

Feeling Out of Place in the Family: A Study of Anne Tyler's *If Morning Ever Comes* and *The Tin Can Tree*

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Abstract

Contemporary American writer Anne Tyler has enjoyed a fifty year career. She has been writing about conflicts between an individual and his/her family. Studying Tyler's earliest two novels reveals that she has chosen this subject from the beginning of her career. Set in the American South, the two novels show the drama of the ordinary people who have set their minds not to change but realize that nothing stays intact through the passage of time.

Keywords : Anne Tyler, American South, family, *If Morning Ever Comes*, *The Tin Can Tree*

Introduction

Anne Tyler (1941-) has enjoyed a fifty-year career as a novelist since the publication of her first novel *If Morning Ever Comes* in 1964. Not many writers have had a career as long as that of Tyler; Philip Roth (1935-) whose *Goodbye, Columbus* came out in 1959 and Joyce Carol Oates (1938-) who published her first novel in 1964 are examples of such rare cases of American writers. Like Roth and Oates, Tyler started her career in her twenties and has continued since. She has published twenty novels so far, and her twenty-first is due June 2016.

Long-time readers find elements of the familiar Tyler world in her latest novel, *A Spool of Blue Thread* (2015). It is about three generations of the Whitsank family and their house: most of the scenes take place in an old, spacious home that houses a large family and it is located in Rowland Park, Baltimore. Their family life is set in a certain period of time and historical reality can be seen in the background, although they seem to be little affected by what goes on in the wider world, nor do they ask themselves what it means to live in contemporary America. Thoughts and feelings of the protagonist is revealed by the narration; readers see the world as it is projected to the protagonist's view. An abundance of conversations create a rhythm that keeps a good tempo to the story. Conversations also illustrate the characters and their relationships. The first ten

pages of *A Spool of Blue Thread* is an example of Tyler's masterly use of conversation: it is between Abby and Red Whitshank in their bedroom just before they turn out the light and readers are drawn into the story, getting basic information about this couple and their black sheep son, and are made to want to know more about them. The novel has almost everything that readers of Tyler's works anticipate: conflict between an individual and other family members, ineffectual communication and misunderstanding, attempts to care for others that often end in disappointment, adolescent, midlife or old age crisis, acceptance of or inability to accept death, and so on. There are even identical images from earlier novels that are found in the latest one. For example, in *Celestial Navigation* (1974), a young mother who has no one to depend on looks at her daughter and is struck by the vulnerability of the child: "The back of her neck was like a little curved stem, and I kept wanting to reach out and touch it but I didn't" (CN 76). In *A Spool of Blue Thread*, Abby Whitshank, in insisting on taking into their own family an abandoned little boy whose father worked for Red's construction company, says to Red: "'He was sitting on the edge of bed last night in his pajamas,' she said, 'and I saw the back of his neck, and it struck me all at once that there was nobody anywhere, any place on this planet, who would look at that little neck and just have to reach out and cup a hand behind it'" (SBT 117). The boy becomes one of her own and is eventually called "Stem."

It is quite evident that there are recurrent themes and images in Tyler's novels throughout her career. Pursuing certain themes and sometimes images for half a century, what has Tyler been focusing on to see and depict in people? Has she been developing those themes and images in a constant way or has she incorporated them into her works in a variety of manners as her career progressed? One possible way to find answers to these questions is to study her works in chronological order.

There is no standard understanding as to how Tyler's career can be divided into different periods. Speaking of the earliest phase of her career, there is a five-year gap between the publication of her second and third novels. During these two years, Tyler birthed her two daughters and the family moved to Baltimore. Ever since the publication of her third novel, *A Slipping-Down Life* (1970), Tyler has published novels every other year on average. What do the earliest works of an acclaimed novelist with a long career reveal about her development as a writer? The purpose of this paper is to study the first two novels of Tyler, *If Morning Ever Comes* and *The Tin Can Tree* as the first step in assessing the development of Tyler's career.

