THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST: NOVEL AND FILM

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ABSTRACT

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The Accidental Tourist, a 1985 novel by Anne Tyler, is the story of Macon Leary, a man whose life and marriage have been shattered by the tragic death of his son. Despite these dismal circumstances, Tyler's book is quirky, offbeat and ultimately comic, due primarily to the unfailing tolerance and humor of the author herself. Lawrence Kasdan's 1988 film adaptation of Tyler's novel is thematically consistent with the book. Kasdan unerringly recognized the scenes naturally suited to dramatization, and in places he successfully transfers Tyler's dialogue directly to the screen with effective comic results. Throughout most of the film, however, the tone is melancholy and the overall effect is much heavier than the novel. Superb acting by William Hurt and Geena Davis help to give Kasdan's film depth and power.

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INTRODUCTION

The Novel

The Accidental Tourist, a novel by Anne Tyler, is the story of Macon Leary, a grief-stricken man who, as the book opens, has plummeted to a state of depression that makes it nearly impossible for him to function. The omniscient narrator confines herself to Macon's point of view, and through his eyes we view the world as he gradually returns to it and finally embraces it. Macon is a man of about forty whose only son was murdered during a holdup in a Burger Bonanza about a year before the book begins, and we meet Macon just as his wife leaves him because their grief has driven them apart.

Only in the hands of Anne Tyler, a master manipulator of the delicate balance between comedy and tragedy, could such a novel be comic, but ultimately this one is. Peter Prescott, reviewing the book in Newsweek, says it well: "Her comedies are of the very best sort, which is to say that they are always serious" (92). The comedy in this novel is provided by the bizarre eccentricities of Macon and the people in his life, and by the narrative

voice of Anne Tyler, whose ready acceptance of human nature, even (especially!) at its most peculiar, finds humor in the most mundane occurrences.

Larry McMurtry, reviewing this novel in The New York Times Book Review, points out that on the level of metaphor, Tyler has never been stronger than she is here. The title The Accidental Tourist has several meanings: superficially, it refers to the name of a series of books Macon writes--travel guides for unwilling travellers (such as businessmen)--which attempt to protect their readers from any unfamiliar experiences they might have in whatever exotic land they might find themselves. (For example, Macon's books tell where to find a Burger King in France, so as to avoid French cooking altogether.) The implication is that the unexpected or unfamiliar is always dangerous and should be avoided at all costs.

Metaphorically, the "accidental tourist" is Macon himself, and indeed the entire Leary family, who are accidental tourists in their own lives, where they have encapsulated themselves in a deadening cocoon of safe, orderly routine in the home of their grandparents, attempting to avoid anything unexpected which might be unpleasant or dangerous. Macon's estranged wife, Sarah, spells out this metaphor for those who might have missed it: "Oh, Macon, it's not by chance you write those silly

books telling people how to take trips without a jolt. That traveling armchair isn't just your logo: it's you" (136). Anne Zahlan, in her essay "Traveling Towards the Self: the Psychic Drama of Anne Tyler's The Accidental Tourist," sees a third and more Freudian level to this metaphor: she finds Macon "ill-prepared to travel, not just over the lands and seas of the external world, but also in life's journey through time and the prerequisite exploration of the self" (85).

Peter Prescott has read all of Tyler's eleven novels and feels that two of her predominant themes are the "tensions of domesticity" and the "temptations of order and chaos" (92). Larry McMurtry agrees especially with the first of these, although he has a different name for it: "the ambiguity of family happiness and unhappiness." McMurtry explains this: "Miss Tyler shows, with a fine clarity, 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" (36).

Prescott and McMurtry make a good point. In all of Tyler's novels the ambiguity of domestic happiness is explored--from Earthly Possessions (where a woman leaves her husband only to return when she realizes that a little superhuman tolerance might go a long way) to Celestial Navigation (where a mildly psychotic man actually has a happy marriage with a lovely woman until a simple misunderstanding sunders them forever) to her most recent

novel, Breathing Lessons (where a woman whose penchant for irrational and exasperating behavior is fortunate enough to have a saintly husband who loves her). This "ambiguity of family happiness and unhappiness" is at the core of The Accidental Tourist; Macon and his wife Sarah had been a reasonably contented couple while their son was alive, but his death has created a wall between them in a hundred ways, so that an apparently sturdy relationship has crumpled like a house of cards. What happened, Tyler is asking: was this marriage always tenuous, or were Macon and Sarah merely the helpless victims of tragic circumstances? No family's happiness is entirely safe in Tyler's hands--she knows the whims of Fate and of people too well to consider any family out of jeopardy.

The second theme Prescott attributes to Anne Tyler is "the temptations of order and chaos." John Updike, in his review of this book in The New Yorker, notes the same motif but expresses it differently:

> The novel explores more forthrightly than any of its predecessors the deep and delicate conflict between coziness and venture, safety and danger, tidiness and messiness, home and the world, inside and outside, us and them. (106)

Updike articulates this theme that winds its way through all of Tyler's work. In Morgan's Passing, a lovable but eccentric man has a wife and family he adores, but he ultimately leaves them because danger and the outside

world are exerting a stronger pull. In Celestial Navigation, a man who is so phobic that he cannot leave the house manages to enjoy a few years of happiness by marrying a lovely woman who creates such a cozy nest that leaving the house is unnecessary.

In The Accidental Tourist, this theme might be best described as "isolation vs. involvement." Macon's first words of guidance to his readership of reluctant travellers are these: "Always bring a book, as protection against strangers. Magazines don't last" (30). Protection against strangers, against anything unexpected, is a way of life for Macon and the other Learys. While waiting in an airport, Macon "sat inside a kind of barricade--his bag on one chair, his suit coat on another" (30). When Macon breaks his leg early in the novel, he needs help and returns to the house of his Leary grandparents, where his sister and two brothers live in a sort of cocoon, and McMurtry notes that he has thereby repeated a motion that is all but inevitable in Anne Tyler's fiction--a return to the sibling unit. The fact that Macon eventually breaks away from this sibling unit is what makes The Accidental Tourist unique. Here, instead of an inexorable tide washing him back to the family shore, we see Macon open up, as delicately as a rose, and begin to embrace people in the outside world. In the beginning, "physical contact with people not

related to him--an arm around his shoulder, a hand on his sleeve--made him draw inward like a snail" (47). By the end of the novel he is giving advice to taxi drivers and ministering to frightened fellow travellers on an airplane--he has begun to allow "them" into his life.

Updike refers to the conflict between tidiness and messiness as one manifestation of Tyler's basic theme of safety vs. danger. His point is well taken, and it is typical of Tyler's astute grasp of human nature that she associates the two (she is, after all, married to a psychiatrist). The Learys make a religion of tidiness and order; sister Rose alphabetizes the food in her kitchen cabinets. Any psychology major will tell you that orderliness, taken to a compulsive level, is a defense mechanism--somehow, the subconscious believes, with extreme neatness I will attain control of my life and remain unscathed. Macon begins as a typical Leary neatnik, but gradually as the novel progresses he learns to "loosen up"; this is all a part of his forsaking safety and coziness in favor of embracing life more actively.

The principal catalyst in this chemical change is the spiky, pushy, flamboyant Muriel, the dog-trainer who sets her cap for Macon and ultimately succeeds.

Macon is drawn to Muriel in spite of himself, and one of the qualities that most attracts him is her "carelessness":

> There was a snarl of hair in the pin tray on her bureau. He picked it up between thumb and index finger and dropped it into the wastebasket. It occurred to him (not for the first time) that the world was divided sharply down the middle; some lived careful lives and some lived careless lives, and everything that happened could be explained by the difference between them. But he could not have said, not in a million years, why he was so moved by the sight of Muriel's thin quilt trailing across the floor where she must have dragged it when she rose in the morning. (245)

The image of Muriel staggering sleepily out of bed, dragging her quilt and letting it fall, is a poignant one, and we can see why Macon finds it so touching. Updike believes that Muriel's messiness has an appeal for Macon because it reminds him of his mother (a flighty, irresponsible woman whom none of her children respected) and that Macon is being drawn back to his roots as inexorably as most Tyler characters. Theresa Kanoza, in her essay on mentors and maternal role models in Anne Tyler's fiction, agrees with Updike: "The marked affinity between Alicia (Macon's mother) and Muriel Pritchett . . . includes their freewheeling behavior as well as their gaudy appearance" (38).

Dianne Johnson wrote a unique review of The Accidental Tourist in The New York Review of Books. Johnson is interested in Tyler's method of "narrative distance," which she contrasts with "a sort of traditional novel as written by James or Bellow, in which you see through the eyes of the characters" (15):

> Now we could say that this is fiction of the "other," in which the authors, very detached, describe mostly what can be seen, and the clarity of visual detail strangely objectifies the characters. (16)

Johnson seems to be thinking especially of Muriel, the dog-trainer, when she says this, because she goes on to discuss the concept of "flat" characterization as it was defined by E. M. Forster. Mrs. Micawber in David Copperfield is the example used by Forster to explain this term, which is not meant to be a denigrating one. It refers to characters upon whom the author does not wish to focus, so he concentrates on just a few qualities or a tag phrase ("I never will desert Mr. Micawber"), with a result that borders on caricature. Johnson's notion that Muriel is a "flat" character is interesting, but I do not agree. First, Tyler does want to focus on Muriel in this novel; she is not a secondary character, but a pivotal one. Second, Muriel's bizarre looks (with her aggressively frizzy black hair, eyes small like

caraway seeds, short red shorts with legs like sticks, talon-like fingernails and nearly black lipstick) do not define her. One of the hallmarks of Anne Tyler's fiction is tolerance, and another is joy in eccentricity; she revels in it, and the more unorthodox persons are in looks, word or deed, the more joyously she plumbs their characters, like a diver who braves the deepest part of the ocean and scoffs at the bends.

Criticism of Anne Tyler's works in general, and of The Accidental Tourist in particular, is almost universally laudatory. Even those who find her oddballs a little too odd or her sunny disposition a little too sunny do not deny her power as an author or fail to acknowledge the increasing richness of her novels as she probes the labyrinth of family life in twentieth-century Baltimore.

