

ANNE TYLER'S USE OF RELIGION AND FORTUNETELLING
IN THREE NOVELS

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BY

NANCY C. BRAY, B.A.

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ABSTRACT

Nancy C. Bray

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The purpose of this study is to examine Anne Tyler's use of religion and fortunetelling in her novels. In determining my conclusion, I read all ten of Anne Tyler's novels and discovered that fortunetelling appears significantly in the plots of Searching for Caleb and Earthly Possessions. These two novels, plus The Clock Winder, also contain ministers. Therefore, I chose these three novels for my study. Additionally, I found that no other researcher has researched my topic. Previous Tyler researchers emphasize Tyler's theme of the family and her use of eccentric characters. Tyler's recognized identity and fascination with isolates appear in her choice of the practitioners of religion and fortunetelling in the three novels above. Tyler combines diction, satire, and logic with plots involving ministers, their families and congregations, and fortunetellers to show that the answers to life's problems come from those who feel, not from those who are ritualistic.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine Anne Tyler's use of organized religion and fortunetelling in three novels: The Clock Winder (1972), Searching for Caleb (1975), and Earthly Possessions (1977). In the three novels listed above, Tyler appears to be questioning the efficacy of organized religion in meeting human needs. All three novels contain ministerial families who figure prominently in the plots: In The Clock Winder, Elizabeth, the main character, is the daughter of a Baptist minister; in Searching for Caleb, the daughter of the main characters marries a minister of an unnamed denomination; and in Earthly Possessions, the main character, wife of a minister, is taken hostage in a bank hold-up. In two of these novels, Searching for Caleb and Earthly Possessions, Tyler juxtaposes fortunetelling and organized religion.

Tyler's works are certainly worthy of study. That she is a popular modern American writer is evident by her position on the best seller list and by the publication of all ten of her books in paperback form. Popularity in itself is one criterion for studying Tyler's writing, but Tyler is now beginning to receive the prestigious accolades

of recognized literary groups. In "The Individual in the Family: Anne Tyler's Searching for Caleb and Earthly Possessions," Nesanovich points out that in May, 1977, Tyler was cited by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for "literary excellence and promise of important works to come" (170). Since that time, Tyler has published three more novels and has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

Because her researchers have generally limited her thematic treatment to that of the family, her work has not received the intensive examination it deserves in other areas. For example, Doris Betts finds that "[H]er microcosm is the family, containing its two extremes, the stay-at-home and the runaway" (27). Betts further sees "other persistent Tyler motifs" as "leaving and returning," "the desire for dream-parents and dream-lives but the confrontation with real ones," the "conflict between individual freedom and duty to others," and "the pull between parents and social life" (28), all of which are subdivisions of the basic family theme. One researcher, Bruce Cook, does allude to Tyler's Quaker background in revealing that Tyler's early childhood was spent in a number of North Carolina Quaker cooperative communities (40), and Laurie Brown echoes this information in

quoting Tyler herself: "'[Growing up in a Quaker community] set me far enough outside the regular world that I have been able to view things from a certain distance . . .'" (11). This Quaker background, however, can be seen in Tyler's use of religion and fortunetelling, although a search of existing studies failed to reveal that anyone has previously examined either of these areas in Tyler's novels. In fact, research shows that very little scholarly study has been published about Tyler's novels. The most lengthy study is a dissertation by Stella Nesanovich.

I have read all ten of Anne Tyler's novels, and by surveying the research, I discovered that no analysis of religion and fortunetelling has been done, as previously mentioned. The three novels discussed herein are the only three in which a minister or his family are important characters, although ministers are mentioned in several others, as will be commented upon in Chapter V. Fortunetellers appear in no other Tyler books.

For the purpose of this paper, religion is defined as the visible and official organized local body of church members, their ministers and the ministers' families, and the activities and rituals of both groups in carrying out their beliefs in God. Fortunetelling includes unorganized,

individually practiced, intuitive methods of foretelling the future by such means as Tarot cards and palmistry.

In examining religion and fortunetelling in the three novels, I have considered the following questions:

1. How are ministers and their families portrayed in a religious setting?
2. How do church members react to or interact with the minister and his family in a church or church-related setting?
3. How are fortunetellers portrayed?
4. What is the role of diction in furthering the images in questions 1, 2, and 3?
5. For what purpose is satire used in the discussion of ministers, church members, and their beliefs?
6. How is logic used in discussing religious beliefs and practices?
7. What is the purpose of organized religion and fortunetelling as shown in each of the three novels?
8. How does the image of the power of ministers, church members, and fortunetellers change in the three novels?
9. What is the importance of ceremonial ritual in organized religion and in fortunetelling?
10. What is Tyler's view of organized religion and fortunetelling as determined from the beginning of the first novel to the end of the last novel used in this study?

In order to discuss these questions, I have devoted one chapter of this thesis to each of the three Tyler books examined: Chapter II will examine religion in The Clock Winder; Chapter III will look at both religion and fortunetelling in Searching for Caleb; and Chapter IV will present religion and fortunetelling in Earthly Possessions. Chapter V will present a conclusion about Tyler's use of religion and fortunetelling in the three novels.

CHAPTER II

FROZEN RITUALS AND FROZEN CASSEROLES

The first Tyler novel in which ministers, their families, and church members are portrayed in a religious setting is The Clock Winder. In The Clock Winder, Elizabeth Abbott, the daughter of a Baptist minister, taking time off from college to "find herself," becomes a live-in handywoman for the recently widowed Mrs. Emerson. In so doing, Elizabeth becomes the focus of sibling rivalry for her affections by her contemporaries in the Emerson family, Matthew and Timothy Emerson, and when she invites Matthew to accompany her home for a visit, Timothy retaliates by teasing her with a gun in his hand. As Elizabeth wrestles with him for the gun, it fires, killing Timothy.

Fleeing from Matthew, who still loves her, and from Andrew, another psychologically unstable Emerson brother, Elizabeth returns home, where her father finds her a job caring for the senile father of a church member. As if it is the only solution to what to do with her life, Elizabeth decides to marry her childhood sweetheart Dommie Whitehill, but she leaves him at the altar and becomes a crafts teacher at a girls' reform school until Mrs. Emerson has a

stroke and the Emerson children and Mrs. Emerson beg for her to return to help out.

Returning to the Emerson household, Elizabeth is again confronted by Andrew, who wounds her arm when he attempts to kill her in what becomes, for him, a catharsis. Ten years later, the old bitterness is replaced by mellowness; Elizabeth and Matthew are married and the parents of two children; and Mrs. Emerson is restored to health.

No fortuneteller appears in The Clock Winder, although there are three ministers: Father Lewis, who, by his title, suggests an affiliation with either the Roman Catholic or Episcopal church; Reverend Abbott, identified as Baptist; and an unnamed revivalist who visits Reverend Abbott's congregation and is revealed only through Elizabeth Abbott's eyes. Additionally, The Clock Winder contains a minister's wife, Mrs. Abbott, and, of course, their daughter Elizabeth. Tyler reveals Father Lewis through both his own assessment and that of his parishioners, the Emersons. Reverend Abbott, however, is a multi-dimensional character, for not only does Tyler reveal him through his own eyes but also through his daughter's and his parishioners' viewpoints.

The first appearance of a minister in The Clock Winder is at Timothy's funeral, where, performing the

"generalities" (111) of the service,¹ Father Lewis, as well as the congregation, seems "annoyed about something" and is waiting for "something more that never came":

He was deprived of most of the phrases he liked to use--fruitful lives and tasks well done, happy deaths and God's design--and when he had finished the few vague sentences left to him he briskly aligned two sheets of paper on his pulpit, heaved a sharp sigh, and frowned at someone's cough. (111)

Father Lewis thus views himself as powerless, unable to render help in this specific time of need. The religious rituals apparently fit general cases, of which a possible suicide is obviously not one. Thus, Father Lewis, in himself thinking that he needs to use familiar phrases, is made to seem even more ineffectual than if he were spontaneous, for there is no proof that he, by church canon, must use specific phrases in this funeral ceremony.

After Timothy's funeral, Mrs. Emerson characterizes Father Lewis as trying to be helpful: "He came and spent time, offered his sympathy, he never even mentioned the manner of Timothy's going. He was no help at all, of course, but you can't say he didn't try" (115).

