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# Faulty Vision and Hearing in the Novels of Anne Tyler

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FAULTY VISION AND HEARING  
IN THE NOVELS OF ANNE TYLER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the motifs of seeing and hearing in the novels of Anne Tyler. Tyler recurrently exposes her characters' strengths and weaknesses through his/her ability, or inability, to see and/or hear.

All of Tyler's main characters possess a deficiency that obstructs both his/her view of him/herself and the world that he/she resides in. As each character struggles in the search for self, the search is often obstructed by family history, the structure of the current family, and imposed societal and marriage roles. By using visual and auditory metaphors, Tyler provides each character with various coping mechanisms that prevents him/her from seeing or hearing clearly. Tyler employs photographs, physical blindness, mirrors and windows, fortunetelling, watching television, and eating disorders as the means by which these characters rely visually. As a means of hearing, or not hearing, Tyler allows her characters to be physically deaf, to wear headphones, to listen to music, and to talk over others as methods of coping.

I also contend that in addition to coping mechanisms, Tyler also provides each character with various visual and auditory mediums to allow him/her to work through his/her blindness or deafness. Tyler imparts her characters with the following artistic professions: photographer, sculptor, writer, actor, musician, and

chef. It is through these professions that many of the characters are able to work through their issues so that they may “see” or “hear” clearly.

A portion of this study’s objective is to identify the different coping methods used by male and female characters in relation to the theme of seeing and hearing. For example, men are frequently represented looking in and out of windows, while women are often looking into mirrors and often suffer from eating disorders. It is then that they see that their self-image is blurred and distorted. Furthermore, Tyler’s male characters frequently require the aid of women to see or hear properly.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For being so selfless, patient, and supportive during this crazy endeavor. This dissertation could not have been done without your understanding of all of my crazy needs. Thank you for always believing in me—especially when I didn't believe in myself.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER II	COPING MECHANISMS: <i>DINNER AT THE HOMESICK RESTAURANT AND SEARCHING FOR CALEB</i> .....	18
CHAPTER III	A MASCULINE VIEW OF THE WORLD? <i>THE TIN CAN TREE, CELESTIAL NAVIGATION, AND MORGAN'S PASSING</i> .....	51
CHAPTER IV	A FEMALE POINT OF VIEW: <i>A SLIPPING DOWN LIFE, EARTHLY POSSESSIONS, AND LADDER OF YEARS</i> .....	97
CHAPTER V	A CULTURAL VIEW: <i>DIGGING TO AMERICA</i> .....	140
CHAPTER VI	CONCLUSION .....	180
WORKS CITED .....		186

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“What if I got arthritis? It’s my second greatest fear. Next to going blind, because it matters very much how the words look on the page”

(“Because I Want More Than One Life”).

i.

Over the past forty years, a great deal of scholarship has been published on the novels and the short stories of Anne Tyler. Having published seventeen novels to date and three times as many short stories, Tyler provides scholars with many opportunities for analysis. Although many studies have been done regarding Tyler’s works, no scholarship has been written exclusively about the parallel themes of vision and hearing. To date, almost all Tyler scholarship deals with the common southern themes of the “dysfunctional” family and the search for self, the desire for seclusion, and sense of place.

The novels of Anne Tyler are frequently classified as novels about the family. In his review of *Searching for Caleb* entitled “Family Ways,” John Updike argues that Tyler has a “fascination with families” (75). More specifically, Tyler’s families are often analyzed as being “dysfunctional,” Caucasian and lacking in emotion. Although Tyler critics frequently use the term dysfunctional, it can be problematic in its definition as it stems from an unattainable ideal of the American family. In her critical analysis of the American family, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Stephanie Coontz argues that the current view of the American family relies upon images and

expectations of the past (8-9). Coontz maintains that “Such families emphasized formality, obedience to authority, and ‘the way it’s always been’ in their childrearing” (9). Tyler’s families fall into the model of the American family that Coontz presents in her study.

The family is a necessary element in Tyler’s works as it is the catalyst for both familial and individual distortion. In turn, Tyler’s characters possess deficiencies that obstruct their ability to see and/or hear properly; thus, the varying modes of seeing and/or hearing are, in fact, coping mechanisms. Family miscommunication has emerged as the root of all of Tyler’s characters’ issues, but there is more involved than just a smack on the face or a negligent parent. In fact, all of Tyler’s main characters have developed means of dealing with their family structure through visual or auditory coping mechanisms.

This study will reveal the motifs of vision and hearing as they serve as dominant and common threads throughout Tyler’s novels. These metaphors are used in each character’s journey toward self-recognition. The differing journeys toward self-recognition take each character through different levels of seeing and/or hearing. Tyler’s use of vision does not merely address physical sight. She broadens her use of sight to imagery and representation. Tyler employs photographs, physical blindness, watching television, eating disorders, mirrors and windows. In addition, her characters lean toward the artistic professions of fortune telling, photography, painting, sculpting, acting, cooking, and performing due to the fact that artistic professions require visual and auditory control.

### *Physical Blindness/Deafness*

Tyler's characters have faulty vision and/or hearing, and oftentimes the fault is physical. The physical ailments of blindness and/or deafness further complicate the characters' unwillingness, or inability, to see and/or hear correctly. For instance, in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, Pearl Tull is physically blind, but her physical blindness represents a lingering metaphorical blindness that exists between her and her family. Generally, the characters have already lived a metaphorical life of blurred vision and/or hearing prior to the exacerbation of their physical ailments.

### *Mirrors*

Tyler employs mirrors in almost all of her novels. Mirrors provide a means of reflection for her characters. In addition, the mirror serves as a metaphor of distortion as the image viewed in the mirror is not a true representation, but rather, the image one sees in the mirror is reversed. Mirrors are a repeatedly used metaphor in the lives of Tyler's women. As women "gaze" into the mirror, the construct that they see is often a male construct. Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," will be used to analyze Tyler's use of the gaze.

Additionally, Tyler often employs rear-view mirrors as another means of visual expression. More often than not, the rear-view mirror is being used by a female passenger in a car being driven by a male. This serves as a double metaphor as one is looking into the rear-view mirror while seemingly progressing forward. In reality, by looking in the rear-view mirror, one is actually looking backward. Tyler uses the rear-view mirror as a way of showing the disillusioned

state of her characters. What one sees in the rear-view mirror is reversed even though the physical progress is forward.

#### *Windows and Windshields*

Windows often act as transparent shields. They operate by allowing the character to view different worlds without actually becoming part of those worlds. For example, In *Morgan's Passing* and *Celestial Navigation*, Morgan Gower and Jeremy Pauling are observers of worlds that they wish to become a part of. When both Morgan and Jeremy attempt to view the outside world genuinely, their attempts result in chaotic consequences that must be resolved before they are able to securely redefine their positions in society.

Likewise, by standing on one side of the window, one is able to see outside of the situation under the protection of the glass. Seeing, but not belonging, provides the distance that many of Tyler's characters require. While windows are used as a basis of security for Tyler's male and female characters, the use is more prevalent for her male characters.

#### *Fortune Telling*

Sylvia Abraham, author of *How to Read the Tarot*, argues, "In ancient times occult studies were taught to those who desired to learn the Truth and the meaning of life" (1). Tyler provides some of her characters with fortune telling as another coping device. The search for Truth is always tainted by Tyler's characters' inability to see or hear properly. Instead, her characters rely on others, often fortune tellers, to show them the "Truth and the meaning of life." In *Searching for Caleb*, Justine Peck acts as a fortune teller even though she is

blinded to her own reality. For Justine, fortune telling provides a means of deferring her own reality elsewhere. Unable to see in her own life, Justine claims that she can see into the lives of others. The transference of Truth onto others allows Justine to remain blinded to the issues in her own life.

### *The “Artist”*

The artist plays an important role in Tyler’s novels due to the fact that the mere act of being an artist requires an interpretation of what one sees and hears. Joseph C. Voekler argues, “Artistic withdrawal is a fascinating and serious matter to Tyler. It constitutes a mode of perception” (68). Tyler imparts her characters with the following artistic professions: photographer, sculptor, fortuneteller, writer, actor, musician, and chef. These professions require both visual and/or auditory perception and proficiency. It is through these professions that many of the characters are able to work through their issues so that they may “see” or “hear” clearly.

### *Eating Disorders*

It is no accident that many of Tyler’s female characters suffer from eating disorders, primarily anorexia. Anorexia is a disease that distorts the sufferer’s perception of herself (Dellasega 83). Correspondingly, what an anorexic sees in the mirror is also an indistinct construct. The inability to see one’s own image clearly is both a product and a symptom of the inability to acknowledge the realities of one’s life. Pamela Emerson (*The Clock Winder*), Justine Peck (*Searching for Caleb*), Emily Meredith (*Morgan’s Passing*), and Pearl and Jenny

Tull (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*), all suffer from anorexia. For these characters, anorexia acts as another shield from reality.

### *Television*

A great deal of Tyler's characters watch television. Television acts as a means of escape from reality by creating an alternate reality on the screen. For example, in *A Slipping Down Life*, Evie Decker and Clotelia (the Decker's housekeeper) diligently watch soap operas. Soap operas become a model of reality for Evie in her romantic relationships. In addition, the news is an important aspect of television as the news allegedly portrays reality. Charlotte Emory, of *Earthly Possessions*, is forced to see the realities of her life when she is taken as a hostage. Her picture appears on the news as is an interview with her husband. Charlotte's exposure as a hostage on the news exposes a part of reality that, oftentimes, Tyler's characters do not wish to see.

### *Photographs*

Family photographs and individual portraits appear in abundance in Tyler's novels. The photographs Tyler's novels function as images and memories of the individual and the individual within the family. Andre Gallant, a prominent artist and teacher of visual design workshops, contends, "Portraits are about emotions, character, strength, and vulnerability" (12). The images presented and the images imagined are central in Tyler's novels. In *Morgan's Passing*, photographs allow Morgan Gower to see the people in his life in a way that he is unable to see them in person. Likewise, in *Digging to America*, photographs

represent not only the past, but they also symbolize the cultural differences and stereotypes that the characters attempt to simultaneously live up to and avoid.

### *Earphones and Hearing Aids*

Earphones are physical methods of deafening oneself. For Tyler's characters, deafening oneself comes as a choice. Wearing headsets while in the presence of his family is a typical coping mechanism used by Duncan Peck (*Searching for Caleb*). The headsets serve two key purposes: to silence his family and to deafen himself to his family. The headsets work by blocking others out. In addition, hearing aids are used in a similar fashion as earphones. By turning a hearing aid up or down, or by simply taking it out, one can control what one hears or does not hear. Also in *Searching for Caleb*, Daniel Peck turns the volume on his hearing aid up and down as a means of controlling what he hears and does not hear.

### ii.

Albeit indirect, in 1990, Susan Gilbert touched upon Tyler's uses of vision in her essay simply titled "Anne Tyler." The essay was published in a collection of essays entitled *Southern Women Writers, The New Generation*, edited by Tonette Bond Inge; therefore, it is no surprise that Gilbert's work focuses predominantly on Tyler's identity as a Southern female writer and the expectations that come with being labeled southern. Gilbert states:

Her books run deeper but not wider. Her concerns are at opposite poles from the historical novelists in this collection. [. . .] In the all-Southern settings of Tyler's novels, the children trundle off to

schools never touched by *Brown v. the Board of Education*; her young men never receive or burn their draft cards; their parents never keep vigil on courthouse steps to protest a war; no women parade with placards for, or against, the ERA. (252)

While Tyler does not openly deal with what one would deem “major” issues, she does in fact deal with the personal issues that pervade the lives of average people on a daily basis. Perhaps this is why her novels have continued to remain popular for over forty years. Within Gilbert’s analysis of what she argues is “the repeated emphasis on movement without change, on change without movement,” (253) she briefly addresses Tyler’s use of visual metaphors almost without meaning to.

Gilbert’s work is valuable because she exposes the presence of photographs and mirrors in Tyler’s novels. While scrutinizing the organization of the Peck family in *Searching for Caleb*, Gilbert addresses the use of mirrors as Justin watches Daniel leave the family home: “When his wife arranges mirrors so he can see the street scene below, because she thinks that ‘he might like to keep in touch with things’” (56), he sees his only son descending the steps and orders the mirrors “taken away” (260). Although the use of mirrors proves that Justin refuses to see the disintegration of his family, Gilbert focuses not on mirrors but on the family’s refusal to progress.

Gilbert discusses these “failures of visions” not as a symptom of familial or character flaws but as the family’s “inability to see the beauty of the present, its outlines obscured in layers of the past, and the inability to see themselves at all” (263). Gilbert argues that some of Tyler’s characters desire to be seen physically;

therefore, they devise various methods to do so. For example, Gilbert contends that Evie Decker (*A Slipping Down Life*) carves *Casey* into her face because she is desperate for attention (265). While Evie's desperate need for attention is apparent, there is much more involved in Evie's mutilation. The disfigurement represents how Evie sees herself. Later, the disfigurement represents who she has become. Tyler's characters want more than to just be noticed; they desire a means of survival.

Gilbert also argues that "Tyler's characters go to extraordinary lengths to break out and be seen. To be seen as an individual, alive in the present, to have focused upon oneself the full attentive gaze of the other" (265), but more is needed in this analysis. I contend that the majority of Tyler's characters require self-recognition as opposed to the recognition of others. Specifically, in her female orientated novels, the "gaze" is the dilemma. Many of her female characters have to learn how to avoid, or reverse, the gaze in order to attain self-recognition.

Photographs are a subject that Gilbert spends a considerable amount of time analyzing in Tyler's novels. Her examination of photographs, again, is limited to their use as prompts or memories, and her interpretation is often very literal. Gilbert argues, "The figures that figure prominently in her [Tyler's] books are a foil to her characters' uneasiness that the present is escaping them, their being 'unable to realize a thing's happening or a moment's passing.' Pictures freeze a moment" (266). People do, in fact, take pictures to capture a feeling or to "freeze a moment," but for Tyler's characters, photographs are images that cannot

always be explained or interpreted. Photographs remind her characters that they are able to see, but they have chosen to blind themselves. In addition, the photographs show Tyler's characters' unwillingness to change. For example, in *The Accidental Tourist*, the Leary family has a family portrait hanging in their ancestral family home: "In the portrait on the end wall, the Leary children gazed out with their veiled eyes" (74). It is often the photographs themselves that represent what the characters are unable to clearly see. In the Leary's case, the photograph characterizes the family's inability to change.

At the basis of Gilbert's study is the assertion that "In attachment, they [Tyler's characters] live; in detachment, they see" (274). Since most of Tyler's characters never truly learn how to completely see or hear, they are rarely given the opportunity to move away from complete states of blindness or deafness. Detachment as a coping mechanism, though, provides Tyler's characters with space. It is within this space that some of her characters (slightly) clarify his/her vision. While Gilbert's essay is indeed useful in its analysis of Tyler as a Southern woman writer, more is needed in its analysis of seeing.

The last major scholarship on Tyler was published almost a decade ago in 1998. Both Paul Bail and Robert Croft produced "companions" to Tyler's works. Bail's *Anne Tyler: A Critical Companion* and Croft's *An Anne Tyler Companion* are highly regarded among Tyler scholars, but these works are over a decade old; therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Tyler scholarship needs to be updated.

Paul Bail's work provides a general outlook on Tyler's life and the connections of her life to her novels. In the Series Foreword, Kathleen Gregory states:

The series is designed to appeal to a wide range of readers. The general reading public will find explanations for the appeal of these well-known writers. Fans will find biographical and fictional questions answered. Students will find literary analysis, discussions of fictional genres, carefully organized introductions to new ways of reading the novels, and bibliographies for additional research. (xii)

Although Bail's work is informative, it is very technical in its approach. Novels are analyzed primarily through plot, themes, characters, and literary devices. In addition, only twelve of her seventeen novels are covered.

Like Bail's text, Robert Croft's *An Anne Tyler Companion* provides very useful information in a practical manner. Most useful as a research guide, Croft's companion is set up like a dictionary, explaining major characters and themes alphabetically. Both Bail's and Croft's texts are well-designed, matter-of-fact "companions" to Tyler research, but Tyler's most recent novels require more analysis. Contemporary Tyler research is lacking. In fact, to date there is no scholarship published on Tyler's most recent novel, *Digging to America*.

In 1990, Susan Gilbert argued, "In twenty years, Tyler's focus has not broadened (252). I argue that this statement would hold true until the release of *Digging to America* in May 2006. Here Tyler broadens her idea of the family beyond the scope of white America. Tyler's family is no longer a primarily

Caucasian family. In *Digging to America*, the “family” is Iranian, Chinese, Korean, and Irish; yet, they are all also American. Tyler’s latest novel looks at Iranian-American identity. The protagonist, Maryam, finds difficulty reconciling her two identities—Iranian and American. Although she has been living in the United States for over twenty years, she is still singled out as someone exotic.

Iranian-American identity conflict has been exacerbated since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Since then, Iranian-Americans have, without just cause, become the focus of racial stereotyping. Lila Azam Zanganeh, in the Introduction of *My Sister Guard Your Veil; My Brother Guard Your Eyes*, states, “The recent political developments in both countries [United States and Iran] [. . .] have only complicated the geopolitical and emotional maps” (xiii). In *Digging to America*, Maryam is unable to see that she is indeed both Iranian and American. Maryam believes that she must choose between her two identities.

In *Digging to America*, Tyler not only addresses Iranian-American identity, but she also addresses Korean-American and Chinese-American identity. The adopted children of both the Donaldsons and the Yazdans see that a lot is expected from them due to their “hybrid” identities. Cultural identity is now the prominent reasoning behind the characters’ inability to see or hear properly. They find themselves corralled in defined “cultural” categories (American, Iranian, Korean, Chinese) that create internal conflict. The conflict and the resolution will be explained in more detail in Chapter V.

Chapter II analyzes the concepts of sight versus blindness in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* and *Searching for Caleb*. I contend that these two novels are very similar in nature with the one difference being seeing versus hearing. *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* addresses each character's inability to separate from the negative bonds of his/her family. This inability is due, in part, to the act of being blind or blinding oneself to the realities of both the family and his or her lives. All members of the Tull family suffer from different types of sightlessness. Pearl Tull is physically blind. Likewise, Pearl is symbolically blind to her own life and the life of her family and her estranged husband. In addition, her children follow in her footsteps as they are all wearing different types of "blinders" over their eyes. They ignore both their own issues and their mother's problems.

Like the Tull family in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, the Peck family, in *Searching for Caleb*, deals with the progression of the family that is stifled by the inability of its members to interact with each other pragmatically. Traditional ideals are prevalent within the Peck family structure. Coontz contends that "Such visions [male/female roles, sexual abstinence, and traditional family structure] of past family life exert a powerful emotional pull on most Americans" (8). These imposed traditional roles hinder every Peck's ability to "hear" properly. The Peck family's inability to "hear" each other creates the same type of chaos as does the Tull family's inability to "see." Daniel in *Searching for Caleb* is physically deaf. In addition, similar to the Tull family blinders, the Peck family

suffers from different modes of deafness. Both families utilize modes of sightlessness or deafness as a means of coping with family issues.

Chapter III addresses the male oriented novels *The Tin Can Tree*, *Morgan's Passing* and *Celestial Navigation*. In each novel, the protagonist is a confused male desperately searching for his place in the world. Ansel Green, of *The Tin Can Tree*, sees the majority of his world through a window. This is a typical trait for many of Tyler's male characters. His brother, James, sees his world through the lens of a camera as a photographer. These characters are unable to see the world without glass separating them from it. Likewise, both Morgan Gower (*Morgan's Passing*) and Jeremy Pauling (*Celestial Navigation*) view the world through windows, Morgan from the outside looking in and Jeremy from the inside looking out. Their lives are defined by what they create: Morgan makes up stories and places himself in the starring role, while Jeremy, as an artist, creates sculptures of how he sees the changing world around him. The windows serve as a transparent shield from reality. I will use Dr. Frank Pittman's book, *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons, and the Search for Masculinity*, to analyze and explore the behaviors, stereotypes, and expectations of Tyler's male characters in relation to their issues with seeing and hearing.

In Chapter IV, *A Slipping Down Life*, *Earthly Possessions*, and *Ladder of Years* are grouped together due to their prominent displays of feminist behavior. I will take the theoretical approach from Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema." Based upon the theories of Lacan, Mulvey addresses the visual interpretation of female characters by the observer:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (8)

As the women in these novels look for ways to identify with themselves as individuals, the men that have been in their lives and who come into their lives are reliant upon their presence. The women fight against the patriarchal order by seeing and hearing differently than their male counterparts. In *A Slipping Down Life*, Evie Decker sees herself through the reverse image in a mirror. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend, “What she [the woman] sees in the mirror is usually a male construct” (17). Although Evie tries to see herself as a male construct, she eventually realizes that the male construct (Car, David, and her father) is unnecessary. In fact, the reverse image that she sees when she looks into the mirror is the antithesis of her (self). As a result, Evie is able to alter her perception of the self by altering the structure of the gaze.

In an interview with Alice Hall Petry, Tyler contends that she is not a feminist (*Understanding Anne Tyler* 18-19). Although Tyler contends that she prefers to not be labeled as a feminist, many of her characters address women’s issues and the need for survival in the world. While most of her female characters have entered into marriage, they soon find that they never took the time to search for themselves prior to taking on the role of wife and mother. Tyler’s women

desire recognition from their families and themselves. In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, Jessica Benjamin argues, “Domination does not repress the desire for recognition; rather, it enlists and transforms it” (219). Tyler’s women desire to be recognized – not as movie stars or famous authors but, rather, as individuals. These women prevail as the strongest characters in many of her novels. Often, women see in ways that men cannot.

Elizabeth Evans argues, “Over and over in Tyler’s fiction women depend on men” (100). While this argument is true in some of Tyler’s novels, it is also reasonable to argue that many of Tyler’s male characters are dependent upon the women in their worlds. In *A Slipping Down Life*, Bertram “Drumstings” Casey is unable to move forward without Evie. He relies on Evie for money (she gets a stable job in the library) and the basic stability that he desires. It is only later, as Evie is leaving, that he sees that he needs Evie more than she needs him. In *The Clock Winder*, the Emerson men find that they need Elizabeth Abbott’s presence and “chaotic order” as a means of survival. In *Earthly Possessions*, Charlotte Emory decides to leave her marriage and is taken hostage after a visit to the bank. During the course of the day, Jake Simms, the bank robber, becomes reliant upon her for guidance. Like Charlotte, in *Ladder of Years*, Delia Grinstead walks away from her family. She continues to find that the men that she encounters rely on her for guidance, nurturing, and companionship. In *The Accidental Tourist*, Macon Leary relies upon Muriel Pritchett to aid him in the redirection of his life.

Chapter V addresses Tyler's most recent novel, *Digging to America*. This novel addresses how "exotic" cultures are viewed in America. The female protagonist, Maryam, finds that she is unaware of where she belongs. Living in America most of her adult life after leaving Iran to marry, Maryam Yazdan is lost—is she American or Iranian? In *Feminism Is for Everybody*, bell hooks' main argument is that in order to find a personal voice, women must recognize their own positions in American society. Maryam finds it difficult to find her voice as an American. Complicating matters for Maryam are the stereotypes of Middle Easterners that are imposed upon her everywhere—in the grocery store, at family gatherings, and even while dating. As stated on the front cover, *Digging to America* "cast[s] a penetrating light on the American way as seen from two perspectives, those who are born here and those struggling to fit in." *Hyphenated Identities: Second Generation Iranian-Americans Speak* explores the issues that many Iranian-Americans face as they question their identities in America. These essays, compiled by Tara Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar, will be used to consider the identity question in *Digging to America*. In addition, I will also use works by Iranian-American scholars Diane Hoffman and Lila Azam Zanganeh.

In Chapter VI I will readdress the connecting themes throughout all the analyzed texts. Tyler uses differing means of vision and hearing as physical and symbolic devices. Overall, Tyler's characters see and hear the world, their families, themselves, and their situations through their blurred eyes or muted ears.

## CHAPTER II

### COPING MECHANISMS: *DINNER AT THE HOMESICK RESTAURANT* AND *SEARCHING FOR CALEB*

*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* and *Searching for Caleb* portray Tyler's concepts of blindness and deafness. The novels are very analogous in nature with the one major divergence being seeing versus hearing. *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* addresses the characters' inability to separate themselves from the restrictive bonds of family. In doing so, they are blinded in various ways. Similarly, *Searching for Caleb* looks at individual family members attempting to survive within the ruins of their family. Individual attempts at self-preservation result in differing modes of hearing/deafness as a means of survival. The Peck family's incapacity to "hear" each other creates the same type of disorder as does the Tull family's inability to "see."

*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* looks at each character's incapacity to separate from his/her family's history. This inability is due in part to the act of being blind or blinding him/herself to the realities of both his/her lives and the family. Each member of the Tull family suffers from distinct types of sightlessness. Pearl Tull is physically blind. Likewise, as a mother, Pearl is symbolically blind, as she refuses to see what she is doing to her children. As a wife, Pearl is powerless to recognize the unstable lifestyle that both she and Beck impose upon themselves, each other, and their children. In addition, Pearl's children follow in her footsteps. Differing levels of blindness dominate Cody,

Ezra, and Jenny. As adults, Pearl's children refuse to acknowledge their personal issues and Pearl's contagious condition, blindness.

*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982) follows the Tull family's narcissistic attitudes that serve as prevalent factors in the decision making skills of each member of the family. In addition, each family member deals with his/her pain in an introverted and unrelated manner. The parents, Pearl and Beck, live separate lives and unintentionally wreak havoc on their children. Similarly, all three of their children, Cody, Jenny, and Ezra, are disconnected from each other as they carry their childhood wounds into adulthood. The majority of their agonizing problems exist due to their inadequate perceptions of reality. Like the Tull family in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, the Peck family in *Searching for Caleb* deals with the progression of the family that is hindered by the inability to function with each other rationally. The Peck family's failure to "hear" each other generates the same type of disarray as does the Tull family's powerlessness to "see." Daniel, in *Searching for Caleb*, is physically deaf. Likewise, like the Tull offspring, the children and grandchildren are afflicted with Daniel Peck's contagious affliction, deafness. Again, these symptoms are both physical and symbolic. Both families utilize modes of sightlessness or deafness as a means of coping with family issues.

All the immediate members of the Tull family have vision problems. These problems with vision complicate their individual growth and personal awareness. Susan Gilbert, in her article "Anne Tyler" contends, "In the shifting points of view of *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, none of the characters

reveal self-understanding” (270). Pearl, the matriarch, does not want to acknowledge what she has done to her family; thus, she conceals a vast part of herself. Both Cody and Jenny identify their lives through the failures of their mother, Pearl. Beck is unable to deal with the realities of his life with his family and physically leaves them so that he is not destroyed by an image of his “real” family. Ezra, in the absence of his father, becomes the patriarchal figure and envisions a family that does not exist. As the patriarch, he takes on the responsibility of recreating his family. All five characters perceive their lives differently based upon their faulty vision.

We are immediately alerted within the first few pages of Pearl’s failing eyesight. Mary Ellis Gibson argues, “The image of Pearl at the beginning of the novel, blind and ill, presides over the view of her” (168). The first chapter, written retrospectively and similar to Faulkner’s chapter on Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, informs us that Pearl is on her deathbed and that her vision is failing: “Every day her sight had faded” (5). Tyler uses Pearl’s physical ailment of blindness as a metaphor for her emotional blindness. Pearl states, “The doctor says that I am going blind” (5). While we learn that Pearl’s sight has been failing for quite some time, she is still unable to acknowledge a lack of vision on her part. She clearly does not accept that she is blind when pointing out that it is the doctor’s diagnosis and not her own. Pearl’s previous years will display a constant denial of the loss of her physical and metaphorical vision.

Pearl’s denial of physical blindness is in direct correlation with the emotional blindness that takes over her memory. By living most of her life in a

“blinded” state, Pearl’s memory of her past, her family, and her friends is distorted: “It was peculiar how her memory seemed to be going blind with the rest of her. She did not so much see their faces as hear their fluid voices” (5). Pearl’s state of (non)vision passes onto her children.

Pearl Tull exists as the central problem in the novel. At the age of thirty she marries Beck Tull and five years later they decide to have children. Starting a family does not come easily as Pearl and Beck have trouble conceiving. Beck’s job as a salesman means that they moved around a lot; thus, moving around gives Pearl a new hope as her optimism is renewed in each new town: “She’d [Pearl] gaze at each new town with hopeful eyes” (7). Like Justine and Duncan in *Searching for Caleb*, Pearl and Beck instinctively move from town to town, running away from their own visions. Town after town gives Pearl a fresh hope for the children that she initially could not conceive. After Cody is finally born, Pearl desires more children so that she will have “extra” children (4). Her need to have “extra” children is due in part to her fear of being left alone. Pearl’s need to have extra children provides her with security that her husband cannot give to her.

A few years after the birth of their last child, Beck abruptly departs from the family and does not return until after Pearl’s death. The thirty years between his departure and return are the darkest years for the remaining family members. Pearl, in an attempt to raise her three children alone, shields herself from reality and passes her faulty vision onto her children. By electing to blind herself regarding her family, Pearl is also blind to herself. She is unable to recognize who she really is as a person; thus, at the time of her death, Pearl is unable to recognize

herself in pictures. Toward the end of her life, when she and Ezra are “looking” at pictures, Pearl feels herself fading away. She asks Ezra, “Do you see me at all?” (262).

Pearl’s continual loss of vision also derives from her fear of being a bad mother. When Pearl is left to fend for herself and her children, she realizes that she has to be responsible for everyone that she cares for. The very idea petrifies her, and she worries that she will not be able to care for her children in the manner that she desires. She states, “If you could just realize how . . . helpless I feel! How scary it is to know that everyone I love depends on me! I’m afraid I’ll do something wrong” (63). Pearl builds her wall of defense by becoming increasingly controlling, ill-tempered, and oblivious to reality. Pearl prefers oblivion to awareness due to the fact that she cannot bear to live with herself otherwise.

Pearl refuses to see what she is doing to her family. Judith Ann Spector argues, “Unfortunately for Pearl’s children, the mother-child relationship suffers as a result of Pearl’s perceptions of Beck’s inadequacies” (315). As a wife and a mother, it is easier for her to believe that all of her misery and anger are the result of her sacrifice for her children due in part to the absence of a husband/father figure. What Pearl fails to perceive is that her repressive and rancorous conduct towards her children has deeply wounded them. During an argument, Pearl “threw a spoon in his [Cody’s] face” (53). In addition, she slaps Cody in the face. Likewise, she “grabbed one of Jenny’s braids and yanked it so Jenny was pulled off her chair” (53). Ezra does not escape his mother’s angry tirades as she slams a

bowl of peas on his head and then wishes that she would find all three children “dead in your beds” (53). Elizabeth Evans argues, “There is hardly a more graphic picture of woman/mother as monster” (114). Throughout the novel, Pearl’s children repeatedly request that she look at the disrupted state of their lives. Pearl has fluttering visions of reality. She sees herself as “an angry sort of mother” (19). Gilbert maintains, “Brief moments of vision do come. The old blind Pearl is humored by Ezra’s reading pages of her old diaries and scrapbooks to her” (269). Even when it appears as if she has decided to take responsibility for her actions, it is apparent that she is unable to blame herself altogether:

Pearl believes now that her family has failed. Neither of her sons is happy and her daughter cannot seem to stay married. There is no one to accept the blame for this but Pearl herself. Still sometimes she has the feeling that it’s simply fate and not a matter for blame at all. (184-85)

In response, Pearl’s children attempt to convey to their mother that she is not viewing them realistically. Pearl’s firstborn, Cody, is severely troubled by his relationship with his mother. As a baby, Cody almost dies from the croup. This fear prompts Pearl to envision a future without children which results in her need to produce extra children. As a result, Cody lives the rest of his life with his mother feeling as if he has been replaced by an enhanced version of himself (i.e. Ezra). Cody does not believe that his mother sees him accurately and constantly questions what she views through her eyes. Evans argues, “Never did Cody find the mother of his fantasy” (96).

