CHAPTER IV

A Comparison between Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler

as Novelists of the Family

This chapter aims to compare select novels of Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler. There are many points of comparison and contrast. The psychic structure of the family, the emotional pattern that it gives rise to, the various family models and the different categories discussed at length in Chapter I will be the guiding factors in the comparison attempted in this chapter.

Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler are American novelists interested in the domestic issues and everyday life of the white Americans. The two American women novelists are separated by a period of about eighty years. While Edith Wharton writes chiefly about the upper class, Anne Tyler portrays the life of the lower middle and upper middle class people. Both of them deal with the urban society.

Edith Wharton’s Social Milieu

The life of Mrs. Wharton spans a long period of seventy five years covering very important world events like the Civil War, World War I, and the Great Depression. The life of the leisured class and the commercial upper middle class people form the chief social setting of her novels. In her autobiographical memoir *A Backward Glance* (1934) Mrs. Wharton paints a
picture of the affluent aristocracy she was born in. It is a social record as interesting as her novels, describing the beliefs and prejudices of this class of Old New York which had vanished when she wrote about it in her advanced years. Her knowledge of this section of New York society was that of an insider.

Mrs. Wharton was born in a community which retained a rich tradition in the course of three centuries. She records the graceful life of her parents, grand-parents and great-grand-parents who "were the heirs of an old tradition of European culture which the country has now totally rejected." (A Backward Glance, 7). Her ancestors were mainly bankers and merchant-ship-owners and their value lay in upholding two standards of importance in any community, that of education and good manners, and of scrupulous profits in business and private affairs (A Backward Glance 21). The commercial aristocracy to which she belonged was so inflexible that it did not permit the retail businessmen or share market profiteers, however rich they might be, to enter their society. It had narrow ideas about the role of woman. "Child-bearing was their task, fine needle-work their recreation, being respected their privilege" (A Backward Glance 14). The little girls were taught needle-work, music, painting and foreign languages. The society of her parents' time is characterised a blind dread of innovation and an instinctive shrinking from responsibility.
In her youth, this class did not suffer from what she terms "gold-fever.' They were satisfied with the wealth they possessed. Among her close relatives there was only one who was in business and none among her husband’s relatives. All of them were men of leisure living on the rapid rise in value of inherited estates. She registers a shift towards the desire for money-making as the only objective of life. She proudly recalls her mother’s advice to her as the first rule of conversation: “Never talk about money, and think about it as little as possible” (*A Backward Glance*, 56).

World War I, the crash of the stock market in 1929 and the rise of the Nazis were some of the chief socio-political and socio-economic events Mrs. Wharton witnessed. Her life was bracketed by wars. She was born during a January week in 1862, when the civil war was going on- she died in 1937, the year that General Francisco Franco waged war against the Republican Army. Her “own literary career was interrupted, almost bisected, by the First World War” (Price, ix). She also saw the rise of Hitlerism in Germany.

Mrs. Wharton’s attitude to New York was ambivalent. Louis Auchincloss makes the following observation in his introduction to *A Backward Glance*:

Yet there was ambivalence in her feeling toward New York. On the one hand she loved it for the very completeness of her
understanding of it and for the richness of the material with which it supplied her. It was, after all, her cradle and family. On the other hand she resented the smallness of its imagination, the dryness of its appreciation... in time living abroad, these resentments turned shrill, but with old age came the reflection that in a rootless world the roots of that lost brownstone city were better than none (xi).

Mrs. Wharton combined toward her home city feelings both of harsh rejection and haughty defense. These are moments, especially in The House of Mirth, when she is utterly without mercy toward old New York: she sees it as a place of betrayal, failure and impotence. In her old age, when she came to write her autobiography, she was mellower. She wrote:

It used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savoured by a youthful palate... (Quoted in Howe, 11)

Anne Tyler's Social Milieu

The First World War did not come merely as a shock. It was a catastrophe, a cataclysm, shattering one's hope in humanity. It was viewed as
the crash of civilization. It marked the end of an era — the age of innocence for Mrs. Wharton and her contemporaries. The Second World War was a greater disaster. Anne Tyler is aware of the ill-effects of this global disaster.