Mrs. Emerson, too, apparently views Father Lewis as functioning mechanically. She admits, however, that "I have

¹All page numbers in Chapters II through V refer to the specific Tyler novel being discussed unless otherwise noted.

never felt all that religious" (115). She feels that the trouble with ministers is that they are not women and implies that they therefore cannot feel how the death of a child negates a mother's efforts beginning with morning sickness and continuing past childhood illnesses (115). Melissa echoes her mother's opinion of religion as a futile exercise in replying, "Hymns. Sermons. Religion. Why do we bother?" Both Mrs. Emerson and Melissa, as parishioners, show that they do not expect their clergyman to be useful, as if the clergyman's role is to fulfill a ritualistic need rather than to speak to a person's inner needs.

Diction in The Clock Winder furthers the image of Father Lewis as ineffective, with Mrs. Emerson's reaction or lack of reaction reflecting his passivity. Father Lewis performs "generalities" of the service. He is without power in being described as "deprived" of his favorite phrases, using "vague" sentences (111). Where softness of word choice might imply compassion, there is only harshness in describing Father Lewis, who "heaved" a "sharp" sign and "frowned" at a "cough." Diction used in describing Mrs. Emerson in this instance adds to the impersonal tone of the scene, with Mrs. Emerson described "as if she wanted to jump up and make additions or revisions." Even the casket is "hovering," reflecting the inaction (111).

Although Elizabeth Abbott's father is a Baptist preacher rather than a Catholic or Episcopal priest, he, too, functions in a ritualistic manner. Reverend Abbott is first shown in counseling his own daughter. When Elizabeth returns home after Timothy's funeral, Reverend Abbott, in the role of both her spiritual and literal father, goes through the motions of counseling her on her future direction. He assures her that he understands young people: "It's part of my job" (139). And in assuring her that she does not have to confide in him the reason she has returned home so suddenly, he says, "You know, however, that my job has given me right much experience in-" at which point Elizabeth, "surprising both of them," replies "No!" (141). The ambiguity of the no, whether it applies to her not wanting to tell why she has returned home or to her father's actual lack of experience at understanding real human suffering, adds further to questioning whether the clergy function from form rather than from feeling. It is as if Tyler herself is not sure of the answer.

Reverend Abbott is also ineffective in preventing Elizabeth from stopping her own wedding. When Elizabeth has told her family that she had changed her mind minutes before her wedding, Reverend Abbott, according to Elizabeth's sister Polly, put the wishes of the wedding

guests above the sanctity of the wedding ceremony in answering ". . . you owe them a wedding" (200).

Even with parishioners, Reverend Abbott's actions are ritualistic: "When he shook hands [Reverend Abbott] laid his other hand on top of Mr. Stimson's--a habit he had when greeting church members" (143). Thus, he performs the expected ritual. Yet, Mrs. Stimson praises Reverend Abbott's sermons and tells Elizabeth that Elizabeth's father is a "magnificent human being . . ." (145). Like Mrs. Emerson, Mrs. Stimson is delivering the expected flattery, especially since her minister has brought her salvation in the form of a sitter for her aging father. This action implies again that church members expect ritualistic actions from their ministers.

Elizabeth herself imagines her father as wishing his family could see him as his congregation does (150). The truth is, however, that Elizabeth is not a church-goer; and Mrs. Abbott, described by the narrator as "on the surface" the "perfect minister's wife," is "underneath . . . all bustle and practicality . . ." (130). She even goes to the trouble of delivering her chicken casserole in disposable pans. As the narrator interprets her actions: "How thoughtful can you get?" (131). Nevertheless, the narrator

does comment that "if she could have deep-frozen her sympathy ahead of time too she probably would have" (130). The sarcasm implies that the casserole is no work of love but instead a ritual, and a cold one, at that. At no time does Tyler show the husband and wife relationship, for the only time that the couple appears together is at Elizabeth's wedding, in which Mrs. Abbott becomes the stronger of the two. When Elizabeth breaks up the wedding, it is not Reverend Abbott who takes control but his wife, who "rose and marched firmly toward her husband. She looped one arm through his and the other through Dommie's, and led them back out the little door" (200). This lack of husband-and-wife interaction further portrays Mrs. Abbott as cold and impersonal. It is no wonder, then, that Elizabeth thinks her father would want his family to see him as his congregation does, for nothing in his family's actions toward him has much to be recommended.

Like the descriptions of Father Lewis and Mrs. Abbott, the narrator's descriptions of Reverend Abbott fail to deliver the energy implicit in warmth. The first appearance of Reverend Abbott reveals an "angular" hand, a face of "straight lines," "stretched" skin, "narrow" bones, hair "conform[ing] exactly" to his "skull," "eyes . . . like blue glass globes," with "tired veins" (138). Nor does

this image change when he is seen visiting a church family, the Stimsons. His voice is "deeper and more southern" and his smile is "faraway" (144). Furthermore, at Elizabeth's wedding, a supposedly happy occasion, Reverend Abbott, although described as "tall and handsome," is also described as "frightening," dressed in "black" and carrying a "black" book (198). His words in the ceremony itself are "hollow" and "doomed" (199).

By contrast, then, Mrs. Abbott exhibits the more energy. Her face is "young and thin and bright" (129). Her dress is homey: a "gingham" dress and "canvas" shoes. She moves with a "quick, definite energy" (131), "all bustle and practicality," "tilting her head serenely" (130). The word proper is used twice in describing her (130); but her voice, reflecting her husband's inaction, is also described as "hesitant" and her sympathy as potentially "deep-frozen" (130). Tyler negates the positive image of Mrs. Abbott with these latter two descriptions, for the human side of Mrs. Abbott is missing.

The liveliest diction occurs in the description of the revival and the revivalist. He is shown as "sweating" and "shouting" (132). He has a "thundering" voice, in contrast to Reverend Abbott, whose voice is "quiet and shining" (133) and whose action is a mere smile (132). Tyler uses the

luxuriant extended metaphor of plums ripe for picking to describe those attending the revival. Action words predominate in describing the revival congregation, their "fits of trembling," a "face flushed and intense," and dilated pupils. Even the revival hymn "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" implies action. Although Elizabeth envisions her father as "mentally entering [the names of the newly saved] on a list that would last forever" (132-33), she wonders why some of these people appeared again the next year to be saved again, as had Elizabeth's friend Sue Ellen, who had been saved three times. Thus, the action is transient, for the saved come back year after year to be saved again, as if the action itself is a ritual, and the revivalist and the minister by morning are "calmly" buttering buckwheat muffins (133), showing that the saving of souls is all in a day's work. Religion becomes powerless again at the revival.

Although Tyler devotes the equivalent of a full page to discussing the revival and the revivalist, he remains nameless. By this act, Tyler uses metonymy so that the revivalist, too, is depersonalized. He is thus merely a part of a ritualistic act, his human side hidden.

Irony heightens this impersonal attitude toward religion in people's lives. While the sign at Faith

Baptist Church proclaims in capital letters that "The [D]ifference [I]s [W]orth the [D]istance," Elizabeth can never remember whether it reads that way or vice-versa. She comments that "Either would do" (132). The effect is that the sign's message does make very little difference in people's lives. This irony is immediately emphasized by the situation irony in the next sentence as Elizabeth "stopped to let the dog squat by the [church] mailbox, and then moved on up the road" (132).

Again, the way Reverend Abbott's congregation views him is ironic. Tyler points out how little Mrs. Stimson, a church member who "doesn't know what [she'd] do" without Reverend Abbott (149), knows about her religion. In a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Stimson and Elizabeth, Reverend Abbott reveals that he and Elizabeth do not agree on reincarnation:

" . . . We don't see eye to eye on--what is it this week? Reincarnation."

"You don't say," said Mr. Stimson. "Why, I never knew it was in any question. Don't you believe in the reincarnation of Christ on the third day, young lady?"

"It's a thought," Elizabeth said. (149)

In mistaking reincarnation for Christ's resurrection, Mr. Stimson reveals the lack of impact of his religious practice in his life, and Mrs. Stimson makes no move to correct the malapropism. Reverend Abbott likewise makes

no attempt to correct Mr. Stimson in what obviously becomes one of the few times that Elizabeth's father defends her, although passively, having just pointed out her belief in reincarnation in a situation which could have been, at the least, embarrassing and could have cost Elizabeth the position she desired with the Stimson family.

