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Suffering and Coping in the Novels of Anne Tyler

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SUFFERING AND COPING IN THE NOVELS OF ANNE TYLER

By
Camden Hastings

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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Approved By

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DEDICATION

For my mother, who has supported me from the very beginning in all of my endeavors,
both academic and otherwise, and who is my hero.

For my younger sister, Tinsley, who has encouraged me so often when I needed it the
most and who has been a source of many wonderful memories and laughs over the years.

For my uncle, A.G. Harmon, who has provided me support, guidance, and inspiration in
this and all other parts of my life.

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My mother, sister, and grandparents provided me with constant support and guidance over the two-year span of reading and writing and allowed me to talk continuously about my project. Their thoughts often allowed me to incorporate new ideas into my project.

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ABSTRACT

CAMDEN STORY HASTINGS: Suffering and Coping in the Novels of Anne Tyler

(Under the direction of Dr. Kathryn McKee)

Through an exploration of the causes of the characters' suffering and their mechanisms for coping, this thesis shows that by developing the perseverance necessary to navigate ordinary, everyday obstacles, Tyler's characters cope with extraordinary circumstances causing them pain. They also realize that victories in the little things lead to discoveries about themselves and the sources of their distress. The six novels discussed here include The Accidental Tourist, Saint Maybe, The Beginner's Goodbye, Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, Ladder of Years, and Breathing Lessons. Nine major characters from these six novels are explored and, while various causes lead to their individual suffering, these origins can be divided into three main categories: grief as the result of freak accidents, motherhood, and insecurities arising from unusual circumstances. Though their coping mechanisms take a variety of forms, this thesis explores the validity of several different responses and also emphasizes everyday endurance as the ultimate victory in these characters' lives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Family, Fate, and Freak Accidents.....	8
1.1: Macon Leary.....	8
1.2: Ian Bedloe.....	23
1.3: Aaron Woolcott.....	36
Chapter II: Motherhood and Identity.....	50
2.1: Pearl Tull.....	50
2.2: Maggie Moran.....	65
2.3: Delia Grinstead.....	78
Chapter III: Insecurities from Unusual Circumstances.....	92
3.1: Cody Tull.....	92
3.2: Jenny Tull.....	102
3.3: Muriel Pritchett.....	116
Conclusion.....	128
Bibliography	132

Introduction

The wide range of causes for her characters' suffering allows Anne Tyler to comment upon the variety of trials that they experience, as well as to discuss multiple mechanisms for conquering them. Additionally, what critics have characterized as her formulaic plots, settings, and character types, actually complement the ordinariness of everyday life that she portrays in her novels and prove not to be formulaic at all. Tyler creates her own world, her own Baltimore, with its distinct features, teeming with the eccentric characters, each seeking to overcome his or her own challenges. The appeal of Tyler's novels comes in that her characters do not simply suffer through an isolated trial and then cope with it on their way to a full recovery. Instead, they suffer every day, in a variety of ordinary and mundane ways, such as deciding one day after several years, to train a dog or backing out of the car repair shop and rear-ending a delivery truck. While potentially making steps towards progress, they often face the possibility of regression. The characters are not necessarily healed; rather, they make discoveries vital to their growth as individuals which allow them to function in the world. Through an exploration of the causes of the characters' suffering and their mechanisms for coping, this thesis will show that by developing the perseverance necessary to navigate ordinary, everyday obstacles, Tyler's characters cope with extraordinary circumstances that cause them pain and also realize that victories in the little things lead to discoveries about themselves and the origins of their pain.

For each of these characters, as well as most of the others whose lives Tyler explores, the family becomes the root of suffering as they seek to identify themselves as

individuals unique from or to solidify their position within their families. Edward Hoagland notes that “in every book, the reader is immersed in the frustrating alarums of a family- [including] the Pikes, the Pecks, the Tulls, the Learys.” These frustrations, however, shape the characters into the people they become and determine the methods they rely upon in interactions with the world.

Tyler’s examination of the family, through its structure, relationships of its members, and the role it plays in each member’s life emphasizes the importance of this entity, no matter how its members choose to view it. According to Robert McPhillips, Tyler characterizes the family as the “only dependable unit against which to gauge one’s identity” (151). While some of Tyler’s characters view family as a unit to retreat to during hard times in life, running into its open arms as a safe haven, others hope to gain independence from its structure and confines. Either way, the family plays a central role in the characters’ lives, from influencing how they make decisions to the people they consider first when they need reassurance. However, even with the members who consider this unit as something from which to flee, many find that they value its role in their lives more than once realized. For example, in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, all three of the Tull children seek to escape the limitations placed upon them within their mother’s household; each desires to identify himself distinctly from the Tull name to experience the world on his own. Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* writes that “Tyler uses the family as a symbol for ‘those two imperatives in American life: the need for community, definition, and safety, and the desire for flight, adventure, and independence’” (Croft 80). Since each of the siblings takes similar measures to carry out this desire, they are actually more alike than they realize. Additionally, that each seeks to

flee the unity that his or her mother so desperately pushes on them becomes negated in the last scene; the three siblings acknowledge that they are all they have in the world and must cling to their family's foundation in order to survive the uncertainties and detours of life. Larry McMurtry notes that through the development of the family, Tyler demonstrates "the mingling of misery and contentment in the daily lives of her families, reminding us how alike- and yet distinct- happy and unhappy families can be" (135).

Because Tyler writes about the nitty gritty details in the everyday lives of her characters, the ups and downs they experience become more relatable, reminding the reader that very little of what these characters encounter is beyond the realm of the average person's understanding. Tyler's work revolves around the creation of normal, everyday characters with whom a wide range of readers can find a particular connection. These characters, according to Hoagland, are "clinging to a low rung of the middle class, they are householders because they have inherited a decaying home, not because they're richer than renters, and they remain bemused or bewildered by the fortuitous quality or most major 'decisions' in their own or other's lives." These traits may characterize them as somewhat hopeless, but at the same time, their ordinariness and ability to be so in-tune with the workings of the world become quite evident. Wallace Stegner describes the characters as "a Dickensian gallery of oddballs, innocents, obsessives, erratic, incompetents, and plain Joes and Janes, [who] all see the world a little skewed, but their author... presents them... [so that] they come off the page as exhilaratingly human. First they surprise us, then we recognize them, then we acknowledge how much they tell us about ourselves" (148).

Despite the often extreme circumstances they face, from a freak murder at a Burger Bonanza to a single moment predicting a drastically different future, the characters must learn how to cope with daily obstacles as they move towards progress. After they experience hardships, the characters cease trying to thrive and focus on simply surviving. Some criticism of Tyler's works claims that her characters are desperate and paranoid people and that "whatever Ms. Tyler puts them through is going to be uprooting and abrasive before it is redemptive" (Hoagland). However, with these unfortunate events and fears that they experience, they have room for improvement and an opportunity to grow. Tyler's characters often reach a temporary halt in their lives, when she ends the books, and at this particular moment, the reader finds satisfaction with the ending. Although many of the endings are temporarily satisfying, it is often tempting to consider what will actually happen next. Robertson points out that "Our short-sighted desire for finalities is often blind to time's amplitude and to the way unexpected turns taken by the beat can make life more interesting and fulfilling" (203). With such an up-and-down plotline, the "happy ever after" ending is often unrealistic compared to an ending that will eventually lead to more upsets and obstacles. Always working to achieve a goal represents a short-sighted view that prevents the achiever from truly enjoying life. Other challenges always arise, but one can alter his way of viewing such circumstances.

Throughout many of her novels, Tyler emphasizes her characters continuing to live everyday life as the most important aspect, not negating the inevitability of evil but focusing on the positivity in life instead. During and at the conclusion of her books, Tyler leaves her readers with a sense of hope; even understanding that misfortune falls upon undeserving victims, such as Macon who has protected his son for twelve years, one must

not give up completely on the future or lose optimism. Likewise, as Hoagland suggests, the out-of-the-ordinary characters in Tyler's books offer the reader an opportunity to define the term "hero" in a more subjective manner. Even the ordinariness of people-- such as Muriel in The Accidental Tourist and Aaron in The Beginner's Goodbye-- serves as a legitimate justification for transforming them into heroes because of their views on life and determination to push through their challenges. Tyler herself writes that "the real heroes to me in my books are first the ones who manage to endure and second the ones who somehow are able to grant other people the privacy of the space around them and yet still produce warmth" (Michaels). With this idea comes the opportunity for characters to cope in a variety of ways, some of which fellow characters consider inappropriate (Macon's dismissal of any pity) and others which are deemed unusual (like Ian who turns to an ascetic religion to cope, a manner very different from his non-religious family). Each person has his or her own way of facing the challenges that arise; no one way suits everyone.

Even though each of Tyler's characters works to escape from something particular to them, whether from the outside world or from being trapped at home, Tyler weaves the common thread of desiring something different than what is available into many of her novels. Susan Gilbert notes that in one book, Tyler writes about characters who have "come home and then run away" while in the next one, she writes about characters who "run away and then come home" (141). People within their own worlds consider both kinds of characters "outsiders" because they pursue dreams in opposition to what others around them aim to achieve. These characters face challenges arising with each day. However, despite many characters' preferences to stay to themselves, most rely

on the outside world more than they realize to conquer their fears. Macon and Ian, for example, both find that interacting with others allows them to move past themselves and to experience the world around him. These experiences present the opportunity to grow stronger and more capable of enduring the world around them.

Reaching the final goal of overcoming their suffering often remains unfulfilled at the end of the novel, but the epiphanies and self growth experienced by the characters along the way provide hope for their lives even after the last page. Tyler's method of portraying the passing of time allows the reader to track the characters' progress as they develop. Typically, she chooses not to state the date or the time elapsed between events but rather displays this evolvment through the characters, their appearances, actions, wardrobes, or statuses in life. Alice Petry, author of Understanding Anne Tyler, points out that Tyler focuses on the "joys and difficulties of reaching certain stages of life: adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, [and] old age" (244). While Tyler utilizes the passing of time as a critical aspect in each of the six novels examined here, Petry notes that "not until Breathing Lessons has Tyler focused so closely on the issue of time as an abstraction and the impact of its passing on individual lives" (Petry 244-45). Tyler herself says that she "depend[s] on the passage of time (births, weddings, aging, deaths) for [her] plot" (Huneven 330). While some of Tyler's characters and novels have been criticized for their drawn out scenes, Petry ties in the common themes of the family as related to time progression. She notes that Tyler raises important points about the requirements to maintain a marriage as well as "how one [can] deal constructively with the inevitable passage of time" (Petry 235).

Like the institution of the family, the elapsing of time also serves as a root for characters' suffering. Many cannot relinquish the past or the influence it has in their lives. They continue to be mentally imprisoned by events, thoughts, people, and choices made in their histories and must actively strive to move to the present. A strength of Tyler's characters, though, involves their steadfastness and unwillingness to abandon their own ideals and values and to avoid anything that might tempt them to do so. In contrast, this "strength" can be a downfall as their inflexibility prevents them from adapting, even when life strongly dictates its necessity.

Through The Accidental Tourist, Saint Maybe, The Beginner's Goodbye, Breathing Lessons, Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, and Ladder of Years, Tyler presents an endurance in her characters that serves as inspiration for all who witness it.

Chapter 1: Family, Fate, and Freak Accidents

Tyler utilizes the disruption of some aspect of the family in many of her novels to emphasize characters' development as people distinct from the collective unit to which they belong. The families undergo some sort of stress, whether minimal everyday matters or life-changing traumatic events. The results of these various situations lead characters to act in different ways. Some members seek an escape from the limitations they experience in the hands of family. Others seek comfort by closing themselves off from the world and retreating to the refuge provided by their families. Still others use their role *within* the family to define their identity as one distinct from the security they find at home. In The Accidental Tourist, The Beginner's Goodbye, and Saint Maybe, Tyler examines a wide range of situations and relationships presented in these, but also in the majority of other Tyler's novels. The family takes on a variety of functions in the lives of its members and allows characters to experience individual self discovery.

1.1 Macon Leary, The Accidental Tourist

In The Accidental Tourist, Macon Leary experiences destruction to the composition his family through the loss of his son and the separation from his wife. Through this life-altering series of events, Tyler explores the opportunity for growth outside the entity of one's family and challenges Macon to seek a different sort of purpose for himself. Macon discovers that the identity he knows, that of husband and father, is the only foundation he can cling to in life. He only realizes this after these roles

are no more. Macon must readjust his life to fit into the unusual circumstances presented through the death of his son and the separation from his wife.

Although Macon's twelve-year-old son, Ethan, has begged year after year to attend summer camp, Macon has always denied his request, believing that too much harm could come from Ethan's leaving. Finally, Macon gives in and allows Ethan to attend camp in Virginia. On the second night of Ethan's "summertime adventure," he sneaks out with some friends to the nearby Burger Bonanza restaurant and is murdered (15).

Ironically, despite the great strides Macon has taken to protect his son within the boundaries of his own home for Ethan's entire childhood, Ethan is murdered anyway and in a situation completely due to chance. It was "one of those deaths that made no sense," as he is "not even supposed to be there" at the fast food joint (15). Ethan is killed because he is somewhere he is not supposed to be- without Macon's knowledge and out from his control. That this tragedy occurs in unusual circumstances suggests to Macon that life is often unpredictable; planning each moment of the day cannot protect against unseen events or defiance from those being protected. For Macon, acting cautiously proves mostly beneficial for twelve years, but also hazes his view of reality.

The freakish nature of the incident resulting in the death of their only son increases the tension between Macon and his wife Sarah. While Macon drives them home from a beach trip several months following the accident (as Sarah constantly reprimands his driving style and habits), Sarah abruptly demands a divorce from Macon (4). Just prior to this unexpected request, Sarah notes that Macon does not seem to "care" much for anything, besides his routines and systems, which she insinuates have greater influence than anything else in his life (3). As becomes apparent, it seems that Ethan was

one of the few, if not the only, reasons for Sarah and Macon to stay married. After the incident, Sarah associates the pain of Ethan's death with her marriage to Macon. She claims, even if not fully confirmed that she believes, that the couple has little in common anymore and that neither contributes much to making their union a success. However, as becomes apparent later in the novel, Macon has come to realize the truth to what Sarah only *voices*, a truth he has tried to avoid or even that he has not been conscious of, before Ethan's death.

Part of the suffering that Macon experiences comes from the inability to accept what has been insinuated all along. Reflecting back on the beginning of their marriage, Macon considers the seven difficult years they endured while trying to have a baby. He believes that these complications have made them miss "connections in the most basic and literal sense" (124). Their early relationship revolves around the disappointments that come each month upon the discovery that Sarah still is not pregnant; instead of allowing them to experience wedded bliss, they are just made more aware of their "essential incompatibility" (124). Additionally, Ethan's birth "brought out more of their differences. Things they had learned to ignore in each other resurfaced" (15). Additionally, Sarah blames Macon for Ethan's death. When the police ask Macon to identify Ethan's body, Macon steps up to the task. But, as Macon recalls, Sarah condescendingly questions whether or not he is "really capable of distinguishing Ethan from some other boy" (293). As Ethan's mother, she believes she is most suited for the job, especially because "Macon had been so intent on preparing [Ethan] for every eventuality that [Macon] hadn't had time to enjoy him" (14).

The root of the family, found in the relationship between Sarah and Macon, is not as strong as it must be to support a fruitful family. With only a weak foundation to begin with, there is little for Macon to cling to through the difficulties that arise. Therefore, when Sarah questions their union and requests a separation, Macon's identity is completely upturned. Without a son to whom he can serve as a father or a wife to whom he can be a husband, and without any sort of relationship to rely on for strength, Macon finds himself very alone. Once again, the idea that Ethan serves as the glue in their relationship becomes apparent. Both the large and smaller scale suffering that Macon experiences through Ethan's death and the alteration of his day to day routine, respectively, force him to realize, even if not immediately, that he needs to find a new source of satisfaction in his life.

The great irony of Ethan's death becomes only the first in a series of ironies in Macon's life. Although the author of a series of guidebooks entitled The Accidental Tourist, he cannot stand to travel. For example, he enjoys the control that comes from "organizing a disorganized country" through his travel guides, which are designed for businessmen who want to remain under the radar during their trips abroad (10). Macon's target audience is "people forced to travel on business... [those whose] concern was how to pretend they had never left home" (9-10). They do not want to explore the country's greatest sights or the unique delicacies offered; instead, they are like Macon in that they want to stay as close to their normal lives as possible this far away from home.

Macon's desire to create order out of chaos makes itself apparent in his daily and travel routines, from his "plotless... but invariably interesting... 1,198 page long" novel allowing him to avoid any contact with fellow passengers (27), to the justification for

bringing just one suit on the trip- “a medium gray” one that will “hide the dirt [and is also] handy for sudden funerals and other formal events” (21). That he feels the need to even prepare for such dismal events, such as funerals, during his week-long trips suggests that he understands- even if subconsciously- the unexpectedness of life. It also validates his excessively protective hold over Ethan for twelve years and his motivation to control each aspect of his own life.

Avoiding the ambiguity of life is a goal Macon strives to achieve, not only on the large scale, such as limiting spontaneity in his life, but also on a daily basis through his routines; just as his travel strategies provide him with confidence that evil will be avoided, his daily routine also favors order: he “tended to eat the same meals over and over... to drop off his cleaning on a certain set day and to pay all his bills on another” (193). Similar to other Tyler characters, such as Aaron Woolcott and Delia Grinstead, Macon thrives on order and regiment. These characters cling to their habits and are undeterred by anyone or anything that could potentially threaten identity they have developed.

However, this inflexibility can also lead to downfall. Macon, in particular, has identified himself through his routine as a husband to Sarah and as a father to Ethan. Now that these roles have been inverted, he must learn how to adjust to life without the structure provided by these classifications. In his essay, “Taking the Anne Tyler Tour,” Joseph Mathewson writes that Tyler creates “these fully rounded people who all their lives have seen no reason to change... but the nature of life sometimes forces us into changing, whether we want to or not” (124). Aside from the bizarre manner in which his son is murdered, the suffering Macon faces follows a pattern of grieving that requires him

simply to endure one day at a time. However, even as he appears to progress, the sadness of Ethan's death cannot be fully overcome. Macon has identified himself so heavily not only through his role as father but also through the now meaningless role of husband. Macon must learn the difference between persistence in his routines which, while comforting, can also be greatly limiting, and perseverance which allows him to step out from his insecurities into liberation.

Until Macon has experienced his ultimate low and most vulnerable position, he cannot begin developing into a stronger, more independent character. As a result of the abrupt breakup of his family in such a short amount of time, Macon finds the routine at the foundation of his daily life flipped. He feels unstable and out of place, even within his own home. After Sarah announces that she wants a divorce, but plans on leaving the house to Macon, he senses that the now empty structure has grown more "crowded," despite the fact that everything belonging to Sarah is gone (6). He decides that in order to move past the uneasiness of his inverted life, he must set up a new way of performing everyday tasks, one that he does not associate with her. He thinks up contraptions and methods to perform the activities of daily life with as little effort as possible. For example, Macon "tie[s] the clothes bag to Ethan's old skateboard and he drop[s] a drawstring bag down the laundry chute" to minimize the work he must perform by walking up and down the basement stairs (43). Likewise, to save himself the need to wash and change his bed sheets every week, he creates a "Macon Leary Body Bag" which he considers as a "giant sort of envelope made from one of the seven sheets he had folded and stitched together on the sewing machine" (9). Even the name of this device, a "body bag" suggests a dismal thought of complete seclusion and utter despair. Macon

relies upon more efficient methods of achieving tasks that before would have been associated with his family. These tasks no longer have any sort of joy associated with them, such as eating or providing a welcoming bed for the family to gather. Macon does not want to associate these tasks with the people that are absent in his life and desires instead to avoid the constant reminder that he is all alone.

Remaining firm to routine as a source of comfort serves as a way Macon copes, but it *is* a sign of hope that he immediately develops new customs, distinct from his life with Sarah. Even with these new measures to combat the grief and apprehension he feels after Ethan's death and Sarah's abandonment, Macon finds that sadness still presents itself through insomnia. He "always took comfort [when looking out his window at night] if he found a light. Someone else had trouble sleeping too" (17). His sadness also presents itself through the anxiety attacks he experiences. Mathewson notes Tyler's unique ability to illustrate a disheartening situation (Macon's wife abandoning him immediately after his son's murder in a freak accident) while also adding lighthearted moments so as to make the situation less dark and more hopeful (124).

Macon finds his growth halted by a mishap with regard to his "efficient" laundry method. To avoid carrying laundry to and from the basement, "spar[ing] [his] trick back," Macon designs an alternative method in which he "tied the clothes basket to Ethan's old skateboard and he dropped a drawstring bag down the laundry chute at the end of a rope" (43). However, Macon's progress is actually crippled both literally and physically when he slips on the laundry basket- skateboard contraption and lands on the cement floor, resulting in a broken leg. Once again, Macon discovers that even with the controlled and

structured means he designs to limit the unexpected incidents of life, unplanned events still arise.

Tyler uses the other members of Macon's family to show the identity they have defined for him and that he needs to escape- even if he does not realize it at the time. Because of his injury, Macon returns to his childhood home for care, where his sister and two brothers all currently reside (two of the three siblings have never moved out). His sister, Rose, has always been called upon to care for the family, to "plan the menus... reorganize the utensil drawer... [and] iron the brothers' socks" (63). Macon's siblings all prove to be just as methodical in their daily routines as he is, from the long list of items his brother Porter reads before he allows the family to leave the house to the alphabetized pantry that Rose keeps, with the allspice located next to the ant poison. Macon begins to wonder "whether, by some devious, subconscious means, he had engineered this injury... just so he could settle down safe among the people he'd started out with" (59).

While Macon easily slips back into the lifestyle he once shared with Rose and his brothers, returning home allows him to remain passive about life. With their eccentricity and need for order, the Leary siblings provide Macon with a security that encourages him to stay in his comfort zone, instead of encouraging him to expand his horizons. Additionally, the family's lifestyle and isolation from society nurses Macon's insecurities about the world. This double-edged sword of Macon's relationship with his siblings- finding comfort at home but only by hiding from reality- is represented through Larry McMurtry's idea as written in his essay, "Life is a Foreign Country." McMurtry writes, "One of the persistent concerns of this work is the ambiguity of family happiness and unhappiness" (132). The happiness, or at least the satisfaction, that Macon finds in the

secluded Leary home arises because he can avoid the outside world where he would find more unhappiness and discontentment. In another example of the double-sidedness present in Macon's suffering, Sarah actually initiates the separation, but Macon also finds himself less than content in the marriage. He is unsatisfied with a "family" consisting only of Sarah and finds more pleasure with his own siblings although they, too, often find themselves arguing.

When he first moves back in with his siblings, Macon takes comfort in knowing that neither Sarah nor his boss, Julian, know where he is hiding. He removes himself from all reminders of his pain, telling his one-time neighbor that he will likely not return to the home he lived in while married to Sarah: "This [idea of not moving back] hadn't occurred to him before... 'I might stay here with my family,'" he says (66). Alice Petry describes this constant need for control as a reason the members of the Leary family "endanger themselves" (Petry 215). By remaining within the limits of their comfort zones, they actually threaten their physical well-being (for example, through the ever-present risk that the ant poison will be added to a recipe instead of the allspice) and also their relationship with the outside world and the opportunities it offers. Peter Prescott describes the Learys' lives, as well as those of other Tyler characters, when he says that "the orderly life, taken to an extreme, becomes a deadening cocoon" (Prescott 117). They cannot bear to leave the routines they are accustomed to and therefore cannot fully live their lives and experience the world to gain personal growth. In his essay, "The Baltimore Chop," Robert McPhillips notes that "Tyler's families are invariably not happy, or never precisely so. They nonetheless remain the only dependable unit against

which to gauge one's identity" (151). This comment is proved by the fact that Macon returns to his roots when his life becomes too disorderly for him to bear.