Unlike Pearl, Cody attempts to escape reality by eliminating his family from his life. He distances and estranges himself from both his mother and his siblings. Like most of Tyler's characters, Cody spends a great deal of his life avoiding reality. By taking himself out of the picture, Cody attempts to create the fantasy life that he desires; thus, his family begins to lose sight of Cody: "She [Pearl] rose fumbling for the arms of her chair in two or three blind passes. [. . .] 'Why, Cody, let me look at you! [. . .] I can't make out your face'" (249). Pearl's reaction expresses both her blindness and Cody's desire to remain hidden.

In addition, Cody is in constant competition with his "replacement," his younger brother Ezra. His inner battles turn into physical battles as he attempts to reconstruct his mother's picture of Ezra. Pearl does favor Ezra and, in turn, Cody endeavors to alter Ezra's image. Tyler utilizes the visual medium of photography in order to illustrate Cody's intent. For example, as a teenager, Cody stages a picture, with his mother's camera, of Ezra sleeping among empty liquor bottles and dirty magazines. Cody anticipates that his mother will find the picture and see Ezra differently. Instead, the tables turn on Cody as his mother realizes that Ezra is innocent. Cody is not able to alter her vision but, instead, he creates a damaging picture of himself: "She leaned closer and Cody drew back. Even her eyes seemed to give off heat" (64). It is in this moment that Pearl takes a permanent picture of Cody to retain for future use. It is this Cody, the manipulative and cunning Cody, who defines Cody in Pearl's eyes for the majority of her life: "Her gaze flicked back and forth across his face. 'I see,' she said" (64). Cody will be unable to erase the picture that he has unintentionally fashioned of himself.

As Cody's life progresses, he becomes increasingly distant from his family as he does not care to witness the relationship that he observes between his mother and his brother. In a manner similar to Beck, Cody's distance from his family allows him to alter his vision of his family; thus, his absence is necessary for his own survival. When Cody does visit his family, the occasions are always brief and unsettling. Cody, unable to change his mother's view of Ezra, continues as an adult to claim that his mother is not viewing her sons clearly or equally.

As an adult, Cody marries Ruth, Ezra's former girlfriend. In essence, by stealing Ruth, Cody is seeking to adopt Ezra's identity; therefore, his hope is that his mother will view him favorably again. However, it is evident that Pearl's view of him is unaltered as she states: "I see through you like a sheet of glass. [. . .] I know everything you're after. I see everything in your heart, Cody Tull" (153). Cody spends the rest of the novel trying to secure acceptance from his mother.

Likewise, Cody is unable to seek and accept the trust that comes in the form of a relationship. He sees his marriage as a farce and continually expects it to break down. Cody states, "Sometimes I seemed to enjoy it [his marriage] better when I imagined I was seeing it through someone else's eyes" (255).

Cody and Ruth have a son named Luke. On a visit home, Cody becomes irrationally enraged as he believes that Ezra is stealing Luke from him. He cries out to Pearl, "Don't you see he's out to steal my son?" (184). In this instance, Cody has regressed to his childhood and is desperately trying to receive approval from his mother. Cody's manipulative ways have turned into paranoia as he is no longer trying to create a picture but, rather, he truly believes the false pictures that

have invaded his mind. In addition, Luke then runs away from home in order to try and see his father's family. Cody's brief return home to pick up Luke results in a confrontation between him and his son in the car. Cody's inability to see his family members properly is revealed to Luke. Even as a child, Luke initially is seeing his life more clearly than his father. Cody's insistence that Pearl is "difficult to deal with" is a concept unseen by Luke as his response is, "Grandma's not difficult" (254). Cody's tirades to his young son about his family create a situation whereby Luke now finds himself in need of protection. Like the other Tulls, Luke's means of survival will be through a form of faulty vision. As Cody continues rambling on, "Luke's eyelids drooped" (255). A few minutes later, Luke "closed his eyes" (256). Cody's inability to see properly is a trait that he now has passed onto his son.

Like Cody and Luke, Jenny Tull also develops problems as a consequence of her upbringing. Jenny's personality is a direct result of her oppressive childhood, and she in turn will pass her anger onto her children. Early in the novel Jenny's perception of her mother is evident. Her view defines Pearl as an abusive and unrelenting mother. Pearl perceives Jenny as a whore, as a physical mess, and as an ungrateful, "useless daughter" (51-53). Like Cody, Jenny believes that her mother never sees her as she really is. For instance, Jenny befriends Ezra's coworker Josiah and is caught having a harmless conversation with him. As Jenny reaches out to him, Pearl witnesses the innocent gesture and accuses her of being a tramp. Jenny responds to her mother's accusations by asking, "It's nothing don't you see . . . he's nothing to me, don't you see?" (109). Evans argues, "Pearl

is incapable of hearing any explanation” (115). Jenny quickly realizes that her mother definitely does not “see.”

As Jenny stumbles through her life desperately searching for clarity, she employs different tactics in doing so. Unable to make confident decisions, Jenny ventures to a fortune-teller looking for answers. Tyler’s inclusion of the fortune-teller illustrates her theme of sight. Jenny, unable to see her present clearly, hopes that the fortune-teller can envision her future. Sylvia Abraham contends, “occult studies were taught to those who desired to learn the Truth [sic] and the meaning of life” (1). Mrs. Parkins, the fortune-teller, says to Jenny, “If you don’t [get married], see, you’ll run into a lot of heartbreak” (96). With nowhere else to turn, Jenny accepts Mrs. Parkins’ vision and marries. Like Pearl, Jenny refuses to accept full responsibility for the outcome of her marriage. Instead of analyzing her own actions, she passes the blame onto the fortune-teller: “They passed the fortune-teller’s window. The same dusty lamp glowed on the table. Jenny, looking in, thought that Mrs. Parkins had not been much of a prophet” (111).

Jenny’s three marriages have assisted in her confused state. She has blindly jumped into these marriages and later sees what was right before her eyes the entire time. While looking at her first husband’s letter of proposal retrospectively, Jenny realizes that her first husband had proposed marriage in the same manner as a business merger: “Well, she had overlooked it. She had chosen not to see” (103). Like the rest of her family, Jenny’s unwillingness to see derives from a childhood of ambiguous relationships with her mother, father, and brothers. She has never been able to clearly identify herself as she has always

been defined by an imposing mother and various husbands. Jenny has conceived so many identities that she is no longer aware of who she really is. Alice Hall Petry, in *Understanding Anne Tyler*, argues: “By the end of the novel she is Dr. Jenny Marie Tull Baines Wiley St. Ambrose, the young Jenny Tull barely detectable in the series of accumulated identities” (195). Jenny’s vision of herself comes to light, oddly, through the actions of her own mother.

Jenny has inherited Pearl’s bad mothering traits. As a mother, Jenny grows increasingly abusive and formal. She physically and emotionally abuses her daughter Becky, even slamming her face “into her Peter Rabbit dinner plate,” giving her a “bloody nose,” and pulling her hair (209). Like Pearl, she is initially unable to see the wounds that she is creating within her children. Ironically, as a pediatrician, she has taken on the responsibility of healing the wounds of other children. As a doctor, she is successful, but as a mother she has a tendency to resort to the same abusive behaviors that she sees in her mother.

In addition, when it comes to mothering her stepchild, Slevin, Jenny keeps her distance as she does not see Slevin as her own child: ““Slevin is not *my* son. He’s Joe’s. [. . .] *Joe* is his father and always has been”” (188). Again, like Pearl, Jenny does not care to realistically see what is going on with her family. Slevin’s abandonment by his biological mother has left him with a fear of desertion and a need to recapture the past. Jenny is not always able to deal with her step-son’s problems due to the fact that she chooses not to see him as her responsibility. By deferring ownership of Slevin to Joe, Jenny is revealing her inability to see her family properly.

Jenny's vision of her mother will abruptly change as she witnesses an interaction between her mother and her daughter, Becky. As Pearl cares for Jenny and Becky following Jenny's nervous breakdown, Jenny recognizes that her vision of her mother may not be altogether accurate. As she watches her mother care for Becky in a grandmotherly fashion, she recalls that she had many happy times with her mother (210). Petry contends, "Her childhood had been more happy than the vividly-remembered, isolated incidents of abuse had led her to believe" (*Understanding Anne Tyler* 198). Jenny sees that she has been dooming Becky to an abusive life due to her own misconceptions of her past. It is because of this realization that Jenny realizes that she must modify her mothering skills: "Jenny Tull learns to change" (Evans 115). Soon thereafter, Jenny's vision clarifies and she exonerates herself and her mother of any wrongdoing. Jenny will later be questioned in the same manner as she has questioned her mother. The priest at her stepson's school questions her in reference to her stepson Slevin's behavior. He asks, "'Don't you see this is serious? We have a child in trouble here, don't you see that?'" (213). Strangely, for the first time, Jenny is the only one who does see the actual behaviors and composition of her family. She is now able to proceed through life with open and unobstructed eyes.

Contrary to Cody's and Jenny's needs to liberate themselves from their family, Ezra envisions a different family entirely and aspires to construct the Tull family according to his fantastical images. Ezra sacrifices much of his life with the hopes of salvaging what little is remaining of his mother's emotions and his family's legacy. Ezra's faulty vision of his family dominates his life, and he

endeavors to make his vision a reality in various ways. Unfortunately, his vision is false and it is not until he accepts the real picture of his family that he is able to see clearly.

Ezra is aware of his siblings' obstructed vision, but he fails to acknowledge his own hindered vision. Jenny questions Ezra's vision as he drives her from his restaurant to their mother's home. While they are in his car, Jenny notices that it is raining but Ezra has not put on his windshield wipers. She asks, "Can you see?" (99). Tyler has carefully included this scene as a metaphor for Ezra's vision of his family and his mother, with the filmy windshield representing Ezra's clouded vision. By declining to turn on the windshield wipers, Ezra is refusing to see the truth of his life. Like his siblings, Ezra is choosing blindness as a means of survival. He is not only blind to himself, but he is unable to recognize the failures of his family members, primarily his mother. Likewise, Ezra refuses to see the physical blindness that has overtaken his mother.

Ezra's realization of Pearl's physical and emotional disability does not occur until he is forced to witness her physical blindness while they are both attending a baseball game. Pearl does not wish for people to view her as helpless; therefore, she will not listen to a radio at the baseball game. A radio would give others the impression that she was using it as a "hearing aid" (270). Ezra is subconsciously assisting in her clouded vision as he interprets the game for his mother. Pearl, having taken on more activity than her old body can handle, passes out. It is not until her eyes open that Ezra realizes the extent of her blindness: "Ezra's mother opened her eyes. The air was bright as knife blades, shimmering

with a brassy, hard light, but she didn't even squint; and for the first time Ezra finally understood that she was blind" (271). Pearl's physical impairment is indicative of her emotional impairment. As Ezra's eyes meet his mother's open but obstructed eyes, he becomes painfully aware that his own vision has been altered by his mother's inability to see. This will be Ezra's first step toward clarity.

Ezra's obsession with the Homesick Restaurant is a symbol for the family that he envisions. Ezra aspires to construct a family within the restaurant and even takes on a surrogate mother, Mrs. Scarlatti, in order to do so. Mrs. Scarlatti sees Ezra as he is, the good and the bad, and he derives comfort from her vision. Mrs. Scarlatti's vision will remain unaltered even when Ezra decides to alter her restaurant. Ezra alters the menu and varnishes the floor in an attempt to make the restaurant better. In doing so, Ezra reveals his desire to change Mrs. Scarlatti's original vision. More importantly, Ezra knocks "down walls to suit his own personal vision" (Petry, *Understanding Anne Tyler* 201). Ezra is aware that she sees the bad in him: "She looked into his eyes. Her face seemed stripped" (128). However, unlike Pearl, Mrs. Scarlatti's love is unconditional: "She didn't refuse to see him—nothing like that" (128).

Ezra hides behind his vision of the Homesick Restaurant. In her article, "*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant: Anne Tyler and the Faulkner Connection*," Mary Elkins states, "Ezra's restaurant is a substitution for reality" (128). Ezra's vision of food and family will never materialize until opposing factors have been resolved. First, what Ezra does not realize is that, like his siblings, he will never

be completely happy until the missing piece of his family is present. Beck's absence creates Ezra's major wounds, and it is not until he can physically see Beck that Ezra's vision begins to clear.

Like Ezra, Cody needs to physically see Beck in order to heal. Throughout their lives, Beck has been the "invisible man" (20). Unable to physically see Beck, Cody has conceived a man that does not truly exist. The vision of Beck that Cody has constructed has to be eradicated in order for Cody's vision to clear.

In addition, after Pearl's death, Cody is able to clearly articulate who his mother really was. In her article, "Intimate Violence in Anne Tyler's Fiction: *The Clock Winder* and *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*", Elizabeth Sweeney argues:

In this chapter [Pearl's funeral], narrated through Cody's point of view, he is able to adjust his grim picture of his mother, whom he remembers mostly as "frantic, angry, sometimes terrifying," and to forgive his father for leaving them with her. (91)

Cody sees that his mother was an angry and violent woman:

"A raving, shrieking, unpredictable witch," Cody told Beck. "She slammed us against the wall and called us scum and vipers, said she wished us dead. [. . .] she used to tell me. 'I'll look out that window and laugh at your brains splashed all over the pavement.'" (294)

He blames Beck for leaving them with a woman who would derive pleasure from seeing her children splattered on the street.

In addition, it is not a coincidence that Tyler has decided to give both Pearl and Jenny an eating disorder. Tyler frequently addresses eating disorders, specifically anorexia. Anorexia is a state of being where an individual's view of herself is distorted (Dellasega 83). In addition, those suffering from eating disorders have faulty vision when looking into the mirrors as they see themselves as fat. Jenny is a textbook case of anorexia: "The people most likely to develop the eating disorder [anorexia] are young Caucasian women who are high academic achievers" (Kittleson and Kramer 15). Those suffering from anorexia aim for perfection but can never attain their unrealistic personification of perfection. Anorexics are unable to be happy, and their unhappiness results in anger and frustration (Sacker 56). Both Pearl and Jenny suffer from this disorder, thus perpetuating their altered ideals. The dinners that Ezra arranges in his attempts to create a family become horrific ordeals for these women. For Ezra, his perception of an ideal family revolves around their ability to eat a meal together. This perception contrasts with Pearl and Jenny's ideal which revolves around avoiding meals. These two conflicting views cannot operate simultaneously.

Beck's re-emergence is the final step in the completion of the Tull family portrait. As Beck appears in the same phantom-like fashion that he disappeared, the family is struck with their conflicting perceptions and visions. Tyler continues to utilize the theme of sight by divulging varying views of Beck, of the children, and of the past. Jenny and her father look at each other as strangers as he declares, "Jenny, last time I set eyes on you, you were just about eight years old" (288). She afterward admits to Cody, "If I just saw him [Beck] on the street I would

have passed him by” (289). We are quickly aware that, without formal introductions, Beck is incapable of identifying his children with his own eyes as we observe him mistaking the salad boy for his grandson. Tyler uses Beck’s return as a means of explaining why he left in the first place.

Beck’s initial disappearance occurs due to his unrealistic vision of what both a wife and a family ought to be. In “Anne Tyler’s *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*: A Critical Feast,” Judith Ann Spector argues, “Beck cannot deal with the loss of the idealized phase of courtship/marriage” (314). In addition, Beck cannot handle the imperfect view that Pearl has of him. Beck states:

Then bit by bit I guess she saw my faults. I’d never hid them, but now it seemed they mattered after all. I made mistakes and she saw them. She saw that I was away from home too much and not enough to support her. (300)

Like Cody, he runs away due to his unfulfilled fantasies.

At the funeral dinner Beck, somewhat oblivious to the harm that his absence has caused, states, “Will you look at this! This group. This gathering. This [. . .] assemblage” (292). Beck innocently commands that everyone physically look at the family, and in doing so, he makes them all aware that, no matter how hard they try to modify each other, they will always be family. This view is not yet good enough for Cody as he still has not attained the clarity that he longs for. Beck does not appear remorseful. In addition, Beck’s stories anger Cody as he bitterly remarks, “He wasn’t ever there, you see, so he didn’t count” (296). Physically, Beck’s eyes change: “His eyes no longer seemed so blue; they

had darkened to a color nearer to navy” (296). Cody now sees his father’s view of Pearl, Cody, Ezra, and Jenny. Beck argues, ““I saw that you could live without me”” (302). Cody sees that he is able to live without his father. Similarly, like Jenny and Ezra with Pearl, it is through his father’s eyes that Cody’s vision begins to clear.

Likewise, *Searching for Caleb* (1975) addresses the familial issues within another oddly impaired family. Like the Tull family, each member of the Peck family deals with his/her internal trauma. The Pecks deal with personal and family issues by choosing when to deafen themselves. They struggle in their searches for identity as they make a concerted effort to shelter themselves from the rest of the world. The more rebellious members of the Peck family endeavor to escape the confining Peck family compound. In doing so, they encounter difficulties as they challenge their family’s history. Oftentimes, as is evident in both families, the characters run away from their problems when life among their families becomes intolerable.

Like Beck Tull, Caleb Peck finds it vital to break away from the family. Caleb’s escape allows others to see that an escape is possible. Duncan leaves in a manner similar to Caleb’s, while Justine marries Duncan, her first cousin, in order to remove herself from her family. Caleb’s brother, Daniel, escapes by spending the rest of his days defying his stable upbringing by searching for his missing brother. These characters have been raised in a predetermined and preplanned life. As the Peck children grow into adulthood, another home is built on the land in Roland Park with almost “no space between them” (58). Caleb, Daniel, Justine,

and Duncan learn that in trying to lose the Peck identity, they in turn will have to unearth a new one.

In their searches for identity, the characters all have issues with listening and silencing. Tyler utilizes the themes of listening and silencing in order to reveal her characters' Achilles heels. Like the Tull family's inability to see, the members of the Peck family fail to hear the answers to their own questions. While all of the characters are searching for something, they almost never listen as they are accustomed to not being listened to. In addition, they have a tendency to resort to self-silencing. These characters silence their words or deafen their ears as a means of survival. Whether they are being silenced or silencing themselves, they are serving as their own worst enemies. Similar to the Tulls' blindness, it is silence that prevents the Pecks from moving forward.

As was already mentioned, Caleb is the first major character to disconnect himself from the family. Caleb leaves his family primarily due to the fact that the Pecks attempt to silence his love of music. Caleb is expected to help run the family business, but since childhood he has had a love of music:

He [Caleb] is temperamentally ill-suited to the world of commerce, but his father refuses to face this—especially in light of the fact that what he really wants is to pursue a career in music. This is attributed initially to his inheritance of “his Grandpa Baum’s delight in noise and crowds.” (Petry, *Understanding Anne Tyler* 131-32)

It is this love of music that will serve as the catalyst for his departure. More specifically, his father, Justin Peck, silences Caleb's love of music as he attempts to mold Caleb into a "proper" Peck. He disregards Caleb's dreams and, in turn, he pushes Caleb away. In turn, Caleb learns to silence himself so that he will not be continually forced to hear his family's incessant commentary on his life. No one but his mother appears to care that Caleb is silent but, still, she does not give him a voice: "She [Laura] pondered over his long, unbreakable silences" (63).

Instead, his mother tries to "shame him" into customary behavior. She would "shut him in the parlor" (54) if he was caught playing instruments in public. In addition, Laura argues, "'You have killed your half of your father'" (56). Caleb survives his parents' tirades by blocking them out: "but he [Caleb] would only wander off, not hearing" (63).

Caleb suffers silently as he is forced by guilt to work for his father. He purchases musical instruments, but his musical desires are hindered by his father. His father has even "silenced" the piano by forbidding it to be played in his home. Justin does not want to hear about Caleb's dreams: "Justin looked at the wall, pretending not to hear" (56-57). It is this silencing that hinders Caleb's growth as an individual. Even when Caleb asks him about going after Margaret Rose (Daniel's wife who escaped the Pecks whom Justin adores), he deafens his own ears so as to not have to deal with the loss: "Now Justin merely closed his eyes and pretended not to hear" (62).

After his escape, Caleb spends many of his years as a musician. His life progresses full circle as he is silenced by Luray, his deceased lover's son's wife.

Despite the fact that Caleb is now part of a new surrogate family, Luray takes over and slowly starts the silencing where his father left off. Caleb is repeatedly stifled by Luray as she silences his music. In a scene that takes place in their apartment, Caleb is blissfully playing his harmonica. Luray forces him to cease playing as she shouts at Caleb, “Hear that? Hear what I hear?” (292). She does not wish to hear the music and orders Caleb upstairs to tend to her children as if he is a teenaged girl hired to baby-sit.

Shortly thereafter, Caleb is forced to give up his harmonica altogether as he is institutionalized by Luray. The institution also attempts to silence Caleb as he is not permitted to keep his harmonica. After all of these years he is in the exact same position as he was in the Peck home. Luray talks over Caleb as she leaves the institution and says, “Now, we’ll be coming back, you hear?” (293). Caleb’s hearing is fine, if not exceptional. In fact, he later tells Justine that as far as life is concerned: “I play it by ear” (310). His search for self continually is sidetracked as his music is limited. His departure from the Peck family serves as a model for future “escapes” by Peck family members. Likewise, as an elderly man, his brother, Daniel, “escapes” the confines of his domineering family. Due to their departures, Caleb and Daniel have not seen each other for the majority of their lives. Daniel’s search for Caleb is significant because he sees that in finding Caleb, he will find a lost part of himself.

Daniel’s search for Caleb commences later in his life as he realizes that he too has been stifled by the confines of the Peck home. He begins his search for Caleb, and his granddaughter Justine assists him in his search. Throughout the

search, Daniel is hindered by his inability to hear properly. Justine serves as a second set of ears as she is able to understand his plight. In essence, Daniel's search for Caleb is his search for self. Joseph Voelker argues: "Caleb has come to represent to him [Daniel] his own life lived in the contrary-to-fact subjunctive—choice not made, emotions denied. Glimmers of error come to Daniel in the last months of his life" (96).

Daniel's hearing impairment is not only physical but also symbolic. He is unable to communicate effectively due to his hearing loss. While the physical nature of the impairment is a result of aging, Daniel can choose when and when not to hear by inserting or removing his hearing-aid. He has the ability to silence all if he wishes to do so. Like other Pecks, Daniel escapes from reality by suppressing his own listening skills. In her article, "The Individual in the Family: Anne Tyler's *Searching for Caleb* and *Earthly Possessions*," Stella Nesanovich argues, "Grandfather Peck characteristically turns off his hearing aid, shutting out more of the world as he grows older" (162). After his stepmother dies, Daniel ultimately is given the responsibility of going through her things. Initially, he blocks out her death by avoiding the home altogether. Months later, as family members are rummaging through her belongings, Daniel struggles to silence their incessant babbling: "He didn't care to hear what she [Sulie] was saying" (160).

Likewise, when Daniel does hear what is being said but does not wish to accept it as truth, he often questions the speaker. Daniel begins his investigation by looking at an image of Caleb in an old photograph. He struggles to see clues within the picture as he believes there to be a hidden message in it. He questions

his daughter Lucy about the picture. Lucy's response is not satisfactory to Daniel because her response reveals that there is nothing out of the ordinary: "it doesn't look to me as if he is playing any note" (161). Daniel's denial of the truth is evidenced by his response: "I never heard of such a thing" (161). It is not until Justine comes to visit that Daniel's requests are seen and heard.

Both Justine and Daniel have spent their most recent years together in pursuance of Caleb. When Justine hears about Daniel's picture of Caleb from her aunts, she goes to her grandfather. The first words out of her mouth are, "Could I see Caleb?" (162). While his other family members are "asking not to see it" (162), Justine is observing the picture in the same diligent manner as does Daniel. It is then that they begin to listen to each other as they search for themselves in the search for Caleb. Justine persistently encourages her grandfather to listen. She continually reminds him to not forget his hearing aid as she knows that he will be unable to communicate without it. In addition, the family does not understand Daniel's need for the actual search. Daniel's children present him with a private investigator to perform the remainder of the search as a gift. He does not understand as they ask him, "Didn't you hear?" (217). Daniel does not hear because he cannot believe his ears. As his family did with Caleb, they refuse to listen to Daniel's desires. Untrue to his nature, Daniel shouts at them in order to be heard, but they still do not hear as they force the investigator upon him.

It is what is at the end of this journey that both excites and frightens Daniel. When he realizes that their journey may come to an end, both he and Justine subconsciously prevent Eli, the private detective, from speaking. They try

to silence him by speaking over him as they are frightened to hear what he has to say. As Eli tries to state that he may have found Caleb, he keeps saying, “Listen here” (243). Finally, Duncan says, “Will you let the man speak?” (244).

Daniel tries to communicate with Caleb via a letter. After a few weeks, Daniel still has not heard from Caleb. It is reasonable to assume that Daniel believes that Caleb does not want to hear from him. He believes that his voice has been silenced and he dies without ever having spoken to his brother. Even at his death he is told not to speak as Justine tries to help him. Daniel’s voice is heard by Caleb, but Daniel never lives to hear Caleb’s. Instead, Justine carries on as her grandfather’s ears as she listens to the stories that Caleb had saved for her grandfather.

Like Jenny’s desire to be seen, Justine fights to be heard. She is often silenced by her family and is later frequently blocked out by Duncan. Justine searches for the identity that she believes was lost when she left her family home. Although she is able to clarify the lives of others as a fortune-teller, Justine is unable to clarify her own life. She remains clouded as she is frequently silenced by her own family members. Furthermore, Justine often chooses to not listen to reality. Instead, Justine opts to live in a state of semi-deafness in order to maintain a sense of self.

Justine considers marriage to her cousin Duncan as her only means of escape. Her decision does not sit well with her father. He pleads with her to “listen to reason” (105). Justine does “listen,” but she is absentmindedly listening to everybody; thus, in listening to everybody she is really hearing

nobody. We quickly learn that she is just listening without considering as she says to her father, “Both sides sound correct. I always agree with who I am listening to” (105). Her father is able to stand outside of the family and look in as he is technically an outsider. His plea to his daughter is fruitless as she has learned by example. As do all of the Pecks, Justine will deafen her ears to the outside world and will not listen even when reality requires her to do so.

Justine’s parents both try to coerce Justine to listen on her wedding day, but with two different motives. Her mother attempts to manipulate Justine as she says, “I want you to listen a minute” (110). She proceeds to tell Justine exactly what to say to her father so that he will listen. Again, her father implores Justine to listen to what he has to say: “But listen, because these are the last sensible words you’ll hear all day, or maybe all the rest of your life: you’ve got to get out of there” (111). Justine believes that she is creating her own identity by “getting out of there,” but her escape is not complete. In bringing along Duncan she is carrying along with her part of what she has been fighting to get away from. Similarly, Justine will be silenced in her marriage as she was at home.

In their marriage, Duncan will assert control over both Justine and their daughter Meg. Justine’s desires will be virtually ignored as Duncan is absorbed with his own search for identity. He will often move her around to different towns, even though she tells him that she does not want to leave their current home. Catherine Peters argues:

Justine, outwardly adjusted to living on takeaway pizza and hardly bothering to unpack the cardboard boxes between moves from one

broken-down house to another, went along with Duncan's vagaries, conforming, as she had done all her life, to what other people expected of her. (80)

Back at the family home after her parents' death, Justine wants to stay but Duncan wants to leave. As they leave, Justine is trying to listen to the family, but Duncan physically deafens her with the noise of the car. Because Justine is not heard, she turns to fortune-telling as a means of trying to "see" the answers to unanswered questions.

As a fortune-teller, Justine is asked to look to the future for answers. In *The Fiction of Anne Tyler*, C. Ralph Stephens argues: "She maintains her serenity in their drifter's life, inventing a mobile career (fortune-telling) that uses the close observation she developed as a silent, watchful child" (105). She spends the majority of the novel trying to predict the future when in reality she should be looking into the past for answers: "When she becomes a fortune-teller, Justine does not drop her own burdens, she picks up those of her customers" (Voelker 101). As Voelker observes, her advice brings answers to those who desire a clear vision of their future: "Justine's absence of self and her wide-eyed perceptiveness make her an able witness of the lives of people among whom she and Duncan live while they exile themselves from Peckian Eden" (101).

Justine utilizes her powers of omniscience in order to provide her patrons with answers. Her most loyal patron, Alonzo Divich, refuses to listen to what Justine has to say. Alonzo tracks Justine down wherever she may be in order to get advice that he never listens to. Year in and year out Justine attempts to lead

Alonzo in the right direction, but year after year he fails to heed her advice. He states to Justine, ““Oh, you were right. If I had listened to you, think where I might be today!”” (44). After many failed marriages and sour business transactions, Alonzo recognizes that had he listened to Justine his life might be more organized and situated. Even after he recognizes his error, he still does not listen. He later tells Justine, ““Do you know that I have never before done what you told me to do?”” (201). Justine asserts to Alonzo, ““Look Alonzo, you are not paying attention”” (202). Like the others, Alonzo is provided with answers but he refuses to face reality, resulting in his confused and unhappy state. Similar to Duncan, Alonzo refuses to listen to Justine.

Like Caleb, Duncan aspires to a life outside of his oppressive family. In order to escape the familial structure he deafens himself to the outside world. His success at independence is reliant upon his ability to block the others out. Duncan’s issues begin as a young man. He rebels against the familial structure and finds listening to their meaningless chatter to be disturbing and frustrating.

Duncan reads obscure novels and takes eccentric jobs in order to separate himself from his family. He begins to read Dostoyevsky and “novels and diaries that none of the rest of the family had heard of” (86). It is not an accident that Tyler chooses Dostoyevsky as Duncan’s author of choice. Dostoyevsky is recognized as an existentialist whose belief system revolves around the freedom to choose. Kristen Hart contends, “Nothing in Dostoyevsky’s work is single, whole, or certain, but his imperfective vision looks forward with a desperate hope for perfection” (284). In addition, Peters argues, “Tyler is concerned with an

existential examination of the nature of freedom” (80). Duncan desires the freedom to elect his own path in life. Duncan tries to express himself through the literature that he is reading, but no one, aside from Justine, listens to his dreams. Even though Justine listens, she does not fully comprehend the magnitude of his desires. He eagerly begs for his parents to listen but to no avail. Duncan approaches various family members and reads passages while shouting, “Listen! Listen!” but he is not heard (86). When he believes that they aren’t listening, he asks in an excited tone, “Did you hear?” (86). Duncan’s desperate plea is in vain as he is speaking to deaf ears.