Obviously, Reverend Abbott puts the welfare of his congregation above that of his family in the above situation as well as in the incident of Elizabeth's wedding. When Elizabeth told her father, as they were leaving for the wedding, that she did not want to be married, he told her that she owed the guests a wedding, not an answer one would expect from a father, especially a minister whose vocation ostensibly includes counseling the individual. Although Elizabeth considers herself non-religious, not attending church, she shoes herself to be the more religious of the two; for she wonders whether the people who wish to back out of a wedding and do not do so regret it forever whereas her father, according to Elizabeth's sister Polly, tells Elizabeth, as if he has knowledge of married couples the world over, that "they forget about it an hour later" (200-01). The marriage ceremony as a religious service is thus devalued.

Elizabeth, obviously, rebels against religion. Because of the nature of her family, she is thus also

rebellious against them--that is, unless her family can accept her individualism. And they have shown that they cannot. Her father has expected her to "shape up" by age twenty-three (139). Her mother "doesn't want to hear about [Elizabeth's not having changed in her outlook on religion]" (92). Ironically, these two people, who bring comfort through counseling young people as part of the job or through chicken casseroles for the bereaved, cannot accept individuality at home. As a result, when Elizabeth, showing more action because of her feelings than any of the religious characters have shown through their ritual, breaks up her wedding ceremony, she is also breaking with her family. Her family is never mentioned again in the book, nor is religion.

In this way, Tyler makes her audience sympathetic toward Elizabeth. At least Elizabeth questions religion, whereas religion is ritualistic for its practitioners, as shown in this chapter. In rebelling against the form of religion, she, like Mrs. Emerson--and like Charlotte in Earthly Possessions--is intrinsically honest. For that reason, too, the reader admires Elizabeth.

It is only near the end of Searching for Caleb, as shown in the following chapter, that Meg, the robotic wife of the minister Arthur Milsom, begins to question the

efficacy of religion. Unfortunately for Elizabeth and her mother, however, there is no fortuneteller to point their way to answers as there is for Meg.

CHAPTER III

THE SEARCH FOR CALEB AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Searching for Caleb is the first novel in which a fortuneteller appears. Justine Peck, one of several fortunetellers in the book, along with her husband Duncan, who is also her first cousin, is the renegade scion of the wealthy Peck family. As a maverick, she follows in the footsteps of her great uncle Caleb, who disappeared in 1912 to follow what later is revealed to be a jazz musician/composer's life. Caleb's brother, Judge Justin Peck, who is Justine and Duncan's grandfather, spends his life searching for his missing brother, a quest that Justine willingly joins as Duncan drifts from job to job.

Living this nomadic, episodic life, Justine becomes a fortuneteller, and Justine and Duncan become parents of Meg, a child as wedded to stability and rigidity as her parents are to change and nonconformity. In search of what she considers a normal family life, Meg elopes with Arthur Milsom, a preacher whose mother is a faith healer, although one whose powers are questionable.

Justine, Duncan, and Grandfather Peck return in 1973 from their only visit to Meg, whom they find less than

happy with her new, settled existence, to learn that a private investigator has located Caleb in a Louisiana nursing home. But Justin Peck dies before Justine is able to spirit Caleb away from his nursing home for what turns out to be a temporary visit. After Caleb leaves Justine and Duncan, Justine and Duncan themselves again move on.

Searching for Caleb is the strongest of Tyler's novels because of the duality of the carefully crafted structure and symbolism. Tyler places fortunetelling and religion so that each may be examined separately; but she occasionally places the two together, as when Justine tells fortunes in a church and when Justine and Duncan visit Meg in Meg's new setting as a preacher's wife, so that one may examine each concept separately as a system of belief and then examine the two together. Furthermore, the search for Caleb becomes a symbolic search for the meaning of life: on the day that Justine tells Meg that the way to live is to accept, endure, and adapt, Caleb Peck is also found, and in this way, the climax of the lifelong search for Caleb occurs on the same day that Justine, in a climax of her power to offer answers to those searching for life's meaning, is able to offer Meg an answer for how to live.

Three fortunetellers appear in Searching for Caleb: Justine, who is pictured as likable; Madame Olita, once

powerful but losing power in old age; and Dorcas, totally powerless but nevertheless a practitioner of the art. Only two ministers appear--Arthur and Reverend Didicott--but two ministers' wives, Mrs. Linthicum and Meg, are linked to fortunetelling: Mrs. Linthicum by having her fortune told in the church and Meg by her being Justine's daughter. The use of fortunetelling and religion, then, is basically balanced in Searching for Caleb. The account of time given in Searching for Caleb to lengthy discussions of both religion and fortunetelling gives credence to the importance of the two approaches to ideas, for Tyler devotes pages 132-41 mainly to the discussion of Justine's education as a fortuneteller under Madame Olita's tutelage. As Tyler devotes nine pages to this discussion, so she also devotes slightly over nine pages (170-80) to introducing the Reverend Arthur Milsom, fiance of Justine and Duncan's daughter Meg. The balance of time spent in discussing the opposing ideas further shows that Tyler in this novel gives equal importance to fortunetelling and religion as worthy belief systems.

Justine's grandfather is the first to accuse her of being a fortuneteller--"[t]his - piffle," as he calls it (10). Even though he tells her that "[i]t's not respectable" and that her aunts "go into a state whenever

a job in Caro Mill because he has no other job since "We've used up all my mother's blood relations." The narrator comments that "The truth that was coming out did not appear to embarrass him" (29). Nor is Justine pictured as the usual patron at the diner. Justine's "munching potato chips with a merry look in her eye" and wearing her hat "a little crooked" (29) caused Red Emma to wonder, as the narrator explains it, "Could she possibly be a drinker?" (29).

Tyler makes these characters likable, however, because of this optimism and their very openness. Justine has no doubts that they will like living in the Parkinson house, which Red Emma implies is unsuitable; she affirms that ". . . Duncan knows about everything" (29); and she makes the ultimate optimistic comment that "[T]his coming year will be the best our family's ever had" (30). Justine meets unspoken criticism head-on after Meg has objected to Justine's discussion of lucky numbers:

"Oh, Mama," Meg said, and ducked her head over her coffee.

"Meg's afraid that people will think I'm eccentric," said Justine. "But after all, it's not as if I believed in numerology or anything. Just lucky numbers. What's your lucky number, Red Emma?"

"Eight," said Red Emma.

"Ah. See there? Eight is forceful and good at organizing. You would succeed at any business or career, just anything." (30)

we speak of it" (11), he is desperate enough in the search for Caleb to further question whether there is "anything to it at all" and finally asks outright whether he will find his brother (11). At no time does Justine answer his questioning although Justine appears "calm and cheerful" (11), not the least threatened by his conflicting feelings.

In the novel, Justine first reveals herself as a fortuneteller, however, to Red Emma Borden, waitress at the Caro Mill Diner, where Justine and her family--her husband Duncan, her grandfather Justin Peck, and her daughter Meg--have come to eat and to pick up the key to their newly-rented house. Tyler pictures both Duncan and Justine as open, if atypical, individuals. Duncan, for example, suddenly speaks about the building of the pyramids, information ostensibly intended for any family member who would listen but apparently loud enough to draw Red Emma's attention, for "Red Emma turned, thinking he was speaking to her" (28). When he finally completes his dissertation upon the building of the pyramids with the illogical assumption that "[i]t's my belief they built it from the top down" (28), the narrator states that "Red Emma thought he must be crazy" (28). He adds further to Red Emma's assessment of him by unashamedly offering information that reveals to Red Emma, a virtual stranger, that he has taken

Obviously, numerology by any other name would still be as sweet; but Justine is able, by denying the word numerology, to discount the unspoken idea that she might be crazy and thus wins Red Emma over. By the time the Peck family leaves the diner, Red Emma confides her dissatisfaction with her present life to Justine, and Justine has advised her to "[C]hange" (32). Justine's optimism and openness have won over Red Emma and, in so doing, the reader, too.