After becoming comfortable with the routines of his siblings, Macon realizes he must resume normal life and return to work. But just as he begins boarding a plane, the first since moving back to his childhood home, Macon is once again "overcome by the lost feeling that always plagued him [on his long trips]" especially as he looks around and sees that all the travelers "gave the impression of belonging to someone" (137). Once Macon identifies himself in the context of his family and house, he feels isolated and lost when placed in a new, uncharacteristic situation. As Mary Robertson notes, "The typical family novel reserves its emotional center for the insiders. No matter how many forays or entanglements the members of the family have with outsiders, such a novel gains its power from a clear definition of traits of both the individual members and the family as a whole" (Robertson 185). While the Leary siblings are considered rather eccentric individually, they could be considered by each other to be somewhat normal, especially within the context of their own family. In general, the means Tyler's characters are willing to take to step outside of their comfort zones plays an important role in how much they can develop. The support (or lack thereof) offered by the family to the individual members as they mature becomes evident when Macon's brothers show their weariness of Muriel's foreignness. They wish for Macon to remain isolated with them.

Since Macon's ability to control life through routines is encouraged within the Leary household, he fails to recognize an opportunity to escape at the time it arises. Macon realizes he needs to take a step back and to analyze his life deeply while playing a childhood card game with his siblings called Vaccination. The name of the game is yet

another underlying symbol of suffering and morbidity as viewed by Macon and the Leary clan. Macon sees that their seating arrangement this night is nearly identical to the one in a family portrait from many years before. He asks himself, “Was there any real change?” and “felt a jolt of something very close to panic. Here he still was! The same as ever!” (74). This discovery, in addition to a dream Macon has of his grandfather questioning when they will be able to escape this house and its rituals, serves as an important epiphany. To change his life after Sarah and Ethan, Macon discovers, even if only subconsciously at first, that he must change his view of the world. This will present him with the opportunity to thrive rather than simply survive.

Mary Ellis Gibson, author of “Family as Fate: The Novels of Anne Tyler,” notes that “Tyler’s families live through a repeating pattern of desertion and reunion. Those who desert- or escape- inevitably carry their pasts with them; those who remain are in danger of becoming too passive, of awakening to find themselves in situations not of their making” (166). Although Macon leaves the family when he marries Sarah- which the Learys consider “desertion”- he still cannot shake the orderly, systemized lifestyle common to the entire clan. Similarly, when Macon returns to them after being away, he realizes he truly has not grown out of their shared lifestyle.

The opportunity to escape such a way of life arises immediately after Sarah leaves him. Macon realizes he has no one to care for his late son’s dog, Edward and frantically drives to a nearby Animal Hospital, the “Meow-Bow.” He first encounters Muriel Pritchett here, the woman who will actively pursue his companionship and ultimately change the way he views life. With Muriel, a fellow survivor of pain and struggles and

eccentric in a different way from the Learys (allowing her to express her willingness to embrace, rather than hide from, the world), Macon abandons his inhibitions.

While reluctant to desert his structured way of life and finding his relationship with Muriel to be founded more on annoyance towards her than anything else, his desperation eventually leads him to hire her as Edward's dog trainer. Without realizing the impact that Muriel will have, Macon opens the door to a new lifestyle, one that will eventually lead him to thrive on spontaneity instead of on his inhibitions. Initially, Macon does not feel that he can even accept an invitation to dinner at Muriel's house because anything foreign from his routine (the one without Sarah and Ethan) makes him too sad; he would rather be alone: "Macon couldn't think of any way to tell [Muriel] this, but the fact was he would never be able to make that dinner. He missed his wife. He missed his son... There was no point looking for substitutes" (179). However, to apologize for standing her up, Macon visits Muriel at her house one evening. Before he realizes what he is doing, he finds himself telling her his entire story of loss and loneliness. Muriel is the first person to whom Macon shares details about Ethan's death. While Macon *should* see his relationship with Muriel as a step towards progress, he feels guilty for moving on, as if believing he should still be in denial about Ethan's death. Even so, she alleviates the feeling he has before meeting her: that he is "far from everyone; [he does not have] any friends anymore and everyone looks trivial and foolish and not related to [him]" (183).

With Muriel, Macon begins to feel appreciated once again. Muriel's randomness in matters such as fighting off a potential mugger with her handbag and believing in the readings of Ouija boards positively influences Macon. Before meeting her, he had "no room in his life for anyone as unpredictable as Muriel... Or as extreme" (193). But after

being with her, he comes to discover “that although he did not love her he loved the surprise of her and also the surprise of himself when he was with her” (194).

Additionally, upon attending a rather chaotic Thanksgiving dinner with Muriel’s family, Macon realizes that he can talk about Ethan freely while around Muriel, providing him with a sense of peace. After spending more time with her, Macon can change his identity from the husband he was while married to Sarah to the more open-minded man he is with Muriel. This is evidenced in his willingness to interact with fellow passengers on the plane instead of burying himself in his book. Macon feels comfortable with one foot inside the security of his home (with his siblings) and the other foot out in the world, leading a more adventurous life with Muriel. Straddling this line between the “inside” and “outside” signifies Macon’s progress in coping with his life’s changes, however tentative the progress may be.

Despite a gradual readiness to adapt to life with Muriel, Macon experiences a minor setback in his priorities when he receives a call from Sarah, asking if she can move back into their old house (which Macon has left vacant). Although Tyler does not provide great detail or analysis on Macon’s motives, the following chapter begins with Macon and Sarah shopping for a new couch. They seem to be resuming their relationship from months before, shopping in Modern Homewares and purchasing fertilizer for their neglected yard. While they do not discuss their separation or Macon’s relationship with Muriel, these topics loom in the background of their renewed relationship. When the occasion to talk about their status finally arises, Macon can only think of Muriel and his relationship with *her*. Muriel’s statements, spat with bitterness as she watches him pack up his things before returning “home” to Sarah, remain in the forefront of his mind.

While arguably Macon knows that he is more content with Muriel than with Sarah, Macon represses this idea in ill-fated hopes that all can return to the way it was before Ethan's death and Sarah's departure.

Not until Macon has traveled thousands of miles to Paris on one of his "Accidental Tourist" assignments does he realize just how much Muriel contributes to his happiness. Ironically, Macon does not understand the true meaning of home (what he has come to associate with his relationship with Muriel) until he has traveled thousands of miles away from her. Unbeknownst to Macon, though, Muriel decides that she would like to make her debut trip to Paris at this same time. Macon tries to remain distanced from her, calling Sarah in the middle of the night as if to reassure himself that choosing Sarah is the right decision. Although reluctant to admit it, Macon is a changed person, one more willing to face the world instead of hiding from it. His compatibility with Muriel dominates over his with Sarah, making it difficult to return to his former life.

In his review of The Accidental Tourist, Michiko Kakutani writes that "Macon, on his part, realizes that he is actually happier than he's been in years; and yet he is reluctant to embrace, even acknowledge, that emotion" (Kakutani). This statement is evident through Macon's insistence that he and Muriel should spend as little time together as possible stating, "I've been married to [Sarah] forever. Longer than you've been alive, almost. I can't change now" (311). It is with this declaration that Macon's pre-Muriel, anti-change lifestyle reappears, as if holding him captive and causing a setback in his progress. Macon seems unable to picture his life in any way other than that which he has always known: with Sarah. Kakutani comments: "fearful of caring too much, unwilling to assume new responsibilities, [Macon] tells himself that his life's

merely on hold, that he can go on drifting, allowing things to ‘befall’ him without making any decisions” (Kakutani). However, as the Parisian trip progresses, Macon realizes that he can experience a whole new side of life with Muriel; she adds excitement and variety to his ordinary work routine, as when she decides to ask the waiter about his choice for dinner rather than just following the same request Macon’s book suggests.

Just as his first injury leads him to realize the necessity for change, Macon experiences a second epiphany after pulling out his back in Paris. Ironically, this injury occurs following Macon’s all- night deliberation about whether to invite Muriel to join him on a day-long excursion outside of Paris. He feels this proposal could influence his relationship with both her and with Sarah. After ignoring Muriel’s calls (almost as if he believes this injury is fate’s response to him for even considering inviting Muriel along), he is surprised to find Sarah in his hotel room one day when he awakens. As Sarah nurses him, Macon comes to his second realization: that “he had not taken steps very often in his life... Really never. His marriage, his two jobs, his time with Muriel, his return to Sarah- all seemed to have simply befallen him. He couldn’t think of a single major act he had managed of his own accord” (326). With this insight, Macon decides to leave Sarah and return to Muriel and overcomes the setback in his development. He assumes the new attitude towards life he has enjoyed during his time with Muriel, demonstrating the first step he performs independently after his self discovery. He sheds the insecurities that have prevented him from a life full of surprises and unplanned occurrences.

In the end, when Macon chooses to follow Muriel (representing his new, more open-minded view), Jonathan Yardley notes that Macon has “been given the gift of life... [through] new connections with himself and with others” (Yardley 121). His decision

reflects two important changes in point of view. In the beginning, Macon believes that there is finality to most things. While this may be a realistic way to approach life, placing things in perspective to their temporality and reducing anxieties about the minor occurrences, it is also rather fatalistic. It dooms him to failure, with any comforts only lasting temporarily. As Susan Gilbert notes, “moments of epiphany seem to come unpredictably, by ‘accident,’ and to have little to do with process or progress, to be timeless, disconnected from the daily order” (Gilbert 273). As Macon comes to identify himself more with Muriel, he discovers that the door opens to life’s possibilities. With the role of the family in this particular novel being one of security but also an entity from which to escape, Macon experiences growth from outside of its hold. While his development will undoubtedly encounter more obstacles along the way, Macon grows to accept the unpredictability and excitement that are part of life and can enrich it.

1.2 Ian Bedloe, Saint Maybe

Just as Tyler considers the Leary family dynamics by portraying its support of Macon through tragedy, she further explores the family from another perspective in Ian Bedloe’s life. Ian’s position within the family contrasts that of Macon; Macon must overcome the inhibition he feels outside the walls of his childhood home and rely on his role within the family to form an identity in the world. On the other hand, Ian views the familial entity as something from which to escape if he desires to achieve personal growth. Through the relationships of Macon and Ian, Tyler examines the distinct, yet equally important influences of the family in providing security and in developing

individuals who seek independence, yet still expand on the foundations provided by their families.

By exploring the family's nourishment of Ian even as he moves towards independence, Tyler examines an individual who willingly branches out from his family. Ian acts in stark contrast to Macon who, without much encouragement to act otherwise, falls back into the routines of his childhood. Interestingly, although Ian adopts his autonomy by choice, it becomes a crucial means of coping with the tragedy that befalls him. Because his suffering originates in part from the guilt of bringing potential pain to his family, Ian *must* confront the situation alone. What used to be a self-assured view of the world becomes a necessary front to maintain so that he can protect those he loves from knowledge of actions contrary to this motive.

Ian's mindset, one characterized by an easygoing, rose-colored view on life, emphasizes that he is a product of his family. Like his parents, Doug and Bee, and his older siblings, Danny and Claudia, Ian takes life as it comes, believing that "things would turn out fine... Hadn't they always?" (5). He develops a sense of independence early on as he does not experience any sort of major hardship requiring him to search for strength from an outside source. From his relationship with "Cicely Brown, [who] was the prettiest girl in the junior class" (5) to "his mother dot[ing] on him and his [baseball coach] father... let[ting] him pitch in nearly every game" (5), Ian rides on the coat tails of life, secure in his future with Cicely, his treatment as the "golden child," and his belief "that someday, somehow, he was going to end up famous" (5). With the confidence that he develops early in life, Ian views his family as less of a supportive unit and more as a stepping stone on the pathway to his success.

Tyler does not present a new aspect of Ian's relationship with his family until he has developed seventeen years' worth of self-sufficiency. Characteristic of the Bedloe family's unique and relaxed attitude towards life in general, Ian's brother, Danny, meets Lucy Dean while working at the post office job he began following his high school graduation. They connect over a discussion about the most economical method of mailing several strange objects, including a bowling ball, back to her ex-husband in Wyoming. When Danny announces to the family out of the blue that he has proposed to Lucy only two weeks after meeting her, Ian immediately feels resentment towards Lucy since Danny refers to her so much that "she seemed almost present in the room" (11). Throughout his life thus far, Ian has rarely found himself in a situation he cannot control, having had most things fall into place for him. Ian idolizes Danny and considers him "his dearest relative, who trusted everyone completely and believed whatever you told him" (31). He is saddened by the thought that Danny has now moved on to a new stage in his life. Danny leaves Ian behind not only physically, but also figuratively as he transitions to a more mature role in a family of his own (that of husband instead of as son).

Unaccustomed to feeling anything other than self assuredness, Ian finds that his customary confidence fails to comfort him in the face of the unfamiliar. Lucy's entrance into the family disrupts the only dynamics Ian has ever known, forcing him to compete not only for Danny's attention but also to maintain his status as the golden child. It becomes apparent that Ian is not as secure in his identity as he once believes, unknowingly confirming that his confidence prevails only when no obstacles for attention lie in his way. Unlike Macon who immediately turns to his siblings to help him endure the uncertainty in his life- as he is sure they will provide a comforting and nurturing

environment- Ian has only ever relied on himself for his identity. He does not know where to turn for support when times become challenging and realizes he has secluded himself from forming relationships with his family and from developing a supportive foundation.

Ian's uncertainty gains temporary reprieve when presented with the opportunity to regain some sort of control in his life. Shortly after the marriage, Lucy announces she is pregnant with her third child. Before she can make her announcement, though, her son Thomas (from her previous marriage) slips the news to Ian. Lucy asks Ian to keep it a secret and he agrees immediately, viewing this pact as "a pleasurable moment, sharing a secret with Lucy" (21). From the very beginning, Ian feels a connection with Lucy, sometimes erring on an inappropriate attraction, considering that she is married to Danny, the brother he worships. Even with this admiration for his brother, Ian appreciates the opportunity to have control of information Danny has yet to discover. In a desperate attempt to find holding ground in the whirlwind of events occurring in the family, Ian greedily keeps this secret, almost out of resentment towards Danny for causing Ian's uneasiness. Even if not aware at the time of this animosity, Ian does not know how else to react to his steady foundation being shaken with the changes experienced by the Bedloe family.

Ian's continual acquisition of secret information allows him to temporarily relieve the instability caused by the ever-changing Bedloe family dynamics and to heal his wounded identity. For example, when Ian calculates the timeline of the relationship between Lucy and Danny, he finds it inconsistent with the birth of Lucy's baby, Daphne. With this epiphany, Ian begins to pick up on other voids in Lucy's life. She has no living

relatives and no friends, she speaks ungrammatically, and she returns from her frequent shopping trips without any purchases. Additionally, since the moment Danny introduces Lucy to the Bedloe family, Ian finds himself thinking about and looking at Lucy in ways that make him nervous; he is uneasy about his infatuation he finds with her clothing choices, her mysterious background, and the social outings she claims to attend to each day. He develops suspicions about Lucy's infidelity, almost as an outlet to diffuse the power of her presence over him, and finds satisfaction with the idea that Lucy is a part of something less than innocent.

The storm of changes occurring in such a short amount of time completely throws Ian off guard and leaves him completely unstable. The desperate desire to upright a toppled foundation based solely on self-assuredness serves as his motivation to develop any sort of explanation he can to justify his uncertainty. While he appreciates the secret knowledge Lucy shares with him as something to hold over Danny, even if subconsciously, Ian finds that this self-reliance becomes too much of a burden to carry on his own. However, discovering his own identity and path in life, independent from his family's influence, leaves Ian unsure of how to lean upon them in time of greatest need.

The source that Ian temporarily grasps onto amidst the changes occurring in his life is the same one that ultimately changes his life forever. When Ian confronts Danny with his suspicions about Lucy and Daphne's inconsistently timed birth, he does so in a fit of anger, upset that Lucy has made him late for a date with Cicely. Danny has been drinking when Ian demands that Danny drive him home. Ian's not-so-subtle hints about Lucy's mysterious shopping trips and visits with "friends" and eventually leads him to ask Danny how much longer his obliviousness towards Lucy's "affair" will last. While

keeping these inclinations to himself allows Ian to maintain a feeling of superiority over Danny, the threat of losing yet another facet of his foundation- his relationship with Cicely- brings about this abrupt confrontation with Danny. Ian seems not concerned with his missed date so much as with the idea of bestowing Lucy with even more control over his life.

The inclination that his certainty and independence is irreversibly slipping through his fingers contributes to the already-present uncertainty Ian feels. All anxieties he has experienced since Lucy's introduction into the family combine and erupt in Ian's abrupt accusation as he storms out of Danny's car. Upon doing so, he hears a "gigantic, explosive, complicated crash and then a delicate tinkle and then silence" (46). Before he even looks outside, he finds that the noise has paralyzed him. He stands looking into the bathroom mirror unable to budge "because once he moved then time would start rolling forward again, and he already knew that nothing in his life would ever be the same" (46).

Tyler's method presenting time progression in Saint Maybe serves as a realistic examination of the Bedloe family's development. With few flashbacks described and more focus on their lives at present, the Bedloes' lives can be divided into before, during, and after the accident leading to Danny's death. This form of progression develops each character in relation to the events occurring to the family as a whole. Even as they all experience the same tragedy, their prior experiences, perspectives, and statuses in life shape how they react to the accident. While Lucy completely shuts herself off from the world and enters a state of depression, Bee and Doug step in to the children's lives even more than before to fill the role they assume Danny would have played. Additionally, Ian maintains his self-sufficiency, or at least attempts to do so, but discovers this method to

be unsuccessful in providing comfort. Even so, Ian is still unlike Macon who retreats from any memory of pain; Ian seeks ways to relieve his comfort even in the daily activities that remind him of Danny.

Although not realized at the time of the horrific event, Tyler introduces Daphne's birth as a parallel to represent the rebirth that Ian experiences following the accident. With the crash that Ian hears comes much uncertainty, including the cause of Danny's death. Was it suicide (as Ian suspects it to be) or just an accident from driving drunk? He also wonders what will happen to Lucy, the children, and the dynamics of the Bedloe family. Ian refuses to tell his family that *he* caused Danny to run into the brick wall; he knows this news, as well as the thought that the death was not just an accident but suicide, will cause his mother even more pain than the accident itself.

That Ian desires independence from his family comes back to haunt him as he must maintain an air to protect them from the truth. The reality of Danny's death presents itself to Ian as "something dark and stony that got in the way of every happy moment," (82) even the most unassuming occasions. He forces himself through a series of thoughts in order to comprehend his loss and to think logically about it: first he accepts Danny's death as permanent, then he tries to convince himself that Danny died as the result of an accident, and then makes himself acknowledge that Danny killed *himself* (83). Finally, the thought Ian has the most trouble accepting is the one that *he* caused Danny to commit suicide. These thoughts are all followed with the act of convincing himself that everyone shares in the guilt he feels.

With such a life-changing experience, Ian must reevaluate his approach to living each day. Because he faces few challenges before Danny's death (and certainly none of

equal magnitude), his self-assured attitude suffices in facing daily life. However, when an event with the weight of death arises, Ian finds that this independency is inadequate in providing comfort from the grief and guilt he experiences. Ian does not want to be the sole sufferer and wishes that he could be sent to prison for his action, so that he would at least be able to suffer physically (rather than mentally) (83). He also tries to imagine comforting words that his mother might say, including that ““every last one of us has caused *somebody’s* suicide”” (83) in order to lessen the magnitude of his remorse.

In addition to the guilt Ian bears of evoking Danny to commit suicide, he also becomes weighted down by other worries. He knows Lucy blames him for everything and feels shamed by his first thoughts following Danny’s death: that he now has a valid reason for missing his dinner date with Cicely (85). Such a thought suggests that even this relationship is more unsteady than he once believed. Due to the magnitude of his guilt, Danny’s death continues to haunt him through his dreams and through even unrelated conversations with Lucy.

Leaving for college introduces the first opportunity for Ian’s rebirth, escaping his past and the need to justify his actions. However, only a few weeks later, Ian receives a call from Bee Bedloe informing him that Lucy has overdosed on sleeping pills. This shocking news immediately brings back Ian’s guilt as he wonders “*how long will I have to pay for a handful of tossed-off words?*” (90). The guilt Ian endures grows like a snowball: first he must cope with Danny’s death and then he feels indirectly responsible for causing Lucy’s death. During Reverend Dr. Prescott’s prayer at Lucy’s funeral, Ian views the possibility of overcoming his guilt and living a semi-normal life. Although considering himself “ordinarily indifferent to prayers (or to anything else even vaguely

religious),” the end of the prayer leaves Ian feeling “that everything had drained away from him, all the grief and self blame.... He was, in fact, born again” (102).

While this feeling of hope and relief gives Ian a more optimistic outlook on how he may continue to live his life, he discovers only temporary liberation. At Lucy’s burial site, one of the churchgoers notices how Daphne’s reaction changes immediately from one of uncertainty to one of joy upon seeing Ian. In this moment, Ian feels the “radiance [that was] left over from church [fall] away so suddenly” (104), almost with a subconscious comprehension of the important role he can essentially play in the lives of Lucy’s children. Ian has only ever experienced the identity of adored son within his family. Therefore, the possibility of losing this foundation and abandoning the only life he has ever known to search for redemption leaves Ian even more uneasy than before.

Although he tries to “recapture” the sense of peace he experiences at Lucy’s funeral when he returns to school, he finds himself devoid of any optimism. Instead, he experiences an even greater degree of guilt, believing that any adverse occurrence, including Cicely’s concern of a potential pregnancy, is a punishment for his actions. Interestingly, Cicely’s false-alarm pregnancy parallels Ian’s struggle of experiencing his own rebirth. Although he realizes that he cannot rely on his family for support because his actions would cause them more harm than good, he also recognizes that he cannot provide himself with adequate strength to face the daily reminders of his guilt. Another source, therefore, arises to allow him to experience important progress towards rebirth.

Even though unaware of its significance initially, Ian literally passes the chance to begin anew. Ian is finishing up a moving job late one night, and continues walking straight past a store-front church called The Church of the Second Chance. Almost as if

his desire to experience renewal consumes him, Ian enters and then speaks his concerns aloud to this religious group. Ian understands, even subconsciously, that he cannot continue bearing the guilt he feels all by himself. While he desires to stay strong even with daily reminders of his brother's death tempting him to give in, his guilt weighs so heavily upon him that he turns to an outside source for strength. He shamefully admits to this group of strangers that he "used to be good... Or I used to be not bad, at least" and asks them to "Pray for [me] to be good again... Pray for me to be forgiven" (119).

With his original foundation destructed by the secret guilt he must bear, Ian discovers that the opportunity for rebirth and structure lies in Lucy's three children. As Ian floods the air with confessions to Reverend Emmett, the Reverend quickly and confidently replies that Ian must offer an active sort of repentance in order to prove his genuine desire to be forgiven. While originally in disbelief, Ian presents the plan to his parents. His in-depth explanations to them, covering a variety of aspects of his life- such as work and the possibility of being called for the draft- show he has given much thought to his future as a potential father to Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne. Additionally, these rationales represent a true desire to seek strength from an outside source, instead of continuing to rely on himself. As a last resort, Ian explains that he feels led to follow this path in order to be forgiven for his role in Danny's death. The situation does not produce questions or objections from his parents as he initially thinks it might, and Ian recognizes the return on the doubt he initially feels upon hearing Reverend Emmett's suggestion. He realizes that he truly is "beginning from scratch, from the very ground level, as low as he could get" and instead of feeling hopeless, Ian "rested all his weight on God, trustfully, serenely" in this first move towards actively changing his life (129).

