

Young Woman's Quest for Selfhood: A Study of Anne Tyler's *A Slipping-Down Life* and *The Clock Winder*

Megumi TANJI

Abstract

Anne Tyler, whose career as a novelist spans well over half century, has consistently produced work that observes family relationships. Evie Decker, the protagonist of *A Slipping-Down Life* (1970), is a 17-year old high school student. Her static life changes when she cuts the last name of a local rock singer on her forehead. This turns the public's attention both to herself and the singer. They marry, but the singer's career comes to a standstill and Evie's desperate effort to save his career and their marriage fails. Having become more independent and confident, she prepares for motherhood. In *The Clock Winder* (1972), the central character Elizabeth Abbott finds working for Mrs. Emerson as a handyman comfortable, until she is involved in the death of an Emerson son in an unfortunate way. In the end she overcomes her fear of influencing other people's lives and accepts marriage and motherhood. In both novels, Tyler gives an insightful account of a young woman's quest for selfhood and sees their motherhood as a choice that suits them rather than reticence or confinement.

Keywords: family, marriage, motherhood, care-taking, selfhood

Introduction

Since the publication of her first novel when she was 23, the American novelist Anne Tyler (1941-) has consistently produced work that observes family relationships. Reynolds Price, who taught the creative writing course in Tyler's freshman year at Duke University, remembers her as "frighteningly mature" (Bail 5). Even Tyler's early novels are characterized by her distinct style, which gives long-time readers a sense of returning to a familiar place. At the same time, the uniqueness of the characters and families she has created in the last fifty-some years is remarkable, despite the similarities between character types and storylines.

The maturity of her first novel, *If Morning Ever Comes* (1964), and her second novel, *The Tin Can Tree* (1965), won favorable responses from critics. In the four-year gap between her second

and third novels, Tyler had two daughters, and the family moved to Baltimore, the city in which the majority of her novels, as well as her personal life, are set. Her next two novels, *A Slipping-Down Life* (1970) and *The Clock Winder* (1972), however, received mixed reviews. *The New York Times*, for example, which carried a 630-word signed review of *The Tin Can Tree*, introduced *A Slipping-Down Life* in a mere 120 words and stated that the main characters have “limited depths” (*The New York Times*, March 15, 1970). The paper’s 170-word review of *The Clock Winder* recognized the charm of the characters but suggested that one would wish “the story had more substance” (*The New York Times*, May 21, 1972).

Aside from having received mixed reviews, *A Slipping-Down Life* and *The Clock Winder* exhibit other similarities: both novels feature a young female protagonist who struggles to adapt to her surroundings; both novels explore these young women’s search for selfhood; and in both novels, the main character becomes a mother in the end. These similarities bring about the question of whether Tyler views motherhood as a way of adapting to adult life. Critics repeatedly question the absence of social issues in Tyler’s works and Robert Croft points out that “the social topic seemingly most overlooked by Tyler” is the women’s movement (Croft 1995, 42). Although Tyler makes little direct reference to the political or ideological aspects of women’s issues, she has created a horde of female characters who struggle to be true to themselves, and this shows her continuous interest in women’s maturity and independence. In light of this, this essay explores the coming-of-age of Tyler’s young female protagonists and the novelist’s insights into individual growth and family life.

Table 1: Central Characters of Anne Tyler’s Novels and Their Age

	Title	Year	Central Character	Age of Central Character
1	<i>If Morning Ever Comes</i>	1964	Ben Joe Hawkes	25
2	<i>The Tin Can Tree</i>	1966	Joan Pike	26
3	<i>A Slipping-down Life</i>	1970	Evie Decker	17
4	<i>The Clock Winder</i>	1972	Elizabeth	22 ⇒ 32
5	<i>Celestial Navigation</i>	1974	Jeremy Pauling	38 ⇒ late 40s
6	<i>Searching for Caleb</i>	1975	Justine Peck	40
7	<i>Earthly Possessions</i>	1977	Charlotte Emory	35
8	<i>Morgan’s Passing</i>	1980	Morgan Gower	42
9	<i>Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant</i>	1982	Ezra Tull	childhood ⇒ 40s
10	<i>The Accidental Tourist</i>	1985	Macon Leary	42
11	<i>Breathing Lessons</i>	1988	Maggie Moran	48