Another of Justine's followers, Alonzo Divich, was among her first devotees seventeen years earlier (48). It is significant that they first met at a church bazaar at which she was telling fortunes (43); for this is the first mention of fortunetelling and religion together, a coupling which calls to mind in the reader that fortunetelling, for its devotees, is a religion. It is also significant that Divich, who seems to worship fortunetelling itself, owns a carnival, so often the bailiwick of the fortuneteller. Divich has followed Justine as if she were his personal icon:

He supplied her with change-of-address cards already stamped and filled out. . . . He would drive halfway across the state just to ask her a single question, and then overpay her ridiculously when she answered. He mourned her moves to Virginia and Pennsylvania and rejoiced when she was safely back in Maryland. He beat on her front door at unexpected times and when she was not home he threatened to fall apart. (47-48)

The fortuneteller's "congregation," however, shows more concern for Justine's entire family than Reverend Abbott's congregation showed for his:

[Divich] adopted her entire family, unfolding for Duncan the mysteries of his diesel engines and his cotton candy machines and the odds on his game of chance, bringing Meg gaudy circus prizes for as long as she was a child, treating the baffled grandfather with elaborate old-world respect and sending Justine a great moldy Smithfield ham every Christmas. (48)

This concern for Justine's family heightens the effect of Justine the fortuneteller as belief leader for the carnival. Tyler sees the church, too, as a kind of carnival, a belief bazaar which admits even fortunetelling into its midst, as can be seen when Justine tells fortunes in a church. The telling of fortunes at a church bazaar, inside a church, is told matter-of-factly, as if fortunetellers are a common attraction at church bazaars, although she was located "with the white elephants" (43), perhaps implying that she was unwanted.

Tyler points out that even so, "[Divich] very seldom took [Justine's] advice" (48). Like the revival congregation of The Clock Winder, who were saved annually at the revival, Divich's "religion" does not produce a profound change.

Fortunetelling is further made to seem desirable and acceptable by Tyler's first description of Justine's

teacher in the art of fortunetelling during Justine's high school years, Madame Olita, who is characterized as "a large, sloping woman with a stubby gray haircut, wearing a grandmotherly [emphasis added] dress and a cardigan" (82). When Justine returns to visit the aged Madame Olita, a laundry worker in the same building echoes Divich's opinion of Justine in his assessment of Madame Olita: "Was she a fortune teller!" (132). In the laundry worker's opinion, fortunetelling is made to seem more desirable than religion:

"Say you got a problem, some decision to make. You ask your minister. You ask your psychiatrist, psychologist, marriage counselor, lawyer--they all say, 'Well of course I can't decide for you and we want to look at all the angles here and I wouldn't want to be responsible for--' They hedge their bets, you see. But not Madame Olita. Not any good fortune teller. 'Do X,' they say. 'Forget Y.' 'Stop seeing Z.' It's wonderful, they take full responsibility. What more could we ask?" (132)

Madame Olita proves to be far from divinity, however. Tyler portrays the aged Madame Olita in less than appealing terms: her clothes "flopped"; her neck was "so scrawny that her face appeared to be lunging forward, vulture-like. She looked hollowed out" (133). This word choice gives the picture of a woman whose power is gone and shows that fortunetelling is truly ephemeral, no more powerful than,

if as powerful as, religion. But Madame Olita blames the difficulty with foretelling the future on other people, people who "are resisting change, digging in their heels against it" (134), thus removing blame from the fortune-teller. In the same way, Mrs. Emerson excuses Father Lewis in The Clock Winder for not being of help after Timothy's death because Mrs. Emerson admits that she herself is not religious.

Justine, too, expresses doubts about ". . . being responsible for people. For telling them who to marry and all" (140). Duncan reassures her, saying that "I'd be surprised if [people] take any advice at all" (141), echoing Alonzo Divich's response to fortunetelling. Tyler in this same scene pictures Justine favorably and responsibly as a "gatherer of secrets, a keeper of wishes and dreams and plans" who "reassured" people who came to her for advice (141).

Also dubious in her power as a fortuneteller is Justine's neighbor Dorcas, Ann-Campbell's mother. Tyler tells us that Dorcas had "learned palmistry in high school" (185). In reading Justine's palm, Dorcas does not give a reading that Justine understands:

"What do you see?" [Justine asked.]
 "Lots of trips. Oh, well, there's much too much to read here. You have an indecisive nature, there are lots

of . . . but I'm not sure what this means. And then a frequent change in surroundings and tendency to--"

"But is it a good palm?"

"I'm telling you, Justine! Of course it is. Its just full of things."

"No, I mean--"

Dorcas raised her head.

"Oh well, it doesn't matter," Justine told her finally.

She never did say what she had meant. . . . (185)

Apparently Justine feels that Dorcas' fortunetelling is not accurate enough to matter. Dorcas has already shown her own precognition to be invalid when she called upon Justine to read the cards to find the missing Ann-Campbell. Therefore, as a fortuneteller, Dorcas is a failure.

Tyler vacillates, then, in her presentation of fortunetellers, with Divich's, Madam Olita's, and Duncan's discussions that people do not follow the fortuneteller's advice; with Madam Olita and Dorcas ultimately without power; and with Justine always presented favorably but questioning the powers of her art. Tyler herself is questioning whether anyone, fortunetellers or clergy, has the answer to life's dilemmas; but because she portrays Justine and Duncan's wedding, Arthur, Arthur's mother, and their physical setting in unappealing and even ludicrous terms, it becomes obvious that Tyler sides with Justine.

Situation and verbal irony make a mockery of religion in Justine and Duncan's wedding ceremony. The usual

ceremonial civilities are turned upside down; the officiating clergyman, Reverend Didicott, later told the assistant minister that it was the "darnedest business he had ever seen" (113-14). The specific use of the word "business" itself shows the lack of religious meaning that even the minister gave the wedding service. Not only did the bride and groom's family sit together up front--in practice actually more symbolic of unity than the usual wedding custom--but Duncan insists to the minister that Christianity is a "dying religion" because "[i]t's the only case I know of where mental sins count too; it'll never sell. . . . Take it from me, get out while the getting's good" (114). Irony occurs not just in the fact that Christianity has lasted for nearly two thousand years but also in picturing Christianity as a commodity to be bought, sold, or traded--that is, secular. Further irony occurs in Duncan's giving business advice, since Duncan has never been a successful businessman. And as if Duncan thought that the minister expected money for his services, even though the minister performs the wedding ceremony expecting no remuneration but traditionally receiving an unrequested fee, Duncan pays for this religious commodity in Confederate money (114). Reverend Didicott himself reinforces the secular image of Christianity by marrying

them not for reasons of faith but because he "couldn't do that to Lucy Hodges Peck" (114), just as Reverend Abbott in The Clock Winder has told Elizabeth that she owes the congregation a wedding. The hollowness of the wedding ceremony here echoes the hollowness of fortunetelling expressed by Madame Olita in teaching Justine to tell fortunes with a prepared list of "things" to tell people. "Just sound sure of yourself," she advises (82). Yet, as Justine is leaving, she says, "This is not a parlor game." And, for that matter, neither is the wedding ceremony. Yet, through irony, both religion and fortunetelling are shown as lacking seriousness.

In the passage that introduces Arthur, the minister who is Meg's husband, Tyler further makes the reader side with fortunetelling. Arthur, in his "nice" looking clerical collar, is "young, pale, tense . . . small but wiry. When he was nervous he cracked his knuckles and his brown eyes grew so dark and sober that he seemed to be glaring" (170). Previously, Justine had confided in Divich that Arthur was "so meek and puny" and "one of those men with white shiny skin and five o'clock shadow" (52). Because Justine has been established as a likable character, her view of Arthur makes him less desirable, and the reader is made to feel that Justine's view is Tyler's view,

as well. By contrast, Meg thinks of her parents as ". . . extreme. So irresponsible! They led such angular, slap-dash lives, always going off on some tangent, calling over their shoulders for her to come too" (170). It is not hard to imagine which of the two, Arthur or Meg's parents, is made more approachable. Therefore, Arthur may be discounted as Tyler's mouthpiece.

As Justine the fortuneteller arrives home in this scene, the minister and the fortuneteller can be viewed together. Tyler describes the house upon Justine's arrival as "swept suddenly with a variety of colors and shapes" (174). Arthur, however, apparently colorless, merely "stood up with his fingers laced in front of him, as he did when greeting church members after the sermon" (174). Justine, immediately embroiled in the news of the latest kidnapping of nine-year-old Ann-Campbell, daughter of neighbor Dorcas Britt, is persuaded to read the cards to determine the child's whereabouts. Tyler explains that Justine "gave in, softhearted as usual" (176). During this time, Arthur informs Duncan that he would like to marry Meg. Arthur, situated next to Duncan, is described as "very small and stalwart" (177). During this same scene, Duncan calls him "any pale fish in a suit" (178) and, as recalled by Justine, considers the marriage a "trap" for

Meg (178). Showing more stamina than the reader has been led to believe Arthur has, Arthur answers, "I am not that easy to discourage" (179). Nevertheless, he "allows" Duncan to guide him toward the door (179). Meanwhile, Justine has read the cards for Dorcas, herself a palmist, who calls Justine a "marvel" because the cards have revealed that Ann-Campbell is with her father and Dorcas is to enjoy the vacation from child-tending (179). Throughout the scene, fortunetelling is made to look more appealing than religion through the portrayal of the representative of each.