Likewise, when the family speaks, he does not wish to hear what they have to say. Duncan says to them, “I’ve spent eighteen years here growing deader and deader, listening to you skate across the surface. Can't you say something that means something?” (87). He is tired of listening to the same inconsequential Peck babble. He is embarrassed by the petty squabbling that his relatives partake in. He wants them to talk about important things like God (again, Dostoyevsky) or life, but instead they are talking about eggshell miniatures. Duncan does not want to hear anymore because he understands that this insignificant talk is part of him by birth. Duncan turns the table and silences them with his departure.

Duncan, having been unheard for so many years, resolves to physically leave his family and put in a pair of metaphorical earplugs. Likewise, he also cuts the telephone line so he does not have to hear the ringing of the phone when his family is calling. Like Daniel, Duncan remains sane by choosing when, and

whom, he wants to hear. Ironically, Duncan's behavior is the exact behavior that he has been fighting for so long to escape from. In a scene between Duncan and Justine, Justine attempts to inform Duncan of his parents' behavior. He abruptly cuts her off by saying, "I don't want to hear about that" (91). Duncan believes that he now has the power to filter as he pleases. His metaphorical earplugs work, but they work too well as he silences everything and everyone.

During a rare visit from the family we learn that Duncan endeavors to be absent even in their presence. Duncan stifles his ability to hear what they are saying by wearing earphones all day long. The earphones serve two main purposes: to silence and to let those being silenced know that they are being silenced. As Duncan is blocking out his family's chatter, he is also letting them know that he does not want to hear what they have to say. Duncan's silence turns to self-imposed confinement as he no longer knows how to handle the silence.

Duncan continually plays the game of solitaire as it is not only a game that he can play by himself, but it is also a game that he must play by himself. No one can invade his space when he is playing the game. In addition, no one can join him in the game; therefore, the decisions are all his own. The game is a metaphor for his life. Duncan is in complete control but he keeps losing. No matter which move he makes, he ultimately ends up making the wrong decision. Furthermore, he keeps losing the cards or they scatter all over the floor or in his suitcase. Instead of picking up the deck and organizing it, he just pulls out a new set. His behavior with the cards reflects his behavior with his family. When his life gets too complicated, or scattered, he leaves the old life and tries to start a new life.

Nevertheless, he continues to lose the game. Not only is Duncan not listening to anyone around him, but he also refuses to listen to himself. When he cannot block out his own thoughts, he numbs them with alcohol: Duncan relies on “the bourbon, the solitaire, the silence” (35).

Eventually, Duncan takes his earplugs out. He begins to find himself and he understands that oftentimes he is required to listen. He even begins to hear Justine. But in spite of everything, his ears are inaccessible to the outside world. As he and Justine leave to begin yet another journey at the end of the novel, their neighbor cries out to Duncan as they start to pull away. True to Duncan’s nature, we discover: ““He must not have heard”” (328).

Like her father, Duncan, Meg also silences herself as a means of survival. She lives her life as a young girl aware of her silence. She tries to create order in a disordered life by cleaning their home and continually putting things into their proper place. Her father, who encourages freedom of choice, often silences her as his family previously did to him and Caleb. Likewise, Meg often silences herself in the same manner that Duncan has silenced himself. When Meg does assert her independence, even as a small child, she is silenced by her father: “Then Meg, silenced finally by his quicker tongue, would take on a closed, sad look” (151). Although he desires to allow his daughter the freedom to make her own decisions, it is exactly this behavior that leads Meg into the confines of the Milsom family. She marries a minister because she believes that this marriage will result in the stability that she has never had. It is Meg’s belief that this marriage will provide

her with a stable and orderly home. What Meg does not anticipate is that she will soon be silenced by her husband's family.

The Milsom family has been waiting for Meg—or any other woman that Arthur chooses to marry. There is a position waiting in the Milsom family as the minister's wife, and her duties are dictated to her. Meg loses her identity as her mother-in-law governs her voice. Meg's every move is managed by Mrs. Milsom. Meg is being silenced.

Meg's relationship with her mother is not much different than her relationships with her father and mother-in-law. Justine is not altogether innocent in this behavior toward Meg as she too does not listen to her daughter: “[Justine] Neglecting to listen to her [Meg] or to ask if she wanted this trip [search for self] at all” (272). Justine has difficulty acknowledging her position as a mother to Meg. She flutters about her life looking for answers when she really should be listening to her daughter. As a child, Meg needs assistance in finding her own voice. As she is given no assistance, Meg's voice does not develop and she lives most of her life silent.

Toward the end of their trip to visit Meg in her new home, Meg is pleading with her parents to listen to her. A distraught Meg explains how she has been living with crazy people. Similar to members of the Peck family, Mrs. Milsom attempts to have a voice and it seems as if she is trying to live through her new daughter-in-law. Meg explains to Duncan and Justine, ““She says she has so much left to do [. . .] She [Mother Milsom] goes on and on about it, calling out so everyone could hear”” (240). Meg has moved from one desperate family to

another and is urgently dying to be heard: “Meg paused and gave her [Justine] a look. ‘Are you listening?’ she asked” (240). This is Meg’s last attempt to be heard. She is unhappy but she has been silent for so much of her life that she is unable to express her needs clearly.

Ironically, it is her father who gives her the answers that she needs to hear, but Duncan is now discredited by Meg as he has failed to listen to her thus far. Duncan tells her to leave while Justine tells her to endure. As Evans explains, “Justine and Duncan see what a dreadful mistake Meg has made and are powerless—or, one should say, *choose* to be powerless—to help Meg escape” (72). Meg disregards her father’s comments, as he has done to her in the past. In her attempt to escape, Meg has found herself trapped, more now than ever. Unfortunately, one is left believing that this is her destiny as she does not reappear as part of the Peck family again. Her distancing is obvious when she cannot be reached for her grandfather’s funeral. Like Caleb and her parents, Meg becomes inaccessible to the members of her family. The Milsoms are now her family, and she will likely continue to be silenced by her new identity as a minister’s wife. Like all the other Pecks, it is reasonable to believe that Meg’s search for self will continue throughout her life.

The search for Caleb is ultimately the search for self. In their search for Caleb, Daniel, Justine, and even Duncan hope to find what they had lost of themselves. Caleb would have been found more rapidly had they utilized what they already knew: “Only everybody soon learned: if you wanted to find Caleb, hold still a minute and listen” (53). Unfortunately, the Pecks’ habit of not

listening led them on crazy journeys that kept them in constant motion. In their plight to escape their familial situation, all believed that they had lost a part of their own identity. In reality, had they just stopped to listen, they would have realized they were running from themselves.

In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* and *Searching for Caleb*, Tyler utilizes the themes of sight and hearing. Tyler's use of physical and metaphorical vision takes each member of the Tull family on a journey from varying levels of "blindness" to differing levels of sight. The Tulls, blinded by decisions in the past, are not initially aware of what is blocking their vision. Likewise, Tyler's use of physical and symbolic auditory devices creates an environment whereby each member of the Peck family relies upon deaf ears as a means of coping. Overall, both families strive to function within the confines of their family structures by utilizing various methods of "seeing" or "hearing" in order to survive.

### CHAPTER III

#### A MASCULINE VIEW OF THE WORLD? *THE TIN CAN TREE*, *CELESTIAL NAVIGATION*, AND *MORGAN'S PASSING*

The men in Anne Tyler's novels oftentimes view the world from a perspective different from that of women. While suffering under the same confines of the family as women and children, Tyler's male characters often deal with their faulty vision and hearing in different ways. Tyler utilizes metaphorical and physical issues with vision and hearing as a means of survival and self-protection. Oftentimes the means of survival and self-protection used are gender specific.

Ansel Green from *The Tin Can Tree* and Jeremy Pauling from *Celestial Navigation* both look at the world through windows. Both male characters look from the security of their homes at the outside world. Ansel, suffering from hypochondria, and Jeremy, suffering from agoraphobia, find safety within the home that created their initial suffering. With the window serving as a transparent barrier, both men feel safe looking at the world through their windows. In addition, the views that they see from their respective windows are solely their own.

In contrast, Morgan Gower of *Morgan's Passing* looks into the windows of others. Morgan's faulty vision is often revealed in his perceptions of others. In addition, he is unable to see a clear image of himself through his own eyes. Voelker argues, "Tyler implies that Morgan's masquerades are necessary falsehoods that he must establish before he can enter into the politics or

economics of human interaction” (88). By looking through windows into the lives of others, Morgan begins to see himself as a part of the lives of the people behind the windows.

Likewise, James Green from *The Tin Can Tree* sees his world through the artistic medium of photography, and Jeremy Pauling interprets what he sees through his window through sculpture. Photography is one of Tyler’s most often used visual metaphors: “Photography [. . .] is a frequent pursuit in Tyler’s novels” (Petry, *Understanding Anne Tyler* 16). In every novel, photographs are either taken, displayed, or observed. It is through photography/photographs that different perceptions are revealed. Tyler’s male characters frequently learn to interpret their lives and the lives of those around them through pictures. For James, the act of taking pictures gives him the sense of creating a picture, but in reality, the pictures are allowing James to see the environment that he lives in.

In addition, many of Tyler’s male characters possess a blurred view of fatherhood because the primary male characters of these three novels all have missing fathers. Tyler’s male characters lack proper father figures. Dr. Frank Pittman, in his psychological analysis entitled *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons, and the Search for Masculinity*, argues, “When fathers are gone for whatever reason, little boys don’t get to learn from watching real men” (11). Ansel, James, Simon Pike (*The Tin Can Tree*), Jeremy, Morgan, and Leon Meredith (*Morgan’s Passing*) have a distorted sense of self due in part to the absence of a father.

Tyler’s *The Tin Can Tree* (1965) displays the same elements of seeing and hearing as do all of her other novels. Taking place in North Carolina, the venue is

different, if not bleak, but the storyline plays out the same—a scarred family tries to sort out their own problems with how they see themselves and each other while learning to survive within the family structure. The characters in *The Tin Can Tree* protect themselves from their personal and familial issues by subconsciously embarking on episodes of faulty vision and hearing. Like all Tyler families, fear of self-recognition results in the characters being unable to communicate in a straightforward manner. Voelker argues, “The novel’s conversations establish a thin surface of banality beneath which seismic emotions lurk. More is heard in its silences, gaps, misunderstandings, and failures to listen than in the words themselves” (37). Throughout the novel, most of the characters are repeatedly questioning if they are being heard. It is through their inability to communicate that the family structure and personal identities are revealed.

The characters also suffer from bouts of faulty vision. As in *Searching for Caleb*, Tyler blends the metaphors of vision and hearing to elaborate on the family and personal dysfunction. More importantly, the levels of faulty vision differ between the female and male characters of the novel. The female characters, particularly Joan and Mrs. Pike, learn to survive by either blinding or clarifying their own vision. As part of the Pike family, Joan takes on the responsibility for caring for the men upon Janie Rose’s death. Unable to function, Janie’s mother, Mrs. Pike, cannot see clearly. Although her grief is understandable, her vision alters as she grieves for the six year old daughter that she ignored in life. As a result, she frequently does “not notice” that her young son, Simon, exists. In contrast, throughout the novel it is evident that while Joan’s

metaphorical vision is lacking in some areas, she is the character who is able to see the most clearly. By the end of the novel, Joan is able to see everyone for who they really are.

The male characters of *The Tin Can Tree* have a central role as their issues with seeing are quite different from those of the women. James, Ansel, Mr. Pike, and Mr. Green are paralyzed within their own lives. Their sight and hearing, both physically and metaphorically blurred, are exacerbated by their unwillingness to move beyond their obstructed views of themselves and the world around them. By the end of the novel, Simon's vision clarifies due to the fact that he has actively worked to be seen properly by his mother.

Tyler utilizes windows and photography as a means of showing how the men view the world. Ansel, a hypochondriac who confines himself to his home, looks through windows to observe the world: "Ansel had that big front window in the living room where he could watch the road. He would sit on the couch with his elbows at the sill, and everything that he saw passing [. . .] meant something to him" (13). Like Jeremy of *Celestial Navigation*, Ansel sees his world from the safety of a window. By using windows as a transparent shield, both men confine themselves to their homes and their immediate surroundings as a means of protection while still being able to see minimal parts of the outside world. In addition, Ansel is worried that his existence is useless and futile. Feeling as if he is disappearing, Ansel frequently fears that he is not being seen or heard. In order to be heard, Ansel talks incessantly. He starts to notice that people are not listening to his long and drawn out rants: "'I've noticed more and more,' he said,

‘that no one listens when I talk’” (185). Ansel’s hypochondria is aggravated by Janie Rose’s death. In turn, this makes Ansel fear his own death—a state when he will no longer be seen or heard: “‘When I am dead, what will they remember but the things I talked about? Not the way I looked, or moved; I don’t look like much [. . .] But only the things I talked about, and what is that to remember when you never even listened?’” (185). He frequently questions if people are listening to him (11, 22, 120, and 123). While sitting on the couch and looking out of his window, Ansel simultaneously talks, or lectures, so as to be seen and heard.

The window that Ansel looks out of is often referred to as “his” window. What Ansel sees out of this window is solely his perception. Maisie, a local woman who likes Ansel, often comes to the Green home. During her visits, Ansel is visibly irritated by her presence. As a means of self-preservation, Ansel redirects his eyes, thereby saying that he is not interested in Maisie. He turns his eyes toward his window. As a means of asserting that the view through the window is all his own, Ansel frequently diverts his eyes elsewhere: “all he did was switch his eyes suddenly to a window” (156). The window serves as a metaphor for Ansel’s view of the world.

The window frame functions as Ansel’s picture frame into the world. Through the frame Ansel is able to observe and see into the lives of the people around him: “[Ansel] lies on their living room sofa and observes, with the keenly impertinent eye of the neurotic goings-on about him” (Voelker 29). In contrast, James is unable to see the same view as Ansel out of the window: “Thinking of Ansel and his window made James look toward it, to see what was going on, but

all he saw from where he sat was the greenish-yellow haze of summer” (13). As a photographer, James requires his view of the world to be framed within the lens of a camera. Voelker asserts, “James, who embodies the opposing vision of the artist, prefers the candid, informal revealing sides of photography” (33).

Due to Ansel’s ailment, James has his own distorted view of the world. While he ventures beyond the neighborhood, his vision is limited due to his loyalty to his brother. In addition, James has resorted to trying to employ the same tactics of self-preservation to “see” as does Ansel. More often than not, James is unable to interpret what he sees through Ansel’s window. James’ medium of visual interpretation relies upon his view through the lens of a camera. Both James and Ansel require a form of glass to be between them and the world in order to feel comfortable viewing the world.

Tyler also utilizes the window and photography metaphors for Simon. Through both windows and photographs, Simon is a passive participant as he is often standing in front of a window in a confused state, and the photographs that James takes of him only serve to make him feel more alienated. As a male child, Simon is trying to be seen. Susan Gilbert argues that Simon has been “displaced in a mother’s eye by a dead sister” (254). Even more so than James, Simon’s views out of the window often provide him with no answers. Likewise, Simon is often “looking straight ahead,” implying that he is focused on one thing—being seen by his mother (9, 10). He often turns to James and Ansel as a source of supposed clarity.

Simon as a male utilizes the windows in a similar fashion as do most other males in Tyler's novels. On the other hand, as a child, Simon still needs to be nurtured. Without this nurturing, Simon is left to look for adult role models among adults who cannot clearly see the state of their own lives. Trying to gain some insight and direction, Simon turns to James and Ansel. Ansel provides an overly graphic analysis of death, and James inadvertently refers to Janie Rose as a "pig in the tree" (26). As a result, Simon leaves the Green home, walking "stiffly and blindly" (26). Simon's "blindness" is understandable due to the fact that he is a child without an adult showing him the way.

Without his mother, Simon tries to navigate (like Jeremy Pauling of *Celestial Navigation*) on his own. He is aware that his mother's metaphorical blindness is escalating: "I bet she'll never notice" (139). Tyler describes Mrs. Pike as being in a state of blindness: "One by one she scraped them [hairpins] off the top of the dresser, working like a blind woman with careful fingers while she kept her eyes on the mirror" (141). Although she is looking into the mirror, it is clear that she is unable to see her true self in the mirror. In addition, metaphorically, Mrs. Pike is acting as a "blind woman" due to the fact that she has not seen her son in days, even when he is standing right in front of her: "For the first time, Simon looked at his mother. He looked from under bunched eyebrows, sliding his eyes over carefully. But she wasn't watching" (145). Through his observations, Simon sees that he is going unnoticed.

Similarly, Simon's father does not see the neglect of his son. Mr. Pike's "eyes were squinted from force of habit even when he wasn't in the sun" (39).

Tyler frequently portrays characters squinting to symbolize their blurred vision. Mr. Pike's blurred vision prevents him from seeing that Simon is being overlooked. As a result, Simon has no one to learn from. Pittman argues, "If he [father] is alive but gone for whatever reason, we [males] only feel his lack of acceptance" (106).

James and Ansel provide little help to Simon as their own relationship is very co-dependent. Ansel needs James to feel as if someone cares for him, while James uses Ansel as an excuse for not progressing. Since running away from their immediate family, James and Ansel live together while James cares for his brother who suffers from being a hypochondriac. As a hypochondriac, Ansel imagines illnesses that do not exist. One can argue that he perceives the evil in himself that he believes his father sees in him. Ansel claims that his father does not like him because he was born with "pinkish eyes" (125). Since birth, Ansel believes that his eyes have been distorted; thus, Ansel allows this perception of his eyes to distort his vision even more. Lacking a proper father figure, Ansel is incapable of seeing or hearing properly.

James tries to become the father figure that Ansel needs. While taking care of Ansel, James sees himself and Ansel as a "whole generation removed" (13). By seeing such a distance in age between himself and Ansel, James becomes the father figure that Ansel requires. In addition, he watches Ansel as a father would watch a child: "watching with narrow, almost paternal eyes" (13). In turn, James bears the responsibility of a father, but without a proper father figure while growing up, James oftentimes resorts to the same types of behaviors as does his

father. Like his father, James frequently closes his eyes in an attempt to both physically and metaphorically block out Ansel: “When he was lying flat he closed his eyes and wished away the figure of Ansel” (118). Ansel requires James to assist him in verifying that he is being seen and heard, but this is just as difficult for James because he has learned how to be a father inadequately from his own father.

While Ansel and Simon are looking through pictures, Ansel becomes enamored with a picture of himself. He needs the picture of himself to verify that he exists: ““Here, let me look. [ . . . ] That’s me alright”” (19). The picture of Ansel shows him with his “profile to the window” (20). Likewise, Ansel views himself as looking “Heroic, like” (20). Viewing himself as a heroic figure, Ansel takes it upon himself to philosophize and lecture others on the state of their lives while refusing to realistically analyze the state of his own life.

In contrast to Ansel, James prefers to view life and people through the lens of a camera. He is more comfortable viewing images of people as opposed to viewing them face to face. When he takes a set of pictures out of his drawer, “he handles them gently” (17). It is as if the pictures are the individuals themselves. Voelker argues, “James takes pictures that record people in acts and gestures that match his vision of them outside the moment of photographing them” (33). He desires to repeat images of people on film that are similar to how he enjoys seeing them in his memory. For example, he likes to remember Joan “the way he had first seen her”; therefore, James waits for another dust storm to occur so he can

capture that moment (18). Through photography, James is able to stop time so that he does not have to progress forward.

Photographs are also used as proof of Janie Rose's existence. Her image is interpreted to us through the eyes of the living characters. Though deceased, Janie is one of the most colorful characters in the novel. While looking at photographs, Ansel sees Janie in the background of a photograph of Miss Faye's house. This photo does more than just give Janie Rose a presence in the novel. The photograph illustrates the scope of Ansel's perception. While Ansel is unable to see his own problems and issues, he is able to perceive the lives of others in ways that others, particularly James, cannot. More specifically, Ansel sees his clearest views through windows. In the photograph, Janie Rose is in a pickup truck and is sitting behind the "glassless window" (23). Within the frame of the window, Ansel has "no trouble" seeing Janie, while James remarks, "I don't see how you found her [. . .] She just blurs right in" (23). Although it is James' photograph, his inability to see through the window demonstrates his and Ansel's differing modes of vision.

James' and Ansel's differing modes of vision are evident after Janie Rose's funeral. James is sitting under the window on the outside while Ansel is looking through the window from the inside: "Behind him [James] was the soft sound of the mesh curtains moving, and the sleeves of Ansel's rough black suit sliding across the splintery windowsill" (26). Their respective positions around the window represent their positions in life. While Ansel views the world from the inside looking out, James tries to view the world as an active participant but is

held back by guilt for his brother. Unable to move forward, James maintains his position around the window but not far from Ansel. In addition, Ansel is trying to get James to listen to him talk, but James “closed his eyes” in an attempt to make Ansel physically and metaphorically disappear (26). Upon realizing that Ansel is in fact speaking to him, James turns around and comes back into the house. Metaphorically, this motion illustrates James’ inability to escape the space of Ansel’s window.

Mrs. Pike’s bedroom window becomes a symbol of Simon’s feelings. Throughout Mrs. Pike’s mourning process, she altogether ignores Simon’s existence. In addition, she is unable to communicate in an effective manner. Mrs. Pike’s “voice came out blurred and gray also, without expression” (75). Simon’s reaction to his mother’s “blindness” is illustrated through his behavior: “Over by the window Simon stood with his back to her” (76). Simon’s back toward his mother within the frame of the window serves as a double metaphor. Fundamentally, Simon turning his back toward his mother represents his feelings of resentment and being invisible to her, while the window represents Simon’s desire to find an answer outside of his mother’s bedroom window.

Unlike Simon, James does not wish to find answers beyond the space of Ansel’s window. As a result, he does not see how his relationship with Ansel affects his relationship with Joan. As Joan is walking down the road, James “squinted his eyes so as to see better” (98). His vision is blurred; therefore, James’ vision is altered as he looks at Joan. He is unable to clearly see that Joan is unhappy as he sees her through a distorted image. Joan also explains to James that

she is able to see the relationship between James and Ansel clearly: “I can see it better than you can” (109). In reply, James says to Joan, “You can’t see” (109). It is clear that Joan sees James’ inability to see past his brother’s imagined ailments. In contrast, James refuses to see the stagnant nature of his life. Joan’s initial refusal to remain stagnant with James leads her to reflect upon the home that she left.

Joan’s level of vision is also reflected in how she sees herself. While remembering a gift from her parents, Joan “frowned into the mirror” (198). Like a lot of Tyler’s female characters, Joan looks into the mirror as a form of self-identification. It is relevant that Joan is reflecting upon herself in the same moment that she is reflecting upon her parents. This simultaneous identification exemplifies Joan’s relationship with her parents and her feelings about herself. Likewise, “Joan’s father was growing deaf” (170). Voelker contends, “misunderstandings are the staples of the novel’s dialogue” (39). Like Daniel and Justin Peck, Joan’s father’s physical deafness also symbolizes his inability to hear his daughter’s needs properly.

Tyler also utilizes the window for Joan but with a different intent from that of her male characters. Like Mary Tell, Joan looks out of the window at moments of escape or progression. As she is packing to go back to her parents’ home, she looks out of the window and sees Simon. As she contemplates leaving Simon, the only thing holding her back, she turns “away from the window” and proceeds to leave (199). In this moment, the window represents her escape but it

also represents who she is escaping. In reality, Joan has become a surrogate mother to Simon, something that she is not ready for.

Joan tries to leave Simon and travels back to her parents' home. On the way there she encounters a blind man. Physically blind, the man asks her assistance with directions. Before realizing that he is blind, Joan fears the man because she is afraid he is "able to *see* how alone she felt" (209). Joan's fear of seeing herself clearly is reflected by her disregarding the man. Upon the blind man telling Joan, "I don't see. I'm blind" (209), Joan realizes that her inner self has not been revealed. Moreover, the blind man is symbolic of Simon as she recalls Simon allowing her to lead him with his eyes closed. It is through the blind man that Joan sees those who rely upon her clearly and returns to Simon.

Like Joan, James travels back home to find Simon. It is clear that things have remained unchanged in the home: "Everything in the room was exactly the way it had been before" (229). Therefore, when James' father "closed his eyes" (233), it is apparent that this is a normal occurrence between James and his father because everything is "exactly the way" it was when James lived there. Like so many Tyler characters, Mr. Green closes his eyes as a means of avoidance. As James leaves, he looks at his father in the rear-view mirror of his truck: "He looked in the rear-view mirror and saw his father still standing on the porch" (236). Through a reverse image, James sees his father and holds "that picture of his father in his mind" (236). Although he is looking at his father, the result of the rear-view mirror is a distorted and inaccurate image.

The last scene of the novel takes place after Simon's homecoming. Gilbert argues:

In the last scene, she [Joan] is photographing Simon's homecoming party. Though all the characters are moving, looking into the camera, she foresees the image in which they will be still forever [. . .] They were going to stay this way, she and all the rest of them. (254)

But the last scene implies more than Gilbert contends. It is important that Joan is taking the picture at the end of the novel as Joan is the only one who has progressed enough to see clearly. The image of the people in the town who have become her substitute family can only be taken by Joan if a clear and true image is the intended result. Ansel will continue to look out of his window, James will continue to take photographs, and "they were going to stay this way" (249).

Like *The Tin Can Tree*, *Celestial Navigation* (1974) addresses the protagonist's issues with seeing himself and others clearly. The protagonist, Jeremy Pauling, is a reclusive man who uses art as a means of conveying his visions, faulty as they may seem. Tyler also employs her common motifs of vision and visual images as a means of illustrating the complexity of identity and self-representation. In *Celestial Navigation*, Tyler employs windows as a means of elaborating upon Jeremy Pauling's faulty vision. Like Ansel, James and Simon of *The Tin Can Tree*, Jeremy has lacked a father figure his entire life. Jeremy, being deserted by his father when he was a child, is left with no male role-model.

Tyler's ten chapters alternate between characters as they convey their observations in first-person, with the exception of Jeremy's four chapters. Gilbert contends, "The shifting perspective shows starkly the gaps between their feelings and what they can tell others" (259). Petry argues that it is important to the structure of the novel that Jeremy's chapters are presented in third, rather than first, person because it provides a more reliable view (*Understanding Anne Tyler*, 109). Throughout the novel, Jeremy struggles with his own image and the image that he has of his expanding family. In addition, it looks as if he is completely misunderstood by both himself and others the majority of the time as his reality is blurred. In order to project this concept, Jeremy's chapters have to be told by someone other than himself so that the reader participates in this misunderstanding. In doing so, we are never really sure if the perceptions that we have of Jeremy are justifiable or misleading. Tyler clearly titles each chapter by defining both the time and narrator. By the end of the novel, it is obvious how time has progressed, and it is evident whether or not the characters have been able to progress along with time.

Tyler often begins her novels with a death, and *Celestial Navigation* is no exception. Death often presents one with the end of a cycle; thereby, the characters are placed at the beginning of a new cycle. Death provides her characters with a new starting point from which to rebuild and discover their true identities, or to re-establish identities previously lost. Oftentimes, the death is the beginning of the eye-opening process that Tyler's characters must partake in.

The structure of the Pauling family is initially presented through Amanda's eyes. Amanda describes her mother's view of life: "That will tell you a good deal about the way she looked at things. She caused no changes; that was mother for you" (6). This view of their mother is vital in understanding Jeremy's fear of change and his current emasculated state. Jeremy's identity, as constructed by Amanda, presents the reader with a desperate, weak, and dependent man. What is problematic about her interpretation is that she really does not truly know him. On the first page, Amanda tells us that she did not recognize his voice on the telephone. She also uses phrases such as "if memory serves me" and "I had trouble placing" in reference to Jeremy (2). Amanda's perception of her brother cannot fully be trusted. Petry argues, "Amanda's point of view is limited and static" (*Understanding Anne Tyler* 105). Although Amanda's analysis lacks credibility, Tyler tries to construct a portion of Jeremy's identity through his mother. Like many of her other novels, Tyler resorts to letter-writing as a way of conveying information. She includes a letter written by Jeremy's mother prior to her death. Within the letter his mother states, "Please see to it that he [Jeremy] just doesn't go to pieces. [. . .] Please don't let anything happen to him" (33). Through this letter, it is recognizable to both Amanda and the reader that Jeremy is the favored child. In addition, Jeremy's mother has catered to and coddled Jeremy his entire life, which has in turn created a co-dependent individual. Even though Amanda's personal perception of Jeremy cannot be trusted, her mother's letter gives us reason to believe at least the portion of her analysis that defines Jeremy as dependent.

While Amanda may not be completely clear on her perception of Jeremy, she does appear to be very clear about her image of herself. Amanda states, “I know what I am. I’m not blind. I see their eyes lose focus and settle elsewhere. Do they think that I don’t realize?” (41). As an unwed school-teacher nearing fifty, Amanda has accepted the identity that society has placed upon her. The contrast between Amanda and Jeremy is relevant as it leaves one to wonder whether or not reality is more productive and blissful than illusion. Amanda quickly states, “I have been bypassed, something has been held back from me. And the worst part is that I know it” (41). This clear self-image makes Amanda a bitter and insensitive woman.

Unlike most of Tyler’s characters, Amanda has a clear picture of herself and her surroundings. Although she only knows her family in part, this lack of knowledge only proves that they are not really a large part of her life: “I had been displaced years ago” (17). By her own analysis, Amanda illustrates the dysfunction that exists within her family structure. Likewise, her view of the family, specifically Jeremy, gives the reader an outsider’s view into Jeremy’s issues with seeing and hearing that are a direct result of his upbringing.

Our first physical introduction to Jeremy is symbolic of his position within the story and, more importantly, his own self-image. Tyler places Jeremy in literal darkness. As Amanda and Laura enter their home, Mr. Somerset states about Jeremy, ““He don’t answer doorbells and he don’t move from where he’s at. Sets [sic] in the dark”” (13). Afraid of reality, Jeremy sits in the dark so as to hide from both the world and himself. Likewise, as the story progresses, he is often

described as being in darkness or altogether unaware that daylight has disappeared. For example, Jeremy spends most of his waking hours in his art studio constructing images. Jeremy frequently finds that he has worked into darkness: “Something made working more and more difficult. It took him awhile to realize that it was the darkness” (186). The darkness symbolizes Jeremy’s faulty vision as the darkness becomes part of his reality. The darkness clouds his vision, thus making his artistic visual interpretations unclear to others. On the other hand, Jeremy’s own artistic visions appear clearer to him when he is engulfed in darkness: “In the dark [. . .] his thoughts seemed more significant than they did in the daytime” (176). Jeremy’s representations are blurred as he has constructed them in the dark. Although they create Jeremy’s personal reality, it is not the true reality which exists outside of his art studio.

Jeremy confines himself to the only home that he has ever known. It is possible that he suffers from agoraphobia, the fear of leaving one’s home, but it is reasonable to believe that his relationship with his mother has led to his anti-social demeanor. All of Jeremy’s surroundings are dark, thereby symbolizing his inability to see past himself. Not only do we find him sitting in the dark, his home is perpetually gloomy and unendingly inactive.