The Film

One of Tyler's most ardent admirers is Lawrence Kasdan, the producer of The Big Chill and, in 1988, the movie version of The Accidental Tourist. (Specifically, the movie was produced by Lawrence Kasdan, Charles Okun and Michael Grillo; it was directed by Lawrence Kasdan. The

screenplay was written by Kasdan and Frank Galati.) Kasdan's reverence for Tyler's work is apparent in the frequency with which he transfers her dialogue, unaltered, to the screen, and a little familiarity with Kasdan's work will explain why: Tyler and Kasdan are rather alike. They work in different media but they have similar life views: both delight in the endless possibilities offered by the interaction of heterogeneous people, both are tolerant and delight in unconventional characters, and both appreciate the delicate balance between comedy and tragedy. The Big Chill is a movie about a group of old college friends who, in their mid-thirties, are brought together again by the suicide of Alex, the most beloved member of the group. They converge from all over the country for the funeral and spend a weekend together in a rambling house in North Carolina. The suicide of this brilliant young man and the degree to which modern American society is answerable for it are never far from the surface in this movie, and yet it is ultimately a comedy, its comic tone deriving largely from the incongruous juxtaposition of dissimilar characters. These people have serious character flaws (one is a womanizer whose scruples are suspect; one is superficial; one is extremely bitter), but ultimately

there are no villains, or even villainous natures. In this, Kasdan and Tyler are much alike; they are products of Freud and the Age of Psychoanalysis: they are passionately interested in people and the endless possibilities of the labyrinth of the human mind. One theme appears in the work of both Kasdan and Tyler: it is not necessary for people to be alike in order to be friends or even lovers; all that is necessary is mutual respect and tolerance of their "differentnesses"; in such a climate everything will be all right. They both acknowledge the existence of evil (Macon's son, after all, was killed tragically and not by accident), but they do not wish to dwell on it.

Critical opinion of Kasdan's movie adaptation of The Accidental Tourist is polarized. A few reviews were mild, Variety's being a good example: "The Accidental Tourist is a slow, sonorous and largely satisfying adaptation of Anne Tyler's best-seller of one man's intensely self-contained passage from a state of grief to one of new-found love" (13). But for the most part, critics either loved this film or they loathed it, and the vast majority loathed it. Pauline Kael, reviewing it in The New Yorker, did not mince words: "I found 'Tourist' hell to sit through" (91). Kael feels that Kasdan

should never have attempted the movie:

> If you're going to write a novel of sensibility on the screen, it had better be your own novel, your own sensibility . . . . In the case of Anne Tyler's novels, voice is everything; she has a fluky sort of precision--a fidelity to everyday eccentricity--that makes her writing enjoyable. Tyler keeps perking along, while Kasdan is cautious--paralyzed. . . . This Accidental Tourist has no voice. It's mute. (90)

Kael's primary objection is that the novel takes place inside Macon's head, looking out, and "in the novel you know what's happening back there. Watching the movie is like trying to read a book with the covers closed" (90). She especially pounces upon William Hurt's performance as Macon:

> He gives a shrunk-inside-himself performance. Most of the time he does his acting behind his eyes, as if he expected the camera to pick up his brain waves, and now and then it just about does that. The rest of the time, it doesn't, and he pressures you with all that sad-sack passivity. He's too mopish, too flat-voiced dull. (90)

Bruce Bawer reviewed the film in The American Spectator, echoing these sentiments but not so gently: "He plods across the screen like Frankenstein's monster, his face pale and eyes dead, and delivers every line in the same robotic monotone" (30). Richard Schickel in Time agrees: "It is very hard to tell the difference between William

Hurt sad and William Hurt happy, so monotonous is his performance of a monosyllabic role" (83).

William Hurt as Macon is the focus of much of the negative criticism of these critics. Variety, however, that quintessential authority on the art as well as the nuts and bolts of movie-making, takes a milder stance. While agreeing that Hurt remains expressionless and speaks in a monotone throughout the film, they point out that his performance is in keeping with the weighty tone that Kasdan and Galati have set from the very opening scene, where Kathleen Turner as Macon's wife Sarah quietly informs him that she is leaving him. Unlike the book, wherein the narrative voice of Tyler keeps the tone comic even when it is only a comic murmur, this movie is serious. If Kasdan and Galati hoped to re-create the tone of the book, they have failed. The critics are unanimous on this point: Kael speaks of the film's gloominess, Variety dubs it "unintentionally serious . . . with a sepia-washed look," and Bawer calls it "a composition in brown and gray."

Even Pauline Kael concedes, however, that the movie captures one of the book's comic features: the Learys. The four siblings--Macon, Rose, Porter and Charles--living in their dead grandparents' home, making a religion out of orderliness, would be pathetic if they

weren't so diverting. (Charles's wife finally left him when he refused to sell the house because he had bought a fresh supply of address labels.) Kael admits that "when we get into the big family house and hear the four anesthetized siblings, Kasdan catches a wry, pixillated family humor. It's close to Tyler's tone and to her patented compulsive families" (90). Macon's publisher, Julian, played winningly by Bill Pullman, is the catalyst in this comic atmosphere. "He has his own drollness," says Kael, "and the movie becomes funnier when he's around" (90). She is right: Julian is a young, immaculately dressed business tycoon and sailing enthusiast; so far he has sailed airily through life without encountering anyone remotely like the Learys, and his reaction to them is hilarious. At first he is dumbfounded, but once he gets used to them he revels in their eccentricity--his enjoyment nurtures the viewer's enjoyment, and we feel a kinship to him. Julian here functions as a substitute for the narrative voice of Anne Tyler--just as we sense her appreciation of the Learys, we sense Julian's, and the movie benefits immensely from his sunny drollness.

The one unhesitant critical cheer for the film was written by Richard Blake for the periodical America. Blake feels that the somber tone set by Kasdan is

appropriate: "John Bailey's cinematography in natural, low-keyed lighting captures the dreariness of Macon's impoverished life. Under Mr. Kasdan's direction, the pieces come together in a quite extraordinary portrait of the ordinary" (126). Blake has made a good point: in the book, Tyler's wit keeps the tone light and, in a sense, disguises the bleakness of Macon's life. Without her optimistic outlook whispering in our ears, the camera picks up the dreary truth and Macon emerges as a sad case. Blake agrees with Kael that the movie captures the Learys well; he notes that the film exploits the comic foibles of the Learys without making clowns of them. This is another point well taken. There is a fine line between laughing at someone's foibles and laughing at <u>them</u>; Kasdan tiptoes delicately along this line and never falls over. The Learys have reserve and quiet dignity, and they invariably treat everyone with kindness and respect: how could we possibly laugh at them?

In general, then, the critical reception of Tyler's book is positive, while opinions of the film are not. One explanation for the lukewarm movie reviews is the near impossibility of enthusiastically embracing the film version of a book you loved. The novel has so much more depth and range--all a filmmaker can do is capture whatever

he considers most important. Much must be left behind, with the result that the moviegoer may find the film shallow and superficial. But literature and film are separate genres. We cannot reasonably expect a two-hour movie to encompass every detail of a three-hundred-page book. What we can hope for is an effective capturing of its spirit.

THE LEARYS

The Leary family is at the psychological heart of this book, and Kasdan has placed them near the heart of his movie as well. The family consists of four siblings--Charles, Porter, Macon and Rose--all in their late thirties or early forties when we meet them. The key to understanding them lies in their childhood: their early years were spent with their mother Alicia, "a giddy young war widow." Steadiness was not Alicia's strong point. At the age when children need stability above all else--someone they can trust to protect them from the monsters in the closet--their only protector was a flighty, immature creature who flitted from one man to another and changed her personality to suit each new man who came along. Tyler describes how the young Learys felt about her:

> It was her enthusiasm that disturbed them. Her enthusiasm came in spurts, a violent zigzag of hobbies, friends, boyfriends, causes. She always seemed about to fall over the brink of something. She was always going too far . . . . Sometimes Alicia's enthusiasm turned to her children--an unsettling experience. Then she turned to something else, and something else, and something else. She believed in change as if it were a religion. (64)

The reader has a vivid impression of four quiet children, huddling together for comfort, waiting in a dingy apartment for their mother to return from her jaunts. When they were still quite young, they were rescued from this bleak life by their paternal grandparents, who raised them from then on. These grandparents were "severe, distinguished people in dark clothes. The children approved of them at once" (65).

Tyler never actually says so, but one has the distinct impression that the dead father was the dependable type, and his children have a disproportionate number of his genes. The remaining years of their childhood pass contentedly (if stodgily), but the initial trauma was deep and Alicia has much to answer for. As adults, the Learys never feel safe unless they are all together. The daughter, Rose, has never left the grandparents' home, and the two older brothers, Charles and Porter, have had brief marriages but have returned to the nest, where Rose looks after them. Macon's failed marriage makes it unanimous, and when he breaks his leg he also returns to the fold.

Comfortably reunited, the four revert to patterns of behavior that began in their infancy. As children they had invented a card game called "Vaccination," a game with such irrational and convoluted rules that no

one else has ever been able to master it. That, of course, is the whole point, and Vaccination serves as a metaphor for the Learys--they are self-contained and intruders are not welcome.

Tyler introduces us to the Leary family early one morning, as Macon wakes up on the couch and hears Rose singing in the kitchen. The preceding chapter had concluded with Macon breaking his leg in his own home, and as Chapter Five opens we follow Macon's musings as he remembers his childhood and prepares us for life in the Leary household. Tyler has the luxury of taking her time, and she makes full use of it, describing the mother, Alicia, and giving us evidence of the Leary self-containment as viewed by two separate people--Macon himself and his neighbor, Garner Bolt. That evening Macon glances up at a portrait of the four Learys as children and realizes that returning to this house may not have been a good idea:

> It occurred to Macon that they were sitting in much the same positions here this evening. Was there any real change? He felt a jolt of something very close to panic. Here he still was! The same as ever! What have I gone and done? (78)

Macon is a keen self-analyst, which is one of the things that most endears him to us. He recognizes his

own absurdity and that of his siblings, while they apparently do not.

