

Treatment of Masculinity in the Accidental Tourist by Anne Tyler

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Abstract:

Anne Tyler's exploration of masculinity throughout her novels is nuanced, multi-layered, and profoundly character-focused. Instead of addressing masculinity through overtly confrontational means, Tyler examines it through the ordinary, everyday lives of her male characters. Her narratives often question conventional male roles such as husband, father, and provider, portraying men who are reflective, passive, emotionally reserved, or sometimes ineffective, yet profoundly relatable. She investigates how male identity is influenced by family dynamics, particularly in father-son relationships or sibling competition. Tyler's works illustrate how men either embrace or reject roles passed down from their fathers. Additionally, she often challenges the traditional protector archetype.

Tyler attempts to illuminate the challenges that postmodern males face on a daily basis by delving into the minds of masculine characters. She highlights their growth by using the chaos in their lives. A father's understanding of the world around him is greatly aided by his family. In *The Accidental Tourist*, a father named Macon Leary experiences sadness after losing his only son. He loses his purpose in life until he meets Muriel, a lady who transforms him in numerous ways.

Keywords: Father, male characters, family, and self-discovery, masculinity

Anne Tyler in her notable novel *The Accidental Tourist* constantly deals with the vexing relationship between distance and sympathy. Family is one of her most dominant themes. The novel *The Accidental Tourist* tells the tale of a man in his mid-forties named Macon Leary and his wife Sarah, who is requesting a divorce following the untimely death of their child, Ethan. Macon is attempting to adjust to life after his wife's departure and deal with the loss of his only child. The most common type of irony is situational, emphasizing how Macon's life is ironic, particularly his work as a travel guidebook author for businessmen. He writes travel guides, particularly for business travelers. But it appears that frequent travel wears him out, and all he wants is to return home.

Tyler's male characters typically undergo changes as a result of the women they come into contact with. Because these men "slump around like tired tourists — friendly, likeable, but not all that engaged," these women change their perspective on life by providing them with what they have been lacking. The novel is narrated from a third person's point of view providing the reader with more insight into the psyche of each character. In this article, the main focus is on Macon. The plot in general is linear and has only few flashbacks to support the story. The story doesn't start out very complicated and by the end of the first chapter, Sarah is already parting ways with Macon, making him the central character. The reader gains a deeper understanding of Macon's perspective on life as the narrative progresses.

Macon represents a type of repressed masculinity following the death of his son, Ethan he withdraws emotionally, incapable of processing or articulating his sorrow. His impulse is to retreat instead of facing his feelings his wife, Sarah, which ultimately results in the collapse of their marriage. His role penning travel guides for hesitant business travelers symbolizes his longing for control, routine and emotional detachment.

Macon moves back in with his siblings, who are also quirky and detached adults, emphasizing the difficulties male characters in the novel face with fundamental household tasks and emotional connections. His family male is humorously strict and isolated, nearly childish, and their domestic life lacks affection. This challenges the notion that masculinity ought to be separate from household duties or emotional work. *The Accidental Tourist* with equal parts compassion and doubt. Through Macon's emotional numbness and eventual realization, she contests conventional male standards and promotes a form of masculinity rooted in the ability for emotional engagement and change.

Macon's development serves as the emotional core of the novel. He begins as a person strongly opposed to emotional vulnerability and impulsiveness. His split from Sarah, his spouse, doesn't trigger change in him until he encounters Murriel, an eccentric, life-affirming woman who confronts his desire for control. Macon starts to face his sorrow and reevaluate the meaning of life through Murriel. Macon embodies 'The Accidental Tourist' in life, passively resistant to involvement, yet gradually drawn into change. His guide books symbolize his perspective secure and predictable, shielded from genuine emotional involvement.

Macon represents a subdued and inactive form of masculinity. He does not dominate rather he withdraws. His journey illustrates a critique of emotional suppression, often sociological in men, revealing how evading vulnerability can transform into a kind of entrapment. Male figures, notably Macon, are torn between a wish for steadiness and the unpredictable yet refreshing influences of transformation. The book challenges the notion that masculinity is tied to dominance, rationality, and emotional suppression. Tyler proposes that being emotionally open and adaptable represents healthier expressions of masculinity.

Tyler's books stall men's acceptance or rejection of roles passed down from their dads. The protector position is regularly subverted by Tyler. Her guys are not heroes or rescuers; rather than they are regular people who occasionally stumble and frequently find it difficult to relate to others' or their individual feelings. Instead of criticizing these characters, Tyler provides them with humor and compassion. Their mistakes are really human, and her depiction implies that conventional masculinity doesn't always work. Tyler frequently softens standard gender stereotypes by placing her male characters in caregiving and household chores that are typically associated with femininity. Many of her characters find it difficult to convey their feelings, especially perplexity, love, or loss. Instead of being criticized, this emotional in articulation is portrayed as very human and occasionally even moving.

The restraint can reflect societal expectations on masculinity, particularly in middle-class American households. In the novel *The Accidental Tourist* Macon exhibits characteristics typically associated with stoic masculinity, such as emotional withdrawal, passivity, and resistance to change. However, his lack of conventional aggressiveness is another aspect of his masculinity. He is very contemplative, avoids conflict, and lacks decisiveness. His relationship helped him grow emotionally and become more receptive to chaos. Tyler presents a guy grappling with bereavement, vulnerability, and the need for connection,

undermining traditional masculine notions of stoicism, emotional repression, and independence.