Ian's pro-active move to change his future and earn his redemption through religion distinguishes him from Macon. Macon reverts to his past and becomes a passive participant in life and the events occurring to him. Additionally, while Macon relies on his family for strength and reassurance, Ian seeks independence from the Bedloes, confident in his decision to pursue religion. Ian's family cannot believe that he chooses this route as they themselves are not the religious type. He turns away from his parents for support and instead *becomes* support for Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne. He devotes himself to them and to his religion, remembering that "without the Church of the Second Chance he would have struggled alone forever, sunk in hopelessness" (211).

As Evans writes, the Bedloe family is the 'ideal' family, but through a series of tragic events, the course of their lives changes dramatically and permanently... [this] novel delves beautifully into the lives of ordinary people and the necessity for endurance" (Evans 160). Through their reactions to Danny's death, Tyler questions the true significance and possibility of an ideal family. That Ian searches for acceptance outside of his family suggests that they are possibly not as ideal as they try to appear. Bee and Doug shed an optimistic outlook on all they encounter and strive to see only the best of every situation (while often overlooking the aspects of evil that clue them into reality). However, suffering lies right beneath their noses. They are even a part of the family's suffering; their lives change dramatically following Danny's death because of Ian's actions, actions that change not only Ian's life but also the dynamics of the family as a whole.

While Ian discovers internal motivations for pursuing religion as a source of salvation- ones that his parents cannot understand- he continues to use the strength they

provide him to gain independence in his quest for forgiveness. Even as Tyler demonstrates the passing of time through the *children's* maturation, Ian's parents still question his monumental decision to follow the path he chooses. However, they do realize, even subconsciously, the aging process has made them rely on Ian to care for their family. Additionally, Ian becomes confident in his role as caretaker for the children and as a devout member of the Church of the Second Chance. He proudly proclaims that it saved his life and engages the often reluctant family members to participate in church functions. As part of his redemption process, Ian enjoys feeling that he can influence on his family through exposure to his own positive, life-changing experience.

Even though Ian enters the position of "father" to Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne out of guilt and hope for redemption, he begins to identify himself by this role. His recognition furthers his move away from his sole identity within the Bedloe family. While initially he only views this responsibility as a step in his journey to salvation, he subconsciously integrates it into his life. The children never know the true reason he finds himself in this position. They believe he *chose* his responsibility as their caregiver and worry that he will be alone after they leave him (227). The irony of the matter lies in the fact that Ian becomes such a significant presence in their lives *because* he destroyed their family in the first place.

Despite the possibility of becoming bitter over Reverend Emmett's suggestion to abandon his current life as an act of redemption, Tyler plays with the passage of time to demonstrate the *lack* of regret that Ian feels. This theme demonstrates that Ian considers how his life might have differed had he not accepted Reverend Emmett's challenge only after many years have elapsed. The children have grown and become a solid part of his

identity before Ian even considers comparing his current life to that of his former roommate who was likely “well established, probably in some field involving creative thought and invention” (250). Tyler examines the passage of time in this novel, as well as several others like Breathing Lessons and The Accidental Tourist, to demonstrate that her characters may progress chronologically, but still pull their baggage along with them via memories, flashbacks, and repetitive occurrences. Ian remains fairly constant throughout the novel in regards to age, although Tyler does chronicle his maturation through a journey into religion and into independence from the Bedloe clan. Therefore, since Tyler does not record the physical years going by, the novel progresses by way of her descriptions of the children’s statuses in life: in the beginning, their ages are six, three, and newborn, but then they are in high school, then in medical school, and then married. Through the children’s growth over the years, Ian’s development and maturation becomes evident.

Although Ian realizes how his life might have turned out differently, he does not seem to regret choosing the particular path he takes. As Susan Gilbert notes, Tyler’s characters often undergo experiences that offer them a chance to “see life’s possibilities, not merely its worn outlines” (273). Ian’s desire for forgiveness initially leads him to follow the life path to which he adheres, but his love for and commitment to Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne encourages him to pursue it and carry on. Ian demonstrates a new perspective developed through his journey towards redemption, one involving the importance of allowing *others’* influences to shape him instead of relying only on himself to survive hardship. He continues to experience occasional flashbacks of Danny and Lucy even after finding himself happily married and expecting a child of his own. These

connections demonstrate the interconnectedness of time that Tyler explores in other novels such as Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant and Ladder of Years. Over the course of his life which takes an unlikely path early on, Ian's guilt and the need for acceptance allow him to serve the children in a way invaluable to shaping how they evolve into adults as well as influencing his own view of the world.

1.3 Aaron Woolcott- The Beginner's Goodbye

Tyler explores the dynamics of the family in terms of Ian gaining and maintaining independence from them and in terms of Macon being provided with a safety net by them. In The Beginner's Goodbye, she expands the function of the family from sibling, son, and father to include Aaron Woolcott's role as husband. Tyler elaborates upon how this role serves as the foundation for Aaron's identity, even when the status of this identity changes. In addition, Tyler explores the various purposes of marriage through The Beginner's Goodbye, The Accidental Tourist, and Saint Maybe. While the same institution is examined, the influence it has on its members varies. In Saint Maybe, Ian's marriage represents a new chapter in his life, a sign of renewal and of progress made from his suffering after Danny's death. For Macon, one marriage ending provides the opportunity to expand his horizons and to really experience the world, free from the inhibitions that have held him back previously. Finally, the culmination of Aaron's marriage allows him to understand himself as an individual distinct from his union with Dorothy. While initially unable to move on because he cannot identify himself in a role other than husband, he realizes that he can use his past in order to create a brighter, more hopeful future.

Unlike Macon and Ian who suffer emotionally following tragedy in their lives, Tyler adds physical suffering to the distress Aaron Woolcott experiences to emphasize an additional area of his life where he can progress. With the physical suffering he undergoes, Aaron observes both obvious obstacles (such as his inability to clearly describe the accident killing Dorothy to the telephone operator) and also visual progress (such as taking walks with his daughter at the end of the book). He understands the meaning of oppression and challenges because of this physical ailment. Therefore, he has the potential to either give up from the get-go or to fight through both his physical and emotional suffering, realizing that he has conquered his physical condition somewhat (or else that he knows how to manage).

Another unique aspect of this novel, Tyler's use of a first person perspective, allows for a deeper understanding of Aaron as he responds to the world after a life-altering freak accident. Additionally, like in Saint Maybe, Tyler utilizes a distinctive method of passing the time in the characters' lives. While in Saint Maybe, Tyler describes the events in more of a present-day view, allowing the family to develop *because* of the accident, in this novel, she uses Aaron's flashbacks to show his regret, guilt, and sorrow. Lisa Allardice comments on this method, saying that "the passing of time, on a personal scale, is one of [Tyler's] most affecting themes" (Allardice). Aaron's progress in the end can only truly be appreciated by outlining the struggles he faces along the way.

In the additional aspect of physical suffering, Tyler lends Aaron the opportunity to conquer two difficult parts of his life simultaneously. However, he does not view his ailments as handicaps since he "feel[s] [himself] to be exactly like everyone else...

[imagining his] back to be straight, [his] neck upright, and [his] arms of a matching diameter” (10), Aaron must endure the pitiful looks people send his way and the attention his older sister Nandina cannot help but give him. His “differences” originate in childhood because his mother fails to inform his pediatrician of an illness, a decision that continues to haunt his mother for the rest of her life (14). Aaron also “suffers” from a speech impediment, one that he calls a “hesitation,” rather than an impediment and that he says he “seldom even hear[s] it” himself (5). From Aaron’s perspective, he has no handicaps because this is the only form of himself he has ever known; he believes that perhaps this is the way he was meant to be, has accepted the way he is, and views himself with the same capabilities as anyone else. Therefore, part of Aaron’s suffering evolves from his desire to be independent despite his weaknesses; he “hated being taken care of, and had deliberately chosen a non-caretaker for [his] wife” (25).

Aaron finds independence in Dorothy, but he cannot overcome the accident causing her death. Aaron describes the journey of their relationship, beginning with Dorothy, a brisk, work-obsessed, routine-oriented doctor, giving Aaron the cold shoulder several times. However, Aaron makes it his mission to woo Dorothy, convincing her to accompany him to a movie (after explaining the practical purpose of such an activity), and then to several dinners; each date encourages Dorothy to open up to Aaron a bit more. Through and through, Aaron sums up his marriage as having had “survived little glitches... [but that] the important thing was, we loved each other” (127). As husband to Dorothy, Aaron relies on this identity for confidence in the world knowing, even if subconsciously, that he endures each day’s obstacles to receive Dorothy’s approval.

Aaron's desire to continue proving himself to Dorothy unintentionally creates a separation in their marriage. Despite that his identity has roots in his union with Dorothy, he wants to display his independence which ultimately serves as a key factor in the life-changing freak accident that occurs. Dorothy arrives home from work early one day to find Aaron on the couch with a cold- a sort of "weakness" which she frowns upon and that he tries to hide to prevent her disapproval. Dorothy initiates a frequently occurring argument between the two, one involving her busy schedule and the lack of time she can devote even to simple tasks like eating. Dorothy and Aaron exchange sharp words, resulting in Dorothy storming to the sunporch in an air of frustration and Aaron retreating to his bedroom.

The guarded front Aaron builds up juxtaposes not only the downfall of the house but also of the crumbling foundation of his identity. As he investigates the source of a loud crash he hears after they part, leaving his leg brace behind for the sake of time, he slowly begins to understand the magnitude of what has happened. He calls 911, battling his stutter the entire call. Upon arrival of the firefighters, he realizes the white oak tree beside their house had fallen and demolished the sunporch. This tree, according to the landscape men, was in good condition and "would only, more like, lean into the house" should it ever fall (29). However, on this particular day when the tree actually had fallen, and "on a day... without so much as a breeze" no less (29), Macon's life changes forever.

Like the freak accident that Macon's son experiences in a place where he is not even supposed to be, the tragic incident Aaron experiences also defies odds. As he struggles to portray to the 911-telephone operator that Dorothy, not he, is trapped under the fallen house, Aaron feels useless, "sitting there like a dummy while stronger, abler

men fought to rescue [Dorothy]” (30). Aaron’s suffering manifests itself in the knowledge that he cannot voice his concerns about his wife’s well-being and also in his despair that he lacks the strength to assist in the rescue. Upon witnessing Dorothy’s destitute condition in the hospital, Aaron immediately experiences overwhelming regret for their harsh words, for parting ways and leaving her, as well as a desire to tell her so much about anything and everything. His guilt leads him to remain with and talk with her as she lies in her hospital bed; in doing so, he believes he plays a role in keeping her alive. The fault Aaron feels following Dorothy’s accident adds another layer to the suffering he already experiences because of his physical ailments.

To complement the destruction of his house’s foundation, the structure of Aaron’s identity also undergoes great ruin with the freak occurrence. When the nurse informs Aaron of Dorothy’s death, he is unprepared to accept the news. Aaron is unaware of the timeliness of her death until he sees that the medical equipment has been removed from Dorothy’s body. At this moment, he gains his first glimpse into his new future, one without Dorothy. Coming into contact with more and more people who try to console him and sympathize with him leads Aaron to realize, upon seeing his sister and her beau, that he is subconsciously afraid of being alone. As Allardice notes, Tyler “is attracted to the challenge posted by the fact that men ‘are almost forced by society to hide their feelings’” (Allardice). However, with Aaron, it seems that his community *expects* him to display his grief and the pain he feels each day.

With Dorothy, Aaron recognizes his ability to serve as the protector instead of the one needing protection; even though his mother and sister constantly look after him, Aaron views himself as a capable being without this extra assistance. In addition, Aaron

appreciates Dorothy's frankness and lack of sympathy for his impairments, which she makes clear by openly asking what is wrong with his arm and why he does not have a handicapped license plate when they first meet. While Dorothy's straightforward and brisk personality influences her refusal to treat Aaron with special considerations, her confidence in his abilities provides him with dignity to live each day as a normal person. He appreciates that she loves him just for being his "gimpy, geeky" self, rather than setting her mind on changing him (123). However, when Dorothy dies, his pride perishes with her and Aaron must learn to face the world of sympathizers once again.

Unlike the curve ball that life throws him with the bizarre incident of the tree killing Dorothy, Aaron discovers that he can survive each day by focusing on the controllable aspects: his work and his routines. His reliance upon these steady areas highlights similarities with Macon and with Ian who both focus more on the feasible aspects of their lives. Following Dorothy's death, Aaron views his "job as [his] salvation... [going] in early, [taking] no breaks, [not stopping] for lunch" (43). Like Macon-- who take great strides to avoid anything diverging from his ordinary routine in the foreign countries he hates traveling to for *The Accidental Tourist* series-- Aaron serves as the editor for *The Beginner's* book series within the family business, Woolcott Publishing. Ironically, Aaron hides behind the entity created by his family but seeks to limit any sort of contact with its members, including his coworkers, in order to avoid sympathetic looks and questions. He wishes to evade the effects of grief over Dorothy's death, a grief as described by Cressida Connolly as "contain[ing] distress, loneliness, pangs of remorse, and a gnawing and restless yearning" (Connolly), and buries himself in his work to do so. In Lucy Daniel's interview with Anne Tyler, she summarizes: "At the

core of [Tyler's] novels is regret, cloaked in the domestic everyday rendered with wit and masterly restraint" (Daniel). Aaron's methodical routine of writing thank you cards and returning empty dishes to concerned neighbors demonstrates this wit as he has his system down to perfection: he receives the dish, dumps it directly into the trash, and rinses it off, while occasionally "intercept[ing] a drumstick or sparerib" (47). The practical pattern he develops allows him to avoid talking with his neighbors about his loss without seeming unappreciative of their care for him. This routine complements his orderly schedule for housework in which he also finds solace.

While Aaron, Macon, and Ian all turn to something they can control after freak incidents that demonstrate the uncertainty of life, the source of this control varies among the three. Ian and Macon turn to an external source to distract themselves from their suffering while Aaron turns back towards what *causes* his suffering to cope effectively. Even so, like Macon who moves in with his siblings following the life changes he experiences, Aaron moves back in with his sister Nandina. Aaron's motives lie in both the fact that his house is demolished and because he cannot stand to be reminded of the fateful events occurring there following Dorothy's death.

Soon after this move, Aaron begins to see visions of Dorothy in unexpected places, but he does not view these experiences as the least bit bizarre. While difficult for the reader and Aaron to comprehend the reality of Dorothy's presence, her reappearances serve as a way for Aaron to cope with her death. Therefore, her visits cannot be written off completely since Aaron uses them as a source of comfort. He begins his story saying that "the strangest thing about [his] wife's return from the dead was how other people reacted" (3). At first, he justifies her returns: that she wants to make sure he is recovering

from her death or because she, too, is lonely and desires his company. Aaron feels that he can make sense of Dorothy's returns if he approaches the strange occurrences with a logical explanation. He suggests that perhaps she has "come back on special assignment. She'd been permitted to return just long enough to tell me something, perhaps, after which she would be on her way" (11). He does not address the idea that she truly is gone forever and instead, begins to find peace with her returns, not questioning the reasons or when they would occur again. Eventually, Aaron learns simply to become more aware of her presence, rather than actually seeing her appear as he turns a corner or shops through the farmer's market.

Although Dorothy's returns provide Aaron with a sense of comfort, they actually hinder his progress as he seeks to recover from her death. Aaron searches for Dorothy wherever he goes, never certain of when she will reappear, but confident that she will, indeed, return and not "abandon" him (129). As a result of this desperation, Aaron becomes almost counter-productive as he resumes only a somewhat normal life, returning to work, to their former home, and to places within the community with the hopes that he will meet up with her again. "For days on end, [he] stay[s] suspended, waiting for her to come back" (130). However, because he *does* venture back into the world in his quest to find Dorothy, he can persevere through the trials he experiences each day. While Aaron and Macon both find solace in escaping from the world to avoid a harsh reality, Macon lacks incentive to reemerge in the world. Aaron, on the other hand, must actively seek Dorothy's presence if he wants to find comfort. He has the opportunity to deny any potential paralysis caused by his grief and instead, makes slow steps towards progress as he overcomes his sorrow. Although initially Aaron seems to be living only for the

moments he can see Dorothy again, it turns out that these moments allow him to ease back into the routine of normal life with Dorothy's support in a way he might not have been able to do alone.

Aaron's perseverance holds significance because, as Elaine Showalter points out in her review, Aaron *is* only 36 years old, although "he acts more like 60" (Showalter). His young age adds a new emphasis to the tragedy he has experienced as his grief automatically ages him beyond his years. However, that he experiences sorrow relatively early in life suggests the opportunity to progress and mature as a 36 year old as opposed to a sixty year old. He can adapt better to a new way of life and has many years left to achieve potential happiness once again. Perhaps Aaron seems older because he has grown up in constant defiance of his mother and sister who baby him because of his handicaps and his desire for independence has led him to mature beyond his years.

Aaron takes several steps in his recovery progress, the first being acknowledgement of his grief occurring when he realizes how much relief he finds in Dorothy's returns. As Showalter notes, "In tackling life's most complicated lessons, [Tyler] has an unpretentious and undramatic touch. But in Tyler's small slices of life there is poetry and wisdom nonetheless" (Showalter). In one particular instance when Aaron realizes Dorothy is standing next to him at the farmer's market, he "want[s] to stand there forever. There was nothing more [he] could have asked for" (133).

Once he acknowledges his internal suffering, he finds that he is more capable in expressing his feelings externally as well. He hopes to avoid any sort of confrontation with his coworkers or with Nandina, but when his longtime friend and colleague, Peggy, blindsides him by asking about the current state of his life, he has no time to prepare an

escape route. However, Aaron surprises himself upon realizing that he “honestly [does] want to tell somebody what [he] was feeling” (135). Additionally, Aaron becomes more willing to allow outsiders to enter his once-private sphere, even if the true purpose behind this decision involves finding out more about Dorothy’s returns from others experiencing deaths of loved ones. Once again, what begins as a selfish desire to find comfort in Dorothy’s presence results in an inadvertent coping mechanism as Aaron is forced out into the world once again, allowing him to conquer the paralysis his grief could potentially cause.

Aaron experiences what could be viewed initially as a setback, but that actually serves a step in the right direction. One of Dorothy’s return visits leads to an argument with Aaron regarding the distance they experienced towards the end of their relationship when Dorothy was still alive. However, this argument also leads Aaron to an important understanding: with Dorothy’s death, he had accepted a load of regret that may or may not have even been justified. His guilt stems from an idea that Dorothy plants before she vanishes once again: that he had pushed her away and perhaps takes more from the relationship than what he gives to it. This fault accompanies his grief and leads him to feel subconsciously responsible for the rough patches they experience. Similarly, Aaron alters his previous “notion that when we die we find out what our lives amounted to, finally... [but he’d] never imagined that we could find that out when somebody else dies” (155). When he recognizes that Dorothy has an equal role in the uneasiness and strained nature of their relationship, Aaron can apprehend an identity separate from her, rather than just as the man into whom Dorothy allowed him to develop. This epiphany provides a chance for him to move forward with the confidence he thinks can only arise from

Dorothy's presence. He discovers that Dorothy's death can be used as a sort of learning experience in regards to his strengths.

Aaron's insight occurs during a crucial moment in his recovery from Dorothy's death. This moment allows him to gain a new outlook on life, both from the perspective of Dorothy's returns and for his own entry back into the world. Aaron's comprehension of the time to move back into his old house (which has been repaired from the tree's damage) marks an initial step in this stage of coping and maturation. While he cannot return to his bedroom because it reminds him of his pain, he recognizes his progress since the incident. Such recognition occurs when he realizes his motives for moving to another room: to avoid the memories of the "weeks after the oak tree fell, when [he'd] lain there alone night after night wondering how to go on" (163).

Despite this important step into his future, however, Aaron has yet to escape from Dorothy's power of leading him back into normal life. Aaron admits that he moves back into house with the purpose of seeing Dorothy again. At first, Aaron views the house where the tragedy occurs as one to be escaped because his sadness originated there. However, upon realizing that his return may present sightings of Dorothy, Aaron considers it as a place of refuge, one where he can foster his courage to face the world head on without Dorothy.

Similarly, Aaron furthers his post-Dorothy transformation as he admits that he can start anew with arranging the furniture, pots and pans, and household items, a task he could not do "with Dorothy around" (165). Even though he feels guilty for considering Dorothy's negative qualities, especially after her death, Aaron's mindset shows maturity from wanting to please Dorothy to developing a new identity and way of thinking. When,

after several months, the contractors announce that they have finished working on the house's renovations- mirroring the rebuilding of his own life- Aaron feels a bit of anxiety at the thought of abandoning the past; he recognizes the uncertainty of the future but also moves forward with the relief that he begins afresh, with hope for times ahead.

Almost in response to this promise of a fresh start, Aaron remembers his argument with Dorothy regarding where to go for their anniversary dinner. While not evident then, Aaron now recognizes, with his fresh mindset and outlook on life, “the familiar, weary, helpless feeling, the feeling that we were confined... neither one of us ever winning” (178). He finally sees that, while love and affection defined their relationship, he and Dorothy found themselves at odds more often than not. Dorothy's final appearance shows Aaron what “she knew and [he] didn't. That she had refused a better job for [his] sake. That she had hidden her feelings for [his] sake. In short, that she had loved [him]” (196). Although in retrospect, Aaron may wish he could go back in time and produce only fond memories during his marriage, he sees that overall, their marriage was a happy one. He also accepts that he would not have wanted to change it had the opportunity been presented to him.

As Connolly notes, “One of the things that makes Tyler's work so radiant is that she seems to believe that people are inherently good and that, thanks to that goodness, ordinary lives can contain moments of great beauty, dignity, and hope” (Connolly) The lack of communication between Aaron and Dorothy ultimately produces the same emotions in both and leads each to appreciate the other even more. Although Aaron does not become aware of Dorothy's feelings before she dies, he recognizes the sacrifices she

makes for their marriage's success, proving that these emotions have been present all along for both parties.

Almost without realizing it, Aaron closes the chapter in his life defined with Dorothy and finds himself able to move on, although he does still look out for an appearance from her every now and then. He accepts Dorothy's death as permanent and becomes conscious of the need to forge ahead with his life. Their final encounter confirms Dorothy's approval that all is right between them and seems to be what Aaron needs to accept the challenge of progressing. Through Dorothy's consent during their last encounter, he quiets his subconscious concern of advancing to the next phase in his life before settling unspoken matters of his marriage. As Gilbert notes, in Tyler's fiction, "the solution is in endurance, that toward really changing things, there's little to be done. Waste in Tyler's world is full of time given to effect change, not waste of life's opportunities for action" (144). For Tyler's characters, growth occurs primarily in perseverance through everyday obstacles. Instead of trying to change the past and dictate the future, she hopes her characters will focus on conquering the struggles that come with each new day. Accomplishing this often more difficult task allows her characters to experience overall maturity in their coping processes. Aaron learns in a rather difficult way that recovery from his grief can only come with time. He indirectly builds stamina to reenter the world through his quest to see Dorothy, but his full development as a character occurs only after he accepts the permanence of her death and learns that he can and must move on without her.

Aaron's new chapter is defined by what has been under his nose the entire time, but that he has failed to appreciate until after he receives closure from Dorothy. His

coworker, Peggy, has long since played an important role in his life, particularly following Dorothy's death; Aaron feels willing to talk only to her about his loss. Once Aaron becomes conscious that her affection for him mirrors his own fondness for her, he takes an important step in his journey. Maeve, Aaron's daughter with Peggy, serves as a physical reminder of this progression as she ensures Aaron he will never be alone. He understands that he can recall fond memories of Dorothy, while still moving on to live his life in the way she would have wanted him to live, as she makes clear during their last meeting.