If Morning Ever Comes (1964)

Anne Tyler was born in Minnesota, moved to North Carolina when she was nine and remained

there until she finished her undergraduate studies at Duke University. Can she therefore be considered a Southern writer? Having grown up in the South and setting most of her novels in Baltimore, it would be natural to classify her as one. However, lists of "Southern" writers available on the web, such as "Documenting the South" compiled by the University Library of the U of North Carolina, "Southern Authors" compiled by the Nashville Public Library, or "Best Southern Literature" compiled by Goodreads, do not carry Tyler's name. Rowland Park, Baltimore seems to be a microcosm of middle or lower-middle class American life rather than a typically Southern community. However, in a 1965 interview entitled "Authoress Explains Why Women Dominate in South," Jorie Lueloff introduces Tyler as a writer who "considers herself a Southerner through and through" (Lueloff 21). In response to Lueloff, Tyler identifies herself not just as a Southern writer, but one belonging to a newer generation and being better at seeing and depicting the true South:

"I don't see that the South in the way most writers put it down," [*sic*] she says, grey eyes gazing out the window. "A lot of things that people stereotype the South as being — the picture isn't true. I think my book gives the true picture. At least I could go South at this moment and find something happening like this any place." (interview by Lueloff 22)

If Morning Ever Comes is, however, not simply about the South or Southerners. It deals with the discrepancy between an ideal family life and its reality.

The first couple of pages reveal the essential facts about Ben Joe Hawkins. He is twenty-five years old and his hometown is Sandhill, North Carolina. He is a law school student at Columbia, has been there for three months, and he hates just about everything that Columbia and New York offers. He did not like law to begin with, has not been able to develop any relationship with his classmates, all of whom seem "quick and sleek and left him nothing to say to them" (*IMEC* 6). He incessantly complains about the cold, damp weather of New York in November. His complaints show that he is homesick for the South: he is ready to give himself several days of leave right in the middle of the semester and go back to Sandhill. He only needs an excuse for going home at the price of missing classes. On calling home, he finds out that his sister who has been away for seven years has left her husband and come back home with her baby daughter. Although his mother tells him that everybody is taking the situation quite calmly, he says he is too worried to be away. So he goes to the station and catches the earliest possible southbound train he can.

Once he is on the train, he hears a different language from that of New York. He happens to travel with an African-American family who turn out to be from Sandhill. Here, Tyler does

something she does not do in her later novels that are set in Baltimore: she has this black family talk away for several pages and records their language. Their conversation is fully equipped with the distinctive accent, rhythm and grammar of African-American English. As to local language, there is also a reference to Ben Joe's Southern accent, when a New York telephone operator tells him, "You have a Southern accent, I can't tell if you said 'four' or 'five'" (*IMEC* 14). Having grown up near Raleigh, North Carolina, Tyler was familiar with the way people talked there. In the interview with Lueloff, she speaks of her love of the South and its language:

"I love the South," she continues. "I could sit all day and listen to the people talking. It would be hard to listen to a conversation in Raleigh for instance, and write it without putting in color. And they tell stories constantly! I love the poor white trash — they're fascinating and everything about them is so distinct. And I love the average Southern Negro — they speak a language all their own. A Southern conversation is pure metaphor and the lower you get in the class structure, the more it's true." (Lueloff 23)

She associates the language of the South with race and class, although these two factors are not the main issues of her novels. The African-American way of talking depicted in the early pages of *If Morning Ever Comes* shows the writer's skill to reproduce the sound and color of their language in print. African American talk sharpens the contrast between New York and Sandhill and shows that Ben Joe is now back in his territory, the South — the region that formed his character.

