



SEARCHING FOR CALEB-THE STORY OF A QUEST FOR A LOST BROTHER, IS BUILT AROUND THE METAPHOR OF TRAVEL

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ABSTRACT

Anne Tyler's novel *Searching for Caleb* is concerned with the family and individualism. Individualism means isolation, while family means belonging. *Searching for Caleb* shows how rules can govern the family. However, in Tyler's *Breathing Lessons*, two characters are isolated in their own way, but find a way to renew their marriage.

Searching for Caleb, the story of a quest for a lost brother, is built around the metaphor of travel, a structure and theme important in several of Tyler's recent works. Sixty one years before the book's opening, Caleb Peck had fled from the restriction imposed by his family and to his art – the music that afforded self-expression even if it brought no worldly success. Tyler lines up the generations of the Pecks for our inspection almost, on a small scale, as Galsworthy does the Forsytes. In Baltimore, as elsewhere, preserving property and tribal allegiance at all costs can lead to a drying up and a dying off. The most vital Pecks are those who get away: Duncan and Justine, cousins and man and wife, who live a life on the move, from one makeshift job to another, from one flimsy rented house to the next.

Reading *Searching for Caleb*, one is constantly being startled by such moments: gestures, words, wrinkles of thought and feeling that are at once revelatory and exactly right. But at the centre of Tyler's characters is a private, mysterious core which is left, wisely, inviolate. Ultimately this wisdom is what makes Tyler more than a fine craftsman of realistic novels

Anne Tyler's *Searching for Caleb* (1976), is more ambitious in scope than her earlier fiction, covering almost a century in the life of the Peck dynasty. She told Wendy Lamb it was "fun" writing about a "huge" family (1981:58). The novel was a significant one for her career; its review in *The New Yorker* by the noted novelist John Updike (1983) closes with the signature phrase: "This writer is not merely good, she is *wickedly good*" (278).

In *Searching for Caleb* Anne Tyler has invented a family whose very conventionality borders on the eccentric. The Pecks of Baltimore are wealthy, standoffish, stolidly self-satisfied. In their suburban enclave of wide lawns and spacious houses, for generations have lived quietly together tactfully ignoring a world they consider loud and frivolous and full of rude people with outlandish surnames. To be a true Peck is to sink into a kind of lukewarm bath that is comforting but enervating, a perpetual childhood presided over by the brisk, formal, aging grandfather, Daniel. Only two have rebelled: Caleb, Daniel's dreamy, cello-playing brother, who

disappeared without a trace 60 years ago, and Duncan, Daniel's grandson, a wild boy in love with scrapes and danger who grows into a strange, private, restless adult. The suspenseful element of plot involves Justine and her grandfather Daniel who take bus trips together to various parts of the country, trailing down possible leads as to the whereabouts of Daniel Peck's missing half-brother Caleb who vanished some sixty years ago.

Periodically, Justine and her grandfather journey to some distant city to track down clues as to where Caleb might have gone, but they only find dead ends. Finally, near the end of the novel, Daniel's sons hire a private detective, Eli Everjohn, to track down Caleb. Eli, who makes a return appearance as a detective in *Saint Maybe*, succeeds in finding Caleb, but Daniel Peck is displeased by the news that Caleb is living in a public institution for the aged indigent, and this seems a disgrace to the Peck family.

Every anticipated climax in this novel turns into an anticlimax. Daniel Peck dies of a heart attack shortly after receiving the news of Caleb's whereabouts and is never reunited with the long-lost brother for whom he has been searching all these years. Instead, Justine is the one who meets Caleb and helps him to escape from the institution where he is living. She brings him home to live with her and Duncan, but he runs away after a while. Justine is disappointed and disturbed by him. She goes into a kind of emotional crisis that, it appears, might resolve itself by her returning home to the Peck family estate in Baltimore. But even this homecoming becomes an anticlimax since Justine decides instead that she and Duncan will join the carnival. Like Caleb, she has been gone too long and cannot really return home again.

The contemporary critical response to *Searching for Caleb* was uniformly positive. Adjectives such as "charming", "old fashioned" and "sunny" freckled the reviews, while John Updike, whose appraisals of Tyler's work in *The New Yorker* have done much to further her reputation and sales, lauded for her seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of such Victoriana as the song "Just a Lock of Hair for Mother," folk remedies (amethyst glass quassia cups), Belgian paving bricks, and horehound drops (1975:63). Tyler herself would seem to have confirmed the nostalgic cheeriness of *Searching for Caleb* by declaring it, "the most fun" (1981:64) to write of all her novels, and by revealing that the prototype for Daniel Peck was her own beloved Grandfather Tyler who, unlike his fictional counterpart, had unfortunately lost most of his teeth. So universally upbeat have been the commentaries on *Searching for Caleb* that it is difficult to read them without detecting almost a sign of relief as Tyler, juggling the events of a full century in the lives of the Peck family of Baltimore, carefully avoids slashed foreheads, locust infestations, accidentally discharged pistols, and agoraphobic artists in the attic. To be sure, there is a suicide, that of the bereaved and beruffled Caroline Peck Mayhew; but otherwise the dark shadows on the sunny Peck family would seem due to nothing more serious than Caleb's running away to New Orleans to play the blues, or Justine's socially dubious talent for telling fortunes, or Duncan's unfortunate fondness for bourbon. These are accessible problems; the critics would seem to be saying these are not serious. These are "charming". Perhaps, but to so aver is to lose sight of the fact that *Searching for Caleb* tackles, more directly than ever before, serious concerns central to the Tyler canon; the complex relationships between the family and the individual self; the Hawthornesque burden of the past, coupled with a terror of the future; and the potential destructiveness inherent in such "good" things as loving one's children. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the mottled quality of this ostensibly sunny novel is to consider the Pecks as a family spanning five generations, as well as the two descendants who most clearly embody the best and worst that family has to offer: Justine and Duncan.

