

BOOKS

Review:

The Accidental Tourist

By Anne Tyler, published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

As the book opens, Macon and Sarah Leary's 20-year marriage is falling apart; they are cracking under the shock of the senseless murder of their 11-year-old son Ethan in a hold-up at a burger stand. Sarah leaves him, and Macon's alienation turns his normal reclusiveness into a wildly comic flight from the demands of everyday life. He stays on in the house, compulsively streamlining the household chores and writing guide books for travelers who hate to leave home—*Accidental Tourists*, he calls them. Macon automates his meals (coffeepot and popcorn popper timed to start in the morning), his laundry (he stomps his clothes clean every night in the shower), and his pet's routines (the cat comes and goes through an unused dryer vent, and the resentful dog is fed by a continual feeder in the basement). Macon regresses to childhood after he breaks his leg when the cat gets stuck in the dryer and the dog trips him on the basement steps. He ends up living at home with his two brothers (whose marriages have also failed) and with his sister Rose (who's never had a serious love relationship and who lines up her jam in the pantry in

alphabetical order). Life settles in to a familiar rut for Macon living with his siblings. After dinner every evening:

"... they went out to the sun porch and sat at their grandparents' card table. They played something called *Vaccination*—a card game they'd invented as children, which had grown so convoluted over the years that no one else had the patience to learn it."

Over several months, Macon gets involved with delightfully unorthodox Muriel, a frizzy-haired energetically resourceful single mother. Muriel works at the Meow-Bow kennel where Macon sometimes leaves his ill-behaved Welsh Corgi Edward, Macon's only living link to his son Ethan. Feisty Edward has a fully developed personality; as *Time* (9-16-85) notes, his "bite is just as bad as his bark."

Reclusive by nature, Macon loathes leaving home, traveling is torture. Updating a new edition of his New York City guidebook, Macon stops in the Buford Hotel:

"He was faced with a familiar problem, here: the narrow line between 'comfortable' and 'tacky.' In fact, sometimes comfortable was tacky. He opened the refrigerator, a little undercounter affair. The ice

trays in the freezing compartment were exactly the same kind of trays—scummy aqua plastic, heavily scratched, that Rose had back in Baltimore."

Later, Macon follows his editor's request to rate a fancy top-floor restaurant in a very tall building:

"An elevator the size of a room stood open, half filled with people, and Macon stepped in and took his place between two women in silks and diamonds. Their perfume was almost visible. He imagined he could see it rippling the air. Have chewing gum handy, he wrote in his guidebook as the elevator shot upward."

These are the most wonderful characters I've encountered in fiction since Ellen Gilchrist's *Victory in Japan*. Anne Tyler is a marvelously talented writer; this is her tenth novel, the last was 1982's highly acclaimed *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. Hollywood may be gearing up for a film version. John Malkovich (who would make a great Macon Leary) is developing a script. Anne Tyler's people, like Ellen Gilchrist's and Alice Walker's, are touching, human, and refreshing. The book's a jewel—read it and pass it on to someone you love.

—Lois Wadsworth

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Weekly Eye Opener

by Larry Deckman

(Taken from *The Book of Lists #3* by Amy Wallace, David Wallechinsky, and Irving Wallace): "On February 5, 1979, Woodrow W. Bussey filed a \$2 million suit in Oklahoma County District Court claiming that the Adolph Coors Co. and a local tavern had caused him to become an

alcoholic by failing to warn him that the 3.2 beer served in Oklahoma is actually an intoxicating beverage. Bussey said that Coors beer had done irreparable damage to his brain, 'pickling his mind' and preventing him from thinking clearly. As of late 1983, the case had not been resolved."

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