The same type of conversation is made in Tyler's second novel *The Tin Can Tree*, between a group of white and black women working together in a shed tying tobacco leaves. In both novels, there is no trace of racial antagonism nor hierarchy. Considering the fact that these novels came out in the mid 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement was at its height, one might wonder whether Tyler was not interested in it. Ben Joe and the African-American family he travels with and Joan and her co-laborers seem to be integrated on their own accord; their interactions give the impression that they are little affected by the turbulence that was taking place in their country. It is difficult to determine what to make of this absence of reference to the historical mass protest movement. As one reviewer of *A Spool of Blue Thread* aptly puts, 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" (Chai). It does not, however, mean that Tyler has a limited perspective. It is rather the characters' limit; they are too concerned with their personal and familial lives to have a wider perspective on seeing the world. Not that they are ignorant of what goes on in America, but they fail to connect themselves to the wider world, and some of them tend to confine themselves to a limited but deeply committed relationship with others. This

tendency applies to Ben Joe, who cannot accept the march of change and keeps connecting himself to the past.

Ben Joe's attachment to his hometown is contrasted with Mr. Dower's return to Sandhill. Eighty-four year old Mr. Dower left Sandhill when he was eighteen and has now come back on the same train as Ben Joe.

"I've been away some time myself," Ben Joe said. "Some time for *me*, anyway. Going on four months. It seemed longer, though, and I sort of left planning not to return."

"Then what you *here* for?" Mr. Dower snapped.

"Well, I don't know," Ben Joe said. "I just can't seem to *get* anywhere. Nowhere permanent."

"I can. Can and did. Went away permanent and now I've come back to die permanent."

"How can you have gone away permanent if you've come back?" Ben Joe asked.

"Because what I left ain't here to come back to, that's why. Therefore my going away can be counted as permanent." (IMEC 33)

While Mr. Dower left Sandhill still in his teens and has come back to die there (in fact, he passes away a few days later) Ben Joe had meant to have left Sandhill for good in quest of a place and means of settling down, but has come back only after four months. It is as if Ben Joe is taking a break from the process of entering adulthood, and as Stella Nesanovich points out, his return "necessarily involves a re-evaluation of himself as well as his family" (Nesanovich 19). Mr. Dower reasons that his own absence from Sandhill counts as permanent because the town has changed totally since his departure. For Ben Joe, the town has not changed physically, but he sees changes in the people he has known most intimately. His older sister has come home leaving her husband, another sister has acquired a full-time job instead of a part-time one, his family eat differently because they have been on a less tight budget since the departure of Ben Joe the family treasurer, and his late father's mistress looks more tired and haggard than ever before. Every little difference he sees makes him not feel at home even at home. Although he does acknowledge these changes, he insists that coming back home means coming to the same place:

"Besides," Joanne said, tying the ribbon under Carol's chin, "it's not the same place I'm coming back to, really. Not even if I wanted it to be."

"Oh, for God's sake," said Ben Joe.

"What's wrong?"

"You and Mama. You and the girls. And Mr. Dower, even. Of course it's the same place. What would it have gone and changed into? Always pulling up the same silly argument to

fool yourselves with—”

“Now, now,” said Joanne soothingly. She picked Carol up. “It’s *not* the same place really, is it?” (*IMEC* 54)

Tyler in her 1965 interview defined this inability to accept change as a Southern trait: “The most Southern thing about Ben Joe is his inability to realize that time is changing. This is a very typical Southern fault” (Lueloff 22).

His inability to accept change is the cause of his restlessness. He was restless in New York and he remains restless even when he is home. The initial excitement of the nine women family members—his grandmother, mother, six sisters and one baby niece—waned soon, and it seems nobody is ready to sit down and discuss things with him in the way he wants them to. His sense of alienation brings him to Shelly Domer who was his first girlfriend. Having lost her parents and her sister in a car accident, Shelley lives an isolated life, and the quietness of her house is a striking contrast to the Hawkes’s residence. She needs a man on whom she can depend to make her way through life. At the same time, she provides him with the care he finds unable to receive at home. Ben Joe and Shelly can be each other’s caretaker and this kind of relationship is something for which Ben Joe has sought. It is the way in which he can relate himself to her rather than her personality itself that Ben Joe is attracted to. What he had not realized until Shelley in tears accused him was that in the days when they were seeing each other, he sought comfort and care from her whenever there was trouble at home. His impulsive decision to take her to New York with him and marry her is in a way going backwards to the old days, yet at the same time marks his entering a new phase of life. When Ben Joe gives his sister Joanne and her husband a piece of advice shortly before he leaves home for New York, he shows that he has a new understanding of life:

“Um, if by any chance you changed your mind about leaving Kansas ...” he said.