The founder of the Peck family line, Justin Montague Peck, carved his family's name and fortune out of the Baltimore business world of the 1870s much as Thomas Sutpen, of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), had carved his out of a Mississippi Swamp. "Where he originally came from was uncertain" (50)*, but what was certain was that he made a fortune importing sugar, coffee, and guano – and this was not sufficient to gain entry into Baltimore society, an entity narrow and ossified even then" (50). So Justin Montengeo Peck created his own little microcosm of high society within his own family circle: he dedicated theirs, to polishing an aura of Peckish respectability and "good taste". Carefully selected outsiders were occasionally brought into the Peck inner circle. At age fifty, Justin chose as his bride the daughter of another importer, Sarah Cantleigh.

Just sixteen years old, Sarah was plain enough to enter fully into Justin's plan to establish a family dynasty, but rather too young for motherhood: she died in 1880 while giving birth to Daniel, just nine months after the wedding. Undaunted, Justin married within the year a somewhat older woman (age twenty), Laura Baum, of "Stronger Stock" (51). As the blunt biological terminology suggests, Justin regarded his marriages as matters of breeding, not love, and although he was correct in sensing the strength of Laura's German blood – she in fact would not die until 1958, aged nearly one hundred – he was incorrect in gauging the direction that strength would take. Knowing she could not challenge openly her intimidating husband, Laura became "mean and spiteful" (234) and refused, apparently, to submit to Justin's demands for reproduction. She had just one child, Caleb, born in 1885.

As is seen so often in literature depicting brothers (Jacob and Esau, Cain and Abel), the half-brothers Daniel and Caleb Peck have little in common, although, unlike most of these fraternal pairings, they are not rivals – a fact which would tend to counter any efforts to draw parallels between *Searching for Caleb* and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952), which traces the long term rivalry between Aron and Caleb Trask. The lack of tension between the Peck sons seems due to the striking differences in their temperaments, differences which at first glance would seem to be attributable to their two mothers. Certainly Tyler appears to be downplaying the importance of environment, as both boys receive quality educations in Baltimore and are raised by Laura Baum Peck, who seems to love them equally. Justin Peck, however, responds to his sons quite differently. As a self-made man, Justin can appreciate and support his older son's desire to enter the law instead of importing, but he is far less flexible with his younger son; Daniel wanted to study law, "therefore Caleb would take over the importing business" (53), whether he wanted to or not. In fact, he doesn't want to: he is temperamentally ill-suited to the world of commerce, but his father refuses to face this – especially in the light of the fact that what he really wants is to pursue a career in music. This is attributed initially to his inheritance of "his Grandpa Baum's delight in noise and crowds. Even as a baby, being wheeled along in his caramel – colored wicker carriage, he would go into fits of glee at the sight of passing strangers. He liked anything musical – church bells, hurdy-gurdies, the chants of the streets vendors selling hot Crabcakes" (52). Not the type to be holed up in a stuffy office all day, Caleb would absentmindedly wander off on his velocipede after any music he might hear, "speechless with joy, his apple seed eyes dancing" (52). As his apple seed brown eyes confirm, Caleb seems not to be what Tyler critics persist in terming a "true Peck" (1980: 334) Lacking the requisite Peck blue eyes and driving need for business like order, Caleb is exiled to the barn to play his Cello, far from the ears of his father. Even a visit to the family's office fails to counter Caleb's love of music; and when he declares that he still wants to be a musician instead of an importer, his father suffers a paralytic stroke. "You have killed your half of your father," declares the distraught Laure (55), but she is not quite accurate. In fact, Caleb has unwittingly resurrected and activated an aspect of Justin's temperament that he had been forced to repress years before.