Anne Tyler portraying of the life of the middle class and the lower middle class people. They are doctors, engineers, lawyers, businessmen, shopkeepers and even workers. They all belong to the advanced bourgeois society as against the leisured class of Mrs. Wharton. The American society of Anne Tyler's time has undergone a sea-change since the times of Mrs. Wharton. Instead of carriages, broughams, landaus and the like, cars have become the common means of transport. Telephone, television, radio, and air-travel are within the reach of the middle class Americans. The sharp division and wide gap between the rich and the poor are narrowed. In other words, the luxuries of the upper class are not impossible to acquire for the middle class.

School education has replaced governesses and tutors at home. Equal opportunities for women in education and many other fields have liberated them from the shackle of old customs. They are no more tied to needle-work, music, painting and similar accomplishments. The aristocratic leisured class ladies and gentlemen have vanished and have been replaced by professionals of both sexes. The so-called invaders from mid-west who were treated as outsiders have standardized a style of living which perhaps would have shocked Mrs. Wharton.
Attitudes to romantic love, marriage, divorce and remarriage have undergone a drastic change in the several decades that divide Mrs. Wharton and Anne Tyler. Dating, teenage marriages, quick divorces, consent divorces, communes like kibbutz, swinging, cohabitation, single-parent families, drug addiction, consequent mental-breakdowns, and disintegration of the nuclear families, have all changed the face of American family.

Anne Tyler chose to write about Baltimore. The world of Tyler’s novels is peopled by eccentrics like Morgan (Morgan’s Passing) and the Learys (The Accidental Tourist), placid people like Ezra Tull, (Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant) and poor but resourceful and lively people like Muriel (The Accidental Tourist) to mention a few. In fact, there is a Dickensian range and variety in Tyler’s characterization.

Tyler’s novels are largely domestic novels with pulls and pushes among their members. Often, the focus is on the sharp differences of opinion and disagreement between husband and wife in their midlife that trigger a chain of painful events.

Their Creative Process

There is a strong resemblance between Mrs. Wharton and Tyler in their creative process, which began in their early childhood. Edith Wharton spent her early childhood with her parents in Europe. While in Paris, she developed the
habit of what she calls "making-up" stories. With Washington Irving's *Alhambra*, in her hand, she walked up and down in her room telling stories. She could not write them as she did not yet know how to read or write. Mrs. Wharton writes thus about this habit in *A Backward Glance*:

Well, the *Alhambra* once in hand, making up was an ecstasy. At any moment the impulse might seize me and then, if the book was in reach, I had to walk the floor, turning the pages as I walked, to be swept off full sail on the sea of dreams... the call came regularly and imperiously. ... I had to obey the furious Muse. (34-35)

In the case of Mrs. Wharton this imperious urge was irresistible in childhood. However, her first novel was published when she was in her early 40s. For Mrs. Wharton, writing was suggested as a therapy to get over her personal emotional problems as her marriage was a total failure. She had no child of her own.

Mrs. Wharton wrote about the commercial aristocracy she knew so well. She was born in to it. The time of the four novels taken for comparison spans six decades—the period between 1870s and 1930s. The locales of the novels are old New York with its brown buildings and European cities. The main characters are either the aristocrats or the upcoming speculators in the share
market. The servants and other minor characters who are on the periphery belong to the working class, or the lower middle class. By and large, the chief characters are aristocratic or upper class in their habits, manners, tastes, and upbringing.

Of the four novels chosen, the protagonists of three novels are in the prime of their lives just before or after their marriage. The lovers in the fourth novel namely *The Children* are well past their youth. The crucial questions in the four novels of Mrs. Wharton are the questions of choosing the life partner or divorcing the existing one in favour of another. The choices are dictated by either romantic love, or economic considerations or both. In *The House of Mirth* Lily Bart, the heroine commits suicide failing to find a suitable husband. In *The Custom of the Country*, Undine Spragg, the central character of the novel, marries two aristocrats one after another and finally settles with Elmer Moffatt who brought with him enormous money and power. The case of the hero of *The Children* Martin Boyne hinges on his disillusionment with Rose Sellers, a widow and Judith Wheater a very young and lively girl. He admired them both but finally chose to remain single as the widow was no more charming to him and Judith rejected him politely.

