

## Culture Clash in Anne Tyler's *Digging to America*

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### Abstract

Anne Tyler, who has had a career of more than fifty years, is one of the most acclaimed writers in contemporary American literature. However, she has been criticized for not discussing major social issues in America in her works. Her 2006 novel *Digging to America* is about two families that each adopt a baby from Korea at the same time. The Iranian-American couple and the grandmother of the adopted baby girl exemplify a conflict between the urge to assimilate into American culture and maintaining an unbreakable tie with the culture of their ancestor's native land (Persia). The central character is Maryam Yazdan, the baby's adoptive grandmother, and through her experiences and emotions Tyler explores the conflicts between different cultures, different generations and different sexes. The two adoptive families form an extended family as the years go by to encompass clashes between cultures. With some references to Tyler's earlier works, this paper concludes that the adoption of conflicting cultures by this extended family resembles how America has encompassed a diversity of cultures. In *Digging to America*, Tyler manages to introduce social and cultural themes into her staple theme of family life. It has its merits to be appreciated in an increasingly intolerant world today.

Keywords: immigration, assimilation, cultural heritage, culture clash, family

Although Tyler has a firm reputation in the contemporary American literary scene, one of the things that some critics point out is her lack of insight into social issues. Mai-Lee Chai, for example, wrote that Tyler “treads very lightly around some of the big issues of these eras — the civil rights movement, for example, and the sexual revolution, for another.” Charlotte Templin in her essay on Tyler's literary reputation refers to the general critical agreement that Tyler has a “rosy” vision of human life (Templin 180). Lisa Allardice in her review of *Digging to America* (2006) quotes a critic who has acidly named Tyler “America's foremost Nutrasweet novelist”. Robert Croft also mentions Tyler's “failure to concern herself in her fiction with current social issues” (Croft 42). It is true that Tyler, who has a career of over half a century since the

publication of her first novel in 1964, did not write about major social issues. She has not directly or explicitly discussed them and seldom has she referred to them indirectly or even remotely.

It is true that the world Tyler created in her novels has been rather limited. With the exception of a few of her earliest works, most of Anne Tyler's fictions are set in Roland Park, a suburb of Baltimore. Planned by Frederick Law Olmsted and some other architects, the area was registered with the U.S. National Park Service as "Roland Park Historic District" in 1974 to recognize its value as one of the first garden suburbs in the nation. Because it was Baltimore's first planned residential district, there were certain restrictions in developing the area that kept Roland Park as it was first laid out in the end of the 19th century. In the midst of an influx of immigrants into Baltimore, the idea was to keep the district homogeneous; that is, to keep it an all-white neighborhood. Roland Park in Tyler's novels is a white-bread district, but in *Digging to America* (2006), we see that it is no longer homogeneous. The novel reflects the multiculturalism in the U.S. which was emphasized in the 1990s. Tyler does not ignore the big issue of the era.

Some critics have focused on social criticism in the works of Anne Tyler. One example is Anna Shannon Elfenbein who discussed Tyler's 1975 short story "The Geologist's Maid" which takes place in the living room of Bennett Johnson, a professor of geology. Bennett has recently suffered a severe heart attack and is confined to bed. Unable to move about, he needs the care provided by his black maid, Maroon. Bennett constantly feels that Maroon's care is far from satisfactory, and that she is taking advantage of him. He is irritated by every move that Maroon makes and he resents Maroon's hearty appetite while his own diet is limited in amount and taste. Elfenbein argues that Bennett fails to sympathize with Maroon, who has more than enough difficulties of her own because of racial and economic inequality that exists between them. She emphasizes the seriousness of inequality and how effectively Tyler illustrates this malady as a social issue in America, cautioning that the gap may cause disintegration of American society. Elfenbein's careful analysis is insightful and sheds light on an aspect of Tyler's that has attracted little attention. She criticizes Bennett's desire to control Maroon and sees this as a tyranny of the advantaged over the disadvantaged.