For Caleb's love of music actually is not pure Baum; it is pure Peck. Though he had hidden it well, Justin Montague Peck seems himself to have been deeply enamoured of music. When Caleb first began to learn ragtime from the family's Crede gardener, Lafleur Boudrault, Justin had simply "shrugged it off" (53). This is not the response of a business-minded music hater, but its implications become clear only after his stroke. Daniel's wife Margaret Rose installs a Graphophone in Justin's sickroom, and "it amused the old man for hours on end. He seemed particularly fond of Cassess. He would order Margaret to stand beside his bed cranking the machine and changing the heavy black discs. Margaret was surprised. If this was the way he felt, why had he forbidden Caleb's music in the house?" (59). The answer is that the "uncertain" background of Justin Peck evidently included a passion for music, one that simply could not co-exist peacefully with his equally strong passion for business. Essentially a dichotomous man, Justin realized that to succeed as an importer required the deliberate repression of his musicality. Only when the stroke made it impossible for him to get to the office did Justin acknowledge once again his love for music. But the business side of him, the side inherited primarily by Daniel, had not been silenced. Unwilling to face the fact that Caleb had inherited primarily his

musical side, and refusing to surrender his dream of a Peck dynasty founded on importing, Justin is furious that Caleb will not sacrifice music for business as he himself had done. Even when Caleb begins going to his father's office in dutiful guilt after Justin's collapse, the old man still rejects him, staring at the bedroom wall when his brown-eyed son visits him.

Caleb, meanwhile, does not comprehend that his father's coolness towards him reflects the old man's own sense of personal loss. He continues to go to his roll-top desk in Justin's office, "already tired and beaten-looking" (62), when he leaves for work in the morning, returning home in various stages of inebriation. The one bright spot in his life is his sister-in-law Margaret Rose, another imported breeder who dutifully produces six little Pecks, including her eldest son "Justin Two" and the family's perennial baby, Caroline. "Things were working out just fine," in his opinion of Justin Peck. "Everything was going according to plan" (58), including the construction of a cluster of magnificent homes in the wilds of Roland Park. But eventually Margaret Rose abandons her family to return to her mother in Washington, the first of a series of Peck runaways. She dies in a fire in 1912, the same year that Caleb disappears without a trace. But the Peck dynasty marches on, in the form of Daniel and those children who seem to embody the rigid, orderly business half of Justin Montague Peck, just as surely as Caleb embodies the intuitive musical half.

Having spent his childhood safely at home perusing that ultra conservative juvenile periodical, *The Youth's Companion*, Daniel goes to join a respectable law firm and to marry a woman chosen for him by his father ("Justin planned to have a great many descendents and he was anxious to get them started" [57]). Appropriately, Daniel becomes a judge, an occupation well-suited to his temperamental inclination to pass judgements on everything from buses ("An inferior class of people tended to travel by bus": [149]) to visitors ("people who were not related to him ought to keep to themselves, he always said" [21]). This same judgmental nature is evident in his children, who by upbringing and inherited temperament have fixed notions about virtually everything:

"[W]e've all been taught that we disapprove of sports cars, golf, women in slacks, chewing gum, the color chartreuse, emotional displays, ranch houses, bridge, mascara, household pets, religious discussions, plastic, politics, nail polish, transparent gems of any color, jewelry shaped like animals, checkered prints . . . we're all told from birth on that no Peck has had a cavity in all recorded history or lost a single tooth; that we're unfailingly punctual even when we're supposed to come late, that we write our bread-and-butter notes no more than an hour after every visit; that we always say 'Baltimore' instead of 'Balmer', that even when we're wearing our ragged old gardening clothes you can Peck down our collars and see 'Brooks Brother's on the label, and our boots are English and meant for riding through none of us has ever sat on a horse ..." (88-89).

Daniel and his descendants drive only Fords, wash only with Ivory soap, write only on cream-colored stationery, and cook only with Fannie Farmer recipes. They never throw away wrapping paper; they never use public facilities; and they never put religious art in the living room "unless it [is] an original" (221). The farcical nature of this litany of do's and don'ts should not obscure the fact that most of these regulations had meaningful, practical origins. For example, when Ivory soap entered the market at the turn of the century, it was heralded for its purity ("so pure, it floats") at a time when there were no government regulations regarding additives. But these preferences were fanned out beyond practicality and quality to include such silly matters as animal-shaped jewelry and plaids. Worse, these preferences have hardened into virtual laws. Did the matter stop at soap and colors, the Pecks might indeed seem like a charmingly eccentric clan, but unfortunately it extends even to attitudes and perception. This is particularly evident in their terror of three interrelated matters; outsiders, change and travel. Once again, the origins of these fears were quite practical. Justin Montague Peck had good reason to steer clear of outsiders. Involved in a business known for keen competitiveness, he chose to stay home entirely after his stroke because "he could not bear to have his weakness observed by the outside world (which would take advantage immediately, he was certain of it" (55).

His tendency to turn inward, to establish a closed family unit in which he could function safely, was thus a matter of business necessity as much as a response to the closure of Baltimore high society. Further, Justin was not personally averse to travel; he enjoyed his daily trips to the Merchants' Exchange, and he seems to have been drawn to importing precisely because of the vicarious travel involved. The Peck ships, those "full rigged steamers" which "looked like brigantines with smokestacks," made "spectacular journeys to Brazil and Peru and the West Indies." Though the operation eventually was cut back to "the more profitable coastwise hauls" (53-54), the fact remains that Justin dealt every day with people and with change in a business noted for the most exciting voyages of the era.