Tyler uses the neighbor, Garner Bolt, to demonstrate how the outside world views Macon's behavior. Garner comes to the Leary house, concerned because Macon seems to have disappeared without a trace from their neighborhood, and is dumbfounded when he learns of Macon's accident:

> "We didn't see no ambulance though or nothing."
>
> "Well, I called my sister."
>
> "Sister's a doctor?"
>
> "Just to come and take me to the Emergency Room."
>
> "When Brenda broke her hip on the missing step," Garner said, "she called the ambulance."
>
> "Well, I called my sister."
>
> "Brenda called the ambulance."
>
> They seemed to be stuck. (70)

Garner is mystified, and we can understand why. In her droll way, Tyler uses this exchange to illustrate how unorthodox the Learys are and how odd they appear to their neighbors.

Kasdan the filmmaker is much more restricted than Tyler. The task of introducing the Learys, without the benefit of Macon's musing and reminiscing, is a formidable one, but Kasdan uses his tools artfully. The only advantage he has over Tyler is a visual one,

and he makes the most of it. Without having previously mentioned these siblings or given the viewer any foreshadowing of their existence, he introduces us to the Learys quite abruptly in one eloquent scene employing very little dialogue. The scene is a dinner table with four people around it, one of whom is Macon, whose leg is in a huge, awkward cast (in Macon's last scene he had just fallen down the stairs). It is evening and the house is dimly lit, with a color scheme dominated by browns and grays. The camera avoids the people at first, concentrating on the dinner plates, where the main course seems to be baked potatoes. Each diner is lovingly seasoning one. The viewer who has read the book knows that the Learys, as children, "used to exist solely on baked potatoes whenever Alicia left them to their own devices. There was something about the smell of a roasting Idaho that was so cozy, and also, well, conservative" (74). Of course, the viewer who has not read the book does not know this, but he does sense something unusual here--these people seem to have a personal relationship with their potatoes. A stillness permeates the atmosphere. The voices are as dim as the lighting, with only an occasional murmur, and while there is a companionable feeling among the diners, there is a strange inertia, and we sense that this is a low-voltage group.

As the camera works its way around this scene, Kasdan uses a technique that will become a motif in this movie: a voiceover by William Hurt. None of these voiceovers have their origins in Tyler's novel; they are a cinematic device used by Galati and Kasdan to clarify their themes. The first words spoken in the film are in voiceover by Hurt: Macon is reading from one of his travel guides, giving us advice on how and what to pack, etc. In all of the subsequent voiceovers, however, Hurt's "travel" advice is meant to spell out Tyler's metaphor of the accidental tourist in life. As the camera is exploring this cozy dinner scene, we hear Macon's voice narrating:

> "There is something elementally comforting to the business traveler about that moment when his flight touches down once again at his own airport. After a demanding journey, even the most impersonal terminal can seem as welcoming as an ancestral home."

Macon has touched down once again at his ancestral terminal. The only dialogue employed in this scene concerns Macon's relief at being back in a place where he feels so unconnected. He remarks that it is nice to be there because no one knows where he is (Sarah, for example, or his boss Julian) and he wishes it could stay that way. Everyone agrees: why can't it stay

that way? They simply won't answer the phone. And they don't.

The camera finally pulls back and the scene fades away as the four begin a game of Vaccination. In this scene Kasdan has achieved a great deal. He has introduced us to four polite, gentle people living in a gloomy old house. These people subsist on baked potatoes and play strange card games, and they unanimously agree, without a moment's hesitation, to ignore whatever input the outside world might have to offer in the form of telephone calls. Unquestionably, this is an eccentric group. The movie does not tell us now, or ever, about Alicia and their strange childhood. It would have been possible for Kasdan to use flashbacks to do so, but he did not, probably because of time limitations.

Structurally, Kasdan parallels Tyler in two scenes that follow. In both book and movie, the muted dinner is effectively juxtaposed by a scene of an outdoor landscape on a crisp October day, where a man has been treed in a giant magnolia by a dog who "was barking so hard that he kept popping off the ground perfectly level, all four feet at once, like one of those pull toys that bounce straight up in the air when you squeeze a rubber bulb" (79). The dog is Edward and he belongs to Macon, but he originally belonged to Ethan, Macon's dead son.

The man in the tree is Macon's boss Julian (the publisher of the "Accidental Tourist" series), who is miffed but relents when he sees Macon's broken leg and learns of Macon's separation from Sarah. Typically, Macon has kept this personal information from the outside world. Julian has come in search of the chapters that Macon should have finished by now. Ignorant until this moment of the existence of Macon's siblings, Julian is about to encounter the Learys for the first time.

Julian is a shrewd observer of human nature and has long been aware of Macon's quirkiness; he likes to tease Macon gently, which Macon calls "going into his Macon Leary act." But he has never encountered such eccentricity "en masse" as he does now, and both Tyler and Kasdan use dramatic irony in this scene and one that closely follows. We know what Julian does not, and it is great fun watching his reaction to these people. Upon being introduced to Julian, Rose apologizes for not having sent the chapters, explaining that "first I have to buy nine-by-twelve envelopes. All we've got left is ten-by-thirteen. It's terrible when things don't fit properly. They get all out of alignment" (83). This dialogue is transferred intact from book to movie, and in both, Julian's reaction is splendid. In the book he simply

says, "Ah," and looks at Rose for a moment; in the movie he smiles and raises an eyebrow almost imperceptibly, but as soon as Rose leaves he whispers to Macon, "The Macon Leary nine-by-twelve envelope crisis."

Both this incident and one that follows could have been written by Dickens, so perfectly suited are they for dramatization: the man in a tree; the jaunty man wandering bemusedly among the dowdy furnishings of a house that might be Miss Havisham's; the polite manly restraint that Julian exercises, with mirth percolating just behind his eyes. In a book so internal, that takes place primarily in Macon's consciousness, there are a few episodes that are pure theater, and Kasdan has lept on them and transferred them nearly unaltered to the screen.

Julian, who has been inexplicably smitten by Rose and her nine-by-twelve envelopes, nudges Macon for an invitation to a family dinner, but Macon ignores the hint (unaware of Julian's romantic motives, he suspects him of wanting to be entertained by the Learys' eccentricity). Never one to be foiled, Julian shows up unexpectedly at dinner-time, and the ensuing scene is flawless comic theater. Rose invites him in for coffee, and they all sit around the dark, antiquated parlor, where it emerges that Porter is missing, which alarms Julian:

"Porter? Where is Porter?"

"Um, we're not too sure."

"Missing?"

"He went to the hardware store and we think he got lost."

"A little while before supper."

"Supper. You mean today?"

"He's just running an errand," Macon said. "Not lost in any permanent sense."

"Where was the store?"

"Someplace on Howard Street," Charles said. "Rose needed hinges."

"He got lost on Howard Street?" (121)

Getting lost on Howard Street in Baltimore would be similar to getting lost on the Champs Elysees in Paris. One of the Leary peculiarities is that they suffer from what Macon terms "geographic dyslexia," an inability to find their way around outside their own little nest. Julian is still digesting this information when the phone rings and, of course, no one answers. Politeness itself, he resists the urge to leap up and silence the thing, but as it continues ringing the strain begins to tell on everyone. The Learys conjecture that it might be Porter so they'd better answer it--but then, of course Porter wouldn't call; he knows they won't answer--but then, maybe he thinks they'll answer because they're worried. Julian's pleasant query, "Do you

always give this much thought to your phone calls?" carries a wealth of emotion. He feels as if he has stumbled into the Twilight Zone. He boldly forges onward, however, trying to learn more about Rose:

> "And Rose? Do you work?"
>
> "Yes, I do," Rose said, in the brave, forthright style of someone being interviewed. "I work at home; I keep house for the boys. Also I take care of a lot of the neighbors. They're mostly old and they need me to read their prescriptions and repair their plumbing and such."
>
> "You repair their plumbing?" (123)

Julian is out of his depth. The idea of this small, demure girl-woman grabbing a blowtorch and soldering pipes is too much.

This is a wonderful comic scene both in book and movie--Kasdan changes little dialogue and captures the spirit unerringly. Here again, dramatic irony is the key. On the surface, it is a quiet, urbane after-dinner scene, but there are undercurrents bombarding each other madly of which the reader, or viewer, is keenly aware. Rose and Charles are prattling in contented ignorance while Macon, who is aware of how strange the Learys seem to outsiders (even though he shares the strangeness) is writhing at Julian's "pleased, perked expression." Macon's perception is accurate up to a point--Julian

is feeling nonplussed--but there is another level of which Macon is ignorant: Julian is attracted to Rose, and each new offbeat manifestation is merely adding to her fascination.

Despite his low-keyed drollness, there is a certain heroism in Julian. As Updike points out, this book "is about, in part, crossing class boundaries" (110). The principal example of this is Macon's attraction to lower-class Muriel, but the secondary example is Julian and Rose. Julian is not only lovable but heroically unprejudiced; it is not merely obtuseness that retards Macon's awareness of Julian's interest in Rose, it is common sense. Julian is described as "an athletic-looking man with a casual, sauntering style--a boater. . . . A dashing sailor, a speedy driver, a frequenter of singles bars, he was the kind of man who would make a purchase without consulting Consumer Reports" (87). Rose, on the other hand, is "pretty in a sober, prim way, with beige hair folded unobtrusively at the back of her neck where it wouldn't be a bother. Her figure was a very young girl's but her clothes were spinsterly and concealing" (61). Anne Tyler has put her finger on an intriguing wrinkle in contemporary life: whereas class boundaries were previously based on questions of money, power, family or education, there is a new category--style. Julian has

dash, panache, eclat. Rose is a nerd. Present-day English has a million words for this most deadly of all social classes--the drip. That Julian is able to see Rose clearly and see her whole is proof of his valiant open-mindedness, a quality that will reappear later when Julian alone approves of Muriel.