12	<i>Saint Maybe</i>	1991	Ian Bedloe	17 ⇒ late 30s
13	<i>Ladder of Years</i>	1995	Delia Grinstead	40
14	<i>A Patchwork Planet</i>	1998	Barnaby Gaitlin	30
15	<i>Back When We Were Grownups</i>	2001	Rebecca Davitch	53
16	<i>The Amateur Marriage</i>	2004	Michael/Pauline Anton	20/18 ⇒ 80/78
17	<i>Digging to America</i>	2006	Maryam Yazdan	60s
18	<i>Noah's Compass</i>	2010	Liam Pennywell	60
19	<i>The Beginner's Goodbye</i>	2012	Aaron Woolcott	36
20	<i>A Spool of Blue Thread</i>	2015	Abby Whitshank	19 ⇒ mid 50s ⇒ early 70s
21	<i>Vinegar Girl</i>	2016	Kate Battista	29
22	<i>Clock Dance</i>	2018	Willa	20s ⇒ 61

A Slipping-Down Life: A Search for Public and Private Attention

Although men and women of various ages populate Anne Tyler's 22 novels, *A Slipping-Down Life* is the only one that features a high school girl as the protagonist, as shown in Table 1. The first few pages of the novel introduce Evie Decker by using adjectives such as "short and wide," "heavy-footed," "plump," "drab," "pudgy and formless," and "heavy." She is not fashion-conscious, and "she had long ago stopped expecting anything of her clothes" (*SDL* 5). In addition to her physical unattractiveness, Tyler emphasizes Evie's loneliness. When at home, she listens to the radio all the time; her father and the African-American cleaning girl Clotelia are "not really company at all" (*SDL* 1), because they are always busy doing their own things. Evie's mother died of childbed fever, and Evie has been a lonely child from the start. At school, too, Evie is an isolated figure to whom no one pays attention. She is an almost invisible young girl who goes to most places alone in a self-defensive posture and with "her books clutched to her chest, rounding her shoulders" (*SDL* 5). The text implies that her low self-esteem is the result of the sense of guilt she has always felt for her mother's death; her mother was "the last woman in Pulqua County to die of childbed fever" (*SDL* 30). Evie secretly fears that she might be accused of having deprived her father of his wife, and, at any moment, she expects him to say, "You are what I traded your mother for, and it was a bad bargain at that" (*SDL* 30).

Magazines, books of romantic stories, and the radio are the only things that connect Evie to the outside world. While most other girls are fascinated by the Beatles or Rolling Stones, Evie devotes herself to a local rock musician named Bertram "Drumstrings" Casey, whose future success as a professional is dubious. Drum has a peculiar performance style in which he mixes

singing with speaking. When he sings, the words are “slippery and whining” (*SDL* 8) and hard to distinguish. His style seems original and mysterious at first, but his audience’s enthusiasm turns into bewilderment after a while. Evie and Drum’s band member and manager, David Elliot, are the only ones who believe he deserves attention. Also, they realize that Drum needs something apart from his music to attract a larger audience, but Drum is reluctant to admit this.

Evie devotes herself to contriving various projects to draw attention to the singer. Her first significant action, cutting his name on her forehead, not only draws the audience’s attention to Drum but also focuses his and the public’s attention on her. Her action makes Evie visible to the world. For example, when she walks out of the roadhouse restroom where she cut the crooked letters “CASEY” with nail scissors onto her forehead, she is supported by two people who hold her “in a professional, movie-like way” (*SDL* 24). Not only does she draw the attention of the crowd in the roadhouse; she also gets publicity when a picture of her is published in the local newspaper. More importantly, however, in the excitement following the incident, Evie sees her action as opening the door to a new phase of her life. She confides to her only close friend, Violet (*SDL* 28):

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 ago my whole life might’ve been different.