It is true that "The Geologist's Maid" exposes the culture clash between the haves and have-nots, but it is also a story about family. In spite of the gap between them, Bennett is familiar with Maroon's family and their problems. Maroon incessantly talks about her family and it is as if her words come through the sheets; Bennett is mentally invaded by the stories of her family until he "feels he knows every one of them" ("GM" 29).

A couple of Bennett's colleagues from the department of geology visit him and three women in his neighborhood call him to ask if he needs anything, so we see that Bennett knows people from his own class although his ties with his colleagues or neighbors seem rather superficial. His

colleagues are there to bring some gossip from work and a few bank statements for him, whereas the neighborhood ladies call him out of their sense of duty; both Bennett and the ladies know for sure that he will never ask them for help. Maroon, with her face "so dark that it appears to have no feature" familiarizes Bennett who has "a large, white face" ("GM" 29) with her family and makes him part of it. Bennett is now part of her extended family. Maroon may be a disreputable maid, but Bennett is unable to separate himself from her, partly because his physical condition does not permit him to, and partly because he knows Maroon's life too well. People as different as Bennett and Maroon may become deeply aware of each other. Their relationship is more like that of family than friends. This idea of an extended family that includes totally different cultures is explored in Tyler's later novel, *Digging to America*.

*Digging to America* starts on August 15, 1997, when two babies from Korea arrive at Baltimore airport and meet the couples that are to adopt each of them. Although the two families go their separate ways right after they claim the babies, their lives begin to be deeply intertwined when Bitsy and Brad Donaldson call Ziba and Sami Yazdan. Soon they start inviting each other and the grandparents on each side to join for gatherings. Each of the ten chapters of the novel is narrated from the viewpoint of one of the characters with the exception of the first chapter which describes the scene when the two Korean babies meet their American adoptive families. Three out of the nine chapters are narrated from Maryam Yazdan's viewpoint. Maryam, an Iranian-American living in Roland Park, is Sami's mother, and she is the central character of the novel.

Maryam is not the first foreign-born Roland Park resident in Tyler's works. "People Who Don't Know the Answers" is the fifth chapter of Tyler's novel *Saint Maybe* (1991) and it was also published as a short story in the August 26, 1991 issue of *The New Yorker*. It features a group of five Middle Eastern graduate students who share a house. The protagonist of the story is Doug Bedloe, a retired high school biology teacher. The very first sentence reveals his problem: "After Doug Bedloe retired, he had a little trouble thinking up things to do with himself" (*SM* 159). Proving himself to be domestically incompetent, he tries different things such as joining church groups, enrolling in night classes, or doing some carpentry work in the basement, none of which keeps him occupied for very long. One day he helps the students in his neighborhood with their attempt to properly set the wire for their shortwave radio. The students install one gadget after another into their house and Doug offers to help them with each attempt. Subsequently he frequently visits their house even when there is no installment going on. The section is narrated from Doug's third person viewpoint: thus through Doug's eyes, readers look on them as "foreigners," a group of people who do not belong to "us." As he observes them, he concludes that their lives in America are "a brief holiday from their real lives" (*SM* 183). When they appear in the first page of the novel, they are referred to as "a constantly shifting assortment" (*SM* 3).

While they are in America, they do their best to conform to the lifestyle of their American neighbors. Their effort includes not only furnishing the house with things that may make their home more American, but also showing a desire to behave in a manner that is socially acceptable to their American neighbors (such as carefully choosing a suitable wedding gift). They conform to American culture, rather than clash against it. Their conformity to “Americanness,” however, is temporary. They enjoy being different from what they are back at home; they enjoy “the other” in themselves. At the same time, Doug Bedloe appreciates their extraordinariness because it is different from his own “entire little world” that is “a cozy, old-fashioned sampler stitched in place forever” (*SM* 183). He realizes that he has lived and will continue to live in the static microcosm that is his family and Roland Park. Judith Caesar concludes her insightful essay “The Foreigners in Anne Tyler’s *Saint Maybe*” by remarking how Tyler tends to have her characters recover from damage by achieving “a kind of self-knowledge that is born of a seemingly disastrous collision with someone Other” (Caesar 78). For Doug, the foreign students are not part of his own world even if they live in the same neighborhood and therefore serve as “the Other” for him.

