter Academy. With an obituary notice of Paul Tabor's death in his hand, the elderly and now partially deaf Daniel, ninety-two at the time the novel opens, solemnly rides along, carefully considering if his half-brother has stayed in touch with his friends and classmates from half a century before—as the
unchanging and steadfast Daniel himself would have. At the same time, he openly criticizes the vagabonds who, like Caleb and Paul Tabor and Daniel's own granddaughter Justine, have moved away from home and family. As Daniel describes the type to Justine, they are people with "'no stamina,'" no "'patience'" or endurance or willingness to "stay around to fight it out or live it down or sit it through, whatever was required." (p. 6)

Seeking "'newness,'" the young man of the type, in Daniel's view, "goes to a distant city instead of staying close to home, ... gets a job, switches friends, widens his circle of acquaintances. Marries a girl from a family no one knows, lives in a house of unusual architecture, names his children foreign names that never were in his family in any preceding generation. He takes to traveling, buys winter homes and summer homes and vacation cottages in godforsaken states like Florida where none of us has ever been." (p. 6)

Worse, as Daniel sees the situation, after the death of the traveler's parents and "'all his people, ... there's no one you can ask any more'" (p. 6) about where he is or what he is up to. Even his own death is unnoticed by those who used to care about him or knew him as a child. Not surprisingly, Daniel Peck's search for his brother has been futile. Besides being Peckishly closed-minded about the value of change and newness, he either ignores or has forgotten the most outstanding traits of Caleb's personality, particularly his love of music, especially the disreputable sort.

Ironically, Daniel Peck initiates his search for Caleb only after recognizing the presence of unavoidable change and loss in his own life. With the death of Laura Baum in 1958, he experiences an emotional loss and a recognition of his own mortality for the first time. Aware after her
death, though not before, that Laura "was the last person on this earth who called him Daniel," that, indeed,

*she had journeyed through all his life with him, minus the first few months: seventy-seven years . . . and that she was the only person who remembered his kid soldier doll, and his father's way of widening his eyes when displeased, and the rough warm Belgian blocks that used to pave the streets downtown.*

(p. 151)

Daniel feels "wounded" by her death:

*struck as if for the first time by the fact that the world kept progressing and people aged and died and nothing in life was permanent.*

(pp. 151-152)

In fact, Daniel recognizes Laura as part of his own youth and a shared familial experience and past that no longer exist—a time remembered now by no other living person, with the possible exception of his long-absent brother Caleb.

With this recognition of loss and change, of the fleetingness of life—recognitions that many of Anne Tyler's characters make, including the youthful Ben Hawkes in *If Morning Ever Comes*—Daniel Peck acquires for the first time some freedom from the injunctions that his childhood, especially the stern Laura Baum, imposed upon him. He begins to remember for the first time in years many of the people family pride and blindness to change had forbidden him to consider: his "little brown German step-grandfather," "Sara Cantleigh's family, who cried whenever they saw him," and, most importantly, "that silent, musical brother of his with the tilted head" (p. 152) and eyes.

A retired attorney and judge at the time of his stepmother's death, "a sensible man" (p. 152), reserved and dignified, Daniel Peck is soon able to dismiss these disturbing thoughts and feelings and to recover from
his sense of loss. However, in the process of sorting Laura's belongings, an act he initially puts off for some time, Daniel encounters once again part of that past he has lost. For one thing, Laura's

neat drawers, with everything arranged so precisely and all for nothing, took away his interest in life.

(p. 152)

And then there is Sulie, the aging family servant. She too seems to have lost an interest in living and refuses "the oval brooch that contained a plait of Laura's mother's hair" (p. 152) which Daniel offers her. Most importantly, Daniel discovers a hidden part of Laura Baum's life and a remnant of his own past:

In a desk drawer behind a stack of stationery he found an ancient brittle advertisement for Baum's Fine Cutlery. Beneath it an envelope that looked as if it had been handled a great deal. Inside was a photograph of Caleb playing the cello in a stable loft.9

(pp. 152-153)

To Daniel's knowledge, it is "the only picture of Caleb in existence" (p. 153).

He had never seen it before, but from the poor focus and the haphazard composition he guessed that it was the work of Margaret Rose that summer she got her Brownie. For a few months she had wandered everywhere, photographing the most unlikely things: Sulie stringing beans, Sarah on her rocking horse, Lafleur Boudrault, the Creole gardener and husband of Sulie who taught Caleb ragtime playing cigar-box guitar and Mark with a mouthful of honeysuckle blossoms.

(p. 153)

Thus, the photograph of Caleb not only stirs Daniel's memories of his half-brother, but also of his wife. Indeed, although "all traces of Margaret Rose had been systematically destroyed long" before Daniel discovers the photograph, in both a real and in a symbolic way, the picture of Caleb becomes "a permanent record of her hasty way of doing things" and is like
"a picture of her too" (p. 153). Even

her presence could be inferred from the head-on, quizzical look Caleb directed to the camera-holder—an expression he reserved for Margaret Rose.

(p. 153)

Confronted so vividly with the supposedly forgotten past and the wife and brother he has not thought about for years, the reserved and "sensible" Daniel Peck becomes for the first time in his life "a little crazy":

for several evenings in a row he sat alone in his bedroom studying the photograph, testing the new feeling of sorrow that drove straight through his ribcage. And when that was absorbed (not lessened, just adjusted to) . . . he began wondering if this photo didn't have some secret message to it. It was impossible for such an object just to be, wasn't it?

(pp. 153-154)

Experiencing for the first time both an awareness of his own mortality and a surge of feelings he was taught as a child to suppress and had obediently withheld, Daniel studies the photograph of Caleb for clues to its significance and to the meaning of his own past experiences. He pores over

the angle of Caleb's hat, the set of his cello, the 'shreds left on the stable wall by some old poster

(p. 154)

as though, through study alone, the past might come alive again and Caleb reappear to solve the puzzle of pain and questioning the aging Daniel is experiencing for the first time.

Significantly, Daniel at first hides the photograph of Caleb from "his bachelor son and his two spinster daughters" (p. 154) with whom he lives. Knowing his children to be perfect models of reserve, respectability, and highly valued family pride he himself taught them, Daniel is reluctant to expose his interest in Caleb and the emotional vulnerability that accompanies it. But, then, he does show the picture to Two's wife,
Lucy, "who played a little piano still," in order to ask "what note" Caleb, identified only as "this man," "is playing" (p. 154). Outraged by her response that "it looks . . . as if he's just resting his bow on the strings" and not actually "playing any note" (p. 154), Daniel begins to experience the pressure of his own children, clearly "all Peck" (p. 60) in their insistence on ignoring the past, especially the long-vanished Caleb. After asking Lucy about the photograph of Caleb, he immediately knew he had made a mistake. For Lucy, of course, had to go and tell Two, and Two out of all the family was the most certain to recognize a description of Caleb. Then everybody knew, and everybody asked him what he thought he was up to. Caleb was best forgotten. He was surely dead by now. What did it matter what note he had played on a summer's day in 1910?

Thus, with all of his family "discussing him behind his back," Daniel Peck becomes, as he tells his granddaughter Justine, "non compos mentis" (p. 155) in the eyes of the family. He becomes, in effect, a family renegade, as his half-brother Caleb had over fifty years before him.

Ironically, this position finds the once consistently reasonable and predictable Daniel not changed exactly, but rueful, and clearly and outspokenly, for the first time in his life, on the opposite side from the other members of his family—here his own children. Daniel, as he sees himself, is on Caleb's side, the brother whom none of the others "count . . . any more. To them he's a deserter!" (p. 155). In contrast, "'to me,'" he explains to Justine,

"he's still a member here. He goes back to nearly as long ago as I can recollect. I just like to think of him, is all."

(p. 155)

Then, hoping to find an ally in his granddaughter, Daniel speaks of his longing for the past, specifically to see his brother Caleb again and to...
re-experience more fully the early days of his own life. "I would give
all the remaining years of my life," he tells Justine, "if I could
set eyes on him again" (p. 155).

"If I could just walk to church with him once more, . . .
only this time, paying closer attention, don't you see.
If I could pass by the Salter Academy and look in the
window and see him wave, or hear him play that foolish
messy music of his on the piano in the parlor--if they
could just give me back one little scrap of time,
that's all I ask."

(p. 156)

It is not surprising in this novel about closeness and separation,
time and loss, that Anne Tyler has Daniel Peck turn to his granddaughter
Justine to express his feelings, nor that he "thought she might under­
stand his viewpoint" (p. 156). A fortune teller by profession, sensitive
and highly intuitive, she learned as a child the value of family and
closeness, especially the warmth and comfort Daniel Peck could bring into
her life and that of her mother.

The only child of Caroline, the "baby" of Daniel's "six children"
(p. 64), and Sam Mayhew, an outsider--Daniel's other two daughters never
marry and hence remain in Baltimore and retain the family name--Justine
spent her earliest childhood isolated in Philadelphia, with the exception,
of course, of the summers, when she was taken to visit the family in
Baltimore. "Exiled in Philadelphia" (p. 65), as her mother frequently
described her life away from Baltimore, as a child Justine was, therefore,
something of "an outsider" (p. 70) herself.

Her last name was Mayhew. She lived in Philadelphia. She
did not always understand her cousins' jokes. And
though they drew her into every game, she had the feeling
that they were trying to slow down for her in some way.
She envied them their quick, bubbling laughter and their
golden tans. Occasionally, for one split second, she
allowed herself to imagine her parents painlessly dead
and some uncle or other adopting her, changing her name to Peck and taking her to live forever in Roland Park with its deep curly shadows and its pools of sunlight.

(pp. 70-71)

In contrast to her summers in Roland Park, Justine's childhood in Philadelphia "was dark and velvety and . . . smelled of dust. There were bearded men under all the furniture" and "blue worms" that "squiggled through the blackness" (p. 64). Instead of Roland Park with its sunlight, its "rustling . . . trees and twittering . . . birds" (p. 69), Philadelphia, where Justine lived, was

a wide expanse of blackened brick apartment houses and dying trees in cages and distant factory smokestacks.

(p. 64)

Much of her childhood was spent, consequently, not outside on the rolling lawn of "her great-grandmother's white brick house" (p. 69), but inside a darkened living room "with the curtains shut so that even to herself she was only a pale glimmer" (p. 64).

Typical of the lonely heroines in other Anne Tyler novels and unlike her Roland Park cousins, who had both the advantages and the incumbent disadvantages of living within a large and very close family structure—including not only their parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins, but also their Grandfather Peck and that family matriarch Laura Baum—Justine had no strong familial support as a child. In fact, she is described as having frequently found herself "marooned on a scratchy brocade chair in the living room" for "days in a row" (p. 66) because her mother had taken to her bed in a bout of depression and self-indulgence from which only Daniel Peck could rouse her. Locked away from her mother in this fashion and isolated from her father, Justine spent her time puzzling over what she might have done to cause her mother's despair and what
"magic password" (p. 66) she had to give before she would be allowed to enter her mother's room again.

Not surprisingly, Justine felt particularly close to her grandfather and learned as a child to associate his visits with periods of change and comfort. Moreover, although his trips to Philadelphia were very brief, "just long enough to get his daughter to her feet again" (p. 68), he managed to have time for his grandchild as well. "A bony man in a three-piece pinstriped suit, with fading hair like aged gardenia petals," he would let Justine wind his "gold wafer of a watch" and always "brought her a sack of horehound drops" (p. 68). So recurring is his behavior that Justine was certain that no matter what, even if he had rushed through fires and floods and train wrecks, he would not forget to stop at Lexington Market first for a sack of horehound drops and he would not fail to cup her head in that considering way of his when he had arrived.

(p. 68)

Once, in fact, Daniel Peck even made a trip to Philadelphia especially for Justine.

She was supposed to be starting kindergarten, the first time she would ever be away from home alone. She refused to go. She wouldn't even get dressed. (pp. 68-69)

Unable to manage her own daughter as she is unable to manage herself, Caroline called on her father to help, and Daniel Peck, usually stern and so busy that he always made his other visits on weekends, arrived on a weekday to take his granddaughter to school. Gently but awkwardly he dressed her and "even did her braids" (p. 69). Then after helping her into her coat, he walked her to school and waited until she entered, so that when she had climbed the steps she looked back and found him still waiting here, squinting against the
sunlight. Forever after that, the dark, homely, virtuous taste of horehound drops reminded her of the love and sorrow that ached in the back of her throat on that first day in the outside world.

(p. 69)

In the expanded relationships of the individual in the family which Anne Tyler presents in *Searching for Caleb*, that of Justine and her grandfather Daniel Peck is especially significant. Central figures in the novel—Justine is, in fact, the novel's only heroine—they not only initiate the search for Caleb, part of the central plot of the novel, but also bring into sharp focus the contrasts in character which mark the Peck family, as we have seen, from its beginnings. Here, these contrasts become particularly noteworthy, for they exist not only, as previously seen, between members of the same generation—between brother and brother, for example—or between spouses, or, indeed, between parent and child. Justine and Daniel Peck are separated by one entire generation, the equivalent of a whole lifetime, and, yet they manage to share in a joint undertaking, the search for Caleb, albeit for different reasons. Likewise, as Justine's early experiences with her grandfather indicate, they share a closeness not evident in other members of the Peck family, with the occasional exception of a few individuals, such as Maggie Rose and Caleb Peck, who resist the family's constraints against joy, intimacy, and caring.