Nor does Julian's liberal attitude go unrewarded; Rose is well worth his attention. Though superficially a wet blanket, underneath she has a core of steel. When she becomes aware that Julian is wooing her, she is pleased and happy, but it is not her nature to be compliant. At one point Macon comes in and finds her knitting Julian a pullover:

> "Actually," he said, "have you ever noticed that Julian wears cardigans?"
>
> "Yes, I guess he does," she said.
>
> But she went on knitting her pullover. (178)

Rose, despite her wrenlike appearance, is a force to be reckoned with. She and her brothers, apparently so stodgy and conservative, are to some extent wolves in sheeps' clothing, beatniks in reverse. Beatniks walked around like zombies and listened to atonal music in order to rebel against their materialistic, bourgeois parents. The Learys are doing the same thing, only backwards. They are walking around like zombies,

alphabetizing their groceries and making a religion out of correct grammar and traditionalism in order to rebel against their undependable mother. The night that Julian appears uninvited for dinner, the following conversation takes place between Macon and Rose:

> "He's only here because he hopes we'll do something eccentric," Macon told her. He has this one-sided notion of us. I just pray none of us says anything unconventional around him, are you listening?"
>
> "What would we say?" Rose asked. "We're the most conventional people I know."
>
> This was perfectly true, and yet in some odd way it wasn't. Macon couldn't explain it. (122)

The explanation is that as children they yearned for convention, habitude and safety, so as adults they have created a microcosm suffused with these things. But, like all Anne Tyler's families, they cannot escape their own genetic code--their mother was no conformist, and neither are they. At Thanksgiving, they decide to have turkey (even though all the Learys dislike turkey) because it's the thing to do; but Rose tries such an innovative way of cooking it that she almost poisons them. Nowhere is tradition more sacrosanct than at weddings, yet at her own wedding Rose eschews the convention of cloistering the bride and mingles with the

guests before the ceremony. There is a hilarious scene in the book where Charles, ordinarily an inept driver and navigator, nonchalantly takes the car and goes in search of Macon in an unfamiliar part of town during a snowstorm. The streets are deserted and covered with snowdrifts, but Charles "dodged expertly between them," and when a jeep looms ahead he "passed it smoothly in a long, shallow arc" (234). In ordinary circumstances he is awkward; in extraordinary ones he is grace itself.

The Learys, like most of Tyler's creations, defy classification. There are no stereotypes in her fiction. Rose and her brothers appear to be old-fashioned, ultra-conservative people, but in reality they are born mavericks who are using conservatism neurotically. Rose tries to fly without this net by marrying Julian, but in a short time the magnetic pull is too strong and she is back with her brothers. Julian is crushed and appeals to Macon:

> "I mean, our marriage was working out fine; that much I can swear to. But she'd worn herself a groove or something in that house of hers, and she couldn't help swerving back into it. At least, I can't think of any other explanation."
>
> "Well, it sounds about right," Macon told him. (308)

Psychologically, Anne Tyler is a realist, and in her fiction people do not swerve permanently out of family grooves. But temperamentally she is a romantic, and she usually sends other people into the grooves to join them, which is what Julian does. He moves into the Leary house and learns to play Vaccination.

The Learys are the one feature of the novel naturally suited to dramatization. Kasdan cannily extracts the Leary conversations that contain key thematic elements; he transfers them almost intact to the screen, where they survive the transplant thanks to excellent performances by Amy Wright, David Ogden Stiers, and Ed Begley, Jr. Wright, especially, is brilliant in the part of Rose: she captures the stiflingly quiet and gentle woman, managing to be meek with just a hint of steel. Each of the above conversations originates in the book and is reprised in the film, with the result that the humor and the essence of the Learys remain consistent in both.

MACON

Macon is the centerpiece. In the novel he is the lens through which we see everything, and in the film he is the focal point of the camera's lens. These are, of course, two disparate things, and therein lies the explanation for the discrepancy between Tyler's Macon and Kasdan's character of the same name.

Reading the book, we learn to know Macon imtimately; for a time we know almost every thought that flits through his mind. As the book opens, he is severely depressed, but he has good reason to be--depression is not his natural state of mind. The Macon Leary of the novel is a multi-faceted man with a gift for honest introspection and self-revelation. He may appear passive on the outside but his mind is kinetic, a fact apparent to a reader of the book but not to a viewer of the movie. The Macon of the movie, played by William Hurt, is so funereal that it defines him. Hurt is a powerful actor, and he captures Macon's despondency so utterly that it is heartbreaking; the scene where Macon must identify

his son's body and the scene where he first explains his grief to Muriel are both gut-wrenching, and our compassion for him is profound.

This is perhaps the area in which the novel and film differ most: there is a marked disparity between the degree of eccentricity in Tyler's Macon and Kasdan's. Tyler's Macon is quirky like his siblings; as the book opens and Macon is learning to survive without Sarah, we encounter an unusual man indeed. At first he is enjoying himself--this is his chance to reorganize, to restore system to the house that haphazard Sarah ("the sort of woman who stored her flatware intermingled") has been mishandling all these years. He swoops in like some demented efficiency expert and takes over:

> He decided to switch his shower from morning to night. This showed adaptability, he felt--some freshness of spirit. While he showered he let the water collect in the tub, and he stalked around in noisy circles, sloshing the day's dirty clothes underfoot. Later he wrung out the clothes and hung them on hangers to dry. Then he dressed in tomorrow's underwear so he wouldn't have to launder any pajamas. In fact, his only real laundry was a load of towels and sheets once a week--just two towels, but quite a lot of sheets. This was because he had developed a system that enabled him to sleep in clean sheets every night without the trouble of bed changing. He'd been proposing the system to Sarah for years, but she was so set in her ways. What he did was strip the mattress of all linens,

> replacing them with a giant sort of envelope made from one of the seven sheets he had folded and stitched together on the sewing machine. He thought of this invention as a Macon Leary Body Bag. (10)

Each night, in order to systematize breakfast, he hooks up the percolator and a skillet with two raw eggs in it to the clock radio on his bedroom windowsill, but when gnawing doubts about food poisoning set in, he changes menus and hooks up the popcorn popper instead. In order to abolish time-consuming dishwashing, he keeps the kitchen sink filled at all times with a solution of water and chlorine bleach and just drops each dish in after using it. Eventually he begins to have doubts about all this: "He realized that he might be carrying things too far. He couldn't explain why, either. He'd always had a fondness for method, but not what you would call a mania" (10).

Well, now you would call it a mania--the Leary mania. Porter's ex-wife summed up the Leary men neatly: "they always had to have everything just so, always so well thought out beforehand, always clamping down on the world as if they really thought they could keep it in line" (12). Pathetic as he is, rattling around the empty house devising new "systems" to mask

his loneliness, Macon has a certain inventive flair, a positive life force that keeps the book lighthearted even in the teeth of tragedy. Macon's methods may be preposterous, but they represent his dogged determination to survive.

Lawrence Kasdan faced the same dilemma of any filmmaker who ventures to dramatize a novel: the need to simplify, simplify. A two-hour movie cannot explore the complexities of a mind like Macon's, so Kasdan pares him down to the qualities necessary to the plot. Pauline Kael, in her New Yorker review, observes that "the plot construction is that of a screwball comedy of the thirties: poor working girl has the life force that upper-class prig needs" (90). This is an incisive overview and a fair one, except that Macon is not so much a prig as a wounded bird. In the hands of Kasdan and Hurt, Macon is transformed into a grief-wracked, beaten man. Gone is the quirkiness and the positive life-force; he is no longer a card-carrying member of the Leary fraternity. In the scenes already explored, where Julian first encounters the Learys, Hurt visibly writhes at each new manifestation of Leary eccentricity--he is uncomfortable because of his relationship to them but not because he is one of them. The movie does not explore Macon's bizarre home-making techniques at all.

In the few brief scenes of his life in the empty house, he appears lonely but conventionally so: he dreams of his dead son, he watches television surrounded by his dog and cat, he eats ice cream out of a carton while staring out a window. Hurt's Macon is not one of the patented Tyler oddballs.

This more ordinary Macon is possibly the result of more than a need to simplify. Anne Tyler is renowned for her tolerance of human foibles--a little flaw like neurosis (and even psychosis in Celestial Navigation) would never interfere with a character's ability to be her protagonist. But average American theater-goers are not so broad-minded; it is doubtful that they would embrace Tyler's creation as a viable leading man. Americans have a good sense of humor, but they like their romantic heroes invulnerable; Tyler's acceptance of the inevitability of neurosis is not shared by the average person. If Kasdan had wanted his film to be in the Woody Allen genre, he could have portrayed Macon as written by Anne Tyler, but ultimately he was aiming for serious romantic overtones, and that required a more sedate hero.

In the novel, Macon spends a great deal of time musing about his relationship with Sarah, and it is primarily through this means that we begin to understand

his motivations. It emerges that they met at a dance when they were seventeen years old: "Even at that age Macon had disliked parties, but he was secretly longing to fall in love and so he had braved this mixer but then stood off in a corner looking unconcerned" (48). Sarah was the Scarlett O'Hara type, surrounded by a ring of admiring boys, and had noticed Macon because he was not one of them--off in his corner, he appeared stuck-up and remote, and therefore a challenge. She approached him, and later "he saw that if he hadn't looked stuck-up she never would have noticed him. He was the only boy who had not openly pursued her. He would be wise not to pursue her in the future; not to seem too eager, not to show his feelings" (49).

And that is exactly what he does. This sensitive boy who wanted to fall in love at age seventeen spends the next twenty years playing a role: "He felt he'd been backed into a false position. He was forced to present this impassive front if he wanted her to love him. . . . In some odd way, he was locked inside the standoffish self he'd assumed when he and she first met. . . . Somehow, his role had sunk all the way through to the heart. Even internally, by now, he was a fairly chilly man" (50-52). The brutal irony is that Sarah ultimately leaves him because she perceives him as cold and unfeeling.

Muriel breaks the ice. Muriel, whose valiant fighting spirit remains undaunted despite the dismal circumstances of her life, touches him and reawakens the sensitive Leary boy. One of the central themes of the novel is articulated as Macon muses to himself: "He began to think that who you are when you're with somebody may matter more than whether you love her." Macon's love and affection for Sarah never dwindle, but as the ice around his heart begins to melt under Muriel's influence, he recognizes that in Sarah's presence he cannot be the person he wants to be.

