Anne Tyler (born 1941) is considered one of America's most important living writers. Her works evince familiarity with an extended literary tradition, with influences ranging from Emerson and Thoreau to Faulkner and Walty.

Anne Tyler was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1941; her family moved frequently, generally living in Quaker communities in the Midwest and South, before settling in North Carolina. Tyler attended Duke University, where she majored in Russian. In her first year, she became a pupil of Reynolds Price, who himself would become a major novelist and long-time friend. Price encouraged Tyler to pursue writing more vigorously, but she instead directed most of her attention to Russian. She graduated in 1961 then entered Columbia University to continue her studies. In 1962, she returned to Duke as Russian bibliographer for the library. The following year, Tyler married Taghi Mohammad Modaressi, a psychologist from Iran. In 1964, the two moved to Montreal, where Tyler worked as an assistant librarian at McGill University Law School and wrote her first two novels *If Morning Ever Comes* (1964) and *The Tin Can Tree* (1965). In 1967, she and her husband moved to Baltimore, the setting for most of Tyler's subsequent novels. With the publication of A *Slipping-Down Life* (1970) and *The Clock Winder* (1972), Tyler began to receive more serious and positive critical attention, but only in the mid-seventies, when such writers as Gail Godwin and John Updike called attention to her, did her novels benefit from widespread recognition. Tyler's stature as an important literary figure was confirmed by the success of *Morgan's Passing* (1980), which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle award and received the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize. *Dinner at Homesick Restaurant* (1982) won the PEN-Faulkner Award for fiction and was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle award and the 1983 Pulitzer Prize. *The Accidental Tourist* (1985) and *Breathing Lessons* (1988) were honored respectively with a National Book Critics Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize.

Throughout Tyler's novels, characters struggle to negotiate a balance between self-identity and family identity. In her first novel, *If Morning Ever Comes*, Ben Joe Hawkes returns home from law school because he could not concentrate; he worried what was happening at home while he was gone. The only man in a family of women, Ben feels he must play the role of substitute father. But after only a day back, he is oppressed with the responsibilities he at least partially imposes upon himself. In *The Clock Winder*, Elizabeth Abellères from the roles of gardener and "handyman" in her family, but she winds up acting out the same roles for another family, the Emersons. She tries to escape that family, too, but returns to be caregiver, wife, and mother. In a less traditional rebellion from conventional family roles, Evie Decker of *A Slipping-Down Life* protests her lot as an unattractive, overweight girl by carving the name of a rock musician into her forehead. The action makes her the center of popular attention, but she eventually marries the musician, whose career she has boosted; she ends up not merely as wife, but as an object of good publicity. *Dinner at Homesick Restaurant* portrays the psychological suffering of abused children who cannot permanently leave the site of their abuse, the "homesick restaurant." The children have the family dinners that were never finished. The novel suggests, much like Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying," that the defining influence of family cannot be escaped. Tyler's more recent novels, while dealing with psychologically suffering characters, have been slightly less pessimistic. *The Accidental Tourist*, the movie version of which helped make Tyler even more well known, deals with the grief of Macon Leary--whose marriage collapses after the murder of his son. Like protagonists from Tyler's previous novels, Macon has a close yet ambivalent relationship with his brothers and sisters and must choose between lonely security and the uncertain comforts of human love. Critics find Tyler at the height of her powers of observation in *Breathing Lessons*, as she defines personality through small details and sensations. Within a day-in-the-life framework augmented by flashbacks, she captures the nuances of compromise, disappointment, and love that make up Ira and Maggie Moran's marriage. The owner of a picture-framing store, Ira is uncommunicative and compulsively neat; Maggie is his warm, clumsy, talkative wife of nearly three decades. Intending to travel to Pennsylvania for a funeral on the Saturday morning of the novel's opening, and to return that afternoon, the couple spend most of the day on the road, making two extended sidetrips caused by Maggie's meddling in the affairs of strangers and relatives. Generously sprinkled with comic set-pieces that reveal her characters' foibles, *Breathing Lessons* has been called Tyler's funniest novel to date.

Despite her status as a best-selling novelist, Anne Tyler remains a private person who rarely lets public demands interfere with family life. She shuns most interviewers, avoids talk show appearances, and prefers Baltimore, Maryland--where she lives with her husband and two daughters--to New York City. Nonetheless she is a well-established writer, having earned what former Detroit News reporter Bruce Cook calls "a solid literary reputation... that is based solely on the quality of her books."


Associated Works

**Breathing Lessons**

**Historical Context**

- The Life and Times of Anne Tyler (1941-)
- At the time of Tyler's birth:
  - Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president of the United States
  - Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese
  - German troops invaded Greece and Soviet Russia
  - U.S. Treasury issued war bonds
  - Ford introduced the Lincoln Continental
  - The times:
    - 1939-1945: World War II
    - 1950-1953: Korean War
    - 1957-1975: Vietnam War
    - 1990-1991: Gulf War
  - Tyler's contemporaries:
    - Nora Ephron (1941-) American writer
Anne Rice (1941-) American writer
Jesse Jackson (1941-) American religious leader, political activist
Joan Baez (1941-) American folk singer
Bob Dylan (1941-) American singer, musician
Stephen Gould (1941-) American paleontologist

Selected world events:
1947: American Theatre Wing established Tony awards
1954: Quebec City's first Winter Carnival held in February
1963: John Sturge's The Great Escape was released
1960: The average U.S. automobile wholesaled at $2,280
1979: George Miller's film Mad Max was released
1986: Margaret Atwood published The Handmaid's Tale
1992: Bosnia seceded from Yugoslavia; civil war breaks out

Life events:
1964: If Morning Ever Comes was published
1985: The Accidental Tourist was published

Further Reading

- Bestsellers 89, Issue 1, Gale, 1989.
- Evans, Elizabeth, Anne Tyler, Twayne, 1993.
- Salwak, Dale, editor, Anne Tyler as Novelist, University of Iowa Press, 1994.

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