Chapter 2: Motherhood and Identity

2.1 Pearl Tull, Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant

Unlike Aaron, Ian, and Macon who all experience suffering after death of a loved one, Maggie Moran, Delia Grinstead, and Pearl Tull undergo a different sort of affliction, a kind arising from their roles as mothers. Each of these characters has reached the point in her life where she realizes that her children are leaving home-- whether to begin college, to find work, or to be married-- and beginning a new phase in their lives. Additionally, that all three mothers only want the best for their children often serves as the source of the eventual uneasiness and grief they encounter upon entering the next stage of their lives. As was evident in the lives of Macon Leary, Ian Bedloe, and Aaron Woolcott, the theme of the family serving either as the source of everyday suffering or relief from it appears in many Tyler novels. However, unlike The Accidental Tourist, Saint Maybe, and The Beginner's Goodbye where the characters turn to their families for strength amid their extreme and life-altering circumstances, Tyler also demonstrates the need for a stable foundation through the obstacles found in more ordinary daily life in Breathing Lessons, Ladder of Years, and Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant.

Similar to her other novels such as The Beginner's Goodbye and Breathing Lessons, Tyler shares the story of Pearl Tull in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant using a flashback-mode of storytelling. The recollections Pearl experiences play an important role in determining the pace of the novel. They also emphasize the theme of family and its collective struggles throughout the story as flashbacks relay the initial causes of

suffering. Not only do Pearl's memories allow the reader to understand how the events of her life have affected and led to her maturation, but they also display the interconnectedness of all things within the novel and within the characters' lives (Gibson 167). Tyler can portray the same event from several perspectives through this method of time passage, allowing for a deeper analysis and understanding of the characters' lives, both individually and as a collective family unit. Additionally, as Mary Ellis Gibson points out in her essay "Family as Fate: The Novels of Anne Tyler," Tyler's use of a third person narrator "allows her to move easily from one character's thoughts to another's and to move back and forth in time. Thus she avoids the sometimes jolting and mechanical transitions from past to present [as might occur in a first person novel]" (Gibson 167). Tyler also manages to "focus more clearly... on the present as a moment of crisis between past and future" (Gibson 166).

Through the retrospective mode of storytelling and the fact that Pearl *is* on her deathbed, unsettled areas of the past meet the present. This in-between state allows temporary resolution of these shaky matters but they ultimately only lead to more unsettling issues, such as death. Unique to Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant is that through the flashbacks, Tyler uses a circular approach to tell Pearl's story, one that begins and ends with eighty-five year old Pearl on her deathbed (Bail 108). In the beginning, Pearl reflects back on her life with her now grown son Ezra by her side. Characteristic to the role of guardian she has exhibited during the maturation of her three children, Pearl cannot quite accept that they are grown now and continues to see it as her duty to protect them from the evils of the world. As Ezra walks around her bed, Pearl attempts to tell him that she wishes he had "arranged for a second-string mother" so that he and his

siblings, Cody and Jenny, would not be left without a guiding light in the world (4). Beck's unexplained abandonment leaves Pearl feeling insecure in her position as mother; while not stated outright, Pearl implies several times that she *is* an inadequate mother to the children because she must fulfill the roles of both parents. Nonetheless, she realizes that she is all they have and devotes herself to protecting them however she can. Even when her own frustrations emerge in what become frequent attacks on the children, she seems to want to protect them from seeing her- their only parent and their foundation- in a weak and vulnerable state. Her often idealized views of both her own life and the relationships between members of her family, most of which occur during her last moments of life, lead her to recognize the reality of how her life actually turned out.

Pearl's glorified yet clouded view prevents her from giving her children enough credit; she believes they need her protection because of their father's abandonment. However, they have learned to survive on their own *because* of their mother's unpredictable rages, a fact that Pearl has not pieced together. While she may not be proud of all her actions as a mother, including her fits of fury that instill a sense of fear in her children, she believes herself worthy of serving in this role as mother most of the time. Of course, the time when she worries about them needing "a second-string mother"- while on her deathbed- her children are all adults, some even married with children of their own. They no longer rely on her as heavily as she believes they do. She is unable to accept that they can fend for themselves in the world and desires to be their sole protector as she used to be during their childhood.

Pearl's suffering throughout the novel comes from her need to guard each child, particularly Ezra- who she describes as "so sweet and clumsy it could break your heart"

(4)- from the world's potential uncertainty. Pearl likely recognizes Ezra's willingness to accept what comes his way in life without fighting back and she desires to protect him from the pain of disappointment. Her constant apprehension for all of three children's safety displays itself in the mindset she develops in their young age: that with the desire for, and therefore the existence of, three children comes the fear that "what she had now was not one loss to fear but three" (4). Pearl's fatalistic mindset prevents her from ever fully enjoying her sons and daughter because of fear that something will happen to them. In fact, even mentioning to Ezra that he should have arranged for a second-string mother echoes her own motivation to continue having more children: " 'some extra'... spare children, like spare tires" (3)- as a sort of insurance.

Pearl's insecurities originate because of a snowball chain of events that life presents to her. Beginning with her parents' deaths early in her life, Pearl goes to live with her Uncle Seward who offers to send her to college. Pearl believes this proposition has roots in the idea that Seward "feared having to support her forever: a millstone, an orphaned spinster niece tying up his spare bedroom" (6). She refuses the offer, believing "that going to college would be an admission of defeat" (6). Just when everyone seems to give up on her, leading her own self esteem to diminish quickly, she meets Beck Tull. Her parents' early death and her hopeless view for the future loom over her in adolescence and follow her into what appears to be a pleasant marriage to Beck, a Tanner Corporation salesman and devout church attendee six years her junior. While their courtship begins in an enjoyable manner, Beck's profession requires several location transfers, speeding up their relationship and necessitating that Pearl and Beck get married immediately. Pearl cannot even "enjoy[ing] her new status [as a married woman] among

her girlfriends” (7). From the beginning of her marriage, Pearl fails to find a steady spot to cling to amidst the hurried and “unsatisfying” whirlwind of their lives. The addition of children, doctors’ appointments, and parental responsibilities to her schedule lead her to “look around [one day and realize]... somehow, without her noticing, she’d been cut off from most of her relatives” (8). As the ultimate factor to her instability, Beck announces matter-of-factly one 1944 night that he no longer wants to “stay married” to her (9). To make matters worse, he deprives Pearl of knowing the reason behind his hasty departure and refuses to talk about the matter with her or to display any desire to visit his children in the future.

The reason Pearl neglects telling her children about Beck’s retreat originates in more than one area of her life. Even though Cody, Jenny, and Ezra are entering their teenage years when their father abandons the family in the dark of night, Pearl takes “infinite care” to ensure that they do not discover anything about his departure. It only becomes apparent as she lies on her deathbed that the reasoning behind this secrecy is that “she’d been expecting to run into Beck again” (30) and perhaps that she holds on to the idea that he will return to the family one day. Additionally, she realizes that “she’d never learned to let go, to give in, to float on the current of a day” (14). Whatever Pearl’s logic, the family resumes normal life unquestioningly the next morning, showing “disappointment [only in the fact] that the oatmeal lacked raisins” (10).

Pearl justifies Beck’s absence wherever she goes, even when no request for an explanation arises. Her children show no outward signs of curiosity at his absence and she informs even unquestioning fellow grocery store shoppers that her husband is away on business. Pearl feels that she must compensate for Beck’s leaving and his absence in

the children's lives. However, it seems that the validation she provides to even unconcerned parties is more for her own sake. Before she informs her friend Emmaline about Beck's abandonment, she "fortunately [catches] herself [and] the moment passed" before she gives herself away (11). Pearl wishes to save face in the presence of her friends and her children whom she believes would think less of *her* if they knew the truth about their father's unexplained absence. Her anxiety likely finds its roots in the past, prior to meeting Beck, when her cousins "had grown tactful-insultingly tactful. Talk of others' weddings and confinements halted when Pearl stepped out on the porch" (6). Both the early indication of people's low expectations for her as well as Beck's unexplained departure- perhaps serving as proof of her inadequacy as a wife- motivate Pearl to hide the truth and in turn, to hide her insecurities.

Pearl's reluctance to tell her children about Beck's departure originates not only in wanting to protect them, but also in her desire to secure the role that has become so engrained in her identity. Pearl fears telling the children will cause them to turn their backs on her, leaving her empty and without a purpose. Each time she tries to share the truth with her children, she imagines herself crying in front of them and cannot bear to consider losing her pride. Because of the instability she has faced in the past, Pearl recognizes that her pride is the only secure thing in her life and it becomes an important factor in her decision-making. In trying to protect her children from the potential pain of knowing their father abandoned the family, Pearl displays what John Updike describes as "the easy wounds given dependent flesh refus[ing] to heal and instead grow[ing] into lifelong purposes" (108). Pearl initially intends simply to save face with her peers and children but finds that her defensive approach to life she develops becomes ingrained into

her persona and matures until her death. When Tyler finally describes Jenny's questioning of Beck's disappearance, Pearl responds that Beck is contributing to the wartime needs. This explanation satisfies Jenny who then bestows much undeserved honor unto Beck's name as she proudly claims him a wartime hero to her friends.

With the great, and perhaps unwarranted, liberty Pearl takes to keep Beck's permanent departure from the family a secret from her children, an alternative motive arises for Pearl's actions. Even though Beck mails monthly checks and occasional letters to "Pearl and kids," (12) Pearl sees it as her motherly duty to protect the children from the pain she assumes they will experience if they discover the truth about Beck's absence. However, since Beck *wants* the children to know about his permanent leave from the family, as evidenced by his letters being addressed to both Pearl *and* the children, Pearl withholding this information does more harm than good; her own hope that he will return, present in her dreams at night, overrides the absolute truth of the situation. With this refusal to admit the truth, it becomes clear that Pearl's own pride is as much a factor in her actions as is the desire to protect her children. When her financial circumstances require that she find a job as a cashier at the local grocery store, she insists on wearing her own hat to give "the impression that she had just merely dropped in and was helping out as a favor, in a pinch" (15). While she feels herself "dying inside" when she sees people she knows, she refuses to let herself "lose her composure" and maintains a "crisp and professional" persona in order to uphold her pride (15).

Even amidst the uncertainty in her life stemming from Beck's abrupt departure and the duty she bestows upon herself to singlehandedly protect her children from the world, Pearl feels more confident with greater control over the circumstances. She

realizes, however, that her routines become a bit excessive. While Beck is absent a good bit during their marriage and while Pearl admits Beck “was not a person she could lean on” before their marriage ends, she still appreciates that he “provide[s] for [the family and has] never let [the] family go hungry” (8). However, once Beck leaves, Pearl feels pressured not only to continue serving in the role she has consistently assumed as mother but also to serve as a provider for the family. In order to cope with this additional load, Pearl, like Macon and Aaron, turns to her customs. On the other hand, unlike these men who rely so heavily upon their regular practices as a part of their identity, Pearl laments that her routines are confining: “she knew she [was limiting herself], knew while she was doing it, but still could not stop herself” (14). Rather than allowing her patterns to overtake her identity, her sense of self lies with her role as a mother, so much so that when she looks back on her life, she laments that as her children matured, “they took some radiance with them as they moved away from her” (21).

However, only on her deathbed does it become clear that Pearl remembers an idealized version of reality, one in which all her children return to visit her and Beck re-enters all of their lives. Tyler’s use of flashbacks verifies that Pearl’s true reality differs drastically from what she imagines; the instances where the children betray one another, where she herself terrorizes them with her fits of fury, and where Beck’s abandonment creates additional strain on everyone all confirm that what she remembers varies from what actually occurred. That her identity is built solely upon her role as a wife and as a mother leaves her feeling empty and depleted when she realizes that her children do not need her as much as they once did. As a result, Pearl looks back on her life not so much

with pride but with regret at all the things she wishes had turned out differently, including her failure to “one day... wake up wiser and more contented and accepting” (30).

Ironically, Pearl’s own insecurities and the anger initiated with the risk of losing her pride threaten the very entity that Pearl seeks to protect. She allows her dignity to completely take over when anything oppresses the family unit, which is one of the things she regrets about the children’s progression into adulthood. Even now in her old age, she laments that Cody will not “absolve her,” as he makes constant references to “Pearl’s short temper, displaying it against a background of stunned childish faces so sad and bewildered that Pearl herself hardly recognized them” (23). She also insists that “[Cody] had no business holding her responsible anymore” (23). Although these rages may come with noble intentions as Pearl earnestly attempts to maintain her pride (and what she thinks is a sensitive area for the children- that of an uncertain childhood because of Beck’s leaving), they eventually lead to implosion and disunity among the members of the Tull family. When the mother of one of Jenny’s friends asks Pearl if she would like to borrow the catalogue used to order the friend’s dress, Pearl considers this the utmost insult. She defends herself to her children, insisting that she may be in difficult financial circumstances but would never stoop so low as to dress her children in “duplicate” outfits to match their friends (52). Without another outlet through which to express her anger, Pearl takes it out on her children, throwing spoons at Cody, grabbing Jenny’s braids, and bringing the bowl of peas “down on [Ezra’s] head” (53).

As the children mature, Pearl’s fear for them in the world (as well as subconsciously for herself after they leave her) grows so much that she cannot accept change, even if for the better. When Ezra announces that he has signed the paperwork to

become an owner of Scarlatti's Restaurant, Pearl immediately begins asking him questions to remind him of what his future holds... or at least what she believes it holds for him. She stresses that he was going to teach (which surprises him) and that "We Tulls depend on ourselves, only on each other. We don't look to the rest of the world for any help whatsoever" (94). Pearl's troubles lie not only that Ezra diverges from the path that she believes he should follow for his life (of attending college and becoming a professor), but also that he intends to pursue a future that relies completely upon others for success. Additionally, Ezra's partnership in the restaurant with Mrs. Scarlatti, who has become a second-mother figure to him, brings about an anxiety for Pearl. Pearl believes Mrs. Scarlatti, whose own son died in the Korean War, will judge Pearl's job as a mother, as suggested through Mrs. Scarlatti's unfeeling response to Pearl's distress.

Subconsciously, Pearl fears that Mrs. Scarlatti will provide better maternal care for Ezra than she did and also that Ezra will now be reliant upon Mrs. Scarlatti, an outsider to the Tull family. Although he does not tell his mother, Ezra already feels "grateful to Mrs. Scarlatti for rescuing him from an aimless, careerless existence and teaching him all she knew" (114). Pearl's uncertainty about the potential for change, even if it will be ultimately beneficial, becomes clear through her insistence that the children only rely on each other. Perhaps because she was betrayed by Beck, one inside her own circle whom she trusted, she cannot bear to consider extending her confidence to outsiders.

Ironically, Pearl's children appear to take the opposite perspective and view entry into the world as an escape from the family they have at home. As Lisa Allardice notes, "The title Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant captures the dichotomy on which [Tyler's] fiction rests: nearly all the characters are homesick in some way- either longing for home,

or completely sick of it.” The home the characters long for may be real, as with Cody’s son, Luke, who goes on a journey in order to find the “home” with Ezra where he believes he should be, or imagined, as when Cody fantasizes about expanding his family and future in the farmhouse he has since abandoned upon moving to New York. Interestingly, the longing for home described might also be a fleeting experience that only reminds the traveler of the most miniscule aspects. For example, when Ezra is away at training camp, the “only mention of homesickness, if that was what it was” is that he “*thinks a lot about Scarlatti’s Restaurant and how nice the lettuce smelled when [he] tore it into the bowl*” (71). Despite whether the homesickness is real or imagined, the family still fails to finish even one of the many family meals that Ezra tries to organize at Scarlatti’s or at the renamed Homesick Restaurant. Ironically, even though Pearl “must be both father and mother to her children... [and] is often frantic and on edge [as she] tries to make the family sufficient unto itself by isolating it from the outside world” (Shelton 182), it is Pearl who typically disrupts the family’s meal.

While the classic cause of homesickness involves being separated from one’s family, the Tull family members typically gather together at Ezra’s restaurant, only to find themselves yearning to leave. Perhaps the fact that the family fails to make it to the end of the meal at the Homesick Restaurant signifies a longing for the past when the family dynamics matched those of each member’s imagination more closely. The early resolution of the dinners often arises because of a misunderstanding between the Tulls when they discover that dreams and reality are two different things. For example, this misunderstanding is evident in the cases of Ezra’s announcement of his career in the Homesick Restaurant instead of as a professor, Cody’s jealousy at seeing Ezra and Ruth

reuniting in the Restaurant's kitchen, and Beck's realization that the family has progressed without him. Each instance presents an acknowledgement by those influenced that the idealized version of their family life does not match the reality; this understanding leads to premature endings of the family gatherings. This past, along with the dreams, goals, and memories coming with it, breaks up the family dinners. Whether because life experiences have altered the way the family members view the world or because relationships have changed from the times when all seemed to be well for the family, this past cannot be attained again. In retrospect and upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that even these times are not as pleasant as the Tulls wish to remember, as in the case when Jenny does not find the movie, *A Taste of Honey*, as emotionally gratifying as she had in her younger years.

Mary F. Robertson describes the independence leading to a newer, more rigid mindset in the children as she notes that "Through the failure of meals, which are usually the classic expression of family order, Tyler shows symbolically the family's inability to thrive when its ideas are hermetic" (Robertson 196). Perhaps the term "hermetic" refers to the Tulls' inflexibility when the ideas or goals of the family cannot be met and when the entire family structure and entity is threatened. Additionally, Robertson's quote refers to Pearl's insistence that the children should never look to anything other than the family for support. However, the family itself is so unpredictable, quick to react, and often in the midst of some sort of civil war, that sealing itself off from the world is a dangerous move for any of its members to be able to succeed and thrive.

While family meals can be considered a hallmark of family harmony, common interests, and support for one another, the Tull family cannot even complete a meal,

suggesting that they are lacking in the family unity Pearl fights so hard to achieve. As Paul Bail notes in Anne Tyler: A Critical Companion, the dinners “are meant as ritualistic affirmation of family cohesiveness... but some quarrel or emergency always disrupts the family meal” (109). Therefore, while the Tull family relies on each other for strength during the most challenging times in their lives and realizes that the familial entity really is all they have, their day to day interactions are rather unstable. While Pearl, Cody, and Jenny each have their own goals they hope to achieve, Ezra’s passivity negates any sort of cohesiveness that the others might have; they react to how *he* behaves, often causing strife between them. Pearl worries about Ezra and as a result, she scolds Cody and angers him. Cody cannot bear life without a challenge, as is the case when Ezra relinquishes his dream of a life with Ruth, and therefore, his marriage proves unhappy. Jenny becomes too caught up first in her own depression and then in her own family life and cannot devote the proper attention to learning how best to interact with her siblings and mother.

Despite their constant interruptions and inability to see eye-to-eye for even one meal at the Homesick Restaurant, the emphasis that Pearl places on the inner family circle is not in vain. While each character seeks both to branch away from the identity created within the realm of their family and to create a new existence in the world as an individual, the family members are like elastic cords that are continually brought back together. Almost as a result of this “fated” reunion, the characters often experience hostility at their inability to escape from the others for long periods of time. Although the Restaurant dinners do not ever conclude in the way Ezra hopes they will, the venue of the Homesick Restaurant serves as the meeting place for the family to discuss their problems and bring them into the light (even if they remain unresolved on that same occasion). As

Evans notes, the children are subjected to the “profound effect [of Beck’s] desertion... and the inability of these children to escape their past, even as adults. In the end, however, the bonds of family overcome the pain of years of misunderstandings and lack of communication” (160). Only the siblings can understand what the others have experienced as a result of Beck’s desertion. Therefore, they have a deeper understanding for each other that triumphs over their day to day arguments and the wrongs they have committed against each other. Cody, Jenny, and Ezra have been in each others’ lives consistently, through the ups and downs, and the ending scene allows them to recognize the significance of their relationship.

At the end of the novel, as the children and family sit together following Pearl’s funeral, the impact of Pearl’s purposeful way of leading life becomes evident in her children’s actions. Even if Pearl herself allows her pride to overtake the good of the family, she has had a noteworthy influence on their lives. The Tull children ultimately experience the same sense of security from one another that Pearl emphasizes, or at least that she strives to emphasize, all throughout their lives. When Beck finally returns to the family dinner at the end, Ezra states what Pearl has seemingly unsuccessfully tried to portray from the very moment Beck left the family: that “ ‘All we have is each other... We’ve got to stick together; nobody else has the same past that we have’ ” (298). With this statement, Ezra ties together not only the family but also the effect of time in their lives. In Sanford Marovitz’s essay, he comments on Pearl’s intentions to maintain positive relations within the family: that “her attempt to keep the family together is a projection of her desire to integrate the conflicting sides of her own consciousness. The children give her life meaning” (Marovitz 215). The two sides of her consciousness

involve the resentment at Beck's abandonment resulting in her need to prove herself worthy; her role as mother serves as the avenue for her to validate her capability. Despite the frustrations she encounters with her responsibilities as a single mother and her diminished dream of Beck's return to the family, she has become so rooted in her identity as mother that the children serve as her main purpose to keep pushing forward. Pearl insists throughout the novel that "with your family, if with no one else, you have to keep trying" (175).

Members of the Tull family initially view family as a hindrance to their discoveries of individual identities, but even the desire to escape ties with each other becomes a common unifying factor. As Mary Ellis Gibson writes, "Jenny fears closeness with her own family [and] like his mother, Cody is prone to violent rages" (Gibson 166). That Cody's rages are passed down through the generations and that Jenny extends herself beyond the family's boundaries both show that "overcoming" these expectations spurs the novel's action and serves as motivation for many of the characters' decisions. Cody wants to "beat" Ezra so badly that he steals Ruth away from her happy union to Ezra, Jenny desires to find a family more stable than her own- for support- and continually seeks a new marriage to satisfy this desire, and Ezra wishes for the family to be happy so badly that he continues arranging disappointing dinners at the Restaurant. Despite this instability, as evidenced by the occasion of Pearl and Ezra visiting the house that Cody once inhabited with Ruth- an unhappy marriage- Pearl serves as the unifying force for the Tull family. Even though Cody has long since abandoned the farm house which served as the foundation for many of his future dreams, Pearl refuses to let the house destruct. "Others might have given up and let the trespassers take the place over,

but never Pearl” (186). Although vacant and requiring a great deal of upkeep, Pearl knows that “she will come again [next season], and the season after, and the season after that, and Ezra will go on bringing her” (186). This house represents Pearl’s resilience in her family and life and just like with her family, Pearl refuses to let it destruct.

On the other hand, this dedication to the house also represents Pearl’s inability to move on with reality and completely abandon the past. Just as she is unaware of her subconscious belief that Beck will return one day, she also clings to the hope that Cody will follow through with his plans involving this house; she cannot face the fact that life truly is different from how she pictures it in her mind, suggesting that, even after all of these years, she still has trouble acknowledging her children’s realities. Like Ezra, she makes up a story for her life, either how she wishes it would be or how she truly pictures it to be, as in the case when Beck leaves her and when she wears her hat in the store so that no one will know she is the cashier. She tries to hide the truth about Beck even from her children who have every right to know that their father will not come back.

Additionally, from the many years that Pearl envisions herself returning to this house, it is evident that Cody is not coming back to live here. If Pearl’s fantasy truly was the case, the house would not need such upkeep by Pearl and Ezra. Even on her death bed, after experiencing eighty-six years of life, Pearl has not overcome suffering from Beck’s abandonment and from her role as mother.

2.2 Maggie Moran, Breathing Lessons

Similar to Pearl Tull’s suffering because of Beck’s abandonment, leading to her desire to protect her children from the world’s evils, Maggie Moran in Breathing Lessons

faces challenges of everyday life simply because of changes that come with her children's maturation. She wishes for everyone in her family to be satisfied with life and often oversteps her boundaries as she ensures this to be true, even if she does have noble intentions. Maggie refuses to give up hope that her son Jesse will reunite with his girlfriend, Fiona, and that she will be invited back into her granddaughter's life. Maggie and Pearl differ in that Pearl cuts off any contact with Beck, hiding his letters and ceasing to consider his presence in her life; she pretends that all is well, despite his unexpected disappearance. Maggie, on the other hand, cannot part with the events or people who have hurt her in the past and even chases after them in order to make things the way they once were previously. Even with the different approaches they take to mend their lives, or at least to cope with the wounds they experience, both women hold unrealistic outlooks on the worlds they view through rose-colored glasses.