Anne Tyler is deliberate on this point--she carefully sketches Sarah as a lovable and sympathetic character; she does not want this to be a simple choice for Macon or the reader. John Updike is the only critic who comments on this important point: "The wife is rather more winningly portrayed than the girlfriend, and Macon loves her with less effort" (108). Sarah, with her exuberant head of tangled brown curls, is haphazard, mercurial, messy and altogether lovable. She handles everything with dignity and gentleness, and she understands Macon quite well; it is she who points out to him that he is an accidental tourist in his own life, muffling himself from experiences in order to avoid pain. It is not her fault that Macon's youthful insecurity

has caused him to assume a specious personality for her benefit. And it is certainly not her fault that their son has been killed, making their life together infinitely more melancholy. In the novel, Sarah is a victim.

The fact is, however, that her influence on Macon is pernicious. The man who begins by carrying a ponderous book on every airline flight in order to discourage friendly seat-mates learns under Muriel's tutelage to embrace the world. On one flight he finds himself seated next to an old woman who fears flying. The old Macon would have ignored her, but this new Macon spends a great deal of time and energy comforting her. At first he perceives his behavior as hypocritical:

> In the same way he was lying now, presenting himself to Mrs. Bunn as this merry, tolerant person.
>
> But after they had landed (with Mrs. Bunn hardly flinching, bolstered by all those sherries), and she had gone off with her grown daughter, a very small child ran headlong into Macon's kneecap. This child was followed by another and another. . . and each child, as if powerless to veer from the course the first had set, careened off Macon's knees and said, "Oops!"
>
> Only later, when he passed a mirror and noticed the grin on his face, did he realize that, in fact, he might not have been lying to Mrs. Bunn after all. (288)

He is beginning to enjoy people, something he has never done before. He develops a more laissez-faire attitude to life in general: when the extreme cold bursts the pipes in his house and floods the living room, his brother Charles is horrified, but Macon's reaction is philosophical: "His living room was . . . appropriate, was what he wanted to say. Even more appropriate if it had been washed away entirely" (236). In this new, broader life of his, a few pieces of waterlogged furniture merit little more than a shrug. We are reminded of how affecting Macon found Muriel's quilt dropped on the floor, and his observation that "the world was divided sharply down the middle: some lived careful lives and some lived careless lives, and everything that happened could be explained by the difference between them" (245). Macon has been living a careful life for forty years, but he is ready to forsake it. This is what Updike refers to as the conflict between tidiness and messiness, safety and danger.

Lest we doubt the source of this change, Tyler affords us a glimpse of what will happen to Macon should he and Sarah reconcile. Toward the end of the novel Sarah convinces Macon that they should "try again,"

and before too long Macon is slipping backwards--a saleswoman telephones, trying to sell him a service contract on his water heater, and he is putty in her hands as she convinces him to take no chances. Macon is astute enough to realize that he is regressing, and later that afternoon he "began to believe that people could, in fact, be used up--could use each other up, could be of no further help to each other and maybe even do harm to each other" (307). Through no fault of her own, Sarah is now doing harm to Macon.

Lawrence Kasdan, restricted by time limitations and the necessity of omitting crucial data, nevertheless manages to salvage Tyler's intent. He discards the input concerning Macon and Sarah's relationship and the circumstances of their meeting; the film makes no attempt to plumb the intricacies of their marriage, with the result that Kasdan's Macon is much less full-bodied than Tyler's. Even a fraction of a Tyler character, however, is better than none at all; and Kasdan and Hurt do a great deal with the shadowy Macon who remains. Though they do not say why, they do make it clear that Sarah has a dampening effect on Macon, Muriel a lightening one. Sarah is the character who suffers most in the transition from novel to film; in the absence of explanatory data, Sarah's deleterious effect on Macon

would be perplexing to the audience if she were the lovable character created by Tyler, so Kasdan gives her a distinct chill. Kathleen Turner frequently plays an engaging and sexy klutz (not unlike Tyler's Sarah), but in this movie she is self-assured, aristocratic and rather unapproachable. This less endearing Sarah serves an auxiliary purpose, too: later, when Macon forsakes her in favor of Muriel, we are spared the ambivalent feelings that the novel engendered when Macon abandoned Tyler's more vulnerable Sarah.

Pauline Kael censures Hurt for his "sad-sack passivity" and "shrunk-inside-himself performance"; she charges that Hurt "does his acting behind his eyes, as if he expected the camera to pick up his brain waves, and now and then it just about does that" (90). This is not a derogatory assessment. George Bluestone, in his book Novels into Film, speaks of "how seriously we tend to underestimate the power of the human face to convey subjective emotions and to suggest thoughts" (47). Hurt's performance is uncommonly touching. He does plod across the screen like Frankenstein's monster for much of the film, but he has just lost his only child and his wife--how should he act? Macon's reawakening at the hands of Muriel is handled with delicacy by both Kasdan

and Hurt, and the changes are at first almost imperceptible.

For the first third of the film, Macon is indeed a walking zombie: his countenance is unrelievedly grim, his eyes dead, his voice a monotone and his body stiff. He is courteous and benign to everyone, including his siblings and Edward--the unruly dog who will be the catalyst in the amelioration of his life--but his existence is joyless. When Muriel pursues him, he initially resists but his depression and passivity are no match for her energy; eventually he accepts an invitation for dinner, then changes his mind and tries to leave a note under her door but is drawn inside and into her arms in a scene that is, in both book and film, truly powerful. This event is pivotal, even more markedly so in the movie because Macon suddenly pours out his feelings; and this is the movie viewer's first glimpse of what is going on behind his eyes. In a halting and broken undertone Macon speaks of his grief:

> "Every day I tell myself it's time to be getting over this. . . . I know that people expect it of me. But if anything I'm getting worse. The first year was like a bad dream, I was clear to his bedroom door in the morning before I remembered he wasn't there to be wakened. But the second year is real. I've stopped going to his door, I've sometimes let a whole day pass by without thinking about him. I believe

> Sarah thinks I could have prevented what happened somehow, she's so used to my arranging her life. Now I'm far from everyone. I don't have any friends any more, and everyone looks trivial and foolish and not--related--to me."

The scene is potent. Its dialogue is taken from the book (though omitting several references to his marriage), and while Tyler's version is powerful, too, this is one instance where Kasdan's is even more so. Moments such as this justify the filmmaker's necessary economies in dramatizing a novel. Kasdan, Hurt and Davis have created a poignant and memorable moment. The lighting is muted, the music is quiet, Geena Davis as Muriel is quiet, and even Macon is so quiet that we have to strain to hear him. The puissance of this film is in its understatement; Kasdan forces <u>us</u> to sit very still in order to catch the small signs of Macon's reawakening over the coming weeks: an infinitesimal lilt in Macon's voice, an ephemeral facial expression.

After this Muriel and Macon embark on a love affair, and the gradual changes in Macon's personality are handled by Kasdan and Hurt with a light touch: a slight crinkling of Macon's eyes, just the suggestion of a grin when he is teased by Muriel's teenage neighbors, a touching moment when Macon spies on Muriel

as she belts out a zany Santa Claus song and he does a little jig in time with the music. The lightening of Macon's mood is subtle, as are his temporary regressions: at Rose's wedding, a relatively buoyant Macon is suddenly and unexpectedly face to face with Sarah again, and her effect on him is revealed by a slight stiffening of his voice and body.

One theme that winds through most of Anne Tyler's fiction is "point of view": every event is subject to different interpretations depending on who is describing it. She is so fascinated by this that in one of her novels, Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, she allows each of four family members to describe the same episodes in the family history in order to demonstrate that everything is relative, not absolute. This theme occurs in The Accidental Tourist as well, most conspicuously in the notion that how Sarah views Macon defines him when he is around her. Sarah sees Macon as cold and stilted, and this belief constitutes a prison from which he cannot escape in her presence. Macon muses on this subject soon after becoming involved with Muriel:

> Then he knew that what mattered was the pattern of her life; that although he did not love her he loved the surprise of her, and also the surprise of himself when he was with her. In the foreign country

> that was Singleton Street he was an entirely different person. This person had never been suspected of narrowness, never been accused of chilliness; in fact, was mocked for his soft heart. (202)

Tyler probes this theme in an episode that is a critical juncture in the book, but that Kasdan chooses to omit. At one point, before becoming involved with Muriel except in her capacity as dog-trainer, Macon goes alone to a revolving restaurant "on the very top of an impossibly tall building." While there he has an anxiety attack, triggered by the terrifying view at the top, which makes him feel isolated from everyone else in the universe. He feels alone and inadequate, while everyone around him appears self-assured and content. He describes a woman whom he bumps into:

> She wore yards and yards of pale chiffon. She was just hanging up the phone, and she gathered her skirts around her and moved languidly, gracefully toward the dining room. (153)

Almost catatonic with anxiety, Macon telephones Charles, who cannot help, then Sarah, who is not home, and finally Muriel, who is. Muriel expresses a different point of view:

> "Did you see Towering Inferno? Boy, after that you couldn't get me past jumping level in any building. I think people who go up in skyscrapers are just plain brave. I mean if you

> think about it, Macon, you have to be brave to be standing where you are right now . . . . Why, you ought to be walking around that building so amazed and proud of yourself!" (158)

After hanging up, Macon's panic has gone and suddenly he views the other diners differently: instead of the languid woman, he notices "a couple who couldn't be past their teens. The boy's wrist bones stuck out of the sleeves of his suit. The girl's dress was clumsy and touching, her small chin obscured by a monstrous orchid" (158). A few minutes ago Macon was a lonely misfit; now he is a confident and indulgent older man.

Kasdan excludes the restaurant scene, but he does not jettison the "point of view" theme entirely. Included in the film is a conversation between Sarah and Macon in which Macon reacts violently to an innocuous comment of Sarah's. The following passage is from the novel, but the dialogue is identical in the film:

> "The trouble with you is, Macon---"
>
> It was astonishing, the instantaneous flare of anger he felt. "Sarah," he said, "don't even start. By God, if that doesn't sum up every single thing that's wrong with being married. 'The trouble with you is, Macon---' and, 'I know you better than you know yourself, Macon---'" (311)

Though Kasdan cannot explore Tyler's themes as fully and leisurely as she can, he tries to preserve them. The foregoing scene reinforces Tyler's intent with regard to the Macon-Sarah breakup: Macon is tired of being Macon from Sarah's point of view. Though the film does not explore their relationship from its inception, it does accurately chronicle its dissolution. Kasdan adds a fillip in his version: in the novel Macon is angry but not violently so; in the film, this is the single scene where he is roused out of his passivity (even Pauline Kael could not fault Hurt's intensity here). He really flails out at Sarah, and with effective juxtaposition he is immediately thereafter on a plane to France. Kasdan may have intensified this clash in order to facilitate the moment when Macon will leave Sarah.