His descendants seem to have lost his receptivity to travel and change while gripping ever more tightly to his understandable mistrust of outsiders. This is conveyed in the behaviour of his grandson, Justin Two. Simply called "Two" he ventures from the family compound in Roland Park just once a year, to visit his father Daniel on his birthday. As is signified by the dropping of his Christian name, Two has little in common with his energetic forebear and namesake: he drives at a "stately tempo" (196) – read "dangerously slow" – in his Ford, a car make chosen simply because all Pecks own Fords. His wife Lucy, yet another outsider imported precisely because of her bland receptivity to Peckish ways, dreads the prospect of a day of travel amongst unknown outsiders, and yearns to be back at the family compound in Roland Park:

Lucy longed for her wing chair in which she could sit encircled, almost, with the wings working like a mule's blinders to confine her gaze to the latest historical romance....And it was so much cooler and greener at home, so shadowy, so thickly treed that when you spoke outdoors your voice came echoing back, clear and close ... (196-97).

A location that offers security to the point of agoraphobic isolation and narcissism, the house features even the kind of chair that has "blinders" – perfect for a family that has reduced Justin Montague Peck's "sharp-eyed: perceptiveness (50) into a kind of tunnel vision.

That tunnel vision extends not just to car makes and colors, but more dramatically to time. The Pecks on Daniel's side of the family are past-oriented, a situation that would have horrified a man like Justin Montague Peck who lived in the day-to-day immediacy of the business world while working towards a secure future for his descendants. Instead, they look back to him, what with their historical romances and appropriately faded - looking cream-colored stationery. Their oak-lined homes are the homes he ordered built in once-secluded Roland Park after the Great Fire of 1904. Their permanently dusty furniture he bought; indeed, everything in their side-by-side houses is officially antique, as young Duncan is well aware:

no one bought anything; the rooms were crowded with mellowed, well-kept furniture that appeared to have grown there, and wherever children departed they took several pieces with them but left the rooms as crowded as ever, somehow, as if more had sprouted in the night (33).

Even the jewelry that his aunts wear "every day of their lives", like Victorian slide pendants, is literally antique (183). So desperately is Daniel's clan oriented towards the past, so infantilizing is their hold of avoiding people and change in the outside world, that they seem to resist growing old. Whereas common place outsiders are subject to what the Pecks regard as "premature aging" (34), they themselves seem to live forever in their dusty world, their "blue, blue eyes" (24), always young and their occasional wrinkles ceasing at the optimum tasteful moment. Daniel's wrinkles, for example, "had reached a saturation point"; no new ones "had been added in years." In fact, he looks the same age as his son, Two: "In the end, the quarter century that divided their generations amounted to nothing and was swept away" (201). Co-existing with their orientation towards the past is their obsession with the present – or, more precisely, with the exact present moment, as an entity on itself. Daniel and his clean pride themselves on owning accurate timepieces and being always punctual. Once again, there were desirable qualities for businessmen like Justin Montague Peck, but his descendants have refined them to an obsessive level. Daniel sports a snap top pocket watch, thanks to which he is able to report the exact moment: "Ah! Five twelve" (181). However, in his focus on the precise moment, Daniel does

not realize what is going on during it, “the unwanted elopement of his grand² granddaughter Meg. Nor does he perceive the bigger picture of time passing. Once Caleb is located in 1973, for example, Daniel is stunned to realize that his brother would now be eighty-eight years old. Even Caleb, gone for sixty-one years, still pictures his childhood home the way it was, “a house with cloth dolls and hobby horses scattered across the lawn” (279).

Significantly, Daniel cannot handle this jolt of reality, this confirmation of time passing. He fears the longed for reunion with Caleb, arguing that “it would be so tiring, having to bring him up to date on all that’s happened. Too much has gone on. I might not know him. He might not know me. I might look old to him” (257-258). Rather than face his brother and the passage of time that he represents, Daniel suddenly dies. In contrast, the more free-spirited Caleb refuses to dwell on the past. “He preferred the present” (268), and actively welcomed the change embodied in the future. This double preference is strong enough to enable him to escape from the rest home in Box Hill with Justine, to decline being reunited with his past-obsessed family in Roland Park, and to move to Wyoming to start a new life, though he is almost ninety years old. These dichotomies – the Danielesque inertia verses the Calebesque restlessness, the Danielesque past/present orientation versus the Calebesque present/future one – constitutes the Peck totality. But they are extremely difficult to integrate, as Justin Montague Peck knew well. Both the Peck dichotomies and the impulse to integrate them into a meaningful whole are evident in the novel’s two protagonists, Justine and Duncan.

Although born a Mayhew in 1933 and raised in Philadelphia, Justine seemed in her childhood and young womanhood to be the embodiment of all that her grandfather Daniel Peck represents. She adores hore-hound drops, coffee beans, root beer, and Luden’s cough drops, a preference shared by her grandfather (“he liked huby things” [5]). She learns of life not through interactions with outsiders, but through magazines; *Mademoiselle* when she is a young miss, *Bride’s* when she is engaged, and *Women’s Day* when she is first married (once she begins her search for Caleb with Daniel, she switches to *National Geographic*). She dutifully dislikes diamonds, one of those dreaded transparent gemstones. She always wears a Breton hat, “perfectly level” (87), because all Peck women wear hats. She drives a Ford. She wears only those clothes selected for her by her mother, Caroline Peck Mayhew. And she dazzles her first sweetheart, Neely Carpenter, by Peckishly announcing one day after church that “It’s approximately twelve thirteen and a half” (79). Justine seems, indeed, to be well on her way to following in the footsteps of her drab, silent spinster Peck aunts, Laure May and Sarah.