What if the foreign students, like Maryam, were to settle down in Baltimore, instead of shifting back to their native country? What if they started a family in Roland Park? Would they cope with their neighbors and the American way of life without having any cultural clash? What insights into themselves would result? Exploring *Digging to America* will lead to finding answers to these questions. It will also be a way of questioning the claim that Tyler fails to “concern herself in her fiction with current social issues” (Croft 42).

Maryam Yazdan, a native of Iran, now an American citizen, has had a rocky life. She departed Iran before she was twenty and her Iranian husband died before she was forty, leaving her to raise her son alone. Now in her sixties, she has survived all the difficulties and is a confident, sober, elegant and, most important of all, independent woman. Maryam has friends both in and out of Baltimore; her horizon extends further than that of Doug Bedloe’s. However, although she has lived in America for more than forty years, she feels she is not American: for Maryam, America is “a country where she would never feel like anything but a foreigner” (*DA* 12). She lives in an old, middle-class suburban district and identifies herself as an outsider to the American way of life. She is conscious of her difference; in other words, she identifies herself as “the Other” in America. Tyler uses Maryam’s situation to explore the familiar theme of her novels, that is, bonds and isolation in family life.

When Maryam recalls the days when she was a student at the University of Tehran, she describes her teenage version self as “the most Westernized of young women, the most freethinking and forward-looking” (*DA* 155). Although it is not made definite what her thoughts

were directed to or what she looked forward to, "Westernized" for Maryam is synonymous with "freethinking" and "forward-looking." She was arrested for taking part in political activity; however, coming from an influential family, arrangements were made to have her released within the hour. Her family unanimously agreed that the only way to avoid directing any more attention to the authorities would be to marry her off, the further away the better. Saving Maryam's face meant saving the whole clan's name. Fortunately for Maryam, her family arranged her to meet Kiyan Yazdan, a doctor in America, with whom she could talk about "politics, and human rights, and the status of women" (DA 157). Nevertheless, she accepted Kiyan's proposal because she was romantically attracted to him rather than because he shared her progressive views. American interference into Iran and its consequence had disillusioned her, so she did not view America as greener pastures. By and by, she made friends, learned how to drive, took evening classes at a local state university, began giving dinner parties: she adjusted well to life in America. Starting a family was for her a means to have "something to anchor her ... to her new country" (DA 17) and make her adjustment even more definite.

Her English language skill may be an indicator of the level of her adaptation to life in America. Compared with her cousin who is also from Iran, Maryam shows a better command of English and has more confidence. However, Maryam is aware that English has not come to her naturally but with self-conscious effort: "She had noticed that as she grew older, speaking English took more effort" (DA 256). It is Dave Dickinson who points it out, saying to his daughter "You know, her English seems to be a lot better than it is" (DA 227). He gives examples of Maryam leaving out articles where they are needed, says that it implies "some reluctance to leave her own culture" (DA 227), and concludes that this was what made her relationship to him difficult. Even his granddaughter notices that Maryam sometimes fails to put a plural -s where one is necessary. Dave also refers to how Maryam would put the Farsi diminutives "-jon" after a male name and "-june" after a female name, or how she would have an elaborate feast for Iranian new year but not the American, as being evidence of her holding on to Iranian culture.