One of two present-day inheritors of her great-uncle Caleb's nomadic, joyful spirit—the other is her husband, Duncan Peck, Justine's first cousin whom she married despite their close familial relationship or perhaps, being members of the clannish Peck family, because of it—and a generous dose of her grandmother Maggie Rose's vibrancy and energy, Justine
Peck is clearly a hasty, haphazard woman unlike most of the other members of her family in temperament and spirit. "Always in a hurry" (p. 19), Justine gave an impression of energy burning and wasting. She moved very fast and accomplished very little. She would open . . . drawers for no reason and slam . . . them shut, pull . . . down . . . a yellowed windowshade and let it snap up again. (pp. 17-18)

She runs "circles" (p. 18) around her supposedly "restless" husband (p. 7), who, although he shares with Justine a sense of adventure and fun, moves "differently" than she: "slower and more deliberately" (p. 18).

From the opening scene of Searching for Caleb, Anne Tyler suggests the contrasts that mark differences in Justine's character and her grandfather's—and, thereby, also the contrasts between Justine and Daniel's children, the "regular" members of the Peck family. "A lanky, weedy woman" (p. 4), she and her grandfather share "identical, peaky white faces" (p. 3)—the blue eyes and coloring that belong to Pecks of every generation—but there the similarities end. For while Grandfather Peck is elegantly dressed in "a black suit, pearl-gray suspenders, and a very old-fashioned, expensive-looking pinstriped collarless shirt" (p. 3), and is clearly a well-mannered elderly gentleman, his granddaughter wears "a faded shift," "a Breton hat" (p. 4) of some years, and a "brown coat with . . . an uneven hemline" (p. 11). Her hair hangs in "streaky ribbons" (p. 11) and, unlike the refined Daniel Peck, she has "a ramshackle way of walking and a sharp, merry voice" (p. 5). Justine also appears youthful and at first glance . . . could be taken for a young girl, but . . . for the fine lines beginning to show in her skin, and the faded blue of her eyes and the veined, parched, forty-year-old hands with the scratched wedding band looking three sizes too large below one
knobby knuckle.  

Where Daniel Peck rides solemnly and quietly along on the train taking him to New York, "his deep-socketed eyes fixed upon the seat in front of him" (p. 3), Justine can be seen restlessly reading a National Geographic from "back to front," flicking "the pages after barely a glance, rapidly swinging one crossed foot" (p. 4). "Halfway through" (p. 4), she impulsively rummages through her large straw carry-all, a "ramshackle" bag that houses not only magazines and Luden's cough drops, the closest thing to old-fashioned horehound drops Justine can find, but also the tools of what her grandfather considers "her mysterious, disreputable profession" (p. 4): "a deck of playing cards wrapped in a square of old, old silk" (p. 16).

Importantly, Justine, unlike her grandfather, is also a lover of travel, adventure, and change. Where he has spent his entire life with his family, almost all of his ninety-two years in one place and only in his later years took up residence with Justine and her husband and daughter in order to facilitate the search for Caleb and avoid the interference of his children, Justine has moved a great deal in her relatively short lifetime. Besides the summers she passed in Baltimore away from "the dark, bearded world of Philadelphia" (p. 72) where her earliest childhood years were spent, at nine she moved to Roland Park with her mother while her father served in the army during World War II. And, since her marriage to Duncan when she was about nineteen, she has moved from first one town to another as her husband explored various occupations and learned a variety of skills—most noticeably unlike his staid uncles and father in Roland Park. Even at the time Searching for Caleb opens,
Justine and Duncan and their Peckish, orderly, and neat daughter Meg are living in a fictional town named Semple, Virginia, but they have lived, we are told, "in another place last year and another the year before that" (p. 7). Indeed, they are scheduled to move, and do, to Caro Mill, Maryland, the next week—though not, it should be observed, with the willing acquiescence of Meg. By the end of the novel, they have abandoned their household possessions entirely in order to join a traveling caravan circus.

Through all of these moves, Justine unpacks fewer and fewer boxes and grows increasingly confused about the places she has been. "Sometimes," in fact,

all these places would run together in her mind.
She would mentally locate friends in towns those friends had never set foot in, . . . /or/ await a visit from a client whom she had left two years . . . /before/ without a forwarding address. She would ransack the telephone book for a doctor or a dentist or a plumber who was actually three hundred miles away and three or four or fourteen years in the past.11

(p. 7)

However, despite the confusion they bring, Justine relishes these changes, and, at one point in the novel, she impetuously tells a client whose fortune she happens to read spontaneously in a small roadside diner only moments after meeting the woman,

"change. I don't needs cards for that. Take the change. Always change."

(p. 29)

In contrast, the elderly Daniel Peck, as we have seen, is openly critical of change—"this dissatisfaction" and craving for "newness" (p. 6) that, in his view, cause people to leave home and family.

Although he lived with Justine and made all those
moves with her he called it visiting; he considered himself a citizen still of Baltimore, his birthplace. All other towns were ephemeral, no-account; he shuffled through them absent-mindedly like a man passing a string of shanties on the way to his own sturdy house. When he arrived in Baltimore (for Thanksgiving or Christmas or the Fourth of July) he would heave a sigh and lower the sharp narrow shoulders that he held, at all other times, so tightly hunched. The brackets around his mouth would relax somewhat. He would set his old leather suitcase down with finality, as if it held all his earthly goods and not just a shirt and a change of underwear and a scruffy toothbrush. "There's no place in the world like Baltimore, Maryland," he would say.

(p. 7)

Significantly, although she is unlike her grandfather in her view of change and her experiences with moving, Justine is the "only" member of the Peck family—indeed, the only person Daniel knows— who would hop into the car with him at a moment's notice and go anywhere, and talk to anyone and interpret all the mumbled answers. And when he was discouraged, Justine was the one who bolstered his confidence again.

(p. 157)

It is Justine who starts her Grandfather Peck on his search for Caleb, for "in November" of the year in which Laura Baum dies and Daniel first discovers the picture of Caleb and shows it to Justine, she sends him his first newspaper clipping, an article on education from the Honora, Maryland, Herald showing a picture of "the author's own school, Salter Academy in Baltimore, around the turn of the century" (p. 156). With it, Daniel "took off for Honora within the hour, driving his V-8 Ford," and "arrived at Justine's house waving the clipping" (p. 156), anxious to begin his search for one Ashley Highham, the author of the newspaper article.

During that first year and after, Daniel Peck and his granddaughter begin to clock up miles on his Ford—"more miles," in fact, "in a year
"than" in "all its past life" (p. 157).

And bit by bit, as the rest of the family grew more disapproving (first arguing reasonably, then trying to distract . . . /Daniel/ with television and scrapbooks and homemade pie, /and/ finally stealing his car keys whenever his back was turned) he began staying for longer periods of time with Justine. Only visiting, of course. It would never do for Caleb to come home unexpectedly and find him vanished without a trace (p. 157)
as Caleb himself had done.

His house still waited for him in Baltimore, his daughters still kept his room made up. But Justine was the only one who would travel with him anywhere at any time.

After a while, Daniel, like his hasty, vagabond granddaughter, begins to "enjoy the search itself, the endless rattling rides, the motionless blue sky outside the window of his train" (p. 158). At first, like Justine, he was in such a hurry. He thought he was right around the corner from success. . . . Then when he traveled clear across the state to find Caleb's oldest, dearest friend and learned that he had last seen Caleb in 1909, he grew morose and bitter. "I always assumed," he told Justine, "that people keep in touch, that if they lose touch they go back and pick it up again, don't you know."

(p. 158)

Going back and picking up the pieces again is, of course, exactly what Daniel Peck himself is doing—going in search of possibly the last living member of his generation and a part of the past he has somehow lost track of. Then, as his search stretches into years, Daniel Peck changes: he "learned to concentrate solely on the act of traveling" (p. 158), as his granddaughter does. Even though he does not find Caleb, he
at least accomplishes part of his goal: he learns to relax and pay "closer attention" (p. 156) to experiences as he lives them. Always a markedly rational man, a former judge who "still gave the impression of judging everything that came his way" (p. 5), on his train rides now, Daniel Peck even indulges his imagination with considerations of how Caleb "himself" may "have ridden" the "very train" (p. 158) Daniel now rides on his search.

These changes in Daniel are not, it should be added, a reversal of his character. In fact, in the telling of her story of family history and adventure, of the growth of the individual within the family and the conflicts that growth generates, Anne Tyler is careful to show how Daniel's late-life quest for his missing half-brother grows out of his earlier commitment to the values of family and home. Indeed, in many ways, Daniel's search is a delayed response to the question asked in his childhood by his stepmother, "Daniel, have you seen Caleb?" (p. 52)

Not surprisingly, when Caleb is located—not by Daniel, of course, but by a detective hired by Justin II and Marcus in hopes of putting an end to their father's "endless, fruitless searches" (p. 208)—Daniel writes a bitter, accusing letter to his brother, now a patient in a nursing home. It has taken Eli Everjohn, the detective, a total of eighty-one days to find the long-absent Caleb, not a fraction of the time invested by Daniel, and the sudden end to his quest leaves the older man somehow defeated. More importantly, the discovery that a member of his family, his own half-brother, is institutionalized in a public nursing home angers him. Expectedly, he reveals that anger and his disappointment to Caleb. In part struggling to "let bygones be bygones,"
he asks Caleb bluntly, "in what way did the family ever injure you?" (p. 246) and attempts to exonerate his father and stepmother for their business-like manner and strict rules of behavior. Chastising his brother for failure to stay close to the family, he writes:

Of course, it is no disgrace to find oneself residing in a Home, if alternatives are lacking and one's family has all passed on. In your case I do not know about the alternatives, but I do know that your family has not all passed on. They are mostly alive and would never consider allowing one of their number to enter a Home for any reason whatsoever. You must surely have guessed this and yet, by some manner of logic which utterly confounds me, chose not to call upon your own flesh and blood in an hour of need.

(pp. 245-246)

The false starts, as well as the entire letter from which this passage is taken, are recorded in the novel, revealing Daniel's difficulty in addressing his brother after so many years--and his unfailing commitment to his family. In writing to Caleb, Daniel is, we learn, blind to his brother's existence apart from the family. At one point, it is clear that he assumes Caleb would know nothing or very little about airplanes or how "the Ford has developed" (p. 245)--thus also assuming Caleb has been removed in time as well as place, as, indeed, he has in Daniel's memory. When Caleb receives this letter, he is struck by its coldness and evocation of the past.

It was 1973.

Yet the language in this letter came from an earlier age, and the stiff, self-conscious voice of the young Daniel Peck rang clearly in Caleb's ears. All the old burdens were dropped upon him: reproaches, forgiveness, reproaches again. An endless advancing and retreating and readvancing against which no counterattack was possible.

(p. 279)

In effect, at eighty-eight, Caleb Peck is once more faced with the
conflicts of his youth and life with his family—reminded "of all the ways he had disappointed them" (p. 280).

Eli Everjohn locates Caleb Peck on "Saturday, August twenty-fifth" (p. 242). He had begun his search on the sixth of June, the date of Daniel's Peck's ninety-third birthday and also the day Eli's services were presented as a birthday gift to Daniel from his sons. The story of Caleb's life after leaving Baltimore is extensive, Eli's investigative work thorough, and Anne Tyler's writing of that story a testament to her skill in handling the detective story genre—particularly in a light vein. In brief, Eli gains her first directive from Sulie, the aging family servant, who had "known the answer" to where Caleb had gone "all along" (p. 237) but was never asked, largely because the Pecks never thought she would know, nor were they a questioning kind of people. Such matters were better left alone. Eli's first clue, of course, is the most obvious fact about Caleb Peck's character, that detail that his family consistently overlooked. As Sulie reiterates, "'Mr. Caleb was a musical man'" (p. 235). With the information Sulie provides and the knowledge of Caleb's musical bent, Eli journeys to New Orleans and is there able eventually to locate someone who, although he does not remember Caleb's name, does, in fact, remember his music and his life there—especially his years of existence as someone called "The Stringtail Man," a street musician who followed behind a blind guitarist and singer. Without much difficulty, Eli Everjohn finds Caleb's whereabouts: "Evergreen County Home for the Elderly, two fourteen Hamilton Street, Box Hill, Louisiana" (p. 243). As instructed, of course, he does not contact Caleb directly. That is for Daniel Feck to do, and he does so on August 27, 1973, the date of his letter. Then, with an irony typical of her other novels, Anne Tyler has
Daniel Peck die of a heart attack before seeing his brother again—even, in fact, before receiving any response to his letter.

Shortly before his death, which takes place on September fourth, Daniel Peck speaks of the disappointment that has come to characterize his life. Accusing Justine of unfounded cheerfulness without "'common sense'" and Duncan of expecting him not to "'say how I feel,'" Daniel tells his grandchildren,

"In my childhood I was trained to hold things in, you see. But I thought I was holding them until a certain time. I assumed that someday, somewhere, I would be given the opportunity to spend all that saved-up feeling. When will that be?"

(p. 250)

Tragically, for Daniel, neither Justine nor Duncan can respond to his question, a very late challenge to the values and rules instilled in him in his early childhood, and the words he speaks on his deathbed a short time after the above incident bring into focus both Daniel's bitterness and disappointment as well as one of the principal underlying themes of the novel—the pointlessness of the Peck family's restraint and unquestioning obedience to traditional, familial values. Trembling and pale, Daniel Peck looks at his granddaughter as if "he seemed to be asking something from her," but his final words more clearly convey his feelings:

"Well," he said finally, "I had certainly hoped for more than this out of life."