But beneath her placid Peckish exterior is another Justine, one that is ill at ease with life in the Danielesque mode. The “bearded men” (64) whom she fears hide under her bed reflect her acute distress, granted, part of her distress stems from her uncertain relationship with her mother, the Peck family baby. But Justine’s uncertainty regarding her mother’s love, her frantic search for the “magic password” (66) that would make all well in their relationship, is only one source of her troubled state. What is more important is that, unknown even to her, she harbors impulses that would render her as much akin to Caleb as to Daniel. These impulses are activated by her first cousin, Duncan Peck.

From the outset, Duncan was nothing like the Danielesque Pecks, in fact, he was actively antagonistic towards them. “A Peck’s bad boy,” (1976: 23) he made Grandfather Daniel a Noxzema and olive sandwich for a family picnic. Unlike his reclusive relatives, he was constantly bringing home such unsavory outsiders as “ten-year-old boys with tobacco breath and BB greens and very poor grammar” (73). When older, he announced his decision to study science instead of entering the law (it had become the “new” Peck tradition when the importing business was sold), and he spitefully drove around in “a forty-dollar 1953 Graham Page that smelled suspiciously of beer” (77). Simply because it was not a Ford; “I have a deep-seated hatred of Fords” (159). What he really hates, of course, is the most neurotic and inflexible aspects of the Danielesque side of the Peck family, their tunnel vision, past orientation and terror of outsiders and of change. So when the first opportunity arises, Duncan runs away, to live in a tiny apartment near Johns Hopkins. Justine visits him there, at first because her family tells her to and because the Danielesque side longs to see order restored, but then

because he opens her eyes to other possibilities, to the side of her Peck nature that made Calebo happy wandering minstrel. Under Duncan's influence, Justine begins "Watching her aunts and uncles in a measuring way that made them uncomfortable" (92). She begins being tardy for classes at her junior college: "Is that what you call the point of life?," Justine demands suddenly. "Getting to a class on the dot of nine o' clock?" (95-96). And perhaps most dramatic of all, she has sex with Duncan, feeling "happy and certain" despite her inexperience, "a naked girl wearing a Breton hat" (98).

But as the trademark hat suggests, Justine's recognition of her free-spirited Calebesque side does not mean an automatic, total rejection of the more conservative Danielesque one. She insists upon marrying Duncan in a church, wearing Sarah Cantleigh Peck's Veil. She accepts the customary donation of antique Peck furniture, none of which is appropriate for the tiny three bedrooms cabin on her new goat farm. She dutifully tries to learn to cook using Peck's preferred Fannie Farmer cook book. She continues to drive Ford cars. And she feels the customary "Caroline had to wait for six cars, all told, before she found one that would run her down" (118).

Even so, the long-repressed Calebesque free-spiritedness begins to assert itself. Once their marriage gets under way, neither Justine nor Duncan wears a watch. Justine acquiesces happily when Duncan decides to grow sweet corn on the front lawn. She is delighted to move from town to town, job to job, as Duncan indulges in his characteristic restlessness. Rejecting Fannie Farmer, Justine eventually ceases looking altogether; most of her nourishment comes from Luden's cough drops and Cheez Doodles. And most important of all, she takes up fortune telling, an activity which likes Caleb's music, requires both skill and intuition. No longer burdened by the past – indeed, every time they moved, "they left more and more things behind" (146) – and no longer intimidated by the future, she advises her clients to "Take the change Always change" (32).

But just as there are dangers accompanying the Danielesque tendency towards inertia and isolation, there are problems inherent in the Calebesque side of the Peck temperament. Those dangers are especially obvious in Duncan. An "aging little boy" (213), Duncan is incapable of following through with an intelligent plan of action. Always chasing rainbows, he embarks on a series of careers selected precisely because he knows nothing about them. Bewitched by the idea of raising chickens for example, "Duncan bought a dozen copper-colored hens and installed them in a shed he had built himself, complete with a box of oyster shells to assist in egg production and a zinc watering trough in which they all immediately drowned" (123).

If, by some fluke, a career began to be successful, he dropped it to pursue another. He abandons his goat farm, for example, when there is sudden local interest in his cheeses and goat milk. And he quits the Blue Bottle antique shop when it begins to thrive:

Once the shop had proved a success, [its owner] expected things of Duncan. He was always to hear good news. Duncan couldn't stand to have things expected of him . . . He felt the air turning gluey with the weight of other people's disapproval, suspicions, hopes, preconceived notions (261).