Jeremy does not reveal what he sees or hears in a conventional manner. To others it appears as if he is not aware of his surroundings or the doings of his family. Even Jeremy himself believes that he is unaware of his surroundings when, in fact, he externalizes all that he sees through his art. As an artist, Jeremy is fully consumed with creating an exact representation of his feelings and

images. Gilbert states, “All the pain and perception will go into his art” (260). He spends days searching for the exact piece of cloth or scrap metal in order to finish his pieces. Jeremy’s perception of the world is explained: “That was the only way his vision functioned: only in detail” (45). Although Jeremy often appears inactive, most of his moments of activity within the novel involve his observations: “His eyes seemed fastened on Miss Vinton’s lavender cardigan, a restful color” (48). Likewise, similar to Tyler’s fear of going blind, Jeremy’s biggest fear is blindness: “Jeremy had tried to picture color-blindness—the worst affliction he could imagine next to blindness itself” (123). Jeremy needs to be able to see color in its clarity in order to convey the images that he envisions in his mind. Often, it takes awhile for his own images to clarify: “He stood for a while letting his eyes blur and swim” (123).

Tyler also utilizes window imagery as a way of conveying Jeremy’s inability to move beyond his own perceptions. Jeremy is often presented looking out of windows but not moving beyond the glass that separates him from the rest of society: “He ate while standing at the window, looking down onto the street. The glare of sunlight on cement came as a shock to his eyes” (181). Not only is he separated by the window, he is frightened by the light which is symbolic of the outside world. In addition, he is often depicted looking out of his studio’s window:

staring vacantly out his window. [. . .] if he wanted a change of scenery he raised his eyes from the screened lower portion of the window, which was open, to the closed upper portion where two

sets of cloudy panes dulled the morning sunlight. Maybe someday  
he would wash them. (113)

Jeremy's means of altering his view of the world is simply by choosing which portion of the window to look out of. In addition, the windows are dirty, thereby signifying that his view out of the window is blurred and distorted, like his view of himself and his life.

Jeremy often struggles when creating images of his family. His understanding of his family is tainted by his unconventional relationship with his mother and lack of a father. Pittman contends that without a male father figure, men "may get a distorted, exaggerated concept of masculinity" (xv). Not capable of progressing without a model of adulthood, male or female, Jeremy replaces his mother with Mary, his "wife." Bail contends, "As for Jeremy, it is quite clear that Mary functions as his mother substitute" (63). Although he is not actually married to Mary, they allow the world to view them as a married couple. On the other hand, his feelings toward Mary are in direct conflict with the maternal way in which she treats him. This is evidenced by the manner in which he envisions his marriage proposal: "Nevertheless he kept picturing himself looking up at Mary from a kneeling position, finding her even more frightening at this angle" (103). Although it is a common tradition for men to get on one knee to propose, Jeremy sees this as a frightening experience and is placed in a passive position at her feet. Bail asserts that Jeremy's view of Mary as he envisions the proposal is from "the visual perspective of a child" (63).

Mary does nothing to pull Jeremy out of the dark. Instead, she encourages him to remain in the dark by allowing him to remain cocooned within his home and his art studio. In the process of trying to protect Jeremy, Mary essentially renders him powerless. Petry argues, “In her effort to protect and comfort Jeremy as a kind mother would, Mary inadvertently sends him the emasculating message that he is neither needed nor wanted as a husband” (*Understanding Anne Tyler* 116). Miss Vinton appears to be the only individual who attempts to understand Jeremy and his reality.

As an external character, Miss Vinton is able to see the situation within the boarding house clearly. It is important to note that Miss Vinton is nearsighted (53). Tyler gives Miss Vinton nearsightedness as a means of showing her ability to view the state of the boarding house clearly. As a nearsighted woman, Miss Vinton has no problem seeing things close-up. Although Miss Vinton does suffer from a form of faulty vision as she is unable to focus on things at a distance, her ability to see close-up makes her one of the few people in the boarding house who are able to see everything clearly. Evans maintains, “Miss Vinton is aware of the lives and roles others lead” (108). Likewise, Alan Pryce-Jones contends, “Only old Miss Vinton understands that his [Jeremy’s] single link with reality is his art” (73). She sees that Jeremy needs to be pushed and does so after the birth of Mary and Jeremy’s son, Edward. Miss Vinton’s attempts to get him to go to the hospital display how Jeremy’s vision is blurred, as is evidenced by his reply: ““I don’t quite see”” (150). Miss Vinton makes Jeremy see that it is his duty, not hers, to go for Mary. Without Miss Vinton, Jeremy would have remained in the dark house.

Tyler places Miss Vinton's chapters exactly in the middle and at the very end of the novel. In her first chapter, she clearly identifies the relationship between Jeremy and Mary. In addition, the distorted views that Jeremy and Mary have of themselves and each other are obvious. Susannah Clapp states, "It is Miss Vinton who comes closest to being an alert and fully functioning person" (69). Miss Vinton observes what is going on within the house. It is through her eyes that the reader is provided with an impartial analysis of Mary and Jeremy. Likewise, Miss Vinton serves as a secondary mother to both Mary and Jeremy. She empathizes with both of their positions as she perceives that neither is helping the other to navigate through life as a "married" couple ought to.

Also, in Miss Vinton's chapter, Miss Vinton is awakened in order to take Mary to the hospital to give birth. Mary states, "I didn't wake him [Jeremy]" (129). This is the first evidence of Mary's perception of her "husband" and her behavior towards him. She views Jeremy as being incapable of handling the situation. In effect, as Petry would claim, she emasculates him by sheltering him from his own image. She also excludes him from the structure of the family, which later becomes an issue for Jeremy. Although he has physically fathered the children, he feels no attachment to them whatsoever. They do not even call him father or daddy; instead, his children call him Jeremy. Pittman asserts, "Men whose fathers ran out on them—literally or emotionally—are likely to approach fatherhood with trepidation" (282). While Jeremy is incapable of fathering his children properly, Mary's need to mother is at the other end of the spectrum.

Aside from her own family, Mary's need to be a mother continues when she brings home Olivia, a young girl who starts living in the boarding house.

Olivia is looking for herself within Jeremy. Olivia has an expectation of what an artist's wife should be, and she believes that Mary does not adequately fit that picture. Olivia argues, "She [Mary] was a very ordinary woman, not at all what you'd expect of an artist's wife" (224-25). When Mary leaves Jeremy, her absence leaves an empty space open for Olivia to fill. She fills the void within her own identity with her image of an "artist's wife." Olivia states, "Although he didn't appear to notice me I stood waiting anyway, hoping to be defined" (228). Not only is Jeremy unable to define her, he has not even seen the person she really is. Although she has been trying to care for him, he looks at Olivia as if she is a complete stranger. In addition, he has confused her with an art student even though she has been bringing him meals for days. Although Olivia desperately wishes that Jeremy see her, he does not, even when he is looking straight at her. Olivia's identity as an invisible woman only pushes her further off course.

Olivia will soon recognize that Jeremy's art is the only means that he has of defining himself and those around him. He transfers what he sees into his own images on canvas or a sculpture. While it may not be perceptible to others, Jeremy's vision is clearly defined within his artistic endeavors. Olivia contends, "When he went through the art supplies he knew exactly what he was doing. For the first time he seemed perfectly sure of himself" (331). Unable to function within the real world, Jeremy creates his own world in his studio with his artistic endeavors. In an attempt to understand Jeremy, Olivia goes to the art gallery

where his art is often displayed. She keeps her sunglasses on, which are symbolic of her subconscious desire to navigate blindly like Jeremy. By partially blinding herself, Olivia will not be able to fully view the art which is a representation of Jeremy's true self. In addition, she represents herself falsely when in the gallery. This is both a private and public deception as she is deceiving both herself and those in the studio. Her deception is apparent when she states, "I didn't get it [Jeremy's art]" (233).

Olivia also misrepresents her relationship with Jeremy. By making her private misrepresentations public, she is hoping to validate the image that she desires. She refers to herself and Jeremy as us; thus, she implies that they are a couple when in fact they are nothing of the sort. On the other hand, Olivia believes in the image that she has created; therefore, her fantasy is her reality.

When Olivia truly realizes that she does not understand Jeremy's art, her eyes open to the false images that she has created. Olivia notices, "But even when I stood directly in his line of vision it didn't seem that he saw me. His eyes were as flat as the cat's eyes in the kitchen. He saw beyond me without even having to try" (247). With Jeremy unable to see her true self, Olivia attempts to "disappear" by starving herself. As she frequently does, Tyler utilizes eating disorders as a visual metaphor. Olivia states, "I wouldn't eat. [ . . . ] I saw that my fingers were getting knobby and my jeans were loose but I felt so fat. He [ . . . ] looked over at me. I closed my eyes" (243). Olivia believes that in closing her eyes she will remain invisible. As she does with Jeremy, Miss Vinton forces Olivia to look at herself: "I want . . . you to take . . . a good look at yourself" (244). She also

informs Olivia that “There’s something funny about your eyes” (244). It is not until Olivia reopens her eyes that she is able to move on.

Tyler leaves Olivia’s character suspended. While she finally sees a clear picture of Jeremy and her position in his life, she does not necessarily find her own image. Olivia is still trying to navigate her way through life. She is looking for someone else to tell her how to navigate. As Olivia departs from the boarding house, she looks for someone to pick her up and take her with her/him. As people drive by her, thus forcing her to navigate on her own, she cries:

I looked straight at her [the woman in a car] through the windshield. [. . .] She didn’t even look at me. Just slid on by leaving me there with my mouth open and my teeth chattering and my heart about to break. Why did she leave without taking me along? (247-48)

Although Olivia understands that she cannot replace her image with Mary’s, she also does not know exactly what her own image is. Like Mary, she will have to learn how to construct a personal image that is not reliant upon anyone else.

Like Jeremy and Olivia, Mary is still trying to view herself clearly. She enters the story immediately following her escape from her husband, Guy. She has run away from her old life as an underappreciated daughter and wife. In doing so, she is also running away from herself. Mary’s desire to view herself on her own is flawed by her reliance upon men and her constant need to be maternal. Mary leaves her husband for another husband. This time the husband is not hers for keeps. Mary is not yet capable of constructing her own image as she has relied

upon others to do so for her for so long. When faced with outside scrutiny, she cries, “I didn’t want to hear what kind [of woman] I was. I didn’t want to learn anymore, ever, about how I appeared in other people’s eyes” (82). In order to move on, Mary will have to come to terms with the woman that she is.

Mary’s initial ideal self-image is that of a mother. In order to fulfill this image, she desires multiple children. In addition, she finds that she needs a husband, whether real or false, in order to make her image complete. She takes that image too far and becomes a mother to both her children and to her husband. As with Jeremy, Tyler utilizes the window motif with Mary. But unlike Jeremy, Mary does not look at the window as a means of comfort, or protection, from the outer world. Instead, for Mary the window represents the barrier between herself and the outside world. Mary states, “I looked out the front window and watched the people walking by, and I wanted to climb into every single one of them and be carried off to some new and foreign existence” (76). The window foreshadows progression and movement. In contrast to Jeremy, Mary desires a life outside of the home and past the windows where she can see the world. Likewise, when she is in the hospital after giving birth, the family performs a ritual when they pick her up:

While we wait I take the children to a concrete space beneath  
Mary’s window. [. . .] She must stay out of sight until she hears our  
voices. Then she comes to the window. [. . .] She pounds silently  
on the windowpane. [. . .] They [the children] suspect that she is  
being kept prisoner somewhere. (147- 48)

This ritual at the window is symbolic of Mary's feeling of being trapped. Behind the window, she pounds on the window without being heard. Unlike Jeremy, the window is serving as a barrier from the life that she wants. In addition, her silence is symbolic of how she sees her life so far. It is shortly after Edward is born, and the family ritual is not performed, that Mary begins to free herself. The window no longer becomes a barrier.

Mary does not compile a complete image of herself until she leaves Jeremy. Mary reflects to herself, "I began to see how every move I had made in my life had required some man [. . .] I could see it clearly ahead of me" (222). In order to leave Jeremy, she has to depend upon yet another man. Brian, Jeremy's friend who owns an art gallery where Jeremy's art is frequently displayed, assists Mary by providing her with a place to stay. Although initially it appears as if she is again diverting personal responsibility onto a man, we later learn that she desires independence. I disagree with Elizabeth Evans when she contends, "Here she [Mary] will endure until, one has to assume, Brian or another man steps in to take her away and the pattern of a woman dependent on a man for financial security will repeat itself" (102). Evans disregards the fact that Mary rejects Brian's advances and eventually gets a job and pays him rent. Mary learns to recreate her image as an independent woman who has learned how to see on her own.

In contrast, Jeremy's life moves full circle and he ends up exactly where he began. Unable to see each other clearly, Mary does not understand that Jeremy is trying to progress, while Jeremy mistakes her learned self-reliance as a sign that

he is not needed. Like Ansel Green, Jeremy will continue to view life from the safety of “his” window.

Like *The Tin Can Tree* and *Celestial Navigation*, Tyler’s eighth novel, *Morgan’s Passing* (1980), is structured with a male protagonist leading the storyline. Paul Bail argues, “Clearly, it is primarily a character study of the central figure, Morgan Gower” (94). Morgan Gower, a middle-aged man, marries, and with seven children, spends most of his days in costume and devising fantasy identities for himself and those that he observes. He has great difficulty seeing people, including himself, for who they really are. Bail contends:

Morgan’s vision of the world is slightly askew, and he is forever coming up with quirky ideas. He has an absurdist view of life, viewing the majority of the moods and events that affect him as essentially causeless, and our notions of predictability and safety as baseless illusions. [. . .] Through fantasies of this nature, Morgan is able to maintain a certain distance from life, feeling as though nothing *real* has ever touched him. (98-99)

Morgan is a very unlikable character. At first glance he appears to be a man confused about his own identity, as are almost all of Tyler’s characters. On the contrary, Morgan is more than just a confused man. He is selfish and concerned only with living in the fantasy world that he recreates minute by minute. While one can argue that his state had a lot to do with the suicide of his father at an early age, Morgan is unable to move past the absence of a male figure in his life. Bail argues, “Morgan is a perpetual adolescent” (97). Like Ansel and

James Green and Jeremy Pauling, Morgan's progress is minimal and his vision remains blurred.

Morgan's initial meeting with Emily and Leon Meredith is fraught with deceit. He meets them at a church Easter fair where the Merediths are giving a puppet show. He poses as a doctor and delivers their baby even though he has absolutely no credentials to do so. In their first interaction, a moment where Emily must fully trust a man she has never met and who claims to be a doctor, Emily is "looking up at the doctor out of level gray eyes" (6). Defined as level and gray, Emily's eyes represent stability and neutrality. In contrast, Morgan's eyes are frequently hidden. He often wears dirty spectacles. Tyler uses his dirty spectacles as a metaphor for Morgan's distorted vision. He is unable to see clearly. In addition, like his hats, the dirty glasses shield his eyes from outsiders: "When he wore glasses, they were so fingerprinted and greasy you couldn't read his eyes" (234). Likewise, Tyler often uses the word "spectacles" as opposed to "eye-glasses" as a play on words. (113, 306). Morgan's faulty vision always creates some sort of spectacle.

As she does with James Green, Tyler uses the rear-view mirror as another metaphor for Morgan's faulty vision: "The doctor braked and looked in the rear-view mirror. His eyes met Leon's" (10). A rear-view mirror provides a reverse image; therefore, the image that Morgan sees of Leon is distorted. In addition, in contrast to Leon, Morgan briefly sees his own distorted image: "The doctor looked in the mirror again. His eyes were more aged than the rest of him" (11). His eyes work as a metaphor. Describing Morgan's eyes as "more aged than the

rest of him” symbolizes Morgan’s exhaustion as he has never been able to see himself clearly. In a moment that foreshadows the rest of the novel, Leon and Morgan visually fight for dominance in Emily’s life: “He and the doctor seemed to be trying to stare each other down” (19). They are physically staring each other down, but this symbolizes the state of their relationship. Morgan will vie for Emily’s affections and will eventually win.

Tyler also uses photographs as a means of visual interpretation. The photo albums in the Gower home are described as “photographs so widely spaced in time that whole generations seemed to be dashing past” (27). As Morgan looks through the photographs, it is clear that the photographs represented in the album only display parts of their family, and not a family as a whole. Morgan’s wedding picture is missing. In addition, it is important to note that once a year a picture is taken of Morgan: “taken aslant and out of focus” (28). The unfocused picture of Morgan represents Morgan’s life and overall self-image. His life is not exactly focused. He does not take the straight and narrow path. Likewise, one can never tell whether he is smiling or frowning because his hat is always covering his face in the photographs.

While Morgan lives in a fantasy world, his wife and many of his family members try to live within the scope of reality. Those who rely on him, particularly Morgan’s sister Brindle and his mother are often forced to revert to an alternate fantasy world due to the fact that Morgan provides no support. His wife and his daughters are forced to ignore Morgan as much as possible in order to survive. Morgan’s absurd behavior is even reflected by the cat’s response to his

presence. Tyler even utilizes visual and auditory metaphors when describing the cat's behavior. The cat pays no attention to Morgan: "The cat [. . .] sent a slitted [sic] stare elsewhere and pretended not to hear" (29). Tyler is employing a double metaphor of seeing and hearing to show that Morgan's behavior is so absurd that even the cat does not wish to bother with him.

Losing his father to suicide as a teenager, Morgan admittedly lacks a male perspective. As a man, Morgan has willingly disempowered himself to the point of being childlike. He and Bonny live in a home that was a gift from Bonny's father. Morgan has no say in the way that his family lives or how their money is spent: "She has this money. We [Morgan and his children] never see it" (141). Morgan's references to his wife's money, as opposed to "their" money, illustrate his lack of decision making within the household. It is important to note that although Morgan is emasculated and powerless, he does not try to obtain any of the power. His desire at the onset of their marriage was to sell the home and start anew: "But Bonny wouldn't hear of it" (30). Additionally, Morgan admittedly "married his wife for her money" (31). He has relied on Bonny from the beginning of their relationship and takes it for granted that she will continue to take care of him.

While they were dating, Morgan was "impressed" by Bonny: "She was so clear about who she was" (31). Being with Bonny made him feel "securely defined at last" (31). Unable to clearly picture himself on his own, Morgan needs Bonny's self-assuredness, money, and family name in order to feel defined as a man. What he sees in Bonny is what he is lacking in himself.

Likewise, his daughters' views of their father have influenced Morgan in the past. Morgan's daughters are frequently unhappy with Morgan's appearance: "Does he have to look so peculiar?" (36). In response to their disappointing views, Morgan did cut his hair and trimmed his beard upon the request of his daughter, but they told him that "it looked artificial" (36). Unhappy with his view of himself or the views that others have of him, Morgan "felt like he was riding something choppy and violent, fighting to keep his balance, smiling beatifically and trying not to blink" (36). This feeling is a metaphor for Morgan's life with all of the conflicting views of whom he should be, including his own. By trying "not to blink" Morgan is hoping to steady his faulty vision.

Part of Morgan's faulty vision is represented in his clothing. Morgan's daily wear is a costume of some sort. In his review of *Morgan's Passing*, Robert Towers states, "The shaggy Morgan Gower, whose identity is so unfixed that he slips uncontrollably into whatever role happens to excite his fancy at the moment. He thinks of all of his clothes as costumes" (104). Lacking a single identity, Morgan takes on the identity of others as a way of getting through life. He sees himself through these different identities. Main components of the costumes are the various hats that complement his attire. Morgan literally, and symbolically, wears different hats. It is through the wearing of these hats that Morgan feels safe. His eyes are generally shielded by the hats; therefore, his true persona cannot be seen. When he gives Gina his hat as a gift, he immediately runs home: "I'd better go home and change. [. . .] Yes, I . . . need another hat" (127). Without his hat he is vulnerable and exposed.

When his mother's dog follows Morgan on his way to the shoe repair shop where he is hoping to get his moccasins for his Daniel Boone costume repaired, Morgan feels that his true self, his family and his home, are exposed. The façade that is represented in the Klondike hat that he is wearing that day does not come with a dog. In order to preserve that day's image, Morgan runs from the dog: "he couldn't backtrack all that way, having started out so speedy and chipper. Instead he turned and took off at a run, holding on to his hat" (41). Morgan's running symbolizes his fear of exposure. In addition, by "holding onto his hat" Morgan is trying to hold on to his Klondike persona. Free from remnants of his "real" life, Morgan "felt stripped and free, like the vacant window, frameless, glassless" (41). Without the baggage of home, Morgan can recreate his fantasy persona, just as he does while standing outside windows.

Morgan's habit of looking into windows facilitates his desire to be someone other than himself. Gordon O. Taylor, in his article, "Morgan's Passion," argues:

Like the housefronts and storefronts Morgan watches from the windows of the buses he rides through Baltimore neighborhoods—giving the illusion of a turning world to the still point of his restless imagination—these lives into which he peers, into which he often *disappears*. (65)

Morgan starts viewing the Merediths through their apartment window. He is on the outside looking in: "It was the third-floor windows that Morgan watched, from the shadow of a Laundromat doorway—Emily and Leon Meredith's

windows” (47). At first it appears as if he is longing for this family, but in essence, he is longing to be Leon: the Leon that he imagines to exist. He will later take on Leon’s persona in more ways than one. He will literally become Leon Meredith.

Unlike Morgan, Bonny clearly sees life, and her husband, for what/who they really are. Trying to take on Leon’s persona, Morgan asks for ““khaki trousers and a really, old, soft, clean white shirt”” (57). Bonny contemplates by “looking straight ahead” in “silence” (57). It is clear that Bonny sees what Morgan is up to and that Morgan’s need to attach himself to others occurs on a regular basis. Bonny asks Morgan, ““You think I’m blind?”” (57). Although she points out to Morgan that she sees the reality of the situation, Morgan still does not admit that he is doing anything wrong: ““I don’t know what you are talking about”” (57).

Morgan is only able to see himself clearly through the eyes of others. While sitting on the bus, he places his hand on the seat in front of him in “plain view” (58). This causes him great distress as he thinks about the women sitting in the seat: “He imagined that he could see through their eyes; he saw exactly how his hand appeared to them—its knuckly [sic] fingers, wiry black hairs, sawdust ingrained around the nails. He saw his whole person in fact. What a toad!” (58). While on the bus, Morgan “gazed at the black windowpanes” (59). Looking out of his own window, Morgan envisions the Meredith home. As he visualizes what Emily and Leon’s evening entails, he begins to copy the imagined movements of Leon. Through the images in his fantasies, Morgan is slowly becoming Leon.

Morgan reveals himself to the Merediths on the day of his daughter's wedding. He is dressed in a "costume" that makes Morgan look like Abraham Lincoln. His thoughts are not with his family, but instead they are focused on his construction of his own identity. Pittman argues:

Men go through life struggling with what they believe to be the demands of their masculinity. They try to be what they think a man would be, and they make a tolerable approximation of masculinity. They may compare themselves to the myths of masculine heroes.

(4)

Dressing like Abraham Lincoln and other male heroes (e.g. Daniel Boone) throughout his life provides Morgan with a sense of masculine identity.

During his daughter's wedding, Morgan's faulty vision is exacerbated because he feels unattached to his family. He does not recognize people, even his own children: "Billy, from the back of your head I didn't even recognize you. [. . .] Morgan stood blinking at him" (17-18). When he feels that he "bore some connection" with his daughters, he realizes that he confuses his daughters: "I'm not Sue, I'm Carol!" (118). Unable to see himself as part of this family, Morgan jumps into his car and "rolled down a window" (119). By rolling down the window, Morgan is hoping to see clearly, but Morgan's view of the world is fixed in fantasy: therefore, he is unable to see much of anything until he looks into the window of Crafts Unlimited. Looking upstairs, he sees the Merediths' window: "The Merediths' windows were empty, as always; you couldn't tell a thing from them" (119). Feeling lost, Morgan creates another alternate identity as a means of

gaining access into Emily and Leon's lives. Dressed as Abraham Lincoln, he tries to portray a French artist to gain access to Emily's workroom. In addition, he derives information from Mrs. Apple because "he wanted to hear how this woman saw them" (120). Morgan is utilizing Mrs. Apple's seeing and hearing as his own means of visualizing the Merediths.

Morgan sees a blurred view of himself in the cabinet in Crafts Unlimited: "its doors were wavery [sic] glass, and they reflected a shortened and distorted view of Morgan" (121). Morgan is comfortable with his distorted image as he sees that he has become someone else. Looking through the "wavery glass," Morgan smiles and "adjusted his hat" (191). With the adjustment of the hat, Morgan is taking on the persona of a French artist, thereby hiding behind his distorted image.

Like his own distorted image, Morgan is also more comfortable with the images of the Merediths that he has created. Once inside the home, Morgan is faced with Leon "glaring" at him (122). Unlike their first meeting where the men were in competition for dominance through eye contact, Leon clearly has the dominating position during this interaction. Morgan is quite happy with the simplicity of the Meredith home, including the photo of Emily, Leon, and Gina "smiling squintily [sic] into the sunlight" (125). Tyler's uses the single photograph as a representation of a family who possess faulty vision. By having the Merediths squinting, Tyler is showing that the vision of the family is blurred.

While Morgan desires to look at everything in their home, including their drawers, Emily, feeling exposed, puts a stop to his critical observation: "He's

seen enough” (127). The actual viewing of the home is two-sided as Morgan is pleased with what he sees, but at the same time, he lives in a fantasy world; therefore, Morgan sees life better in a fantasy. By his own admission, Morgan favors watching the Merediths from the outside: “I almost preferred watching, don’t you see” (127). His desire to view, and not immerse himself into his fantasy families, changes once he enters the Merediths’ world.

Morgan also has faulty hearing. As with his vision, Morgan hears what he wants to hear and blocks out everything else. He lives in his own world and only hears what pertains to that world. During his daughter Amy’s wedding, Morgan does not hear the minister’s directions because he is imagining running away. Like Frankie in Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding*, Morgan envisions running away with this newly married couple. In addition, Morgan further emasculates himself when he decides that he will “act helpless” so that “Amy would feel a need to care for him” (115). Lost in his own world, Morgan misses the commands that the minister is giving to him.

In an effort to get Emily to care for him, Morgan overly dramatizes his injuries when he is “run over” by a mail truck. It is apparent to Emily shortly after the accident that Morgan was not seriously injured at all. One can argue that Morgan’s need for female support is the catalyst for his dramatic response. Morgan moves from one woman to another for support: “he attempted it [to stand], with an arm around Emily for support” (151). Jumping from one woman to another symbolizes Morgan’s constant need for support by a woman, now Emily.

Tyler also uses photographs to illustrate Morgan's faulty vision. Looking at a photograph of Leon in the newspaper, Morgan declares, "I once looked a little like Leon" (157). Bonny tries to get him to see that they are nothing alike, but Morgan insists as he claims, "but there's something about the eyes" (157). By defining the eyes as the prominent descriptive characteristic, Morgan is identifying himself as Leon.

Morgan also takes on other personas. Many of his personas are represented through his costumes and hats. Bail argues, "Morgan's search for self involves trying on different identities, costumes, and hobbies" (100). Morgan begins his day without looking into the mirror. More specifically, he makes sure to not look in the mirror while putting on one of his many hats. By avoiding his own reflection until his costume is in place, he is avoiding the view of himself that is exposed: "He inched out of bed, took a sombrero from the wardrobe, and put it on without looking in the mirror" (166). Walking around the beach house in his underwear, Morgan needs the identity of the sombrero for security.

Like the blind man in *The Tin Can Tree*, Morgan is "traveling blind" (170). Morgan feels as if he does not have anything to base his life as a man on because he lacks his father's history. He claims that he does not have a visual example of how to be a man due to his father's suicide. Morgan would argue that his faulty vision is a direct result of his father's suicide. Morgan looks for male figures and takes on their qualities. Upon meeting Leon, he looks to Leon as a model of masculine behavior. Morgan now models his own behavior after Leon until he becomes Leon Meredith.

Leon temporarily disappears while at the beach. It is during Leon's disappearance that Morgan sees his true reflection in a store window: "'Look!' he said, feeling his cheeks, peering into the glass. 'I'm so old! I'm so ruined! I seem to have . . . fallen apart!'" (203). Without Leon's presence, Morgan is lacking his alter-image. In turn, Morgan is forced to see an image of himself that he is unfamiliar with.

In a photograph of Emily from the beach, Morgan contemplates how Emily must see him through her eyes: "Emily herself, marble-pale in folds of black, met his scrutiny with eyes so clear that he imagined he could see through them and behind them; he could see what she must see, how his world must look to her" (206). Morgan's faulty vision does not allow for a clear image of himself through his own eyes. Instead, he needs to be seen through someone else's eyes, now preferably Emily's.

Morgan's obsession with Leon results in an affair between him and Emily. By becoming Leon, Morgan must claim sexual authority over Emily. Morgan feels guilty about betraying Leon, but he does not feel guilty about betraying Bonny due in part to his own selfishness: "But with Bonny, strangely enough, Morgan felt no guilt at all" (254). His guilt toward Leon is exacerbated by Leon's manner of looking at Morgan: "Leon had a way of looking at Morgan, lately, with his long black eyes expressionless, lusterless, impassive" (254). He sees himself as Leon; therefore, he is betraying himself. As a result of their affair, Emily becomes pregnant. Emily forces Morgan to look into her eyes when telling him about her pregnancy: "She met his gaze firmly" (261). By forcing Morgan to

look straight at her, Emily makes sure that Morgan understands that this is not part of his fantasy world. Likewise, looking straight at Morgan illustrates Emily's dominant position in their relationship.

Morgan now looks at the Gower home from the outside looking in and at the Meredith home from the inside looking out, even though he is not yet officially Leon Meredith: "Even his own house, his family, he suddenly saw from the outside. [. . .] It was not a bad place: the window open, curtains fluttering" (263). Morgan is transforming into Leon: thus, his own family is now even more foreign to him. By observing the windows from the outside, he is taking one last look at his family before he leaves them to become Leon.

Bonny now clearly sees how Morgan operates as she witnesses Morgan becoming Leon. She states to Emily:

"He only feels he's real when he's in other people's eyes," Bonny told her. "Things have to be *viewed*. All alone in the bathroom, he's no one. That's why his family doesn't count. They tend not to see him; you know how families are. So he has to go out and find himself in someone else's line of vision." (300)

In essence, Bonny is warning Emily about Morgan. Morgan's need to be viewed by others continues as he physically becomes Leon.

In search of Mr. Leon Meredith, Durwood Linthicum comes to Emily and Morgan's apartment door. Morgan instantly takes on Leon's persona and becomes Leon Meredith. Bail contends, "Morgan eventually adopts another identity wholesale" (101). As Morgan takes on Leon's identity, he declares that, as Leon,

he will only need one hat. The identity that Morgan desires most is within his reach; therefore, the only hat that he needs is the hat of “Leon Meredith.”

Traditionally, as part of a couple, Emily would have taken the name Gower. Instead, Morgan emasculates himself by taking Emily’s first husband’s name. Immediately following Morgan’s change of name, Bonny’s concern about Morgan’s eyes symbolizes her concern for his identity. Bonny states, “‘I’m worried about his eyes. [. . .] Everything’s in the eyes’” (322). Unable to see Morgan physically, Bonny has no idea about the condition of his actual eyes; therefore, Tyler is utilizing the eyes as a metaphor for identity.