(p. 253)

With the death of her Grandfather Peck, Justine is faced with abandoning her search or continuing it. She continues, but this time for her own reasons. In fact, at the funeral of her grandfather, Justine recognizes she has lost more than just Daniel Peck. She has also lost part of herself and is painfully aware of how, of all the family, "only . . .

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was different" (p. 257). Her cousins are older but unchanged. Awkward and frustrated in talking to the people she once felt close to, Justine recognizes that over the years, through her separation from the family, she has somehow speeded up with every year, gathering momentum. Racing toward some undefined future and letting the past roll up behind her, swooping Meg along under one arm but neglecting to listen to her or to ask if she wanted this trip at all. So Meg grew up alone, self-reared . . .; and Grandfather Peck became ever more lost and bewildered stumbling through a series of paper shanties. And Justine woke one day to wonder how it had happened: what she had mislaid was Justine herself.

(p. 258)

As a consequence of her realization, where previously she had undertaken the search for Caleb with her grandfather out of a love of travel and adventure, "the point of the search" being "the trips themselves" (p. 216), now that Daniel Peck is dead, Justine renews the search as part of her own journey toward identity. Locating Caleb and bringing him home becomes, in effect, a way of finding the self she has mislaid; the sense of belonging and identity she craved as a child, achieved through residence in Roland Park, and, then, through her life with Duncan and her own rejection of the Pecks and their stifling ways, had somehow lost.

Through her marriage to Duncan Peck, Justine both aligned herself with the Peck family of Roland Park—literally fulfilling her childhood fantasy of acquiring the Peck name—at the same time she rejected them, for, by marrying Duncan, she was also joining forces with the most markedly rebellious and individualistic Peck of the fourth generation, a true inheritor of his great-uncle Caleb's waywardness. From his earliest days, Duncan Peck has represented a challenge to the family's rules,
values, and assumptions. As a child, he was considered "an evil, evil boy" whom "all his cousins worshipped," primarily because, unlike them, he was "prankish and reckless and wild" (p. 73). Moreover, like his great-uncle Caleb, "he had a habit of disappearing," and he "was always dragging in strangers" to play,

the wrong kind of strangers at that, ten-year-old boys with tobacco breath and BB guns and very poor grammar. His cousins took piano lessons and hammered out "Country Gardens" faithfully for one half hour a day, but all Duncan would play was a dented Hohner harmonica—"Chattanooga Choo Choo" complete with whistles and a chukka-chukka and a country-sounding twang that delighted the children and made the grownups flinch. His great-grandma complained that he was impudent and dishonest. It was perfectly obvious that he was lying to any adult who asked him a question, and his lies were extreme, an insult to the intelligence. Also he was accident-prone. To his cousins that was the best part of all.

(p. 73)

After Justine moves to Roland Park with her mother, an imaginative child herself, she is attracted, like her other cousins, to Duncan and thrilled by his behavior. As a teenager, he teaches her to drive, not the family black Ford, but his own car: "a forty dollar green 1933 Graham Paige that smelled suspiciously of beer" (p. 77). The driving lessons are, of course, a service to Duncan too, because after them, he has Justine chauffeur him and his girlfriend—"a dimestore clerk named Gloriatta de Merino" (p. 77)—around town so that they can neck in the backseat. Most importantly, however, it is Duncan Peck who challenges Justine's acceptance of the family and their Peckish way of thinking and doing things, and it is he who plays on her earliest doubt that perhaps "she had . . . missed out on something . . . by choosing to be her mother's child alone" (p. 72). In Duncan's view, clearly she had, and he tells her at one point that he sees "the four brick houses" (p. 80) in
which the family lives as similar to the life style of

"hamsters. Or baby mice, or gerbils. Any of those little animals that cluster in one corner piled on top of each other even when they have a great big cage they are free to spread out in."

(p. 81)

Later, after Duncan has disturbed the family even more by enrolling at "Hopkins instead of the University" and studying "science instead of law" (p. 31), he and Justine grow increasingly closer. Then, when he takes to reading Dostoevsky—to the dismay of his father, Justin II, who actually comments that he does not understand why his son is reading because "'I thought he was scientific!'" (p. 83)—Duncan rejects the family to move to a room no one but Justine knows the location of, and only Justine visits. During this period, the challenges of Duncan to Justine's way of thinking about the family increase as does her own discontent. Then, although everyone in the family accepted Duncan's absence, the changes in Justine's behavior are not so easily explained. She grows increasingly quarrelsome with her family until, in "March of 1953" (p. 98), Duncan returns home in order to announce his engagement to Justine, the young cousin whom he has seduced, both physically and mentally.

After their marriage, Duncan continues to draw Justine away from her family by moving her not only away from Roland Park and out to the country, but also entirely away from the notion of a settled existence. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the couple moves to a new town almost every year after they are married. In each new place, Duncan takes up a new and different trade—including such things as goat farming, organic gardening, and the repair and sale of antique tools and farm instruments—only to grow bored and restless again once the challenge of the new wears thin.
During these periods, he becomes silent and withdrawn, much like his great-uncle Caleb, and takes to drinking and playing solitaire. Only another move, a new adventure and challenge, sparks his interest again.

Through the years, Justine herself grows increasingly restless and eccentric—less attached to her family and their traditional values and much more adaptable. At first, of course, she is resistant to moving from town to town. Her parents die within two days of each other—her father of a heart attack, her mother a suicide victim—and at first she blames Duncan for taking her so far from home. But, then, she takes up the disreputable occupation of fortune telling—a trade she reluctantly tried her hand at in high school during a fair—and she herself becomes increasingly attached to travel and meeting strangers, especially those with varied and colorful pasts and problems for her to solve. With each move, she leaves more and more boxes unpacked and does less housekeeping, until, finally, she owns only a broom and sponge mop, one or two pots, and, to the horror of her Aunt Lucy, only one set of sheets.

It is during this period that Meg, Duncan's and Justine's only child, is born. Named after her great-grandmother, Margaret Rose, she is the last of the Peck line and the only Peck of the fifth generation, and, not surprisingly, she carries the contrasts in character that mark the Peck family from its beginnings into yet another generation. Described near the beginning of the novel as "a neat, pretty girl in a shirtwaist dress, with short hair held in place by a sterling silver barrette," Meg is always "scrubbed, shining, buttoned, combed" (p. 19), unlike her somewhat scruffy and reckless parents. Where they are also joyful, energetic, and carefree, she is serious and plodding, just like the Pecks of Roland Park and
noticeably unlike her namesake, Margaret Rose Bell. With her great-grandfather, Daniel Peck, she seeks regularity and, above all, "to live like other people" (p. 164). Thus, where to Justine moving is an adventure, the idea of her being a nomad "romantic" sounding, to Meg it is "ruining our lives!" (p. 164). Like other Pecks before her, she is the antithesis of the few family renegades, her parents and her great-great-uncle Caleb—whom, of course, she has never seen—who thrive on strangeness and irregularity and who are, like Meg's father Duncan, "fascinated by randomness" (p. 20). Partly as a consequence of her frustration with her parents, Meg elopes late in the novel with a milquetoast minister named Milsom, a man totally dominated by his mother, with whom the couple will live. The result is that she decidedly rejects the vagabond lifestyle of her parents and disappoints them in much the same way they disappointed the Pecks—not so much by their marriage, which was, after all, within the family and therefore more acceptable than marriage to a stranger, but by the unsettled manner in which they chose to live.

The story of Meg's elopement, of her parents' visit to her after her unhappy marriage, and of Daniel Peck's death and funeral fills a large portion of the last pages of Searching for Caleb. So also does Caleb's own story. How he got to the nursing home in Louisiana, his sixty-one years apart from the Pecks, and the record of his escape with Justine are given careful attention, as are the disappointment and difficulty Justine faces once Caleb has returned with her. For, as the early history of the Peck family testifies, Caleb is strikingly unlike the other members of his family, especially his half-brother Daniel, whom Justine somehow hoped to replace with her great-uncle. In fact, Caleb, the original family
renegade, has none of his brother's manners. Indeed, as Justine com-
plains to Duncan, "He doesn't have a trace of the family left in him and
he tells me so as if he's proud of it" (p. 292). In truth, Caleb

had gone . . . far afield. . . . He had journeyed such
a distance from his family. Now it appeared that the
return trip was not that easy, maybe even impossible.
He had a hundred habits and qualities that the Pecks
would never have tolerated, skills they neither possessed
nor wanted, bits of knowledge they would not know existed.
(p. 290)

Unlike Daniel's, Caleb's clothes "looked scruffy and poorly cut" (p. 284),
and "he was not above accepting a slug or two of bourbon" (p. 285) direct
from the bottle Duncan offers him. In fact, Caleb Peck is so different
from what Justine expected, so unlike his half-brother, that she accuses
him of not being Caleb Peck at all, but an imposter, although in essence
he has done exactly what Justine herself has--changed "by degrees,
traveling only where led, merely proving herself adaptable, endlessly
adaptable" (p. 291). Only Duncan sees the ways in which Caleb has remained
truly a part of the family, and, as he tells his wife,

"Oh, use your head, Justine. Who do you know who acts
more like a Peck? Consider that he has remained alone
his whole life long, never let in anybody who wasn't
a blood relative."

(p. 292)

Indeed, Caleb has "never married," "never was a father," and was "never
... close" (p. 292) even to the musician he followed through the streets
of New Orleans for years. Isolated and distant from his family, he
remained distant from others as well, and, fittingly, even his return is
an isolated event. He is brought back to Maryland only after the last
Peck of his generation, Daniel, is dead and the last "regular" Peck, Meg,
is gone. Only Duncan and Justine ever know he returns, or that he

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disappears again in the middle of the night, only to contact them a few weeks later from Wyoming, in true Peck fashion, by sending a bread-and-butter note on a "crumpled" sheet of "cream-colored" stationery, "gray around the edges" (p. 303) from age.

With the return and re-disappearance of Caleb, the Peck family history comes almost full circle. The central mystery of the novel solved—Caleb accounted for and off to even more distant places than Louisiana—Justine and Duncan embark on their own new adventure. Throughout the novel, Anne Tyler introduces a number of intriguing, vividly portrayed minor characters, many of them clients of Justine in the various towns she and Duncan move to. One of these includes Alonzo Divich, a foreigner of undetermined origin, the owner of a traveling circus, and a man addicted to having Justine read his fortune. At the end of the novel, Duncan and Justine are offered positions as mechanic and fortune teller in Alonzo's Habit-Forming Entertainment Company, as he calls his circus, really a cluster of tents and caravans from which, fittingly, strains of "The St. James Infirmary Blues"—a clear musical link with Caleb Peck—can be heard "spinning itself out among the cries of children and hot dog vendors, and teenagers clinging to the Tilt-A-Whirl" (p. 42).

In the brief final chapter of Searching for Caleb, Justine and Duncan have ended their own search and are embarking on another moving day, this time for a life in which they will always be moving. They are on their way to Alonzo Divich's circus and to a life clearly antithetical to the staid, respectable, and orderly existence of their family in Roland Park. Symbolically, they are moving only "their books and clothes" and a few boxes of "Duncan's spare parts and inventions" (p. 307).
They were leaving everything else behind. Furniture would be supplied in the trailer. Built in. Justine liked the idea of having everything built in. She enjoyed telling people they were traveling light, and would have thrown away even some things they needed if Duncan hadn't stopped her.

(PP. 307-308)

All the family furniture, moved from house to house for years, is left behind, as also at last is Justine's attachment to family, and it is she, in the final scene, who races ahead of Duncan, leading him away from the group of friends, strangers really, they had made in Caro Mill.

In this closing scene, as elsewhere in the novel, Anne Tyler focuses on Justine's energy and adaptability to change, traits she shares with those family renegades, her great-uncle Caleb and her first-cousin-husband Duncan. By the end of the novel, Justine has, in fact, become a renegade herself, and much of Searching for Caleb is concerned with this change—with Justine's longing for a sense of belonging and identity with the Pecks of Roland Park and her gradual relinquishment of her hold on that identity, particularly the values and beliefs the Pecks revere. Indeed, in large measure, Searching for Caleb, like Anne Tyler's other novels, is about those human beings who exhibit an ability to "adapt and endure" and "go on loving" in the face of conflict and change and those who cannot—who, like many of the Pecks, become stagnant and, as in the case of Justin Montague Peck, literally paralyzed. Those with the greatest ability to adapt—Duncan, Justine, and above all Caleb Peck—remain vital and free, and we last see them joyfully moving onto some new experience without the encumbrances of the past or the reservations that bind the other members of the family, including the seventeen-year-old Meg.

Very clearly, Searching for Caleb is to date Anne Tyler's most ambitious, extensive, and successful study of the individual in the family.
Focusing on the principal individuals in the Peck family, it traces the history of five generations of family and depicts the extensive relationships among the numerous people who are born or marry into the Peck clan. How those people contend with the problems of living together, adjust to change or fail to adjust, and go on living, either as they were before or differently, is of principal concern to the novelist here. Moreover, because Searching for Caleb covers such an extended period of time, it is also unavoidably not only concerned with the challenge and conflict raised by certain individual members of the family, but also with a more general conflict between present and past, change and tradition, the challenge of a new era to an outdated way of thinking and living. A testament to Anne Tyler's skill as a story-teller, Searching for Caleb evokes this more abstract conflict largely through the novelist's adept handling of the family past and her use of narrative and descriptive details that successfully capture not only the inevitable and recurrent differences in the characters she creates, but also, vividly, the scenes and images from past eras—"the moonlit roads," "the faint, musical whistling of . . . streetcar wires" (p. 63), no longer audible, that belong to the era to which Caleb Peck, his brother Daniel, and their parents also belong.
CHAPTER V

EARTHLY POSSESSIONS

In February, 1977, Anne Tyler's seventh published novel, *Earthly Possessions*, appeared in condensed form in *Redbook* magazine. In May of the same year, Alfred A. Knopf released the novel in its entirety. Two months earlier, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters had cited Anne Tyler for "literary excellence and promise of important work to come," and in May, the same month in which *Earthly Possessions* appeared in the complete edition, the Institute presented awards of three thousand dollars each to Miss Tyler and nine other writers, including, most notably, the novelist Paul Theroux and the poet Charles Wright.