Evie is exhilarated by monopolizing everyone’s attention, and she savors the feeling that her life will start to change. It is as if she has affirmed her identity by repeatedly thinking of her own name. Her desire to make the rock singer notice her is intertwined with her own need for attention.

Yet, what at first seemed like a hopeful pathway leading to a new selfhood proves to be as ragged as the scar on her forehead. When her alarmed father arrives at the hospital with a bed jacket, she imagines him bringing the same object to her mother when she gave birth to Evie. Evie sees the bed jacket as a silent reminder of her guilt and responsibility for her mother’s death. Only a couple of hours after she tastes her glorious awakening, she realizes that she cannot change overnight. She is overcome by inertia and experiences an “untidy feeling” (*SDL* 45). Finally, it takes Evie a few weeks to return to school, but the conflict between her inner needs and her surroundings deepens as she continues to involve herself with Drum.

Evie eventually overcomes this phase of apathy when she decides to take action. She finds Drum’s home address in the phone directory, calls him, asks him to visit her, and eventually gets him to drive her to school. Although he is not impressed with the scar on her forehead and does

not show much interest in Evie, she is aware of the attention she receives at school, which spreads like a ripple when she arrives. She is no longer invisible; instead, she is known as the "girl who slashed the singer's name in her face" (*SDL* 52). The attention she receives gives her a sense of power and the confidence to act more boldly. She allies herself with David Elliott, who talks Drum into having Evie sit near the stage when he performs. Initially, this strategy is effective until the audience gets used to the sight of Evie and Drum's complacent performance style.

Just as Evie starts to admit to herself that there is not anything to Drum's music, he turns to Evie for support, and they get married. The turning point of the novel happens around the middle, in Chapter 9, when, one evening, Evie has a vision of her future (*SDL* 93):

She pictured herself growing older and fatter in this airless dark house, turning into a spinster with a pouched face and a zipper of lines across her upper lip, caring for her father until he died and she had no one left but cats or parakeets.

Evie is frightened at the prospect of not changing and becoming stagnant. In search of refuge, she surrenders herself to Drum, who presses her with the question: "Don't you want to change your life around some?" (*SDL* 95). The immature Drum has been thrown out of his home, is out of a job and unable to support himself, and at a standstill as a singer. He decides to turn to Evie because he sees the scar on her forehead as a sign of her commitment to him. At least he adds to the proposal: "Plus, I do like you. I wouldn't be asking if I didn't" (*SDL* 95).

Their married life is a continuous struggle to make ends meet as Drum's career in music turns even more precarious. Evie gets a part-time job at the library. Significantly, her working environment—with its emphasis on neatness and preciseness—is in stark contrast to the young couple's disordered life. For Evie, the "importance of details seemed peaceful and lulling" (*SDL* 120). There can be no doubt that Tyler, with her experience of working at a university library, is aware of the soothing effect that card-cataloging could have on librarians. Here, Evie finds the comfort that has evaded her all her life. Evie shows that she possesses the efficiency and potential to straighten up and take a step forward instead of living a purposeless life. In her married life, though, her attempts are in vain. She is determined to create publicity for Drum but has no better idea than an improvised kidnapping, which turns into a farce. The childish scheme leads to Drum having an affair with her school friend, who helped with the false kidnap. The affair results in Drum and Evie's separation.

Evie regards publicity as a miracle: "Publicity was everything. She felt that more and more. She thought of publicity as the small, neat click that set into motion machines that had previously

been disengaged” (*SDL* 128). She is obsessed with having Drum’s name publicized: “How will you get ahead, then, if nobody knows your name?” (*SDL* 137). A desperate desire to be known permeates the novel. When she cuts Drum’s name on her forehead, for example, Evie’s private body turns public, and she becomes a social object.