Morgan has distorted his vision of himself. Now known as Leon Meredith, he feels powerless to respond to the obituary for Morgan Gower that Bonny has placed in the newspaper. The obituary represents the symbolic death of Morgan Gower. In turn, Morgan is temporarily confused and vulnerable. In addition, the hat that he is wearing provides him no protection: “He felt insufficiently shielded by his cap, which was trim, narrowly visored, of no particular character” (329).

As Leon Meredith, Morgan is now looking through the window from the inside out: “he watched them [Emily and Josh] through the living room window” (333). Morgan is not completely fulfilled by his new position as Leon Meredith. Morgan “turned away from the window” (333), symbolically showing that his image is still faulty. As Morgan turns from the window, the phone rings. Morgan answers the phone and takes on the persona of Sam, the person the caller is looking for. Unlike his past behavior, something invades his vision: “But there was some optical illusion. His surroundings appeared to glide past him” (334).

His vision altering yet again, Morgan “blinks” and tells the caller that he is not Sam (334). Morgan temporarily sees that he cannot go on viewing himself through the eyes of others.

Like Morgan, Leon also needs Emily, but he does so in a manner different from Morgan. He needs her presence in order to avoid his own life. He allows himself to be trapped within their relationship. They serve as binaries to each other—he is everything that she is not. As time progresses, the positions of their binaries flip. Leon is now trapped in his marriage but is relieved, instead of upset, when Morgan and Emily have an affair. He is now free. The small apartment that the Merediths occupied left no room for Leon. Between Emily, Gina, and the puppets, the apartment represents a life that Leon should not be a part of: “The window was painted shut, its panes so sooty that the sun set up an opaque white film in the afternoons” (66). The closed and unclear window of the puppet room represents the state of those residing in the house. The difference between Emily and Leon, though, is that now Emily finds comfort in the trapped feeling of the home while Leon slowly begins to detest the trapped feeling.

Likewise, Leon also has issues with his father. Like Mr. Green, Leon’s father is emotionally absent. He does not wish to see Leon for who he really is and he tries to change him. As Leon listens to tirades from his father but with his back to him: “Leon was standing at the window with his back to them” (69), Leon is looking out of the window at his options, which symbolizes his need to be free from his parents’ restrictive rules. As with Morgan, the window serves as a visual means into another world. This passage runs parallel to the image of Simon

Pike when he is not being seen by his mother. Although of different ages, both Leon and Simon are not being viewed properly by their parents. As a sign of resentment, both have their backs turned to their parents as a means of controlling what is being (or not being) seen. Like Ansel and James, Leon leaves the oppressive atmosphere of his emotionally unattached father.

When Leon decides to free himself from his family, Emily observes Leon's image through the windows of his dormitory: "Leon walked out of the room. Through the parlor's windows (small-paned, with rippling glass) Emily saw his angular figure repeatedly dislocating itself, jarring apart and drawing back together as he strode across the quadrangle" (72). The vision of Leon through the rippling glass of the window represents Leon's fragmented view of himself, his family, and Emily. He passively allows Emily to come along to New York with him, neither excited nor angry, about his companion in his escape. In essence, Leon uses Emily as a reason to escape a family that he is unable to define himself within.

Like a lot of Tyler characters, Leon escapes from reality by watching television. As he grows apart from both Emily and Morgan, Leon uses the television as a means of avoiding seeing the Gowers: "He wanted to watch this program on TV" (251). As with those in the Pauling boardinghouse, television serves as an escape from reality and a measure of avoidance. In addition, although Leon is aware of their affair, he allows Morgan and Emily to go off together to Morgan's home. The television offers Leon a source of avoidance.

Leon's avoidance and distance are apparent as he is overly congenial about Emily's affair and pregnancy. He remains expressionless and unemotional as Morgan and Emily inform him of her pregnancy: "Morgan cast a sideways glance at him and found his face unmoved" (287). Leon proclaims that he knew about their affair but did nothing to stop it. All along, Leon has felt trapped inside his relationship with Emily and is now free. The entire interaction is a bit too casual. Although Leon is aware that Morgan wants to take Leon's identity, he seems too eager to give it up: "Really, what do I need with all that? Take it" (288). Leon is telling Morgan to "take" over the image of Leon that Leon no longer wants. Leon does not see his position in life as being a husband, father, and puppeteer.

After Morgan and Emily's son is born, Leon comes back to the apartment to visit Gina. He has visibly changed. He is no longer the Leon who runs around like a gypsy giving puppet shows, but instead he presents an image of a "polished" businessman. He sees that the apartment is no place for his daughter. He sees it differently now. In addition, he asserts dominance over Emily through eye contact: "Leon gave Emily a long, stern look. It was plain what he was saying: Call this a fit life for a child?" (309).

Morgan and Leon are not the only male characters with altered vision. Victor Apple declares his love for Emily in front of a window: "He stood in front of the window, framed by an orange sunset so they had to squint at him from their places on the floor" (91). Standing in front of the window, Victor symbolizes escape for both him and Emily. Emily is unable to see the window as a form of

escape, though, because she is blinded by the light and her vision is altered, as is shown by her squinting. Instead, Emily envisions a violent Leon, one that we are never sure really exists. She sees Leon angry at Victor: “She imagined him cowering against the window” (92). Instead of seeing the window as an escape, she sees it as a form of imprisonment. By imagining Victor cowering, she is envisioning Leon as a strong man and Victor as a weak man. In reality, Victor escapes the entrapment of the apartment, whereas Leon remains trapped for years within his marriage.

In addition, like the other men in the story, Robert Roberts is unable to see things clearly. He comes back to marry Morgan’s sister years after their high school romance, but he is unwilling to let go of the image that he has preserved in his mind for years. Through photography, Tyler illustrates Robert’s faulty vision: “he pretends he’s watching TV, he’s really watching my [Brindle] photo. I see him clicking his eyes back in focus when I walk into the room” (178). Brindle declares, “I’m not the girl in the photograph” (196). Robert Roberts is like Morgan. He wants the life that he imagines, not the life that he has. His faulty vision is due in part to the fact that it looks back to a time that no longer exists.

Morgan’s vision never completely clears. Even as Leon Meredith, Morgan reverts back to his old ways. He goes back to his old home and views his old house in the same manner as he used to view the Merediths’ apartment—from the outside in. He begins to follow Bonny on the streets as he used to do with Emily, but “she didn’t even look in his direction” (337). “Morgan Gower” no longer exists as his own mother does not even recognize him. When Morgan encounters

his mother while in his old home, she is unable to identify him as her son: “Don’t call *me* Mother, you scruffy-looking, hairy person” (339). Although Morgan comes to terms with the fact that his old persona is dead, he never gives up all of the other personas that he takes on. Instead, now he will portray a postman as Leon Meredith.

Anne Tyler’s male characters possess differing levels of vision and hearing. Oftentimes, they need women for guidance as they are unable to progress toward self-recognition on their own. Pittman argues, “They [men] collapse on women” (130). Other times, Tyler’s men require the assistance of external mechanisms, like art or photography, in order to understand and create some form of self-identification. In *The Tin Can Tree*, *Celestial Navigation*, and *Morgan’s Passing*, the male characters lack a self-awareness that is necessary to see properly. In all three novels, the prominent male characters lack sufficient male role models. In adulthood, Ansel, James, Jeremy, and Morgan are unable to visualize how they should appear as men; thus, their visions of themselves and how they are perceived are blurred by their lack of male support in the form of a father. Likewise, their inability to listen to others renders them even more in need of a woman to interpret for them. The ends of the novels do not provide a clearer vision for these male characters, but instead, they provide a self-recognition that their blurred vision and hearing are an unchanging part of their identities.

## CHAPTER IV

### A FEMALE POINT OF VIEW: *A SLIPPING DOWN LIFE, EARTHLY POSSESSIONS, AND LADDER OF YEARS*

Like many male characters in Tyler's novels, most of Tyler's female characters also have distinct ways of viewing themselves and the world. Like all of Tyler's main characters, her female characters have severe issues with self-identification and self-preservation. In order to restore their vision, these women detach themselves from their oppressive conditions. Gilbert argues:

failures of vision have impelled all of Tyler's characters on their flights, the inability to see the beauty of the present, its outlines obscured in layers of the past, and the inability to see themselves at all, the fear that they are invisible as individuals in the webs of others' lives. (263-64)

As a means of survival, these characters suffer from faulty vision and hearing. Varying forms of faulty vision and hearing serve as coping mechanisms for Tyler's female characters. More specifically, many female characters have issues identifying their positions in the world and their hierarchical positions within the marriage structure.

For her female characters, Tyler frequently employs mirrors and eating disorders as viewing mechanisms. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar argue that "what she [woman] sees in the mirror is usually a male construct" (17). Evie Decker, Charlotte Emory, and Delia Grinstead go through different stages of self-definition that are symbolized through images reflected in

the mirror. Like Pearl and Jenny Tull from *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* and Olivia from *Celestial Navigation*, Evie Decker from *A Slipping Down Life* and Charlotte and Lacey Emory from *Earthly Possessions* suffer from different forms of eating disorders. bell hooks contends, “Feminist struggle to end eating disorders has been an ongoing battle because our nation’s obsession with judging females of all ages on the basis of how we look was never completely eliminated” (33). Tyler explores different eating disorders—overeating and anorexia—in order to show the different measures that women take in their attempts at seeing themselves clearly.

By no means are Tyler’s works strictly “feminist” works (Petry, *Understanding Anne Tyler* 18-19). In fact, Tyler herself argues against the idea that is conventional for a feminist. Susan Gilbert argues: “Tyler’s work shares the subject matter of the feminist revolution but not its attitudes” (276). What Tyler’s works do portray are women trying to define themselves while trapped within a patriarchal scope of feminine ideals. In the article, “A Re-Awakening: Anne Tyler’s Postfeminist Edna Pontellier in *Ladder of Years*,” Paul Christian Jones argues that post-feminism should be viewed as “an evolution of feminism” (181). Tyler’s women evolve in their own unique manner while living within a traditional patriarchal structure. Many of Tyler’s women, while striving for self-actualization, possess feminist qualities that allow them to eventually move past the confines of patriarchy.

Within this patriarchal structure reside the strict, confining, and non-progressive definitions of womanhood. It is within this scope that Tyler’s female

characters become part of a structure that requires their physical presence in order to help define the male presence. Laura Mulvey, in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” argues:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (586)

Evie, Charlotte, and Delia, during their struggles for individuality, become bearers of the gaze. In addition, they are bound by the “silent image” that defines their roles as good wives.

Tyler’s women possess various views on feminist thought. bell hooks argues, “Lifestyle feminism ushered in the notion that there could be as many versions of feminism as there were women” (5). While not always conventionally feminist, Tyler presents women who find themselves alone within the worlds of marriage and motherhood. Stephanie Coontz contends, “[When] a woman focuses her self-sacrifice on parent, husband, or child, the simultaneous connection and contrast between nurturing within the family and competition outside it leads to a profound sense of loneliness” (58). In turn, Tyler’s women aspire to recover their lost selves. Also, not all of these women wish to permanently give up their families, but they must “detach” themselves from the very structure that has oppressed them in order to see clearly. Susan Gilbert, in her chapter, “Anne Tyler” argues, “in detachment, they see” (274). It is only through the clarity of

detaching themselves from their current lifestyles that their faulty vision begins its process of clarification.

In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, Jessica Benjamin, a prominent theorist of feminism and psychoanalysis, argues:

domination is a complex psychological process which ensnares both parties in bonds of complicity, and shows how it underlies our family life, our social institutions, and especially our sexual relations, in spite of our conscious commitment to equality and freedom. (back cover)

Although Evie, Charlotte, and Delia go on journeys that allow them to clarify their vision and hearing, in the end they are still bound by the roles/rules of being an accommodating mother, a subordinate worker, and an appealing wife.

Tyler's female characters do not generally surround themselves with, nor are they permanently part of, groups of women. While Evie has a friend in Violet, and Charlotte and Delia temporarily interact with other females, these relationships are not permanent. Elizabeth Evans asserts, "Although they [Tyler's women] do not totally cut themselves off from the older generation of women, they nevertheless lead lives that are individual rather than communal and thus remain outside the circle of women" (99). Although their lives are "individual," they are not independent of fulfilling the dominating roles that their parents, their society, and their husbands have imposed upon them; thus, all three women feel lost and are unable to see themselves clearly. As a young woman, Evie must learn

the ropes of womanhood without a role model of any sort. Charlotte is trapped within her childhood home as she moves from taking care of her sick father to taking care of her husband and his wayward brothers. Likewise, Delia suffers from faulty vision as she can no longer see who she is within her own life and a life that she cannot define. Although Delia does temporarily have a few female friends, they will be quickly forgotten when she returns to her husband.

In *A Slipping Down Life* (1970), Tyler reveals a young girl unable to actualize the self. Although this ailment is a commonality among teenagers, Evie Decker lacks the support of a traditional family. More specifically, she is without a mother, and although her father is physically present, he is deficient in parenting skills. Gilbert contends, “Evie’s father is colorless, kind, and uncommunicative” (256). Evie’s search for self is complicated by her inability to separate herself from her image of Bertram “Drumstrings” Casey, a boy she first encounters on the radio and her future husband. By making her false image of Drum part of her own likeness, Evie even further obscures her perception of the self that she desires as a woman. Becoming Drum’s wife, Evie takes on the perceived “feminine” roles that she has studied through stereotypes exemplified on soap operas and in magazines. In her attempts at self-actualization, like a character in a movie or a television show, Evie takes on different roles in hopes of defining herself among these roles. Evie is unable to see a lucid image of her own self; thus, she blindly falls into the roles of womanhood that have been provided for her. In addition, Evie’s need to be heard by her father and Drum often goes unanswered.

Evie's image is often displayed as a reverse image in a mirror, but this image is ultimately distorted by looking into the mirror. The distorted image in the mirror reflects Evie's inability to clearly see herself and who she can be. Tyler uses mirrors as a means of identification. Using an *Alice in Wonderland* analogy in reference to Evie, Bail argues, "The beginning and end of the circular movement are framed by mirrors" (34). Bail argues that the mirrors serve as a "looking glass" of sorts that transports Evie "back through the looking glass to her middle class home" (34). What Evie sees in the mirror is an image of herself that she cannot identify with. Evie takes a picture of herself: "She snapped her own picture in the full-length mirror" (24). Tyler employs a double metaphor as Evie is attempting to create a permanent image of her own image that is distorted and reversed within the mirror. The result is an image that is so far removed from the original that it is unidentifiable.

Evie is unhappy with the image that she sees in the mirror: "But she always woke up feeling hopeless and betrayed. [. . .] she would catch sight of her reflection whispering in the bureau mirror and she would clamp her lips shut and lie down again" (54). Due to the fact that she is despondent with what she sees in the mirror, Evie turns away from her own image: "She smiled in the mirror, exposing large square teeth. She frowned and turned away" (57). Through her frown Tyler is revealing Evie's disappointment in her image of herself. Incapable of seeing a lucid image, Evie attempts to redefine herself by attaching herself to Drum. Unfortunately, Evie's image of Drum is also distorted; therefore, Evie relies on a distorted image to define her own distorted image. Benjamin asserts,

“Woman’s missing desire so often takes the form of adoring the man who possesses it” (86). In order to restore her metaphorical vision Evie must learn how to see her true self clearly. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar argue, “She [woman] must, in other words, replace the “copy” with the “individuality”” (19).

Evie’s inability to see herself clearly is also altered by her habit of overeating. Like many Tyler women, Evie tries to control her life through an eating disorder. Evie’s disorder, overeating, allows her to temporarily control her chaotic life. The fix is temporary, though, due to the fact that her physical image suffers as a result of her overeating. Evie will go so far as to steal food out of Clotelia’s purse: “She ate chocolates, or the last pack of Nabs out of Clotelia’s purse” (48). Gilbert and Gubar argue, “so many real women have for so long expressed loathing of (or at least anxiety about) their own, inexorably female bodies. [. . .] the pruning and preening, the mirror madness” (34). As Evie tries to control her frenzied teenage life by overeating, what she sees in the mirror becomes even more distorted.

Evie’s father is also unable to see Evie clearly. Perhaps, though, this is not completely his fault. One cannot expect Mr. Decker to understand female teenaged angst as he has been left alone with Evie without the help of a mother figure. Regardless, as a single father, Sam Decker fails to recognize Evie’s personal and physical issues that are very common among teenage girls.

Evie’s problems with vision are also reflected in her inability to see others clearly. Insecure with her own being, Evie is not always able to look directly at

the men in her life. For example, Evie has difficulties looking at her father as she is blinded by the light coming through the hospital door: “She shaded her eyes to look at him [her father]” (35). She is embarrassed and unclear as to how to progress with her father in her life; therefore, Evie shies away from the patriarchal figure.

Likewise, Evie asks her father, “Do you want to see?” (35). Unable to bear the sight of his daughter, Mr. Decker glances up and “dropped his eyes” quickly (35). Mr. Decker puts forth minimal effort to try and see and hear his daughter clearly: “He barely heard her” (36). “Listen. [ . . . ] Things will look different in the morning. You’ll see” (37).

Sam Decker’s view of his daughter remains misconstrued even after she cuts *Casey* into her forehead. He does not attempt to get Evie to talk about what is going on in her life, nor does he go beyond the surface of the situation. Instead, Sam Decker assumes that Casey must be a boyfriend of sorts. His insinuation that Drum is her boyfriend exemplifies the fact that he has not been paying attention to Evie: “I won’t allow you to see any more of him” (37). Mr. Decker reveals his ignorance as he does not realize that this insinuation is insulting to Evie because she has never even met the bearer of the name on her forehead. More importantly, Sam Decker is feeding upon Evie’s misperceived image of the situation as he believes that a relationship is the cause of Evie’s self-mutilation: “Evie looked up, with two small pleased folds beginning at the outer corners of her eyes. But by then he had jammed his hands in his pockets and walked away” (37). While trying to become visible, Evie’s father only exacerbates her feelings of invisibility by

clearly illustrating his inability to see the state of her life clearly. Evie is disillusioned even more so by her father's lack of knowledge about her life; thus, Evie maintains that she will keep the identity that she has voluntarily carved into her forehead as she refuses care from a plastic surgeon.

It is at this precise moment that Evie understands that she has been seen by the world, but not yet by Casey. Her father's dismay becomes her pleasure.

Evie's desire to be seen goes beyond her need to be noticed by her father. In high school, prior to branding her forehead with *Casey*, Evie is virtually invisible: "When classmates met up with her they passed in a hurry, barely noticing her. Evie never spoke to them" (6). Going unnoticed both at home and at school causes Evie's vision of herself to be blurred. Not only do the students at school "barely notice her" but, in turn, Evie "never spoke to them" (6). This distinction is central to Tyler's storyline as Evie also participates in her own failures. Evie is left with few options because she has never learned how to communicate effectively. In an attempt to be seen, Evie's self-destructive behavior ends up being Evie's only option for visibility in a world where she formerly went unnoticed. Her need to be seen leads to drastic measures as she would rather be seen as an object than not seen at all.

Evie is seen somewhat as a novelty act as she is walking around school and the town with *Casey* carved into her forehead. Not only does Evie want Drum to see her devotion to him, but the carving also symbolizes how she wishes to see herself. Unable to clearly define herself on her own accord, Evie tries to define herself through Drum. Mulvey contends, "Thus the woman as icon displayed for

the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified” (591). Evie has put herself on display to be gazed upon whereby Drum and his assistant Dave become the controllers of the look.

It is also important to note that Evie’s behavior continues to go unnoticed by her father, even after she has become front page news. As she leaves to go out yet another night to be “gazed” upon, Evie’s father barely acknowledges that she is in the room: “Her father didn’t answer. He might not have even heard” (69). She makes repeated attempts to gain his attention. Even when she tells her father that she is now married, her father is unable to connect with her: “Her father wasn’t paying attention” (125). Perhaps if Evie had a mother (or a mother-figure) in the home she would receive the attention that she requires.

Evie’s faulty vision is also influenced by her lack of a mother figure. Although Clotelia is ever present, her position as the Decker’s “help” influences Evie’s assessment of her motherly abilities. In addition, Clotelia’s presence always appears temporary as is symbolized by her refusal to put down her purse as she works in the Decker home. Evie’s search for self causes her to turn to Drum. In need of some form of individual distinctiveness, Evie looks to a figure known only through a voice heard on the radio.

Drum is first heard, not seen, on the radio by Evie. Her attraction to Drum is based solely on his lack of speech during an interview on a program entitled, “Sweetheart Time” (2). Evie longs to be the sweetheart of the voice she hears on the radio, although in fact, Evie does not hear much of anything as Drum’s

responses are sparse and full of long and uncomfortable silences. Voekler argues that Drum's silences are emblematic of his desire to avoid being "trapped" (43-44). But the silence is what intrigues Evie: "When the silence grew noticeable she took a bobby pin from her mouth and looked at the radio. All she heard was static" (3). By looking at the radio, Evie tries to see what she is unable to hear. Evie hopes to visualize the image of the man who will become the core of her obsession and her future husband.

Evie's obsession leads her to later carve Drum's last name, *Casey*, into her forehead. In doing so Evie both physically and symbolically demonstrates that she desires to be a part of him. In addition, through marriage, Evie actually becomes part Casey; therefore, her identity is split in half. She is now part Evie and part Casey. The visual representation of her identity remains as a scar on her forehead as Evie has refused plastic surgery to "cover" her mistake. Instead, Evie longs for this new part of her identity to blaze across her forehead for the world to gaze upon. She desires objectification over obscurity, and her increased interaction with Drum provides her with the attention that she believes she desires.

Evie's interactions with Drum follow a pattern that is similar to her relationship with her father. Not only is she unable to see Drum completely because he is frequently wearing sunglasses, but it is also through the reflection in the sunglasses that Evie sees herself: "He had on sunglasses made of a silvery black that mirrored Evie perfectly and turned his own face, what you could see of it, into something as hard an opaque as the glasses themselves" (41). Evie sees her reflection as a reverse image, only this time it is through Drum's scope of vision.

In addition, the sunglasses serve as a barrier between Drum and the outside world. Likewise, Drum's "hard" stare is reflective of his continued image of Evie. As their relationship progresses, Drum will continue to shade his eyes.

David, Drum's manager, exploits Evie by exploiting her image. Evie's image becomes the main component by which Drum obtains brief success as an artist. Mulvey claims:

The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (589)

David exploits Evie by putting her on display. He "styles her accordingly" by telling her what to wear, how to act, and where to sit: "He dragged a stool next to the dance platform and set a chair beside. [. . .] 'Sit down,' said David. She sat. 'No, not like that. [. . .] I want you half turned from the audience, not quite sideways, so that they can get a glimpse'" (71-72). David creates the image of Evie that he wants the public to see. He does not do this for Evie's benefit. Instead, David is trying to turn Evie into a spectacle so as to cause others to gaze upon her. In fact, he even makes Evie change her clothes when David and Drum arrive to pick her up: "'Nope. It's not what I was thinking of. [. . .] You want to stand out. We'll wait'" (68-69).

Evie responds to being gazed upon by trying to deny the gaze that she longs for: "They glanced at the candle and then at Evie. Evie stared straight

ahead at nothing at all” (72). In contrast, when Drum enters her line of vision, Evie can do nothing but gaze upon him: “Evie stared at his face without blinking” (72). In essence, Evie is subconsciously attempting to regain control by reversing the gaze.

Evie also tries to gain control of her life as she learns how to navigate between childhood and adulthood as her own image is distorted with her uncertainty about herself: “Evie spent the last few weeks of it [school] feeling blurred and out of focus” (75). Since she lacks the ability to see herself clearly, her vision becomes more and more distorted as a means of coping with her lack of sense of self: ““By now I don’t notice. I don’t even see the letters in the mirror, half the time. [. . .] Does anybody see them?”” (86). Evie’s ploy to be seen is only temporary as everyone soon tires of the novelty that is Evie’s forehead. More importantly, Tyler uses the carvings in Evie’s forehead as a visual metaphor. Evie soon realizes that she is unable to see herself as part of the *Casey* image that is carved into her forehead. With no alternate image to cling to, Evie becomes even more invisible to herself.

As Evie’s popularity wanes, she must search for new ways to be seen: “She noticed that people in the Unicorn had stopped staring at her. No one whispered about her; no one stood up to get a better look. They craned their necks around her in order to see the musicians” (87). Evie’s presence now obstructs the views of those that formerly gazed upon her. Evie’s presence as an “object” to be exploited is no longer needed; therefore, David quickly dismisses her. Dave’s

dismissal complicates Evie's view of herself because she has returned to a state of obscurity.

Throughout her journey toward self-recognition, Evie attempts to see her true image as opposed to the image of herself that she created through Drum. She is not yet at a point to feel comfortable with herself: "She cut herself a set of bangs, long enough to cover her eyebrows. Her eyes without eyebrows looked worried and surprised" (93). Evie is still uncomfortable with her own image; therefore, her worry is displayed through her eyes. In addition, she tries to cover the part of her identity that she has contrived as a means of discovering her own self. Her vision is still distorted, though, as she quickly sees the distorted image of herself upon Drum's return.

Distorted images are also seen through pictures/photography. Tyler utilizes pictures/photographs as a means of identification. Evie has three different physical images of Drum upon which she now relies: a drawing of Drum that Fay-Jean drew and gave her, the snapshot she took of Drum while at The Unicorn, and the photograph of Drum given to Evie by Drum's mother. These images function as alternate identities. Evie's inability to view herself as Evie Decker leads her to define herself as Mrs. Bertram "Drumstrings" Casey. Unfortunately, the image that she is aligning herself with is no more identifiable than the faulty view of her self that entered the relationship. Evie, in her own attempts of self-actualization, reveals Drum's unfamiliarity with himself. Admiring Drum, Evie goes on and on about how Drum's family must be "proud" of him. Her image of Drum is inconsistent with his image of himself. In response, Drum's view of both

Evie and himself is vacuous: “His eyes would flick over to her, as sudden and as startling as the appearance of someone in a vacant window” (77-78). Tyler’s use of this image clearly shows Drum as a man lacking in self-awareness and confidence. In addition, Evie’s perfect vision of Drum demonstrates her own need for self-actualization. The photograph that Drum’s mother gives to Evie is a symbol of Drum’s image. Mrs. Casey gives Evie a picture of Drum posing with a guitar. In essence, Mrs. Casey is handing over the responsibility of Drum’s image to Evie. Going to get Drum, Mrs. Casey “disappeared, looking backward one last time” (83). Tyler’s inclusion of “one last time” makes it clear that, through her actions and handing over the picture, Mrs. Casey is seeing Drum as he is for he last time.

Due to the fact that Evie is uncomfortable with her own image, she is also awkward and embarrassed with Drum’s eyes directly upon her. “His eyes were closed; she could look at his face without feeling he might blind her by looking back” (95). Mulvey maintains, “The power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned onto the woman as the object of both” (593). With Drum’s eyes closed and unable to see her, Evie’s comfort level improves.

Evie also copes with her feelings toward Drum by employing faulty vision. Like the women in the soap operas that she and Clotelia watch, Evie chooses to not see that Drum has relationships with other women. Drum tells Evie that he was fired for “getting on good with the manager’s daughter,” and “Evie blinked, cutting off the daughter forever with a single moment” (96). Tyler uses

“blinked” as a metaphor for Evie’s selective vision. Although Drum is clearly showing that he was having physical relations with the manager’s daughter, Evie opts to immediately transfer the view of Drum that she does not wish to see elsewhere.

Likewise, Drum’s views of Evie are contingent upon what she can do for him. Drum looks at photographs of Evie’s family and asks questions, but he does not listen to her answers. Although he is looking at images of Evie and her family, he is not really seeing them. In addition, he rarely listens to what she is saying: “If she talked he seemed to not listen” (103). Lost in his own world, Drum exploits Evie as he yearns for the patriarchal image of a wife. He does not desire Evie for who she is as a woman. Instead, he longs for his own ideal image of a wife and tries to turn her into that image. Moments before he asks Evie to marry him, Drum says to her, ““Have you ever thought of losing some weight?”” (111). Even though Evie is offended, she agrees to marry Drum because he “likes the way [she] listen[s] to people” (113).

In marriage, Evie learns to care for herself and her home. Bail argues, “More and more, Evie becomes the decision maker” (27). She decides to get a job even though Drum does not want her to support them because “it wouldn’t look good” (141). Drum cares about how the external world sees him because he relies upon outside observations to establish his identity. Closing in on reality, Evie begins to separate herself from Drum by going forward and getting a job at the library. Through her own image of herself, Evie sees that she can be a self-

sufficient woman: “She pictured herself in a blue smock, calm and competent” (141).

In contrast, when Evie’s father visits them in their marital home, Sam Decker continues to blind himself: “But he still didn’t look” (133). Mr. Decker does not “look” because he is fearful of what he will see. He does not want to see the uncontrolled state of his daughter’s life because he does not have the ability to help.

As Evie’s metaphorical vision improves, she sees that she must take ownership for herself and the choices that she has made. Although she will leave Drum, she maintains that the name is hers to keep: “I’ll tell them it is my name. It *is* my name” (184). In *Ladder of Years*, Delia will also assert her independent identity through the correct use of her name.

Upon leaving Drum, Evie asserts that she in fact did not carve *Casey* into her forehead deliberately: “I didn’t cut my forehead. Someone else did” (185). Evie’s realization that she does not need to be part of Drum is clarified by this assertion. No longer a daughter or a wife, Evie can proceed in life as her own person. Drum begs Evie to both see and hear what is happening, but he lacks the clarity required to convey anything constructive : ““Look,” he kept saying. ‘Wait. Listen.’ But nothing more” (181). Although he pleads with Evie to “look and “listen,” Drum has nothing to show or say that will change the reality of the situation.

Evie clearly sees the realities of her life. Her father is dead, she is scarred for life over a man she barely knows, and she is living in horrible conditions. She

asks Drum, ““Have you ever *looked* at this place? It’s a mess. And I’m freezing to death, it’s much too cold”” (180). Just as Drum requests of her, Evie requests that Drum see the reality of their living situation. Clearly, Evie’s views have clarified while Drum’s views remain blurred and distorted. Voelker asserts, “Evie found her way to an identity as an adult and a mother, heir to the family house [. . .] through the consequences of an event that was not her choice but accidental” (47).

Evie regains power over herself and her relationship with Drum. She forces him to make a choice between their old life and a new life with a child. She will no longer make the decisions for him, but Drum does not see the reality of the circumstances: ““I don’t see how that changes anything”” (183). Gullette maintains, “For most of Tyler’s women, the baby, not the husband, is the true sign of entry into adulthood” (109). Drum is incapable of seeing how a child will change their lives; therefore, Evie leaves. Voelker argues, “She [Evie] tells him she is pregnant; when it makes no difference, she goes home, changed from her year of Drum Casey, a wiser and more self-directed young woman” (45).

Upon her departure, Evie sees herself as a character in a movie or a television show: “Then she began folding the blouses that hung in her closet. Hundreds of times, in movies and on television, she had watched this scene being rehearsed for her” (183). By choice, she is being gazed upon and she has chosen Drum as the gazer: “Drum came to be her audience” (184). It is clear that Evie has regained control over her life and her image. She can now progress as a woman, and a future mother.