It is apparent that Tyler intends the Julian-Rose and Macon-Muriel relationships to parallel one another; both couples are seemingly mismatched but nonetheless viable and for similar reasons. Kasdan wants to be sure that we do not miss this point, and he concocts a speech for Julian that is equally applicable to both couples:

> (Julian is explaining to an astounded Macon that he is going to propose marriage to Rose):
>
> "You may laugh at this, but I love the surprise of her, and I'm surprised by myself when I'm with her. I'm not exactly the person

> that I thought I was . . . . Macon, isn't it amazing how two separate lives can link up together, I mean two differentnesses?"

This speech in the film is a compilation of two separate passages from the novel, and it demonstrates the degree to which Kasdan sees the two relationships as nearly interchangeable: although the concept of differentnesses is originally Julian's, "the surprise of her and the surprise of himself when he was with her" is actually Macon's thought in the novel. Kasdan has not erred in his judgment, however; this thought is applicable to both Julian and Macon, and the transposition is smooth and believable.

One aspect of Macon's life that should not be overlooked is his role as a father. Tyler uses Macon's roles of fatherhood (to Ethan) and surrogate fatherhood (to Alexander) to explore some interesting ideas. With Ethan, Macon was apparently loving but (this does not surprise us) stifling and overprotective. With Alexander, however (and this does surprise us), he is the opposite; it is Muriel who is overprotective and Macon who is relaxed. Alexander is a little boy plagued with allergies who was born prematurely and has always been sickly. Macon soon realizes that Muriel, usually so adventurous, is unconsciously reinforcing Alexander's

sickliness by being frightened of it; he breezes in like a zephyr and opens up new vistas for Alexander. He surreptitiously serves him foods to which he is supposedly allergic; he buys him his own tool kit and teaches him to attack leaky faucets. He encourages Alexander to creep out from under Muriel's protective wing. Macon muses about his relationship with Alexander:

> There was a peculiar kind of luxury here: Alexander was not his own child. Macon felt linked to him in all sorts of complicated ways, but not in that inseparable, inevitable way that he'd been linked to Ethan. He could still draw back from Alexander; he could still give up on him. "Oh, well," he could say, "talk it over with your teacher tomorrow." And then his thoughts could wander off again.
>
> The difference was, he realized, that he was not held responsible here. It was a great relief to know that. (227)

Tyler has created for Macon a unique opportunity, a situation that contributes largely to his rejuvenation: in the beginning, before he has "fallen in love" with Alexander, he experiments with a more daring way of life; his instinct tells him that Muriel is suffocating her son, so Macon, who for the first time in his life has nothing to lose, tries a more cavalier approach and is rewarded by positive results. When Macon first meets Alexander, he is a "small, white, sickly boy with a shaved-looking skull" who "reminded Macon of a homework

paper that had been erased and rewritten too many times" (226). After only a few weeks of Macon's influence, Alexander has undergone a transformation: his face has filled out, his hair has grown thick and floppy, and he emerges triumphantly from a dressing room during a shopping spree to announce, "I look wonderful!" (253).

Kasdan appreciates the importance of Alexander in the renewal of Macon's will to live. Whenever Kasdan is determined that we will not overlook the significance of something, he composes a voiceover for Macon employing the "accidental tourist" metaphor, and he does so here. While walking his dog one day, Macon happens upon Alexander as he is being tormented by a pack of bullies, and the intensity of his protective feelings for the boy is highlighted by this voiceover:

> "Even the most disciplined professional traveler may sometimes stumble across that unexpected item he feels he simply must take home. That's fine, as long as one is willing to accept the inconvenience and awkwardness that come with each additional piece of baggage."

This voiceover is an especially interesting one, indicating as it does that Kasdan has changed the thrust of Alexander's influence on Macon. While Tyler's Macon burgeons as a result of his successful laissez-faire

treatment of the boy, Kasdan's Macon benefits from the opposite--the responsibility. In a sense the movie suffers from this change, because we lose the important idea that Macon is learning to live, like Muriel, a less "careful" life. In another sense, however, this was a shrewd maneuver on Kasdan's part, since without the benefit of Macon's inner thoughts, there really is no means of conveying on film Tyler's "careful vs. careless" theme. Even if Hurt's Macon were to voice it, such a cavalier attitude toward a child (however fleeting) would not sit well with most film audiences. So Kasdan skips ahead to what happens eventually in both novel and film--Macon's bond with Alexander. The different methods by which the "two" Macons achieve this ultimate bonding do not alter the fact that serving as Alexander's father-figure is a crucial stopover on Macon's road to recovery.

One final aspect of Macon's character is stressed equally by both Tyler and Kasdan: his passivity. Tyler's Macon has fallen into almost every chapter of his life: his marriage to Sarah; his profession (Julian pursued him and proposed the "Accidental Tourist" series); his divorce (Sarah left him); his relationship with Muriel (he had, after all, gone to her house to

refuse a dinner invitation and was actually led by the hand to her bedroom); his return to Sarah (she pursued him to Canada via telephone and wore him down). All these events are transferred to the screen unaltered by Kasdan, indicating that he considers this passivity a key element of Macon's character. Tyler's Macon muses on this subject the night before he leaves Sarah for good:

> He reflected that he had not taken steps very often in his life, come to think of it. 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.
>
> Was it too late now to begin? (339)

Kasdan's Macon voices the same idea out loud to Sarah: "You were right about me, I haven't taken steps very often, but maybe it's not too late to start." And then he leaves her. (Perhaps that will teach her to keep her thoughts to herself.)

In essentials, Kasdan and Galati have done a skillful job of dramatizing the character of Macon. One way of assessing this is to pinpoint the major themes of the novel as they relate to Macon and then draw a comparison with the film. I see four major ideas in Tyler's book: the subject of grief; isolation versus involvement;

point of view; and passive versus active. The first of these, grief, is almost over-stressed by the movie, but the fact that Macon begins to improve as soon as he vocalizes his grief to Muriel and becomes involved with her reinforces Tyler's message, namely that turning inward and trying to avoid mourning does not work. The second theme, isolation versus involvement, is the one most neglected by the film. Tyler's Macon undergoes a literal transformation as he learns from Muriel to trust and enjoy his fellow humans, but in the film Macon's outer-directed energies are confined to Alexander. The "point of view" theme is a little too subtle to lend itself to dramatization; it requires listening to Macon's thoughts. Kasdan does make it clear, however, that Sarah's view of Macon is a prison from which he cannot escape in her presence. The final theme, passive versus active, is thoroughly explored by the film, partly because passivity is something easily conveyed on screen. We do not need to hear Macon's thoughts in order to discern his passivity; the limpness of his body and the obvious contrast between his listless resignation and the forcefulness of Sarah or the positive dynamism of Muriel tell the story.

In general, the movie and the novel are remarkably similar in their depiction of Macon. Both men are

grief-stricken, passive, essentially kindly and yet resentful at having spent the last twenty years locked inside a chilly shell. The only startling difference between Tyler's Macon and Kasdan's lies in the realm of eccentricity: Hurt's Macon does not stomp his clothes clean in the bathtub or sleep in envelopes fashioned out of percale. The goofy eccentricity that Tyler revels in and does so well is missing in the film's Macon.

MURIEL

Kasdan may well have ironed the quirkiness out of Macon because he felt that Muriel was quite eccentric enough for any story. Muriel is the electricity in this book. Without her, The Accidental Tourist would be stuck in neutral, peopled with polite, conservative folks whose engines run only on idle. Muriel is the antithesis of the passive Learys--a spiky, scrawny bulldog of a woman who has the world clenched in her teeth, and will still be shaking it when she draws her last breath.

John Updike notes that one of the themes in the novel is the difficulty of crossing class boundaries, and he is thinking primarily of Muriel when he says this. Muriel represents a step outside Anne Tyler's usual boundaries; while noted for her eccentric characters, Tyler has never before attempted to create a heroine from the wrong side of the tracks. Tyler's characters are invariably individual, but they usually exude a natural, if faded, gentility that speaks of their rightful place in the patriciate of nearly-southern

Baltimore. Muriel, on the other hand, has no honorable ancestry to sustain her.

When first we encounter Muriel, she is presiding behind the counter of the "Meow-Bow" animal hospital, where Macon has come to board his dog Edward for a few days. It is no accident that Tyler does not describe Muriel in detail or focus our attention on her in any way. At this meeting Macon barely registers Muriel's existence; he views her the same way that his family would and will continue to: as an undereducated, unrefined commoner to whom one is courteous but distant. Tyler does not write fairy tales, and she wants it understood that never, never in a million years, would Macon have become interested in Muriel, were it not for the close proximity into which they will shortly be thrown.

Macon returns from his trip a few days later and comes to retrieve Edward. At this second meeting he is unable to ignore Muriel, because she has been waiting impatiently to see him again (having been attracted to him from the first). Muriel does not believe in waiting for good things to come to her. She launches a frontal attack, suggesting that Macon hire her to train Edward (who has unaccountably taken to biting people). She insists that Edward has fallen in love with her and

presses Macon to telephone her: "Pick up the phone and just talk." Here we finally have our first clear picture of Muriel, and it is quite an eyeful:

> She had aggressively frizzy black hair that burgeoned to her shoulders like an Arab headdress. . . . Her eyes were very small, like caraway seeds, and her face was sharp and colorless. . . . Her legs were like sticks. . . . This evening she wore a V-necked black dress splashed with big pink flowers, its shoulders padded and its skirt too skimpy; and preposterous high-heeled sandals. . . . She had painted her nails dark red, Macon saw, and put on a blackish lipstick that showed her mouth to be an unusually complicated shape--angular, like certain kinds of apples. (28, 40)

Throughout this novel, Tyler consistently uses in describing Muriel adjectives one associates more with a scouring pad than a person: her voice is rough, tough, wiry; she exudes spikiness; her perfume is bitter, her face sharp, her hair scratchy.