The same impulse towards evasion is evident in other areas. Duncan is a compulsive liar, and rather than discuss anything substantive he engages others in pointless arguments, claiming that English spelling is illogical (" 'a waste of letters'" [137]) and that Christianity is "a dying religion" (109) – something appreciated by the Rev. Didicott almost as much as the fifty dollars in confederate money that Duncan paid him for the wedding. Constantly on the run and incapable of dealing with either the past or the future, Duncan sinks more and more deeply into endless games of solitaire, bottles of bourbon, and marijuana.

Justine's father, Sam Mayhew, had spoken more rightly than he knew when he warned her that Duncan wanted to marry her for "one of two reasons. Either he wants a Peck along to torment, or to lean on. Either he's going to give you hell or else he's knotted tighter to his family than he thinks he is" (108). The knot truly is an issue, for Duncan is more like Daniel Peck than this compulsive liar cares to admit. Indeed, even his quasi incestuous marriage to his first cousin is typically Danielesque: "this way there's no adjustment for

[Justine and Duncan] to make, no in-law problems" (99) – in other words in outside reality to contend with. This is seen further in the fact that Duncan takes jobs only with relatives Silas Amsel, owner of the Blue Bottle, who is his mother's sisters brother-in-law". "We've used up all my mother's blood relations", Duncan said cheerfully" (27). Further, his constant movement is, as Frank W. Shelton points out, "a way of separating himself from others" (1984: 357). Even the corn he grows in his front yard is every bit as isolationist as his mother's wing chair: their corn was so tall it blocked that view of the street. Cars swished by unseen, almost unheard . . . people walking past were no more than disembodied voices" (217). And, as Mary Ellen Brooks observes, in opposing his daughter Meg's marriage to Rev. Arthur Milsom, Duncan is "saying essentially the same things Justine's father had said to her about her choice for a husband. Duncan's negative response to Meg and her fiance reveals that he [is] as narrow-minded as the Pecks he ran away from." (1983: 343). What is worse, as Duncan becomes increasingly drawn to close-minded Danielesque conservatism under the self-deluding guise of Calebesque free-spiritedness, Justine is dragged along with him. Entering fully into his compulsion to keep moving, the once-serene Justine "gave an impression of energy burning and wasting. She moved very fast and accomplished very little" (17-18). In the process, she barely connects with her daughter Meg, that Danielesque child who asked for a toaster for her seventh birthday and dutifully shampoos her hair every Monday and Thursday. During Meg's greatest crisis her showdown with her father over her engagement to Arthur Milsom, Justine was not present. Even when Meg located her immediately thereafter, in the kitchen learning I Ching using raw spaghetti, Justine was unable to understand or respond to the severity of the situation:

"I just want to tell you this," Meg said. "I blame you as much as him".

"What, Meggie dear?"

"The two of you are as closed as a unit can get, I don't care what he says"

"Closed? What?" said Justine, looking bewildered. (172)

After Meg's elopement, Justine recalls a revealing visit to a New Jersey lighthouse. In her determination to race to the top, Justine had completely forgotten about little Meg left sobbing on the next to the last flight of stairs: "But had that taught [Justine] anything? She had only speeded up with every year, gathering momentum. Racing toward some undefined future and letting the best roll up behind her, swooping Meg along under one arm but neglecting to listen to her or to ask if she wanted this trip at all". As a result, "Meg grew up alone, self-reared, and left home done for a sad stunted life she had not really wanted," while Grandfather Daniel accompanied Justine and Duncan on their endless moves. Finally, "Justine awoke one day to wonder how it had happened what she had mislaid was Justine herself" (258).

To be Calebesque is thus to run the risk of being irresponsible, selfish, flighty. Justine comes to recognizing the emergence of these qualities in herself, and it leaves her first destructed, unable to read fortunes with her usual care and gusto, and then upset. Indeed, although she originally had been delighted to rescue Caleb from his Louisiana rest home, once their contact increases she experiences a dramatic change of heart. She had to admit there were times when Caleb disappointed her, "No, more than that. Tell the truth. There were times when she almost disliked him" (290). After all, Caleb had proven himself to be "adaptable, endlessly adaptable":

As Justine herself had. Then a trembling would rise from the soles of her feet, turn her stomach queasy, pass through the hollow of her chest to bed in her throat like a second heart. (291)

In nurturing the most irresponsible aspects after Calebesque side, she had lost the most stabilizing aspects of the Danielesque, just as surely as her ancestor and namesake, Justin Montague Peck, had actively repressed the creative and intuitive half of his temperament in favour of the more conservative business oriented half. Justine will try to do what Justin could not: to select out the most desirable qualities of each half, to nurture them, and to re-integrate them into a healthy whole. In short, she must relocate the "mislaid" Peck self.

In "Searching for Caleb" in the company of an ancestor, Grandfather David Peck, Justine is searching for that mislaid self. Surely it is no accident that the title of Tyler's novel echoes *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett's famed play, for many of the issues Tyler raises are indeed existential in nature. As Catherine Peters points out in the [London] *Times Literary Supplement*, it becomes clear in the course of this robust, witty novel that Anne Tyler is concerned with an existential examination of the nature of freedom. The choices, between staying put and running away, conforming or rebelling, are not as simple as they seem, perhaps not in themselves important; it is the use made of them that matters (Catherine Peters, 1976).