Maryam's closest friends are Turkish, Greek and French and they agree to be different, to be "the Other" in America. They are all excellent cooks and over the years they have taken up the habit of eating at each other's places more and more frequently instead of eating out. On these occasions, the four women cannot help talking about Americans: "But almost always the subject of Americans came up, in an amused and marveling tone. They never tired of discussing Americans" (DA 259). Sami, too, likes to discuss Americans with his relatives, but in a considerably different way. His talk on Americans is referred to as "a performance piece that he liked to put on for the relatives" (DA 80). His criticism is directed to the following tendencies that he sees in Americans:

1. Lack of understanding of cultures as old as that of Iran
2. Craze for logic
3. Refusal to accept bad luck
4. Belief that the rest of the world is keenly interested in America
5. Claim to be open when in truth they are not ready to accept outsiders into their lives
6. Claim to be tolerant when in truth they criticize outsiders who break American rules

Sami's audiences seem to agree with him and they provide examples from their own experiences to emphasize the points he makes. As far as his clan is concerned, his observation is not without justifiability. It is impossible to tell whether these observations are Tyler's own or not; however, this kind of reference to a particular society or culture is rare in Tyler's works and therefore noteworthy. *Digging to America* is the second Tyler novel published after 9.11. The arrival of Jin-Ho and Susan is set in the summer of 1997; but when the same crowd gathers again at Baltimore Airport to welcome Xiu-Mei, the Donaldson's second adopted daughter, it is after 9.11. Sami cannot help mentioning an experience of his friend who was stopped just before boarding an airplane because of his Middle-Eastern looks: "Ever since September eleventh, every Middle-Eastern looking person is a suspect" (DA 169). Maryam feels the same way, too and says that "that's what it's been like ever since September eleventh" (DA 179).

Maryam may not be as aggressive as Sami, but she, too, complains that being foreign is "a lot of work and effort" and that she never quite manages to fit in (DA 179). She is conscious of her differentness: "She was not American... She was a guest, was what she meant. Still and forever a guest, on her very best behavior" (DA 15). The way she dresses shows her self-recognition. She dresses "with the utmost care even just to babysit" (DA 15) and makes sure to wear her hair neatly with the gray streaks tinted away. Just as houseguests would not make themselves at home, she thinks it is "important to keep up appearances" (DA 15). She admits to herself that if she had lived in Iran, she would dress more casually. Maryam's dressing is juxtaposed with that of Bitsy Donaldson whose plain clothing and makeup give Maryam the impression that it is a certain statement. Bitsy's slackness shows that she feels at home but Maryam is always on the lookout.

However, Maryam believes that Sami does belong to America. "Her son belonged. Her son didn't even have an accent; he had refused to speak Farsi from the time he was four years old, although he could understand it" (DA 13). That is why she feels uncomfortable with Sami's critical comments on Americans and says to him: "You with your Baltimore accent ... American born, American raised, never been anywhere else: how can you say these things? You are American yourself! You're poking fun at your own people!" (DA 82) Sami soothes her, saying his comments are made in good humor. Maryam cannot let him get away with it:

"It doesn't sound so good-humored to *me*. And where would you be without this country? I ask you! You take it for granted, is the problem. You have no idea what it feels like to have to watch every word, and keep every opinion to yourself, and look over your shoulder all the time wondering who might be listening. Oh, I never thought you would talk this way! When you were growing up, you were more American than the Americans." (DA 82-83)

Maryam, who left Iran in order to be "freethinking and forward-looking" (DA 155), *became* an American of her own accord, whereas Sami has been one all his life. It was not his choice to be an American. For Sami and Ziba's generation, Maryam's coming to America is more of a fairy tale than an exile. Maryam sees that this has caused a rift between Sami and herself.

Parenthood for Sami and grandparenthood for Maryam forces them to reevaluate their identity as hyphenated Americans. When it came to adopting a baby from Korea, Sami was not sure if he would be able to love the child as his own. He confessed his doubt only to his mother, saying that he was worried that that child would "feel out of place" because he or she would "always look so unmistakably foreign to other people" (DA 92). Maryam's only response is a bemused look. Who are "other people" and what does it mean to be "foreign"? Apparently, Sami does not think that he is "foreign"; he looks at himself as one who belongs to America. However, he imagines that his foreign-born daughter-to-be would not. He also worries that because the child would not bear any physical resemblance to him nor his wife, it would be too obvious that they were not "the true parents" (DA 93).

His mother said, "Ah well. When your children resemble you, you tend to forget they're not you. Much better to be reminded they're not, every time you set eyes on them."