At the beginning of the next chapter, fortunetelling and religion merge as Justine is preparing to tell fortunes at the Polk Valley Church, again at a bazaar. [Throughout Searching for Caleb, the denominational affiliations of the minister and churches are unknown, although Arthur's church has a rectory suggestive of the Episcopal denomination; therefore, one can only assume that Tyler's opinions apply to religion in general rather than being directed to one particular faith or denomination.) The ladies of the church where Justine tells fortunes are also less than appealing: "bustling around in pantsuits and varnished hairdos. Justine hated pantsuits" (182), and "Mrs. Edge's pantsuit was pale aqua, Justine's least favorite

color" (182-83). Nor does Mrs. Edge's comment to Justine prove tactful: "Mrs. Peck? Why, I thought you would be darker"--even when immediately countered with "We've heard amazing things about you, dear" (183). Mrs. Linthicum, the pastor's wife, might be termed more a neutral personality. Unlike the homey Mrs. Abbott of The Clock Winder, she is a "tall wispy woman with freckles seeping through her pink face powder . . . patting her bosom as if to make certain it was there . . ." (183). She has the moral strength to say that she is not afraid to hear a bad fortune, but Tyler describes her as "pressing Justine's palm briefly with her cool, wilted fingers" (184). Again, there is no hint that there might be anything unusual about fortunetelling at a church bazaar.

Fortunetelling and religion merge again when Justine, Duncan, and Grandfather visit Meg, Arthur, and Arthur's mother, Mrs. Milsom. Mrs. Milsom is as distastefully pictured as was Arthur. First described as a "lady in white" (230), possibly symbolizing purity or religion, she is quickly described negatively through diction: her "fingers felt like damp spaghetti"; "she was a long, wilted lady" whose hair was "crimped tight," with a "pale tragic" face and eyes as "black and precisely lidded as a playing-card queen's" (230). Other unappealing words used in the

description are "limp," "hollowly," "skinny," "lusterless," and "secret sorrow" (230). When she sat down, she "floated slowly downward" (230). One would recognize her instantly as Arthur's mother, for he has previously been described as "meek and puny" (52), and Duncan has referred to him as "Reverend Mildew" (226).

Arthur's church and house are equally cold and uninviting. The steeple "had seemed sharper than necessary, barbed with some glittery metal at the tip" (227). The house is "without trees or shrubs," having a "bald" picture window and "artificial-looking" grass. The only warmth comes from the "rosebud-painted lamp" in the window (228). A "hitching post in the shape of a small boy with a newly whitened [emphasis added] face and black [emphasis added] hands" leaves the impression that there are no undecided issues in this environment.

The interior of the house becomes an amusing array of lower-class chic: furniture which "seemed to come in twos," as if Arthur were Noah and Meg his wife, the only religious people in an iniquitous world; a house "where Christ gazed out of gilt frames on every wall" (228), pictures which Tyler describes as "a sense of melancholy brown eyes and lily-white necks" (229). Duncan adds to the humorous scene by commenting: "They've got [Jesus] in the

dining room too. Praying in the garden" (229). When Justine chides him for his irreverence, Duncan accuses her of taking "their side" (229), and fortunetelling and religion are almost united. At least Justine is allowing the religious practitioners to have freedom of expression, but Meg and Arthur, the religious members of the family, have shown unrelenting disapproval of any ways other than their own. In this way, fortunetelling is shown to be more charitable than religion, just as fortunetelling was shown to be through Alonzo Divich's concern for his fortuneteller's entire family.

Even though Mrs. Milsom claims to be a faith healer, Meg is disturbed over living with a faith healer and tells her mother privately during this visit that Mrs. Milsom is "powerless" (237). Justine, however, thinks it exciting that Meg lives with a faith healer (237). Duncan replies, in what seems for a moment to be Tyler's own real solution to solving life's problems:

"That's what you're going to tell your daughter? Just accept whatever comes along? Endure? Adapt?" (237)

However, Justine, like Tyler in this questioning, "hesitated" (237). Then,

. . . [Justine] got into the car, but untidily and with backward glances because so much seemed still unsettled. The troubled feeling was nagging at her mind again. She

couldn't quite put a finger on it. She felt as if she had mislaid an object somewhere, something important that would thread through all her thoughts until she found it. (238)

Justine's final answer is to refer to fortunetelling as one of "more gifts from heaven" (238). More gifts obliquely refers to faith healing as a gift from heaven, thus equating faith healing and fortunetelling. Still, the answer to life's questions has come not from the faith healer, whose power is waning, but from the fortuneteller. Religion is not mentioned again in the book. Fortunetelling, however, ends the novel. Justine has told Duncan's fortune for the first time; and they move, true to the fortune, to "live happily ever after" (318).

Logical conclusions are overturned in both religion and fortunetelling in Searching for Caleb. One would assume that Arthur's mother, as a faith healer, would be able to cure his Sunday headaches, but she cannot. One could also assume that Meg would find happiness married to the minister who represented for her a more stable world than that of her parents, as shown above. Instead, she defines her situation as living "among crazy people" (237). Neither the world of the fortuneteller nor that of the clergy is preferable by a comparison of the two. Even so, the answer to Meg to "accept," "[e]ndure," and "[a]dapt" (237) comes from fortunetelling, not from religion.

CHAPTER IV

CONVERSIONS AND CONTENTMENT

Although a fortuneteller does not appear in Earthly Possessions, Tyler creates the aura of fortunetelling with Alberta Emory, described as a "gypsyish type" (71), who serves as a role model for Charlotte Ames and elopes with her own father-in-law. It is Alberta's son Saul, the "boy next door," whom Charlotte Ames marries.

Almost immediately thereafter, Saul, floundering for a vocation, decides to become a fundamentalist minister. After that time, Charlotte is no longer satisfied to be married to Saul. She continues to cast off earthly possessions as excess baggage for an unspecified trip, just as she has always done, while Saul seems oblivious to possessions, piling in furniture from his mother's home.

Saul aborts Charlotte's first attempt to run away from the marriage by finding her in a local motel. She later gives birth to Selinda; Saul's brothers return to live with them; and she keeps a one-hundred-dollar traveler's check hidden for the day when she will finally leave. But again, when Charlotte goes to the bank for money to run away, she is taken hostage by would-be bank robber Jake Simms. Tyler's structure alternates chapters of Jake and

Charlotte's episodic trip from Clarion, Maryland, to Florida with flashbacks revealing Charlotte's life.

Charlotte passively stays with Jake through rescuing his pregnant girl friend from a Florida home for unwed mothers. Giving him her one hundred dollars, she finally decides to escape to return home. She is apparently more satisfied to be home, now that she has made her long-unspecified trip, and decides that "we have been traveling for years, traveled all our lives, we are traveling still" (222).

Tyler's view of the minister, of his wife and family, and of his congregation has softened, but only slightly, from her viewpoint shown in The Clock Winder and Searching for Caleb. This changed view is shown through Saul's speech and actions, even though Charlotte views him as complacent; through his congregation's and his brother's viewpoints of him and his wife; and through his daughter Selinda's actions. Tyler's implied view of fortunetelling, less attractive in Earthly Possessions and never explicitly identified as fortunetelling, also adds to the softened viewpoint toward religion as the two become merged in Charlotte.

Before Saul Emory entered the ministry, Charlotte saw him as having a "serene, pure" face and "heavy-lidded

eyes" (74). But Saul has a conversion, and one sees the symbolic scales fall from his eyes and almost expects him to assume the name Paul, although he does not. As Charlotte explains it,

Certain parts of him suddenly [emphasis added] began to seem preacherly--even his bone structure, the echo in his voice, the tranquil gaze that could also be viewed as complacent, I saw now. (95)

Again, while Saul is enrolled in the Hamden Bible College, Charlotte implies that he is complacent:

He didn't even need to think. In any situation, all he had to do was rest back on his easy answers. He could reach for his religion and pull it around him like his preacher's robe. (122)

Later, when Saul appears on television during Charlotte's kidnapping episode, Charlotte describes him as "a towering hatrack of a man, gaunt and cavernous and haunted-looking as always . . ." (55). His voice is described as "hollow" and [h]e didn't seem to be thinking of what he was saying" (56). He also cracks his knuckles, as did Arthur in Searching for Caleb, on television (55). Jake Simms, the bank robber, in one of the few outside glimpses of Saul, refers to him as a result of his appearance on television as "that Frankenstein husband" (58). Becoming a minister has not enhanced Saul Emory but instead has made him ghoulish, similar to the

description of Arthur Milsom in Searching for Caleb. In these descriptions of Saul, Tyler's attitude toward the clergy shows no change from that in Searching for Caleb and The Clock Winder.