He paused, waiting without realizing it for Joanne to interrupt, but she didn’t.

“If just by chance you did,” he said finally, “I don’t know that I would call it going backwards instead of forwards. Sometimes it’s not the same place when a person goes back to it, or not the same ...”

That inner mind of his, always scrutinizing him as if it were a separate individual from him, winced. Ben Joe nodded and tipped his hat to it; the separate mind returned his bow and withdrew.

“Not the same person,” he finished. (*IMEC* 174)

He is integrated into a new being and is able to move forward. After his father's sudden death, he worked to support the family instead of going away for higher education; now he recognizes the end of his role as the caretaker of his family, and is able to better endure the absurdities that he sees there.

In the closing pages, Ben Joe and Shelly are on the train for New York. Shelly is obviously more excited than Ben Joe to leave Sandhill and get married; it is possible to see in Shelly a resemblance to Linnie Mae in *A Spool of Blue Thread*. Although they seem timid and helpless, in their desperate desire to be taken away from their stifled lives and fear of being labeled "old maid," they know how to get what they want and eventually guide their men to maturity. Watching Shelley's sleeping face, he wonders: "What was she thinking, back behind the darkness of her eyelids?" (IMEC 185) "Who knew how many other people that he had met and loved before, might lie beneath the surface of the single smooth-faced person he loved now?" (IMEC 186) He does not force himself to find an answer. Nesanovich is right in calling Ben Joe "the first Tyler character to recognize the unavoidable distance between human beings and to go on loving" (Nesanovich 20). The novel ends with a vision he has of Shelley and their future son. Shelley and the boy halt still before Ben Joe's eyes for a while, "then they danced off again and he let them go; he knew he had to let them" (IMEC 186). He finds them "as unreachable as his own sisters, as blank-faced as the white house he was born in" (IMEC 186). At the end of his six-day visit back home, he comes to accept that he cannot remain unaffected by the passing of time. Tyler is sympathetic to those who endure, however clumsily, the people around them. "Won't have to change" (IMEC 186), announces the train conductor as the train leaves Sandhill, meaning there is no need to change trains to reach New York. It's an epiphany for those who do not give up caring for those that are closest to themselves. That is what family is all about: they may be forever baffled by each other, they may have serious fallouts and misunderstandings, and they may even cause suffering to each other, but they do not give up being a family.

***The Tin Can Tree* (1965)**

"After the funeral James came straight home, to look after his brother" (TCT 1). *The Tin Can Tree* begins just as those who gathered for the funeral and burial of six-year-old Janie Rose Pike, killed falling from a neighbor's tractor, are dispersing. One of the recurring images in Tyler's novels is sudden, violent death. In *If Morning Ever Comes*, Ben Joe's father suffered a heart attack at night in his mistress's apartment and death was instantaneous. Ben Joe recalls how his mother Ellen rushed to the place she referred to as "your father's friend's house." He saw that even in the nightmarish chaos, "the same small practical things were going on at the same time"

(*IMEC* 58). However great the shock might be, the living ones must eat, sleep and work to make ends meet. Children have to be taken care of: after Ellen Hawkes leaves, one of Ben Joe's little sisters has her head caught between two posts of their stairway railings and he has to get her out. It was while he was at this task that "the first sorrow hit him — just one deep bruise inside that made him catch his breath" (*IMEC* 61). Doing their usual chores and taking care of others help to keep the bereaved go on with their lives. At the same time, at certain unexpected moments, they are seized by the power of death and are led to a new understanding of themselves or a different outlook on their lives.