"I don't think I'd need reminding," he said.

"I remember once when you were in high school, I heard you phoning a girl and you said, 'This is Sami Yaz-dun.' It came as such a shock: my oh-so-American son. Partly I felt pleased and partly I felt sad."

"Well, I wanted to fit in!" he said. "I wasn't so American! Not to them, at least. Not to the kids in my school." (DA 93)

Maryam recognizes her ambiguous feeling about her son's identity. She is glad that he belongs to America in a way she never did but at the same time regrets his disloyalty to Iranian language and culture. Because she has, at least in theory, a strong desire to value independence more than anything else and understands that one's own child is an independent being and not part of the parent, she has not willed him to speak Farsi. In order not to press any expectation on him, she is

suppressing her desire to maintain the link with her native culture.

Yet Sami's Americanness is by no means simple. As a youngster, he imagined his future family would be like the one in a popular TV sit-com:

As a child he had longed for a *Brady Bunch* family — a father who was relaxed and plaid-shirted and buddy-buddy, a mother who was sporty rather than exotic. He had assumed that his schoolmates enjoyed an endless round of weenie roasts and backyard football games and apple-bobbing parties, and his fantasy was that his wife would draw him into the same kind of life. (DA 83)

*Brady Bunch* was a popular half-hour TV show run in the early 1970s. A widowed father with three sons and a widowed mother with three daughters, marry and they form a blended family. This iconic family life comes true for Sami, not by his marriage to Ziba who is an immigrant from Iran, but by Bitsy Donaldson who initiates the relationship of the two families.

It is a common experience for anyone to have new friends and acquaintances when they become parents. Meeting with other rookie parents at the doctor's office, sandbox in a neighborhood playground, pre-school or ballet lessons, the occasions are everywhere. Having children sometimes throws the parents into cultures that are quite different from the ones they have enjoyed before. In Sami and Ziba's case, it was adopting a baby from Korea at the same time as the Donaldsons that drew them into a *Brady Bunch* style of life. When Sami and his family first visit, it is Brad Donaldson in corduroy pants and woolen shirt that welcomes them in a casual, friendly, "buddy-buddy" manner. Bitsy in her jersey, slacks and jogging shoes is far from exotic but not quite sporty, either. It is as if Bitsy and Brad are a faded, therefore more realistic, version of *Brady Bunch*. They show that the vision of a perfect American family that Sami longed for in his boyhood is fantasy and is not available in real life. Even with their "ultra-American" family name (DA 22) and the array of getting-together occasions such as the annual "Arrival Party" to commemorate the babies landing on American soil, the leaf-raking party, or the "Binky Party" contrived to encourage the baby to give up her pacifiers, Tyler makes the readers aware that there is no such thing as an ideal American family and the reality is not as bright as the iconic TV version.

As the inevitable result of getting closely involved with the Donaldsons, the Yazdans reexamine their life as Iranian-Americans. In the fourth chapter which narrates from Sami's point of view, Ziba and Sami host the annual Arrival Party. Not only the girls' parents, but the grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins crowd into the house. When Ziba stops enjoying herself after Bitsy made some candid comments criticizing her style of parenting, Sami feels irritated and gradually



