

Living through the Lines: Spontaneity of Literary Style in Anne Tyler's Select Novels

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Abstract

Literary style in writing refers to the unique way of writing a piece of literary work. The combination of word choice, figurative language, irony, pun, sentence formation all work together to create an effect through which a story is told. To identify literary style, the diction or the style of the author's word choice, sentence structure, the tone or the mood of the story should be considered. In this regard, the Pulitzer Prize winner and membership in the Academy of Arts and Letters, the American author Anne Tyler is one of the best kinds of longevity and stands apart in her writing style with her choice of words and connectivity. Tyler's writing style sounds like a luxury, a dream come to life, with a tone of realism. The major themes in her books include families and its complications like marital tensions, sibling rivalry, human attachment and women running away seeking better prospects. On reading through the pages, the reader could even realize a part of himself or his family mates through Tyler's endearing and eccentric characterization.

Keywords: Writing style, connectivity, longevity, realism, complications.

Compared with the writing style of famous writers like Jane Austen and Eudora Welty, the American author Anne Tyler finds a special place in the field of literature through her Retrospective manner of storytelling. Tyler's characters are "brilliantly imagined and presented with absolutely accurate detail" (Pollitt). Tyler is also noted for her "rigorous and artful style and her astute and open language" (Schine). Further, her novels are categorized as Southern for their detail of family, but they are modern too in their fictional techniques. A critic praises, "her ability to select details that reveal precisely how her character feel and think and her gift for sympathy, for presenting each character's case with humor and compassion" (Kakutani). Each of Tyler's characters is presented with clear details with a description of their interior life. Threaded with a light humor, her novels tend to give a consolation to the readers as well.

It is however difficult to label the writing style of Tyler. She simply pens down the real life events into her character's pages. Critic Cathleen Schine, rightly describes her "style without a style" in her 'New life for Old', "So rigorous and artful is the style without a style, so measured and delicate is each observation, so complex is the structure and so astute and open the language, that the reader can relax, feel secure in the narrative and experience the work something real and natural even inevitable" (43). Tyler's novels are definitely something so soothing and relaxing to read. Her words flow off naturally but contain a deeper sense of knowledge and meaning.

Even simple things find a detail and elaboration in Tyler's style of writing. The passage of time, as narrated through Beck in Tyler's novel *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* reads thus; "Everything," his father said, "comes down to time in the end--to the passing of time, to changing. Ever thought of that? Anything that makes you happy or sad, isn't it all based on minutes going by? Isn't sadness wishing time back again? Even big things--even mourning a death: aren't you really just wishing to have the time back when that person was alive? Or photos--ever notice old photographs? How wistful they make you feel? ... Isn't it just that time for once is stopped that makes you wistful? If only you could turn it back again, you think. If only you could change this or that, undo what you have done, if only you could roll the minutes the other way, for once." (384)

Tyler's selection of words mesmerizes and makes the reader turn sympathetic even towards the villainous Beck. However, the readers could only sympathize for him as what is done cannot be undone, be it in fiction, or in reality.

Tyler is well aware of the passage of time. Even while her characters try to correct their mistakes by going back into time, they realize as Delia in the novel *Ladder of Years*, that, "but if you never did anything you couldn't undo, you'd end up doing nothing at all"(43). In the novel, *A Spool of Blue Thread*, Tyler also talks about death. She is not afraid to write about death in the writings. Through Abby, Tyler's lines read, "the trouble with dying", she'd told Jeannie once, "is that you don't get to see how everything turns out. You won't know the ending". (29). Although death does not form a central theme in her fiction all novels open with a sense of loss or absence, and the description of death through her lines is quite noticeable.

The miniature of family life has a great significance as Tyler shows. Her own life experiences with her isolation and struggle provided both the style and subject material for her fiction. She also concentrates on the decay of modern urban life due to the lack of communication with members in a family. She finds a rich source of literary materials in a common place setting and hence she uses a common place, Baltimore, in all her novels.

Tyler's warm portrayal of multiple generations of families is quiet prominent. Tyler's women especially, struggle to deal with their family, as they lose their self-identity slowly and battle with familial relationships. Rebecca in the novel, *Back when We were Grownups* meditates, "and she thought what a clean, simple life she would have led if it weren't for love". (238). Rebecca thinks, if she had not fallen for love, her life would have turned into a different one. Similarly Linnie Mae in *A Spool of Blue Thread* has her own love story to tell, that keeps her as a great ancestor for years.

The picturization of home as a perfect destiny also finds place in the novels. In the novel, *A Spool of Blue Thread*, Red says, "Houses need humans" (219). Home is where, one finds peace and consolation and almost all characters like Denny from the novel *The Spool of Blue Thread*, Delia from *Ladder of Years*, Rebecca from *Back when We were Grownups* all return home, as they find out that their perfect place is home.

Tyler is good in irony too. In the novel *Vinegar Girl* the line reads, "in my country they have a proverb: "beware against the sweet person, for sugar has no nutrition". This was intriguing. Kate said, "well in my country they say that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" (12). Tyler's fun and mockery of words makes her fiction quite interesting and memorable. This has become possible only because, she has developed a very close relationship with the characters, which are entirely fictitious although Tyler stands unique in her closing of plots. Rather than focusing on a happy ending, she makes sure that her characters' quest gets answered and readers close the book with a complete satisfaction. In some novels, she also leaves the closure to the readers to finish. Her writing style and continuous flow of words with realistic depictions makes the novels quite enjoyable.

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