In *The Tin Can Tree*, the house that twenty-eight-year-old photographer James Green comes back to from Janie Rose's burial is a three-family building with three small paths leading to each of the three doors. One part is occupied by the Pikes: Janie Rose's parents Roy and Lou, their ten-year-old son Simon, and Roy's twenty-six-year-old niece Joan. The middle section houses the Potter sisters, Miss Lucy and Miss Faye, who are both in their sixties. At the other end from the Pikes live James and his brother Ansel, who is two years younger than James and suffers chronic inertia. The occupants of each of the tri-partite house are not related to each other. It is never mentioned how these three parties came to share the long, tin-roofed building that stands somewhat isolated from other houses. Just as *If Morning Ever Comes* covers the six-day period of Ben Joe's life, during which he leaves New York, goes back to Sandhill, and takes the train back to New York, *The Tin Can Tree* also covers six days starting with Janie Rose's burial. The Pikes, the Greens and the Potters are all affected by the abrupt death of the little girl. Not that they are in the same kind and degree of grief, but it can be said that their grief is shared and they respond to it and are affected by it each in their own way. As Ansel Green says: "Just about everything has to do with Janie Rose these days. I don't know why. Looks like she just kind of tipped everything over with her passing on" (*TCT* 97). It is this common experience that holds *The Tin Can Tree* together. As Stella Nesanovich aptly points out, the long tin roof that covers the three households "parallels the one major experience of the novel that touches them all" (Nesanovich 21).

Although the focus is on Joan Pike and James Green, it is naturally the deceased girl's mother who is suffering the greatest shock. Her grief is intensified with a strong sense of guilt. Lou Pike blames herself for not having paid attention when Janie Rose was telling her she was going to a friend's house. Her reproach on herself is all the more fierce because of the fact that their daughter came along when the Pikes were not planning for another child. Not that Janie Rose was a neglected child; she was properly cared for. Yet there was a subtle sense of estrangement, a recognition on Lou's part that she did not pay enough mind to her, that she never gave her daughter a fair share. Lou's supposed awkwardness towards Janie Rose seems to parallel the way

Joan's mother treated her. Having already reached middle age when Joan was born, her parents "weren't sure what they were supposed to do with her; they treated her politely, like a visitor who had dropped in unexpectedly" (TCT 23). Joan proved herself to be a good caretaker of Simon and Janie Rose, saw that they needed her and has ended up staying with her uncle's family for the past four years. Having grown up a visitor to her parents, it is only natural that she keeps living with the Pikes as a visitor. Which does not mean she has no desire to be part of a family: she has been going steady with James and is waiting for him to propose to her. For Joan, marriage is a means of acquiring a family, a family quite different from her own which was not a fulfilling one for her. Working nine months as a secretary to the school principal and three months in the summer tying tobacco leaves, Joan makes enough money to pay the Pikes for her bed and board, send part of her salary to her parents, and keep some for herself. She is an independent young woman who is capable of supporting herself, yet she is in desperate need for marriage and family. Spending time together with Simon and Janie Rose, Joan "pretended to herself that they were hers" (TCT 24). At the same time, Joan knows James will not talk about marriage on account of having to take care of his self-pitying brother Ansel. Unable to understand why James bears such a burden as Ansel, and feeling frustrated for not being able to see a future with him, she packs her things and boards a bus to her hometown, although she turns around halfway and returns to the tin-roofed house. It was her brief encounter with a blind man who needed her assistance at a bus station that made her recall the way Simon trusted in her. She returns to her role as a caretaker. In other words, she confirms her identity in caretaking.

While Joan is away, however, Simon runs away from home in a desperate attempt to get his mother's attention. Grief has confined his mother Lou to bed before Joan contrives a scheme to make her leave the bedroom. Joan's scheme partially succeeds: Lou resumes her work as a seamstress, yet she continues to be preoccupied with grief and self-reproach. Simon is left to be cared for by Joan, but the lack of his mother's attention makes him not feel at home at home. Although he gives no outward sign that he is lonely, he runs away when he finds that Joan has left. Although he reproaches no one, Simon cannot stop himself from grasping any chance to receive all the attention he needs. His little adventure succeeds in winning his mother's attention and care, and also helps her to be on her feet again. As Missouri, one of Joan's African-American co-workers in the tobacco field, says: "Bravest thing about people, Miss Joan, is how they go on loving mortal beings after finding out there's such a thing as dying" (TCT 79). The six days after Janie Rose's passing is a period of slow introduction to a new phase of life in which those who share the tin-rooted house eventually come to terms with death. Tyler's novels often depict the lives of those who have survived their loved ones, those who feel guilt for their deaths, or those whose life took an unexpected course after a death in the family: *The Clock Winder*, *Saint Maybe*,