Evie is brave enough to accept the changes she undergoes as she involves herself with Drum. Clotelia refers to him as “trash,” and Evie, too, is aware that her marriage to him is a “Slipping down” in terms of class. For example, when they bring furniture from Evie’s father’s house to their home, which used to house tenant farmers, the mismatch between the middle and lower classes is made explicit. In the American south, “tenancy was the context for a culture of rural poverty” and “tenants and croppers were often seen as unworthy and shiftless people who had neither the ability nor the desire for self-improvement” (Merz 31). Drum is a 1960s version of the stereotypical poor white in the South. Moving into Evie’s father’s place after his sudden death presents an opportunity for Drum to move up the social ladder, but he refuses to use it. Despite Evie’s urge to “pick yourself up” (*SDL* 155), Drum is too proud and lackadaisical to change his ways. Moreover, although he does recognize Evie’s self-mutilation as an act of self-sacrifice, he underestimates its value because of her physical unattractiveness. He says: “It’d been a hell of a lot more sacrifice if she’d been prettier to begin with” (*SDL* 133). He exploits her, both morally and economically.

Without her father and her immature husband (albeit with a baby due in several months), Evie is free to live as she wishes to. She owns a comfortable middle-class house and can give her child the maternal attention that she herself never receives. Finally, despite her closed-in family, Evie has the opportunity to create her own story instead of following social norms. Since her self-mutilation, she has gradually gained the confidence to be independent. In cultural anthropology, bodily sacrifice is defined as “the ritual marking of the body, often in the context of a rite of passage” (Barnard and Spencer 782). The definition applies to Evie: What at first seems like a fad turns out to be the point of transition from childhood to adulthood.

***The Clock Winder* (1972): Making it Through the Shadow of Death**

Tyler’s fourth novel, *The Clock Winder*, marks a transition in her career; it is not set in North Carolina like her earlier works, but in Rowland Park, Baltimore, which is the signature setting for her later novels. Paul Bail points out that the novel also “marks the point in Anne Tyler’s development when she was beginning to reveal herself more openly through her characters” (Bail 39). Bail argues that the protagonist Elizabeth Abbott’s “footloose impulsivity” (Bail 39) is similar to Tyler’s own character. In Tyler’s next novel, *Celestial Navigation* (1974), she creates an

artist protagonist whom she considers “most like herself” (Croft 1998, 55). Other elements also point to an expansion of the sphere of her novels. Unlike the preceding three novels, which cover relatively short periods, *The Clock Winder* has a ten-year time frame (from 1960 to 1970), which traces different phases of the characters' lives. The novel is considerably longer than the previous ones and houses a more significant number of characters. Most importantly, Tyler narrates the chapters from different viewpoints—a technique she repeatedly uses in her work.

The novel opens with the arrival of the 22-year-old Elizabeth Abbott in Roland Park, where Mrs. Emerson lives in an old three-story house by herself. It is three months since the death of her husband, and Mrs. Emerson has just dismissed her handyman, who has served the family for 25 years. The house needs constant maintenance, including painting the shutters, keeping the old plumbing fixed, and cleaning the gutters. The several clocks in each of the house's rooms have different spans for winding; if not properly taken care of, they will strike the hours discordantly. The late Mr. Emerson used to wind the clocks, and no one else seems able to synchronize them. None of the seven adult Emerson children assumes these maintenance tasks, and the household has begun to show signs of physical and mental deterioration. Mrs. Emerson does not admit her helplessness to her children, hired hands, or neighbors; instead, she confides in Elizabeth, who takes on the role of handyman and clock winder. Ultimately, she resets the rhythm of the household.

Elizabeth feels more comfortable in Mrs. Emerson's house than with her parents and younger sister in her hometown, Ellington, North Carolina. Mrs. Emerson, who has been a city-dweller all her life, reveals her contempt of country people when she says: “Oh, I have cousins in North Carolina. Not to know personally, of course” (CW 11). Ellington and Baltimore are juxtaposed: the small town of Ellington is static; the big city of Baltimore is fluid. When she is in Ellington, Elizabeth always manages to bump onto her minister father's congregation members, who have, since she was a child, compared her to her younger sister, saying, “You're the one with the cute little sister” (CW 161). Polly, a year younger than Elizabeth and already married and expecting a baby, has taken the life course expected of young women, whereas Elizabeth has always been the black sheep of her family and the community. Her parents are conscious of the eyes of the church members and take great care in their appearance. For these reasons, there “was nothing about this place that made her feel comfortable” (CW 156). Like Tyler's other protagonists, Elizabeth feels out of place in her family. Away from home, Elizabeth finds rides and jobs on bulletin boards; she prefers to make connections with others through need and not through kinship or friendship. She accepts Mrs. Emerson's offer to be her handyman, because the idea of a relationship that will end once the contract expires, appeals to her. With Mrs. Emerson, who admits to never having “felt all that religious” (CW 137), Elizabeth is also free from the religiosity