Nevertheless, Saul's speech and actions show him as active rather than complacent. Unlike Arthur Milsom, Saul reads the scripture in a "firm, authoritative voice" (122). He is not the weak Sunday morning preacher who dissolves into a headache after preaching but one who invites the homeless and sinner home to Sunday dinner (125). One of these people, Arthur Sisk, from the mourner's bench, explains to Saul's brother Amos that "I was contemplating suicide. Preacher up and offered me an alternative solution. . . . Recommended I give my life to Christ, instead. Well, I liked the way he put it . . ." (160). And, when Charlotte worries about feeding his extended family, Saul replies, "The Lord will provide" (126).

The latter reply is Saul's only typical religious platitude. He doesn't force "it's God will" on Charlotte following her miscarriage as she fears he, as a preacher, might. Instead, he speaks in rather individualistic, secular adages, such as "There is no way not to be alone" (126) and "Nobody's ours" (155). Rather than preaching to Charlotte, he is the man of action who brings

her a homeless baby to care for after her miscarriage. Although this therapy is not termed therapy, it does give her an interest outside herself to help her discard her grief. He is not afraid to say that he does not have all the answers when Charlotte's mother is dying, admitting that he is "so poor" at deathbed scenes, not liking dying people and not knowing what to say (199). Saul obviously believes in a theory of perfectibility, for he comments on his weakness by explaining that "I believe we're given the same lessons to learn, over and over, exactly the same experiences, till we get them right . . ." (199). It is true that Father Lewis in The Clock Winder also expressed helplessness in being deprived of his favorite phrases in officiating at a suicide victim's funeral, but Tyler's softened viewpoint emerges in Earthly Possessions in Saul's very act of being allowed to express his doubts, thus making him more human and approachable.

Saul's positive approach is further balanced and counter-balanced by Charlotte's opinion:

Saul had become a man of blacks and whites. . . . Often, . . . I would catch sight of him striding through the town on some wild mission--larger than life. . . . He carried a Bible, always, and wore a dark, intense expression, as if narrowing in on something. (158)

And,

But sometimes when giving his sermons he stumbled and halted, and appeared to be considering the words he had just spoken. Then, I would have to consider them myself, trying to discover what truth might lie within them.

. . . [s]ometimes, while lashing out against the same old evils, he would stop in mid-sentence and sag and shake his head and walk away, forgetting to say the benediction. Then his bewildered, even smaller flock would rustle in their pews. . . . I pictured some great subscription shifting and creaking inside him. . . . (158-59)

Nevertheless, one must question Charlotte, for it is plain that she feels left out and thus may be prejudiced in her view, as shown in the sentence, "Most of the time, he didn't even see us" (158). Charlotte has not submerged herself in preparing frozen chicken casserole as has Mrs. Abbott of The Clock Winder nor is she the compliant, robotic Meg of Searching for Caleb. Even so, both Meg Peck Milsom and Charlotte are miserable in their roles. Charlotte appears more the individual, for it is only to please her husband that she attends church at all (122). One is not surprised that she meets Amos, Saul's brother, secretly and finally becomes the runaway wife. Indeed, it is Amos who tells her that she is passive: "Every year you've settled for less, tolerated more" (205).

Thus, if Saul is pictured in "blacks and whites," so must Charlotte also be:

I never have been [religious], not since I was seven and they gave me this book of children's Bible stories, this jealous God throwing tantrums, people having to sacrifice their children, everybody always in the wrong. I didn't like it. See it's not that I don't believe. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't, it depends on when you ask me. What the trouble is: I don't approve. I'd rather not be associated with it. It's against my principles. . . . (182)

Charlotte's attitude here echoes Justin Peck's attitude toward fortunetelling in Searching for Caleb, as explained in Chapter III of this thesis. In this balancing, Tyler shows that both fortunetelling and religion are unacceptable universal belief systems.

Tyler uses irony frequently in Earthly Possessions in discussing religion, especially as Charlotte views God as a joke player (96). Charlotte first sees God in this way when Saul announces to her that he has been called to the ministry:

Although I didn't believe in God, I could almost change my mind now and imagine one, for who else could play such a joke on me? The only place more closed-in than [her] house was a church. The only person odder than my mother was a hellfire preacher. I nearly laughed. (96)

It is ironic that Charlotte, who does not believe in God, is almost led to believe in Him because He is a joker rather than a giver of blessings. Another of "God's little jokes," according to Charlotte, was Reverend Davitt's death

from lung cancer when he "didn't hold with tobacco" (122). Charlotte further laughs about a pamphlet called "What If Christ Had Never Come?" She points out ironically,

That [pamphlet title] always makes me laugh.
I can think of a lot we'd have missed if
Christ had never come. The Spanish
Inquisition, for one thing. (122)

The title itself, Earthly Possessions, is also well chosen. One cannot help questioning the use of the word earthly by considering its alternative, heavenly. It is Saul who is storing up "heavenly" possessions through his ministerial duties whereas Charlotte, in preparation for a nebulous journey--undoubtedly symbolic of the journey through life--has been getting rid of "earthly" possessions since childhood. Among these encumbrances are her husband, children, and even friends (41-42). It is not surprising, then, that after Saul becomes a minister, Charlotte ironically wants to drive him off, to

be free . . . of his judging gaze that noted
all my faults and sins, that widened at
learning who I really was. I would be rid
of his fine and mannerly presence, eternally
showing me up. (117)

Thus, Saul is, for Charlotte, what God Himself is traditionally, the Omnipotent, Eternal Judge of human frailty. It is because Charlotte views Saul in this way that she decides to become a runaway wife, as if running from God. Indeed, both of her attempts to leave are aborted by the

interference of others: first, when Saul quickly tracks her down in a motel; and second, when the bank robber takes her hostage. In this way, the ironic use of Saul as a God figure also becomes symbolic of one's wish to flee from God's judgment, only to be found. And paradoxically, only in her hostage state is she able to be free.

Since Charlotte has been preparing for a trip all her life, it is obvious that she is expectantly awaiting some answer to the meaning of life. The literal trip for her ends when she gives the money to Jake, who expresses a need for her and thus frees her to leave him. For Charlotte, then, the meaning to life is found in being needed and in surviving her own personal trial by fire in being kidnapped. Charlotte, too, thus has a conversion of sorts and returns home content with the life to which she returns.

Religion has already been shown to be a fake means of explaining the meaning of life. Tyler's Charlotte points out the inconsistencies in religion: God as Giver of blessings and as Giver of persecution and even painful death to the believer. But Tyler's Charlotte points out religion as fake in its insistence on form rather than feeling. In order to be married at the Holy Basis Church, one has to attend for a month, so Charlotte and Saul sit

near the front so as to be seen (92). Furthermore, Charlotte's mother wanted her to have a church wedding although "not a one of us belonged to a church, but why point that out?" (89) as Charlotte reported. It is obvious that the outward ceremony of religion is more important to the practitioner than the inner benefits, as is also shown in the two novels previously discussed in this thesis.

Contrast this idea, however, with Saul's visionary call to the ministry, which even he calls "not all that logical" (95). Saul explains that "Reverend Davitt felt it was an experience of a religious nature" (95). Tyler here is saying that religion cannot be explained logically, that the inner feeling derived from religious experience belongs only to the believer and is somewhat mystical, seeming to be a necessary but meaningless form to the unbeliever, represented here by Charlotte and her mother.

Charlotte sees herself as more righteous than the recognized righteous, however, explaining that "it is harder to be good if you do it without religion" (182). Ironically, then, at the time of her mother's funeral, she reveals that she feels as if the congregation does not react well to her:

None of the congregation thought much of me
(I wouldn't come to Sewing Circle, lacked

the proper attitude, really was not worthy of Saul in any way), but they were very kind and said what they were supposed to. . . . (202)

How the congregation really feels is never revealed; Tyler offers no evidence that the congregation really feels the way that Charlotte senses them. But things have come full circle, and the congregation ministers to the non-religious Charlotte just as the priest ministers to the non-religious Mrs. Emerson after her son's suicide.