Tyler employs her male characters to analyze and confront conventional ideas of masculinity. Tyler illustrates a wide range of male reactions to trauma, love and change from Macon's subdued repression to Julian's frankness and the Levy brothers emotional detachment. In the end, she supports emotional development openness and the bravery to connect with life even during painful moments.

In Anne Tyler's novel *The Accidental Tourist* masculinity is depicted as emotionally controlled, with conflict apparent and influenced by family dynamics that favor distance over emotional display. Murray Bowen, a popular present-day American Psychiatrist is of the view that the male characters in a family are more differentiated and they sustain their identity within intimate relationships. He also views individuals as existing along with a spectrum of emotional differentiation and those who are less differentiated tend to be more emotionally reactive. Ronald Levant is an American psychologist, in an interview he states that how male norms impact help seeking, relationships and mental health. His approaches for men who struggle with emotional expression due to masculine socialization.

Macon Leary exhibits low differentiation. His emotionally detached and passive demeanor shows his difficulty in expressing his emotional needs while staying connected to those around him. Particularly in his connections with his wife Sarah and girlfriend Muriel and his family. Macon withdraws into his daily habits and solitude following his death instead of facing his grief, suggesting a lack of differentiation. Emotional cutoff occurs when individuals handle unresolved conflicts with family by minimizing emotional connections. Here, masculinity is portrayed through traits of withdrawal and avoidance frequently inherited from Macon's family of origin, particularly from his siblings who also inhabit a closely knit, emotionally insulated environment.

The siblings of Macon, Garner, Charles and Porter Leary. They are the brothers of Macon, particularly Charles and Porter, embody a small scale versions of peculiar, solitary masculinity. They exist in a realm of their unique schedules and peculiar household arrangements. The brothers avoid genuine human connection and emotional risk by living in a suspended state. Their actions reveal an exaggerated version of Macon's own problems as well as a neurotic demand for order. They stand for the perils of severe emotional detachment and avoidance. They are socially stunted as a result of their fear of emotional exposure. Tyler critiques how isolated and ineffectual this type of masculinity can

be when faced with reality by using them in a way that is almost humorous.

Tyler uses the family as a means of expressing this conflicting outlook on life. The fundamental unit of all societies is the human family. It is the one thing that all societies have in common. Nevertheless, each person's response to their family is distinct and personal. Tyler enjoys examining how family relationships are created and the conflict that exists between a character and their family. The theory of actualization explained the innate human drive to realize one's full potential. Abraham Maslow explain in detail about the self-actualizing behaviour of man in the theory of actualization.

One of Tyler's greatest titles for the book is *The Accidental Tourist*, which sums up her outlook on life quite well. Like the Learys in the book, many individuals pull in their horns and isolate themselves out of fear of being harmed because there is no guarantee that anyone's life will be ordered, changed, or given a choice. Still, Time and life set everyone on a road that includes all of those things, whether they like it or not. Everybody is a visitor. Macon Leary is merely a traveler who tries to balance these opposing demands for stability and change.

Conclusion

Tyler employs male characters in her stories to illustrate the struggles experienced by men in the postmodern era. She explores the difficulties faced by the father figure in defining his individuality apart from his family. Tyler urges the postmodern father to find a new sense of purpose and depicts the challenges he encounters through the character of Macon. Following the

loss of his wife and son, Macon realizes that his identities solely as a husband and father have disappeared. He grapples with the choices of either succumbing to misery, isolating himself from others, or seeking to move forward from his past and engage with the world. Macon embodies both traditional and contemporary notions of fatherhood.

Macon's quest for order is coming to a standstill. After his son Ethan dies, he withdraws into his Macon Leary Body Bay and shuts himself off from the outside world. Finally, he further isolates himself by fracturing his leg after falling down his basement stair, which results in his physical encasement in a cast. After that, he withdraws even further by going back to the secluded Leary family home, which is managed by his sister Rose. Rose's compulsive alphabetizing and providing care for neighbors and Macon's other two divorced brothers, who have already gone home, only serve to emphasize her own suppressed life. The present study explores the family ties and psyche of male characters in the novel *The Accidental Tourist*

of Anne Tyler. These characters are represented as idiosyncratic personalities, truthfully depicted as well as typical. In reinterpreting the essence of manhood, Tyler emphasizes compassion, openness, and transformation as vital elements of a more wholesome and genuine masculinity.

Edward Hoagland is an American author who wrote about the character Macon in *The Accidental Tourist* by Anne Tyler in the *New York Times*, as "Macon Leary, the magnificently decent yet ordinary man in *The Accidental Tourist*, follows logic to its zany conclusions, and in doing this justifies...the catch-as-catch-can nature of much of life, making us realize that we are probably missing people of mild temperament in our own acquaintance who are heroes, too, if we had Ms. Tyler's eye for recognizing them....Muriel, the man-chaser and man-saver of *The Accidental Tourist*, ranks among the more endearing characters of postwar literature."

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