loses control of himself. When some of the more sensitive guests sitting at the same table do their best trying to smooth things over, Sami secretly marvels at their “peacemaking skills” and thinks they are derived from “life in a large family” (DA 99). Unlike Ziba’s family who immigrated when Ziba was in high school, Sami grew up having hardly any connection with either his father’s side or his mother’s relatives. He made his debut to a large family when he married Ziba. With the marriage came his decision, to his mother’s covert disappointment, to cut short his pursuit of M. A. in history to work for one of Ziba’s relative’s business instead. John Updike, in his review of one of Tyler’s novels, phrased a large family that goes back many generations “a suffocating plurality of kin” (Updike 118). If Sami adjusted to the plurality of the Hakimi’s without any problem, he owed it to their “elaborate old-country courtesies that concealed everybody’s true feelings” (DA 140) with which he must have been familiar because it was his mother’s way as well. The merger with the Donaldson-Dickinson coalition, however, turns out to be a somewhat different experience for him. He cannot help reacting to their innocent yet indiscreet and pushy comments such as Bitsy giving a little sermon on childrearing or Brad’s shallow understanding of immigrants. At the Arrival Party, Brad says to Ziba’s aunt: “One day not too far off, immigrants are going to be the new elite in this country. That’s because they bear no burden of guilt. Their forefathers didn’t steal any Native American land and they never owned slaves. They have perfectly clear consciences” (DA 100–101). He does not give any thought to the immigrants’ circumstances or emotional conflicts on leaving their native land. Sami’s irritation reaches boiling point and he lunges on Brad, but instead of going into a serious physical confrontation, they end up smiling and hugging each other like two teenage brothers or friends. The scene shows Sami’s sensitivity to his own foreignness which he has not admitted and at the same time his discovery of his identity as a “regular American” (DA 104). The boyishness of both men symbolically illustrates that they belong to a yet immature culture.

The biggest drama in *Digging to America* comes towards the end when Maryam is romantically involved with Bitsy’s widowed father Dave Dickinson. When Maryam first becomes intimate with Dave, they have a conversation on Maryam’s foreignness and what it is “to belong.” This conversation is made in her car as Maryam gives him a ride from Baltimore airport where everyone gathered to welcome the Donaldsons’ second adopted baby from China. Without showing any sentiments, Maryam confesses that she has this mind-set that her life is “defined” by her foreignness and that she tends to think “everything would be different if only you belonged” (DA 181). Dave assures her by saying: “You belong. ... We *all* think the others belong more” (DA 181). They hold hands for the first time when Dave urges her to come inside the Donaldsons’ house instead of just dropping him and driving home, saying: “Come in, Maryam. Come inside” (DA 182). This urge appeals to Maryam’s need to “belong” and she is drawn not

only into the house but into intimacy with him. Dave makes a proposal to get married, which she first accepts and then changes her mind and declines. After she decides to stay separate from him, she recalls their conversation bitterly:

For the sake of feeling needed she had linked herself to a man so inappropriate that she might as well have fished his name out of a hat. An *American* man, naïve and complacent and oblivious, convinced that his way was the only way and that he had every right to rearrange her life. She had melted the instant he said, “Come in,” even though she knew full well that inclusion was only a myth. And why? Because she had believed that she could make a difference in his life. (*DA* 266)

Maryam’s characterization of an American man is a modified and abridged version of Sami’s list of demerits of Americans. For a moment, she believed that by entering a life with Dave she was going to be finally and for the first time fully included in America. Her desire for inclusion and fear of losing independence clash within herself, and she chooses to remain foreign and therefore “the Other” to Americans. However, her inner voice sounds pained rather than confident, thus revealing her need to belong and to be included despite her attachment to her native culture.

Liesl Schillinger in her review of *Digging to America* points out that Tyler’s own experiences and needs are reflected in this novel. Tyler’s late husband Taghi Modarressi was an Iranian-born psychiatrist and it would be natural to assume that Tyler had first-hand knowledge of Iranian-Americans and their cultural clash with, and adaptation to America. Schillinger also points out that the novel came shortly after Tyler lost her mother who had been a political and social activist all her life. That and the shock of nine-eleven with the subsequent antagonism that was turned towards Middle-Easterners may well have influenced Tyler to untypically deal with international and cultural clashes. Critic Michiko Kakutani in her review aptly titled “Belonging to a Family, Belonging to America,” argues that Tyler’s earlier characters questioned whether they belonged to family or not, whereas in *Digging to America* the question of belonging referred to belonging to America as well as family.