We are reminded of John Updike's comment that Sarah is portrayed more winningly than Muriel and Macon loves her with less effort. It would be difficult to imagine anyone less like Sarah, whose cream-colored, elegant simplicity is crowned by a halo of soft curls. Muriel is the antithesis of aesthetic gentility--she has

lived a traumatic life and prevailed by swimming with a powerful stroke against the current, and her appearance reflects this. But Tyler's boldest step in the creation of this anti-heroine becomes apparent only when Muriel opens her mouth and begins to speak: her grammar is atrocious. If her appearance jars us visually and her perfume is an olfactory offense, her solecisms are an assault on the auditory nerve. Muriel awakens the snob that may or may not be sleeping in all of us (including Macon) by abrading our cultured sensibilities. Tyler creates for herself the Herculean task of inventing a character whom she wishes us to accept as a heroine, but who is endowed with superficial attributes so uninviting that Muriel begins with several strikes against her. And it so happens that from Macon's point of view she has two and three-quarters strikes against her, because one of the Leary idiosyncrasies is a fanatical devotion to perfectly-spoken English. Even Sarah's syntax has occasionally failed to meet the Leary standards, and we can almost feel Macon wince whenever Muriel speaks.

Muriel makes several attempts to interest Macon in a social relationship, but he recoils and she eventually gives up. The matter would have ended there,

had not Fate intervened in the form of Edward, the Welsh corgi who once belonged to Ethan and has been traumatized by the loss of his master and the dissolution of his home life. When Macon's broken leg forces them to remove to the Leary home, Edward finally has a canine nervous breakdown, manifested by his growling at everyone, chasing Julian up a tree, and ultimately biting Macon. This last spurs the Leary siblings to demand action from Macon, who cannot part with Edward because of his connection to Ethan and who remembers in a moment of desperation that Muriel trains dogs. Thus begins a remarkable relationship.

Muriel begins coming to the house every day to train Edward, and during these lessons she prattles about her life, asks impertinent questions about Macon's, and occasionally turns her attention briefly and crisply to Edward, who obeys her forthwith. Macon follows her around passively, at first an unwilling audience, but soon mesmerized in spite of himself by the sheer force of her personality. Without a drop of self-pity she reveals a bleak history: a beautiful chubby blond baby, she was adored by a shallow mother until she grew "thin and dark and sober" and was replaced forever in her mother's heart by a winsome baby sister. Upon finding herself

pregnant in her teens, she married a "mama's boy" who left her alone and destitute soon after the premature birth of their son Alexander, who nearly did not survive his first year and remains in delicate health. For the past nine years, Muriel has raised and provided for Alexander without help from any quarter through a series of menial jobs and resourceful money-making schemes. A woman of twenty-seven with such a history might be expected to have become saturnine, but Muriel is endowed with a "spiky, pugnacious fierceness" that sees adversity as a challenge and life as a game that requires ingenuity and shrewdness. She tells Macon her philosophy:

> "When I was in high school I made nothing but A's," Muriel said. "You're surprised at that, aren't you. You think I'm kind of like, not an intellect. I know what you're thinking! You're surprised."
>
> "No, I'm not," Macon said, although he was, actually.
>
> "I made A's because I caught on to the trick," Muriel told him. "You think it's not a trick? There's a trick to everything; that's how you get through life." (101)

Macon's sister, Rose, watching Muriel from a distance, is blinded by her uncouth exterior and describes her unkindly as "a flamenco dancer with galloping consumption." This unfavorable opinion of Muriel is

shared by Porter and Charles and does not alter in the course of the novel. All three of these siblings are essentially kindly people, and Tyler offers their reaction not to diminish them, but to demonstrate the degree to which our lives are impoverished by superficial appearances and class consciousness. Macon, too, begins with the assumption that Muriel's tawdriness extends throughout her being, but before very long her story begins to touch him deeply: "It seemed she had webbed his mind with her stories, wound him in slender steely threads from her life" (183). The knitting metaphor is unmistakable--like Madame Defarge, and Rose with Julian's pullovers, Muriel knits Macon into her life.

Two of Muriel's stories have a particularly profound effect on Macon. The first involves a fleeting memory Muriel has of standing at a hospital window looking out at the Emergency Room door (the premature Alexander was hospitalized for many months and Muriel worked in the hospital as a maid to be near him). As an ambulance screeched in one day, Muriel suddenly wondered what a Martian would think if he happened to be watching:

> "He'd see an ambulance whizzing in and everybody running out to meet it, tearing the doors open, grabbing up the stretcher, scurrying along with it. 'Why,' he'd say, 'what a helpful

> planet, what kind and helpful creatures.' He'd never guess we're not always that way; that we had to, oh, put aside our natural selves to do it. 'What a helpful race of beings,' a Martian would say. Don't you think so?" (170)

Later, when his brother Charles, mystified by Macon's interest in Muriel, asks, "Can you tell me one unique thing about her?" Macon thinks, "She looks out hospital windows and imagines how the Martians would see us" (239). Macon has been wallowing in self-pity and feeling like Job for about a year, and it takes Muriel's lionhearted spirit to snap him out of it. Tyler is again exploring her "point of view" theme. Muriel's life has been bleak by most standards, but she does not see it that way. She views life as a challenge, a puzzle requiring that you "learn the trick," a series of roadblocks that require resourcefulness to get around. At a time in her life when her marriage was falling apart and her infant near death, she was not thinking about herself at all but looking at scurrying ambulance attendants and thinking how nice it was that so many people would scramble in aid of one fellow human. Later, when Macon moves in with Muriel, he finds that her house is often noisily filled with neighbors who cluster around Muriel as if drawn to an energy source: her enthusiasm for

life and its problems is not confined to her own, and she is a sort of Mother Earth who thrives on giving of her plenty. Macon learns from Muriel that one of the best ways to transcend your own problems is to become absorbed by the problems of others.

Along with her life-embracing kindheartedness, Muriel possesses a quality that at first glance seems contradictory: she is a hard-headed pragmatist and a steely adversary. When she first comes for the dog training, her lack of sympathy for Macon's broken leg irks him ("Listen, I've taught a man with no legs at all" (109), but in fact her attitude proves more salubrious than Rose's coddling.

This flinty quality is evident in the second anecdote from her past that impresses Macon--it involves an incident that occurred when Muriel was new to dog-training. A mutinous Doberman Pinscher had knocked her off a porch; she regained consciousness to find that her right arm was broken and the Doberman was standing over her with bared teeth. Ignoring the panic that rose up in her, Muriel stared into the dog's eyes (apparently they hate that), held out the palm of her unbroken hand and said steadily, "Absolutely not." And the Doberman backed down.

In Macon's eyes, this story becomes a metaphor for Muriel's approach to life. He often pictures her after being knocked off the porch:

> Her arm hung lifeless; he knew the leaden look a broken limb takes on. But Muriel ignored it; she didn't even glance at it. Smudged and disheveled and battered, she held her other hand up. "Absolutely not," she said. (115)

Smudged and disheveled and battered himself, Macon is filled with admiration for Muriel's undaunted spirit. In appearance she is clownlike and in speech unpolished; but Muriel has force. Edward the dog knows it instinctively: a whole houseful of Learys are cowed by him, but when Muriel hisses at him between her teeth, Edward shrinks back.

Some time later, Edward tires of this authority figure and decides to eliminate it:

> With a bellow, Edward sprang straight at her face. Every tooth was bare and gleaming. His lips were drawn back in a horrible grimace and flecks of white foam flew from his mouth. Muriel instantly raised the leash. She jerked it upward with both fists and lifted Edward completely off the floor. He stopped barking. He started making gargling sounds. (116)

Muriel holds him suspended until he faints. This is one of the most powerful moments in the novel; Edward has tested Muriel's mettle and found it to be genuine.

Macon is horrified at this manifestation of what he considers cruelty, but Muriel cannot understand Macon's horror. One of the hallmarks of Muriel's character is her matter-of-fact acceptance of necessary evil. To her mind it is quite simple: dogs cannot be allowed to attack people's throats, period, and any other reaction on her part would have been maudlin and useless shilly-shallying.

Hardy and intrepid as she is, however, there is one weak link in the chain of Muriel's excellent character: her relationship with her mother. Both of Muriel's parents are boorish clods, and it is noteworthy that The Accidental Tourist is an anomaly for Anne Tyler, whose characters tend to be inexorably anchored to family and roots despite their best efforts to escape. In this novel, not only does Macon escape his stifling family, but Muriel has made a literally biological escape from the inferiority of her genetic roots. Through some mathematically improbable biochemical fluke, Muriel's DNA marches to a tune of its own, her chromosomes aligning themselves in a noble formation; she emerges from an uncouth and unpromising parental chrysalis as a person of brains, sensitivity and depth.

One of the ironies of human psychology, however, is that even the most brilliant and gifted person can

spend a lifetime trying to please an undeserving parent. Muriel's mother is an uneducated and spiteful woman who simply dislikes Muriel and never overlooks an opportunity to hurt her feelings; but instead of avoiding this woman, Muriel goes out of her way to keep in contact with her in a futile daily attempt to win her love. Macon muses on this phenomenon:

> Muriel stood with her back to him, talking on the phone with her mother. He could tell it was her mother because of Muriel's high, sad, querulous tone. "Aren't you going to ask how Alexander is? Don't you want to know about his rash? I ask after your health, why don't you ask about ours?" (195)

This evidence of Muriel's vulnerability is valuable because a character of Muriel's vivacity and forcefulness could easily lose our sympathy. Tyler effectively employs dramatic irony here. Readers know that Muriel's mother is unworthy of her effort, but this evidence of Muriel's feet of clay, of her inability to face the truth because of her simple human need for affection, retains for her the status of vulnerable hero. She has successfully weathered numerous storms in her life without losing her resilience, but she has never been adequately loved, and this gives the relationship between Macon and Muriel an added poignancy. As Macon gradually steers through

the dense fog of his own class prejudice, as his respect for Muriel's valiant qualities overcomes his aversion to her unpolished veneer, the way becomes clear and he is able to love her. This wished-for resolution is all the more appealing because both of these characters are needy and uniquely well-equipped to help one another.