Both from the point of view of critical theory of the family and from a novelist's point of view, the family is viewed as a psychic structure. The psychic structure is determined by the family model. Edith Wharton’s novels
capture the conflict between the aristocratic and bourgeoisie models of families. The last quarter of nineteenth century America saw the decline of these aristocratic families which were yielding to the pressures from the speculative pioneers and shrewd businessmen from the west. The conflicts arising out of their invasion from the west and the compromises they were compelled to strike are enacted in *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence*. The bourgeoisie prevailed over the American aristocracy. Her novels also register the transition from the one to the other. The invasion resulted in inter-marriages between the two groups.

About Tyler's childhood Elizabeth Evans writes:

Tyler remembers that as a small child she whispered stories to herself in bed at night "in which I'd pretend to be various other people - a woman named Delores with eighteen children...", and a girl going west in a covered wagon..." Reading (and being read to) during the early childhood years exerted an obvious influence on Anne Tyler, and a distinct experience at the age of four brought her a moment of insight that has lingered. For this birthday (in 1945) Tyler got a plaster doll, a tin suitcase, and a copy of *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton, a book that impressed Tyler. She felt she had "been presented with a snapshot that showed me how the world worked; how the years flowed by
and people altered and nothing could ever stay the same. Then the snapshot was taken away. Everything there is to know about time was revealed in that snapshot, and I can almost name it, I very nearly have it in my grasp... but then it's gone again, and all that's left is a ragged green book with the binding fallen apart” (Tyler's ellipsis). She may have been very young, Tyler says, but that was a moment when she acquired wisdom (3-5).

From the scant biographical references available about Anne Tyler, we learn that she juggled between domestic duties and writing. Anne Tyler's married life or her children were no problem for her. Her first novel was published when she was twenty-three.

The four novels of Anne Tyler chosen for study are about middle class or upper middle class people in and around Baltimore. The time of these novels ranges from the first to the last decade of the twentieth century. All the four novels begin with a crisis in the lives of the protagonists. Interestingly the crisis comes roughly twenty years after their marriage. It begins with disillusionment with their spouses and ends in separation or divorce and remarriage or better understanding of the spouse. The chief question dealt with by Anne Tyler is the question of disagreement between the husband and the wife caused largely by a temperamental incompatibility. Estrangement, desertion, running away from home (temporarily or permanently), divorce and remarriage are the usual
endings. But Delia in *The Ladder of Years* returns home after a year's separation from her family. The central characters are wiser after years of suffering and understand themselves and their spouses better towards the end. Nevertheless, Mrs. Wharton and Anne Tyler do not end their stories on a note of 'they-lived-happily-thereafter optimism and hope. In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* Beck Tull, who left his wife and children in the lurch, returns for the funeral of his wife. It is no happy reunion as he thought at first. In *The Accidental Tourist*, Macon Leary undergoes a total transformation under the influence of Muriel Pritchett and chooses her instead of his estranged wife Sarah. *The Amateur Marriage* is the story of a life-long battle between Michael Anton and his wife Pauline, his divorce and remarriage with Anna.

Anne Tyler's novels focus briefly on romantic love, choice of the spouse and concentrate chiefly on the long term problems after marriage. Both are unromantic in their attitudes to love and marriage. Both keep a distance from feminism. They are neither avowed feminists nor avowed anti-feminists. Both the writers do not describe sex in detail.

Newland Archer and his son Dallas of *The Age of Innocence* represent the transition from aristocracy to bourgeoisie and the change of values affected by time. On the other hand, in the novels of Anne Tyler it is the neo bourgeoisie class replacing the bourgeoisie. A similar transition or generation gap can be perceived in the case of Dr. Sam Grinstead and his children in *The*
Ladder of Years and Michael Anton and his children especially Lindy in the Amateur Marriage.