As Evie leaves, “She rolled the window down” (185). Evie is no longer looking through the window. The process of Evie rolling the window down on her own to look at Drum signifies her independence from Casey. She sees both her own image and that of Casey clearly. Evie no longer requires a transparent barrier to protect her from the outside world. The final moments of *A Slipping Down Life* present the reader with the image a woman who is sure of herself and her future.

Petry argues:

The ending of *A Slipping Down Life* is thus an affirmative one. Essentially a parable of the evolution of one woman’s strong, healthy sense of identity [. . .] If it is not a flawless vision [. . .] it is nonetheless meant to be a positive one. From this point on, strong women able to raise their families alone and to deal with crisis and impediments of daily life will be a salient feature of Anne Tyler’s novels. (*Understanding Anne Tyler* 68-69)

Like Evie, Charlotte Emory leaves her husband. Tyler’s first line of *Earthly Possessions* (1977) states, “The marriage wasn’t going well and I decided to leave my husband” (3). Charlotte Emory is trapped in a town that she had hoped to escape, and she sees her years ticking by. While growing up with an overweight mother and a disapproving father, Charlotte longs for a life full of excitement and an undetermined future. Getting into college, Charlotte thinks that she is on her way out, but her father’s car accident traps her in a life in Clarion in the same home where she was born. Likewise, her marriage to a minister leaves

her even more confined within the same home. She is, in essence, a “hostage” within her own life.

Like Evie, Charlotte’s identity has been blurred by her roles as a daughter, wife, mother, and surrogate parent to family members that come through the family home. In fact, in the beginning of the novel, Charlotte represents what Evie Decker may have become had she not left Drum. As a young girl, Charlotte lacks the maturity required to create a solid self-image; thus, Charlotte moves into adulthood with a blind eye. One in the same, her father’s house becomes her husband’s house. Voelker maintains, “Her mother’s child, Charlotte inevitably became a person upon whom domestic burdens fall; while she rejects them in principle, she has become in fact the caretaker and servant in Saul’s household” (120).

It is pertinent that the novel is told in first person from Charlotte’s point of view. The novel is seen and conveyed through Charlotte’s eyes; therefore, Charlotte’s thoughts and feelings, although inconsistent at times, are transparent to the reader. Bail argues, “The subjectivity and unreliability inherent in the first person narrative form is heightened by various devices that the author uses to subvert the reader’s attempts to determine what is ‘real’ in the naïve sense” (79).

Like Evie, Charlotte believes that she is invisible to both herself and the outside world. Although Charlotte starts her day off knowing that is going to leave her husband, she has no idea that she will not be doing so of her own accord. Instead, Charlotte is kidnapped during a botched bank robbery. Although

Charlotte is, in fact, leaving, she is being forced to leave; therefore, her own free will is lost. In turn, her every move is dominated by her kidnapper, Jake Simms.

In addition, throughout her kidnapping ordeal, Charlotte detects that no one is noticing her. As she is being pulled through town, Charlotte states, “Wouldn’t you think that she [the waitress in *Libby’s Grill*] would give us at least a glance? But no, she kept her eyes down” (7). Although it appears as if no one is noticing that a strange situation is occurring, Charlotte has gone to great lengths in her life to not be noticed as she generally desires to not be seen. In order to blend in, Charlotte prefers silence to noise. Even when faced with her kidnapping, Charlotte remains silent. She states, “I would rather die than make any sort of disturbance” (17).

Tyler utilizes many methods to show that Charlotte has continual issues with her own identity. The news report states that Charlotte is “a female hostage as yet unidentified” (17). This report explains two aspects of Charlotte’s life. As a “hostage” Charlotte is under the control of someone else. In this literal moment, it is Jake. But Charlotte is also a “hostage” in a metaphorical sense. She has felt like a hostage to her mother due to her father’s death. In addition, she also feels like a hostage to her husband and children. She states, “A husband was another encumbrance [. . .] And children even more so” (37). The second issue of Charlotte’s life is reflected in being “yet unidentified.” Being “unidentified” shows not only the town’s inability to decipher her on camera, but also her own inability to see clearly her own views of herself.

Charlotte's position in life with respect to her male relationships is reflected in her feelings toward her kidnapper: "There was no escape" (26). Charlotte believes she is under Jake's control because he is an actual kidnapper. She realizes that there is "no escape" from the man holding her hostage. In addition, Charlotte will be unable to escape her family. In a moment of irony, Charlotte's escape from her husband only leads her into the grasp of another man. Also, it is important to note that Charlotte has this realization when she is viewing herself and Jake on television. In *Earthly Possessions*, Tyler uses television as a means of identification. It is not until Charlotte is standing outside of herself and viewing her own image on the television screen that she is able to begin the process of seeing her life clearly:

A picture appeared of Jake and me, backing away from the camera. In spite of the snow, our faces seemed more distinct now. By next week you would be able to count our eyelashes, maybe even read our thoughts. But our stay was much briefer this time, cut off in midstep. We were replaced by my husband. (48-49)

By viewing herself on the television screen, Charlotte sees herself more distinctly, but she is only able to see this image for a brief period of time as the image is replaced by an image of Saul, her husband. Charlotte's image has been physically and metaphorically replaced by her husband's image. Although she sees herself clearly for a brief period of time, her clarity is blurred by the picture of Saul.

Charlotte does possess a feminist point of view but initially lacks the ability to fulfill her dreams of becoming an independent and free woman. John

Updike, in his review of *Earthly Possessions*, argues, “She [Charlotte] belongs to what is becoming a familiar class of Anne Tyler heroines: women admirably active in the details of living yet alarmingly passive in the large curve of their lives” (91). Charlotte sees the woman that she desires to be, but she cannot yet see this woman within herself. Benjamin contends, “The pain that accompanies compliance is preferable to the pain that attends freedom” (5).

Like Evie, Charlotte also views herself many times through mirrors, or mirror-like windows. Tyler utilizes a bus window that functions as a mirror (because of the reflection), and Charlotte sees her own image within the glass: “I could look out the window and see my own reflection gazing back at me, more interesting-looking than in real life” (19). Charlotte believes that her temporary exit from her “real” life makes her a more interesting person. Although she is seeing her own reflection, and not an image even altered by a photograph, like Evie, Charlotte is seeing a reverse image of herself.

In reference to seeing, Charlotte states, “My eyes were used to the dark by now” (21). Seeing in the dark is another metaphor for Charlotte’s view of her blurred vision. Although her eyes have become accustomed to the dark, she is still trying to see what ends up being a distorted image. Due to the fact that Charlotte is viewing life “in the dark,” the dark and distorted images she sees are reflective of how she views her own image. Although she does not necessarily wish to be “in the dark,” Charlotte has learned how to function within the realm of her blurred vision. Although she can see, she is nevertheless still in the dark.

As Charlotte's adventure progresses she will look into mirrors over and over again. Charlotte "looked at [her] face in the mirror. [. . .] I seemed the same as usual" (40). It is apparent that Charlotte is not yet ready to see a change within herself or her circumstances. Also, when discussing how she sees herself while in her parents' presence, Charlotte states, "I remembered who I really was. In the smoky mirror behind my mother, my pearls were as outlandish as a string of bear claws" (54). While Charlotte is outside of the family home, she is able to portray the woman that she desires to be. As soon as she enters her home, she realizes that she is not a young woman who is free of domination.

Charlotte sees Saul as her means of escaping a dominating atmosphere. As they begin to date, she looks into the mirror: "there in the mirror was this college-age girl in a sweater and skirt—not a sullen old spinster after all" (67). With Saul, Charlotte sees herself as the woman that she believes she wants to be while avoiding the woman that she does not wish to become. Mistakenly, she sees Saul as a man strong enough to free her from the bonds of domination. Instead, her life with Saul will cause her restraints to tighten. Charlotte fails to progress, and when she marries, Saul and she live in the same home that she grew up in. Charlotte's distorted reality is also seen through her view of Saul. Bail contends, "Saul Emory, like all the other characters in the novel, is someone whom we see only through Charlotte's highly subjective eyes" (81). Thus, it is difficult to determine the level of Saul's (in)excusable behavior due to the fact that we are viewing Saul through Charlotte's faulty vision. Charlotte must clarify her vision before she is able to see others clearly.

On the day that Charlotte decides to leave Saul, she looks into a mirror: “The mirror showed me someone stark and high-cheekboned, familiar in an unexpected way. My eyes had a sooty look” (189). Charlotte sees her image as “familiar,” thereby showing that somewhere within her reflection she is able to see part of her true self. In contrast, her “eyes had a sooty look.” If something is sooty, then it is covered or blackened (Webster’s 158). Thus, even though Charlotte sees an identifiable part of her true self, her vision is still blurred as is defined through the sooty look. Like Evie, Charlotte must leave her home in order to find the part of her that is familiar.

During her ordeal as a hostage, Charlotte is provided with many opportunities to escape, but it is clear that she views her current situation as a better alternative. She warns her kidnapper that the car they are traveling in will “catch people’s eyes” (51). This implies that she does not want to be seen. Later, Charlotte is put in charge of navigating the car in order to pull the car out of a ditch. With the power to control where she and the car are going, Charlotte blindly tries to drive: “It got free of the men. I looked into the mirror and saw the ribbon and the men running it down, waving and shouting. But I had forgotten to look in front of me” (74). This moment symbolizes the speed bump in Charlotte’s life. In addition, it shows how the patriarchal structure surrounding her aids in slowing down her progress. Distracted by the image of the men in the mirror, Charlotte forgets to look ahead. Charlotte’s progress is disrupted by looking behind. Likewise, moments later she is in the restroom and the image of herself that she sees in the mirror is still unclear: “I stood awhile staring into the mirror

on the paper towel dispenser. [. . .] My own eyes stared back at me surprisingly dark [. . .] My face appeared pinched and confused” (74).

Charlotte is also confused by the image of herself that she sees on television. The picture of Charlotte that they show on the news broadcast of her kidnapping is an old photograph from high school taken by her father: “A picture teetered up [on the television] of me alone, photographed by my father for my high school graduation” (49). The image on the screen is an image of Charlotte as portrayed by her father. It is not her present true image. Due to the fact that the photograph of Charlotte is from high school, it is clear that even Charlotte’s own family sees her in a distorted light.

Charlotte’s vision is also distorted (like Evie) through an eating disorder. In contrast, Charlotte’s disorder of choice is anorexia. Charlotte states, “I’d been systematically starving myself ever since I discovered my breasts” (53). In an effort to control her chaotic surroundings, Charlotte tries to assert control through her own body. bell hooks argues that early feminism created a “space” for women to work on “appearance obsession” where “compulsive eating and compulsive starvation were highlighted” (33). This type of control, though, provides one with a distorted image, and it is this distorted image that Charlotte carries with her to adulthood and into her relationship with Saul.

From the onset of their relationship, Saul does not ask Charlotte what she wants; instead, he tells her how it will be. “Listen,’ he said” (67). Saul asserts dominance over Charlotte. Charlotte attempts to be heard but Saul does not hear her: “But I might as well not have spoken” (68). The decision to marry is

completely Saul's idea. He does not ask Charlotte if she wishes to marry him. Instead, he tells her that they will be married. Any power that Charlotte has over her own life is now lost. Evans argues, "nor does the marriage relieve the woman's feeling of powerlessness" (117). In her marriage, Charlotte will lose herself within the roles of being a mother and being a preacher's wife.

Tyler also employs religion as a means of self-reflecting and self-defining. Shortly after Charlotte and Saul are married, Sal declares his desire to be a preacher. As a preacher, he will be in a position to force people to listen to him. He will have that "tranquil gaze" (84) of a preacher. It is through this declaration that Charlotte begins to view and analyze Saul: "Why hadn't I noticed before?" (84). She sees herself as being previously blinded to Saul's true identity. In addition, Charlotte does not believe in God and sees church as being more "closed-in" her own home (84). hooks argues, "patriarchal religion has been and remains a barrier preventing the spread of feminist thought and practice" (107). Saul will use religion, and his preaching skills, in order to attempt to maintain control over Charlotte. Charlotte sits in the pew, listens to Saul's sermon, and attempts to "look as rapt as I was expected to" (109). In an attempt to regain part of her own identity, an identity that does not believe in God, Charlotte states, "That was the last sermon of Saul's that I ever listened to" (110). Charlotte alters her hearing as a means of survival. Charlotte continues to employ different tactics as she attempts to find herself within her marriage.

Charlotte does try to leave Saul, but she returns when he sees that she is pregnant. It is important to note that Saul sees her pregnancy before Charlotte has

even deemed it possible. Charlotte's view of herself is so distorted that even she does not realize that she has a "condition" (106). In addition, although Charlotte has momentarily left Saul, he believes that he is able to see her future behavior. Saul asserts, "I know you wouldn't leave me" (106). He repeats this again on the television newscast for the world to hear. Bail argues:

Faced with any evidence of her leaving, he simply shuts his eyes and enters a state of denial. As a consequence, Saul disempowers Charlotte by refusing to hear anything that she says that threatens his fixed view—thereby, in effect silencing her. Rather than reveal his vulnerability by telling Charlotte how much he *would miss her*, Saul comes across in an authoritarian fashion. (82)

Saul's dominating conduct and "fixed view" of Charlotte pushed her further away from her own view of herself. Her desire to be someone else continues through motherhood.

Charlotte's desire to be someone else is also reflected in her fantasies of being someone else's daughter. Tyler utilizes photography as Charlotte's belief is that she is, in fact, living another woman's life. Charlotte believes that she has found proof that she is living someone else's life when she finds a photograph among her mother's belongings. When Charlotte confronts the picture of her mother's "true daughter" (172), she sees the girl who should have her life: "It *was* my life, and she was living it while I was living hers" (173). Charlotte carries the picture around with her: "She was with me permanently" (173). Although the picture is not of Charlotte, it represents who she really is. Being part of her now,

the picture becomes her identity. This picture is a turning point in Charlotte's self-acceptance. Later, at her mother's deathbed, Charlotte forces her mother to "look" (180) at the photograph. When she reveals to Charlotte that the picture is of her mother as a young girl, Charlotte slowly begins to see that the life that she has is the life she is destined to live.

Charlotte's mother, Lacey, is another complication in her life. Lacey marries a "traveling photographer" who "didn't want a wife who worked" (10). The example set by her mother complicates Charlotte's natural inclinations to be independent and explore the world. Living in a virtually isolated environment, Charlotte learns that her mother's life has gone through significant changes due to her marriage: "then after she was married there was a brief flurry of invitations, as if she had suddenly been declared alive after a long misunderstanding" (11). Due to this knowledge that she learns growing up as a female, Charlotte believes that a socially acceptable woman is a married woman.

Lacey implores Charlotte to take a good look at herself. "I married him out of desperation. [. . .] I settled for what I could get. Don't ever *settle*, Charlotte" (61). Benjamin argues, "masculinity and femininity become associated with the postures of master and slave—how these postures arise in boys' and girls' different relationships to the mother and father, and how they shape the different destinies of male and female children" (8). Although Lacey tells Charlotte not to settle, she can only operate by what she has observed through her parents her entire life. Charlotte has watched her mother live in

subjection to her father; therefore, it is only natural for her to find a relationship where she lives in subjection to a man.

In addition, Lacey explains that she has tried to appease her husband and that her weight became more of an issue for her than she has let on. She tells Charlotte, ““But I tried, oh, for his sake I . . . all those times I went without meals, and got weak and dizzy just trying to reduce some. He wasn’t a satisfied man, Charlotte”” (62). Lacey possesses traits of an eating disorder which helped to facilitate Charlotte’s own issues of a distorted self-image.

Charlotte’s desire to escape is exacerbated over time as she sees that she is living in subjection to her husband. Lacey’s previous advice is contradictory to her current advice to her daughter as she advises Charlotte to not “drive him off” (104). This advice is given after Charlotte defends herself in an argument. Charlotte’s immediate thoughts are that she “would be free of his judging gaze” (104).

Charlotte tries to free herself of her husband’s gaze by having a brief affair with his brother, Amos. Tyler does not elaborate much on this affair and, in fact, presents it as almost a blip in the scope of her life. But this affair is significant due to the fact that the affair with Amos makes her feel as if she can see part of herself again: “Gliding past a mirror, I was accompanied by someone beautiful” (176). For a brief moment, she sees her reflection in the mirror in a positive light. Unfortunately, her view of herself is influenced by another man.

Tyler’s inclusion of another female on Charlotte’s trip allows Charlotte to see a version of her former self. Mindy, Jake’s pregnant girlfriend, serves as a

younger and slightly freer version of Charlotte. She is unable to see her life without Jake. She desires marriage and envisions a life with pretty curtains and a loyal husband. She lacks vision when it pertains to how she sees herself. Like Charlotte as a younger woman, Mindy is moving straight into marriage. Like Saul (and Drumstrings Casey from *A Slipping Down Life*), Jake elects selective hearing as he filters when to listen to Mindy. Mindy asks Jake, ““Will you please tell me what is going on?”” (161). Although Mindy is inquiring about Jake’s immediate circumstance, the question is also emblematic of their life together. Jake responds by telling her to ““Hush *up*”” (161). It is reasonable to believe that she will follow the same path as Lacey and Charlotte.

It is clear that Charlotte’s return to Saul is not merely Charlotte surrendering under the rule of a patriarchal marriage. Instead, Charlotte sees that she desires the life that she returns to because she is now able to see herself clearly. Critics argue that although Charlotte returns home, she has returned on her own with her own new set of rules. Evans contends, “Charlotte Emory returns home from her escape in *Earthly Possessions* wiser and probably more self-sufficient” (98). Likewise, Gullette argues: “When Charlotte comes back and settles down after being kidnapped, the return seems appropriate—this is the life she has deliberately chosen” (113). In fact, Charlotte does return to her family as a more confident and assertive woman. Jones asserts: “Her journey in the novel, including her ultimate resistance of oppression as she walked away from her captor, produces a transformed home where she now has the power to effect change” (181). Like Evie, Charlotte learns how to view herself through a stronger

lens; therefore, she is able to return to her life as a stronger woman, capable of maintaining a clear view of her own being.

Like Evie and Charlotte, Delia, the protagonist in *Ladder of Years* (1995), sees that she is invisible to both her family and to herself. Delia's escape from her family is vital because she is able to establish herself as an independent being, free of both a husband and children. In her article, "Comic Constructions: Fictions of Mothering in Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years*," Heidi Slettedahl McPherson argues:

Delia Grinstead, homemaker, mother of three, youngest daughter of a beloved patriarch, subconsciously understands that these "roles" do not contain her true identity—so she sets out to create another one. Yet in the process, she comes to understand that her attempt to step outside of the roles placed on her by her family entails more than simply renaming herself, or inventing herself anew. [. . .] This emphasis on female identity as constructed—and therefore possibly reconstructed—cannot help but invoke a feminist reading. (134)

Delia obtains her own job and prefers living in a small room rather than the large house that she has lived in her entire life. This "room of her own" (Woolf) defines her self-reliance. Delia makes her own money, quits her jobs when she perceives that she is being treated poorly, and goes back to her husband when she determines she is ready. Delia regains some of the power that she lost when she became a mother and a wife. Jones states, "Within this postfeminist novel then is

a strong feminist assertion about women's capability of transforming their spheres of influence" (182). She is now able to return to her life as Delia, as opposed to Mrs. Sam Grinstead. Macpherson asserts:

Tyler's exploration of gendered identity points to the fact that what seems to be one thing, may actually be something else. Delia Grinstead, homemaker, mother of three, youngest daughter to a beloved patriarch, subconsciously understands that these "roles" do not contain her true identity—so she sets out to create another one. (132)

As she does with Evie and Charlotte, Tyler employs mirrors as a symbol of identity and self-reflection. Throughout *Ladder of Years*, Delia looks into mirrors as she progresses through the states of self-recognition. The image that she sees changes as she begins to see changes within herself. In addition, what she sees in the mirror is often influenced and/or complicated by patriarchal influences prominent in her life.

At the onset of the novel, Delia has a brief, but intense moment with Adrian Bly-Bryce. Adrian asks Delia to be something that she is not—his girlfriend. Like Evie and Charlotte, Delia rejoices in becoming a character of sorts. Delia reflects upon Adrian's view of her: "“Why you're very pretty. You have such a little face, like a flower”" (14). Although his comment is slightly offhanded, if not coerced, it is of great importance to Delia: "“She studied her face in the mirror when nobody else was around. Yes, maybe it did resemble a flower”" (26). She is not yet capable of defining herself based upon her own perception;

therefore, she requires the aid of a male figure to clarify her own image. Her reliance upon the male gaze only works to obscure her perception of herself. In addition, Delia takes on the passive role of woman as this is the only role that she has ever known. Benjamin argues, “even today, femininity continues to be identified with passivity” (87). Even Sam’s description of the first day they met shows a passive young woman: “But you were so shy and cute and fumbly, smiling down at your little glass eyecup of sherry” (306). Throughout her marriage, Delia strives to be a feminine woman by remaining passive.

Delia admires the characters in the romance novels that she reads. Similar to both Charlotte and Evie, her perceptions are not based in reality. The books that Delia favors are romance novels that portray women being rescued and taken care of by men:

So many of these books had wealthy heroes, Delia had noticed. It didn’t matter about the women; sometimes they were rich and sometimes they were poor, but the men came complete with castles and a staff of devoted servants. Never again would the women they married need to give a thought to the grinding gears of daily life – the leaky basement, the missing car keys. It sounded wonderful.  
(29)

The women didn’t matter. What matters are the men that chose to marry them. Before Delia’s “detachment” and transformation, she desired to be one of these women. She sees her involvement with Adrian Bly-Bryce as a scene in a romantic novel. She imagines that “he had come to take her away” (60).

Delia's "affair" almost becomes visible through a photograph. As she does in *A Slipping Down Life* and *Earthly Possessions*, in *Ladder of Years* Tyler also uses photography as a means of verifying one's existence. In a photograph that is meant to provide evidence of Delia's adulterous relationship, Delia is unidentifiable: "It was a Polaroid snapshot, so underexposed that it amounted to no more than a square of mangled darkness" (62). Not only is she unidentifiable to her family, but she is also unidentifiable to herself. Within this photograph, Delia is the "mangled darkness." The mangled darkness symbolizes Delia's view of herself. Likewise, the blurred photograph also exemplifies the family's distorted image of Delia: "everybody stirred and chuckled" (62). Although Delia should be pleased that the image on the photograph is so vague that it makes her unidentifiable, it actually makes her feel slighted and lost: "It was perverse of her, she knew, but for one split second Delia actually considered confessing, just to show them" (62). She desires to "show them" who she really is, but this is impossible as she really does not yet know who she really is. In addition, her family views her as a wife, a sister, or a mother and not as Delia, a woman, and a sexual being.

Delia's arrival in Bay Borough represents a rebirth of sorts. "Delia blinked and took a step backward" (87). Her arrival in Bay Borough is a return home as her ancestors lived there. Previously powerless to find her own way, Delia realizes that under a patriarchal structure she will have to find her own way of progressing: "You always had to begin by finding some man to set things in motion, it seemed" (82). Although Delia wants to find a life of her own, she has

never been given the opportunity to put her life “into motion” without the aid of a man. Delia will find herself and put her halted life into motion in Bay Borough. Delia must step back to the moment when her development as a woman ceased in order to find out who she really is within the scope of her own world.

Delia’s view of herself is also revealed as she is trying on a new outfit to facilitate her change:

[Delia] turned to confront her reflection. She had assumed she would resemble a child playing dress-up, for the hem nearly brushed her ankles. What she found, though, was someone entirely unexpected: a somber, serious-minded woman. (88)

The image that she sees is not the image of a woman that she imagined existed. Without the oppression of her husband, Delia is able to see herself as a woman and not a child. It is with this assertion that she begins to see Miss Grinstead as a character that she is viewing from the outside looking in. Over time, Delia learns to become the character that she has created.

At her new job in Bay Borough, Delia quickly realizes that her input should be valued. Initially, Delia derives joy from playing the loyal secretary role. Later, Mr. Pomfret comes to represent patriarchy within the workforce. hooks asserts, “work does not liberate women from male domination” (49). Mr. Pomfret’s desire to dominate Delia is reflected in his attitude toward her when voicing her own opinion. He says to Delia, ““You are paid for your secretarial skills, not for your opinions”” (159). In essence, Mr. Pomfret desires for Delia to be seen and not heard.

Mr. Pomfret represents the patriarchal structure that Delia has allowed herself to be a part of. Delia sees that she no longer has a need to be controlled: “He’s so bossy, though. So condescending” (167). Now that she has “detached” herself from her family, Delia begins to clearly see that being patronized is not a necessary part of her existence. As a woman, she sees that her desire to just have any job is being replaced by her desire to legitimately validate her existence.

Like Evie and Charlotte, Delia looks for a sign of her existence in the newspaper. The description of Delia is unsure and unclear. The recollections of her disappearance by various family members include: “to the best of their recollection,” “presumably,” and “her family members could not agree upon her clothing” (3). No one in her family is able to summon a very clear description of how Delia looks. In addition, while she is looking for proof of her existence in the newspaper, Delia notices that “No one seemed aware of [her] presence” (99). Delia sees herself as invisible among both her family and society.

In addition, like Charlotte, Delia’s family uses an old and outdated photograph of her to display on the news. Delia’s biggest concern is not how her family reacts, but instead she asks her sister Eliza, ““What photo did they use?”” (115). Delia is astonished when she learns that the image the family has of her is old and outdated. It should come as no surprise to Delia that her family views her as unchanged. Delia learns how to see herself clearly when she leaves her large family home and lives in her own room in Bay Borough.

The only thing that Delia desires is a room of her own. Woolf states, “a woman must have money and a room of her own” (4). Pleased with her small and

sparse room, Delia proudly shows Eliza her symbol of freedom. Caren Town, in her article, "Location and Identity in Anne Tyler's *Ladder of Years*," states, "More than just a blank canvas onto which she can paint her new identity, Delia's space begins to change her sense of self" (11). Delia does not write in her room, but instead she spends every night reading novels from cover to cover. It is through these novels that Delia sees a world in which men save women from a life of slavery and domesticity. It is through these novels that Delia tries to find her place in the world. Benjamin argues, "The fantasy of erotic domination embodies both the desire for independence and the desire for recognition" (52). As her vision begins to clear, she then turns to more substantial literature (i.e. Fitzgerald).

Delia's desire to be recognized leads her to create a manner of seeing in which she believes she sees herself through the eyes of others. In fact, she imagines that she is being seen as she sees characters in the novels that she reads: "anybody watching would think, *That woman looks completely self-reliant*" (123). Delia imagines outsiders seeing her as dependable and confident, but she does not necessarily see herself as being self-reliant. This is something that Delia has yet to prove to herself, but she will learn how to live on her own in Bay Borough. Later, when she is defending herself to her employer and surrogate husband, Joel Miller, for using a public phone, Delia sees an image of herself as she imagines an outsider would: "Delia had one of those flashes where she saw herself through someone else's eyes" (246). She sees a "Mystery Woman" and

she “almost laughs” (246) because she is beginning to see that her own outside images of herself are slightly absurd.

Like Evie, Delia blinks as a means of blocking out images that she does not wish to see. When neighbors, Belle and Vanessa, mention divorce to Delia, “Delia blinked” (132). It is apparent that Delia is not comfortable with the idea of divorce as she blinks when divorce is mentioned. It is clear that a divorce is not what she is looking for. Instead, Delia wants to see who she is within the scope of her family structure.

While almost all of Tyler’s female characters avoid close relationships with other women, Delia becomes a part of a collective group of women. Although these friendships are temporary, Delia relies upon Bella and Ellie to aid her in creating a clear picture of what type of woman that she wants, and does not want, to be.

Belle’s desire to be the perfect woman to countless men shows her need to be accepted and loved. In addition, she views her part in the patriarchal structure to be that of a perfectly domestic woman. She states that she wants to “look domestic for this fella I’ve been seeing” (145). This “fella” happens to be a married man with a new baby. Belle’s inability to see the wrong that this is doing to his wife is alarming as she does not understand how this situation is disrespectful to both herself and his wife. Belle argues, “I need for this guy to see me as proper and respectable. And also you could advise me on the wifely touches” (146). Upon realizing that Belle has been dating a married man,

Vanessa tells Belle “to look for someone who doesn’t *have* a wife” (153). Belle’s need to be told whom to look for exhibits her faulty vision.

Likewise, Joel Miller’s ex-wife, Ellie, is a weather forecaster on television. Tyler’s juxtaposition of Delia and Ellie is essential. Delia, as a childcare worker, physically takes Ellie’s place in the Miller home. On the other hand, while she does not replace Ellie as a wife, she is viewed from the outside as such. While at Ellie’s father’s wedding, Delia feels the guilt of an affair that does not exist: “Guiltily, Delia lowered her eyes” (218). The view that others have of her, as an adulterer, gives Delia a feeling of shame. In addition, she begins to feel the guilt of her affair with Adrian Bly-Bryce. Her unconventional relationship with Ellie allows Delia to see her own mistakes.

Delia’s solitary trip to the beach a year after leaving her family symbolizes an act of freedom. All other trips to the beach are controlled by Sam’s need to plaster her with sunscreen against her will as he is one of the controlling forces in Delia’s life. At first glance it appears as if Sam is just being a considerate husband because he wants her to protect her skin from the damaging rays of the sun. Upon closer look, it is clear that Delia has little control over her own body. When she protests wearing the sunscreen, Sam tells her to ““Hold still”” (73), thereby symbolizing Delia’s life under Sam’s influence. Unable to move forward under his control, Delia “obediently” turns around upon Sam’s request. Like Evie, Delia attempts to assert her identity through her name. Delia asserts her identity as she angrily tells Sam, ““And my name is not *Dee*”” (74). Although it is apparent that she does not wish to be called Dee, her declaration symbolizes much more. It is

within this moment that Delia clearly desires an identity of her own. By asserting that her name is not Dee, she is claiming power beyond the scope of her husband.

While at the beach on her own, Delia neglects to use sunscreen. In addition, the mirror plays yet another important role in the process: “Her first act when she returned to her room [from the beach] at the end of the day was to check the mirror, and every day a more highly colored person gazed back at her” (250). By viewing herself in the mirror, Delia is able to see a person who is unrestrained and colorful.

In contrast, a few months later, after Delia agrees to attend Susie’s wedding, she again looks into the mirror. Her vision is now distorted and impaired: “She looked up and met her own face in the bureau mirror—her eyes wide and stricken” (256). Although her eyes are “wide,” it is clear that by being “stricken” she is feeling pain. Although one can argue that the pain is due in part to her being a stranger to her own family, it is also reasonable to contend that the pain is a result of her now confused identity that she sees in the mirror. Delia will have to return to her family home in order to complete her transformation. It is not until she is able to see herself clearly within her past that Delia will be able to move forward into the future.

During a discussion of her daughter Susie’s impending marriage, Sam takes both Delia and Susie out of the picture: “I hate to see her jumping from school to marriage. From her father’s house to her husband’s house” (242). Although it is clear that Sam’s desire is to see Susie become her own person prior to being married, he still facilitates the oppression of a patriarchal structure. Delia

questions his lack of clarity, but not outwardly. She thinks to herself: “How about her mother? Oh, all right . . . but her *husband’s* house?” (242).