Curiously, *Earthly Possessions*—unlike its immediate predecessors, *Celestial Navigation* and *Searching for Caleb*—met with mixed critical response. Several reviewers felt the book was disappointing only in contrast to the two earlier books, which set very high standards. Some critics objected to the contrapuntal structure of the novel, the alternation of chapters describing the three-day journey of the major character as a hostage in a bank robbery with chapters relating her life history, from babyhood up until the time the novel opens. Told in the first-person by the central character, Charlotte Emory (a thirty-five-year-old, Clarion, Maryland, housewife who longs to escape the unchanging dullness of her life), *Earthly Possessions* bears little external resemblance to either *Celestial Navigation* or *Searching for Caleb*, both of which received almost unanimously strong praise from reviewers. While both of these novels also provided the life histories of their principal characters, with special attention to their family histories, neither did so in the
highly structured, alternating manner of *Earthly Possessions*, nor was either novel told consistently in the first-person point of view by one narrator. *Earthly Possessions* is the first of Anne Tyler's novels to be related in this fashion. Additionally, perhaps as a result of the point of view, the focus of *Earthly Possessions* is limited—one lifetime as compared with five generations of Pecks, for example—and the characters clearly not as endearing: a bony, straight-haired housewife; her grotesquely overweight mother and moody, bitter father; her husband, Saul Emory, the boy-next-door who returns to Clarion to become a Bible-toting fundamentalist minister and the pastor of the Holy Basis Church; and, perhaps most importantly, the two-bit criminal, Jake Simms, who takes Charlotte hostage in a bungled bank robbery that nets him only a fistful of one-dollar bills. Moreover, in telling her story (the experience of her journey to Florida with Jake in a stolen car and the history of her relationships with first her parents, then Saul, their children, and Saul's three brothers), the principal character exhibits a stoical, passive attitude, salted with a generous dash of cynicism about life and God which was undoubtedly distasteful to some first readers and reviewers. Nonetheless, it is through Charlotte Emory and her experiences that Anne Tyler presents in this novel the same kinds of remarkable insights into the life of the individual in the family which characterized her other books. Indeed, like those other books, *Earthly Possessions* addresses problems and conflicts similar to those that afflict Anne Tyler's other fictional families: the painful isolation of the individual despite—perhaps even because of—the presence of others; his struggle for identity and freedom in the face of commitment and emotional ties to his family; and, as *Searching for*
Caleb eloquently illustrated, the overriding tendency of families to discourage growth and change in favor of emotional dependence and what Anne Tyler has referred to as the "grooves" that "dictate a predictable life."\(^3\) Admittedly, not only families lead to the spiritual and psychological entrapment that dependence and lack of growth engender, but any "relationship," as Miss Tyler pointed out in speaking of *Earthly Possessions*, even one

"as bizarre as /that of/ a bank robber and hostage could become a bickering familiar relationship. Anything done gradually enough becomes ordinary."\(^4\)

And, thereby, it becomes both predictable and encumbering. It is, however, largely the unpredictability of life, the bizarre features of even the most seemingly ordinary of lives, and the unexpected emotional ties that hold even a character like Jake Simms that fascinate Miss Tyler and provide the basis of her story in *Earthly Possessions*.

*Earthly Possessions* opens with one of the narrator's characteristically unadorned assessments of her life--here, specifically her marriage to Saul Emory. "The marriage wasn't going well," she tells the reader in the first sentence of the novel,

> And I decided to leave my husband. I went to the bank to get cash for the trip. This was on a Wednesday, a rainy afternoon in March. The streets were nearly empty and the bank had just a few customers, none of them familiar to me.\(^5\)

Moments later, even before the reader learns her name, Charlotte Emory is taken hostage in a robbery and forcibly made to take the very journey she has been preparing for—not, we learn as the story unfolds, just prior to the bank hold-up, but almost her entire life. In fact, Charlotte's story is one of a lifelong quest for freedom and anonymity.

"Since October 16, 1948," she comments shortly into the novel, "I have been
trying to get rid of all belongings that would weigh me down on a long footmarch" (p. 36).

My life has been a history of casting off encumbrances, paring down to the bare essentials, stripping for the journey. Possessions make me anxious.

(p. 37)

Husband and children, not only worldly goods and possessions, are also "encumbrances," and Charlotte, we learn, "would have liked to strip" herself "of people too." "I was pleased when I lost any friends" (p. 37), she comments.

Expectedly, the anonymity of the bank where she is taken hostage pleases Charlotte, and the journey she is forced to make offers her hope. Forced first to run with "a stranger all in black" (p. 7)—the rather "ordinary, calm-looking" (p. 5) Jake Simms—and then to board a bus out of town, Charlotte is a willing hostage. Witnesses to the escape of bank robber and hostage report the two "appeared to be running away together" (p. 49), and, in fact, once on the bus, Charlotte comments that when she "sank into a seat," she "felt suddenly light-hearted, as if . . . expecting something." "As if I were going on a trip, really" (p. 7), she points out. Charlotte reveals this somewhat peculiar attitude toward her captivity in those chapters in which she relates the story of her trip south with Jake Simms and her relationship with him. However, it is in those chapters relating her life history, especially the nature of her family life, that Charlotte provides the reasons for her desire and readiness to escape.

From the opening pages of Earthly Possessions, it is clear that the narrator views herself as an entrapped housewife. She is also, however, by her own admission an ironical and stoical character given to assessing
her life in a matter-of-fact way and viewing events and other people with both distance and "a faint, pleasant humorousness that," as she herself points out, "spiced my nose like the beginnings of a sneeze" (p. 113). At thirty-five, she has spent her entire life in her hometown of Clarion and admittedly has not "been anywhere" for "years" (p. 16) prior to boarding the bus with the bank robber. As she tells her husband late in the novel, just before her trip with Jake Simms,

"I have never, ever been anywhere. I live in the house I was born in. I live in the house my mother was born in. My children go to the same school I did and one even has the same teacher. When I had that teacher she was just starting out and scared to death and pretty as a picture; now she's a dried-up old maid and sends Selinda [Charlotte's daughter] home for not wearing a bra."

(p. 187)

Leaving her husband provides contact with people she has never seen before, unfamiliar faces like those she encounters in the bank that day she is taken hostage. And, indeed, although there was a time when Charlotte "knew everybody in Clarion" (p. 3), new people have moved in, giving her a sense of anonymity she enjoys. The change in population is also, of course, the principal one to affect Charlotte's life, allowing her to run with Jake without being easily spotted. Most everything and everyone else are as familiar as the streets of the town itself.

Besides the stasis and worn familiarity of her adult life, Charlotte also characterizes her childhood as an isolated, miserably lonely period marked by a strong desire to escape her parents for what she believed was a normal life. Like many other Tyler heroines, she grew up as an only child in a dark, closed house—"that big brown turreted house next to Percy's Texaco" (p. 9) that is elsewhere referred to wryly as her mother's "dead father's house" (p. 10). There, the air was "stale, dark,
ancient" and "nothing had moved for a very long time" (p. 12). "Meals were strained and silent: only the clinking of silverware," because, as Charlotte points out,

my parents didn't speak, or if they did, it was in a hopeless, bitter way. "Bitter as acorns," my father said.

(p. 14)

She continues,

there was no point in eating. Anything you ate in that house would sit on your stomach forever, like a stone.

(pp. 14–15)

Secluded from the outside world until she entered school, Charlotte speaks of her "two main worries . . . as a child" (p. 15) in terms related directly to the only two people she knew, her parents, and the tension evident in their strained relationship. "One" of those worries, she tells the reader,

was that I was not their /i.e., her parents' / true daughter, and would be sent away. The other was that I was their true daughter and would never, ever manage to escape to the outside world.

(p. 15)

Significantly, Charlotte describes herself as noticeably unlike her parents, both of whom appear as minor grotesques. "My mother," she points out,

was a fat lady who used to teach first grade. Her maiden name was Lacey Debney.

. . . I mention her fatness first. You couldn't overlook fatness like my mother's. It defined her, it radiated out from her, it filled any room she walked into. She was a mushroom-shaped woman with wispy blond hair you could see through, a pink face, and no neck; just a jaw sloping wider and wider till it turned into shoulders. All year round she wore sleeveless flowered shifts—a mistake. Her feet
were the smallest I have ever seen on a grownup, and she owned a gigantic collection of tiny, elegant shoes.  

(p. 9)

"She traveled in a casing of thick, blind differentness," Charlotte comments, and grew so obese after her marriage that she had to carry about a "special chair"—a "heavy white slatted one with . . . stolid legs, the kind you ordinarily see in people's yards" (p. 28)—lest she break the other chairs with her tremendous weight. "Horrible things . . . happened at our house," Charlotte continues, "that would have been very embarrassing if witnessed by an outsider" (p. 28).

"When she was in her mid-thirties—still a maiden lady teaching school, living in her dead father's house beside the Texaco station," Lacey Debney was saved from spinsterhood by marriage to "a traveling photographer named Murray Ames [who] came to take her students' pictures" (pp. 9-10). Unlike his wife—"what did he see in her?" Charlotte asks—Murray Ames was thin: "a stooped, bald, meck-looking man with a mustache like a soft black mouse" (p. 10). He

hung about as if he didn't own his body—shoulders sagging, middle caved in; he looked like an empty suit of clothes (pp. 11-12)

and was "given to fits of cold, black moodiness that scared" his wife "to death" and "made her flutter all around him wondering what she'd done wrong" (p. 10). Nonetheless, it is the relationship of these two vastly different people—so at odds they seem to their daughter "never" to have "touched" and "seldom" to "look at each other" (p. 12)—that produces in Charlotte an overwhelming desire to escape the life she knows as a child.

In writing about the character of Charlotte Emory, Anne Tyler observed
in a letter that while the narrator of *Earthly Possessions*

is undeniably affected by her upbringing, ... looked at from another direction, she is also the unlikeliest daughter for those people /her parents/ to have, and shows a great many traits that can't possibly be linked to them. Indeed, it is precisely such an awareness of her differentness that haunts Charlotte herself as a child—in fact, into her adult years. Encouraged by her mother to doubt her parentage, Charlotte spends a large portion of her life looking for someone she can identify as her true mother. Charlotte herself, it seems, was a surprise birth. Her mother believed at the time she was undergoing "the Change" and that she "had a tumor (which she seemed to picture as a sort of overripe grapefruit)" (p. ii). Narrating in her usual matter-of-fact style the bizarre conditions that surround her birth, Charlotte comments that as her mother "got fatter and fatter," also "grew listless, developed indigestion, felt short of breath" (p. 10),

she was certain she had a tumor but would not see a doctor; only took Carter's Little Liver Pills, her remedy for everything.

One night she woke up with abdominal spasms and became convinced that the tumor ... had split open and was trying to pass. All around her bed was hot and wet. She woke her husband, who stumbled into his trousers and drove her to the hospital. Half an hour later, she gave birth to a six-pound baby girl.

(p. 10)

To add to this dilemma of a surprise birth, Lacey Debney Ames also "believed" that Charlotte was not her "true daughter" (p. 13) and passed the idea onto her child. Clearly unlike her short, fat, blond mother and dark, "stooped" father, Charlotte does seem to have "inherited" some "stranger's looks" (p. 13) and personality. For one thing, she "was
thin and drab, with straight brown hair. Nobody else in the family had brown hair" (p. 13). But besides these differences, "there were other peculiarities," we are told, "that no one could explain": her "extremely high arches, which refused to be crammed into many styles of shoes," her "yellowish skin," and her "height" (p. 13). As Charlotte herself observes,

I was always tall for my age. Now where did that come from? Not from my father. Not from my mother's side—my five-foot mother and her squat brother Gerard and her portly, baby-faced father beaming out of the photo frames, and certainly not from my Great-Aunt Charlotte, for whom I was named, whose pictures show her feet dangling comically when she is seated in an armchair. Something had gone wrong somewhere.

(p. 13)

As a consequence of her observations and her mother's idea of there being some "mix-up at the hospital" (p. 13), Charlotte grows up partly convinced that she has "a false name, a false identity, a set of false, larcenous parents" (p. 14), for, as she tells us, only "my father believed I was really their true daughter. My mother didn't" (p. 13). The result is the double bind of her childhood, the "two main worries" mentioned earlier: a fear of being sent away from her parents and its opposite, a fear of being trapped with them without any hope of escape. In Charlotte's life, it is the latter that proves true.