Child-rearing practice

The upbringing of May Welland exemplifies the aristocratic values especially with respect to sex, marriage, divorce, and reputation of the family. A criticism of this upbringing is voiced by her husband Newland Archer, the mouthpiece of Edith Wharton. Newland Archer of The Age of Innocence and Ralph Marwell of The Custom of the Country are almost identical in their upbringing, attitudes and the values they uphold. Undine is incapable of appreciating these values.

The bourgeois upbringing is represented by the way Lily and Undine are brought up. They value social status, money, social advancement. The finer things of life available to Ralph and Newland are unavailable to Undine and her group of friends. They virtually live in two different worlds and Undine cannot comprehend the existence of a whole range of feelings which are sacred to Ralph. The worst type of bourgeois upbringing can be witnessed in The Children. Judith’s lack of education is visible in her awful spelling in her letters. They are brought up in hotel-culture devoid of parental care. They are so badly brought up with so much indifference and insensitivity that Blanca and Judith get engaged to lift boys at the age of eleven.
The upbringing of children in the neo-bourgeois families as presented in the four novels of Anne Tyler depicts a different set of values. It is an interesting fact that *The Children* in many aspects including child-rearing practice, looks forward to the 'steps and all' in Jenny's family in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. There is a striking similarity between Judith and Jenny with their siblings.

The upbringing of the Tull children in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* by Pearl Tull, a single parent, illustrates the imbalanced mental growth of the three children as they feel the vacuum in the absence of a father who has deserted them. They also develop a hatred for him as he had left them in the hands of a witch of a mother with an unpredictable temper.

In *The Accidental Tourist* the eccentric character of the Learys can be attributed to the fact that the mother Alicia set a bad example by her fast changing stands and the way the four Leary children were brought up by their grandparents. There was the genetic factor too. Alicia often told her children that in their stiffness they took after their father who died when they were young. Alicia remarried too quickly for her children to understand and she finally left America. The Leary children grew up attached to one another so much that they found interactions with others almost impossible. When they grew up into men, the Leary men proved impossible husbands. Poster notes
that children in neo-bourgeois families are not pampered as in the bourgeois families of Mrs. Wharton's novels.

**Everyday life:**

The upper class of the 1870s consisted of two groups. One, the aristocracy, the leisured class which disdained any money-making profession and relied on its estates and ancestral property. Secondly, the upcoming business class which imitated the aristocracy. The daily life of Mrs. Wharton's upper class characters Judy Trenor, May Welland, Ellen Olenska, and Ralph Marwell was filled with visits to museums, theatres, concerts, operas and parties when they were in New York during the season. They spent their summers either in their country places or visited Europe. Gambling and charitable activities were the expensive pastime for them. They were a bad model for the middle class people like Selden, Lily, and Undine. Mrs. Wharton's aim is to expose the hollowness, and superficiality of the vanishing aristocracy.

While painting the picture of the upper class life, Mrs. Wharton draws our attention to the drab, tiring life of the working class as much as their simple and innocent pleasures. Gary Farish, the poor relation of Selden, and her friend Nettie Struther in *The House of Mirth*, Mrs. Heeny in *The Custom of the Country*, Horatia Scope the governess of the Wheater family in *The Children* represent this class.
On the other hand, Tyler’s characters largely belong to the upper middle class and middle class families barring some exceptions – like Pearl and Beck Tull, Muriel Pritchett and her parents. Her characters are professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers, TV announcers, small and big shopkeepers, at the top of the social ladder. Cashier, hotel servant (Josiah Payson), a dog-trainer (Muriel Pritchett), car-mechanic Dominick, travelling salesmen (Beck and Lamb) and the like are at the lower rung of the social ladder. Their daily life includes apart from their regular professional work, visits to friends, relatives, shopping malls, or hardware shops, green grocer’s, hotels, clinics and many similar errands.

**Family Dinners:**

In the novels of Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler a meal at home reflects the psychic structure of the family, its varying moods, and the inter-relatedness of its members. The coffee served by Selden to Lily in *The House of Mirth* is misrepresented and misconstrued by the servant maid as well as Sim Rosedale. The coffee and the lighting of Lily’s cigarette by Selden is revelatory of their mutual admiration and affinity. Selden describes it as the “Republic of the Spirit.” Similarly the breakfast prepared by Gary for Lily and the coffee offered to her by Gary’s friend are expressive of the intimacy free from jealousy found often among the upper class. The noisy and bubbly dinner of the Wheater children, “steps and all” presided over by Judith is an instance of a happy and fulfilling meal because it is emotionally satisfying signifying a rare domestic
felicity. It is a rare and evanescent moment for all concerned. Martin Boyne later finds that it could never happen again.