Tyler herself seems quite conscious of this aspect of her novel, as she has Justine, steadily leaving behind more Peck impediments and abandoning respective routines like cooking, wonder "if just being were enough to take all her time and attention" (147). Determining the answer and then translating it into meaningful, purposeful action is the central issue of the book, and it seems particularly compounded as Justine witnesses Duncan's Danielesque and Calebesque undesirable qualities becoming mutually destructive. But ultimately Justine finds the answer:

They will join Alonzo's carnival, with Duncan putting to good use his genuine knack for things mechanical, and Justine putting to good use her own sound judgement and intuition as a fortune teller. Life in a "forty-miler" carnival with an established home base in Maryland is the ideal symbol of integration, offering them "both permanence and change, identity and variety, home and lots of travel" (7).

The ending of the novel is not, as Martha B. Tack would have it, "wonderfully inconclusive" (1976: 95). Justine has focused upon the one mode of living that would enable her and Duncan to rein in the worst aspects of Danielesque and Calebesque Peckness while nurturing the best. They are not denying their Peck identities: like Caleb's farewell bread-and-butter note, some of the family's tastes and habits will never leave her. But as Medome Olite suggested years earlier, Justine can select which ones will stay; she cannot change the past, the Peck tradition, but she can change "what hold it has on you" (129).

Of course, the other Pecks seem unable to achieve this integrative, emotionally healthy vision. While Caleb remain insistently Calebesque, the others remain Danielesque. The sterility of their one-sidedness is reflected in the family tree. Shaped like a diamond, a jewel, the Pecks have been taught to despise, the family tree embroidered by Aunt Laure May symbolically leaves no room for any children to be born to Meg and Arthur. Like the Pyncheons in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the once-powerful Pecks will fade into an oblivion as complete as that out of which Justin Montague Peck emerged a century before. Tyler seems not to find this tragic. A family dynasty, however wealthy or imbued with "good taste" is not necessarily conducive to the nurturance of the individual self. And the dynamics of that nurturance is a central element of Anne Tyler's fictional vision.

Searching for Caleb, the story of a quest for a lost brother, is built around the metaphor of travel, a structure and theme important in several of Tyler's recent works. Sixty one years before the book's opening, Caleb Peck had fled from the restriction imposed by his family and to his art – the music that afforded self-expression even if it brought no worldly success. Tyler lines up the generations of the Pecks for our inspection almost, on a small scale, as Galsworthy does the Forsytes. In Baltimore, as elsewhere, preserving property and tribal allegiance at all costs can lead to a drying up and a dying off. The most vital Pecks are those who get away: Duncan and Justine, cousins and man and wife, who live a life on the move, from one makeshift job to another, from one flimsy rented house to the next.

There are two conflicting notions in this novel, conflicting notions that operate in most of Tyler's work: the urge to nonattachment, irresponsibility, and freedom, and the counter urge to settling, gathering, and drawing together. Tyler does not cheat: the weight is evenly distributed before the Treg-o'-war begins, and she convincingly conveys the paradoxical coexistence of the solid love between Duncan and Justine and the alliance between Justine and the grandfather who joins the vagabond household without relinquishing one whit of his quintessential Peckness. The impulses fuse, however, as Justine and her grandfather journey

together in ostensible search for the defector Caleb. Daniel Peck does not live to see his long-lost brother once he is found, and Caleb, the artist, even in extreme old age, is one still compelled to “light out for the territory”.

The family as a sealed unit, with an imperious grip on its numbers through the twin traps of heredity and environment, is the subject of *Searching for Caleb*. The Pecks, a well-to-do Baltimore clan, are skillfully traced from the founding father down four generations to the single young descendent. The shape of the family tree, as one character notes, is a diamond. Outsiders brought in by marriage do not thrive: the insular Peck personality, a melange of mediocrity, loyalty, emotional evasion and impeccable respectability, smothers them or drives them away. In a way reversal of the thesis that “you can’t go home again”, *Searching for Caleb* asks instead whether you can ever really get away. The Peck renegades, after the trauma of breaking family ties, are left passive, dry and remote—still dominated; it would seem, by the tyranny of chromosome.

Anne Tyler’s tone is understated, ironic and elliptical, which suits her characters well. *Searching for Caleb* rarely gives us heights and depths of emotion or the excitement of discovery, but it does offer the very welcome old-fashioned virtues of a patient, thoughtful chronicle.

Anne Tyler goes of her work with as much gusto as Margaret Drabble, but on a smaller scale and in a style that is more tightly controlled. Miss Tyler has learned a great deal about her craft since her first novel was published, but she has retained a kind of innocence in her view of life, a sense of wonder at all the crazy things in the world as an abiding affection for her own falky characters.

As Walter Sullivan has observed, “In addition to profundities there is joy in the surface...Anne Tyler is concerned with the quality of human existence. She turns her characters loose to live as they will, and the choice that each makes is a testimony to life’s infinite variety. . . . “ There is joy in the surface, the remarkable accuracy with which Tyler depicts the world, the unobtrusiveness of her technical skill, and the wit and perception with which she creates her people and establishes her conflicts. Within the boundaries she has set for herself she is almost totally successful”(121-122).