Besides the doubts conveyed by the obvious contrasts between herself and her parents—her thinness and her mother's obesity, her height and her parents' short stature, her difference in coloring, to name but three contrasts—the story of her "unexpected birth" (p. 13) and the sense of smothering she has around her enormous mother also reinforce Charlotte's doubts about her parentage and identity. So too does her actually being kidnapped briefly as a child by a strange woman she quickly identified because of her coloring as her real mother. The trip with Jake is not,
therefore, "the first time," Charlotte tells us, she had "been kidnapped. It had happened once before" (p. 27). At the age of seven she was entered in a Beautiful Child Contest at the Clarion Country Fair—largely, as she tells us, because "if I won, it would be good advertising for my father" (p. 27), whose photograph of his child was used as an entry. When she did, in fact, win, Charlotte, in her characteristically humorous way, comments that it was not because of her beauty, but because the photograph her father had taken showed "a dark little girl" with "straight hair," an "expression of despair," and "orphanish clothing"—"The Little Match Girl. How could they bear to hurt my feelings?" (p. 31). Then during her reign, when she was forced to sit "on . . . [a] splintery gold-painted platform" "everyday" after school "from three to six . . . for a solid week" (p. 30), she was observed "hour after hour" by "a dark-haired woman who stood in front of" her, "staring up into . . . [her] face without a hint of smile" (p. 30). Certain that the woman was her real mother, Charlotte willingly went with the stranger on the last day of the fair, and, although her escape from her oppressively obese mother and brooding, silent father was short-lived—only about half of one evening—it was long enough to convince Charlotte that, in fact, she "had been kidnapped" (p. 38), but perhaps by the very people masquerading as her parents. "I was almost certain," she comments, that "I had been kidnapped," "but when I tried to remember I was not so sure who had done it" (p. 38). Like the dark woman who had taken her away—a foreigner of some kind, it turned out, a refugee—Charlotte envisions at that time her fantasy of the "long footmarch" (p. 36) she anticipates will be expected of her. From the time she rode home with her parents, Charlotte tells us,
she fashioned "a plan. A picture of my future" (p. 36).

In this picture, I am walking down a dusty road that I have been walking for months. The sky is deep gray, almost black. The air is greenish. From time to time a warm and watery wind blows up. I am carrying nothing, not even a bite to eat or a change of clothes. The soles of my feet hurt and I am stringy-haired, worn down to bone and muscle. There is no house or landmark in sight, no sign of life. Though sometimes I have an impression of other, anonymous people traveling in the same direction.

(p. 36)

And, indeed, it is precisely this fantasy of the "long footmarch" that Charlotte finally fulfills by her flight with Jake Simms. Her freedom tied directly to her knowledge of her real identity, once Charlotte learns she is her mother's "true daughter," an event that occurs on her mother's deathbed a few weeks prior to the novel's opening, she is free to act out her fantasy with her fellow traveler, Jake Simms, and the other, anonymous people who surround her in the Maryland Safety Savings Bank the afternoon she is taken hostage.

In creating the character of Charlotte Emory, Anne Tyler gave her two principal features of her own personality. First, both character and creator "share a voice--I tend to be ironic, I place great value on stoicism, and most of what I see strikes me as funny," the novelist has observed. Secondly, of the other "little pieces" of herself which Miss Tyler gave Charlotte, there is also the significant one of her "refugee fantasy" which the novelist, like the narrator of Earthly Possessions, has "had since ... /she/ was seven": "not her urge to get away," Miss Tyler points out, "but her conviction that a long foot-march would someday be expected of her." Clearly, however, this fantasy is an integral part of Charlotte's character. As she comments about first envisioning her march when she was only seven,
how was I to know this picture would stay with me forever after, never go away, haunt me even when I was grown and married and supposedly sensible, occupy all nights I couldn't sleep and all empty moments every day of my life?

(p. 36)

For years, Charlotte remains prepared for her trip. She purchases "walking shoes" and always carries "a hundred-dollar traveler's check in the secret compartment of . . . [her] billfold" (p. 113) in preparation for her departure. Very clearly, her journey with Jake Simms is a fulfillment of the fantasy trip she has been preparing for her entire life.

Ironically, however, her trip with Jake, like the other circumstances of her life, is not quite what Charlotte anticipates. For one thing, with Jake, she is a "hostage," however willing, and through at least a portion of her trip, she has a gun jammed in her back or ribs. Then, after Jake steals a car to make his break to Florida, he chains the passenger's side closed so that Charlotte cannot escape on her own. Repeatedly, Charlotte discovers that escape is never easy. Indeed, the story Charlotte tells of her life reveals how her every opportunity for freedom was countered by some event that made escape impossible, leaving her to give "up hope," "in order not to mind too much" (p. 113). As a consequence, Charlotte develops the "habit" of humor that allows her "to look at things" from "a few feet off" (p. 113). Successive events—beginning with the early kidnapping she had truly believed would free her from the dismal life she had with her parents, her high school efforts to be thought of as "normal" (p. 54), her brief stay at college, and even her marriage to Saul Emory and her "escape" journey with Jake Simms—keep Charlotte tied to the grotesquely obese woman she does not believe is her mother and her dull, uneventful life in Clarion, Maryland.
As a high school student, Charlotte put great efforts into being "the most vivacious girl in the senior class," unlike her indolent parents, and "also best groomed" (p. 54). Attempting to escape through school activities, she points out that as a teenager she would stay after school for sorority meetings, Honor Society, Prom Committee, cheerleading . . . but those things can only last so long. In the end . . . she would find . . . home again, walking into the overused air and . . . her parents' eternal questions.

(p. 54)

She continues:

I would look down at them (for I was taller than both, by now) and everything came back to me: I remembered who I really was. In the smoky mirror behind my mother, my pearls were as outlandish as a string of bear claws. My face had a yellowed look around the edges.

(p. 54)

Intrepid despite these reminders of her gothic childhood and grotesque parentage, Charlotte relates how she renewed her efforts for freedom by getting "a part scholarship in mathematics at Markson College, near Holgate" (p. 54), a town close to Clarion. Stoical about enduring what for others would have been an intolerable existence in the closed world of her parents' home, already aware of what later she calls "God's little jokes" (p. 109), Charlotte is uncertain of a successful escape. "It seemed too simple," she comments. "I kept wondering where the catch was" (p. 54). And, expectedly, there is a snag. On the way home from dropping his daughter off at her dormitory, several hours before anyone else, Murray Ames has "an accident," although the doctors weren't so much worried about his injuries as about the heart attack that had caused the accident in the first place.

(p. 55)
As a consequence, Charlotte is once again "home, trapped," with "no escape," her "life rolling out in front of . . . like an endless, mildewed rug" (p. 56). Since there is no way for the immobile Mrs. Ames "even" to help her husband sit up "without" Charlotte's "help" (p. 56), college is postponed—indefinitely, as it turns out, when Murray Ames dies a short time after returning home from the hospital.

It is during his brief period of convalescence at home just prior to his death that Charlotte takes up her father's occupation of photography. However, her approach to taking portraits is quite contrary to her father's. Where he insists on what he calls "'an honest portrait,'" none of "'these fancied-up photographs'" (p. 58), Charlotte "would take a picture any way people asked." "I had no feelings about it" (p. 57), she comments. In fact, as the years wear on and Charlotte keeps her father's studio open in order to raise money so she and her mother can live, she continues to photograph anyone who drops by in whatever pose they choose, in any costume they happen upon. Thus, where the subjects in her father's photographs all "looked serious" and "stiff" with "bemused and veiled" expressions, perfect posture, but no smiles—"honest portraits" (pp. 58-59), her father called them—Charlotte's pictures are

limpid and relaxed, touched with that grace things have when you know they're of no permanent importance. (p. 113)

Through the years, Charlotte's photographs not only lose her father's "formal composition" (p. 139); they also come to be symbolic of the only sense of genuine freedom Charlotte ever seems to experience: her remote, disinterested, and ironical way of viewing the events of her life and the people around her. Commenting on the changes in her pictures, she observes that
during the years stray props had moved . . . /in/: flowers, swords, Ping-Pong paddles, overflow from Alberta's /Saul's mother's/ clutter. People had a way of picking up odd objects when they entered, and then they got attached to them. They would sit down still holding them, absentmindedly, and half the time I never even noticed. I wasn't a chatty, personal kind of photographer.

(p. 139)

Only after developing the pictures does Charlotte see that by her disinterest and inattention she has also given her subjects the freedom to be anything they like, to assume a false identity if they want. Thus "some high school girl in Alberta's sequined shawl, strung with loops of curtain-beads, holding a plume of peacock feathers" becomes a "proud, beautiful" woman who manages "to astonish" (p. 140) even the impersonal photographer.

Despite these changes in the composition of her pictures and their contrast with those of her father, Charlotte makes no changes in the studio itself, for she persists in believing that her stay with her mother is temporary and an escape inevitable. Consequently, she never identifies with the room she works in, and never comes to think of the camera as her own. Both are "his," as she says.

Those were his yellowish, brittle prints curling off the walls. I was only a transient.

(p. 113)

Nonetheless, following the death of her father, Charlotte is at least temporarily trapped with her mother. The money to return to school is not available, and her Uncle Gerard will not make a loan unless she postpones returning to Markson until the following fall. In truth, Charlotte's mother is unable to cope with the death of her husband and for days needs her daughter "to help . . . /her/ into her clothes . . . " (p. 61). She must also constantly be reminded of things and seems at times deranged.
She would wander into the photography studio "halfway through a sitting," Charlotte tells us, "pulling herself along by clutching at pieces of furniture" (p. 61). Often she would mutter aloud to Charlotte and the customer about not having placed "much faith in physical things" or given "the world enough credit" (p. 63). "On certain evil days I had thoughts of running away," Charlotte comments, "but of course I never did" (p. 63). Despite the painfulness and hopelessness of her situation, she remains committed to her mother, "locked in a calendar" (p. 61), hoping to return to school the following fall as her Uncle Gerard had encouraged. As with the other possible escape routes in Charlotte's life, however, that particular one is also closed off by the reappearance of Saul Emory in her life.

Besides her mother, Saul is the other major commitment that ties Charlotte to Clarion and prevents her from returning to college. One of the sons of a former neighbor, he returns home himself from the Army in the spring following Murray Ames' death in order to settle the property of his own family. That family has disintegrated and disbanded. Saul's mother—"secretly as sad as my mother," Charlotte observes, despite "appearances" to the contrary—has "eloped with her father-in-law" (p. 65). Saul's father drank himself to death, and his three brothers now live in different parts of the country. When Saul comes to Clarion, therefore, he responds to the "ROOMS TO LET sign" Charlotte has posted "in desperation" (p. 62) about money, and his appearance is fatal to Charlotte's escape.

Although she is aware that the Emorys were not nearly so normal as she once believed them to be—largely because of their contrast with her
own family—Charlotte is predisposed to fall in love with Saul Emory. For one thing, he is, she hopes, her way out of Clarion and her means of escaping her mother. He is also tall and dark, with a "serene, pure face" (p. 67), although later Charlotte thinks of him as "a towering hatrack of a man, gaunt and cavernous and haunted-looking" (p. 49). Additionally, since her childhood, Charlotte tells us, she was fascinated by Saul's mother, Alberta,

a gypsyish type, beautiful in certain lights
and carelessly dressed, slouchy, surprisingly young.

(p. 64)

Secretly, Charlotte had wished for Alberta to adopt her. "I longed for her teeming house and remarkable troubles," Charlotte relates,

for on Alberta, troubles sat like riches. "Look," she seemed to be saying, "at how important my life is. See how I've been blessed with eventfulness?"

(p. 64)

Moreover, unlike Charlotte's own family, Alberta's was large. She had "four strapping sons," all of whom seemed to be in trouble of some sort most of the time.

Amos kept running away, Saul got in trouble with girls a lot. Linus was subject to unexplainable rages and Julian had a tendency to gamble. I don't believe there was a day in their lives,

Charlotte adds,

that something complicated wasn't happening to them.

(p. 64)

One of the ironies of Charlotte's life, however, involves her late recognition that, despite "appearances," the Emory family was "as queer as ours once you got up close to them" (p. 65). Enchanted by Alberta herself, she overestimated the happiness of Alberta's sons and failed to suspect what Amos tells her only late in the novel: Alberta's sons hated their
mother. "They had wished her dead" (p. 151).

Her sons had winced when she burst into their rooms. She breathed her hot breath on them, she laughed her harsh laugh. She called for parties! dancing! let's show a little life here! Given anything less than what she needed, he said (and she was always given less, she could never get enough), she turned mocking and contemptuous. She had a tongue like a knife. The sharp, insistent colors of her clothes and even of her skin, her hair, were painful to her children's eyes.

(pp. 150-151)

Notably, this part of her husband's own familial experience remains a mystery to Charlotte until nearly fifteen years after their wedding.

Yet another irony of Charlotte's life is tied to Saul Emory and her view of him. For one thing, Saul is not the person Charlotte believed Alberta would have for a son. He "lacked the recklessness," she tells us, that she had expected of him, had hoped of him even. If anything, he was too serious.

(p. 69)

"He treated . . . /her/ in a stern, unsmiling way that made . . . /her/ shy" (p. 69). Then, besides these differences, he turned out to be far more committed to Charlotte's mother, and to Charlotte's own commitment to her mother, than was healthy for a clean escape. In fact, after proposing to Charlotte, he began addressing her mother as "'Mother Ames'" and told her openly, "'you're a member of my family now, and I need your portrait for my family album!" (p. 82) once he and Charlotte were married. Also, throughout their courtship, Saul was unsettled about what he called "his life's work" (p. 69), too serious a term in Charlotte's view for a job.