The private family life of her chief characters is the major concern of Anne Tyler. And this is best expressed when they sit at a family dinner. In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, Ezra Tull never succeeded, despite several attempts, to host a complete meal for his family at his restaurant. At home, whenever Pearl was in a tantrum, the Tull children found their dinner most unpalatable. In contrast to this, Jenny found her frugal dinner served by the mother of Josiah Payson wonderful as it was served with love and admiration. The small family life of Josiah and his mother was enchanting like a fairy-tale life to Jenny.

**Family-society relation:**

The farewell dinner given to Ellen Olenska marking her return to Europe in *The Age of Innocence*, brings to the fore the intensest emotion felt by Newland, Ellen and May, the persons involved in the love triangle. It is like cutting a person’s throat without much bleeding. This situation illustrates how the family and society establish a tacit understanding in the interests of protecting a family from disintegration and ignominy. In the hierarchical relation between family and society, the individual’s passions are sacrificed to ensure that there is no breach between the two. However in the same novel, after about twenty five years, family–society solidarity is not the same. The
role of society is not the same. It permits what it would not have done twenty-five years ago. For instance, they would not have permitted the marriage of Dallas with Fanny Beaufort on the grounds that she was not the daughter of a respectable member of the society. Society has relaxed its ethical standards. However, Newland remains the same sticking to the old values. He prefers to remain faithful to May even after her death. He even prefers not to see Ellen when he visits Paris with the sole aim of cherishing the past.

In a similar situation Macon Leary of *The Accidental Tourist*, after oscillating between his wife Sarah and his friend Muriel, chooses Muriel. Society, represented by his brother and sister tries to persuade him against this choice, but does not insist on it. Times and values have so changed that family and society go hand in hand. In *The Amateur Marriage*, Michael after thirty years of marriage gets a divorce from his quarrelsome wife and cohabits with Anna Pauline's friend and then marries her. Marrying one's wife's friend is not desirable. But yet, society does not interfere in the personal affairs of an individual.

**Three Generation Novels:**

There is a visible change in ethical values relating to divorce or remarriage. Society or family is not inflexible or unrelenting or even vindictive as it was at the time of Mrs. Wharton. Mrs. Wharton and Anne Tyler deal with three generations of a family in some of their novels, which give them a social
investigator’s knowledge of the changes in family and society from a historical perspective. The lives of Catherine Mingott, the grandmother of May in *The Age of Innocence* and Pearl Tull in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* cover three generations marking the changes in society. They go back to their distant past to vouchsafe the changes. They are aware that change is inevitable. In presenting their points of view the novelists could foresee as illustrated earlier certain changes which are sad and unfortunate.

**Love:**

In all the three family models love means romantic love, be it the case of Ralph and Undine or Lily Bart and Selden, or Martin Boyne and Rose Sellers or Dallas and Fanny, or Newland and May. In the world presented by Anne Tyler, love between the young or middle-aged people is romantic, but viewed with considerable scepticism.

If it is the romantic love of an aristocratic young man for an exquisitely beautiful woman, it is the man who has illusions about taking his young wife to various monuments, churches and places of historic interest in Europe and reading European classics with her. Of course he discovers soon that this idea of romantic love and of reading classics with the Alps or Paris as the background is sheer nonsense. A young woman’s idea of honeymoon means buying fashionable dresses, jewels and partying with fellow Americans. This
kind of romantic love is illustrated in the case of Ralph and Undine in *The Custom of the Country*.

The bourgeois family model also favoured romantic love with a difference. Here, economic considerations also counted. Lily Bart, Undine, Sim Rosedale, and Elmer Moffatt exhibit their interest in money, power and status even when they are carried away by romantic love. Marriage in the bourgeois class was solely based on social status and economic considerations.