of her family. After having dropped out of college and not wanting to rely on her parents, Elizabeth settles down in Baltimore in September 1960.

Elizabeth sees her settling down in the Emerson house as achieving independence; she is not in school, she has a paid job, and she has a room, which is “no one’s but her own” (*CW* 39):

She awoke here every morning feeling amazed all over again that she had finally become a grownup. Where to go and when to sleep and what to do with the day were hers to decide—or not to decide, which was even better. She could leave here when she wanted or stay forever, fixing things. In this house everything she touched seemed to work out fine. Not like the old days.

At this point, her view of adulthood is rather superficial. In the first three chapters, Elizabeth enjoys the kind of non-committal life she leads. Everywhere she seems to find things she would change; for instance, she “wanted to banish all their complicated designs to the basement and sand the floors down to bare grain” (*CW* 29), but it is “something she knew better than to suggest to Mrs. Emerson” (*CW* 29). Elizabeth knows that it is not her job to change existing things. At one point, she emphasizes that she will never “change someone else’s affairs around” (*CW* 67). Her outlook causes trouble, especially with the brothers Matthew and Timothy Emerson, who are both attracted to her. Timothy does not understand her approach; he thinks that she is unable to take things—including him—seriously and that “everything they did ended in giggles” (*CW* 54). Although they do things together, their relationship does not give him the security he seeks in a deeper involvement.

It does not take long before Mrs. Emerson and the house rely on Elizabeth for support. Because Elizabeth does not talk much, Mrs. Emerson, who has “a compulsion to fill all silences” (*CW* 17), is able to pour out her heart. The source of her discontent is her seven children. She knows that they find her difficult and says: “I feel like the center of an asterisk” (*CW* 17). On the outside, they may look like a perfect large and lively family, but she admits that this is far from accurate (*CW* 17, 18):

“Those auto rides,” she said, “with all of us crammed inside. ‘There go the Emersons,’ people would say, and never guess for an instant that behind the glass it was all bickering, arguing, scenes, constant crisis—”

“Oh, well,” Elizabeth said comfortably, “I reckon most families work that way.”

Elizabeth knows, from her own upbringing, that there is no such thing as a flawless and perfectly

content family. When, for example, she returns home after Timothy's funeral, she finds her practical mother fixing casseroles to give out to church members who suffer a family bereavement. Elizabeth observes her mother: "On the surface she was the perfect minister's wife, ... offering sympathy in the proper soft, hesitant voice; but underneath she was all bustle and practicality, and if she could have deep-frozen her sympathy ahead of time, she probably would have" (*CW* 155). Mrs. Emerson and Elizabeth may think their families are complete opposites, but they are similar in the sense that their surfaces are misleading. Mrs. Emerson realizes this when a stroke compels her to lie on the floor. Helplessly, she looks up at the "undersurface of the table" that is "rough and unfinished, a cheat" (*CW* 252). In drawing the reader's attention to the contrast of the beautifully polished table to its underside, Tyler implies that a family can never be a finished product inside and out; a family is always "rough and unfinished," with new conflicts and crises emerging constantly. The idea of an imperfect family is presented in an earlier chapter through Timothy's thoughts (*CW* 74, 75):

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. 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.