Delia’s return home for Susie’s wedding is ultimately her return to her family. After a year and a half of being away, Delia sees herself as an invited guest in the home, but her family sees her otherwise. They rely on her to fix their mistakes and mishaps. Like Charlotte Emory, Delia desires to return to her home as her vision clarifies. Jones contends, “Delia also seems to be similarly empowered [as Charlotte Emory] at the conclusion of *Ladder of Years*. [. . .] This newly self-sufficient Delia is depicted as a benefit rather than a threat to her family” (280). In addition, Delia’s desire to know that she is going to be seen by her family is, for her, verified when Sam asks if there is a way to “persuade you to come back” (324). Delia sees the clarity in her home that she desires; thus, like both Evie and Charlotte, she returns home under her own authority.

All three women return home with a better understanding of who they are and what their positions are within the family structure. For Evie, she returns to her childhood home as a mother. For Charlotte, she returns to her large family of “surrogate” children and a preacher for a husband. Likewise, Delia, now feeling as if she is has truly been “seen” by her family, stays with her husband and children. Evie, Charlotte, and Delia have clarified vision; thus, they can see themselves and their situations clearly.

Tyler’s female characters view their lives, their life situations, and their families through a different lens than Tyler’s male characters. As wives and mothers, Evie, Charlotte, and Delia suffer from a loss of self distinctly different

from Tyler's male characters. Although all of Tyler's main characters suffer from some form of faulty vision or hearing, her female characters often suffer twofold due to their gender. The patriarchal demands and the priorities of being a wife and a mother hinder their [Evie, Charlotte, and Delia] vision. It is through detachment from their families and their lives that Evie, Charlotte, and Delia learn to see again.

## CHAPTER V

### A CULTURAL VIEW: *DIGGING TO AMERICA*

Tyler's most recent novel, *Digging to America*, progresses beyond the family structure by presenting the structure of the family in relation to cultural identity. *Digging to America* moves away from Tyler's customary focus of a typical white American family. This turn is understandable considering that, in the past six years, the United States has undergone a radical change in cultural identification due to the events of September 11, 2001.

It is reasonable to contend that *Digging to America* is directly influenced by Tyler's family life. In 1962-1963, while working as a Russian bibliographer in the library at Duke University, Tyler met Taghi Modarressi, an Iranian doctor. He proposed to Tyler after dating for only seven months and they married. In addition, they had two daughters, Tezh and Mitra (Bail 5). As part of an Iranian family, Tyler would have observed firsthand the cultural traditions and feelings of "foreignness" that she writes about in *Digging to America*. Cultural differences play a role in the process of identification.

The observance of cultural differences, along with cultural acceptance and political correctness, is prevalent in this work. Cultural stereotyping and profiling has intensified in the past seven years due in part to the after-effects of the attacks on September 11, 2001. In the introduction to *My Sister, Guard Your Veil, My Brother, Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices*, editor Lila Azam Zanganeh contends, "The recent political developments in both countries [. . .] have only complicated the geopolitical and emotional maps" (xiii). Tyler

addresses these complications through character analysis. Like previously mentioned Tyler characters, Tyler's characters in *Digging to America* suffer within the confines of their families and their personal conflicts. In addition, they manage their suffering by employing various (deficient) modes of seeing and hearing.

Like Tyler's past novels, *Digging to America* (2006) addresses identity through an analysis and deconstruction of the family. Like all of Tyler's families, the Donaldsons and the Yazdans are delightfully eccentric. In addition, like the Deckers, the Paulings, the Emersons, the Learys, the Tulls, the Pikes, and the Pecks, the Yazdans and the Donaldsons have difficulties seeing and hearing properly. Throughout the novel, almost every means of communication is blocked by difficulties with seeing or listening.

On the other hand, unlike Tyler's past novels, *Digging to America* utilizes faulty vision and hearing through a cultural lens. In 1993, Elizabeth Evans argued, "Although Tyler does not write political novels, neither does she altogether ignore the political issues of her day" (19). At the time of this statement Tyler had written eleven novels, all pertaining to aspects of the family, but ethnic representation (other than American) was an issue that she had yet chosen to tackle. In the 1980's, Tyler did "visit" gun control and abortion (Gilbert qtd. in Evans 19), but major issues were minor interruptions in Tyler's characters' lives. Abortion was mentioned but never seriously considered or discussed. Gun control was nothing but a blip in a conversation. In contrast, in *Digging to America* the characters see themselves and each other as representations of presumed ethnic

identities. Politics are part of their party conversations; ethnic stereotyping and discrimination, both innocent and deliberate, are part of Tyler's new world.

Diane Hoffman, in her article, "Self and Culture Revisited: Culture Acquisition among Iranians in the United States," points out that "cultural confusion" is a major issue in Iranian-American literature beginning with the pre-revolutionary period (35). More specifically, she asserts that the "loss of self" is a major theme expressed through Iranian-American characters (35). Tyler utilizes this "loss of self" theme in all of her works, but in *Digging to America*, the "loss of self" is in direct relation to ethnic identity. Personal confusion and stereotyping exacerbate each character's difficulties with seeing and hearing one's self, and each other, clearly.

Cultural stereotypes are abundant in this novel. The members of both the Yazdan and Donaldson families observe each other and judge how everyone should act based upon their locations of birth. The stereotyping is not one-sided, though. In fact, assaults are thrown and thwarted from all angles. The Yazdans initially represent Iran while the Donaldsons initially represent America. Zanganeh argues, "Iran's tainted perception of the United States appears to oddly mirror America's perception of Iran" (xiii). At the onset, the perceptions of the families are representative of their presumed cultures. As time progresses, the families' "cultural identities" merge and stereotypes begin to fade.

The surrogate family in *Digging to America* initially develops due to the common bond of foreign adoption. The two families meet for the first time in an airport on August 15, 1997. It is an airport free of mass security and restrictions.

The Yazdans and the Donaldsons are able to meet their new children at the gate, something that they are unable to do later due to the attacks on September 11, 2001: “Speaking of September eleventh. When the girls arrived, we were all at the gate, but this time we’ll be, I don’t know, milling around outside, being shouted at by the police” (170). The security changes in airports due to the events of September 11, 2001 become an important element in their lives because the Donaldsons are unable to recreate a second Arrival Day when they adopt their second child, Xui-Mei. They cannot meet their new child at the gate as they did before.

On the surface, the families are nothing alike. The Yazdans, although American, are visibly “foreign” to others. They are unassuming and concerned only with picking up their adopted child, Sookie (Susan). On the other hand, the Donaldsons are a stereotypical Caucasian American family. Their presence is “obvious” and they have turned Jin-Ho’s arrival into a party. (Bitsy Donaldson will continue to create parties that progressively become more elaborate and more ridiculous as the years pass.) Throughout the novel, Tyler merges the two families as a means of eventually creating one family with comparable expectations of what a family entails. Julie Persing Papadimas, in “America Tyler Style: Surrogate Families and Transiency,” argues:

Tyler’s characters, however, usually do not rely on formally organized support systems; instead they take a more individualized approach, as do many Americans, and form bonds with outsiders to create substitute families. (45)

The Yazdans and the Donaldsons desire children that the respective couples cannot have naturally. They create surrogate families through adoption. But it is not only the children adopted that create the surrogate family. In addition, through their airport meeting, the Yazdans and the Donaldsons will create a surrogate family through the merging of the two families with very different ideas on childrearing, traditions, and life in general.

Evans argues, “Often Tyler’s characters long for the family to appear as it *should be*” (128). Both the Yazdans and the Donaldsons strive to create a picture of how their respective families should appear but fail to immediately understand that the new family that is emerging is beyond their control. As the story comes to an end, a new family materializes. It is the time in between where Tyler explores both the harm and the benefits through faulty seeing and hearing.

Throughout the story, the characters try to find their places within their birth families. In addition, they also struggle to define their places within the surrogate family, and their significance within American society. The blending of cultures and religious backgrounds only serves to complicate matters as each character finds him/herself confronted with cultural stereotypes. Cultural stereotypes not only affect how characters see each other, but also how these same characters view themselves.

As the primary character, Maryam Yazdan represents the conflicting identity of being Iranian-American in contemporary America. In her article, “Stereotyped,” Monica Faridi argues, “When labeling your identity, you can never use too many hyphens. Hyphens will only expand the definition of your

label” (87). Maryam sees the hyphen as problematic. She desires to be loyal to her Iranian roots while simultaneously appreciating the freedoms and the life that she has been able to take advantage of in America. The hyphen only serves to complicate Maryam’s identity due to the fact that the hyphen does not complete her identity. In “Iranian-American Identity,” Rafean Anvari contends, “The hyphenation of their identity (i.e. Iranian-American) symbolizes a transformation or an adjustment to a new culture” (28). Although Maryam has been living in the states for over thirty years, she still views American culture as a “new” culture. She views the combining of these cultures as conflicting; thus, American culture confuses her. She is unable to see herself clearly. Tyler reflects Maryam’s confusion with the use visual and auditory metaphors.

In addition, Maryam’s view of herself and those around her is complicated by her perceived role as a woman—an Iranian-American woman. Farid John Jaffarad, in his essay, “The Hyphen Struggle,” contends, “Consequently, as a society, we often deem it necessary to label individuals with a hyphen such as Iranian-Jew, Asian-American, or Iranian-American woman” (37). Not only is she frequently defined and stereotyped by conflicting ethnicities, but Maryam faces complications due to her gender. She finds that people are often put off by her self-assuredness and unwillingness to remain in social situations that make her uncomfortable. Maryam is defined by others as an Iranian (as opposed to American or Iranian-American) woman; therefore, her self-assuredness is confusing to others. Jaffarad argues, “She seems to be in a constant struggle over which values to embrace and when to embrace her Iranian side versus her

American side” (39). Tyler juxtaposes Maryam with Mrs. Hakimi, her daughter-in-law’s mother. Mrs. Hakimi represents what Americans expect of an Iranian woman—humble, passive, and polite. On the other end of the spectrum, Tyler also gives representation to the “American woman” through Connie Donaldson. Tyler positions Maryam somewhere in between Mrs. Hakimi and Connie. Maryam has a difficult time seeing exactly where she belongs within each extreme definition.

In between Mrs. Hakimi and Connie reside Maryam’s “hyphenated” close friends and relatives. Tyler goes into detail about Maryam’s friend, Kari, and Maryam’s cousin, Farah. Maryam spends time with these women outside of the Yazdan/Donaldson get-togethers. Kari is a very confident and independent female friend originally from Turkey. Tyler defines Kari as a beautiful woman, and she does so primarily through the description of her eyes. Kari is defined as having “hauntingly shadowed eyes” (152); thus, it is easy to develop an image of a confident woman encompassing a bit of mystery.

As a confident woman, Kari utilizes stereotypes against her as a means of power. In conversation, Maryam asks Kari, ““Do you ever feel exposed because you are not half of a couple?”” (152). Kari replies by explaining how she makes the most of the stereotypes that pertain to her in America. Being “exposed” as a woman means being “vulnerable” (152) to men and their advances. Kari exposes male ignorance while protecting herself from the continued advances of men. Not only does she scold her potential suitors by stating ““my culture forbids it,”” but she shows that, in fact, they are unable to see who she really is: ““It’s clear you

don't know I am a widow'" (152). In addition, she jokes to Maryam that she could wear a veil as a way of hiding herself from men. Kari exploits the stereotypes that Americans have of foreigners to her advantage. Being able to exploit others' ignorance to her advantage gives her power as a woman.

Farah is another confident woman in Maryam's life. Farah is Maryam's cousin who embraces her Iranian culture, almost to the extreme, and "is married to an ex-hippie she had met while studying in Paris" (142). She is outwardly "exotic" as she wears outfits so intricate that they would have drawn attention in their home of Tehran. In contrast, Maryam always appears very plain but classy. One can argue that Maryam dresses this way in order to blend in as she has spent most of her life in America trying not to be too American or too Iranian. Farah is undeniably Iranian as is described in not only her clothes but also her features: "She saw Farah's Karimzadeh eyes, long and narrow with pointed corners, and the Karimzadeh nose as straight as a pin. Unlike Maryam, Farah was letting her hairs go gray" (142). Unlike Maryam, Farah wants America to see that she is Iranian. Farah's western husband has nothing to do with her desire to acclimate. Instead, Farah and her husband, William, are a couple in love who admire each other: "He loved to hear her talk about Iran" (146). William clearly represents America while Farah represents Iran. William's attire includes "jeans patched with bits of the American flag" (144). Tyler's intention is to clearly define William as an American. While wearing parts of the American flag, William represents all of America, fragmented into different parts, but clearly being one nation.

Much different from many of Tyler's female characters, Maryam has a support system of female friends. She enjoys cozy dinners, she chats about books, and she has pleasant conversations with women. More importantly, she does not feel emotionally threatened with her friends as she often does with her own family. It is important to note that all of her friends are foreigners. As "foreigners" these women share a common bond of feeling hyphenated. Likewise, Maryam is comfortable being labeled a foreigner.

In most of Tyler's previous novels, the women are isolated by their own behavior. Evans states that Tyler's women do not have many female/female relationships (93). In contrast, in *Digging to America*, Maryam's feelings of isolation are temporarily resolved by her friendships with other foreign women. In fact, her circle of women has been at the center of her social life for many years. Not only do they have "foreignness" in common, but they are women sharing their experiences in America. The dinners that she shares with them give her a feeling of comfort and solidarity as she does not feel the pressure to dress or act any particular way when meeting with them: "Dressing for an evening with her friends, Maryam felt none of the anxiety she used to feel dressing for social events in the old days" (258). Interestingly, most of their conversations center on the behavior of Americans. The isolation that does occur in Maryam's life is self-created. Unlike past Tyler women, Maryam's life is very socially interactive, but while at home, Maryam prefers to be alone in the comfort of her own things. She seeks comfort in her isolation. While her friends and family members are loading up on the newest gadgets and technology, Maryam chooses to remain free of these

modern advances. Her lack of technology and gadgets is comforting to her because it permits her selective isolation and allows her to control all aspects of communication. If she does not want to hear from her family, like most of Tyler's characters, she simply will not answer her phone.

One of the most significant items missing from Maryam's home is an answering machine. Maryam contends that if someone wants to talk to her badly enough, then they will call her back. Her desire to be disconnected from her family is typical of Tyler's characters. The lack of an answering machine provides Maryam with the anonymity that she desires. As her relationship with Dave Donaldson progresses, Maryam's forced immersion into technology proves to be a mistake. Dave requires an answering machine and even goes so far as to coerce Maryam to possess one. Maryam's personal greetings are fractured and often show signs of frustration and technological incompetence: "she didn't know how to work it. [ . . . ] Her outgoing announcement kept reverting, for some reason, to the generic greeting provided by the factory" (188). In contrast, Dave's machine is fully functioning. In addition, Connie's voice is permanently recorded on Dave's machine, and after her death, Dave continues to play Connie's message. Hearing Connie's voice provides comfort to her family. On the other hand, Maryam's frustrated attempts at owning an answering machine only reveal her distress to her family. Likewise, the voice that often replaces Maryam's on the answering machine is "a robot-like male voice without intonation" (188). Maryam's voice is both literally and symbolically being replaced by a male voice.

When Maryam allows Dave's perception to influence her own perception of herself, she is lost and confused. In reality, she temporarily loses her voice.

Like many Tyler characters, Maryam also suffers from a physical form of blindness. Although Maryam is not going blind, like Pearl from *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, she does suffer a form of impairment to her vision. Dave reminds her, "You don't have any night vision. You always end up getting lost" (205). This statement serves two purposes. First, like so many of Tyler's characters, Maryam is in denial of her own issues with seeing. It does not immediately occur to her that being unable to see will get her physically lost. Her blurred vision is a metaphor for her current position in life. Although she cannot see, she is only temporarily blinded due to the fact that her vision will clarify when daylight returns. Daylight, in turn, is another metaphor for her clarity. In addition, in accordance with Hoffman's contention, Maryam's personal narrative is that of the "loss of self." Tyler utilizes this metaphorical representation to define Maryam. It is important to note that Maryam's response to others when they question her poor night vision and deficient navigational skills is: "Not always" (205). Maryam is beginning to understand that, although she frequently misplaces her identity, there are bits and pieces of her self that are clear to her. It then becomes a matter of piecing these parts together to understand her hyphenated identity.

Maryam's perceptions aren't solely on how people view her; she participates in reactive stereotyping and judging of Americans. Even though she grows annoyed at others' needs to separate her as foreign, oftentimes Maryam

separates herself by being the other. Maryam's otherness remains as part of her own desire to see herself as Iranian and American.

Maryam pushes people away due to the fact that she believes they are only interested in her because she is "exotic." In addition, the perceived notions of her "arranged marriage" and her role as "ethnic educator" leave her feeling drained and annoyed. In addition, as previously stated, she views herself as the other.

Maryam states, "You can start to believe that your life is *defined* by your foreignness" (181). Maryam's own view of herself is complicated by the restrictions that she places on herself, her son, and American society in general. She is unable to remove her own idea of "foreignness" from her identity.

Although she has been living in America for her entire adult life, she sees herself as an outsider. In actuality, she prefers to remain as an outsider but is often frustrated as she finds that she is on the outside looking in. In "Reconstructing a New Identity," Nima Tasuji claims, "Iranian-Americans have a perplexing mixture of the East and the West, being out of place everywhere, and really at home nowhere. They cannot relate in a constant way to two or more reference groups in each country" (2). To complicate matters, Maryam also sees everyone else as an outsider.

Names, and the pronunciation of names, are a significant factor in determining how Maryam sees herself. In Iran, Maryam's identity would not have changed after marriage. In essence, "she was an invention of the Americans" (148). In Iran, Maryam would have retained her birth name even after marrying into the Yazdans: "She was a Karimzadeh, and back home she would have stayed

a Karimzadeh even after marriage” (148). Not only is she confused by her status as an Iranian-American, but she is also puzzled due to the fact that her identity has been changed through the change of her name.

Maryam was born in Tehran; therefore, her life, like every other person, was molded by her experiences growing up in Iran. In *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been*, Al Young argues:

Like the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, women of the Iranian Diaspora—mothers, daughter, sisters, wives, girlfriends, aunts, cousins—have inherited the heartbreak and the hurt of the émigré, the immigrant, the exiled, the disconnected, the misunderstood and the unwelcome; in a word: the uprooted.

(Karim xiii)

Maryam's identity is complicated by her life in Iran. Although she is a native Iranian, she has lived in the United States for over thirty years. She often feels “uprooted” and does not always see a place where she fits in. When she looks back on her life in Iran as a young woman, she always thought of herself as “Western.”

While in Iran, Maryam saw herself in comparison to other Iranian woman. Looking back on her life as a college student in Tehran, Maryam saw herself as the “most Westernized” of women in the University. More importantly, Maryam saw herself as “forward-looking” (155). Her need to disconnect from the other women in Tehran clearly shows that Maryam straddled the line between east and

west for a period of time prior to her arrival in America. In addition, as a “forward looking” woman, Maryam sees herself as an individual.

Upon the arrival of her Korean by birth granddaughter, Maryam’s conflict with her identity intensifies. She becomes even more foreign to herself and is left unable to clearly visualize a coherent identity. Although she has lived in the United States for most of her adult life, she sees her own identity as being contingent upon retaining her Iranian heritage. The crazy, contrived celebrations that will work to simultaneously break and bond the Yazdans and the Donaldsons also affect how each individual member of both families sees him/herself and each other.

Often ethnicity is defined by food and celebrations. In *Digging to America* the narrative revolves around various social gatherings. More specifically, the narrative revolves around Bitsy’s invented traditions and parties. The meals and the preparations for the made up celebrations serve as visual metaphors for the acceptance, tokenizing, and stereotyping that occurs between the families.

Shortly after the Yazdans meet the Donaldsons, they are invited to participate in one of Bitsy’s many contrived parties. As the food is passed around two important factors are revealed. First, Brad and Bitsy are vegetarians. As they continue trying to be politically correct, vegetarianism seems to be the only proper mode of eating available to the Donaldsons. Second, Bitsy continues on with her political correctness as she says to Ziba: ““We certainly love *your* cuisine”” (28). By defining Iranian food as Ziba’s cuisine, Bitsy is creating a visual distinction with food.

Bisty's Leaf Raking Party also represents her need to create a culture in which Jin-Ho's and Susan's heritage is maintained and preserved. She believes that Jin-Ho and Susan should become friends so as to "maintain their cultural heritage" (19). But what is their heritage? Being born in Korea but adopted by American parents gives them the hyphenated identity of Korean-American. Like Maryam, Jin-Ho and Susan were born in another country. On the other hand, unlike Maryam, the children have no recollection of a life other than their lives as Americans. While Maryam has recollections of a life in Iran, the children are solely American. Their birth place is not the source of conflict, but rather, it is Bisty's insistence on forcing an additional identity upon them that adds to the confusion.

A lot is revealed during Bisty's celebrations. Unintentional stereotyping occurs as everyone is suffering under a cloud of political correctness. In addition, like all of Tyler's families, the eccentric family structure of the Yazdans and the Donaldsons is revealed. As the two families begin to take the shape of one cohesive family, the eccentricity expands.

Maryam's initial perception of the Donaldsons is that they "seem so ultra-American" (22). From the start, Maryam defines the Donaldsons based upon their Americanness. When Maryam learns that Jin-Ho's complete name is Jin-Ho Dickinson-Donaldson, she is taken aback by the complexity of the merging names. Later, as the actual raking begins, Maryam believes that this "party" is odd and groups together all Americans and strange traditions: "that was Americans for you" (26), as if she is not part of the grouping of people that she considers

American. Although Maryam's identity is hyphenated, her issues with this hyphenating are reflected in how she sees others during the families' celebrations.

Maryam's personal conflict concerning her hyphenated identity comes to light again when she is asked about her life prior to, and in, America:

Maryam hated being asked such questions, partly because she has answered them so many times before but also because she preferred to imagine (unreasonable though it was) that maybe she didn't always instantly come across as a foreigner. (26)

Maryam's internal conflict is apparent. Although she prefers to maintain her Iranian background, she does not wish for her "Iranian-ness" to be quite so apparent. She tires of answering questions about "her" culture as if she was just airdropped into Baltimore from Tehran.

Although Maryam begins to enjoy herself at the Leaf Raking Party, it is evident that she sees herself as separate from American traditions. She does not have "the slightest illusion" of being part of America but "enjoys getting a peek" at the traditions that she has separated herself from (27). Tyler clearly places Maryam as an outsider looking in. It is only through numerous contrived parties that Maryam will begin to see that she is part of the traditions that she considers American.

When describing the Donaldsons' home, Tyler begins her description with the windows: "Sunlight poured through the uncurtained windows" (24). Windows mean different things in Tyler's novels. For a lot of her male characters, windows serve as a means of escape from the realities of life. Oftentimes, as in *A*

*Slipping-Down Life*, the car window serves as a metaphor for change. When it is up, one is trapped. When the window is down, the character assumes some level of freedom. For the Donaldsons, the uncurtained window represents their openness to all cultures. With all good intentions, the Donaldsons strive to not be discriminatory. They truly believe that they are open and willing to see all cultures as equal. Through the uncurtained window, they are opening up their lives to the world. What they don't see is that their methods of visualizing cultures often create a separation, or a distinction, between the cultures. In addition, throughout the novel, Bitsy, more so than Brad, acts as both judge and jury of the political correctness court. Bitsy states, "See how Jin-Ho looks so tan-skinned next to Susan? [ . . . ] We think Susan's father maybe was white. [ . . . ] Oh! Well! But actually that's not something we would *notice*, really!" (25). While Bitsy is quick to point out her observations of Susan's heritage, she is also quick to point out that she is really not seeing the differences at all. In this novel, Tyler elaborates as she has never done before on ethnic biases and stereotypes.

Another significant difference between *Digging to America* and Tyler's previous novels is that often the characters in *Digging to America* are able to communicate solely through eye contact. Immediately following Bitsy's comments, Ziba and Maryam look at each other questioningly: "There was a silence. Ziba rounded her eyes at Maryam—*Why not?*" (25). The silence represents their confusion, while the eye contact is clearly acknowledged by both parties as meaning "why not?" Maryam then quickly shrugs back at Ziba so as to convey confusion by Bitsy's comment. Throughout the entire interaction between

Ziba and Maryam, no words are exchanged, only eye contact and physical motions. It is significant that they understand each other as this is something that is usually lacking with Tyler's characters.

Bitsy attempts to convey to all that she understands child rearing more than everyone. One of Bitsy's allegations is that children only see in black and white. She conveys to Ziba that she might want to wear black and white also, as does Bitsy. In essence, Bitsy is giving the children color-blindness, an ailment that exists with past Tyler characters (Jeremy Pauling, for instance). In addition, she is trying to assert dominance over Ziba's mothering style. Tyler's underlying humor comes to fruition as Maryam mentions the white rice and the black beans. She tauntingly comments, "Are they for the sake of the baby's eyesight?" (32). Maryam's sarcastic nature is again indicative of her view of others.

For Susan's first birthday, the Donaldsons buy Susan a traditional Korean kimono. Tyler refers to these outfits frequently as "costumes," thereby signifying their use as a costume, rather than an outfit. The costume at hand represents Korea; therefore, Bitsy is clearly trying to define the girls as Korean. It is important to Bitsy that the girls maintain their Korean culture, while westernizing the children is a priority for others. Ziba's Iranian-American family is concerned about Susan's eastern appearance: "In L.A. we have plastic surgeons that make Chinese people's eyes look just as good as Western,' she [Maryam] heard Ali's wife tell Ziba that morning. 'I can get you names if you like'" (33). During the second Arrival Day Party, it is also determined that the Donaldson family as a whole sees Susan as looking "too Chinese" (91). Like Bitsy's costumes, the

appearance of these two young children is of highest priority. On some level, both the Yazdans and the Donaldsons believe that how Jin-Ho and Susan are seen by the American public is essential to their success. In addition, the phrase “look just as good as Western” alludes to a superior western ideal.

Again, at the birthday party, food becomes central as the guests “gaped when they saw the buffet table” (34). Upon hearing that Maryam cooked the food, Bitsy humbly asks Maryam for the recipes in a way that connotes that Bitsy sees these foods as ancient and exotic secrets. For Maryam, these meals are normal, everyday foods. She sees Americans as a conglomeration of cultures that are able to pull from all cultures:

By now she was aware that Americans thought recipes were a matter of creative invention. They could serve a different meal every day for a year without repeating themselves—Italian-American one day and Tex-Mex the next and Asian fusion the next—and it always surprised them that other countries ate such a predictable menu. (34)

As parties and get-togethers are planned, traditions and cultures continue to be represented by the food on the table.

Shortly after their meeting, Maryam is inclined to invite the Donaldsons to her home for a traditional New Year’s dinner—Iranian style. Initially, the party was Ziba’s doing as she felt inclined to display their Iranian “culture” on a traditional Iranian Hafsteen table for the Donaldsons. Due to a typical Tyler family miscommunication that is revealed during the party, Maryam ends up

giving the party but is opposed to displaying their culture on the table for everyone to see: “Why should they have to put on these ethnic demonstrations? Let the Donaldsons go to the Smithsonian for that! Let them read *National Geographic*” (36). Cooking an elaborate Iranian meal is now becoming an act of ethnic demonstration. The food is no longer merely for eating; instead, the food represents Maryam’s ethnicity as is seen by the party attendees. While these are mostly everyday foods for Maryam, like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and hotdogs are to Americans, they begin to represent her entire being. Likewise, while planning for the New Year’s dinner, Ziba and Maryam have one of many miscommunications: “Ziba said, ‘It wasn’t a burden! What are you talking about?’” (47). The conversation is confusing as they never truthfully answer each other’s questions. In fact, they are both hearing what they believe the other person is trying to say in order to please each other while replying with an equally agreeable answer. In response to a misunderstanding about the Iranian New Years Party, Maryam states, ““Our family is not good at saying what we want”” (50).

It is also during this party that Tyler addresses political issues. Unlike her previous novels, Tyler addresses foreign politics within the scope of the American mind. On their drive to Rockville for “exotic” ingredients, Maryam reflects back on Kiyam and states, ““If only your father had lived to see the Shah overthrown!”” (37). Maryam argues that the Iranian people who are dead are lucky. She argues this because, through their death, they are unable to see what is going on in Iran. Death prevents full disclosure. Likewise, Tyler displays how different views on

politics created animosity between Maryam and her Iranian friends. As a result, she does not see them anymore.

It is also learned that Sami has never been to Iran. As an American born citizen, Maryam looks at Sami “sadly” while observing his face, particularly noticing his “endearing little spectacles” (38). The “endearing little spectacles” symbolize Maryam’s attitude toward her son’s social awareness. She sees the glasses as being endearing, like a child who makes his non-smoking mother an ashtray in third-grade art class. Like an unusable ashtray, Maryam sees Sami’s social ideals as interesting and cute, but not of much use.

Maryam also reflects back upon her trip to Iran. Upon her arrival she “fully realizes” that she will never see the Iran that she saw as a young girl. Tyler then utilizes a frequently used metaphor. Maryam compares herself to a bird in its cage when she tried to leave Iran. Temporarily halted due to a minor issue with her exit visas, Maryam “felt like a bird beating its wings inside its cage” (39). It is clear to Maryam in the airport that she did not see herself as solely Iranian anymore. Rod Mahmoudizad, in his essay, “The Complexity of Hyphenated Identity,” maintains:

Hyphenated individuals and hyphenated families [. . .] are always struggling to find out which group they belong to. Thus, hyphenated Americans such as Iranian-Americans cannot fit in with a specific group of people who share the same identity because all of them have a different degree of “Iranianness” (or

any other identity) and “Americanness” within them and a different sense of belonging to both of these worlds. (46)

In America, Maryam is able, in part, to be the hyphenated version of her own self; whereas in Iran, Maryam is expected to see herself as solely Iranian but is unable to do so due to the hyphen. It is through her own process that she will find meaning within the hyphen.

Maryam is not only critical of her own self but is outwardly critical and judgmental of others. Being judgmental, Maryam is in fact forming an opinion based upon her observations. She sees a conflict in behavior concerning Iranian-American children. While at the grocery store Maryam is enraged when she witnesses Iranian-American children addressing their parents “using the familiar ‘you’” and “showing bare midriffs” (39). Maryam holds Iranian children to a higher standard than she does American children. She refers to them as “her countrymen” (39). In addition, she is assuming, based upon their appearance, that the children are indeed Iranian. It is important to note that Tyler does not state if the children are speaking English or if they are speaking Farsi. In effect, Maryam is placing the same type of cultural impositions on these children as does Bitsy on Jin-Ho and Susan. Sami comments to his mother: ““Why should they act any better than Americans? [. . .] They’re only behaving like everyone else, Mom; so quit *judging*”” (39). Maryam responds by maintaining her silence. It is within the silence that Tyler’s characters in this novel are often heard. By remaining silent, Maraym is showing her displeasure at her own judgmental ways. Maryam makes

a conscious decision to “watch herself” (39), which displays both her desire to still assimilate and her self-consciousness due to her hyphenated identity.