In the neo-bourgeois class with which Anne Tyler deals, romantic love, of course, is the driving force. But the unwritten thesis of Anne Tyler is that the marriage runs into rough weather sooner or later and reaches the critical point in about twenty or thirty years. Disillusionment in romantic love is common to all the models of families be it in the novels of Edith Wharton or Anne Tyler.

**Marriage:**

For Edith Wharton in particular, and for her contemporaries in general, marriage was indissoluble until death separated the couple. Her personal views are amply illustrated in her novels in this respect, and this view had religious sanction too. Though born a Protestant, Edith Wharton started liking the Catholic rituals towards the end of her life.
To most of the chief characters in the novels of Edith Wharton, marriage is like a voyage in an uncharted ocean, a risky affair. Newland, Ellen, Ralph, Martin, Rose-Sellers, found marriage a risky affair. The minor characters like Sim Rosedale, Percy Gryce, Miss Van Osburgh, Lipscomb, Elmer Moffatt, Medora Manson treat marriage as a socio-economic affair. To the Wheaters, Zinnia, Lullmer marriage is a casual affair treated with utmost irresponsibility. The younger generation in her novels represented by Dallas Archer, do not find any problem in marriage. So also traditional May is unaware of the changes in attitude to marriage, family and divorce.

The main characters in the novels of Anne Tyler too find marriage and family life too difficult to manage. Beck Tull leaves his wife and children to fend for themselves and reappears only after about thirty years to attend his wife’s funeral. He confesses that his married life was grey and that too much nearness to his wife was unpleasant to her as she saw every one of his faults. Macon Leary had a similar experience with Sarah who catalogued his eccentricities. It was Sara who wanted a divorce. Delia, unable to put up with the indifference of her husband and children, left them for a year. Michael Anton, on his thirtieth wedding anniversary left his wife Pauline. All these go to prove that staying married for long was next to impossibility to the main characters of Anne Tyler.
The chief difference between the two sets of novels in terms of marriage is that while Edith Wharton's characters consider divorce or separation an anathema, characters of Anne Tyler, separate or divorce without any social consequence. In the times of Edith Wharton, though divorce was legally permitted, society considered it a degradation. For instance, Undine could not become an ambasaddress because she was divorced earlier.

**Martital Disharmony**

Martital disharmony arises from the characters of the husbands and wives. Edith Wharton's heroes – Selden, Ralph, Newland and Martin – are invariably insufficient, unsatisfactory, slow in understanding their women folk, weak in decision-making and unenterprising. Her socio-economically successful men – Sim Rosedale, Elmer Moffatt, Cliff Wheater and Julian Beauforte for example – are unrefined and unimpressive philistines. On the other hand, Edith Wharton's women like Lily Bart, Ellen Olenska, Rose Sellars, and Clare Van Degen are much more intelligent, practical than their menfolk are. By their side, the men pale into insignificance. In the case of Anne Tyler's men, they are mostly methodical, systematic, reasonable, unsociable whereas her women are sociable, unsystematic, volatile in their temperament but highly resourceful and intelligent.

While Edith Wharton's heroes and heroines are young excepting Martin Boyne and Rose Sellars, the heroes and heroines of Anne Tyler are in their 40s
when the story begins. Edith Wharton’s concern is with the marital problems of young lovers whereas Anne Tyler’s concern is with the midlife crises of her characters, which usually erupt twenty years after marriage.

**Divorce**

The novels of Anne Tyler present a high rate of divorce in comparison with those of Edith Wharton. What distinguishes the neo-bourgeois model of family from the aristocratic and the bourgeois models is its audacious attitude to divorce and sexual relation outside marriage. Undine Sprag is the precursor to this attitude in Edith Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country*. Her flippant view of her friend’s possible divorce is shocking to the Marvells, to say the least. Estrangement, divorce, remarriage after twenty or thirty years, are the commonest features in the novels of Anne Tyler.