Nonetheless, ignoring these warnings, Charlotte accepted Saul's proposal of marriage, because, as she points out,
the leathery, foreign smell of his skin called up so much love that I seemed to be damaged by it. (p. 69)

She continues,

I should have refused. I wasn't helpless, after all.
I should have said, "I'm sorry, I can't fit you in.
I never planned to take a second person on this trip."
But I didn't. (p. 69)

Years later, her life complicated and she and Saul often distant with one another, Charlotte recognizes that just such commitments of love are what keep people together, something she sees even in the habitual criminal Jake Simms. After her own mother's death, for example, Charlotte sees "that all of" the family—a group that comes to include not only Saul but his three brothers; Charlotte and Saul's natural daughter Selinda and an adopted child, Jiggs; and even two boarders from the mourners' bench at Saul's church—"lived in a sort of web, criss-crossed by strings of love and worry" (p. 182). "It appeared," she adds, "that we were all taking care of each other, in ways an outsider might not notice" (p. 183).

As suggested by the above description of how Charlotte's family expands after her marriage to Saul Emory, it is obvious that yet another irony of her life involves her mistaken view of what marriage with Saul will provide. The freedom she hopes to achieve is not only unavailable once she is wed, but her relationship with Saul serves to multiply the complexities and encumbrances of her life, the number of people she must consider before making her "long footmarch," as well as the items of furniture and other "earthly possessions" that fill her house. Shortly after their marriage, Saul announces that not only does he not want to leave Clarion; he is also going to attend Bible College in order to
become a minister at the Holy Basis Church where he and Charlotte were married and where his own father once served as a deacon. "It was very clear," Charlotte observes,

they were tearing down the rest of the world completely. They were leaving no place standing but my mother's. They were keeping me here forever, all the long, slow days of my life.

(p. 85)

Indeed, to Charlotte, who "didn't believe in God"—although at Saul's announcement, she tells us, "I could almost change my mind . . . and imagine one, for who else would play such a joke on me?"—

the only place more closed-in than this house /her mother's/ was a church. The only person odder than my mother was a hellfire preacher.

(p. 84)

Then, to add to the clutter of her life, Saul fills Charlotte's house with "Alberta's furniture that he'd stored instead of selling, for some reason, back when he sold her house" (p. 100). He "brought everything home with him," Charlotte relates:

her rickety bedroom suites, linoleum-topped table and worn-out chairs, her multicolored curtains and shawls and dresses . . . /and/ her father-in-law's belongings as well, all the props and costumes the old man had stashed in the dining room.

(p. 100)

As a consequence, the Ames house, which "was overstuffed as it was," ended up with double of everything:

an end table in front of another end table, a second sofa backed against the first. It was crazy. Every piece of furniture had its shadow, a Siamese twin.

(p. 101)

Determined to rid herself of these encumbrances, Charlotte leaves Saul "in 1960, after an argument over the furniture" (p. 100), but, as before, her escape is short-lived. She must spend the night at a hotel until the
Thursday-afternoon bus can carry her away, and in the meantime, Saul is able to track her down.

Everybody knew where I'd gone; everybody'd seen me tearing off down the street on a brisk October day without my coat on.

(p. 105)

To complicate her life more and only add to the "muddy, tangled, flawed relationship" (p. 102) Charlotte has with Saul, both Linus and Julian, two of Saul's brothers, return to live with the family, and on June 2, 1961, Charlotte has a daughter, Catherine. Linus fills the already cluttered household with doll's furniture, small items that triplicate the furnishings that already crowd the halls and rooms of Charlotte's house. Catherine, whom Charlotte is certain is her own because she "refused all anesthesia including aspirin" during delivery so she "could be absolutely sure nobody mixed her up with any other baby," turns out to be so different and independent of her parents that not only does she believe in God, unlike her mother, but at the age of two, "invented a playmate named Selinda" and "after a while," moved Catherine "to Selinda's place and left her own place empty" (p. 108). While the invention of the playmate "was normal" at first, later Catherine/Selinda carries her fantasy so far that eventually, as Charlotte relates, only Selinda remained.

We have had Selinda with us ever since. Now that I think about it, Charlotte continues,

I might as well have taken that anesthesia after all.

(p. 108)

In addition to these complications in her familial life, Saul becomes increasingly "abstracted," settling Charlotte "quickly into his life" after their marriage and moving "on to other projects" (p. 101). Besides
"losing" him "to the Hamden Bible College" (p. 108), she also loses him almost completely to the Holy Basis when he is made pastor. Then, of course, he wanted Charlotte "to start attending the services" (p. 109), something she eventually assents to, although not without some protest. There, moreover, she must confront a person other than the one she knew at home: Saul "in his robes," looming above the crowd, looking "like a stranger" (p. 109), literally distant from his wife and talking about things she fails to listen to. Over the years of their marriage, the two grow increasingly apart until, with her mother dying of cancer and Charlotte resentful of Saul's attention to Mrs. Ames, the two no longer talk. In fact, Charlotte tells us, during this period, she grew close to Amos, Saul's oldest brother, who had also returned to Clarion by that time, and planned at least halfway to escape with him once her mother has died. Although Saul said nothing, Charlotte would wake "in the night" and "find him sitting on the edge of the bed, unnaturally still, watching" her (p. 175). "We stared at each other blankly," Charlotte observes of their relationship, "like two people at the windows of separate trains" (p. 166).

As suggested earlier, Charlotte learns that she is, has been all along, her mother's true daughter only when her mother is dying, an event that takes place only weeks before Charlotte's escape journey. Resentful of her mother's "dying without answering any really important questions or telling . . . [her] a single truth that mattered" (p. 180), Charlotte questions her mother about a photograph the dying woman had asked her to destroy weeks before. Convinced that the blond, dimply girl in the picture is her mother's "true daughter," someone Charlotte herself comes to call "my true self" (p. 177), she is stunned to learn that the picture
is one of her mother as a child. "But . . . I thought it would be your true daughter," she tells her mother, "the one they mixed up in the hospital!" (p. 180). Then, when Charlotte refers to the baby her mother had by surprise as "it," Mrs. Ames replies,

"It? . . . It wasn't an it, it was you, Charlotte. The it was you."

(pp. 181-182)

Aside from a few exchanges indicating Charlotte's determination to learn if in fact her mother is telling the truth, the revelation of her true identity after a lifelong search provides the closest contact Charlotte ever has with her mother, for she tells us that as Mrs. Ames rested amid hospital "tubes and cords,"

more gently than I've ever done anything in my life, I laid my cheek against my mother's.

(pp. 181-182)

The death of her "true mother," of someone "more important than . . . she'd expected to lose" (p. 182), plus the growing distance between herself and Saul and a confrontation with Amos over her not leaving with him all contribute to Charlotte's making final preparations for her "long footmarch." She begins immediately giving things away. As soon as Amos is gone, she becomes "very energetic" (p. 185) and strips the house bare, "polished like a bleached skull" (p. 186). Charlotte also discards people. She ignores or dodges anyone familiar on the street or in the grocery store, effectively aiming for that condition of anonymity her fantasy calls for. Then, finally, when Jiggs—the abandoned baby she and Saul adopted years before and Charlotte gave an offhanded name to in order to show "how lightly . . . she would give him back" (p. 139)—points out that "in the month of March," his mother has "three perfect days" (p. 188),
times free of commitments, Charlotte ventures to the Maryland Safety Savings Bank, hoping all along, she tells us, "to be snagged somewhere" (p. 190). And, indeed, she is, but not by anyone she knows or has a previous attachment to. Her new commitment, the added unpredictable element and complication in her life becomes one Jake Simms, Jr.— demolition-derby driver, county jail escapee, self-proclaimed "victim of impulse" (p. 43), and inept bank robber.

As readers of Earthly Possessions, we accompany Jake and Charlotte on their dual journey. Both characters are, we quickly learn, ordinary people who share a common desire: they are each seeking freedom, and neither can "'abide . . . being locked up!'" (p. 18). The difference in their situations is, of course, that Charlotte, her childhood and teenage protests to the contrary, is a willing prisoner of relationships that, although they hopelessly muddle her life, still provide her with love and a sense of being needed. Jake, on the other hand, has escaped the county jail for impulsively wrecking his brother-in-law's car lot as though it were a demolition-derby track or field. Charlotte's skill and coolness in handling the unexpected situation of being a hostage and in dealing with Jake (a nervous, restless, nail-biting man), are revealed through those chapters which counter-balance those narrating her life history. In the process of telling her own story and Jake's, however, Charlotte also establishes a close, fairly familiar relationship with her captor. Moreover, because Earthly Possessions is primarily concerned with illustrating how close, familial ties bind all of the characters, it is not surprising that Jake too is "criss-crossed by strings of love and need and worry" (p. 182).

First, although he is not essentially an extraordinarily likeable
guy--his *modus operandi* makes him a bit unpleasant, to say the least--Jake Simms is portrayed by Charlotte as a rather ordinary man, unlucky and foolish and permanently "restless . . . by nature" (p. 16). He is also short-tempered and impatient. He takes Charlotte hostage mainly because she is in front of him at the bank and he could not wait for his turn in line. Anger at being refused a job and laughed at in public led to his wrecking his brother-in-law's car lot, and he has escaped jail because a letter has come from his seventeen-year-old Kewpie doll of a girlfriend, Mindy Callendar, begging him to get her out of the home for unwed mothers where she has been imprisoned. Only everything goes wrong for Jake, as he confesses to Charlotte as they drive first to Georgia to pick up Mindy and then onto Florida, hopefully to find one of Jake's old training school buddies.

"I thought I would clear a thousand at least, hitting that bank. Thought I would be free then and unencumbered. But here we are. Seems like everything got bungled. Every step was stupid, every inch of the way. Every move I made was worse than the one before."

(p. 95)

Clearly, even the vocabulary is reminiscent of Charlotte's "footmarch" speech, for Jake, like Charlotte, seeks freedom from "encumbrances" that would bind him to one place. Like Charlotte, moreover, he is more lied down than he realizes. Mindy plans marriage for them, and his old training school friend has himself married and is expecting a baby also. At one point, Jake symbolically gives up the driver's seat in the stolen car he and Charlotte ride in and sits passively "in the passenger's seat, with his head bowed low and buried in his hands" (p. 125), the image of a defeated man.

Along their journey Charlotte and Jake become increasingly familiar
with one another, although their contact never spawns any sexual activity between them—a difficult relationship to comprehend, as one critic has observed, until we learn of Charlotte's past history and her relationship with Saul. However, although they are not lovers, Charlotte and Jake do become mirrors for one another and offer insight into the other's relationships as they each talk about themselves and their lives. Jake is able to share with Charlotte the history of his involvement with Mindy, and Charlotte, whether she wants it or not, gains some useful insight into Saul's view of her. Arguing that she has "'come to stand for everything bad'" (p. 163) in Saul's mind because of her non-religious outlook and lack of belief in God, Charlotte is countered by Jake's observation that Saul told the newswoman on the television report of the Clarion robbery that his wife "'was a good woman'" (p. 164). Jake asks,

"But how come he said all that on TV?"
"Said you was a good woman."
"Maybe he sees things different now you've left, . . .
Or more likely, you just had him figured wrong to start with. I mean, it could be he really does believe you're good, and worries what that means for his side. Ever thought of that?"

(p. 164)

Earlier, moreover, it is Jake who awakens Charlotte to the fact that she is, at last, "'traveling'" (p. 134), that the traveler's check she has saved for that purpose can be used for the very purpose she intended it for.

Also, in the course of their journey, Jake and Charlotte have several opportunities to witness themselves on television. The bank camera film of the robbery appears on television news programs at least as far south as Virginia, but with each showing, hostage and captor are farther away
and the television picture fuzzier. Paralleling this action is not only the increasing familiarity of the two, but also a change in Charlotte's view both of herself and of Jake. At the outset of the novel, he is nothing more than a disembodied arm that encircles her neck, a black sleeve on a "slithering-sounding, city-type jacket" (p. 3). Later, she is able to look at his face and see the whole man, his "ordinary, calm-looking" appearance, his
tousle of oily black hair and black-rimmed, pale gray eyes. His eyes were level with mine,
Charlotte observes, and

he was short, for a man. No taller than I was.
And much younger. I took heart.

(p. 5)

Much later on in their journey, after they have picked up Mindy, Charlotte actually finds herself grieving for Jake and his girlfriend, for the pain their experience of being trapped together brings them. Charlotte has been married a long time; Mindy and Jake are only beginning to set out together. Then, when Jake tells Charlotte, "'Everything's gathering in on me'" (p. 128), she takes his arm, the same one that two days before encircled her neck as she was taken hostage in the bank robbery. By the end of the novel and their journey together—a scene which takes the reader back to another bank, but this time where Charlotte cashes in her traveler's check and walks away free—Charlotte has been deeply touched by Jake's dilemma. No longer brandishing his gun, he asks her not to leave him because, as he tells her,

"I can't quite manage without you just yet. Understand? I've got this pregnant woman on my hands, got all these . . . Charlotte, it ain't so bad if you're with us, you see. You act like you take it all in stride, like this
is the way life really does tend to turn out. You mostly wear this little smile. I mean, we know each other, Charlotte. Don't we?" (pp. 196-197)

Indeed, they do, but Charlotte, having fulfilled her fantasy of the long footmarch, even having lost the anonymity she started out with, walks coolly away from Jake, on her way back to Clarion and her husband. "Marveling" at her own "slipperiness," she speaks of herself as gliding through so many dangers and . . . emerging unscathed. As smooth as silk I swerved around a child, passed a glass-boxed woman in front of a theater. I reached the end of the block and looked back. There he stood, surprisingly small, still watching me. His collar was raised, his shoulders were hunched. His hands were thrust deep in his pockets. Come to think of it, I wasn't so unscathed after all.