It is fascinating to explore the small and subtle techniques Kasdan employs in transferring Muriel to the screen. In the novel, Muriel's quirky, forceful presence is nearly ubiquitous, since she is present in Macon's thoughts even when she is absent in fact. In the film, however, Muriel is on the screen for a relatively brief time, which partially accounts for the movie's being a heavier, more somber vehicle than the novel. Nevertheless, when she is on the screen, Muriel lights it up with an inner (and outer) fire that provides a dramatic contrast to the prevailing dismal ambience.

We first encounter her, as in the novel, behind the counter of the Meow-Bow animal hospital, where she is thrust upon us in a splash of fiery red colors that diverge sharply from the sepia-washed hues in Macon's life. Throughout the film, red is Muriel's signature color, often a combination of reds and purples that clash with each other enough to seize our attention but

not enough to be truly repulsive. This sudden onslaught of red is deliberate, as is the staccato camera transition, which does not carry us smoothly from one scene to the next, but hurls Muriel at us in a startling and sudden visual attack. This technique is repeated frequently, as Kasdan uses Muriel in a series of sensory assaults that juxtapose sharply against the well-bred, well-modulated Learys and Sarah. For example, there is a scene in the Leary's kitchen after Edward bites Macon wherein his three siblings are expressing their concern about the dog; they are seriously upset, but the prevailing impression is one of muffled and ineffectual floundering. This scene trickles away, to be supplanted abruptly by a single hand, a feminine hand with impossibly long red nails, arched authoritatively with the forefinger pointing. Soon a voice joins it, the clipped voice of Muriel saying, "Edward, stay." Muriel has arrived, and instinctively we know that Edward's biting days are over.

Another example of Kasdan's use of sensory impressions to convey characterization is his handling of background music. Customarily, the major characters in a film such as this will have their own musical "theme" that follows them around and announces their appearance on camera in a kind of musical signature.

In this movie there is only one theme, a sad tune in a minor key that weaves its way around both Macon and the Learys. In an artful gambit, Kasdan deprives Muriel of any music of her own: Muriel's "theme" is the stark absence of music, often with bustling, cheerful street sounds in the background, sounds of life. This strategy is extremely effective, since music is a potent conveyer of mood, and in Muriel's scenes we feel as if we have been ejected from a muffled room into a busy thoroughfare.

This aspect of Muriel's character--forcefulness--is conveyed pointedly by Galati and Kasdan and tends to overshadow her other characteristics. Her vulnerability is also apparent, imparted primarily by the acting of Geena Davis, who uses her eyes expressively to register, for example, apprehension at Rose's wedding, where Muriel mingles awkwardly with her social superiors, or fear as she looks on while Macon packs to return to Sarah. In fact, Geena Davis's eyes are so eloquent that one is reminded of Arab women, whose eyes are said to be more articulate than their tongues. Frequently in this film the dialogue that was written for Davis seems subordinate to the expression on her face, and much of the success with which this film captures Anne Tyler's intentions is due to Geena Davis. Though Kasdan

and Galati have frequently transferred Tyler's dialogue directly to the screen, the words themselves would be hollow without the spirit; Davis has captured Muriel's poignant combination of dynamic optimism, unsophisticated manners and childlike vulnerability.

The unpolished exterior that initially repels Macon is conveyed by Davis not so much by what she says and does (although she does ask impertinent questions and tinker officiously with the photographs on his mantlepiece) but primarily by the piercing way she looks at him, with a too-direct, searching, almost challenging look in her eyes that is diametrically opposed to the politely discreet eyes of Sarah and the Learys. Bold and impudent eye contact is not a quality that Tyler invented for Muriel, but it is a nice touch in the film, an effective visual manifestation of Muriel's brashness. As the movie progresses and her positive qualities prevail over her lack of couth, Davis's eyes continue to tell a story. In the powerful scene already discussed in which Macon first divulges to Muriel the facts of his son's death, Muriel utters not a single word for several long minutes, but the sympathy and horror in her eyes are eloquent. Later, when she audaciously follows Macon to France even

though he has left her, she allows a flicker of fear in her eyes, just the briefest flash, to controvert her apparent boldness.

One of the definitive aspects of Muriel's character as written by Anne Tyler is her all-encompassing interest in people: she looks out hospital windows and imagines how the Martians would see us, and her house tends to be full of neighbors who flock around this life-sustaining fountain of plenty. In the film, however, no one flocks around her, and the Martian story is omitted. The result is that Kasdan's Muriel is not the multi-dimensional, fully-realized character that Tyler created. Geena Davis gives a potent, memorable performance, but ultimately this film belongs to Macon, and Muriel's chief significance lies in the effect she produces on him. This indirect, reflexive manifestation of her character is handled subtly throughout the film. In fact, the most fully-achieved aspect of this movie is the rendering of the gradual effect that Muriel's buoyancy has on Macon.

In the beginning, her brashness offends him, but even the initial stupefied look on his face is an improvement over his habitual saturnine mien. Startled offense gives way to mild interest as he begins to listen to the story of her life, but at this stage his face

still lapses into lifelessness whenever she is not around. During the brief time that he lives with her, an occasional wan smile plays around his eyes, and his face regains some elasticity. After he leaves Muriel and returns to Sarah, the dismal look returns, but this time there are signs of life, such as irritability. Near the end of the film, after spending a few days in Paris with Muriel, he will occasionally grin even when he is alone and just thinking about her. This inchmeal return to life and humor is so gradual as to be almost imperceptible; in fact, it was imperceptible to the critic who felt that Hurt merely "plodded across the screen like Frankenstein's monster."

In the novel, as mentioned before, we are aware of Muriel's personality almost constantly, since she permeates Macon's thoughts. Kasdan has created the film equivalent of this: though Muriel is physically present on the screen only sporadically, she permeates the film with a kind of glow through her effect on Macon. Just as the reflection of the sun on a waterfall is more spectacular than looking directly at the orb, the reflection of Muriel's verve and optimism in Macon's previously vacant eyes if far more powerful than her tangible self.

CONCLUSION

The concluding pages of the novel, and the parallel climactic scenes of the film, are awash in symbolism. The literal events are these: in Paris, where Macon has gone to do travel research for his latest book, he strains his back and is painfully immobilized in bed. Completely helpless, he nevertheless ignores Muriel when she knocks, enlisting instead the aid of a hotel employee to phone his sister Rose in America. Rose responds by sending Sarah, who arrives laden with painkilling narcotics and the resolve to do his travel research for him. Macon passively swallows the pills, then spends the next twenty-four hours fighting his way out of a narcotic stupor. Eventually he rejects the medication, pulls himself out of bed and, despite his pain, packs his bags with the intention of returning to Muriel. Out in the unfamiliar Paris streets, a young boy who bears a remarkable resemblance to Ethan assists Macon in hailing a cab and then, "to Macon's surprise, lifted a hand in a formal good-bye" (341).

Anne Zahlan notes that in this final chapter, almost every word can be read metaphorically. Zahlan describes Tyler's novel in the following statement:

> Anne Tyler makes new the perennial American struggle with the conflicting claims of stability and freedom, the contrary urges to settle and to roam. . . . In The Accidental Tourist, Tyler explores in psychic terms the tension between the impulse to roam and the urge to stay put. (84, 85)

Zahlan points out that the image of Macon frozen in bed, semi-comatose while Sarah does his traveling for him, is a metaphor for what Macon's life has been for twenty years. When Macon finally rejects Sarah's sedatives, reflecting that "anything was better than floating off on that stupor again," he has determined to brave life's pain and travel his own way. When his taxicab passes the waving boy on the street, Macon has managed to let Ethan go.

The symbolism of this last chapter was not lost on Lawrence Kasdan, and the degree to which he faithfully reproduces it on the screen demonstrates his respect for Tyler. In some ways Kasdan's conclusion surpasses Tyler's in its emphasis on symbolism: Tyler's metaphors are delicately threaded through the mundane events, but the camera is more insistent as it focuses our attention

and zooms in on the unswallowed pill in Macon's hand, the heavy baggage that Macon leaves deliberately by the roadside, the boy's ethereal face. In its replication of theme, then, Kasdan's adaptation of The Accidental Tourist remains faithful in both spirit and fact to Tyler's work.

George Bluestone's book Novels into Film remains, after more than thirty years, one of the definitive works on the subject of film adaptation; he is still quoted extensively today. One of his statements bears reprinting here:

> It is insufficiently recognized that the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genres, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture. . . . In the fullest sense of the word, the filmist becomes not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right. (62)

This is patently true, and should serve to silence those of us who writhe in pain when a screenwriter "mangles" a beloved work of fiction. The film equivalent of a novel is unobtainable; we must allow a filmmaker to be an artist and not a mimic. Having decided this, we can forgive Kasdan for some things and applaud him for others.

The most notable discrepancy between Tyler's novel and Kasdan's film, and the one most dwelt on by the critics, is the difference in tone. Tyler's novel is bittersweet but comic: Macon flounders around, passively being knocked about by the waves of life, while keeping up a running commentary on his own absurdity and that of everyone around him. The overall effect is a good-natured acceptance and appreciation of the challenges of life.

Kasdan's film is somber, dark, with a preponderance of muted colors, muted voices, muted music. The lively and garish flamboyance of Muriel injects the film with an occasional flash of life, but does not dispel the overall effect of melancholy. I conclude, as Variety's reviewer did, that the gloom was unintentional. In his attempt to convey the unspeakable grief that has immobilized Macon, Kasdan is too successful: the sadness overwhelms us. Tyler's novel is a darkened room with chinks of light merrily peeping through all the shutters; in Kasdan's room the shutters are tightly closed.

However, Kasdan has created his own work of art. His Macon is not the quirky, eccentric antihero of Tyler's novel, but he is a sympathetic and believable character--a gentle man whose suffering is acute and

whose welfare absorbs us. When Hurt finally claws his way painfully out of bed and goes in search of the spiky, pugnacious, life-embracing Muriel, our relief is profound, and the message--that a life lived too carefully is not lived at all--comes through eloquently.

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