This part anticipates the many mismatched families that Tyler creates in her subsequent novels. The communication between parents and children, or between siblings, often fails, and her families' projects are left uncompleted. The post-funeral dinner, for which Mrs. Emerson, five of her children, and a relative named Aunt Dorothie get together, is an exemplary example. The Emersons' "helplessness and incapacity to communicate" (Petry 1992, 9) is recognized by one of the daughters, who says: "Have you ever known this family to make it through to the end of a meal?" (*CW* 142). When a family member feels out of place, they escape to a more comfortable place but often end up coming back—a tactic that is present in many of Tyler's novels and is referred to as the "escape/return paradigm" by one critic (Croft 1998, 60).

This novel also draws attention to the idea that leaving and returning provides one with a new understanding of themselves. This idea is presented in Chapter 9 when Elizabeth is about to marry her childhood friend Dommie. The chapter is told from the viewpoint of Margaret, one of the Emerson daughters who attends the wedding. For Elizabeth, the wedding is an act of moral ablation and attempt to come to make peace with Timothy's death. She admits to Margaret that

she has intentions to change, be orderly and decisive, and make her parents “breathe easy for once” (CW 241). When Margaret, who would become a witness to Elizabeth’s walking out of her own wedding, confides to Elizabeth how her first marriage ended, she makes it sound as if her mother forced her and her husband apart. On hearing this, Elizabeth exclaims: “But took you away! She’s so little!” (CW 229). Elizabeth’s reaction makes Margaret realize that her mother was not at fault; it was her own decision to separate from her husband. Although she does not realize it, hearing Margaret’s story on the night before her own wedding, affects Elizabeth, and she ends up leaving her groom at the altar and running away from her family and hometown. In this regard, Margaret Morganroth Gullette points out that “adults should (even) accept the cruelty built into satisfying their desires rather than believe that they were once innocent victims” (Gullette 53). Because she leaves in Margaret’s car, Elizabeth has no other choice but to articulate and review her actions in a conversation with Margaret. Their conversation forces her to realize that she is not someone who merely conforms to satisfy others; she is capable of hurting them in order to be herself.

As if to suggest that life involves hurts and mistakes that may bring about irreversible consequences, Elizabeth’s entire journey is haunted by the image of death. At an early stage in the novel, Elizabeth refers to her belief in reincarnation, saying: “I just think it’s a nice idea. You can stop getting so wrought up about things once you know it’s not your last chance” (CW 66). Despite this, images of death permeate the story. For example, when Elizabeth meets Mrs. Emerson in the first chapter, it has only been three months since Mr. Emerson passed away. In Chapter 2, Elizabeth cannot bring herself to kill the Thanksgiving turkey; she says she has no problem with the feathers and the innards, but she cannot bring herself to kill the bird. In Chapter 3, Timothy talks to Elizabeth about having a sense that he has just died, a prelude to his death. The next chapter gives the account of Timothy’s death and Elizabeth’s involvement in it, followed by Chapter 5, which depicts his funeral and the family gathering afterward. Elizabeth, at this point, is no longer the easy-going girl she used to be. Death seems to loom over her life, resonating with her fear of doing “damage you can’t repair” (CW 241).

When Elizabeth returns home in Chapter 6, she accepts a job to take care of the 87-year-old Mr. Cunningham, who is senile. In Chapter 7, which is composed of letters that Elizabeth writes and receives, Timothy’s twin brother, the mentally unstable Andrew, repeatedly threatens to kill her. Chapter 8 recounts Elizabeth tending to Mr. Cunningham in his final days and his eventual death. Chapter 10, which follows Elizabeth’s failed wedding, describes Mrs. Emerson’s stroke and her critical condition afterward. The next chapter marks the sign of change, or growth, in Elizabeth. During the slow recovery process, taciturn Elizabeth and talkative Mrs. Emerson reverse their roles. One night, the sleepless Mrs. Emerson wakes Elizabeth. Elizabeth tries to

guess what Mrs. Emerson wants, and it turns out that she needs Elizabeth to talk and fill the silence. Elizabeth then tells Mrs. Emerson of an insight she had upon observing parents and children. She says she came to realize that for “every grownup ... you know there must have been at least one person to lug them around ... for years and years, without a break” and is amazed at “how hard people work to raise their children” (*CW* 294).

