

*Noah's Compass*  
By Anne Tyler

Anne Tyler's books are always filled with characters who are equally humorous and poignant. Her most recent novel, *Noah's Compass*, is about sixty-one-year-old Liam Pennywell who has just lost his job teaching fifth grade at St. Dyfrig's, a private boys' school. Liam thinks that perhaps this is a sign, a sign that it is time to prepare for the final stage of life. He imagines sitting in his rocking chair in his new, smaller apartment, reflecting on the past and trying to understand all of the choices that have led him to this point.

Fortunately, for Liam's story, many people intervene to keep him out of his rocking chair, but reflecting on his life does occur as he begins to really see and listen to the people around him. The reflection is stimulated in part by an assault which causes a head injury and renders him unconscious. Liam had gone to bed in his own bed but wakes up the next day in a hospital. This period of time which he can't remember troubles him greatly as though a piece of himself is missing, although others point out that we all forget things that have happened to us all the time. But Liam hasn't just forgotten. That period of time is simply gone.

A whole parade of women, none of whom he really knows or understands, pass through his little apartment: his ex-wife, Barbara, his sister and his daughters including Kitty, the youngest who wants to move in with him to get away from her mother. Into his life comes Eunice, a woman who works for an elderly businessman and helps him remember dates and appointments. Liam is convinced that if he could get to know Eunice, she could be his "rememberer." Eunice who dresses in a dowdy fashion and has

some very strange ways becomes very dear to Liam until he discovers a most unpleasant truth.

Tyler's characters will endear themselves to you as do the characters in all of her books. Their foibles seem all too real which perhaps can help us imagine what others see when they look at us. Liam does finally open his eyes and his heart to the people in his life who are important to him. As he says at one point before this awakening, "It's as if I have never been entirely present in my own life." Being present does make all the difference even if it is sometimes painful.

*Noah's Compass* is published by Knopf and retails for \$25.95.