Because Tyler uses the first person narrator of Charlotte Emory, almost all of the character descriptions are seen through Charlotte's eyes. Unless Charlotte is Tyler's persona, then, there is little to refute her perspective. Charlotte may very well be Tyler's persona, for the two have much in common: Charlotte, like Tyler, was born in 1941, and the story of Charlotte's life is being recalled in 1976, when Charlotte is thirty-five years old, the year before the first publication date of Earthly Possessions. Thus, there is reason to think that Charlotte is Tyler's mouthpiece. Certainly she is the most sympathetic of the main characters.

Amos, Saul's brother, views Charlotte and Saul as a trade-off of religion and non-religion in a conversation with Charlotte, in which Saul, the representative of

religion, and Charlotte, the non-believer, are both described in religiously empty terms:

[Amos] studied the ceiling for awhile. "I don't suppose it's easy, being a preacher's wife," he said.

"Why would you think that?"

"Well, having him so, well, saintly. Right?"

.

"Or for him, either; it wouldn't be easy married to you. Selinda says you aren't religious. Doesn't that scare him?"

"Scare him? It makes him angry," [Charlotte] said.

"It scares him. Of course it does, the way you coast along, no faith, all capability, your . . . sparseness, and you're the one that makes the soup while he just brings home the sinners to eat it. Isn't that so? He forever has to keep wrestling with the thoughts that you put in his mind."

"I don't! I never touch his mind! I deliberately keep back from it!" I said.

"He wrestles anyway," said Amos. He grinned. "His private devil." (165-66)

Selinda, Charlotte and Saul's daughter, goes "to all those extras that [Charlotte] stayed home from: prayer meetings, Family Night, and so forth" (151). Charlotte sees her at thirteen as ". . . suddenly turned beautiful. Her hair was blonder than the sun and she had these burnished, threadlike eyebrows and dusty freckles" (164). Additionally, she accepts the expected family role which Elizabeth Abbott does not. Perhaps Tyler is showing the extremes of children of the clergy, showing that they, like any other children, do not fit a mold.

Fortunetelling, as such, is never mentioned in Earthly Possessions. Nevertheless, Alberta, Saul's mother, is described in ways that imply the fortuneteller image of Justine Peck:

This Alberta was a gypsyish type, beautiful in certain lights and carelessly dressed, slouchy, surprisingly young. In the summer she often went barefoot. . . . [On] Alberta, troubles sat like riches. (71)

Like Justine in Searching for Caleb, she told all, being described as "a woman who kept no secrets" (70), one who "told her news between breaths of laughter. . ." (71). Like Justine, who married her first cousin, Alberta weds from the family circle, eloping with her father-in-law.

At these first appearances, Alberta seems to be the character made to be most likable. By Charlotte's own admission, Alberta became, in Charlotte's childhood, Charlotte's role model (71). And even at Alberta's death years later, Charlotte admits that "I wanted her approval; she was so much braver, freer, stronger, than I had turned out to be" (156).

But upon Alberta's death, a different image emerges. Her sons decide not to attend her funeral; Tyler tells the reader, through the narrator Charlotte, that "in her absence [the sons'] colors had faded" (157). Her house, too, had "crumbled and vanished, her belongings had taken

on a rusty smell" (157). Amos reveals that Alberta was "pushy, clamorous, violent, taking over their lives, meddling in their brains, demanding a constant torrent of admiration and gaiety" (167). He also sees her as "mocking and contemptuous" with a "tongue like a knife" (167). The "beautiful" and "surprisingly young" look that Charlotte admired was, for her sons, "painful" to their eyes. Amos explains that "[t]hey had hated her. They had wished her dead" (167). And, according to Amos, "Saul hates Alberta worse than any of us" (168). Nevertheless, Alberta continues to have her magical hold over Charlotte, who feels that Amos has "twisted every bit of it, muddled his facts hopelessly" (168).

Since Alberta is Charlotte's role model, she has passed on her aura to Charlotte in much the same way that Madame Olita before her death passed on her fortunetelling ability to Justine. Amos has already accused Charlotte of tampering with Saul's mind, just as he declared that Alberta "meddled in their brains." Charlotte, too, in picturing religion as a joke, is capable of being "mocking" and "contemptuous." In this way, Charlotte, whom Amos terms Saul's "private devil," becomes the real fortuneteller in Earthly Possessions. Already Alberta's sons have returned to live in her house rather than their mother's

old house. Also, through the message "[K]eep on truckin'" (27) on Charlotte's most prized earthly possession, a cereal box badge, Charlotte gives Jake the same message that Justine has given Meg in advising her to accept, endure, and adapt. Thus, Charlotte becomes aligned not only with Alberta but also with Justine. If Charlotte is a fortuneteller as well as a minister's wife, the message of religion and fortunetelling becomes the same in Earthly Possessions.

CHAPTER V

FEELING VERSUS FORM

The body of scholarly works about Tyler's novels does not mention the prominence of a religious theme in her work or see an importance in her use of either religion or fortunetelling. John Updike, writing "Family Ways," a review of Searching for Caleb for the Washington Post, speaks of Tyler's "fascination with families" and considers this book to be ". . . among other things, a detective novel . . ." (110). As previously mentioned in Chapter I of this thesis, Doris Betts, in "The Fiction of Anne Tyler" in Southern Quarterly, also thinks "[h]er microcosm is the family, containing its two extremes, the stay-at-home and the runaway" (27). Betts further mentions as other "persistent Tyler motifs" the "leaving and returning; the desire for dream-parents and dream lives but the confrontation with real ones; the conflict between individual freedom and duty to others; and the pull between private life and social life" (28). Margaret Morganroth Gullette in "The Tears (and Joys) Are in the Things: Adulthood in Anne Tyler's Novels" in the New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly, finds that "[t]wo of the seventies novels, Earthly Possessions and The Clock Winder, are about the

apprenticeship necessary before a woman is ready to accept family life" (329).

Other reviewers find Tyler's characters marked by eccentricity. Among these reviewers is Katha Pollitt in her January 18, 1976 New York Times Books review of Searching for Caleb, who finds that ". . . [Tyler] has invented a family whose very conventionality borders on the eccentric" (22). Nicholas Delbanco, in reviewing Earthly Possessions for the May 28, 1977, issue of The New Republic, thinks that ". . . eccentricity becomes its own system and demands that every character be somehow peculiar, particular . . ." (36). Mary Robertson, in "Medusa Points and Contact Points," theorizes that "the fact that [Tyler] is married to an Iranian is bound to have had some influence on Tyler's theme of difference" (140), but she is further able to defend Tyler's use of difference as the "door through which the reader passes to a deeper sense of realism" (120). Gullette, too, thinks that

Tyler's people need to be a little eccentric in the external things . . . to defamiliarize what they're about, which is so homey and familiar, and yet at the same time so serious and crucial--growing up through the psycho-social stages, answering philosophical questions in their plain concrete language and modern literalized ways. . . . (334)

Tyler views herself as an isolate of sorts and also shows an affinity for isolates. As Laurie Brown, writing

in "Interviews with Seven Contemporary Writers" in the Southern Quarterly, quotes Tyler: "'[Growing up in a Quaker community] set me far enough outside the regular world so that I have been able to view things from a certain distance . . .'" (11). Writing in "Because I Want More than One Life" for the Washington Post, Tyler herself reveals that in her writing room, "[m]ost of the pictures on its walls (I realized one day) have to do with isolation . . ." (1). This fascination with isolation, also shown to some extent in Tyler's choice of an Iranian-born husband as well as in her growing up in a Quaker community, becomes obvious in her treatment of religion and fortunetelling and her choice of ministers and fortunetellers and their respective families.

The leaders of religion and fortunetelling, strangely enough, and with them their families, share the quality of isolation, although at extremes of social acceptability. Fortunetellers do not enjoy the position of prestige that ministers do because fortunetellers are often associated with transient elements of society, such as carnivals. Fortunetellers further isolate themselves by living and working away from established residential subdivisions, often choosing rural locations along highways rather than operating from office buildings. Because ministers are the

spiritual leaders of society, society sets them apart as the epitome of the religious ideals about which they instruct their flock, as people higher on an imaginary scale of righteousness, as close to perfection as is humanly possible. This feeling among the secular segment of society can clearly be observed in such simple matters as the apprehension felt by a homeowner who finds out that a clergyman is moving next door, as if the homeowner's unknown sins will be instantly obvious to the clergyman. If the minister is married, his family also carries this select stigma. Close examination of the logic behind this prevailing community attitude, however, reveals its flaws: no one is perfect, and no person is capable of judging another's righteousness.