Eventually, Elizabeth overcomes her fear of having significant effects on others and gets a job teaching craft at a girls' reform school. This section is told in a page-long monologue, which is encouraged by Mrs. Emerson, who repeatedly tells Elizabeth to “Talk” (*CW* 293). Although Elizabeth insists that she is helping Mrs. Emerson temporarily, she no longer believes she can avoid changing “someone's affairs around.” In other words, Elizabeth is preparing or leaning toward being entangled in family life. Toward the end of Chapter 12, just as the Emerson children are ready to leave their mother and the house under Elizabeth's care, Andrew shoots Elizabeth in the arm. Although the incident causes little physical damage, facing death gives Elizabeth an epiphany: “She felt silly and light-headed, and the pain in her arm was getting mixed up with the stab of light that cut through her brain: Now we are even, no Emerson will look at me ever again as if I owe them something; now I know nothing I can do will change a bullet in its course” (*CW* 302). At this moment, the sense of guilt she has felt for her involvement in Timothy's death, as well as the boundaries she kept between her and the Emersons, disappears.

In the final chapter of the novel, Elizabeth—now Matthew's wife and the mother of two children—is referred to by the name “Gillespie,” as the tongue-tied Mrs. Emerson pronounces her name before regaining her speech. By giving her this name, it is as if Mrs. Emerson (who is now her godmother and mother-in-law) gives Elizabeth a new identity or reincarnation. Elizabeth and Mrs. Emerson give each other new lives: Elizabeth helps Mrs. Emerson to regain strength and acknowledges her struggles as a mother of seven, and Mrs. Emerson passes her role of the family matriarch on to Elizabeth. Surprisingly, Andrew now lives with them, and the chapter is narrated from the point of view of Peter, the youngest of the children. On returning from Vietnam (another symbol of death), Peter married P.J., a lively and good-natured, yet rather unrefined country girl (another of Tyler's mismatched couples). The uncultivated P.J. explodes when she learns that Peter never told his family about their marriage (*CW* 331):

That little closed-up family of yours is closed around nothing, thin air, all huddled up together scared to go out. Depending on someone that is like the old-maid failure poor relation you find some places, mending their screens and cooking their supper and fixing their chimneys and making peace—oh, she ended up worse off than them.

Unsophisticated as she may be, P.J. turns out to be a keen observer. Her relentless comment on the Emersons' dependence on Elizabeth/Gillespie is accurate and represents the observations of an outsider. In a 1972 interview, Tyler comments on this novel's ending: "I think of it as a sad ending, and I've been surprised that not everybody does." At the same time, however, Tyler admits that "what she [Elizabeth] does is the best and happiest thing for her" (Ridley 27). In this regard, Elizabeth smiles to herself at one point and imagines Matthew's future: "She saw his life as a piece of strong twine, with his mother and his brothers and sisters knotting their tangled threads into every twist of it and his wife another thread, linked to him and to all his family by long, frayed ropes" (CW 208). Elizabeth, a natural caretaker, fits well into the Emerson family that forever needs mending. The very first sentence of the novel reads: "The house has outlived its usefulness" (CW 1). In the end, however, it returns to life, housing Matthew, Gillespie, their two children, Andrew, and Mrs. Emerson. *The Clock Winder* is a story of revival, in which Elizabeth reincarnates Mrs. Emerson, the house, and herself.

Conclusion: Retreating into Motherhood?

Evie Decker lives in the age of popular culture. Mass media convey ideas and images, which are then received and consumed by the public. Evie feeds on such images and follows them as the model for her married life. Soon, however, she is aware that she has to work out her own plot. Some of Tyler's female characters need more time to realize this. For example, in *Breathing Lessons*, there is a reference to a middle-aged married woman who has learned that "marriage was not a Doris Day movie" (BL 68). Evie, at 17, soberly accepts this as a fact of life. She no longer needs a model plot. A scene close to the end illustrates how confident she has become. Because their shack is cold, she keeps her coat on. It is the same coat she used to wear to school: "Her coat was old-fashioned, wide-shouldered, falling in voluminous uneven folds around her calves" (SDL 5). When she decides to leave Drum and live by herself, the same coat gives her "a brisk, competent feeling" (SDL 153). Outside she might look the same, but she has matured and become confident inside.