While both Pearl and Maggie share firm opinions and desires to make their thoughts and intentions known, critics have described the characters in the two respective novels in contrasting ways. Maggie and Ira have been characterized as "vaguely predictable" (Croft 85) and "two rather 'flat' protagonists" (Petty 234) while "the principle characters in Dinner have their tics but also real psychologies, which make their next moves excitingly unpredictable" (Updike 110). This difference in opinion perhaps stems from the fact that the Tull family is more complex than that of the Morans; Bail notes that the characters are multilayered, a recurring theme throughout the novel. "Each of [the characters] is driven by some fundamental ambivalence" (Bail 114), clear through each Tull child's unyielding personal opinion and an agenda that he or she struggles to achieve outside of the family identity. Rarely are these opinions in accordance with those

of the others. Maggie's sole goal, on the other hand, involves reuniting Jesse with Fiona in order to bring Leroy, her granddaughter, back into their lives and to cure Jesse of the discontentment she has convinced herself he experiences. Only Maggie seems to believe the possibility of achieving this goal and, since Maggie rules as the matriarch, this goal consumes the entire family. Even so, the family members she wants to help most desperately- Fiona and Jesse- often resist her, sure that what Maggie believes is best for them is not actually so. The plainness of the Morans suggests their normalcy and relatability, especially evident through the repetition of the same arguments, conversations, concerns, and goals as even Fiona notes. This constant revolution of daily events reflects back to the circular narrative approach of Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, beginning and ending with Pearl on her deathbed, and also emphasizes the interconnection of past, present, and future.

Unlike Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant which occurs over several generations of the Tull family, Breathing Lessons takes place within a twenty-four hour period. Tyler still uses critical flashbacks and memories in order to fill in missing pieces of information and to demonstrate the effects of certain events in the characters' lives during this time frame. Through the flashbacks, Tyler elaborates more on the characters, their motivations, and justifications for actions at present and also expands upon a theme found in much of her work-- the interconnectedness of life. As Alice Petry notes, "Tyler would argue that life and time are best not seen as a continuum with the past faded or lost, but as a series of layers. Ideas and feelings accumulated over time" (Petry 250). Petry's reference to layering becomes a common theme not only in this novel, but in others as well, including The Accidental Tourist and Ladder of Years. Many of her characters

cannot completely let go of the past and find, even if not evident to them at the time, that the experiences they have and the decisions they make shape their present and futures. Maggie, for example, cannot relinquish hope that Fiona and Jesse will be happy together once again and therefore, she devotes much of her time to scheming and planning the logistics of achieving this goal. Similarly, Macon keeps one foot in the past, especially when he moves back in with his siblings, even though part of him wishes both to live in the present and to move forward into the future with Muriel. By creating a story that occurs within such a specific window of time, the characters and their lives enter real-world context; this twenty-four hour period represents the types of conversations and motivations typical of daily life with the Morans. Tyler presents merely a glimpse into their lives, but this glimpse is enough to allow for the weaving of past, present, and future.

In the interview entitled “A Conversation with Anne Tyler” found in the back of the novel, Tyler herself notes that the condensed time frame proved beneficial in limiting the number of events that her characters could experience, but it also pressured her to include as much as could possibly fit within these twenty-four hours (Huneven 329-30). Therefore, in order to escape the restrictions placed on her by the rising and setting of the sun, Tyler utilizes flashbacks to comment upon the current state of things, such as comparing the attendees at the funeral of Maggie’s best friend’s husband in present day to the day many years ago when Selena and Max had been married. In their youth, Maggie remembers that “No one... had suspected that it would all turn out so serious” (115). Perhaps because she remembers this more idealized, pleasantly ignorant perspective Maggie and the rest of the wedding clan had in their juvenility, she cannot let

go of such recollections from the past. She fails to leave the memories of early years because she believes these memories affect the status of present situations and people. Her desire to hold one foot in the past for the purpose of having a set identity in the future distinguishes Maggie from Pearl. Pearl *yearns* to sever ties and associations with her past identity as a cashier and as a wife whose husband leaves her unexpectedly. She works through the events of the past and does not want the memories of her earlier years, when still ripe from the separation and her own desperation, to shape her current status. On the other hand, Maggie believes the estranged relationship of Jesse and Fiona, for example, still holds relevance. In her opinion, the hope of their reunion justifies her meddling which she views simply as helpfulness.

As Tyler describes the relationship of Maggie and her husband, Ira, it becomes apparent that their decision to marry plays a significant role in influencing the lifestyle choices each makes early on about their shared future. With this knowledge, Tyler emphasizes marriage as a key factor in determining one's identity, as she also does in The Accidental Tourist between Macon and Sarah and then between Macon and Muriel. As the story progresses, Tyler relays that Maggie has several opportunities that she *chooses* to turn down in order to marry Ira. Ira's future, on the other hand, has already been determined because of familial circumstances. His dreams of becoming a doctor fall short, both because he "could never scrape together the money... to go to college" and because of his father's "'weak heart'" (104). Because of these circumstances, Ira must live above the family's watch shop and care for his father and his two "much older sisters, one of whom was a little slow and the other just shy or retiring or something" (104). Even though Ira accepts this way of life forced upon him, his missed opportunities

loom over him and affect the way he lives the rest of his life. He realizes that his “[sensitivity] to waste comes from the fact that “he had given up the only serious dream he’d ever had. You can’t get any more wasteful than that” (166). Because of the lifestyle change demanded of him, Ira often resents Jesse because Jesse has many opportunities for his future but chooses not to take advantage of them (Petry 242).

Tyler juxtaposes Ira’s past and his choice to accept and be content with the alterations to his dream with Maggie who struggles to feel secure knowing *she* turned down opportunities. Unable to escape her history and live in the moment, she often looks past the consequences of her own actions and focuses instead on how the choices of *others* have affected the present. Ira realizes that he must take care of his family, live for others, and admit the inevitability of change. However, Maggie cannot be satisfied with the alternate routes required in her life and the lives of her children. Ira often shows little patience for Maggie’s failure to move on, as when he considers that “it was amazing... how people fooled themselves into believing what they wanted to. (How Maggie fooled herself, he meant)” (269). While Ira’s view of waste originates from his missed opportunities, Maggie’s approach to life seems characterized by Susan Gilbert’s thoughts at the end of her essay: that “the solution is in endurance, that toward really changing things there’s little to be done. Waste in Tyler’s world is full of time given to effect change, not waste of life’s opportunities for action” (Gilbert 144). Maggie’s constant meddling in order to achieve what she thinks needs to be achieved- making life better for Jesse and Fiona- proves that Maggie never misses an opportunity to work for change, whether within her own family, friend group, or through interactions with complete strangers. Through Maggie’s efforts, Tyler shows that even the unsuccessful expenditure

of much energy to work for change, one would hope that at least the journey to this point would have taught her something about life, family, and motivations. This idea further elaborates upon the theme of layering found throughout this and other novels.

Maggie's inability to acknowledge reality prevents her from enjoying the present; she cannot move past her history or cease considering the hypothetical "what if's" that stem from her dreams for the future. Alice Petry presents what Maggie does not recognize: that "nothing good from the past is ever lost: it is nestled somewhere in a layer of the gunnysack of the psyche" (Petry 251). Petry's gunnysack image references the dream that Maggie's patient describes to her where all he has lost in his lifetime can be stored in a gunnysack until he arrives in Heaven one day (313). Maggie has difficulty comprehending that things have worked out in the right way- because life at present varies from how *she* imagined it would be. Therefore, she cannot focus on the positive aspects that may be outside of her dreams, such as the immediate connection Leroy and Ira share.

That Tyler discusses Daisy, the daughter of Maggie and Ira, only rarely in the novel signifies a possible coping mechanism that Maggie uses to overcome her maternal struggles. Daisy cannot accompany Ira and Maggie on their daytrip to Cartwheel because she is packing for college and will leave the very next day. When Maggie admits she regrets not spending the day with her daughter, Ira points out that Daisy is not even home that day- she is at work and that Maggie would see her plenty the following day on the car ride to college (20). Maggie also adamantly insists that she could "never get sick of Daisy!" (21). Scenes or memories involving Jesse and Fiona often overwhelm those with Daisy, suggesting a motivation for Maggie's distance from her. It is likely that Maggie

realizes Daisy's self-sufficiency over Jesse and therefore that her time and efforts should be focused on fixing the "mess" in Jesse's life. Daisy does not seem to need Maggie as much as Maggie wants to be needed by Daisy, leading her to attend to Jesse instead. On the other hand, Tyler portrays Daisy as rather independent, working on her last day at home, gathering everything she will need for her freshman year. Therefore, perhaps Daisy has not involved Maggie in her life to the same extent that Maggie has invited herself into Jesse's life. Additionally, Daisy, only a freshman in college, likely has not yet experienced the magnitude of drama that Jesse has experienced. Either way, Maggie's minimal focus on Daisy suggests that Maggie distances herself- as a preparatory coping mechanism- to face the empty-nest syndrome she will experience upon Daisy's leaving. Having involved herself so deeply in Jesse's affairs, Maggie realizes, even if subconsciously, that she is in too far to separate herself from Jesse now and hopes to avoid this same pain in her daughter's life.

Maggie's unwillingness to move out of the past arises from the comfort she gains in knowing that her decisions have allowed some control over what has already happened. This control, however, is an illusion as is evidenced by the fact that Maggie's main purpose in life at present involves righting the relationships and aspects of life that did not turn out how she believes they should have the first time. Had she truly been in control in the first place, there would be no need for this correction now. She recognizes the unpredictability of the future and fears the unknown in what lies ahead. Maggie devotes herself so wholeheartedly to her family that she comes to identify herself by her role as mother and wife. Therefore, as her children mature and prepare to enter the world independently, she feels that she loses a piece of herself as the world is "taking things

away from [her]” (81). Afraid to move on, beyond what has comforted her after all these years as a mother, Maggie begins to experience loneliness and a sense of empty nest syndrome now that her children have left. She even becomes distraught simply by recalling her inability to remember the term “car pool” when talking with one of her patients (9). When Ira asks why she would even need to remember this word, she becomes saddened, claiming that this forgetting “shows you how time has passed” (9). Having been so far removed from playing an important role in her children’s lives, she understands that she is about to enter a new stage and must find a new identity.

Although Maggie continues to interfere in her children’s lives, often causing more of a harmful effect than a beneficial one, it becomes clear that benevolent intentions underlie her meddling. The attention she devotes to observing Leroy’s affection for Fiona shows that she simply wants to be “central to anyone’s world” as she once was for her children (292). She receives little appreciation at home from Ira and her children and seeks gratitude elsewhere, as in allowing herself to become enamored by an elderly resident at the retirement home where she works. Because of this desire to feel valued, Maggie connects with each of Jesse’s girlfriends, initially out of guilt when she realizes their futures with Jesse are grim, but then because “the girls continued to visit her for months after Jesse had dropped them... [sitting] in the kitchen and [confiding] in her... [and] Maggie enjoyed that” (222). Ira calls attention to what he calls Maggie’s “weakness: believ[ing] it’s all right to alter people’s lives. She thinks the people she loves are better than they really are, and so then she starts changing things around to suit her view of them” (267). However, underlying Maggie’s elaborate schemes- including one that involves bringing her entire family, from Fiona and Leroy to Ira’s sisters and father,

to the horse race- rests a genuine desire to arrange what she believes will bring Jesse happiness. The disastrous result of the outing leads to the ultimate reality: that Fiona and Jesse have moved on to new stages of their lives, apart from each other. As Marianne Brace notes in Robert Croft's Anne Tyler: A Bio-Bibliography, Maggie is "a well-meaning optimist whose acts of kindness are infuriating at best, dangerous at worst" (qtd. in Croft 86). Not until afterwards does it become evident that Maggie does not *want* to hurt or alter the lives of those she loves. Rather, she desires only to ensure that Fiona and Jesse have no regrets, especially as she looks back on the happiness they once experienced together.

Maggie experiences a necessary growth in character only after she realizes the true source of her own suffering: wanting everyone to be content with their lives and the unrealistic idea that she herself can manipulate this satisfaction into existence. Despite several signs early on that Fiona and Jesse are better apart than together, Maggie only understands that she has overstepped her boundary after the catastrophe at the horse race. Maggie recognizes herself through the eyes of Fiona who expects Jesse to be living with his parents still, even after all these years. Maggie outwardly acts perturbed at such a suggestion, but after stepping back from the situation, she realizes that she understands Fiona's view: that "you have this picture of a person; you have him tucked away in your mind in this certain fixed position" (303). This mindset mirrors her own viewpoint of the relationship between Jesse and Fiona. The primary source of conflict between them involves Fiona's focus on the person she thinks she knows and what she *wants* to recognize about Jesse; she overlooks his negative aspects (Petry 236). Like Fiona's idea about Jesse, Maggie likely knows deep down that the best interest of the couple is to

remain separated, but she cannot bring herself to admit this. Maggie's persistence in bringing happiness to her family is quite admirable, but her constant meddling confirms that her help is unnecessary. While Fiona may hang on to the memories she has of her time with Jesse, she has come to terms with how her life is now, without him. However, because Maggie cannot accept this idea, the relations between Jesse and Fiona become even more tense than they were before Maggie works her "magic." Only after the family has completely fallen out with each other does Maggie conceive that what she believes others think of her and what they actually think of her differ greatly. She must identify herself as "pushy and meddlesome" and as the deserving recipient of everyone's blame and scorn (309).

Even as Maggie comes to this important discovery, she feels that she has invested herself too heavily in securing a future for Fiona and Jesse to abandon it completely. She inquires of Ira "What are we two going to live for, all the rest of our lives?" (323), demonstrating that she has formed too much of an identity in her children to change from her role as a protective mother. Wallace Stegner comments that the "answer [to Maggie's question] is implicit in Maggie's character. They are going to live for the day, from hour to hour and from misapprehension to bruising correction. They are going to cope as they have coped during this exhausting day" (Stegner 149).

The twenty-four hour setting for this story seems to drag on for a much longer period of time, likely because of the action-packed plot, flashbacks leading to other stories and memories, and the variety of experiences encountered by the Morans. In the same thread, however, the short time frame provides a realistic, everyday approach to describing ordinary struggles that Maggie must overcome. Like the circular approach

used in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, Tyler emphasizes the interconnectedness of time as the past influences the present. Therefore Maggie develops hope for a future characterized by new beginnings in the relationship of Jesse and Fiona. Without the many detours, both physical and emotional, that the Morans undergo, any sort of progress, even if only minor progress, would be difficult to see. Tyler's use of flashbacks along this journey provides a starting place for the characters so that their growth and development can be recognized.

While the many growing experiences through the ups and downs of relationships, friends' deaths, and marital woes certainly guide Maggie towards a new way of viewing her life as a whole, she cannot change the way she lives her day to day life. She remains focused on the goal of bringing her family back together. Gene Koppel asserts that "the reader... does not doubt that Maggie finds in her work and in her efforts (wise and otherwise) to love and help her family what she needs to consider her life worthwhile" (Koppel 278). She feels that her family still needs her help in order to have a happy life even if, along the way, she has become more conscious of her affections for Ira, more accepting of the inability to redo parts of her past like raising Jesse, and more appreciative of life's value. As Alice Petry notes, "Maggie Moran has had to learn for herself, through painful experience and observation, how to place marriage, time, and life itself into a perspective that would enable her to continue down a not always smooth road" (Petry 251).

Unlike other Tyler novels where the characters' journeys towards progress can be observed, the end of Breathing Lessons does not present as satisfying of a confirmation that progress actually *has* been made; "there are to be no breakouts to new beginnings"

(Lescaze). While Macon, for example, seems only to have room to develop into a more well-rounded person (as his whole life is pulled out from under him, leaving him with no solid foundation), Maggie and Ira simply try to survive in the lives they have been handed. Maggie's optimism throughout the book overshadows any sort of doubt she may have as to whether things will work out as she hopes. Her struggles arise because of her role as a mother and therefore she continues facing everyday events that lead her back to meddling and worrying about her children's happiness.

Additionally, through the condensed time frame of the novel, Tyler emphasizes more of the journey that the Morans take, rather than focusing on where they end in relation to where they began. The brief twenty-four hour period constantly cycles through repetitive events, contributing further to the Morans' ordinariness. Maggie limits her vision to only the matters that will help her achieve the goal of improving her family's happiness, even if this goal is unnecessary. In order to most effectively endure the struggles present each day, she needs to break out of the cycle of her life. While she cannot completely abandon her hopes for the future and without solid confirmation that Maggie *has* changed in her ways, there remains hope for a new, more feasible outlook on how she approaches reuniting Fiona and Jesse. Additionally, there lies potential for the ultimate happiness of her family, and an insinuation that she has learned the importance of boundaries and of staying in her place.

Common to many other Tyler novels is the theme of family. According to Edward Hoagland in "About Maggie Who Tried Too Hard," "Maggie, although exasperating, isn't sad, and like... Ezra Tull... she is trying to make a difference, to connect or unite people, beat the drum for forgiveness and compromise" (Hoagland). Maggie's family

values her and serves as the source of many of her actions, worries, concerns, and hopes. However, her desire to control her family's future and the responsibility she takes of ensuring they are all happy leads her to the dilemmas she often encounters. For example, she drives miles and miles to visit Fiona and Leroy so that she can convince Fiona that it is best for everyone if she returns to Jesse. The qualities that often get Maggie into trouble also allow her to be strong for her family and to be so persistent in her goals that she resists the changes brought on by time. Similar to Ezra's many failed attempts at constructing a fruitful family dinner, Maggie is unwilling to give up the aspiration of bringing happiness to her family, even if it means they are prevented from simply living their lives the way they wish.

Following their unsuccessful efforts, both Ezra and Maggie often supplement the missing parts of their lives with imagined scenarios in order to bring about the satisfaction that they fail to experience. Maggie imagines a reunion between Jesse and Fiona and the role she will have in Leroy's life. Ezra becomes attached to Mrs. Scarlatti as a second mother who can fulfill the needs his own mother cannot. Both have trouble accepting the reality of the present and instead look to another source-- their fantasies-- to create the life they believe should exist in the perfect case scenario.

2.3 Delia Grinstead, Ladder of Years

Like Pearl and Maggie, Delia Grinstead experiences a kind of domestic suffering because of her role as a mother and wife. As she faces the reality of her children growing up and out from her protection, her physician husband ignoring his own health orders and obsessing over house renovations, and the grief of her father's recent death, the everyday

sources of Delia's distress become evident. Despite the similar type of daily suffering they all share, Delia copes differently from Maggie or Pearl. While Maggie has a hard time accepting the reality of her life, she still takes an active role pursuing what she believes is her purpose: reuniting the family once again. Likewise, Pearl seeks involvement in her children's lives, however much they resist. Despite the suffering caused by her husband's abandonment, she continues living each day with her head held high. Delia's uniqueness lies in that she simply chooses to flee the reality of her three unappreciative children and her oblivious husband, as well as the sadness surrounding her father's death. She discovers that Bay Borough is the destination providing what she believes is relief from this unrewarding lifestyle and where she can assume a new identity all together.

The role of mother and wife serves as key reason Delia leaves her life in search of a new one. Early in her marriage to Sam, Delia remembers claiming she loved him so much that she would rather die by consuming poison than go on living without him. She reminds herself that "she could say such things, not having had the children yet" (212). With the birth of her children, she understands that from the very beginning, her purpose for living revolves around her family and their need for her. Therefore, when she realizes they are not as reliant upon her as they once were, she feels her foundation has been pulled out from beneath her and she flees. Delia's mode of coping life's challenges is rather unrealistic- just up and leaving one day from the beach while on a family vacation. Yet her escape allows her to discover more about herself in her identity as mother and wife.

Like in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant and Breathing Lessons, Tyler utilizes flashbacks in order to emphasize the interconnectedness of the past and present. However, in Ladder of Years, Tyler stresses the passing of time as one of the key struggles Delia must overcome; Delia's nostalgia manifests itself through flashbacks, as well as dreams and activities of her imagination. Even when she *is* at home with her family, she realizes that the changes occurring all around lead her to be "overtaken suddenly by a swell of something like homesickness" (21). This homesickness is evident, for example, in the voice of a particular neighbor which brings back memories "of all the women on this street where she had grown up" (21). Delia has trouble viewing a future without her father, especially in this house where she has grown up, and savors reminders of the past. One such relic she associates with her father is his bedroom, which she cannot bear to change after his passing. The rest of her family, though, seems to accept the transitions that have occurred and can move on. For example, Delia's son Carroll longs to have his own room, but Delia laments that she is not ready to relinquish the only room available- that belonging to Delia's father- to Carroll. Similarly, Delia's sisters, Eliza and Linda, are less reluctant than Delia to move on, and can see past the sentiment of the room; Linda insists that she will not sleep one more night with Eliza "when there's a whole extra room going empty" (43). Deep down, Delia knows the time will come when accepting the changes will be necessary. But for now, she is unwilling to stray too far off her own beaten path and disregard the emotions attached to her memories.

As much she dreads accepting her father's death and the necessary adjustments because of it, Delia still allows her imagination to run wild, almost in an attempt to overcome the part of her that wants to remain in the past. Temptation to escape her

mundane life escalates (even if Delia does not recognize it as temptation) and she imagines herself being led away by Adrian, the man with whom she has the briefest of affairs, while her family watches in “bewilderment” (60). Much to her dismay, however, her family does not believe she could possibly participate in an act so contrary to her normal self. Even Sam insists that ““Of course [Adrian] just an acquaintance [as Delia is] not exactly the type to have an affair”” (74). With the confirmation that her family believes to know her through and through, the harsh reality of her own humdrum life as Mrs. Grinstead resurfaces. Delia’s fantasy displays itself in a similar manner to the one Maggie experiences upon exiting the car after an argument with Ira. Maggie insists that even though her “dress-up purse” is rather small and inconvenient for her abundance of long-term needs (34), she would “register at a no-frills motel... shop at Nell’s Grocery for foods that didn’t need cooking... [and finding] something clerical” in terms of work (35). Even after all these years of marriage, both Maggie and Delia welcome the opportunity to imagine a life completely independent from their families and in a role distinct from the ones they play at home.

Beginning with the simple fact that her family still lives in the same house where she grew up, Delia clearly takes great comfort in the familiar and consistent aspects of her life. However, with the reassurance of a routine also comes the risk that life may become boring after awhile. Because of Delia’s ordinariness and predictability, she finds herself “stunned... by what she had gone and done”-- the spontaneous act of leaving her family (85). Brooke Allen complements this thought, noting that “Delia Grinstead, a creature of impulse like so many of Tyler’s characters, never makes a conscious decision to leave; she simply veers off down the beach... and disappears not only in space but in

time, for the destination she picks almost at random” (Allen). Interestingly, Delia neglects voicing her concerns to her family in an attempt to overcome the insecurities or lack of appreciation she feels. Instead, she impulsively jumps in a repairman’s RV, assuring herself that “she could still get back [home] on her own” (81), until the very end of the road when she believes she has landed where she is meant to be: in Bay Borough.