Searching for Caleb juxtaposes the comic and the serious, chronicling three generations of a Baltimore family of Roland Park. Family strife climaxes when the first cousins, Justine and Duncan, marry each other. These two set out on adventures best symbolized by the May flower truck that moves their rosewood chests and crystal from Roland Park and by the Orange U. Haul Von that, much later, moves only their books and clothes to a circus’s winter trailer park. Like *Celestial Navigation*, this novel brings characters into Chekhovian scenes where people talk to unlistening ears. Daniel and Caleb Peck, Tyler’s most endearing old people; Justine, Daniel’s fortune-telling, named-like granddaughter; other Pecks; and eccentric strangers make up this comic novel, which details men’s foibles, charms, mores, weaknesses and flaws. *Searching for Caleb* is, among other things, a detective novel, with an ominous detective, Eli Everjohn (he looks like Abraham Lincoln, “even to the narrow border of beard along his jawline”), and an ingenious unravelling; readers should be permitted unhampered enjoyment of the plot’s well-spaced turns. Suffice it to say that, with the quest for Caleb as her searchlight, Miss Tyler warmly illumines the American past in its domestic aspect. (1976: 110). Miss Tyler’s details pull from our minds recognition of our lives. These Pecks, polite and unpleasant and tame and maddening and resonant, are our aunts and uncles. Justine and Duncan’s honeymoon, when they are “isolated, motionless, barely breathing, cut loose from everyone else,” is everybody’s escape from a suffocating plurality of kin into a primitive two-ness; the America they truck their fraying marriage through is our land, observed with a tolerance and precision unexcelled among contemporary writes. Paragraph after paragraph, details kindle together, making heat and light. For, along with the power to see and guess and know, Anne Tyler has the rarer gift of coherence—of tipping observations in a direction, and of keeping tack of what she has set down . . . Dozens of . . . strands of continuity glint amid the cross-woven threads of this rich novel of nostalgia and divination, genes and keepsakes, recurrences and reunions” (1976:110-111).

Miss Tyler does not always avoid the sly. Her ease of invention sometimes leads her to overdo. The secret of Caleb’s departure, she would have us believe, was harboured for sixty years by a family servant

whom no one ever thought to ask and who therefore, with the heroic stubbornness of a Faulkner character, declined to tell. Such moonbeams of Southern Gothic, without a sustained sense of regional delirium, shine a bit stagily. She says she "considers herself a Southerner;" and she does apparently accept the belief, extinct save in the South, that families are absolutely, intrinsically interesting. Her Pecks contain not only their milieu's history but every emotion from a mother's need "to be the feeder" to an old man's perception that "once you're alive, there's no way out but dying." Does Miss Tyler share Daniel Peck's preference when he says, "I would prefer to find that heaven was a small town with a bandstand in the park and a great many trees, and I would know everybody in it and none of them would ever die or move away or age or alter"? Such goodness is suggested in this book, through Justine's hopeful forward motion. As John Updike has rightly pointed out, "Miss Tyler gives us a border South blurring into the Middle Atlantic sprawl, a modern South busy commercializing its own legends.... The America she sees is today's, but, like the artist-hero of her previous novel, *Celestial Navigation*, she seems to see much of it through windows. There is an elusive sense of removal, an uncontaminated, clinical benevolence not present in the comparable talent of, say, the young Eudora Welty, whose provincial characters were captured with a certain malicious pounce ...; [they] have, an outrageous oddity they would disown if they could decipher the fiction. Whereas we can picture Anne Tyler's characters reading her novels comfortably, like Aunt Lucy in 'her wing chair in which she could sit encircled, almost, with the wings working like a mule's blinders.... The upholstery was embroidered in satin-stitch, which she loved to stroke absently as she read'. Sit up, Aunt Lucy. This writer is not merely good, she is wickedly good". (1976:111-112)

In discussing *Searching for Caleb*, Gilbert writes: "Here and always [Tyler] paints folkways with more affection. ... This country domesticity may have added to Tyler's appeal for some readers in the last two decades, with their flourishing fads of healthful, simple countryness" (262). Tyler's ironic treatment of Morgan's dreamy pastoralism indicates that Gilbert's statement needs to be tempered and qualified, especially since there are other instances of this irony. Less perfectly realized than *Celestial Navigation*, her extraordinarily moving *Searching for Caleb* is Tyler's sunniest, most expansive book. While etching with a fine, sharp wit the narrow-mindedness and pettishness of the Pecks, she lavishes on them a tenderness that lifts them above satire. For example Daniel Peck is a cold and unoriginal man, aging gracefully but without wisdom, he is yet allowed moments in which we glimpse his bewilderment at a life that has been in the end disappointing: "In my childhood I was trained to hold things in, you see. But I thought I was holding them in until a certain *time*. I assumed that someday, somewhere, I would again be given the opportunity to spend all that save-up feeling. When will that be?" (26)

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