In her dungarees and moccasins, Elizabeth is a plausible rebel against the stereotype of that time and the idea that marriage is the best way for a young woman to settle down. Yet, she becomes a mother. Getting married is not reticence or submission, however. Elizabeth exemplifies the dignity of an ordinary person whose life may be small but who can exert great influence as they care for others, especially family members. In the final chapter, she is seen preparing dinner, breast-feeding her baby, mediating between family members, keeping the locusts out of the house — all at the same time, and with a natural composure. Tyler does not

make it explicit what happened between the last two chapters; five years after being shot by Andrew at the end of Chapter 12, Elizabeth emerges as a wife and a mother of two children in Chapter 13. There is no way to know how she came to her decision to marry Matthew. The drama is in assuming a role in family life rather than in romance. She was in a way invited by the Emersons, and having overcome her fear of becoming a parent, she accepted the invitation. It is not an act of self-effacement but a way of finding the meaning of life for herself.

In both cases their house serves as a shelter provided by the patriarch who is no longer present. The support and shelter that men provide are much needed. At the same time, Tyler probably shares Elizabeth's mother's knowledge, that "from the day they're born till the day they die, men are protected by women" (CW 170). Evie finds her life no longer meaningless once she is determined to promote and protect Drum; even though she loses him, she has grown into maturity. Elizabeth/Gillespie, "sheltered" under Matthew's arm (CW 326), lives a life true to her care-taker's nature. Tyler is known for saying "I hate 'em all" when she was asked her opinion on "novels by liberated women" (Ridley 27). She was also known as a "Writer 8:05 to 3:30" (Michaels 40), when her daughters were in school. Alice Hall Petry sees feminist views in *If Morning Ever Comes*, but criticizes Tyler for losing her feminist streak and creating a rather clownish mother-housewife heroine in the Pulitzer-winning *Breathing Lessons*. In a letter to Petry, Tyler explained her "hatred" of "novels by liberated women", saying: "I assume I'm one myself, if you can call someone liberated who was never imprisoned" (Petry 1994, 33). Both Evie and Elizabeth are "mother/housewife without professional work" type characters that populate Tyler's novels and they may have made immature or careless moves before they were ready to be responsible for their choice. However, they are not prisoners in motherhood. Tyler amicably watches and presents these young women's growth into motherhood.

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(たんじ めぐみ)

若い女性の自我の希求

—アン・タイラー *A Slipping-Down Life* と *The Clock Winder* 研究—

丹治めぐみ

要 約

現代米国の作家アン・タイラーは、作家として半世紀にわたるキャリアをもつ。20作以上におよぶ小説作品は、第1作から家族の関係に焦点をあて続けている。本研究は、若い女性を主人公とする小説第3作と第4作を論じる。第3作の *A Slipping-Down Life* では、生きる目的を持たない女子高校生 Evie が、地元で活動する19歳の男性ミュージシャンに世間の耳目を集めるためにハサミで自らの額に彼の姓を刻むという行為に走る。これを発端に、ミュージシャンと駆け落ち同然に結婚し、無気力状態から脱して自らの行動を自ら決めることができるようになっていく。妊娠中に結婚が破たんするという結末を迎えるものの主人公は成長を遂げている。第4作 *The Clock Winder* の主人公 Elizabeth は、handymanとして雇われた一家に深く関与するようになる。一家の息子の死に関わったことから一家から離れようとするが、最後には他者の生に影響を与えてしまうことへの怖れを克服し、一家の別の息子と結婚し母親となる。いずれの小説も若い女性主人公が母親になる姿を描き、それが女性にとって不承不承の選択や束縛ではなく、むしろ主体的な選択であり成長の証しであることが示唆されている。

キーワード：家族，結婚，母であること，ケア，自我