The Accidental Tourist, *Back When We Were Grownups*, *The Beginner's Goodbye*, and *A Spool of Blue Thread* are all examples of novels involving this type of plot.

James, too, is not unaffected by Janie Rose's death and Simon's running away. James, as well as Joan, has chosen to leave his family. For James, who grew up in a family consisting of his parents, two sisters and two brothers, "his dislike of his father was one complete and pure emotion" and "that alone could send words enough swarming to his mouth" (TCT 185). His aversion to his home has been so strong that he has even refused to go back to attend his mother's funeral although his hometown is only one hour away by car. When Simon is discovered missing, James knows that he must have taken the bus to Caraway, his and Ansel's hometown, and where his father lives with one of his sisters and his other brother. Assuming the role of Simon's caretaker, he goes home for the first time in several years. There, with his observant eyes, he sees that his sister Clara has "the look of an old maid beginning to set in around her mouth" (TCT 184), and his brother Claude, who was a teenager the last time James saw him, is now a grown man, but his extreme shyness seems not much different from that of his early teens. His other sister Madge is in China as a missionary, "whose one romance they had broken up" (TCT 184). And there was his late mother who was "scared of everything" (TCT 184). The implication is that it was a tyrannical patriarchy that caused James not to be relaxed at home, and the family to disperse. Although his father seems to have softened as he grew old and feeble, James sees that there is no chance for himself and his siblings to start families of their own: "She [Clare] would probably never get married, he thought. None of them would" (TCT 189). He is determined to look after Ansel for the rest of his life.

In many of Tyler's novels, we find large families and problems that arise among siblings. Often there is a problem child who makes life difficult for the parents or their siblings. There are those who create conflicts in the family but manages to get on with life, such as Denny Whitshank in *A Spool of Blue Thread*. There are also those who are mentally unstable and incapable of self-support let alone caring for others, such as Andrew Emerson in *The Clockwinder*, Jeremy Pauling in *Celestial Navigation*, and Ansel Green in *The Tin Can Tree*. Ansel can be quite trying for those around him, and Joan (as well as readers) finds it impossible to endure him. Why James came to live with Ansel is not mentioned, but their lives seem so intricately woven together that it seems impossible for Ansel to live without James. It is not a fair relationship. James left home on account of feeling stifled; now he is trapped and grounded in his relationship with Ansel. Theirs is a typical case of the negative force that family exerts over an individual. In studying families in Tyler's works, Robert W. Croft asserts that family can be "a destructive force in an individual's life, stripping an individual of his or her freedom and restricting the person's outlook, opportunities, and personality to the point of stagnation" (Croft 92). This description fully applies

to James's situation. The opening sentence of the novel shows how James's life is centered on taking care of Ansel: "After the funeral James came straight home, to look after his brother" (*TCT* 1).

The novel, however, ends in a redemptive note. All the inhabitants of the tin-roofed triplex gather together for a group picture to celebrate Simon's return. It is as if they are taking a family portrait; sharing the experience of worrying over Simon and rejoicing at his return unites them. They are isolated, lonely individuals who seem unable to understand or appreciate each other, but the same set of experiences, emotional crisis and sense of belonging hold them together. So the Pikes, the Potters and the Greens, who survived the six days after the funeral under the same tin-roof, are squeezed into the frame of a single picture. Joan is asked to shoot, and upon looking at the group through the finder, she comes to the following understanding:

She thought whole years could pass, they could be born and die, they could leave and return, they could marry or live out their separate lives alone, and nothing in this finder would change. They were going to stay this way, she and all the rest of them, not because of anyone else but because it was what they had chosen, what they would keep a strong tight hold of. (*TCT* 201)

Because of her visitor mentality, she has an objective point of view over this group of people and is granted with a moment of epiphany. She now realizes that she has actually been part of this larger family for some time. An analogy can be seen between their lives and the South: they are closed-in, stifled, sometimes destructive, forever tied to the past, and seem immune to change. However stagnant their lives may be, it is by their own choice, not a fate forced upon them. Painting a portrait of so called Southern "poor whites," Tyler celebrates their courage to persevere.