All the four novels of Edith Wharton, disfavour divorce. There is one exception, of course, the case of Countess Ellen Olenska who is separated from her European husband. The reasons for the separation are not expanded on and it is reported that the Count had affairs with other women and ill-treated his wife. Divorces in the 1870s were not uncommon. There is Medora Manson the aunt of Ellen, who has divorced more than once. In *The House of Mirth* too, there is Carry Fisher who is a divorcee. The frequent divorces of Undine (*The Custom of the Country*) and the Wheaters (*The Children*) are disapproved by society. Perhaps the chief reason for presenting such a world lies in Mrs.
Wharton’s personal attitude to divorce. She strongly believed that marriage was a life-time affair and divorce an insult to the institution of marriage. Although she divorced her husband in 1913 after twenty eight long years of unhappy and ill-matched married life, in several novels she presented the havoc caused by divorce. Ralph committed suicide and Paul, his son was a stranger at his home and disapproved Undine’s judgment of Raymond, his stepfather. *The Children*, is a full-length analysis of the disintegration of family, and the emotional turmoil of the children.

Though Anne Tyler too disfavours separation and divorce in all the four novels her attitude to it is complex. The separation of Beck Tull (in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*) leaves a permanent scar on Pearl and her children. Alicia’s desertion (in *The Accidental Tourist*) turns her children into eccentrics, impossible husbands and provoke their wives to divorce them. Michael Anton divorces his wife Pauline (in *The Amateur Marriage*) thirty years after marriage when he himself is a grandfather. In *Ladder of Years*, Delia leaves her family for more than a year. Joel Miller is an estranged husband left to manage his teenaged son Noah. Nat, Joel’s father-in-law cohabits with Binky, a divorcee and marries her at sixty-five, and runs away from home. Brice’s wife has left him. This novel deals with a large number of broken homes. The irony is that the husband or wife does not want separation but it is thrust upon them. Anne Tyler takes a sympathetic view of their predicament and portrays their attempts to reunite with their families. Separation, even for a year, causes
disruption in Delia’s family. The family virtually disintegrates. Only after her return, normalcy is restored.

Anne Tyler deals with cohabitation, friendship between a young man and an estranged woman and dating of old people. She also deals with divorcees, their attempt to start life afresh with a new partner, their inability to forget their old spouses, comparing them with the new friends, their attempts to reunite with the separated spouses and a host of new problems arising out of their separation or divorce. Anne Tyler handles these issues with the thoroughness of a family theorist. While Edith Wharton narrates similar problems with a bias against divorce, Anne Tyler treats these unfortunate souls with sympathy, understanding their problems from different points of view including their own, which is crucial. For example, the question why Beck Tull deserted his family is answered by him at the end of the novel Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant. It is a fair enough treatment of the question of desertion and not a judgmental one from a narrow moral point of view. Here, Anne Tyler exhibits understanding and sympathy in taking sides with the weaker and the disadvantaged people.

Extra marital sex is a clandestine affair permitted to married women in the novels of Edith Wharton (The House of Mirth). On the other hand, in Anne Tyler’s novels, society does not take it seriously. Sarah knows that Macon cohabited with Muriel Pritcheft and asks him to his face, if he thought
she had slept with somebody when they were separated (The Accidental Tourist). While extramarital sex is scandalous (The Age of Innocence) in the novels of Edith Wharton, it is not considered immoral in the novels of Anne Tyler (The Accidental Tourist).

**Age and Sex Hierarchy**

On the question of age and sex hierarchy, children are obedient in the aristocratic families whereas the children of bourgeois families are rebellious (The Custom of the Country) in the novels of Edith Wharton. Similarly the conflict between husbands and wives are greater in bourgeois families than in the aristocracy presented by Edith Wharton (The Custom of the Country) As Anne Tyler deals with neo-bourgeois families children are more disobedient and indifferent to their parents. The wives question the authority of their husbands (Ladder of Years and The Amateur Marriage).

**The Endings**

The endings of the novels of Edith Wharton are characterized by failure in love and death (The House of Mirth), or acceptance of the failure in love and glorification of the existing order (The Age of Innocence) or failure in love and loneliness (The Children) Anne Tyler’s novels end in a truce (Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant) or choice of a new partner (The Accidental Tourist) or family reunion after a separation for one year (Ladder of Years) or remarriage
and family reunion with a runaway daughter after thirty years (*The Amateur Marriage*).