(p. 198)

Ironically, at the end of their brief journey together, neither Charlotte nor Jake is without a kind of dependence and loving acceptance of one another, the kind that characterizes most "bickering familiar relationships" and familial commitments.

Throughout Earthly Possessions, primarily through the ironic reversals and added commitments that mark Charlotte Emory's life, Anne Tyler makes it clear that the freedom her narrator seeks is an elusive goal: familial relationships are best described in this novel as a form of physical and emotional entrapment. As in her other novels, moreover, Anne Tyler suggests these ideas through the use of several symbols: here both the cluttered house in which Charlotte lives as well as the car she and Jake ride in. Saul's house is boarded up after his parents are gone, so he literally fills up the Ames house with his mother's possessions, his three brothers whom he welcomes home, and other people he brings in from the Holy Basis Church. Symbolically, he brings only these things to
his relationship with Charlotte: his family's possessions, added clutter in Charlotte's view, and a commitment to his own family and to saving others as part of his life's work. Likewise, Charlotte brings to their relationship the same attitudes she has had throughout her life. She lives in the shadow of her family also, works in her father's studio and cares for her mother in what is always very clearly still her mother's "dead father's house" (p. 9). Throughout most of her narrative, in fact, Charlotte views both her life at home and her relationship with Saul as forms of imprisonment. She and Saul grow apart. The house itself is stagnant and unchanging, filled with monstrous potted plants . . . that hadn't put out a new leaf since . . . [Charlotte] was born. (pp. 79-80)

Then, as her life becomes complicated and crowded with people, so also the house becomes increasingly crowded. Even when she has discarded almost all of the furniture, new things continue to appear, almost like new shoots on a living plant. Even "the piano grew new layers of magazines and keys" (p. 186), Charlotte comments right before her journey.

On her journey and in the car with Jake also, Charlotte's perception of the scenery along the road and the condition of the car itself allow us to witness the changes that her relationship with Jake undergoes, as well as the changes in Jake himself and his commitments. For one thing, as the two ride southward, the scenery along the road gradually changes. Away from Clarion, there is open highway—later, in Georgia, only "crumbling sheds and unpainted houses" (p. 86). Florida, where Jake finds that his old friend from training school has settled down, is "strung" with shoddy fast-food restaurants, "sea-shell emporiums,"
"drive-in movies" (p. 191), and motels that make it impossible to separate one town from another. Thus, at the same time Charlotte and her captor grow increasingly familiar with one another, developing a familial, "ordinary" relationship of sorts, symbols suggesting the crumbling of family life, the random and haphazard character of modern existence, and the curious restlessness and disease of transience that afflicts many mid-twentieth-century Americans also become prevalent. A counterpoint is established between the symbols appearing with more frequency in the novel and the relationship the principal characters establish. At the same time, the restless, impulsive Jake gradually gives up hope about ridding himself of Mindy, the seventeen-year-old he has impregnated, and the likelihood of marriage. "Like someone sick or beaten," he sinks, "low in his seat" (p. 191), Charlotte observes, and ultimately admits that he has "some ties" to Mindy after all, that he will eventually "end up married to her" (p. 196).

Moreover, in the process of abandoning his plans for freedom, even the car in which Jake and Charlotte had escaped, their personal symbol of freedom, becomes a wreck, suggesting an end to the independence each of the travelers sought. By the end of the novel it is as cluttered and dirty as the house Charlotte left in Clarion, and just as suggestive of the muddle that characterizes most human relationships. Near the end of the journey, Charlotte observes "what" somehow she had missed before: in the course of our trip we had wrecked it [i.e., the car] pretty thoroughly. Its rear end was caved in, one tail-light hollow, front bumper gone, and there were long weedy scratches across its side.

(p. 161)

Then when Jake opens "the door" to the car, what emerges is "a strong
cat smell" (relics of the cat Mindy tried to carry with her from the Dorothea Whitman Home for unwed mothers),

a welter of candy wrappers and potato chip bags. A Pepsi can clanged to the pavement and rolled a great distance.

(p. 161)

In the end, the early 1950's model car Charlotte and Jake drive replaces the cluttered Ames house in Clarion, Maryland. The anonymity of the "Second Federal" (p. 195) bank in an unidentified Florida town balances the impersonality of the Maryland Safety Savings Bank in Clarion, the cold, wet March Maryland afternoon on which Charlotte left Clarion by the warm Florida climate. Other things have not changed: the clutter and muddle, the weariness and misunderstandings, the web of "criss-crossed ... strings of love and need and worry" (p. 182) that mark all human relationships in this novel.

During her three-day trip with Jake, nothing very much seems to change for Charlotte, except, as her husband had suggested earlier, "in little ways" (p. 188). Thus, when Charlotte returns to Saul and her children, to Linus and Julian, and the sinners from the mourners' bench she had left for a while, only her perspective on life has altered considerably. She no longer fantasizes about a "long footmarch" or prepares to take any trips. In fact, she tells her husband, they don't need to go anywhere.

We have been traveling for years, traveled all our lives, we are traveling still. We couldn't stay in one place if we tried.

(p. 200)

She and Saul still disagree and misunderstand each other, she tells us, still must adjust to living with one another and "come to one more invisible parting or tiny, jarring rearrangement of ourselves" (p. 200),
and, in the end, Charlotte observes,

I still wheel my camera around, recording upside-down people in unexpected costumes. But I've come to believe that their borrowed medals may tell more truths than they hide. While Saul grips his pulpit as firmly as always, and studies his congregation. No doubt they are suspended in a lens of his own, equally truthful, equally flawed. (p. 200)

Clearly, like Anne Tyler's other novels, *Earthly Possessions* is a novel about the adjustments human beings make "to the absurdities of their confinement," and the ways in which they are isolated from each other even as they share parts of their lives, confront the loss of freedom as a consequence of their commitment to others, and struggle for identity, both as individuals and as parts of the families they are born to. It is, in fact, like Miss Tyler's other novels, about the life of the family, particularly the individual in the family.
CONCLUSION

At present, the contemporary American novelist Anne Tyler has published seven full-length novels and forty short stories, almost all concerned in some way with the intricacies of family relationships and the essentially isolated life of the individual within the family. An eighth novel, its title undecided at this time, is scheduled to appear in the spring of 1980. To date, moreover, Miss Tyler's fiction has consistently demonstrated her skill in the development and handling of character, a remarkable insight into the complexities of human relationships and the logic of human motivation, and an especially lively, clear prose style and keen ear for dialogue and the language of everyday speech. One of the main purposes of the present study has been, in fact, to call attention to the quality of Anne Tyler's fiction, as well as her central themes and concerns, and to recommend additional critical assessment of her work. To facilitate and encourage such additional critical assessment, a checklist of Anne Tyler's works and reviews of her novels has been appended to this dissertation. As the checklist demonstrates, the field for critical studies of Anne Tyler's fiction is open. The present study essentially undertakes a thematic analysis and is intended to offer an introduction to Miss Tyler's first seven novels. Clearly, discussions and studies of the short stories as well as future novels will be useful. Comparative studies of Anne Tyler's fiction and that of other women writers, especially such contemporaries as Elizabeth Spencer and Joan Didion, may also prove valuable, as would studies of the influence of Eudora Welty on Anne Tyler or of Reynolds Price, Miss Tyler's teacher at Duke University.
In any analysis of her first seven novels, moreover, it quickly becomes clear that although Anne Tyler was born in Minneapolis and raised largely in the South, her vision is hardly regional. Indeed, in her presentation of the struggle of the individual within the family, his isolation and separateness from others even within a presumably close relationship, Miss Tyler touches on universal themes. Her work does, of course, have a predominantly Southern setting. Four of her novels—If Morning Ever Comes, The Tin Can Tree, A Slipping-Down Life, and The Clock Winder—are all set, in whole or in part, in North Carolina, reflecting Miss Tyler's familiarity with that state. The last three novels discussed in this study—Celestial Navigation, Searching for Caleb, and Earthly Possessions—are all set in Maryland, at least two in Baltimore, where the novelist has lived since 1967. Moreover, of these novels, it is only those which employ the Roland Park setting—The Clock Winder, in part, and Searching for Caleb—that can actually be said to rely heavily on locality for thematic significance. Perhaps of more importance is the shift from largely rural to urban settings evident in the last four novels, for in at least two of these, Celestial Navigation and Earthly Possessions, this shift in setting accompanies an intensification of the individual's isolation and confinement.

Just as the settings in Anne Tyler's novels change, so also does the extent of her treatment of the individual in the family. The last four novels mentioned above, for example, offer clear evidence of Miss Tyler's maturation as a writer. The time schemes are expanded to cover several years in the lives of the major characters; even several generations of family are included. Also, along with this expansion come increased complexity, variety, and depth in the familial relationships Miss Tyler
portrays. The kinds of relationships change, and so do the characters. These become not only more numerous in the later books, but also increasingly more complex and eccentric and clearly more fully developed. A houseful of boarders establish familial ties in Celestial Navigation; the hero is an aging, reclusive bachelor and artist. Searching for Caleb focuses on the family renegades, not the regulars. A ninety-three-year-old man emerges as one of the principal characters in the novel, and his relationship with his granddaughter is clearly more central to the plot than that he has with any of his children. Charlotte Emory in Earthly Possessions is not only older than the other Tyler heroines of her type; to the virtues of strength and passivity that characterize figures like Joan Pike and Elizabeth Abbott, she adds wry humor and a sense of the absurdity of life. Like her predecessors, she confronts profound problems of freedom and commitment, but she is clearly aware of issues they do not consciously consider, particularly the futility of escape through any means other than one's vision of the world around him.

The theme of the individual in the family and his experiences of isolation and separateness are not, of course, the only subjects of Anne Tyler's first seven novels, nor are these books as bleakly pessimistic as words such as isolation, separateness, and confinement would suggest. In fact, most of Anne Tyler's novels discussed in this study are at heart joyful books, celebrating through their colorful observations and details the novelist's love of the characters she has created. They contain many humorous, ironical portraits of both the delightfully eccentric as well as the painfully dull, of equally unforgettable characters like Caleb Peck and Evie Decker. Above all, Anne Tyler's are joyful books because they repeatedly emphasize the possibilities of human choice, of love
and commitment, compassion and humor in the face of some seemingly hopeless and unchanging life situations, including the rigid, unfailing anger of a father toward his son and the imprisonment of a housewife as a hostage in a stolen car.

Perhaps, however, the key to the spirit of Anne Tyler's novels is best expressed by the novelist herself. Speaking of the reasons she writes in the first place, she tells us

I write because I want more than one life. I insist on a wider selection. It's greed, plain and simple.*

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INTRODUCTION

1. Besides her regular monthly reviews, which began in February, 1975, Miss Tyler also contributed three earlier reviews to The National Observer: one in November, 1972; one in January, 1974; and one in November, 1974. For a complete listing of Anne Tyler's published work to date, as well as criticism on that work, see the checklist appended to this dissertation.


3. Exceptions have been journals, such as Shenandoah and The Southern Review, which have published one or more of Anne Tyler's short stories, and other publications, such as The Sewanee Review, which give notice to the work of new Southern writers. The above mentioned journals have reviewed one or more of Miss Tyler's novels. For additional information on critical reviews, see the Appendix.

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. See also the short story "Outside," The Southern Review, NS 7 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 1130-1144.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. It was Price who was to nominate "The Artificial Family" for the Pushcart Prize volume, a story which first appeared in The Southern Review, NS 11 (Summer, 1975), pp. 615-621, and who, according to Miss Tyler, "sent some of my things to an agent." Mademoiselle, 62 (January, 1966), p. 46. Price and Miss Tyler share the same literary agents, Russell and Volkening. See also the excerpt from the letter quoted above.

Chapter I

Letter from Anne Tyler to the author, 25 July 1977. Miss Tyler is herself unsure of when she helped edit The Archive, although an April, 1977,
issue of that magazine containing a new story by Miss Tyler mentions her editing the magazine, but it does not supply any other information.

2See The Archive, Volumes 71 (March, 1959), pp. 36-37, and 72 (October, 1959), pp. 5-6.


4"The community" is not identified in the story, but it is possibly one of the early Quaker cooperative communities which Miss Tyler lived in as a child. Other autobiographical elements include the adolescent narrator's reference to her youngest brother Ty. Miss Tyler has three younger brothers, the oldest of whom is named Ty. Of interest also is the fact that "Laura" is written in the first person and contains a youthful smattering of the ironic view of life that characterizes most of Miss Tyler's fiction, a view that achieves its fullest expression to date in her latest novel, Earthly Possessions.


8This sense of continuity evidences itself not only in her first novel but also in Miss Tyler's attitude toward her characters. As she mentioned in her letter of July 25, 1977, when asked about re-using some of the characters she had created, "Who knows for sure . . . ? I miss some of them, and like to imagine how they're doing nowadays, . . . in fact, I wonder how Evie Decker's baby turned out?" See also Miss Tyler's comments contained in Marguerite Michael's "Anne Tyler, Writer 8:05 to 3:30," The New York Times Book Review, 82 (8 May 1970), p. 13, as well as Miss Tyler's "'Because I Want More Than One Life,'" The Washington Post (15 August 1976), pp. G1, G7.

9References to characters and parts of the plot in this story, particularly the observation of Ben Joe and Shelley's return by Shelley's younger sister Phoebe, are made several times in If Morning Ever Comes. See especially pp. 94-95.