Conclusion

In one of a few interviews that Tyler has given, she speaks of the earliest of her novels. The interviewer reports that Tyler "says she wishes she could destroy her first four books," and that she vehemently commented: "Just wipe them out. I didn't know what I was doing. I was just finding my way." (interview by Allardice) "Her first four books" include *If Morning Ever Comes*, *The Tin Can Tree*, *A Slipping-down Life* (1970), and *The Clockwinder* (1972). As a matter of fact, *If Morning Ever Comes* received an enthusiastic review in *The New York Times*, which said: "Some industrious novelists never learn how to write good fiction. Others seem to be born knowing

how. Mrs. Tyler is one of these” (Prescott 61). *The Saturday Review* marvels that *The Tin Can Tree* is a work of a writer still in her early twenties: “On page after page she offers proof of a maturity, a compassion and understanding one would expect to find only in a more seasoned heart than hers could possibly be” (Frankel 63). Although the reviewer also points out that it is “the savor of an author’s talent rather than a novel’s content” (Frankel 64) that remains after reading, it is nevertheless a favorable review on the whole. It is impossible to know why exactly Tyler denounces her earliest novels. It may be said that the characters in the first two novels are not distinctively enough profiled. Ben Joe’s sisters seem to be just a bunch of girls and it’s difficult to tell one from the other. One critic points out that Ben Joe’s mother Ellen Hawkes is marked with unresponsiveness, reticence and pride (Nesanovich 17–18); however, not enough description is given to define her character as such. To a certain extent, the same applies to Joan Pike and James Green in *The Tin Can Tree*. Their sense of feeling out of place in their family and their power of perseverance is dominant throughout, but as characters they lack vitality.

The two novels are, despite Tyler’s dismissal and certain weaknesses compared to her later works, cornerstones of her career as a writer. They introduce the prototype of familiar Tyler characters: those who feel out of place in their family. Ben Joe, Joan, and James commonly have a sense that they have not been able to make themselves at home in their own family. It did not happen as a result of ill will. Their parents may have been clumsy in showing that they care, and were inept in communication, but they were not without affection. On the afore mentioned occasion, even James’s father, whose patriarchal tyranny is strongly implied, shows that he wished James would stay for the night instead of leaving after half an hour: “We still have your old bed” (*TCT* 189), he offers. It is impossible to undo the complicated knot of carelessness, misunderstanding, hurtful words and deeds. Yet it is also impossible to sever oneself from family ties.

Feeling out of place in the family may not necessarily have negative influence on a person. It gives one the strength to be independent and to have an observant eye. Ben Joe, Joan and James have not been displaced from their home; they made the decision to leave on their own accord. They don’t change their minds, but they also realize that nothing stays intact through the passage of time. This understanding causes conflicts within themselves and with others, often other members of their family. It is in these conflicts that Tyler sees the drama of the earthly, ordinary people. She has been turning mundane affairs into extraordinary stories for fifty years. And it all started with *If Morning Ever Comes* and *The Tin Can Tree*.

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(たんじ めぐみ)

家族の中の孤独

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。全20作におよぶ小説作品は、第1作から個人と家族との関係に焦点をあて続けている。本研究は、米国南部を舞台とする小説第1作と第2作が、平凡に暮らす人々が変わることを拒否しながらも時間の経過に伴う変化から逃れられないことを自覚する様子をとらえており、作家の全体像をとらえるうえで重要な意味をもつことを明らかにする。

キーワード：アン・タイラー、アメリカ南部、家族、初期小説作品