Delia becomes weary upon realizing that she cannot control the pace of life or the adjustments that must be made as time progresses. She observes her family’s transformations before she has had time to prepare for them, from her husband who “suffered a bout of severe chest pain.... [leaving her] terrified anytime he went anywhere alone” (18) to her children who “turned into semistrangers [and to whom] she [had] lost her central importance” (211). After time away from her family, she also realizes, to her own dismay, that “they, in fact, had become just a bit less overwhelmingly all-important to her” too, though she is not certain when this truth first surfaces (211). In contrast to the time early in her life when, like Pearl, Delia admits that “she used to be so afraid of dying while her children were small,” Delia now leads herself to believe that she “was expendable. She was an extra” (127). However, not until she writes a postcard to her mother-in-law, Eleanor, an interesting recipient as Eleanor has always caused Delia great aggravation, does Delia realize the true reason for escaping: “Her leaving had very little to do with any specific person” and instead is, as she writes ““because I like the thought of beginning again from scratch”” (139). Ironically, because she carries these desires with her into her new, more independent life, she actually does not begin from scratch and instead builds upon those desires already present. Delia desires to feel appreciated by her family, to add some excitement to the ordinary routine of life, and to find an identity

outside of her role at home. The only way she conceives to achieve this goal involves recreating herself as the self-contained Miss Grinstead.

While the town of Bay Borough itself is composed of a simple, “perfect grid, with the square mathematically centered between three streets north and south of it, two streets east and west” (105), it provides the ideal avenue for Delia to begin anew, complete with a fresh identity, fewer possessions, and a restored outlook on life. After arriving, Delia immediately sets forth to find a new outfit (as she is still dressed in her beach cover-up upon arriving in the town) and to muster up the courage to apply for a secretarial job. She has so few belongings, besides a new handbag, wallet, and other trivial necessities that after unpacking, she realizes “she could look around the room and detect not the slightest hint that anybody lived here” (97). With a lack of materialistic attachment to her previous identity and lifestyle, she really does start anew in Bay Borough. As that same afternoon progresses, Delia finds that there is “a whole unspoken history” (95) of the new “Miss Grinstead... the new Delia... It seemed apt that she should accept this compromise- the unmarried title, the married surname” (94). She notes the appropriateness of this name to complement her new identity as “the aproned, complacent sound of ‘Mrs.’ no longer applied, and yet she couldn’t go back to being giggly young Miss Felson [her maiden name]” (95). Additionally, as time passes in this new role, Delia discovers, almost as an outsider looking in on her own transformation, that Miss Grinstead differs greatly from herself. She is not as personable and holds the view that “the people involved in her daily routine remained two-dimensional to her” (101).

Delia finds moving on to be more difficult than simply putting up a front against all sentiment and memory. In fact, she becomes a part of Bay Borough, conforming to its

ways with a new identity that is only applicable within the perimeters of the town and finding a routine that fits into the town's offerings. Delia's evolution into a citizen of Bay Borough is most evident when Delia's sister, Eliza, comes to visit and "seemed out of place in these surroundings—somebody from home, with that humble, faded look that home people always have" (114). Similar to the homesickness referenced in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, Eliza has become accustomed to ordinary life, "humble" in that traveling too far out of her routine is a foreign concept. Her unassuming ways and nonconformity, even in this tiny, unintimidating town, both peg her as an outsider.

Tyler subtly hints about time passing in Bay Borough as well as describing Delia's transformation into a new person as this time elapses. Delia's first inkling to escape from her family occurred as they were on their summer trip to the beach when it was still "early in the season" (71). After Delia arrives in Bay Borough, she has initiated a new routine in just three days, even though part of the reason she leaves involves abandoning the structure that has consumed her. After establishing this routine, each day seems indistinguishable from the next, an "endless, unmarked, unchanging string of days" (101). Even Delia wonders "what [she] would do in the wintertime" since "in Bay Borough it was always summer" (101). In winter, the weather would not permit her daily pattern of lunching in the middle of the town square; "[summer] was the only season she could picture here" (101). Tyler's next reference to time comes with Delia's (and therefore the reader's) recognition that her birthday month—September-- has arrived. Over the span of July to November, Tyler briefly mentions the uneventfulness of Independence Day and the annual Bay Day celebrations. Then, only a few pages later, Delia receives an invitation to attend Thanksgiving lunch with Belle, her landlord.

Through these fleeting moments during her stay in Bay Borough, Delia “wonder[s] how humans could bear to live in a world where the passage of time held so much power” (213). Before Bay Borough, Delia is accustomed to a humdrum, ordinary life, complete with its routines, scheduled tennis lessons and dentist appointments. To her satisfaction, Bay Borough permits the consistency of her routines with the passing time. Her own life perfectly exemplifies her viewpoint of life in general: “Just a few scattered moments... have a way of summing up a person’s life. Just five or six tableaux that flip past again and again, like tarot cards constantly reshuffled and redealt” (129). Delia discovers that this pattern of passing time plays an important role in defining her identity and cannot simply be thrown away. As for the other members of her family, Delia gradually understands the inevitable elapsing of time and that it ultimately plays a large function in dictating each member’s roles in the family.

In order to live independently while in Bay Borough, Delia seeks a professional job. When her first job as a secretary turns out differently from what she has imagined, Delia takes to the *Classified* section of the paper to search for work. She is intrigued by a job description asking for a “Live-in woman” (159) to serve as a mother for a twelve-year-old boy as the father is often at work (160). After investing more into the position and visiting with the father and son, Joel and Noah respectively, she decides to take the job. Even as she visits the house for the very first time, she realizes that her motherly instincts prevent her from maintaining the “professional” and distant front she has established in her time away from her family. Upon seeing the guest room where she eventually ends up living, she immediately “feel[s] within the curl of her fingers the urge to [cut vegetables and prepare soup for the boy] and [after placing it in front of him], turn

away briskly (twelve was too old to cuddle) and pretend she hadn't noticed his tears" (163). In seeking to escape the role of mother to her own children, she finds herself in the exact same position as a mother to Noah. While Delia likely does not grasp the meaning associated with accepting this job at the time, it shows what she later discovers: that her role as mother is too much a part of her identity for her to abandon it completely.

For the first few days in her position, Delia sits in her room, gathering the courage to guard herself against the memories of her own children that will inevitably result from her "job" as Noah's mother. Her amazement at how "easy [it is] to fall back into being someone's mother!" (172) demonstrates her belief that she can keep her personal emotions and memories separate from her maternal responsibilities. However, try as she might, she learns that the sentiment and love she experiences are inherent to her position as a mother; even if she distances herself from her children and family, she cannot completely disregard or control such feelings. As she accepts the inability to distinguish between her title and the emotions that accompany it, Delia throws herself into her role as a maternal figure for Noah. She later affirms that she is more of one than his actual mother, Ellie. Delia even discovers how much she desires to "prove her claims to membership [in the realm of motherhood] - the labor pains, the teething, the time when she too could have told her baby's age to the day" (131) as she talks to a fellow town member. However, she "resist[s] [the] temptation" to admit any sort of connection as a mother (131).

Tyler uses Delia's involvement in Noah's life (and in the life of his father, Joel) in order to express a change in the way she views herself in terms of her family. Delia begins to pity herself as "a person without a past," upon first arriving in Bay Borough,

but she must remind herself that *she* chose this lifestyle; she does not have to leave her family, but felt at the time that this was the only appropriate path to independence and appreciation from them. While a seemingly contradictory motivation, Delia discovers that before her family can fully respect her role in the family, they must understand her potential to live a separate life from them. However, that she cries each night before falling asleep shows her homesickness for her family and normal life, even if it is a subconscious, disregarded feeling. After several reality checks reminding her that *she* left her family, Delia begins to have more of a genuine longing to return to her past, familiar life, and routines. Additionally, the true sign that she misses, not just the ideal images of her family but the actual reality of their faults as well, occurs when she hears children quarreling and immediately begins to yearn for her clan. Even after the many good times of the vacation and life with her family, this tense moment reminds her of how much she loves them and is when she misses them the most.

Try as she might to believe that she has moved on to a newfound identity in Miss Grinstead, just one thought or reminder from that former life leads her to begin reminiscing again. When she sees her son Carroll for the first time since her arrival in Bay Borough, she feels a “wrenching” feeling, “like the grip of some deep, internal fist, [leading her to understand] for the first time how terribly much she had missed him” (201). Similarly, after Carroll leaves, Delia describes a simplistic, yet significant account of her nostalgia and it becomes clear her life from here on out will change. The “[feeling of] the most amazing hunger, all at once [followed by feeling] absolutely hollow” (209) serves as the turning point for Delia as she seeks to step back into her life as Mrs. Grinstead.

Not until she returns home for her daughter's wedding does Delia undergo an important realization about just how much her family values her. As she learns about Susie's wedding plans, she understands that her desires fall on two sides of the same coin: she wants to maintain her independent identity away from her family yet she also regrets missing out on important parts of her children's lives and family decisions. Arriving back in front of the house-- the same house where she has lived all her life and with the same people she has known forever-- as a wedding guest-- she feels she is leaving the "familiar" world of Bay Borough and entering into the "unfamiliar" territory of her home (275). Immediately upon stepping into the house, however, she discovers a scene of chaos and, after being welcomed by her family as a source of aid, she discovers herself "alarmed, of course, but also grateful to find herself in demand" (276). Within the first few hours, Delia easily settles back into her role as mother and wife, from her initial maternal reaction upon hearing her sons' names that someone ought to wake them to the simple signs of familial desperation, such as the unkempt mulberry tree outside her house. She realizes her significance as part of the family dynamics, but also that returning to familiarity within the Grinstead household allows for such a realization. Upon really talking to Sam for the first time since her disappearance, Delia admits that all she desires to be content once again is spoken confirmation of her family's true need for her. Despite the signs intimated before of her family's wish for her return, Delia now claims the independence she has been developing all along.

In fact, Delia finds that her newfound independence can be integrated into her original lifestyle in order to perform her duties as mother and wife to the best extent possible. Upon first arriving back at home and standing amid the pre-wedding chaos,

Delia understands that “she had never realized before that worry could be dumped in someone else’s lap like a physical object. She should have done it years ago” (288).

While undoubtedly a passive and unrealistic approach, Delia’s gains an important insight into part of the source of her discontentment: that she “assigns” *herself* the responsibilities and roles she plays within her family. As Brooke Allen writes in “Anne Tyler in Mid Course:” “Though Delia has undergone a breakdown of sorts, she has kept her sanity, and little by little Bay Borough loses its elements of fantasy, just as Miss Grinstead and Delia begin to coalesce” (Allen). Only after she has been away does she realize that she can contribute even more to the family she left behind.

The ultimate integration of her new and original identities is best represented as she prepares supper for the family in her own familiar kitchen. She moves in her kitchen, with “those weird little nipples on the cabinet knobs [and] the squeak of the exhaust fan above the stove” while still “in Miss Grinstead’s forest-green dress and old-maid shoes with the strap across the instep” (295). Delia relies on her newfound confidence as Miss Grinstead in order to live her original role more efficiently, such as defending her family from outsiders’ skeptical views. She recognizes her delight over her family’s uniqueness, ““not mingling or taking part, living to [themselves] like [they] do,”” according to Susie’s fiancée, and prides herself that this is why they are a one-of-a-kind family (311).

Immediately, the connection of past and present becomes evident through the idea of a “ladder of years” (193) where the importance of memories, learning from the past, assimilation of the past and present, and the willingness to move onto the future all take hold.

Tyler explores the dual nature of the family as an entity to cling to as a foundation amid changing times, as well as a unit to escape from in order to seek an independent identity in the world. According to Allen, Tyler's "subject is not the bid for independence but the bridging of gaps; her characters struggle, more or less successfully, not so much to free themselves from repressive relationships as to find ways of communicating within these bonds" (Allen). Similarly to Macon who does not leave Sarah to hurt her but rather to make the point that he desires more independence than his relationship with her allows, Delia does not wish to hurt her family as she takes off at the beach. This is most evident in that she often reminisces about her family and wonders about their current states while she is away from them, like chronicling what they must be doing on Christmas morning, for example. Delia's motive in leaving her family stems from the idea that in her absence, they will learn to appreciate her. Such a motive, as well as the doubts that she can commit to remaining in Bay Boroughs until winter, both suggest that Delia has every inclination of returning to them, even if not conscious of this desire at the time. However, she also learns for herself that the role she plays in her household is such an ingrained part of her identity that she cannot simply abandon forever. The fact that Joel hires her in Bay Borough to serve in the same capacity as she serves in at home, that of a mother, demonstrates this understanding. The time away from her family shows that despite the extreme measures that may be taken to escape (whether escaping from one's own mind, fears, or doubts), rarely can one leave her past behind completely. Delia understands that no matter her circumstances or position in life, the foundation she has developed for herself will remain constant and will allow her to maintain her identity even within unfamiliar circumstances.

Although both Macon and Delia find independence in a source outside of their familiar surroundings, they differ in the steps they take following this newfound autonomy. After a minor setback, Macon decides to leave Sarah, who represents structure and dependence, and instead follows Muriel, who embodies spontaneity and independence. In making such a decision, Macon exemplifies the self-sufficiency he has developed during his time away from Sarah and with Muriel. Delia, on the other hand, leaves her family to gain independence, which she discovers through her time and identity as Miss Grinstead in Bay Boroughs. However, instead of remaining with the source of autonomy as Macon does, Delia returns to her roots equipped with this newfound independence and uses it to build upon her original role of mother and wife. Even though they choose different paths with their newly developed self-reliance, both Macon and Delia continue to grow and readjust their views on life and happiness.

Chapter 3: Insecurities from Unusual Circumstances

3.1 Cody Tull, Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant

Unlike Macon, Ian, and Aaron all of whose guilt and grief intensifies the pain of life-altering events, Cody Tull, Jenny Tull, and Muriel Pritchett all have insecurities that stem from unusual circumstances in their lives. This insecurity, however, does not directly disable them; they seek methods to overcome the challenges their uncertainty presents. Unfortunately, their coping methods often affect them indirectly; their progress is hindered, either by the unrealistic ideas of how their lives should be, by the pain they cause the people they love, or by the holes of unhappiness they dig themselves deeper into through failed attempts at achieving it. Even as they struggle to determine the most effective way to cope, the majority of the characters eventually find qualified satisfaction in their lives.

As the oldest of the three Tull children, Cody takes this status to heart and allows it to create an air of superiority. Cody often focuses on the next thing life will offer him; rarely does he pay attention to the present moment without foreseeing its effect on the future. When Jenny first suggests that their father, Beck, has left the family, Cody's initial reaction is to observe his surroundings, noticing, "for the first time, that there was something pinched and starved about the way this house was decorated" (42). The bareness of everything in the house, from the picture-less walls to the lack of perfume bottles on his mother's dresser lead him to ask himself "Who *wouldn't* leave such a place?" (42). He longs for a normal life, complete with a "mother who acted like other

mothers... gossiping with a little gang in the kitchen, letting them roll her hair up in pincurls, trading beauty secrets, playing cards, losing track of time... He wished she had some outside connection, something beyond that suffocating house” (59). Cody believes his house and family contain a coldness influencing how he interacts with his family and the world.

In the days after Beck Tull abandons his family, the Tull siblings recognize the importance of their relationship with each other as they enter an uncertain world. As Frank Shelton notes Tyler's “characters often rebel against restrictive institutions, especially the family. Disengaging themselves from others in order to seek freedom, they struggle between the two poles of distance and sympathy” (176). While many of Tyler's characters seek freedom from their families, most come to realize that they can only identify themselves by their families and that their role within this entity plays an important part in their identities. Additionally, their desire to break free of this structure can help them to find out more about themselves. According to Robertson, “The family is shown or implied to be the principle determinant of adult identity and the primary social unit... the characters can either submit to or reject the family's ways and values; the family as a whole can either triumph or be destroyed” (Robertson 186).

Beginning from the moment Cody realizes the truth about Beck, he claims all of the guilt for this disappearance. He experiences dreams where he is “not his present self [but instead] he had somehow slid backward and become a toddler again” (47). In his dreams, he becomes “conscious of a desperate need to learn to manage, to take charge of his surroundings” and then imagines himself parading in front of his father to prove that he could make it on his own without Beck’s presence in his life (47). However,

immediately upon awakening from his dream, Cody's insecurities reappear, causing him to wonder what he did to make his father abandon their family. Because of the frequent comparisons between Cody and the "perfect" Ezra, especially by his father during a family archery outing, Cody's sense of inadequacy leads to a self-proclaimed, unrealistic demand for success. He often overachieves at the expense of anyone that stands in his way. In addition, he not only throws his resentment at its deserving recipient- his father, who "had uprooted the family continually... [and] had ruined their lives"- but also at Ezra, an undeserving victim of this contempt (59). As becomes evident later in the novel, Cody's pranks to outdo Ezra stem from a deep admiration of him, proven when Cody breaks up with one of his girlfriends because "she really hadn't understood Ezra; she hadn't appreciated what he was all about" (166).

Cody's insecurities and desire for success arise from several sources: spite towards his father, desire to win his mother's attention, and identification of his position within the Tull family. Following Beck's abandonment, Cody does all he can to claim his territory as man of the house, including the great strides he takes in removing all the wooden slats from Ezra's bed, sabotaging the relationship between Ezra and his friend Josiah, and hiding all of Ezra's favorite items. Once he has made his point- that he rules as the dominate male figure- he believes he can move on with his life. However, Cody cannot escape the strong desire to prove himself superior. To overcome his insecurities, Cody "keep[s] things separate- his friends in one half of his life and his family in the other half" and "only allow[s] his friends in the house when his mother was at work" (48). Cody proceeds to show his friends all of his mother's belongings, for a purpose unknown to even him, describing with great care the quality of her ironed handkerchiefs

and jewelry. The great emphasis Cody places on these material items suggests an attempt to prove himself to his friends, and to himself, that he is worth something even without a father.

Beck's lack of appreciation for Cody's accomplishments plant the root of these doubts before Cody even recognizes them. Tyler suggests that interactions during a family archery outing are characteristic of Cody's inability to please Beck and demonstrate his defiant attitude. On this particular family occasion, Cody laments the fact that he is missing a viewing of *Air Force* with his friends and decides he will take control over the way this afternoon pans out by shooting the arrow before his father tells him to do so. After Beck's frustration with Cody becomes evident (as does Cody's with himself when he misses the target completely), Beck insists that Ezra try to shoot the arrow. Upon doing so, Ezra hits the bulls eye perfectly, spreading a sense of shock through the whole family. Out of rage, Cody pretends to shoot Ezra. Ezra, believing that the arrow really is coming for him, tackles Cody, causing Cody to shoot Pearl instead. Shooting his mother brings up the irony Bail notes: winning his mother's love motivates Cody's mischief against Ezra (Bail 190).

The grand aspirations that Cody expresses to anyone who will listen often stem from a source he is unwilling to admit: his family. Even as Cody sabotages Ezra, reacts embarrassingly to his mother, and seeks to find an identity outside his family, Cody thrives on his family's approval. As he realizes the main reason for his relationship failures involve his girlfriends falling for Ezra instead, Cody asks himself why "he went on making these introductions, considering his unfortunate experiences" (132). Since "he live[s] in New York City and his family live[s] in Baltimore," it is unnecessary to make

the introductions (132). Although he tries to be independent and to show a lack of attention to his family's opinions, Cody realizes that keeping a potential wife from his family “would mean a lifetime of suspense” (132), both as he would imagine his family's reactions to her and vice versa. John Updike remarks that “the family, that institution meant to shelter our frailty, in fact serves as a theatre for intimate cruelties” (109). While Cody wishes to have his family's approval as they have seen him through the ups and downs in his life, he potentially exposes himself to their harsh opinions and “intimate cruelties.” Since they know so much about him, they can target him in his most vulnerable state, even if unintentionally. In addition, Cody sets lofty goals so that he can prove that he has overcome the circumstances of Beck’s betrayal. However, funding Ezra's education at Princeton and purchasing a medical clinic for Jenny are at the top of this list of goals, which proves how much his family means to him; all of these major aspirations involve providing for his family before anyone else.

While Beck’s betrayal and Pearl’s indifference contribute to Cody's insecurities, his dark sense of humor and harsh approach to life seem to be inherent characteristics. Pearl claims that Cody has ““been mean since the day [he] was born”” (64), suggesting that “Cody’s personality problems have more to do with Pearl's upbringing of him than she is wont to admit” (Bail 190). Even while Cody constantly sabotages his brother in order to make Pearl see Ezra in a less favorable light, Cody does not realize that the magnitude of affection she has for him leads her to *have* other children, as a source of insurance (Bail 190). “But Cody's motives are always warped: he always is trying to buy [Pearl’s] affection, to outmaneuver the non-maneuvering Ezra” (Bail 191). Cody views

himself in constant competition with Ezra and allows this need to drive his decisions and actions.

Even though Cody cannot overcome the mindset that life is a race against Ezra, he discovers that crossing what he considers to be a finish line never provides him with full satisfaction; another sort of goal always arises that he sets his eye upon. When Jenny informs Cody that Ezra has a new girlfriend named Ruth, Cody's initial thought is that he will no longer have to worry about losing his own flames to Ezra. However, "a little twinge of uneasiness" (134) immediately follows this thought, perhaps because his primary motivation involves triumphing over Ezra. Cody begins imagining Ruth's appearance, personality, how she looks at different times of day and in different settings, almost to the point where he is unable to focus on his job. His obsession with just a name poses the question of whether Cody would be consumed with such fascination if Ruth had not been associated with Ezra first. When Cody "reache[s] the stage where he'd angle and connive just to get someone to utter Ruth's name (153), Pearl tells Cody that she can see through his actions. She claims that he has "no earthly use for that girl. She's not [his] type in the slightest; she belongs to [his] brother" (153). Cody replies that she does not understand the situation, implying that he, himself, also does not know any other motive, besides his greediness.

Cody sacrifices potential happiness by convincing himself that he can overcome the insecurities of Beck's abandonment and of winning his mother's love from Ezra. Instead, he focuses on reaching what he deems to be the finish line against his brother. He uses dreams about Ruth as his reward when he cannot see her in person and even sacrifices her happiness to achieve what *he* desires, by wooing her away from Ezra.

According to Bail, Cody views “happiness [as] a limited and measurable commodity, like time. He cannot feel happiness from within... [he] looks for some external indicator of success- some competitor to measure himself against” (Bail 110). Always needing to outdo someone sets Cody up for disappointment and presents him with a rather grim outlook and approach to life. Striving for the next finish line prevents him from experiencing the happiness that Ezra experiences daily. Even after Ruth and Cody are married, he fails to let go of the jealousy he feels when he hears that Ruth may be in the distant vicinity of Ezra. Cody measures his successes in how many times he has beaten Ezra “who is not interested in competing” (Bail 110). Even when he has the ultimate victory over Ezra, it does not lead to happiness or even to the satisfaction of knowing he has “won;” he then lives in constant paranoia that his “victory” will be ripped from beneath him (Bail 110).

Ironically, the feat that Cody believes will seal his victory against Ezra- that of stealing Ruth- leaves him feeling empty, just as all other “successes” have done before. When Pearl visits Ruth and Cody at their farm house, she notices “a sense of something missing. A certain failure to connect, between the two of them. Everything seemed so tenuous” (178). While Cody may have “won” Ruth, the house they share serves as the only sign of their identity and structure as a married couple. Additionally, after Cody has married Ruth, he relocates them to Illinois, far away from the Tull family. Bail remarks that Cody’s act of stealing Ruth can be seen as “a hateful attempt to deal a deadly blow to Ezra and a twisted expression of his love for Ezra... [that] he is trying to win from Ruth the love he felt Pearl bestowed exclusively on Ezra” (Bail 110). In an attempt to overcome the jealousy that he never seems quite able to conquer, Cody throws himself

into his relationship with Ruth to fill what he believes is a void in his life. He devotes less attention to what he considers are futile efforts to win Pearl's affection, calling his mother infrequently, becoming "more like an acquaintance" to Pearl, "[a] not very cordial acquaintance" (179) and only sending pictures of his infant son, Luke.