Tyler attacks this stereotyped view of saintliness attributed to ministers, especially in their family life, and allows the reader to see them as human beings: Father Lewis, groping for words at a funeral, not having the answer any more than any other mortal; Reverend Abbott, wanting to impress his congregation, yet failing to hear the inner need of his daughter Elizabeth; Saul, often drifting away from meaning in his sermons, whose wife meets an inner religious need by not attending church functions; and Arthur Milsom, whose surface religiosity causes Meg

Peck to marry him but later causes her to see him and his mother as "crazy." In short, they are intrinsically no different from other people although isolated by society's perceived difference.

Additionally, Tyler's ministers are mechanical, obsessed with form or ritual. Father Lewis is disquieted by being deprived of his favorite phrases. Reverend Abbott and Reverend Didicott see the wedding ceremony as an expected, external spectacle rather than an inner religious commitment on the part of the participants. Just as the secular world holds certain expectations of the minister and his family, what the mainstream congregation expects, rather than what participants feel, becomes the criterion for religious ceremony. Arthur apparently thinks that he must preach every fifth Sunday, even though he develops a migraine, and one marvels that he would not consider some less painful way of serving God, much less some other vocation, rather than make a ritual of ritual. Even the revivalist in The Clock Winder, though somewhat more emotional, promotes form, for the saved mechanically return every year. Only Saul, in the third novel chronologically, seems less bound to form. He is never shown to worry about forgetting part of his sermon. In fact, Tyler allows him to bumble through his sermons, a perverse reaction against ritual.

Most of the ministers' wives, too, show the rigid surface preoccupation with doing what is expected. Mrs. Abbott, for example, goes through the expected preacher's-wife motions; she even mass-produces her chicken casseroles, staying ahead of death, as if all deaths called for chicken casseroles and none for the individual preference of roast beef. Meg also searches for a rigid life, being uncomfortable with her parents' disorganized lifestyle, and she finds the rigid life she so desires in being married to a minister, only to see the faults of his way of life from within it. Again, it is with Earthly Possessions alone that the minister's wife breaks free of this rigidity and confirms that she is paradoxically more religious by not being what the world would consider religious. Unlike the others, she acts what she feels.

The Quaker influence is apparent in these books. Elton Trueblood, in The People Called Quakers, states that "[i]f there is anything which the world looks upon as original with Quakers it is the practice of group silence. . . . There is great merit in keeping still when one does not have something valuable to say" (93). The Quaker concept of a ministerial vocation is approximately a century old, according to Trueblood (122); and Trueblood thinks that the modern Quaker concept of the ministry may

have the answer to why the ministry, as detailed below, is not appealing as a vocation in modern times:

[Young men] can easily see that clergymen are almost forced, by the pressures of the lay members of the churches, into utterly false positions. They are expected to be officially religious men, always praying at banquets, always giving the address of welcome, and being accorded an ambiguous honor in return. They are called "men of the cloth," with the consequences that conversation tends to take on a different tone and character when they appear in any social group. In short, they become the official holy men of the community unless they make almost superhuman efforts to reject such a role. (125-26)

These clergymen, then, are Tyler's isolates, with Tyler influenced by the Quaker system she must have observed, if not practiced, living as a child in Quaker communities. And Tyler shows religious practitioners who run the gamut of Christian beliefs, from Episcopal or perhaps Roman Catholic to Baptist to faith healing and fundamentalism. Although Saul does appear less rigid than the others, even he, in forgetting his sermons mid-delivery, promotes the Quaker tenet of the Inner Light.

Because of this latter Quaker belief of speaking only when divinely inspired, the answers to the search for the meaning in life in Tyler's books do not come from the religious leaders. Instead, they are furnished--if at all--by the fortunetellers, those who speak from feelings.

At first glance, ministers and fortunetellers seem to be poles apart. But are they? Both encompass belief systems based on intangibles--the former embodied in the Bible, the latter in a system attributed to a deck of cards or the palm of a hand. Both have interpreters or enablers--the one a minister, the other a fortuneteller. And both offer answers to those searching for an answer to life's problems.

Their difference, at least in Tyler's books, is that only the fortuneteller offers answers, although at times both have spoken in platitudes or have been advised to do so. Justine has already been shown to offer the answer to Meg to accept, endure, adapt. And if Charlotte is viewed, as previously suggested in Chapter IV, as having become the identity of the suggested fortuneteller Alberta, Charlotte's motto to "keep on truckin'" affirms Justine's advice.

Tyler is herself working through the role of belief systems in these three novels; and her answer is, at least at this point in her writing, that feeling is more important than form. The influence of what Current Bibliography terms spending her childhood living in rural Quaker communal groups throughout the Midwest and the South (431) and her resulting familiarity with Quaker

beliefs has had an obvious effect upon her solution to the problem.

The question must arise, then, about the interruption of these three novels, containing ministers and/or fortunetellers, by Celestial Navigation (1974), published after The Clock Winder (1972). Celestial Navigation certainly would lend itself to a continuation of a silent debate between religious ritual and spontaneity, for the book begins with the death of Jeremy Pauling's mother, but the only mention of a minister is that he dropped by--certainly a part of the minister's expected ritual--but extremely minor in a situation in which Tyler has revealed other ministers in the three novels discussed in this thesis. The book is not without its religious symbolism as Mary takes on Madonna characteristics, giving almost divine inspiration to the agoraphobic artist Jeremy. (Jeremy calls her flowers "Mary-blue . . . the blue from a madonna's robe" (82). He also finds that "Mary's pregnancies appeared to be entirely her own undertakings," and he "could find no physical resemblance to himself" (141) in their children.) Tyler's religious interest, therefore, takes another direction in Celestial Navigation, in discussing the divine inspiration of the artist.

The religious theme, of course, is prevalent in literature, and it does appear in other Tyler novels. A belief about death, certainly a part of a religious theme, as in Celestial Navigation, appears or is a catalyst for action not only in The Clock Winder and Searching for Caleb (1975) but also in A Slipping-Down Life (1970), The Tin Can Tree (1965), Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant (1982), and The Accidental Tourist (1985).

Morgan's Passing (1980), Tyler's next novel after Earthly Possessions, begins and ends in a church. The fortunetelling at the church bazaars in Searching for Caleb has become the Easter puppet show of Morgan's Passing. Ritual--the Easter Fair--has now become overt manipulation because a puppet show, rather than fortunetelling, occurs in the church. Furthermore, at the wedding of Morgan's daughter Amy, Tyler is able to tell us not only that Morgan disliked the minister performing the ceremony but that "[h]e disliked all ministers" (113). This is the first and only incidence of Tyler's allowing a character to make such an admission. Because The Clock Winder, Searching for Daleb, and Earthly Possessions do not portray the ministers as sympathetic characters, the reader can see that Tyler no longer has to hide her true feelings in Morgan's Passing. Moreover, Tyler has stated in "Because I Want More than One

Life" that "I write because I want more than one life; I insist on a greater selection" (G7). Morgan Gower is obviously Tyler's mouthpiece here, as he virtually makes a career of impersonation throughout Morgan's Passing.

Tyler's characterization of the minister continues to present him as mechanical in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant. At Pearl Tull's funeral, Reverend Thurman "delivered a eulogy so vague, so general, so universally applicable that Cody thought of that parlor game where people fill in words at random and then giggle hysterically at the story that results" (291). If Reverend Thurman had been married to Reverend Abbott's wife in The Clock Winder, the two might have started a church for robots. Nevertheless, he is able to use his favorite phrases for the funeral, whether or not they fit the deceased, unlike The Clock Winder's Father Lewis. Reverend Thurman is either less sensitive to need or more ritualized or both.

That Tyler's ministers are unsympathetic characters is thus clear. Heavily burdened with a need for ritual, they fail to deliver meaningful, individualized answers. And fortunetellers, though joined to ministers through their common isolation from the mainstream and through a degree of ritual, are sympathetic characters who are afraid neither to give their advice nor to live their

advice. The amount of time spent discussing ministers in Tyler's later novels has diminished, but there is essentially no change in her viewpoint. It will be interesting to see if the fortuneteller re-emerges in Tyler's future novels.

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