**Transformation**

Even in Edith Wharton's novels, transition from the aristocratic values to the bourgeois value is visible. Her portrayal of the Americans of the 1870s and the 1920s record the changes that have taken place in the course of fifty years. In the case of Anne Tyler too a similar difference can be perceived between the novels dealing with the 1980s and those about the turn of the twentyfirst century. The difference is the difference in attitudes to love, marriage, divorce and remarriage as well as the relationships among the members of the family.

Some of the protagonists in the novels of Edith Wharton achieve self-realisation. Lily Bart Selden and Newland Archer are wiser towards the end whereas Undine and Martin do not undergo a significant change in character. But in the case of Anne Tyler's protagonists there is a transformation in their characters along with self-knowledge. The Tull children make a reasonable success of their lives. Macon Leary, under the influence of Muriel Pritchett, is transformed into a sociable, warm human being cured of his fear and anger. Delia, after her one year stay in Bay Borough returns home a changed woman. Michael Anton, like Macon, matures into a more sensible man after his marriage with Anna.
Survival of the Family

Irving Howe declares that Edith Wharton "lacked the vocabulary of happiness" (18). Though there is a pervasive note of pessimism in her novels with reference to her attitude to society, especially, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, there is an undercurrent of the value Mrs. Wharton attached to the family. Nettie Struther (The House of Mirth) symbolizes this value. The sacrifice of Newland Archer and the efforts of May and her tribe to evict Ellen Olenska stress the importance of the family over the individual (The Age of Innocence). The painful life of Paul Marvell (The Custom of the Country) and the sufferings of Judith and her flock (The Children), needless to say, bring home the importance of the warmth and security a family offers. Raymond de Chelles and later Elmer Moffatt assure protection for Paul Marvell. So also Martin Boyne and later Mr. Dobree give the much needed protection to Judith and her siblings. The family, in these novels of Edith Wharton, survives withstanding the negative forces namely loveless marriage, separation and divorce.

Anne Tyler, essentially a domestic novelist, dramatizes the conflicts in a family caused chiefly by a midlife crisis of the protagonist. The Tull children, though brought up in a broken home, know the value of a happy home and struggle hard to build a family for their children. Cody resolves to provide his son Luke with the security and support he missed. Though Jenny married thrice she wanted to ensure a family free from disruption.
The Accidental Tourist depicts different types of neo-bourgeois families which complement one another. Love, and marriage find consummation in establishing a happy home and the novel relates the difficulties each character faces in achieving it. While Porter, Charles and Sarah fail to make it, Macon, Muriel, Julian and Rose make a tolerable success of their lives, especially in different types of families. Julian needs the stability of Rose, which is hell for Macon who finds a satisfying family life in Muriel’s home notorious for its clutter. Muriel’s son Alexander completes the Macon-Muriel family. This novel begins with disintegration of the Macon – Sarah family and ends with the promise of a new family for Macon.

Similarly Ladder of Years begins with the running away of Delia from her family and ends with family reunion. It also presents the marriages of Belle Front with Lamb and Nat with Binky. However, there is the broken home of Joel Miller with his son Noah and Adrian separated from his wife Rosemary. Marriages are likely to fail. Nevertheless there is always the possibility of reunion and the survival of the family. Delia returns to her family, brings order by reintegrating the family members who have left Sam Grinstead in the lurch.

Lindy Anton’s defection, the result of an unhappy family, is the crisis with which the Amateur Marriage begins. However, when it closes, Lindy has returned to the family fold as a grand mother. But the reunion and family
integration takes place after a series of unhappy events, violent quarrels, Michael’s separation, divorce from his wife, Pauline and his remarriage with Anna. This four generation novel enacts untold sufferings in epic dimensions before a harmonious extended family is established.

In this chapter a comparison between Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler was attempted in terms of their social milieu, creative process, theme, class, child-rearing practice, everyday life, dinner, family-society relation, three-generation novel, love, marriage, marital disharmony age and sex hierarchy, transformation and finally their attitude to the survival or otherwise of the family. From this comparison we can make some inferences which will be discussed in the next chapter.