In order to keep his confident persona and to prevent anyone from noticing his insecurities, Cody moves around frequently so as to keep his true self under wraps. Cody only rents the Chicago home where he and Ruth first move for "the four months or so that [he] would need to reorganize a plastics plant in Chicago" (179). After these four months, Cody and Ruth move to another part of Illinois. As Shelton points out, Cody "never stays in one location long enough to find a place in a community and in fact does not really want one. Though determined not to desert his family as his father did him, he distances himself even from his wife and son, poisoning their lives with his resentment" (Shelton 182). Cody does not physically leave Ruth and Luke, but often is absent emotionally or else has an improper attitude to welcome a warm family relationship. He then takes to moving around in order to "outrun" the insecurities caused by his father's abandonment, as well as the "guilt over his father's leaving" (Shelton 182).

Cody searches for a new goal to achieve once he has Ruth and no longer needs to fight for her. He hopes to distance himself from the status as head of the family. Bail describes Cody's view of time as being "fleeting moments that one wants to possess but that keep receding" (115) and that, as Voelker notes, Cody's problem that "'anything you can have is something you no longer want'" (qtd. in Bail 115). Almost in an attempt to have *something* to control, Cody finds a career as an "efficiency expert, doing time-motion studies at factories" (Bail 108). This position demonstrates his idea that

everything, even time, can be controlled. However, as he learns from the unexpected turns his life takes, time cannot be regulated; it can only be managed efficiently. Gibson points out that “even Cody feels, especially when presented with his family, that his life is plotted in a pattern he did not design” (Gibson 170). For example, upon experiencing “his strange notion” that Luke is actually Ezra’s son because he shares more in common with Ezra than Cody, Cody learns that he cannot outrun his past’ “he is forced through Luke and Ezra to submit to time... as the repetition of ceaseless conflict. Cody might fight disorder, but it is always there to exert a pressure on him to be more flexible than he might otherwise be” (Robertson 195). Cody realizes that he cannot escape time, particularly the past, because his son resembles Ezra so closely. Interestingly, the one accomplishment Cody believes he has won over Ezra- marrying Ruth- results in a constant reminder of Ezra's presence. It is as if Ezra continues to “haunt” him by way of Luke. According to Bail, Luke allows us to see “the old conflicts... through the eyes of another generation” (Bail 110).

Additionally, Cody feels pressure to maintain the new identity he has created with Ruth; he cannot lose face with his family, which would happen if they recognized his insecurities have yet to be overcome. Robertson remarks: “Cody feels that the resemblance is the vengeance of fate, but we see it as a kind of fortunate prevention of a too- pure family identity, for Cody has tried to seal off his own family just as Pearl had” (Robertson 195). By limiting communication with his mother and siblings, Cody deserts the many years he has invested into forming his identity within the Tull family; he seeks a new, independent role as husband and father, even if he fails in those roles.

Although Cody's marriage to Ruth is rather unlikely, Tyler demonstrates a theme common in several of her novels: "day-to-day endurance" through this entity (Shelton 182). She shows us that "people will often choose strangeness over similarity for their own self-preservation... Her narrative ethos... seems to say that such a choice is somehow right, as if Ezra and Ruth are too much alike for their own good" (Robertson 195). Tyler demonstrates that even if Cody and Ruth do not necessarily have the happiest marriage, they do endure, despite their differences (Robertson 195). Ruth even tells Luke she calls Cody in a moment of desperation to tell him that "'we've got so interwoven; even if you don't love me at all, now we're so entwined. It's you I have to stay with'" (219). Despite the very ordinary reason to stay together, more of an obligation than a desire, they both realize that each has changed things about his or her life because of the other. They cannot return to their pasts as they have made a life together and rely on this foundation as the only steady place amid the turmoil of their lives. They have withstood life's trials together, through sickness, injury, and hard times, and now must stay devoted to the relationship.

Even while Cody struggles to find the appropriate balance between his insecurities and his need for independence, he discovers that he cannot escape his past. When Beck returns for Pearl's funeral, Cody realizes that he misses his own son, Luke. He remembers that 'he would rather die than desert a child of his. He had promised himself when he was a boy: anything but that' (299). Cody's memory demonstrates one of the first clear steps of progress he makes to overcome his insecurities instead of just dwelling on them. Confronting Beck with questions and resentment about his abandonment allows Cody to tie up the loose ends he has felt his whole life. When Beck

finishes confessing his regrets to Cody and also voicing his admiration for Pearl raising the three children as she did, Cody finds himself speechless. However, right at this moment, he turns to “see his family rounding the corner... [and] Cody felt surprised and touched. He felt that they were pulling him toward them- that it wasn't they who were traveling, but Cody himself” (303). Hearing Beck's regrets leads Cody to realize the value of “meager handful of advice offered by Beck Tull” (298)... that family is “all there really is, in the end” (301).

While Tyler only suggests Cody's minimal progress at the end of the novel, she implies that more will come. His rivalry with Ezra has deep roots in his identity, and he will likely fall back into jealous rages at times. However, seeing his own father's attitude about the past, followed by the significant feeling of connection he experiences upon watching his family run towards him, suggests that Cody will play a more significant role as father and husband from this point forward. Pearl ultimately brings the family together again, even though only her memory remains.

3.2 Jenny Tull, Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant

Like her brother Cody, Jenny Tull struggles to overcome the insecurities that arise because of her father's abandonment. As the youngest of the three Tull children, Jenny does not experience her father's presence for as long as Cody or Ezra do. However, his disappearance still greatly affects her; she initially tells people he had gone to join the war effort in order to rationalize his leaving. Later, she is the first of the children to voice an explanation for her father's disappearance: that ““he's left us”” (41). She moves from a somewhat naïve and optimistic view of believing everything her mother tells her about

her father to a more mature and realistic outlook that her father is not coming home. Pearl's description of Jenny as "so brisk and breezy but... oh, you might say somewhat opaque, a reflecting surface flashing your own self back at you, giving no hint of *her* self" (33), shows that Jenny learns, from an early age, the necessity of protecting herself from the world's cruelties. From the moment she comprehends her father's permanent absence, Jenny develops a defensive front and remains cautious about allowing anyone to enter her private sphere. As Shelton points out, Jenny seeks to maintain distance from anyone in her life in order to ensure that she is not disappointed and to protect herself from further betrayals (182).

Just as Cody realizes that his family is a foundation to which he reluctantly clings, Jenny also often finds support from her brothers, especially when their mother's rage from the misfortune of life strikes. The three Tull siblings are the only ones who can recognize the motivation for Pearl's irrational behavior- her frustrations of having to "raise these children single-handed" and feeling the pressure to serve the role of two parents (185). Even as she tries to keep it hidden from everyone she encounters, Pearl's children feel the impact of her double pressure. The siblings also serve as a collective unit that understands the only way to overcome these rampages involves simply enduring them as they arise. As Allen points out, Tyler's "fascination with family life is rooted, [Tyler] states, in the fact that it is 'horrific at times' while remaining 'the one situation that we are generally forced to go on with, even so picking ourselves up and trying again in the morning'" (Allen). Following one of Pearl's tirades where "she [dumps] all Jenny's bureau drawers," Ezra and Cody begin reconstructing the chest as "Jenny travel[s] around the room collecting her clothes [with] tears in her eyes" (50). Jenny

receives a scolding from Cody, warning her that their mother's wrath will return if she sees Jenny crying. Nevertheless, Jenny recognizes that her brothers comprise the only permanent foundation she has to survive the unpredictability and irrationality of her mother's anger. From her mother's "hurl[ing] Cody down a flight of stairs" to having been "more than once... slammed against a wall," Jenny experiences a constant fear of her mother, even within their own home (71). Between Beck's disappearance and her mother's senseless tirades, little stability or security remains in Jenny's life.

Jenny finds relief from the turmoil at home through the routines to which she remains loyal. From the way she comes into the house after school, closes the door, walks upstairs, and "set[s] her books out neatly on her desk, align[ing] her pencils, and adjust[ing] the lamp so it shone at the proper angle" to the ultimate goal she sets for herself of becoming a doctor, "never receiv[ing] a grade below an A" (69), Jenny serves as her own disciplinarian and motivator. While all else may be in shambles around her, Jenny holds firm to one of the few things she can control in her life: her routines and personal aspirations. Even with these customs, Jenny differs from Macon who becomes restricted by the patterns he develops to endure hardships in his life. Jenny relies on daily structure to cope with all other uncertainties that may arise, but still adapts these routines to the changing circumstances of life. Macon, on the other hand, expects life to adapt to *his* routines, as evident when he assumes the delivery man will know to bring his perishable groceries and cat food to the back of the house while the dog food, not to be confused with the dog biscuits, go with the "upstairs items" (53).

Despite the Tull children's vulnerability because of Pearl's resentment at life, the familial unit still plays an important role in contributing to their identities. Tyler uses the

family less for strength in this novel as in others, as “Jenny fears closeness with her own family [and] like his mother, Cody is prone to violent rages (Gibson 166). However, this important entity still serves as the foundation of the book, even if escaping from it provides a goal for the characters to achieve. That Jenny extends herself beyond the family boundaries shows that “overcoming” these expectations spurs the novel’s action and influences many of the characters’ decisions. Cody wants to “beat” Ezra so desperately that he steals Ruth; Jenny desires to find a family sturdier than her own, divorcing and remarrying in order to find stability; and Ezra longs so deeply for a happy family that he sets up “family” dinners at the restaurant, only to find himself dissatisfied with the results. Even with the disappointments that each child feels whenever his or her high hopes are foiled, each strives for independence outside the Tull household.

Tyler emphasizes this need for autonomy by questioning the stereotypic image of the family dinner table. While Ezra continues to plan grand meals where the family members can talk to each other about important news, lofty aspirations, and their current statuses of life, not a single meal reaches a successful completion. Ezra’s method of planning ahead for each meal, informing the kitchen staff not only of the preferred menu, but also of the course schedule, timing, and number of attendees, suggests the ideal, individualistic picture each child has of the family. However, the dynamics of the dinner go awry each time, from the soup coming out cold to the inappropriate number of place settings to the unsuitability of food served to guests’ palates. The harsh, not so pleasant reality of their family life and relationships replaces the idealistic, imagined meal. Beck’s return on the night of Pearl’s funeral represents both sides of the spectrum, the real and the fantasized. Upon first observing the dinner scene before him, he claims that it “looks

like... one of those great big, jolly, noisy, rambling... why, *families!*” (294). Beck’s perspective of a big happy family dinner parallels the romanticized image each child, especially Ezra, holds for a perfect dinner. However, the reality to which Beck remains oblivious because of his absence is represented through Cody’s response about the truth of the situation: that Pearl terrified the children more than anything else and that Beck has a completely incorrect idea about the scene before him now. Despite the setting that Ezra desperately desires to symbolize as home, the constant sense of chaos represents the reality that this table is *not* actually home and *is*, in fact, a restaurant. Even with Ezra’s reluctance to admit it, the main purpose of the commercialized Homesick Restaurant involves providing meals for the general public, a less personalized audience.

In contrast, Jenny’s visit to Josiah’s house for dinner represents aspects of the idealized family and meal times for which the Tull children long. Mrs. Payson’s pouring of the milk, setting the three simple place mats, and constant “refilling [of Josiah’s] plate” with large helpings of spaghetti and salad followed by chocolate cake, focuses on providing sustenance but also on enjoying the company of Jenny and Josiah (78). With Mrs. Payson’s domestic and maternal acts in the kitchen and the great care she places into serving a meal filled with nourishment for both the body and for the mind and soul, Tyler presents the opportunity to actually achieve the type of meal for which the Tull children can only yearn.

Members of the Tull family often seek the interactions of families distinct from their own to identify what they are missing. For example, Jenny befriends Ezra’s friend Josiah, secretly, since Pearl identifies him as a “dummy” and “a retarded person” (79). Jenny finds herself immensely comforted by the loving environment that Josiah’s mother

provides and realizes that her own life, including her “own bustling mother... seemed brittle by comparison, lacking the smoothly rounded completeness of Josiah’s life” (78). Jenny also discovers that even though she and Ezra *are* family, they are more often than not only so in name; Josiah, not Ezra himself, informs Jenny of Ezra’s plans to open a restaurant instead of pursuing his mother’s dream for him of becoming a professor. Jenny’s experiences with Josiah, and Ezra’s with Mrs. Scarlatti, demonstrate that the Tull children view their own family as suffocating. In fact, Ezra identifies so heavily as Mrs. Scarlatti’s son- he is, as Mrs. Scarlatti says, “‘really *better* than my son,’ if the truth be told” (93)- that he feels immense guilt at disappointing her with Scarlatti’s transformation into the newly renovated Homesick Restaurant. Upon hearing Mrs. Scarlatti’s dying words telling Ezra to change the restaurant sign to match the décor inside, Ezra believes that “from the pain he felt, Mrs. Scarlatti might as well have reached out from death and slapped him across the face” (129). The Tull children find inspiration for the kind of home and family environment they lack outside their own four walls.

When the time comes for Jenny to enter college, she discovers the opportunity for independence and a fresh start that she has unintentionally searched for since her father’s abandonment. However, she finds that forming a new identity is unnecessary; rather, college provides her with a place where she can flourish with the identity she has already developed throughout her life. She works for a purpose, “waiting tables, folding laundry, shelving books in the library stacks” (82) and throws her energy into achieving the goal she has always strived for: “a straightforward path to a pediatric practice in a medium-sized city, preferably not too far from a coast” (82). The coast providing reassurance that “she could get out anytime” (82) resembles Delia’s mindset as she flees the beach scene

in the RV, maintaining at least partial control over the circumstances. Additionally, Jenny only returns home to visit Pearl two times a year, making “excuses for the other holidays” as she discovers the breath of fresh air present in the world outside of the tense Tull home (83). While Jenny admires her mother for raising three children alone and remaining strong throughout their lives, she feels that the atmosphere of the Tull house does her more harm than good; Pearl and Ezra- bring her down and after long absences she begins “to discard the very thought of them” (83).

Jenny becomes a very different person with the family’s diminishing influence. She becomes “brisker, busier, more hurried” (83), very different from the “orderly, conscientious girl” she had been in high school (69). Before she realizes it, she has fallen in love with an unlikely prospect, Harley Baines. Unlike the crush she develops on Ezra’s friend Josiah, more of a genuine affection, Jenny’s business-like relationship with Harley is more of an infatuation, particularly because he has just been accepted into medical school. In fact, their shared plans for the year after they meet- attending Paulham University- leads her to “notice Harley Baines” (84). She fears the “narrowing” of her life, which allows her to “predict so easily” the future and what it would bring (89). The act of marrying Harley, someone outside the “[security] in the center of her own noisy group” (84) relieves her fear by providing her with a sense of spontaneity but without completely upturning her foundation. Therefore, even after finding that she has fallen out of love with him when he proposes, Jenny views this marriage as an opportunity both to step outside her comfort zone and to find the potential structure and stability she has been lacking in her life. After Beck’s departure, the defense she creates against outsiders as protection from further disappointment leads her to see the possibility for personal

satisfaction rather than on contributing to the marriage. According to Robertson, the reason for Jenny's first marriage is to "open oneself to the disorder and uncertainty that strangers bring into one's life; it is the ability to be enriched by these strangers, even to be derailed by them, without trying to erase their radical difference from oneself" (Robertson 191). Besides Josiah, whom Jenny only tentatively allows past her shield, Harley is the first person whom Jenny admits into her life. To avoid the "narrowing" of her life that she fears, Jenny steps outside of her comfort zone to experience the spontaneity of such an impulse, even if the relationship lacks love. However, her goal involving potential stabilization through marriage demonstrates that her need for order ultimately dominates all other desires.

Even though she longs to latch onto something solid and to change her insecurity into stability, Jenny becomes conscious that her impromptu infatuation with Harley fails to provide the foundation she expects. In retrospect, she experiences disappointment in herself for not noticing his quirkiness, from his nighttime routine of brushing off his already clean feet to the "pompous language... she overlooked" in his proposal letter (103). However, she actually does make strides towards another conclusion. She understands that, upon returning to the Tull house which she has avoided as long as possible, she feels "safe at last, in the only place where people knew exactly who she was and loved her anyways" (102). Though she does not comprehend it at the time, the failed attempt to escape her family actually leads her closer to its members.

Although Jenny comes to realize the importance of her family's presence in her life, she still regrets the influence she allowed her mother to have on her before she branched out and sought independence. Jenny visits Ezra's new restaurant, at his request,

and runs into Josiah to whom she has not spoken since the fateful night when Pearl chased him off the front porch. As Jenny walks away from the restaurant, “her feet felt unusually heavy, and there was some old, rusty pain deep inside her chest” (105). In retrospect, Jenny wishes she had been brave enough to stand up to her mother and to have focused on her own happiness. Yet, with each setback Jenny experiences, she learns not only more about herself, but also develops a sense of confidence, even if not evident right at the moment. According to Marovitz, Jenny, “more than the others, grasps how readily she has allowed herself to be guided, manipulated, and even driven by the past and how necessary it has thus become to determine her own course” (213). However, even though she realizes her prior vulnerability, Jenny pursues a mode of achieving independence that insufficiently produces the stability she desires.

Jenny believes she will find security through relationships and marriage, with each relationship providing an important self discovery. Prior to marrying Harley, Jenny allows nothing to interfere with her dream of attending medical school. Nonetheless, as soon as Harley proposes, presenting Jenny with a vision of the opportunities that could lie ahead, she “burn[s] all her bridges: quit[ting] her job, giv[ing] away her goldfish, and pack[ing] everything in her room. It was the most reckless behavior she had ever shown” (89). Despite her desperate desire for balance between holding true to her routines and dreams and seeking spontaneity in her life, Jenny throws away everything she has worked for, with only on the *hope* that she will find roots in her next venture.

Besides details about her unsatisfying marriage to Harley, Tyler reveals little information about Jenny’s current status in life. Jenny’s letter to Cody allows Tyler to introduce Jenny’s second flame, Sam Wiley. Jenny writes that “her divorce was coming

through in June...two more months, and then she'd be free to marry Sam Wiley" (133). In addition, the end of her marriage brings a "serious [consideration to] drop out of medical school. The complications of her personal life, she said, were using up so much energy that she had none left over for anything else" (133-34). In her efforts to achieve the stability she lacks-- aside from a brief relief through her union with Harley-- Jenny overcompensates and burns herself out; she loses confidence in the goal she works towards her whole life, as well as in any hope of a foundation.

However, Jenny renews her search for another source of security even before her unhappy marriage to Harley ends. Tyler affords few details about Sam and their union, except for Pearl's disapproving opinion that this marriage comes before the divorce to Harley is finalized and that Sam "has no steady employment" (138). Still, it becomes clear that Jenny's desire for security remains unfulfilled. In fact, Jenny hits rock bottom in her marriage to Sam as she realizes that, after eight months of pregnancy, her marriage had no hope of surviving: "She saw that she had always been doomed to fail, had been unlovable, had lacked some singular quality that would keep a husband" (208). With no legitimate lead into finding happiness and steadfastness, Jenny lacks a solid foundation to cling to outside of the often shaky relationship with her family.

Jenny's downward spiral comes to a halt, though, as evident through Tyler's insinuation that Jenny completes her medical degree and through the description of Jenny's pediatric practice. Only a short time after the brief introduction to Sam, Tyler presents Jenny with her new husband Joe, joking to an unamused priest about the secret for their marriage's success: "'Whoever's the first to mention divorce has to take the children'" (187). With her union to Joe, Jenny inherits six children from his previous

marriage, joining Becky, her child with Sam. This marriage provides Jenny with the closest degree of stability in her life thus far.

At the gain of security comes a risk that Jenny will develop a sense of claustrophobia and entrapment. As she looks around her dinner table one night, surrounded by Joe and their seven children, “she [has] an unsettling thought: it occurred to her that this would have to be her permanent situation. Having taken on these children, straightened their upturned lives and slowly, steadily won their trust, she could not in good conscious let them down. Here she was, forever” (194). Even though she desires stability her entire life, Jenny consistently maintains at least a sliver of opportunity for spontaneity and flight. The sense of permanency that she acquires with her role as mother leaves her anxious as the escape route she had thoughtfully planned out in adolescence- that of living on the coast for easy retreat- is inaccessible. However, only in title does she feel trapped as her actual role within the family brings an abundance of activity in the form of chaos. Jenny “represents a move away from rigidity to disorder” (Robertson 194). Her first inclination of loving Harley begins with the logical tasks of working math problems and precisely folding a picnic blanket. Her third marriage to Joe with his six children, on the other hand, represents complete chaos (Robertson 194). The shift Jenny experiences demonstrates her maturation from *desiring* a life of mostly rigidity but a little impulsiveness and actually *living* such a life, discovering the importance of balancing each of the two aspects.

Even with Jenny’s uncertainty and restlessness, Tyler makes it clear that Jenny adopts this life for herself. She continues to divorce and remarry to find the stability she misses and also *chooses* to stay in Baltimore to practice medicine, turning down “more

lucrative offers in Philadelphia or Newark” (212). That Jenny longs not only to remain close to her family in Baltimore but also to keep one foot in the door of her past demonstrates that she may have more of a foundation and identity there than she believes, even if she is unaware.

As Jenny’s relationship with Joe’s children becomes stronger, Tyler examines the theme of the interconnectedness of the past and present, as well as generational interlocking. Jenny finds that she can use her own experiences and self doubts to help Joe’s oldest son, Slevin, cope with his insecurities. When Pearl accuses Slevin of stealing her vacuum cleaner, a doubtful Jenny confronts him about the supposed theft. She discovers Slevin’s role as bandit, but understands that his act is not out of malice. Instead, his motivation lies in the fact that everything about the vacuum, from the smell to the appearance, reminds him of the appliance his mother used to use to clean the house. This longing for the past and the desire to control one’s insecurities connects Jenny and Slevin, both of whom find abandonment at the root of their self doubts.

In another, not-so-pleasant instance, a depressed Jenny slaps Becky and “then [shakes] her till her head lolled” (209). Jenny experiences a sense of complete hopelessness at the “doomed” interconnectedness of the generations (209). Upon regaining some composure, “all of her childhood returned to her: her mothers’ blows and slaps and curses... Cody catching hold of Pearl’s wrist and fending her off while Jenny shrank against the wall” (209). Although this dark time in Jenny’s adult life, characterized by her endless search for satisfaction, represents looming self- destruction, it also begins her journey towards recovery and important self-discovery. Gibson remarks that “the careful weaving of past, present, and future is an advance on Tyler’s earlier

novels, and narrative structure here focuses more clearly than before on the present as a moment of crisis between past and future” (Gibson 166). During Jenny’s time as a medical intern, she endures a pregnancy with the knowledge that her marriage has reached its end, struggles through thirty-six hour shifts with only twelve hour breaks, and becomes so delirious that she “misdiagnosed a case of viral pneumonia [and] she let a greenstick fracture slip right past her” (209-210). When Pearl calls to check on her, Jenny cannot even scream the harsh accusations she wishes to direct at Pearl for ““damage[ing] [and] injur[ing]”” her (210). Instead, Jenny begins weeping into the phone, resulting in Pearl’s arrival to care for Jenny and Becky and her brothers flying in to check on her occasionally. Gibson adds that “Tyler manages to suggest that people do go on attempting to nourish each other” (Gibson 172). Despite the rocky times the family experiences, the ultimate goal for Pearl with her children, for Cody with his grand aspirations that distance him from his family, and for Jenny with Becky involves each providing a support system for the others. Only through the struggles and dark times of life can Jenny and the Tull family experience the opportunity to grow closer as a unit of strength against the uncertainty of the world.