Maryam’s vision also alters when looking at others. Maryam “noticed” that Mrs. Hakimi allows her family to take advantage of her (42). Ziba frequently interrupts her mother’s conversations in Farsi with disapproval. Ziba is instantly agitated when she hears her mother speaking Farsi in social settings. She encourages, if not demands, that her mother speak English: ““Mummy, *please*; you promised you’d speak English for this!”” (42). Although Ziba is excited about showing off her American culture, she is simultaneously ashamed of her mother’s inability to separate herself from her Iranian identity. Her mother has not adopted the accepted hyphenated version of Iranian and American.

In addition, Maryam sees a connection with Mrs. Hakimi and they too, like Maryam and Ziba, often communicate through eye contact. Mrs. Hakimi looks to Maryam after Ziba scolds her for speaking in Farsi: “Mrs. Hakimi broke off and looked at Maryam helplessly” (43). It is within the eye contact that Maryam is able to relate to Mrs. Hakimi’s confusion. It is during the first Arrival Day Party that Mrs. Hakimi’s character begins to develop. As a traditional Iranian woman, Mrs. Hakimi gives the impression of a modest and congenial woman who only wishes to please those around her. Bitsy views the Hakimis as being “blessedly exotic” and enjoys their presence (61). Bitsy sees the Hakimis as a representation of what white American culture is not—refined, polite, and mysterious.

Mrs. Hakimi is a relatively quiet woman. In contrast, Mr. Hakimi is very social and interactive. Upon their arrival to the party, Mrs. Hakimi “mutely” presents Bitsy with a gift. This silence is a definable part of Mrs. Hakimi’s personality throughout the novel. When Bitsy speaks to Mrs. Hakimi, she raises her voice, the way people talking to foreigners do, believing that it will allow Mrs. Hakimi to hear her more clearly. In addition, Mrs. Hakimi is also unable to accept compliments easily. In fact, she “looks down” when her husband compliments her on her expertise with pastries (67). Without a sound and through a motion of her eyes, Mrs. Hakimi expresses her humble nature.

The Arrival Parties mean different things to each family member. Bitsy initiates the idea of the Arrival Parties, but at the same time, it is important to both Bitsy and Brad that Jin-Ho retains her “Koreanness.” They require Jin-Ho to wear a traditional Korean costume. Bitsy states, ““The girls can wear Korean outfits. Shall we offer to lend Susan a *sagusam*? You can be sure she doesn’t own one”” (53). In addition, Jin-Ho’s Korean hairstyle is preserved. Ironically, it is also Bitsy who initiates the tradition of a sheet cake decorated like an American flag. The American flag sheet cake only serves to complicate both Jin-Ho’s identity and the expectations of those around her. Is Jin-Ho Korean or American?

Brad appears concerned about Bitsy’s “ethnic” ideas for the party, but like a typical Tyler character, he does not vocalize his concern. Bitsy decides on a “sheet cake frosted like an American flag” (53). Tyler utilizes the American flag throughout the novel as a very literal means of American representation.

A tradition within a tradition begins during the first Arrival Day Party; the arrival day video is viewed. As the years pass, the video takes on different meanings to different people. The Arrival Day videotape is a vital visual symbol of the merging of two families into one family. Tyler employs the videotape in three ways: the visual story allows all involved parties to observe what the others observed on August 15, 1997; it serves as visual proof of the memories that the two families now share together; it is also a visual reminder of change. It brings the memories of Arrival Day together to form one memory, as opposed to two.

In contrast, the existing audio tape conveys a different meaning from that of the videotape. Tyler juxtaposes both tapes as confirmation that her characters are both uncomfortable and frequently unwilling to hear each other. The fear of being exposed is paramount in Tyler's characters. While the videotape encompasses everyone, the voice heard on the audiotape is primarily Bitsy, which makes Bitsy uncomfortable with the personal information recoded on the tape. When Sami suggests playing the tape at the party, Bitsy replies, "I think I would feel stupid if other people heard it" (59).

Although most people present at the party were at the airport during the girls' arrival, no one present has seen the videotape prior to this viewing. As Bitsy reflects back upon the actual arrival day, she remembers it as being a "blur" (67). When Ziba speaks of that day, she recalls her parents' absence due to a prior engagement and "lowered her sweeping lashes a fraction of an inch" (68). With this action, Ziba is negatively speaking with her eyes that she doubts that her parents had a prior engagement.

Tyler employs a visual metaphor of people taking pictures of people taking pictures: “He [Mac] was squinting into his video camera, and just beyond him Uncle Oswald was squinting into *his* camera” (71). The Donaldsons’ vision is distorted as the images that are being seen and assessed are recycled images; therefore, the images are not completely authentic. Louis Masur, in his article, “How the Truth Gets Framed by the Camera,” asserts, “I am also struck by how our memories and vision of the past are inseparable from the form of the prints” (B7). The chain of photo/video capturing is emblematic of the Donaldsons’ desire to capture a memory for the future. People taking pictures become part of that memory.

It is also on the videotape that Connie is preserved for the future: “Connie appeared” (71). In her life, Connie lives like any other woman. She takes care of her family, goes to parties, and spends her days with Dave. Later, in her death, she is defined by her image before, during, and after the tape. As the years progress, the tape serves as a signifier for Dave’s view of Connie. Dave is able to see her alive, but also dying, on the videotape.

At any given moment, any of Tyler’s characters have moments when they feel foreign. Although Bitsy is determined to integrate all cultures into her life, she finds moments when, as an American, she still sees herself as a foreigner. During a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Hakimi in which they are speaking Farsi, Bitsy becomes the outsider: “Bitsy couldn’t understand his words. She had to guess at his meaning just from his tone, as if she were a foreigner in an unfamiliar country” (79). Bitsy is able to hear the words but she is unable to

understand their meanings. As in all of Tyler's families, words are spoken, and oftentimes even heard, but they are frequently misunderstood or ignored. There is no difference between Bitsy not being able to understand the Hakimis and Daniel Peck's (*Searching for Caleb*) selective hearing. In both instances, family members are not being heard.

Hearing, or not hearing, is prevalent during a discussion of the Arrival Day parties. During the discussion, Sami declares:

“Doesn't it strike you as quintessentially American that the Donaldsons think the day their daughter came to this country was more important than the day she was born? For her birthday they give her a couple of presents, but for the day she came to America it's a full-fledged Arrival Party, a major ceremony of song and a video presentation. Behold! You've reached the Promised Land! The pinnacle of all glories!” (87-88)

Sami's remark clarifies his feelings about America and about the Donaldsons. In his sarcastic tone he critiques an American ideal that relies upon a “west is best” attitude. In response, Ziba tells her relatives to “ignore him” (88). By permitting her Iranian relatives to ignore her husband, she is disregarding his opinion. Instead, she goes on to explain that this year she will be hosting the Arrival Day Party and it will be Iranian themed. The meal shows an immersion, or conflict, of identities as the Iranian foods are commingled with the American flag sheet cake.

This specific Arrival Day Party is, in fact, a female dominated event: “There happened to be seven relatives visiting at the time of the Arrival Party:

two of Ziba's brothers and their wives, two young nieces, and Aunt Azra" (88). Sami's ability to communicate with his female relatives is lacking as he is "drowned out" by Ziba's female relatives. He declares, "'You've missed my whole point!'" (88). Again, no one hears him. Although he is confused by the idea of creating an Iranian meal for what is essentially a "welcome to America" party, he "sees that he has lost his audience" and quits trying to be heard (88).

The next Arrival Day Party begins with an announcement by Bitsy: "'We've brought photographs from last year so we can set up an exhibit'" (94). Exhibits are generally set up in museums. Bitsy's continual tokenizing of the children and their culture is evidenced by her need to display, like an exhibit, the day of their arrival. Like a dinosaur exhibit at the museum, Bitsy hopes to set up visual evidence of Jin-Ho and Susan's past arrival days. Likewise, during this party, a lot of eye communication takes place between the characters: Sami "tries to catch her [Ziba's] eye but she wouldn't look up" (100). Instead, Ziba is "gazing down at her plate" (100). Sami is trying to comfort Ziba because she appears upset. Sami instead catches Mrs. Hakimi's eye. This makes him uncomfortable because the message that he is conveying with his eyes was meant for his wife and not his mother-in-law.

Later, during a dispute between the families, Susan looks at her father [Sami] with "her eyebrows raised in two worried slants" (102). Without words, Susan is able to convey worry to her father through eye contact. Again, during an argument over childrearing, Sami defends Ziba. In return, Bitsy looks at him square in the face to convey her astonishment. Sami then "raises his eyes to his

guests” (104), and their horror is shown through their expressions. No words are spoken.

Sami and Brad see that their dispute over their wives is silly, and they proceed to hug each other in an almost manic state. Tyler ends the second Arrival Day Party with the following: “Two wild crazy Americans, two regular American guys” (105). Tyler is trying to equalize them by plainly stating that even though Sami’s heritage is Iranian, the bottom line is that they are both just American guys.

While planning the third Arrival Day Party, neither Bitsy nor Dave listens to each other, even though they are on the telephone having a conversation. As Bitsy discusses with her father the menu for Arrival Day, Dave offers suggestions that Bitsy ignores: “But Bitsy wasn’t listening” (111). Likewise, Dave chooses to not hear Bitsy. Tyler uses many of her characteristic visual and auditory metaphors here:

If Dave stretched the telephone cord to its very farthest limit he found he could reach the remote control for the television set. He switched on the evening news and then hit the mute button so that Bitsy would not suspect. (112)

Like those in Jeremy Pauling’s boardinghouse and Evie and Clotelia in the Decker household, Dave uses the television as a means of not hearing. In contrast, unlike Tyler’s previous characters, Dave is not watching game shows or soap operas, but instead, Dave is watching the news. While the news suggests knowledge of world events, it is also important to note that Dave has placed the

television on mute so that Bitsy does not hear him not listening. Although Dave has the news on, he is not taking in any actual knowledge of world events that may help him gain a deeper understanding of other cultures.

Instead, Dave tries to understand Maryam by observing her. During the third Arrival Day Party, Dave is trying to see who she is, and in doing so, he is required to alter his gaze to see her adequately: “He looked over at her. He was often startled by Maryam’s smallness—someone so elegant should be statuesque, it seemed to him—and now he had to lower his gaze a few inches to take in her profile, her eyes trained on the other guests” (119). Not only is he observing her, he is observing Maryam looking at everyone else. Dave is also coerced into looking at pictures from the previous Arrival parties. Mr. Hakimi forces Dave to “look” at the pictures (115). Although Dave is apprehensive, he acts as if he is paying attention by taking his glasses out of his pocket. The glasses allow Dave to feign interest, but Tyler never clarifies whether or not Dave actually places the glasses on his face: “Dave had to walk over there and pull his glasses from his pocket to demonstrate his interest” (115). By “demonstrating” interest Dave is showing that he does not desire to see the pictures. Dave’s “demonstration” illustrates his need to blur his vision from the realities of his existence; thus, Dave chooses to reside in a state of blindness as a means of protecting himself.

The pictures represent the distorted family image. The pictures create an instant memory and solidify the Arrival Party moments in history. In addition, the physical aspects of the actual pictures are symbolic of the family: “most of them unframed and curling in the middle” (115). The images within the pictures are

unchanged, but through time and wear the components that hold the images distort the images. Masur argues, “What every photographer captures is of the moment and beyond it, random and in odd ways determines, fixed yet always changing” (B8). In addition, without frames, the pictures have a hard time standing on their own. This is a metaphor for the combined family of the Yazdans and the Donaldsons. Without a good foundation, the family members are disjointed and fragile. This is demonstrated when Dave is forced to look at the pictures on the mantel.

Dave is clearly fragile in the picture of him and Jin-Ho. He sees that he looks horrible and cannot believe that he ever looked so overwrought: “I look ruined!” (115). It is as if he has not looked in the mirror in the past two years and this is the first image that he has seen of himself. Still, this image that he sees of himself remains in the past for Dave as he assumes that he does not look that way now but is “almost certain” that he “must have progressed” since Connie died (115).

Dave remains distant as the family is involved in normal conversation. He “listened with what he hoped was an attentive expression” (116). Here, Dave is neither fully listening nor completely observing. Instead, as Tyler frequently does, she mixes both the senses of hearing and seeing. She does this as a means of conveying how the two senses are often utilized simultaneously. Dave hopes that the way that he appears will be proof that he is listening to the conversation.

A short time later, as the “family” is watching the Arrival Day video, Dave attempts to “watch more closely” (118), but Tyler never clarifies whether or

not Dave is wearing his glasses, which leaves one to question as to whether or not he is seeing clearly. In addition, Dave is uncomfortable with the prospect of others noticing that he is trying to see his deceased wife on the video. During this Arrival Day Party the video is given a new title that includes Susan. Including Susan in the new title—*The Arrival of Jin-Ho and Susan*—provides evidence that the families are beginning to merge together to eventually form one family.

Maryam serves as a liaison between the Iranian relatives and the American relatives. Maryam's identity is complicated by her own sense of foreignness, but it is this foreignness that connects Maryam to the Hakimis: "And the Hakimis felt even less connected, if you judged by their glazed smiles. Only when Maryam emerged from the kitchen, where she must have been helping out, did they come to life" (116).

Likewise, Maryam shows compassion and understanding for Dave through her silence. After the video, Maryam notices that Dave is silent and has his eyes fixated on the television screen. Dave stares at one spot because he does not want anyone to see his emotional state. In addition, he is looking at the spot where he last saw Connie. His thoughts are interrupted by Maryam's concern, and he replies, "I liked seeing her so healthy" (118). Maryam's sympathy is then expressed through her eyes as she says nothing other than raising her eyebrows at Dave's comments. Dave later explains to Maryam that he regrets moments that he should have spent with Connie: He recalls putting in a sound system (that he invented) instead of seeing a movie with Connie. Again, Tyler merges auditory and visual symbols together.

Dave's memories of Connie are complicated by his own guilt. Dave tells Bitsy: "When I think back on your mother's illness I see I reached a point where I couldn't wait for that all to be over with. I'm horrified at myself" (125). Dave is sickened by his own behavior during Connie's illness. Likewise, looking back on Connie's last days, Dave sees Connie's illness as his own illness. He frequently suffered from the same side effects of the chemotherapy as did Connie.

It is important for his view of the future to believe that Connie is watching over him: "His [Dave] dreams had become so vivid. [. . .] He closed his eyes again and willed her, willed her. He summoned up her most concrete details" (126-27). He desperately tries to see Connie in his dreams, but these distorted and uncontrolled images only hurt Dave:

He cocked his head to listen for a winding-up note in Connie's voice, but she wasn't speaking just then and he realized now that she had been silent for several minutes. Then he understood that the silence was real—the silence in the actual bedroom—and that Connie wouldn't be speaking ever again. (128)

Instead, Dave, looking for a replacement wife, sees Maryam in a dream. Within his dream he sees Maryam guiding him out of the field, thereby symbolizing Dave's need to be lead: "Then he felt a hand slipping into his, and he turned to see Maryam Yazdan. [. . .] he tightened his hand around hers and followed her out of the field" (130). He takes the dream as a sign to pursue Maryam relentlessly. Dave's choice for a replacement is misguided, though, as Maryam is unable to guide herself out of the maze that she has found that she is lost within.

During the fourth Arrival Day Party there is no American flag sheet cake, but instead, there is a baklava with American flag toothpicks all over it. This represents another merging of cultures. The Yazdans and the Donaldsons decide to play the videotape but no one pays any attention to the memories unfolding on the television: “The videotape ran almost unobserved” (201). People would only “glance” at the screen during a lull in their conversations. Not much is mentioned concerning the fourth Arrival Day Party:

Several women started cleaning up while the other guests stood about in small groups, merely glancing toward the screen from time to time and remarking how small the girls used to be, or how much more hair Brad used to have, before returning to their conversations. (201-2)

Tyler shows her characters’ disinterest so as to elaborate on how mundane this event has become.

In addition, the later Leaf Raking Party is significant. While the first Leaf Raking Party was the first celebration where the Yazdans and the Donaldsons came together, this Leaf Raking Party causes the families to temporarily break apart. Communication issues ensue as Dave proposes to Maryam. Before, during and after the proposal, both verbal and eye communication blur. “Maryam looks puzzled” (208), as she did not see this proposal coming. “Sami looked over at him [Dave],” but he too is unable to see what is about to transpire (208). During the actual proposal, Maryam “looked at the girls” instead of answering Dave. Still without answering, she “looked past the girls to the others” (209). She finally

looks back at Dave after looking at everyone else for guidance and agrees to marry him.

It is also important to note that, unlike Maryam and Ziba, Bitsy and Ziba are unable to communicate through eye contact. As Dave is preparing to propose to Maryam, Bitsy looks to Ziba for answers: “Bitsy raised her eyebrows at Ziba, but Ziba had no idea” (207). Ziba’s inability to read Bitsy illustrates the muddled state of Ziba and Bitsy’s relationship. While other members of the Yazdans and the Donaldsons are learning to understand each other, Ziba and Bitsy are on completely different pages. Although they are friends, they are unable to communicate with each other effectively.

In contrast, Maryam is able to find clarity after spending time alone in her home. The realization that she has made a mistake is clear. Maryam has an “unhealthy look” and is distraught over the public viewing of the marriage proposal (210). Again, through eye contact, Maryam conveys to Sami that she needs him to speak for her: “She looked over at Sami. [. . .] ‘Mom didn’t mean to say yes, he told her [Ziba]’” (211). Maryam “looked at Ziba” but, unlike previous times, Ziba does not return the gaze.

Maryam accuses Dave of being too American. Maryam’s “loss of self” is aggravated by Dave’s Americanized Iranian traditions:

“Americans are all larger than life. You think that if you keep company with them you will be larger too, but then you see that they’re making you shrink; they’re expanding and edging you out. I could feel myself slipping away.” (212)

It is within this declaration that Maryam's Iranian accent is intensified as a means of trying to alleviate the hyphenated "Americanness" from her identity. Maryam "looked next at Ziba, but Ziba said nothing" (213). In her silence, Ziba is expressing her disapproval. The Yazdans will continue to express disapproval as Bitsy continues to invent reasons for get-togethers. Bitsy's Binky Party is a disaster due to the fact that the Yazdans and the Donaldsons no longer see eye to eye. Separated by Maryam's refusal of marriage, the families are momentarily two distinctly separate families. Likewise, as the families move apart, Bitsy's desire to keep the families, and the cultures, merged, causes her to not see clearly. Bitsy and Brad have adopted a child from China, and like Jin-Ho, have retained her Chinese name—Xui-Mei. In an effort to get Xui-Mei weaned from her pacifier, Bitsy has a Binky Party. Dave tries to get Bitsy to see that Xui-Mei will grow out of the pacifier. Although he makes an attempt to be seen by being heard, he physically leaves so that he cannot hear Bitsy's replies: "Then he left in a rush, as if he didn't want to hear what Jin-Ho's mother would answer" (222).

Like the Gower cat in *Morgan's Passing*, even animals and imaginary characters in Tyler's world utilize their vision and hearing in altered ways. When Jin-Ho asks her mother why the Binky fairy just "didn't come this morning," her mother replies, "That was just a . . . miscommunication" (217). With Jin-Ho growing into her own person, she has ideas and questions Bitsy is unprepared to answer. Bitsy and Jin-Ho's distress is amplified by Xui-Mei's incessant crying as she is being weaned from her Binky. As Bitsy talks to Jin-Ho about the party, she does not notice that Jin-Ho is not listening: "Jin-Ho said, 'MmHm,' with her

fingers stuck in her ears” (224). Even as a child, Jin-Ho begins taking on the traits of her family.

As Jin-Ho ages, she sees that she hates the Arrival Parties. Her dislike for the costumes, the food, and the video is due to the fact that she feels tokenized. She does not view herself as different from the other children in school, but her parents are set on reminding her that she is different. She is from Korea. They want her to be Korean. Their expectations of Jin-Ho are stressful to Jin-Ho because they expect her to educate Americans about Korean culture and diversity. Bitsy and Brad force her to maintain her Korean hairstyle, wear traditional Korean garb, and eat traditional Korean food. In addition, they try to teach her a language that she is unfamiliar with since she has been raised in America. Likewise, they confuse these very young children by redefining who their mothers may be: “Jin Ho’s mother said, ‘Someday you might even travel to Korea together and look up your biological mothers.’ ‘Why would we want to do that?’ Jin-Ho asked” (220). Jin-Ho clearly defines herself as American, not Korean. At five years old, Jin-Ho is more aware of her own identity than her parents: “Jin-Ho was not about to travel to Korea. She didn’t even like the food from Korea. She didn’t like wearing those costumes with the stiff, sharp seams inside, and she never, ever, even once in her life watched that stupid videotape” (220). Bitsy’s incessant desire to create a cultural identity for both Jin-Ho and Susan only serves to distance the two girls: “‘Why, maybe even your mothers go back!’ she said. ‘Maybe your biological mothers were best girlfriends in Korea.’ Jin-Ho was very careful not to let her eyes meet Susan’s” (241). Jin-Ho’s need to avoid eye contact

with Susan is important because she does not want to acknowledge the Korean connection that Bitsy is trying to impose upon the girls.

The final Arrival Day Party is, in essence, Maryam's Arrival Day Party. The initial intent of the Arrival Party was to welcome both Susan and Jin-Ho to America. Although Maryam has been living in America most of her adult life, she has not accepted her Americanness. Instead, Maryam has spent much of her life in America defining herself as the other: "[Maryam] wondered if every decision that she had ever made had been geared toward preserving her outsidership" (270). Maryam's final acceptance of her identity and of her newfound family begins with "laying one arm across her eyes which felt hot and tired and achy" (272). Symbolically, this gesture represents the exhaustion of running from oneself and one's family. By placing her arm across her eyes, Maryam is temporarily blinding herself to her own illusions and allowing herself to drift off to sleep where her visions will be uncontrolled. In her dreams she sees the Arrival Party, including all of its pleasures and perceived faults that she is now unknowingly missing. Maryam finally finds acceptance in a "typical" American family, complete with a hodgepodge of cultures and beliefs. This moment is symbolic of Maryam's current vision of herself that is the result of past self-denial. Her eyes are "tired and achy" due to the fact that she has expended an enormous amount of energy observing both herself and others while hoping to finally see who she really is in the eyes of others. In order for Maryam to take the next step in self-identification, she must rest her eyes in order to gain a fresh outlook.

Maryam is awakened by the ringing of the telephone. Sami says to her that “the coast is clear” (273). While Sami is referring specifically to the Donaldsons leaving the Arrival Day Party, it is also symbolic of Maryam’s clarity. The “coast is clear” for her to be exactly who she is without spending every minute trying to clearly define the hyphen that connects her two identities. Instead of defining “Iranian” and “American” separately, Maryam accepts the hyphen and sees that she is all encompassing.

In addition, the Donaldsons come to Maryam’s home. As she passes “an open window,” she notices Brad, Dave, and the rest of the Donaldson family (274-75). For a brief moment, she is still separated from the family by the window as she looks down upon the entire Donaldson clan. As they turn to leave, she spins “away from the window” (27). Maryam spinning away from the window symbolizes her final moment of clarity. She sees that she is also part of this manufactured family. Maryam’s journey of the “loss of self” ends by turning away from the window. She is turning away from what separates her from everyone else as she declares, ““Wait for me!”” (277).

Like all Tyler characters, Maryam Yazdan suffers from the basic desire to know who she really is. Throughout her journey, the lives of both the Yazdans and the Donaldsons become entwined as they learn about their lives in America. Cultural differences serve as both connecting and separating factors. As two separate families with different traditions and histories, the Yazdans and the Donaldsons begin to merge their families and create new traditions. In “Iranian-American Identities: Peeling Away the Layers,” Ali Baghri contends:

Identity can be paired down to its most basic element: human relationships. There are fundamental truths about human nature that everyone can understand. There are pervasive shared human experiences. There are universalities that cut through language barriers, political differences, and even cultural differences. Our identities at their core are about how we relate to other people. (78)

Tyler's characters have a love/hate relationship with human relationships. It is within human relationships that their inability to see and/or hear correctly is revealed. In *Digging to America*, Tyler's visual and auditory metaphors shift toward cultural representation and identity. Like all Tyler families, the Yazdans and the Donaldsons have issues with seeing and hearing, both literally and metaphorically. Likewise, the lens that they see through is a cultural lens that has been blurred by stereotypes and discrimination. It is not until Maryam, and both the Yazdan and the Donaldson families, accept these differences, that a clear lens is present to see through.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

On the surface, Anne Tyler's novels could be defined as nothing other than a conglomeration of eccentric family members attempting to survive within an eccentric family structure. When one delves deeper though, it is clear that Tyler examines both traditional and non-traditional families and the plights of the individuals within these families. Alice Hall Petry argues that Anne Tyler examines "the dynamics of the individual and the family [and] man's inability or unwillingness to communicate" (*Understanding Anne Tyler* 23). For Tyler's fans, over the past forty-four years Tyler has created characters that are real and relatable. Their main method for surviving requires a "blinding" or "deafening" of his or herself to the realities of the families from which he or she derives, and also the new families that are created within this structure. It has been shown that almost all of Tyler's characters suffer due to their desires to be seen and heard. From the teenaged girl longing to know who she will become, to the young couples trying to find a part of themselves within newly adopted foreign children, to the middle-aged men and women who have lost a part of themselves, Tyler perpetuates an environment in which all of these characters long to be seen and heard.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Gilbert argues that "Tyler's characters go to extraordinary lengths to break out and be seen. To be seen as an individual, alive in the present, to have focused upon oneself the full attentive gaze of the other" (265). Regaining sight or hearing does not necessarily represent a major

change for most of Tyler's characters. Instead, what occurs for these characters is a realization that they live within a "dysfunctional" structure; thus, most of her characters remain within the families that they cannot leave, no matter how hard they try. What changes, though, is their perception of their families due to the fact that their faulty vision has been corrected. In addition, those who learn the truth are able to see/hear their respective family members for who they are, rather than what they want them to be.

Time and space restraints have not permitted me to address every one of Tyler's novels. That does not mean, though, that not all of Tyler's novels follow the same patterns of faulty vision and hearing. In fact, the opposite proves to be true. All of Tyler's main characters suffer from a form of faulty vision and/or hearing. It is within the scope of visual and auditory metaphors that Tyler creates her characters' journeys toward self-identification.

In *If Morning Ever Comes* (1964), Ben Joe Hawkes' family is "blindly cheerful" (back cover). Not only is the Hawkes family "blind," but like all Tyler families, they utilize selective hearing in order to survive: "How could he tell anything about a person if he could not see him? Sometimes he [Ben Joe] thought something must be wrong with his ears; what he heard told him almost nothing" (13). In addition, in a manner similar to James and Ansel Green, Morgan Gower and Jeremy Pauling, Ben Joe also uses windows as a transparent shield to protect himself from the outer world: "Ben Joe stopped in front of the window and looked out. There was a Venetian blind between him and the outdoors" (12). By the end of his journey, Ben Joe learns how to see his world a little bit more

clearly: “Behind his own eyelids the future rolled out like a long, deep rug, as real as the past or the present ever was” (243).

Tyler’s fourth novel, *The Clock Winder* (1972), explores the life of the Emerson family and their female handyman, Elizabeth Abbott. Both Pamela Emerson and Elizabeth Abbott serve as central characters who try to learn how to live within the confines of a structured environment. In addition, these structured environments leave little room for the women to explore their own identities. The Emerson house itself is described as “hooded and silent” (3). Mrs. Emerson attempts to control her environment by silencing everyone. Elizabeth Abbott leaves her family home to avoid living the life of a married woman, only to become trapped in the oppressive environment of the Emerson household.

Macon Leary, of *The Accidental Tourist* (1986) also illustrates issues with faulty vision and hearing. As Macon learns how to live his life without his son, Ethan, who was murdered, his ability to see clearly falters. It is only in his dreams that he can see Ethan; therefore, he reverts to living in a dreamlike state: “Macon closed his eyes and drifted off. [. . .] But eventually he found himself conscious of his dreams. [. . .] Ethan, at two, at four floated up into his vision as clearly as a color film projected upon the bedroom ceiling” (14-15). As Macon’s vision fails, so does his marriage. Macon’s vision is also hindered due to the physical darkness of the nighttime. Looking through windows, Macon desperately searches for light in the darkness: “he’d stand at the bedroom window looking over the neighborhood—black branches scrawled on a purple night sky, a glimmer of white clapboard here and there, occasionally a light. Macon always took comfort

if he found a light” (17). Macon’s need to find the light through the windows shows that he is searching for a way out of his blindness. It is not until he meets Muriel Pritchett that she literally leads him, like the dogs that she trains, out of the darkness and into a brighter future.

*Breathing Lessons* (1988), *Back When We Were Grownups* (2001), and *The Amateur Marriage* (2004) all address a form of faulty vision that occurs as the female characters enter middle-age. In *Breathing Lessons*, Maggie Moran struggles to discover her place within her family. Her vision is altered as she cannot truly see the woman she believes herself to be. In addition, her husband Ira eventually sees her clearly as “her eyes filled with tears” (174). Although Maggie’s vision is still blurred, Ira wishes that others could view Maggie as he does: “if only people would see” (174). Like Delia from *Ladder of Years*, Rebecca “Beck” Davitch, from *Back When We Were Grownups*, finds that she has lost the image of herself that she possessed prior to marrying Joe. At the age of fifty-three she thinks to herself, “The old Rebecca would have never known the woman she saw in the mirror. [. . .] She opened her eyes in the dark” (80). Likewise, in *The Amateur Marriage*, Pauline Anton finds herself alone after her thirtieth wedding anniversary. She is viewing photographs of herself and Michael before they met. While viewing the photographs she thinks about the past thirty years of her life. Tyler again uses photographs as a catalyst for self-reflection.

In *Saint Maybe* (1991), the Bedloe family’s vision and hearing are significantly altered by the death of a family member and religion. Danny Bedloe’s car accident, that is believed to be a form of suicide, is the catalyst for

Ian Bedloe's murky vision and hearing. As Ian bears the responsibility of taking care of his brother's children, he learns to survive by altering how he sees and hears the occurrences around him: "But he [Ian] must not have been listening" (70). Likewise, it is through religion that Ian blinds himself to the outside world. Like Macon Leary, Ian Bedloe requires the help of a female to lead him out of his metaphorical darkness. Rita diCarlo, a consultant of clutter, comes into Ian's life and slowly helps him to regain his vision as she is able to see what "clutter" needs to be removed: "'Yes, I see'" (289). It is with Rita's help that Ian relearns how to see and hear clearly.

Finally, Barnaby Gaitlin of *A Patchwork Planet* (1998) lives with blinders on and will require the aid of a female companion to help refine his vision. Unlike most of Tyler's other male characters, Barnaby ends his journey alone as he learns how to see himself more clearly than others can see him. It is Sophia Maynard's doubt in Barnaby that propels him to clarify his vision so that he can survive on his own.

It is only with her most recent novel that we see a shift in Tyler's writing. As was mentioned in Chapter IV, through a deep analysis of *Digging to America*, it is clear that although Tyler's plot revolves around the structure of the family, her writing has evolved beyond the structure of the white American family. In fact, her analysis of the family has expanded to include different cultures. On the other hand, Tyler's use of metaphorical sight and vision is intensified in *Digging to America*. As I have shown, all of the main characters in this novel are represented as suffering from some form of metaphorical blindness or deafness

due to their position within American society. As our society remains intact, but ever so slightly changing, so will the novels of Anne Tyler.

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