The final scene in which the whole Dickinson-Donaldson clan come to Maryam’s place to urge her to join the annual Arrival Party, Maryam cannot resist her inner need and run out of the house to be received into their arms. It resembles the closing scene of *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982) in which Ezra Tull urges the whole family to go out onto the streets to find the father who slipped away from the family dinner. Would this be considered as another “nutrasweet” ending? *Digging to America* is saved from presenting an overly rosy view of life thanks to Tyler’s characterization of Bitsy Donaldson. Bitsy, as Sami in his outrage described

her, can be “pushy, and self-righteous, and overbearing” (*DA* 103). Bitsy’s insistence on keeping her daughters’ original names rather than giving them new, American names, and to clothe them in pseudo- traditional attire of their native countries exemplifies her shallow understanding of cultural heritage that the Yazdans roll their eyes at. Yet Tyler turned Bitsy into one of the most memorable of the characters she created by making her a vulnerable and even pathetic person who has known many disappointments in life: her first marriage that didn’t last, her failure to pursue a career, her unfulfilled wish to bear a child, and her fight with cancer. Always having felt insecure and never reaching maturity, adopting a baby was a means to anchor herself in life. Self-righteous and overbearing she may be, however, Bitsy encompasses everyone, adopting the Yazdans to be a part of the extended family that has formed around her. It is Bitsy’s “hopefulness, her whole-heartedness, her manufactured ‘traditions’ that seemed brave now rather than silly” (*DA* 227) that causes Maryam to go out to meet Bitsy and her clan. And to a large extent that is what the United States has been about for the rest of the world: America, its history so short and incompatible with a culture as ancient as that of Iran, has adopted the foreign-born and their offspring. The extended family absorbs a diverse assortment of generations, ethnicities, cultures, and sexes, as well as clashes between them. In *Digging to America*, Tyler manages to introduce social and cultural themes into her staple theme of family life.

Over a decade after its publication, *Digging to America* deserves to be read in a time like today when words expressing racial, ethnic, and cultural bias or even hatred are heard, and new rifts are created between peoples not just in the U.S. but all over the world.

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(たんじ めぐみ)

## アン・タイラー *Digging to America* にみる文化の衝突

丹治めぐみ

### 要 約

現代米国の作家Anne Tylerは、家族をテーマとした小説を半世紀以上にわたり発表し続け、作家として安定した評価を得ている。しかし、アメリカを揺るがせてきた大きな社会的問題への直接的言及がなく、その点を批判されてきた。2006年に発表された第17作*Digging to America*は、同じ時期に韓国から乳児を養子として迎えたイラン系アメリカ人夫婦とヨーロッパ系アメリカ人夫婦が関わり合うなかで、新たに祖母となったイラン出身のMaryam Yazdanを中心に、家族への帰属、出身国の文化への帰属、アメリカへの帰属をめぐる意識が主題として展開される。同じイラン系アメリカ人家庭においても、10代の終わりにアメリカに渡ったMaryamとアメリカで生まれた息子Samiのあいだには古い文化への帰属意識に大きな差がある一方で、共にアメリカを外部者の視点で批判的に見ている。Maryamにとってアメリカへの帰属は自然になされることではなく、アメリカに来て40年を経てもそれは変わらない。養子として迎えた子どもたちがアメリカに来てから成長する数年のあいだに9・11が起り、中東系アメリカ人を白眼視する風潮もMaryamらの自己認識に影響を与える。

ヨーロッパ系アメリカ人家庭に迎えられた子どもの祖父となった男性とMaryamが互いにひかれあう過程で、Maryamは受け入れられたい気持ちと何者にも支配されずに独立を守りたい気持ちのあいだで揺れ動く。Maryamを軸に展開される世代間、異民族間、男女間において生じるそれぞれの文化の衝突は、養子を迎えた2つの家族からなる大家族に吸収されていく。それはまた、様々な異文化の要素とその衝突を呑み込んできたアメリカという国家のあり方と重なる。

本論文は、*Digging to America*以前の短編および長編小説作品にも言及し、Tylerが社会的問題に無関心でないことを明らかにし、異質な存在への不寛容が広がりゆく今の時代に本作品が読まれる意義を示す。

キーワード：移民、同化、文化的伝統、文化の衝突、家族