Jenny comes to the conclusion that her stability and identity develops more over time than she realizes and that each experience provides her with a firmer grasp on life. As Jenny and the entire clan watch a movie that Jenny had seen only once in her early motherhood years, called *A Taste of Honey*, she remembers its significance in her life even years later. Her initial viewing of the movie sets such a high precedent for all other movies after she has not experienced the same “detached enjoyment” (206) since then. However, upon watching it on television surrounded by Joe and their children, Jenny

comes to understand the maturation of her life perspective. No longer did the movie make “her feel hopeful” (206). It now “wrenched her with pity” (206). Interestingly, of all the events Jenny endures, from the difficult relationship she shares with Pearl to her several failed marriages to the darkness and self-doubt that grows during her years as a medical student, this small moment in Jenny’s life leads to a most significant self-discovery. Perhaps the contexts of Jenny’s life during the two viewings exist in such stark contrast that she arrives at realizations she was not in a position to do before. The initial viewing of the movie occurs “in 1963, [when] she was a resident in pediatrics, struggling to care for a two-year-old born six weeks after her marriage dissolved... as she [somehow finds] the time, during such a frantic schedule” to sit in the movie theater (206). The second viewing occurs as the movie airs on the *Late, Late Show*, with the older children preparing hot chocolate while “the younger ones set out potato chips. Becky and Slevin arranged a ring of chairs around the TV set in the living room” (205). Jenny finds herself in a more secure position as a wife, mother to seven children, and successful pediatrician during the second viewing; her happiness is within reach, not just something to long to achieve from a movie. Jenny’s constant quest to find a solid foundation through marriage and the restructuring of her life helps her recognize that each experience contributes to her identity as a wife, mother, and doctor, bringing contentment with it.

In the last, and most significant, family event of the novel, the chance to confront the initial cause of Jenny’s insecurity leads to her feeling of closure. When presented with the opportunity to speak with her father at the dinner following Pearl’s funeral, she pays more attention to her own children and brothers than she does to the man who abandoned them so many years before. While she introduces him to Joe in order to connect her past

with her present, her attention quickly switches to tying the baby's bib. This focus on the present becomes evident again when she quickly negates Beck's inquiry as to whether Becky is named after him. Jenny no longer feels that contentment will come from Beck's presence in her life. She has found other holding ground in the family that has been her support through her ups and downs. Although open to the potential for her to grow and develop more as a wife, mother, and sister, Tyler leaves the reader confident that Jenny's future holds great opportunity for self discovery and satisfaction.

3.3 Muriel Pritchett, The Accidental Tourist

Like Jenny and Cody Tull in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, both of whom experience instability because of their father's disappearance early in their lives, Muriel Pritchett also undergoes the effects of desertion in The Accidental Tourist. Even though each character has a distinct mode of coping with the betrayal he or she encounters, all three take an active approach to managing their lives after disappointment strikes. Cody strives to prove himself to his absent father, through the setting and achieving of often lofty goals. Both Muriel and Jenny create protective fronts to cope, but impose this guarded mechanism for different reasons. Jenny's shield serves as a self-defense from both disappointment and the world. Muriel erects her guard to prevent others from observing her suffering and viewing her as weak. Muriel's strength and independence grow throughout the novel as though *because* of the unfortunate circumstances that befall her. These traits develop her into one of Tyler's more admirable heroines, even if readers do not commonly consider her one.

Tyler utilizes Macon's initial interaction with Muriel to introduce both her positivity and her eccentricity. From the very first moment Macon meets Muriel, Tyler presents her as an assertive but also passive character who accepts things as they come. Additionally, Muriel holds a hopeful outlook for the future. For example, when Macon frantically rushes into the Meow Bow to drop off his dog, Edward, Muriel greets him. She casually (while also rather blatantly) asks why his wife cannot care for Edward while Macon is away. When Macon answers that he does not have a wife, Muriel nonchalantly classifies herself as a fellow "divorsy" and claims that she "know[s] what [Macon] is going through" (25). That Muriel has no hesitation in providing Macon with a self-proclaimed identity (even though he is a complete stranger) confirms her acceptance of this status. Also, because of her own misfortunes, she displays a sense of confidence, believing she can help Macon cope with his troubles. As Macon prepares to leave after Muriel has accepted Edward- even after Macon has informed her that Edward was turned away at another facility for biting the attendant- Muriel's farewell rings with a sense of desperation. This loneliness that she inadvertently expresses reveals a loophole in the self-assured air she wants to present.

Interestingly, Muriel's bold, confident interactions with Macon emphasize her insecurities the most. When Macon comes back to retrieve Edward following his time away, Muriel eagerly asks about the details of the trip he had mentioned only in passing when dropping Edward off. Her sincerity juxtaposes Macon's avoidant personality and suggests that she desires to form *relationships* with the people she comes in contact with, as opposed to just passing them by. She wants to learn their stories in order to learn more about them as individuals. Muriel's openness and desire for connection directly contrasts

Macon's evasiveness, especially evident through the "1,198 page... plotless" novel he brings on every trip to avoid any potential interactions with his fellow passengers (27). As Macon signs his receipt at the Meow Bow and fills out all contact information, Muriel curiously inquires whether the number he provides is a house or business number, then quickly offers that she trains dogs at customers' homes. Her desperation for Macon not only to remember her name, of which she reminds him with her "salmon-pink business card that she seemed to have pulled out of nowhere" (38), but also to serve as a potential companion suggests that she desires more human interaction in her life.

As the relationship between Macon and Muriel blossoms, it becomes clear that Muriel does not open herself up simply to Macon; she searches for some sort of connection with everyone she meets. From eagerly offering Macon's brother pancakes within just a few minutes of him entering her house to "discussing Caesareans" with Macon's sister-in-law, June, Muriel appeases her longing for human interactions (249). She learns the importance of being well-rounded, a trait she has no trouble displaying because of her full life; she places herself in a potentially vulnerable position through her openness. However, Muriel's intentions prove genuine, as evident when she arrives in France and simply desires to learn more about the origin of the term "French windows" (313). In France, she has nothing to lose by not opening up, yet she chooses to do so anyways.

While her reasons for befriending Macon are not completely clear from the beginning (possibly a longing for romance or simply for companionship), Muriel realizes she has the opportunity to help Macon develop as an individual. Even if she does not know his past or pain, Muriel may decide that focusing on Macon will lead to a greater

fulfillment in her life, giving her a purpose and allowing her to forget her own afflictions. For example, after Ethan's death, Macon goes for a whole year without saying the words *Death* and *Ethan* in the same sentence (Petry 224). Meeting Muriel, though allows him to "learn... that he must communicate if he is to survive" (Petry 224). Perhaps because of her eccentric "aggressively frizzy black hair that burgeoned to her shoulders like an Arab headdress" (25), her "dark red [nails]... [and] blackish lipstick that showed her mouth to be an unusually complicated shape" (37), or her outrageous choice of clothing, Muriel experiences harsh and hasty judgments from others, formed before they can even get to know her. However, like many of Tyler's other characters, Muriel remains fixed in her values and thoughts, undeterred by anyone or anything.

Muriel's eagerness for companionship displays itself when she invites Macon to call her "'for no reason!'" (38). In fact, in a rare moment of admitted weakness, Muriel confesses to Macon that "'Sometimes late at night when [she] get[s] desperate for someone to talk to [she] call[s] the time signal'" (94) just to hear the voice on the other end of the line. Additionally, the Christmas present Muriel gives to her mother- a framed portrait of Muriel and her son Alexander- shows evidence of the suffering she cannot escape. Her natural sadness shows itself most vividly through the "studio portrait in dreamy pastels" in which "neither of them smiled. They looked wary and uncertain, and very much alone" (205). While rarely allowing her suffering to display itself, Muriel's gloom manifests most in her desperate desire for friendship.

The source of Muriel's suffering also serves as the source for utmost joy. One day in the middle of a training session with Edward, Muriel tells Macon the root of her insecurities (although she does not view them as such). Muriel explains that her husband,

Norman, left her and their newborn son, Alexander. Alexander had to be delivered via Caesarean section and because of the complications that arose, she was prevented from ever having more children. The reason Norman abandons their family is preposterous, even to Macon who has never met Norman. Norman leaves because Muriel spends more time in the hospital with the premature Alexander than she spends with him. Muriel feels torn between the two people she loves the most and must suffer for it. Not only does she agonize that her life is falling apart, but she also suffers emotional and financial agony; the hospital bills for Alexander's lengthy stay are not covered by the family's partial insurance. Muriel decides to take on a position in the hospital, even the lowly job of "cleaning patients' rooms... emptying trash cans, wet-mopping floors" (160) in order to make a dent in the costs and to be closer to her baby. Norman's jealousy of Muriel's attention to Alexander prompts him to talk about Muriel's past boyfriends with his own mother, who then insists that Muriel has cheated on Norman and must now grant him a divorce. With no other option, Muriel finds herself a single mother to Alexander. Prescott notes that there is "something heroic about the way [Muriel] exposes her mangled past as if it were a book from which she must read aloud at once" (118). This abrupt but quite complete and detailed story of her suffering contributes to Muriel's heroism. While Macon eventually makes strides towards progress, he relies on Muriel in order to do so. Muriel, on the other hand, must only rely on herself for strength, yet she perseveres and comes out even stronger in the end.

Even with the undeserved misfortune that befalls her, Muriel takes an active role in moving on with her life, accepting that the past cannot be reversed. She adopts a take-charge attitude, coming up with "inventive ideas," such as lending her delivery truck to a

neighbor three times a week in return for his handiwork, to ensure that she and Alexander can pay the rent and have food on the table (172). Even with rough times, including a “leaky roof, stopped-up sink, faucet dripping hot water so [the] gas bill’s out of this world” (173), Muriel refuses to allow others to see her suffering. She masks any pain she might experience, whether physical, emotional, or financial, with her determination to succeed and her optimistic outlook on life. The “fifty jobs” she takes on, from “lessons at Doggie, Do” to “trying to start [a] research service” to “going up and down the beach offering folks these box lunches [she] and Alexander fixed in [their] motel room every morning” (173), all allow her to maintain her pride and provide her with hope for a better future. Even after hearing her story and seeing the difficult and often uncertain life she leads, not until Macon feels the “corrugated ridge of flesh jutting across [Muriel’s] abdomen... The Caesarean [scar]” does he realize she truly has suffered in her lifetime (184). Because her never-say-die attitude prevents her suffering from overtaking her, outsiders, such as Macon, are unaware of her inward pain. As Yardley notes, this novel demonstrates a theme of “how the lives of others alter our own [and that] life leaves no one unscarred, that to live is to accept one’s scars and make the best of them- and to accept as well the scars that other people bear” (Yardley 121-122). Her diligence and positive face result in her growing stronger in spite of her trials and pain. According to Petry, Muriel serves as “an agent able to put matters into perspective for [Macon] while articulating truths that should have been self evident” (221-222).

Even as Muriel rejects the pity of others, she understands that she must still overcome the image people have of her. As she tells Macon that she made all A’s in high school, she follows this declaration immediately by accusing him of being “surprised...

think[ing] [she is] kind of like, not an intellect” (96). The disapproval she receives and hardships she encounters throughout her life do not discourage her as they might some. Instead, Muriel accepts and acknowledges the others’ opinions, but then continues living her life, taking an active role in overcoming this mark. In fact, she names her son Alexander because she thinks “it sounded high-class” when he was born (155). With this rationale, Muriel hopes her son will bypass feeling undervalued, as she too could have experienced. Muriel avoids this fate by deciding to take the high road in life early on and to accept only the identity *she* forms for herself.

Class standing proves a large obstacle that Muriel fights against. Beginning with an accidental pregnancy that necessitates a marriage at only seventeen years of age and continuing on through the tough years of Norman’s abandonment, Muriel faces challenges in the way others view her. While her hard work ethic and determination to make ends meet proves the “inventiveness” she deems necessary as a single mother (172), the fifty jobs she must take offer no promise of climbing the social ladder. Instead, she finds herself living on Singleton Street, composed of “a block of row houses that gave a sense of having been skimped on... There was nothing to spare, no excess material for overhangs or decorative molding... the screen door... was made of pitted aluminum” (181-182). In contrast, Macon is situated in a higher class status where his brothers talk about things such as investing in baby chickens and selling them once they grow into hens. As he drives through the “labyrinth of littered, cracked, dark streets in the south of the city, Macon wondered how Muriel could feel safe living here” (181). Macon does not understand that Muriel has limited options; because of her situation as a single mother, she must endure this working class neighborhood, armed with her “double-

barreled shotgun” for protection (182). As he spends more time with Muriel, Macon discovers he can transform into an “entirely different person [on Singleton Street]... [one whom] had never been suspected of narrowness [and] in fact, was mocked for his soft heart” (194-195). In this foreign part of town, residents must be tough, giving no sign of weakness (evident through “soft hearts”) or pain. Though she lives in a completely different world than Macon, Muriel does not see their potential friendship as an opportunity to climb the social ladder. If she did, she would not invite him to visit *her* on Singleton Street, visit *her* parents’ for Thanksgiving, or shop at thrift stores with her. She wants Alexander to experience a higher status of living than she does, but sees no opportunistic gains through her friendship with Macon.

The standoffish treatment she receives from others motivates Muriel to overcompensate for their judgment, leading her to be overly accepting of those with whom she comes in contact. Even though Macon does not call Muriel to train Edward until he realizes that there are absolutely no other options, she insists that he only pay the five dollar training fee, instead of the ten dollars she usually charges. When Macon inquires as to why she charges him less, she insists that he is “a friend” and does not even wait for him to object before hanging up the phone (89). Muriel’s non-judgmental opinion and accepting attitude may stem from the limited personal interactions she experiences. Such a perspective also develops because she realizes that finding flaws in potential friends will lead to no social interactions at all. Muriel is most admirable for recognizing that everyone has some inherently good characteristics about him, even if not visible at first impression. She understands that one must look past the surface to see such qualities, just as she hopes others will do in regards to her shortcomings.

Even as Muriel's desperation for companionship becomes evident, she does not let such dejection affect anything about her. She holds strong to her values and unknowingly influences the people whose lives she crosses. When Macon, a self-proclaimed "very worldly and well-traveled man" (190), takes Muriel on her first airplane ride, her reactions to the many new opportunities that arise, such as "taking lots of trips! France and Spain and Switzerland" (191), bring about a new perspective for Macon. While the realistic Macon initially negates Muriel's ideal destination list claiming that these places require too much money, "for the moment, he was borne along by her vision of things" (191). Muriel becomes eager to show Macon a sight she sees from the window, but when he actually looks outside, the scene strikes him with a newfound realization: "that each little roof [on the houses they were flying over] concealed actual lives. Well, of course he'd known that, but all at once it took his breath away" (191). Before he meets Muriel, Macon lives just to get through the day, rarely focusing on anything outside of his normal range of regularities because of this narrow-minded focus. However, Muriel's fresh outlook restores him, allowing him to see his own self worth and to give life to what he viewed as mundane before. Even Tyler, who allows the characters to create their own identities and develop into who they want to be, describes Muriel as "a pretty powerful force" who is responsible for Macon's ultimate decision ("Accidental" 334). The joy she finds in the little things she observes from her airplane window, for example, presents her with a purpose for living despite her hardships. This appreciation of the little things extends to Macon as he gains a new perspective on what it means to be a survivor. He realizes, even if subconsciously, that Muriel's way of coping provides a greater opportunity to experience life.

The joy that Muriel maintains does not mask the calluses she has formed because of her struggles. The hardships she experiences lead her to become more apt in caring for herself and for those she loves. When Macon and Muriel are grocery shopping one night, a thief comes up to Muriel and demands that she give him everything in her purse. While Macon shrinks away in fear, Muriel confidently slings her purse to knock the boy in the jaw and tells him to run away before she seeks retaliation herself. Macon is in disbelief, but Muriel does not give a second thought to this out of the ordinary situation, carrying on as if nothing had occurred. Macon “supposed he might be mad at himself. He had done nothing to protect her... while Muriel... why, Muriel hadn’t even seemed surprised” (258). Perhaps living on Singleton Street has prepared Muriel to face events such as this one, but her overall mission- to protect those she cares for- trumps any fear she might feel. Muriel’s ability to see the often unobservable good in the world does not haze her capacity to recognize the reality of evil still present. Left to fend for herself in the years since Norman’s abandonment, Muriel develops a sort of toughness that helps her to survive a harsh reality.

Additionally, this toughness adds to the front she uses to protect herself from being hurt. When Macon suggests that he will pay for a private education for Alexander, Muriel immediately questions whether he is committed to the relationship. She takes Macon off guard, explaining that she knows he only appreciates her half the time, and that she demands an answer for Alexander’s sake. She wants a more certain future for Alexander than what she has enjoyed, as demonstrated through her concern more that Macon doesn’t “go making [Alexander] promises [he doesn’t] intend to keep” (260). She knows the suffering life can bring. By choosing a “high class” name for her son,

dressing him in a “navy polyester blazer that Muriel had just paid a small fortune for” (241), and longing to provide him with a stable future with Macon, she hopes that Alexander will escape this pain. However, Muriel seeks this success for Alexander only through noble means, not relying on Macon to provide it for him.

In the end, Muriel’s consistency prevails over the uncertain fate of her relationship with Macon. Even though Macon believes it is right to leave Muriel and Alexander and to return to his first wife, he finds that memories of Muriel constantly present themselves. Macon leaves Muriel before they take the joint trip to Paris that she envisions, but Muriel does not allow Macon’s departure from her life to ruin her dreams. As Macon boards the plane to Paris for an addition to his book series, he finds Muriel has also booked the same flight, claiming that she is coming with Macon because he ““needs”” her (305). She carries out her full intentions of having a wonderful time in Paris, just as she has hoped, from buying Parisian clothes to trying Parisian cuisine. She also caters to her curiosity by asking the French waiter about the identity of French windows. Having experienced much disappointment in her life, Muriel does not allow anything to alter the hopes she has made for the future; rather, she learns to rely only on herself. Through her strength and independence, she adds to the list of heroic qualities that define her.

That Muriel remains firm in her identity explains why Macon returns to *her*; her stability provides him with a firm foundation. Additionally, Macon realizes an opportunity for spontaneity and develops a refreshed mindset in his life with Muriel. Unlike many of Tyler’s characters who seek simply to survive their day-to-day lives, Muriel actively approaches life, looking to enjoy each moment. Muriel overcomes her

hardships and defines her own identity. She realizes that challenges can be endured, unlike some of Tyler's other characters, whose first instincts are to flee from suffering. Muriel understands that devoting herself to some purpose, whether working for Doggie, Do, raising Alexander, or befriending strangers like Macon, allows her to work through the trials of life. She refuses to remain idle and adopts a never-say-die attitude from the very beginning. For this reason, Muriel Pritchett stands out as one of Tyler's most admirable characters.

Conclusion

The wide array of people, experiences, and memories present in Anne Tyler's Baltimore plays an important role in defining her work. With its bustling units of everyday home, school, and work life all coming together to form one unique place, the large city Tyler often chooses as the setting complements the variety of characters found there. She writes that she enjoys using the backdrop of Baltimore because she "like[s] the city's gritty, comically feisty personality. It makes writing a lot easier if your characters live in a place that has its own sense of self" ("Anne Tyler Opens Up"). Through her development of a diverse cast of characters in her novels, Tyler emphasizes that there is not just one "cookie cutter" type of person; rather, each individual is unique in the struggles faced, the coping mechanisms used, and the journeys experienced in order to achieve a satisfying life.

Tyler maintains elements familiar to Baltimore natives in her works, but she also redefines it so it will fit her characters' lives. Tyler's characters are all outsiders in their own way; they must feel out of place enough to have the opportunity for growth while still falling in the mainstream so as to have a *way* to grow, with others around them. With the potential for much uncovered territory in this large city, even Tyler's most eccentric characters can fit in with the majority of the population; there are likely more "unusual" people than "normal" people there. In fact, in several of Tyler's novels, including The Accidental Tourist and Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, the unconventional characters relate more to other unconventional characters (Macon to Muriel and Jenny to Josiah)

instead of to the more “ordinary” or like-minded ones (like Macon to Sarah and Jenny to Harley). Additionally, the city holds a special place in its inhabitants’ hearts; the sense of familiarity comforts them as they encounter the instability of their lives.

Despite this sense of reassurance from being within Baltimore’s limits, Tyler’s characters still continue to undergo suffering that they often do not fully conquer, even at the end of the novels. Therefore, an important aspect of each character’s method of coping becomes the pathway towards progression that he or she chooses and the lessons that can be learned along the way. While in cases like those of Maggie Moran and Pearl Tull who do not completely overcome the suffering arising from their roles as mothers, the characters seem to gain a new perspective on life- or at least Tyler presents the reader with hope for this to be true. In other cases like those of Ian Bedloe and Macon Leary however, the characters’ lives are fully changed because of their journey towards closure. These characters adopt new perspectives *because* of their trials. Many of Tyler’s books end as just a pause in the timeline of her characters’ lives, suggesting that there is always potential for more suffering to occur. While this moment of ambiguity may be unsatisfying for the reader, Robertson notes, “Our short-sighted desire for finalities is often blind to time’s amplitude and to the way unexpected turns taken by the beat can make life more interesting and fulfilling” (203). Simply knowing how the story ends demonstrates a rather short-sighted outlook on life; always working towards achieving a goal prevents the traveler from enjoying the journey. Through these journeys, most of Tyler’s characters grow to understand the importance of finding a balance between staying true to their own values and welcoming the opportunity for a new outlook on life.

While they do not stray too far outside their limits at first, many come to realize that true growth and development can be achieved only through adaptation.

Through the scale of suffering that Tyler develops over the course of these six novels, she demonstrates that no matter the source, whether extreme and rare or ordinary and routine, affliction can be overcome. From the freak murder of Macon's son at the Burger Bonanza to the maternal concern Maggie feels for the happiness of her family, Tyler demonstrates her characters' endurance through a range of trials all across the spectrum. She inspires her readers with the idea that they too can face whatever comes their way, no matter the degree of suffering they experience. While this thesis permits exploration into the suffering of nine of Tyler's main characters, her novels introduce a host of other characters, both major and minor, who also undergo a range of distress and must learn to cope. While many of the characters struggle to persevere through their hardships despite some sort of doubt or setback in the process, these obstacles present the characters as more realistic and relatable to the reader. That the characters find unique modes of coping only after trial and error proves that triumph over such trials *is* feasible. Tyler's characters and their experiences, extreme as they might be, represent typical human expressions, like desires, fears, joys, and grievances, in a comical way. The reader finds that his loyalty lies with the characters throughout their ordeals. Even if temporarily dissatisfied with them, the reader's faith is restored by the end. The humor Tyler uses to shape even the most somber scenes, such as Max's funeral in Breathing Lessons, does not overshadow the respect she has for the sadness of her characters. However, this humor provides the reader with an opportunity to view an otherwise grim situation from a new

perspective, one permitting hope for future progress, and maintains the lighthearted tone of the novels.

The connection that readers feel to Tyler's characters serves as a response to criticisms that her "reputation among the academic establishment is less than it could be because her work does not easily fit into current intellectual fashions" (Bail 11). Even with her eccentric and often marginalized characters, Tyler still develops them into loveable people with whom readers can laugh, cry, sympathize, and celebrate. The storytelling methods that Tyler relies on, including that of flashbacks, time passage through character development, and full-circle approaches, allows the reader to experience the ups and downs of the characters. This endearing character development explains why Tyler's work proves enjoyable to readers despite the inability to categorize it into one specific type of writing. As a supplement to this rational, Bail follows up his quote by noting that "Anne Tyler is not a genre writer and hence cannot be easily classified. Her work is complex and interweaves diverse influences" (Bail 13). These diverse influences, including her own life and family, literary influences that have shaped her work, and dreams she has had, each play a distinct role in contributing to the value of Tyler's work as a whole. This value stems from her ability to develop a relationship with her characters and then to introduce them to the reader in such a way that hope for future trials of his own may blossom.

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