10Anne Tyler, If Morning Ever Comes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 265. All subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.

The title of the novel, *If Morning Ever Comes*, is, in fact, derived from a story Ben Joe's father often told and refers to the endlessness of night for the Hawkes family, most of whom suffer from some form of insomnia and wander about at night as though there were no difference between light and darkness. Interestingly, Anne Tyler herself is an insomniac and grew up telling herself stories at night "just to get to sleep." See Marguerite Michaels, "Anne Tyler, Writer 8:05 to 3:30," *op. cit.*, p. 42.

Michaels, p. 43.


No germ story exists for *The Tin Can Tree*, although chapter four of the work appeared under the title "Everything But Roses" in *The Reporter* one month prior to the novel's official publication date. See Anne Tyler, "Everything But Roses," *The Reporter*, 33 (23 September 1965), pp. 47-52.

Anne Tyler, *The Tin Can Tree* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1965), p. 6. All subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.

30. Tyler letter, 25 July 1977. Charlotte Emory, the central character and narrator of Earthly Possessions, is also a photographer, and a photograph of the missing Caleb in the 1976 novel, Searching for Caleb, serves as the only remaining evidence of his existence. Additionally, Miss Tyler's comments about photography as an occupation and interest of her characters came in response to a question about the use of cameras in these novels as well as The Tin Can Tree.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. For a detailed publication history of the novel, see the Introduction as well as the Appendix to this study.

34. Anne Tyler, as quoted by Clifford Ridley, op. cit.

35. Anne Tyler, A Slipping-Down Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 42. All subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.

36. In its portrayal of teenage musical obsessions, A Slipping-Down Life is especially reminiscent of the 1960's.

37. An interesting sidenote here is the fact that A Slipping-Down Life is the only one of Miss Tyler's novels on which a movie option was sold. Originally, Paul Newman held the option to make the novel into a movie and Miss Tyler was "supposed to adapt it." Newman "let the option go when money . . . got tight and . . . an unknown quantity began to look too uncertain to invest in." As of January, 1978, according to Miss Tyler, a small company in Washington, D.C., held the option, although at the time I originally received this information, that option was about to lapse. Miss Tyler's opinion of adapting the novel into a screenplay incidentally, is that "it would make a terrible movie." All information and citations here are taken from an unpublished letter from Anne Tyler to the author, 18 January 1978.

38. Ridley, op. cit.

39. Ibid.


41. Ibid.

42. As quoted by Ridley, op. cit.

43. As quoted by Jorie Lueloff, "Authoress Explains Why Women Dominate the South," (Baton Rouge) Morning Advocate (8 February 1965), p. 11A.

CHAPTER II

1 For a publication record of The Clock Winder, see the Appendix to this study.

2 According to Miss Tyler, Knopf disapproved of The Button Mender as a suitable title for her fourth book and suggested instead A Help to the Family, a title which the novelist herself objected to because, as she wrote to me in her letter of 18 January 1978, "it makes me think of a first-aid book for beginning babysitters." However, before the writer was able to submit the present title of the novel, Knopf had released A Help to the Family "to whomever compiles . . . various reference works." As a consequence, references to both A Help to the Family and The Clock Winder appear in Contemporary Authors as well as the Cumulative Book Index, suggesting two separate novels rather than just one.

3 Anne Tyler, The Clock Winder (New York: Aldred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 117. All subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


CHAPTER III

1 "Olives Out of a Bottle" (An interview with Anne Tyler), The Archive, 87 (Spring, 1975), p. 77.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p. 73.

4 Ibid., p. 77.
CHAPTER IV

For a complete listing of reviews and short stories by Anne Tyler during this period, see the Appendix to this dissertation.


3 Ibid., p. 112.

4 Ibid., p. 110.

5 Ibid., p. 112.

6 Ibid., p. 112.

7 Anne Tyler, Searching for Caleb (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 50. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.

8 See the discussion of Roland Park in chapter two of this study where the setting is mentioned in connection with The Clock Winder, the first of Anne Tyler's novels to be placed in the area.
The pose of Caleb in this photograph is one Anne Tyler took from "a photo of . . . /her/ Great-Grandfather Tyler unaccountably playing a cello in an open stable door, 20 feet off the ground" (Unpublished letter from Anne Tyler to the author, 25 July 1977). Like Miss Tyler's second novel, *The Tin Can Tree*, and, to some extent, her seventh, *Earthly Possessions*, *Searching for Caleb* here uses photography to suggest the cessation of time. Appropriately, Daniel Peck's quest is, in many ways, for just such a halting of change. For discussions of the use of photography in the other novels, see chapter one and chapter five of this dissertation.

See, for example, the discussions of Joan Pike in chapter one and of Charlotte Emory in chapter five of this dissertation.

Justine's state here and her moving throughout her life are reminiscent of Anne Tyler's own childhood which, as she has indicated, was characterized by continuous moves, "maybe once or twice a year, till I was six." Further, Miss Tyler comments, "I consider this a convenient explanation for my legendary ability to get lost, and for my utter lack of a sense of place, which I bend over backwards to compensate for in my writing" (Unpublished letter from Anne Tyler to the author, 1 July 1977).

In her letter of 25 July 1977, Miss Tyler wrote to me of how she liked to think about the highly energetic and rebellious "Duncan Peck rocketing around his mother's womb" (Tyler letter, op. cit.) even before being born—an apt description of the disruption and discomfort Duncan causes in the lives of his parents.


CHAPTER V


For a complete listing of these reviews, see the Appendix to this dissertation.


*Earthly Possessions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 3. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.

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CONCLUSION

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"Olives Out of a Bottle." An interview with Anne Tyler. The Archive, 87 (Spring, 1975), pp. 70-79.


-----------. Letter to the author. 1 July 1977.


-----------. Letter to the author. 4 January 1978.

Letter to the author. 20 October 1978.

Letter to the author. 1 February 1979.


APPENDIX
AN ANNE TYLER CHECKLIST, 1959-1978

Born October 25, 1941, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the contemporary American writer Anne Tyler has produced a remarkable amount of quality fiction to date. By the end of 1978, she had published forty short stories and seven full-length novels. Eight of her stories have appeared thus far in The New Yorker, five in The Southern Review, while two others have been included in the O. Henry prize volumes for 1969 and 1972 and another in the first edition of the Pushcart Prize anthology published in 1976. In addition, one of The New Yorker stories, "Your Place is Empty," was included in Best American Short Stories 1977, while another, "The Geologist's Maid," appeared in the 1978 anthology Stories of the Modern South. All seven of the novels and most of the short stories are set in the South, primarily in North Carolina, where the novelist grew up, or in Baltimore, where she has lived with her husband and two daughters since 1967. Moreover, since the publication of her first story in 1959, Miss Tyler has shown a continuing isolation of the individual within a family setting.

Despite the large body of Miss Tyler's work, the poignancy and insight into the human condition revealed in her fiction, and recognition in May, 1977, by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for literary excellence and promise of important work to come, for the most part Anne Tyler has been overlooked by the scholarly community. To date, no major critical study or book-length work has been published on her fiction. To fill the gap created by the neglect of Anne Tyler's work, I have compiled the following checklist. It will, I hope, encourage the serious critical consideration which I believe this writer's
work deserves. Fortunately, Miss Tyler herself has been able to supply me with information on the foreign editions of her novels and, on occasion, with help in locating some of the short stories and reviews published in unindexed periodicals. Correspondence with the editor of the Duke University student publication, The Archive, provided information on the early stories published in that magazine. Finally, although the list of primary works is complete, the sections containing the titles of secondary sources include only those articles and reviews listed in existing indexes or referred to me by friends and colleagues.

This checklist has been divided into five principal sections and arranged chronologically. Works by Anne Tyler make up the first section and are grouped as follows: Novels, including all editions, translations, and abridged versions of Miss Tyler's seven novels; Short Stories, including both first publication citations as well as later appearances in anthologies; and Articles and Reviews, a listing of all of Miss Tyler's miscellaneous articles and her reviews appearing in various national publications. Secondary sources, consisting mainly of reviews of the novels and a few articles on Anne Tyler or referring to her work, complete the last section of the checklist.

I. PRIMARY WORKS

A. NOVELS

If Morning Ever Comes, 1964.


If Morning Ever Comes (continued)


Denmark: Glydendal, 1969 (tr. as Måske i Morgen by Merete Ries).


The Tin Can Tree, 1965.

The Reporter, 33 (23 September 1965), pp. 47-52 (imprint of chapter four as "Everything But Roses").


New York: Popular Library, April, 1977 (paperback).

The Clock Winder, 1972.

Works in Progress, 6, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972,
pp. 121-139 (chapter one only).


Frankfurt-am-Main: Goverts, 1977 (tr. as Caleb oder das Glück aus den Karten by Danehl von Gunther).


B. SHORT STORIES

1959

"Laura." The Archive, 71 (March, 1959), pp. 36-37.


1960


1961


1963


1964


1965


"I'm Not Going to Ask You Again." Harper's, 231 (September, 1965), pp. 88-98.

1966

"As the Earth Gets Old." The New Yorker, 42 (29 October 1966), pp. 60-64.


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1967


1968


1971


1972

"Respect." Mademoiselle, 75 (June, 1972), pp. 146-147, 164-166.


1973


1974


1975


1976

1977


"Under the Bosom Tree."  The Archive, 89 (Spring, 1977), pp. 72-77.

"Foot-Footing On."  Mademoiselle, 83 (November, 1977), pp. 82, 86.

"Uncle Ahmad."  Quest/77, 1 (November-December, 1977), pp. 76-82.

1978


C. ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

1965

"Youth Talks about Youth: 'Will This Seem Ridiculous?'"  Vogue, 145 (1 February 1965), pp. 85, 206.

1972


1974


1975


"Olives Out of a Bottle." An Interview with Anne Tyler. The Archive, 87 (Spring, 1975), pp. 70-79.


1976


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1977


1978


II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. REVIEWS AND CRITICISM

Celestial Navigation.


Booklist, 70 (1 July 1974), p. 1182.


*The Clock Winder.*


*Booklist*, 69 (1 September 1972), p. 43.


The New Yorker, 48 (29 April 1972), p. 140.


Earthly Possessions.


Fuller, Edmund. "Two Women, Casting Off Life's Encumbrances." The

Supplement (9 December 1977), p. 1456.

Jefferson, Margo. "Two for the Road." Newsweek, 89 (2 May 1977),
pp. 75-76.


Kirkus Reviews, 45 (1 March 1977), p. 44.

Larson, Charles R. "Anne Tyler, Storyteller." The National Observer,


Nesanovich, Stella. "The Individual in the Family: Anne Tyler's
Searching for Caleb and Earthly Possessions." The Southern Review,

Neville, Jill. "Journey to Treason." The Sunday Times (23 October
The Progressive, 41 (July, 1977), p. 44.

If Morning Ever Comes.


Jackson, Katherine G. "Mad First Novel, but Without Madness."


Vansittart, Peter. "Landscapes, People." *Spectator*, 215
(9 July 1965), p. 56.


Searching for Caleb.


Booklist, 72 (15 April 1976), p. 1166.


de Usabel, F. E. Library Journal, 100 (15 December 1975), p. 2344.


Kirkus Reviews, 43 (1 November 1975), pp. 1253-1254.


Neville, Jill. The Sunday Times (16 May 1976), p. 41C.


Sage, Lorna. The Observer (9 May 1976), p. 27.


A Slipping-Down Life.


Booklist, 67 (1 April 1971), p. 655.


The Tin Can Tree.


Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. "A Small Pebble with a Big Splash."
McNiff, Mary S. America, 113 (30 October 1965), pp. 507-508.
Richardson, D. E. "Grits and Mobility: Three Southern Novels."
Stedmond, J. M. University of Toronto Quarterly, 36 (July, 1967),
   pp. 383-384.
   The Times (1 September 1966), p. 12.

B. BIOGRAPHICAL ARTICLES AND MISCELLANY

"Anne Tyler." Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Phyllis C. Mendelson
   and Dedria Bryfonski (Detroit: Gale, 1977), VII, 479-480.
   Bookviews, 1 (October, 1977), p. 29.
   Contemporary Authors, ed. James M. Ethridge (Detroit: Gale, 1964),
   IX-X, 455.
Contemporary Authors, eds. Clara D. Kinsman and Mary Ann Tennenhouse
   (Detroit: Gale, 1974), IX-XII, 910-911.
Cook, Bruce. "New Faces in Faulkner Country." Saturday Review, 3
   (4 September 1976), pp. 39-41.


 Associated Press, Morning Advocate (8 February 1965), p. 11A.


Stella Ann Nesanovich was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on July 23, 1944. She received her elementary education in the parochial schools of New Orleans and graduated from Saint Mary's Dominican High School in New Orleans in 1962. In May, 1966, she received the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of New Orleans (then Louisiana State University in New Orleans) and in May, 1968, the Master of Arts degree in English from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. Her thesis concerned the artist figure in the poetry and tales of William Butler Yeats.

During the summer, 1968, following her receipt of the Masters degree, Stella was an English Speaking Union Scholar at the University of London, and she attended the Yeats International Summer School in Sligo, Ireland, in August of that year. From the fall, 1968, through June, 1971, she taught as an Instructor in English at the University of New Orleans. In September, 1971, she returned to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge to pursue the doctorate in English. From the fall of that year through summer, 1976, she taught as a graduate assistant in the Department of English at LSU, and, in the fall, 1976, was given a full-time instructorship, a position she held until May, 1979. She is currently an Instructor in English at Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina.