

**Manners in Anne Tyler's The Accidental Tourist**

**Prof. Sahar Abdul Ameer Haraj**

**Al-Qadisiyah University, sahar.abudalameer@qu.edu.iq**

**Master Student: Khitam Kamil Mubdir**

**Al-Qadisiyah University, khitam93kamil@gmail.com**

تاريخ الطلب: ٢٠٢٢ / ٥ / ١٠ تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٢ / ٦ / ٢

**Abstract**

This paper deals with Anne Tyler (1941), one the most important American novelists. Many critics have describe Anne Tyler as the embodiment of true writer from the south because she tries to combine humor and tragedy together. In this paper, a study is undertaken to investigate the use the novel of manners in Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist*. The writer focuses on the weaknesses of her characters and stresses

that life is full of chaos that a character like Macon cannot bear. She tries to give hope and strength to her characters and the writer confirmed ,they must not fall in their lives. They must learn to take responsibility. The writer offers her characters a choice that is fateful for them, and emphasizes that there is no alternative that does not bring pain.

Key words: manners, weaknesses, behavior, responsibility ,and death.

### خلاصة البحث

يتناول هذا البحث آن تايلر (1941)، أحد أهم الروائيين الأمريكيين. وصف العديد من النقاد آن تايلر بأنها تجسيد للكاتب الحقيقي من الجنوب لأنها تحاول الجمع بين الفكاهة والمأساة معاً. في هذه البحث، تم إجراء دراسة للتحقيق في استخدام رواية الأخلاق في رواية السائح العرضي للكاتبة تايلر. تركز الكاتبة على نقاط ضعف شخصياتها وتؤكد أن الحياة مليئة بالفوضى التي لا تستطيع شخصية مثل ماكون تحملها. تحاول إعطاء الأمل والقوة لشخصياتها وأكدت الكاتبة ألا تقع شخصياتها في حياتهم. يجب أن يتعلموا تحمل المسؤولية. تقدم الكاتبة لشخصياتها خياراً مصيرياً لهم، وتؤكد أنه لا بديل لهم لا يجلب معه الألم

This paper is a part of an M.A. thesis entitled : "The Novel of Manners in Anne Tyler : A Study of selected Novels " prepared at the University of Al-Qadisyiah, College of Education, Department of English.

During the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup>c. a new genre emerged and women writers

began to write novels of manners and focus on social details. However, physical appearances remained vague despite their importance in the social analysis of novels, but sometimes they have a wide amount of interest in behavior. The social issue is of high privacy and manners become the object of concern.

Accidental Tourist is one of the important novels written by Anne Tyler in 1985. This novel gets awards, one of them the "National Book Critic Circle" for fiction, and this novel is selected to "Pulitzer Prize" also the novel converts to a film. "Frank Shelton" term the writing of Anne Tyler and emphasizes that the writer deals constantly in a manner that can be describes as semi obsessive with the relationship that she is with disturbing between sympathy and distance. The novels of Anne Tyler are dominated by one important topic, which is

the topic of the family. The writer uses simple and easy language in the novel of *The Accidental Tourist* in order to help readers better understand the novel and its positions. The writer uses a lot of irony in the novel, and publishing in it does not contain complexity, and the plot is very fluid (Taher and Alias 2021,23).

Focusing on the complexities that exist in family relationships is the central focus of Anne Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist*. After Macon's son Ethan is murdered and leaves behind by his wife Sarah. Macon finds himself isolated, lonely, and despairing. Macon become afraid of being a dry core of a human being. In this novel, the character of Macon evolves and begin to face the difficulties that confront him also start creating a new life for him. After he meets Muriel. The writer mixes

tragedy and humor resulting of this is a story that illustrates recovery after loss. Many critics have praised Tyler's novels and lovingly portray characters (Stanley 1999,1).

The writer's novel win a Critics Circle Award, and the writer has difficulty dealing with this novel, as Tyler says :

"It's hard to think what I had in mind for this book when I started-it has gone through so many changes. It was unusually difficult to write, maybe in part because I hated to handle even the thought of a child's dying. In fact I superstitiously made Ethan younger than either of my own children so that I could take comfort that they were already

that danger"( Cited in Willrich 508).

The novel tells the story of a man in his mid-forties , Macon Leary and his wife, named Sarah. When the parents lose their son Ethan, his wife files for a divorce . Macon makes an attempt to be able for change his life after the death of Ethan, who is his only child . So Tyler uses the irony that is often uses, which is that Macon's life is an irony. The writer focuses on how Macon's life like full of humor. Macon's writes manual a travel guides for those who work as businessmen. Macon writes books to guide people when they travel, especially those who they are businessmen. Also it turns out that Macon is exhausted from traveling and only wants to settle in his home (Taher and Alias 2021,23).

*The Accidental Tourist* is narrated by a third person

narrator, and this helps the reader to be able to know and see into the psychology of each of the characters in the novel. With all this, the main interest and main focus is on the character of Macon. The plot is linear and carries little past and memories to help support the story. The complexity in the novel does not exist at the beginning. Sarah leaves Macon at the end of the first chapter, and this makes the character of Macon the main focus of the story(Taher and Alias 2021, 24).

Anne Tyler uses comic relief in this novel to alleviate the suffering of the characters, by presenting the writer to characters characterized by eccentricities and unconventional. And developments that are unconventional, and the writer increases the tragic elements in the novel as well as relieves the tension that occurs in the novel. The tragic elements are

often presented in the novel by mixing comedy and tragedy by presenting scenes related to Edward the Macon dog. These comedic elements are part of the entire novel and an essential part of it (Stanley 1999, 8).

Many critics have described Anne Tyler as the embodiment of the true writer from the South because she tries to combine humor and tragedy together. The writer uncovers the broken bonds of the characters of her novel through the use of humor. (Taher and Alias 2021, 28) Macon understood that his relationship with Sarah was causing him to lock him up when he first met Sarah. But when he met Muriel, she helped him to know and discover himself. With the help of his relationship with Muriel and Alexander, Macon changes from an unfamiliar and passive person to a strong

person who makes his own decisions (Stanley 1999, 7).

The American critic Barbara Harrell Carson believes that the heroes of Anne Tyler, particularly white southerners, are trying to change their life also reject all the chains for sake to be liberation from old traditions. Heroes have to figure out ways to adapt to the changes present to them by the new people they meet (Taher and Alias 2021, 26).

The events of the novel revolve around about Macon. The character of Macon is characterized by shyness as well as innate anxiety. His son Ethan, who is killed in a shooting at a burger place, is killed a year before his wife Sarah leaves him and her separation from him. This event leaves a deep impression on Macon and he becomes devastated, and he is by nature a restrained restraint. Macon's struggle begins with the sadness inside him in his

typical stoic style and he finds and adopts strange ways to hide the pain of his loss. Macon stays indoors and only goes out to buy necessities, which are only on Tuesdays because he doesn't want to socialize with more people and because on Tuesdays the supermarket isn't. Macon's eccentric behavior slips into a compulsive neurotic(Hemalatha and Menon 2013 , 59).

Faulkner focuses and highlights the decline of the Old South, especially in Absalom 1936. Thus, Macon's character is considered an embodiment make by Tyler of the Old South . Because Macon preserves the tradition habit, which are essential to gain job and a family. By analogy with the character of writer Faulkner, Stupen, Macon achieves the image of the Old South and the circumstances that occurred to Macon when he leaves his wife. As well as with the

death of his son Ethan, it becomes clear that Macon loses almost all of his ancient values, figuratively speaking. So Macon welcome to a modern value, because the old no longer exists. An example of the new values is the appearance of the character Muriel in Macon's life and her personality, which is very different from that of Macon's. Macon believes that keeping children within the confines of the family will bring them safety. That's when he prevents his son Ethan from going to summer camp. Jacques Lacan describes his role in the composition as a symbol of power who enforces these cultural rules and ensures that they are followed. The death of Macon's son confirms that life does not have the right to run it as we want it to and that tragic events happen at times we doesn't expect them to happen(Taher and Alias 2021,25).

Freud also thinks that when people act funny or say words that are out of context and manner of conversations. They say something that should not be mentioned and so they can use words for the purpose of serving their hidden intentions. As Joseph C asserts about feelings that when using words . Individual words may not seem to carry something of importance, but when you look at it and look from a literary dimension, it means a lot (Taher and Alias 2021, 28).

The travel in the novel *The Accidental Tourist* gives Tyler the basic framework for her novel. Karin Linton argues that space travel is a metaphor for the protagonist of *The Accidental tourist* on his journey through life . And the novel's temporal landscape emphasizes Macon and his ability to change. And upon the death of his son Ethan. Macon's test is seen in six stages, as Macon returns to his

childhood home, his wife Sarah departs from him, gets to know Muriel, his dog undergoes training, his wife Sarah returns. Macon's decision to choose a new life. All the time, Macon's behavior is similar to of his dog, Edward, and the dog is seen as similar to Macon's evolution. It is said that Macon has a bleak future, lacks orientation towards the future, and is dominated by the bleak past. But Muriel becomes responsible for the change in Macon's life. Muriel minimizes the influence of the past on Macon and helps him open up and confront the world (Gretlund 1989, 100).

The family can be a place like a trap for the characters of the writer Tyler. Home is not always the best place, and that the family can be an obstacle to the individual and the development of his personality . Macon finds that he needs to stay away from his wife and marriage. Which lasted twenty

one years, this is because he thinks that people can be exploitative of each other and cannot help each other. Sometimes cause harm to each other. When Macon goes to Muriel, he thinks he is successful in making his decisions(Kissel 1996, 82).

Muriel tries to form a relationship with a person and asserts that if it is impossible to make a relationship, she can live without the need for someone to take care of her . Also she is able to take care of herself and this indicates that Muriel is left alone without any help . Muriel relations with her mother indicates she is suffering from a disease related to her family. What called psychological wounds by Voelker he explains the psychological wounds that humans carry against their will as a result of being force to grow up when they are young in their homes. Muriel asserts that she is nothing more than a bad girl in the eyes of her

family. Unlike her sister, who describes as kind. However, the wounds she is suffering from give her strength to develop her view of freedom. Muriel strength and independent nature when she quits her job and Macon worries about her , but she answers him that she is able to find someone else and that she is able to take care of herself(Stanley 1999,11).

The Accidental Tourist is a novel full of humor, hope, and compassion. Many critics explain that women characters of Tyler have power more than men that her novels contain, but Tyler replies in Baltimore “ I’m not interested in generalization about the sexes. Men and women can do anything the other sex can do. Macon isn’t passive because he’s a man” (Willrich 1992, 509).

American Journalist Jonathan Yardley praised *The Accidental Tourist* for the

many qualities that make the novel exceptional. Stressing that it is a novel with deep meaning and very moving. Anne Tyler her work is literally unique, and the writer Tyler is exceptional as well, not for her quiet writing or for the sympathetic nature of her characters. But because of the writer's disagreement with the fashion for literature and the writer's conviction that emphasizes the work rather than the person. Jonathan explains that one thing can be said about *The Accidental Tourist*, by Tyler, is a cheerful, beautiful, glowing book that walks through an undercurrent of sadness, and with all that sadness there is a comic side that includes some scenes of a cat, a clothes dryer, a dog, and the last birthday dinner( Stanley 1999, 14).

Family novels were dominated by mainstream writers in the early 1980s. Among these novelists was the writer Anne Tyler. Who

was distinguished by her novels that discuss the surprising family systems. Perhaps related to and discuss the issue of coercion in the family(Bump 1997, 34).

The theory of family systems can be used to highlight the extent to which we understand this type of novel. Joseph Voelker expose many types of family dynamics in many of her novels. But his personal opinion is that Anne Tyler's novels share with lacanian theory her sense of self . Which is that the self is formed by linguistic patterns and the self is unstable in its center. It is similar to stories about families and legends. Psychology can be something that calls for optimism, because if the self with heredity is just an instability of linguistic patterns. Then it can be changed and a new soul can be created, but myths and heredity have shown a kind of noticeable resistance

to change in the novels of Tyler. Because they renew something stable in the self, it is difficult to transform this, although not almost impossible. It turns out that family systems are more suitable for Tyler's writing than Lacanian theory, and in fact, the word system is the key to *The Accidental tourist*(35).

At the beginning of the novel, Macon and Sarah were traumatized by the death of their son, Ethan. Which happened when a fast food restaurant was robbed. When Sarah abandons Macon, he tries to get used to his situation on his own. But when he has an accident and breaks his leg, he has to go to his grandfather's house there where his brother and sister live. Macon saw Sarah at Leary's house. Both Macon and Sarah were trying to reconcile, but at the end, Macon returned to the one who found a new life with

her. Muriel, whom Macon saw as different and introduced him to a new life completely different from his previous life (Kline 1996, 76).

The important and main key to analyzing the important themes in *The Accidental Tourist*, is humor. The idea of communication is the most important for the writer Tyler's law. Which is either a comedy or tragedy. Carson McCullers, the American novelist commented on the similarity between Anne Tyler with Carson McCullers. Petry clarify it turns out that Tyler accepts McCullers' saying that love is one of the resistances she uses against a world that is considered hostile to a great sense of freedom and self. We must know and learn how to communicate with each other and that communication brings people together and

distinguishes them from other beings is what makes us human. Tyler explains that communication gives the opportunity to its characters to say something funny, and because it is the verbal communication of humans with each other. It is the words they use themselves that are misunderstood, mispronounced and misanalysed . That are unconventional and words that are insufficient to communicate (Bennett 1995, 59).

Macon reveals that his wife Sarah is wrong . Despite all the limitations that Macon is experiencing. But this does not mean that he is unable to choose change in his life quite the contrary. Tyler explained, It is very difficult and that it is a difficult choice . In an interview with Alice Hall Petry with Anne Tyler in 1989. The writer revealed the difficulty that she faced in

writing a chapter of the novel *The Accidental Tourist*. "I wrote an entire final chapter in which Macon stayed with Sarah and then realized I couldn't do it. not only because it spoiled the dramatic line of the plot but also because it meant [Macon] abandoning [Muriell's son] Alexander" (Cited in Stewart 75). And this indicates that Macon does not like to run away from responsibility with Muriel and her son , but he loves to be with them (Stewart 2004, 75).

Many critics have expressed clear interest in *The Accidental Tourist*. The novel is a balance between pathos and comedy. As it described by Peter S. Prescott and Benjamin DeMott. He praises Anne Tyler's mastery of comedic undertones as well as the grave. The main conflict of marriage in the novel is between Macon and Sarah. Where Macon is characterized in his superior and manic

style. Sarah is the most emotional but when Macon and Sarah separation. Macon's behavior becomes ramshackle while Sarah goes into a deep slumber and lives in chaos in her new apartment( Kndapally 166,167 Women Journey 2011).

The manuals that Macon writes to help those who have to travel for work. There is no author's name on these brochures. There is only a winged armchair logo on the cover. Macon hated traveling a lot, but on the contrary, he loved writing. The novels written by Macon do not call for change and renewal, Tyler, with the novel *The Accidental Tourist*, gives a journey from despair to hope and rebirth(Stephens 1990, 86).

Susan Gilbert explains that the struggle between Sarah and Macon's marriage was comical .She explains that

at first they were going quickly to meet each other, but their goal was wrong. The main events in this novel, which is Sarah telling her husband Macon that he is a cold man and does not have any kind of sympathy. As well as the tendencies that Macon have for order . Sarah's insistence on a divorce from her husband Macon, and the truth of Ethan's death and a year after Ethan. Sarah's claim to her husband that he does not love Ethan. On the other hand, readers realized when they saw Macon in his house screaming. Macon was sad because he couldn't keep his son Ethan from dying and because his wife Sarah blames him for not being able to control the situation( Kondapally 167 Women Journey 2011).

Tyler cites the society in which she lived, a Quaker society, which was known as isolationism. Where the writer lived her childhood

as an origin for the mists of irony. Tyler grew up in the Quaker community of North Carolina in Raleigh, although she was born in Minneapolis, but her upbringing was in the Quaker community. When Anne Tyler was eleven years old, her family left the commune. Tyler never used the phone. The writer explains that she was a stranger to her schoolmates, and for what was important to her writing career was that everyone seemed strange to her (Levy 2013, 113).

Towards the end of the events of the novel *The Accidental Tourist*, Macon travels to Paris. Where Macon finds himself in a way he does not expect, joined by his wife Sarah, as well as Muriel . Both of whom were traveling to Paris. Macon has a strange feeling as he feels torn and confused between them. Macon realizes he cannot hurt either of them, no matter what path of business he takes.

Macon sees a chance to be happy with Muriel, even though he'll never forget that he's always married to Sarah (Kondapally 169 Women Journey 2011).

In *The Accidental Tourist*, Anne Tyler asserts that divorce does not only cause the family's disintegration of the family. But also extends to the disintegration of the families of Porter and Charles. Perhaps Tyler wants to draw the attention of those in power to look at this problem . Which is one of the most important problems facing families, and whose consequences are surely great . There is no doubt that divorce affects not only spouses, but also children and the environment in which they live. In addition to the impact of divorce on society, Tyler adds the effect of television on society, and considers it a destructive force for society. And when Macon went through his

psychological crisis and could not sleep. It was not only because of the obsession that Macon lived in, but because of his habit of watching television (Al-shalabi 2015, 85).

In *The Accidental Tourist*, Tyler portrays a less than perfect family in their failures and successes. Readers soon learn that Sarah has abandoned her marriage, leaving her husband. Macon twenty years behind, thinking her life with Macon in tree lined Baltimore is over. Due to the death of their son Ethan, and when Macon is freed from Sarah. He returns to the childhood family and lives among his brothers. Some of the old customs of the family comfort Macon, but he rejects some. When Macon meets Muriel, Macon learns a lot about competition and families in a family completely different from his own. Macon reveals a lot,

shares family experiences and begins again, like many of the characters of the writer Tyler(Ferry 1987, 94).

In the novel *The Accidental Tourist* Tyler, the siblings are like clones because of their strange resemblance to each other. The characters of Macon and his brothers Porter and Charles, as well as his sister Rose, are all unqualified to deal with the chaos and randomness of life. Their inability to communicate with people outside their family is the reason for killing their marriage, as well as the inability to face life's difficulties and crises . Their marriage fails all one by one and they return to their original home in which they lived their childhood. Their grandparents' house where their sister Rose, who is also failed to communicate with mothers , strangers. These siblings find

tenderness and sanctuary in their communication with one another which they fail to find outside their home (Ward and Mink 1993, 60).

Tyler believes that it is necessary to give her characters another chance. But despite that she does not make a big change in their personalities. The writer does not believe that anyone can change but allows people to change their behavior to be different with different people and as a result. Tyler does not create an internal change of her character, but an external change of circumstances. In *The Accidental Tourist*, the character of Macon is considered a warmer character with Muriel and one way with Sarah. We must realize that he does not intend to change his personality. After the fourth novel by the writer Anne Tyler in 1972, and in an interview with her, she talked about her novels and said :

"something that tends to come out in all my books is an utter lack of faith in change. I really don't think most people are capable of it, although they think they are" ( Cited in Levy 119).

In *The Accidental Tourist*, Macon learns many lessons from his journey in life. He learns to be forgiving, kind, and adventurous. As in many of the Tyler's novels, Macon learns that he doesn't have to have the strength to escape past pain or hardships. Macon learns how to cope. He makes decisions and choices and how he chooses who accompanies him in traveling and living happily despite all circumstances, even if he cannot get rid of the effects of pain or the painful past (Werlock 2006, 5).

At the end of the novel *The Accidental Tourist*, Macon wonders as he takes a taxi ride :

"And if dead people aged, wouldn't it be a comfort? To think of Ethan growing up in heaven-fourteen years old now instead of twelve eased the grief a little ... The real adventure, he thought, is the flow of time; it's as much adventure as anyone could wish. And if he pictured Ethan still part of that flow-in some other place, however unreachable he believed he

might be able to bear it after all" ( Cited in Tompkins249).

The picture portrayed by Anne Tyler at the end of this novel is very transcendent and accurate. Macon's deep desire to continue and continue in his life appears despite the loss of his son and loss. This is the desire that drives us to communicate despite our loss. Tyler emphasizes that change is closely associated with loss(Tompkins 1995, 249).

One of the most important features of the novel of manners is that it is concerned with the behavior of individuals in society. In this novel, the writer emphasizes the strengths and weaknesses of her characters. The reader sees the character of Macon, who appeared at the beginning of the novel as a shy character unable to make any decision, and his crisis worsened with

the death of his son Ethan. The writer succeeds in creating another character from this weak character characterized by strength, facing difficulties and making fateful decisions.

The writer is trying to send a message to the reader that it is possible for a person to become strong despite his weakness and the setbacks he faces. Macon is a weak character who turned into a strong character with the help of Muriel, the woman he meets after his wife Sarah left him. Muriel helps him to get rid of fear and anxiety on the contrary from his wife Sarah, who is the cause of his frustration and weakness. Macon is able to make the decision to abandon his wife Sarah and go with Muriel. Many sad and comedic situations occurred in the novel, such as the situations that occurred between Macon and his dog Edward. Also with regard to Macon's life with his brothers and the ways they use

to arrange things. All of these images, the writer tries through which to convey a lesson to the reader to discover his weaknesses and strengths.

### **Conclusion**

Anne Tyler's "*The Accidental Tourist*" is like a mirror to the world and that the characters act arbitrarily to suit the postmodern imagination. Tyler tries to explain to the reader that the whole family is affected by one's actions. The writer takes chaos in the family as a way to show the development of the characters of the novel and that the characters face difficulties and some of the characters are greatly affected by the challenges they are exposed to, and this results in a great change in their personalities completely. Ann Tyler uses such shocking events to illustrate and shed light on

how Macon develops and how it gives him another purpose in life. In *The Accidental Tourist*, Tyler presents a correct view of the lives of ordinary middle class people who have obligations to their families. As they search for their identity and their families suffer great turmoil and decline. An example of this is the character of Macon, who writes travel brochures for people who are afraid and hesitant to travel. These brochures provide advice and instructions to them and give them a feeling that they are still at home despite their travel. Macon, who fails with his family after the murder of his son Ethan. After Sarah feels that divorce is a source of comfort for her and leaves Macon the family collapses and fails. Macon realizes that his life has no meaning and he cannot find a solution to

make his life more meaningful.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alias, Merna Thaer, and Isra Hashim Taher. "The Father Figure in Anne

Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist*." *Al-Adab Journal* 2.136 (2021): 23-34.

Al-Shalabi, Nazmi. "Anne Tyler's the *Accidental Tourist*: a Postmodernist

Study." 2015 .

Bump, Jerome. "The family dynamics of the reception of art." *Style* (1997):

328-350.

Bennett, Barbara A. "Attempting to Connect: Verbal Humor in the Novels of

Anne Tyler." *South Atlantic Review* 60.1 (1995): 57-75.

Ferry, Margaret. *Recommended: Anne Tyler*. 1987.

Gretlund, Jan Nordby. "Anne Tyler and Larger Themes." (1989): 97-104.

Kissel, Susan S. *Moving On: The Heroines of Shirley Ann Grau, Anne Tyler,*

*and Gail Godwin.*

Popular Press, 1996.

Kondapally, Sunalini. "Women Journey of life in the Novels of Shashi

Deshpande and Ann Tyler". K L University Press, 2011.

Kline, Karen E. "The Accidental Tourist" On Page and On Screen:

Interrogating Normative Theories About Film Adaptation."

Literature/Film Quarterly 24.1 (1996): 70-83.

Levy, Barbara. *Ladies laughing: wit as control in contemporary American*

*women writers*

Routledge ,2013.

Mink, JoAnna Stephens, and Janet Doubler Ward, eds. *The significance of*

*sibling relationships in literature.* Popular Press, 1993.

Menon, Latha K., and TK Hemalatha. The Healing Power of Time and Change in Anne Tyler's "The Accidental Tourist" 2013.

Stanley ,Deborah .*Novels for Students* ,1999.

Stephens, Charles Ralph, ed. *The Fiction of Anne Tyler.* University Press of

Mississippi, 1990.

Stewart, Robert Scott. "Big houses, small politics: public and private spaces

in Anne Tyler's fiction." Journal of Comparative Literature and

Aesthetics 27.1-2 (2004): 71-87 .

Tompkins, Jane. *Private Voices, Public Lives: Women Speak on the Literary*

*Life*. University of North Texas Press, 1995.

Werlock, Abby HP, ed. *The Facts on File Companion to the American*

*Novel*. Facts on File, 2006 .

Willrich, Patricia Rowe. "Watching Through Windows: A Perspective on

Anne Tyler." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 68.3 (1992): 497-516.