CHAPTER III

SECTION 1

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant

*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* was published in 1982. It is the story of Pearl Tull bringing up her three children independently after the desertion of her husband Becky Tull. Her three children Cody Tull, Ezra Tull and Jenny Tull grow up in a very peculiar family atmosphere of constant tension. This novel is a searching study of a single-parent family. The jilted and deserted mother has a fierce and unpredictable temper. This novel is also a social document about what happens to a lower middle class family when the father deserts his family. The sufferings of the mother and the emotional scar on the minds of the children are long-lasting. In this novel, the children react in three different ways to their mother’s oppression. It is also an analysis of the behaviour of the children in troubled families.

Pearl the central character in this novel remained a maid till thirty with no prospect of marriage. Her friends got married, had children and invited her to baby-sit. Becky Tull, six years younger to her was a salesman working for Tanner Corporation. He fell in love with her and married her. He took her wherever he went on transfer. Everything came late for Pearl. Like marriage, pregnancy was also delayed. Only six years after marriage, her first child Cody
was born. His health was poor and his life was precarious. She wanted more children. Ezra and Jenny were born later.

Soon after marriage, Pearl started seeing the faults and weaknesses of Becky. He was an average salesman, a swaggerer who occasionally drank heavily. Being a man of weak ambition he did not make progress in his career. These and many other common spots disenchanted Pearl. Somehow or other, all his attempts to make her and her children happy met with failure. Her dissatisfaction with him and her silent protest against his failures drove him mad.

“One Sunday night in 1944, he said he didn’t want to stay married. They were sending him to Norfolk, he said; but he thought it best if he went alone ... I’m not an irresponsible person, I do plan to send you money (9).

Pearl could not understand him. All along, as a salesman, he could not be with his children more than once a week. As he was transferred frequently they had no permanent friends. Theirs was a lower middle class nuclear family of the neo-bourgeois period. The privacy of this nuclear family was extreme to the point of starved socialization, especially for Pearl. The absence of the father rendered it a broken, single-parent family. Pearl always carefully pretended to her children and to others that their father was away on business.
The neighbours were indifferent to his absence. The children who sensed that something was wrong with their father maintained an ominous silence. Pearl took infinite care to keep everybody in the dark to create an illusion that theirs was a normal family. When her old friend Emmaline stopped by, they were awake half the night gossiping and giggling like young girls. Pearl was on the brink of confessing the truth about her husband’s desertion, but on second thoughts restrained herself.

Beck Tull left his family twenty years after marriage, by which time his three children were fourteen, eleven and nine years old respectively. He left them once for all without any intention of seeing even his children. The character and looks of Pearl Tull changed considerably. The money Becky sent periodically was insufficient and she was forced to take up the job of a cashier in a nearby shop. It was a typical broken home and there was no chance of dating or remarriage for Pearl. She never even once thought of it. Their hand to mouth existence made life miserable for her children.

**Psychic Structure of the Tull Family**

According to Poster, the psychic structure of a family is the shaping spirit of children. The crisis in Pearl’s life initiates a series of painful events in the Tull family. The alteration in the character of Pearl determined the emotional pattern of her family. She became an angry woman. People called her “the witch of Calvert Street”. Her character acquired a hardness and toughness. She
became unsociable and did not speak much with the neighbours. She isolated herself and her children from them. The home became bleak and gloomy for the children after their father left them. They soon stopped referring to their father in their conversation with their mother.

There was an emotionally stifling atmosphere at home. They were not encouraged to mix with other children. She turned into a difficult mother. Her fierce and bad temper struck terror in their hearts. She was a virtual nightmare. The following is a slice of the everyday life of the Tull family when Pearl was at her worst:

Their mother went on one of her rampages. “Pearl has hit the warpath”,

Cody told his brother and sister. He always called her Pearl at such times. “Better look out”, he said. “She’s dumped all Jenny’s bureau drawers”.

After they’d put everything in order, the three of them sat in a row on Jenny’s bed. The sounds from the kitchen were different now - cutlery rattling, glassware clinking. Their mother must be setting the table. Pretty soon she’d serve supper. Cody had such a loaded feeling in his throat; he never wanted to eat again. No doubt the others felt the same; Ezra kept swallowing. Jenny said, “Let’s run away from home”.

“We don’t have any place to run to,” Cody said. (39 - 40)
Though this kind of unpleasant event was not an everyday affair, it was not infrequent and so it determined the emotional pattern of the Tull family. Working in a grocery shop was a strain on the nerves of Pearl. She had no husband to get angry with. Her pride did not permit her to seek support from her friends or relatives. Her children had to bear the brunt of her fury. When she was extremely angry she slapped the children left and right, and cursed them dead. “I wish you’d all die and let me go free. I wish I’d find you dead in and let me go free. I wish I’d find you dead in you beds” (42).

Authority of Parents

Parental authority is in essential part of upbringing according to Poster. Excesses in it will have adverse effect on both parents and children. At seventeen Jenny was alone with her mother. She could not forget how dangerous her mother Pearl could be as the passage below illustrates:

Jenny had seen her hurl Cody down a flight of stairs. She’d seen Ezra ducking, elbows raised, warding off an attack. She herself, more than once, had been slammed against a wall, been called ‘serpent’, ‘cockroach’ ‘hideous little snivelling guttersnipe’.... But she never felt entirely secure, and at night, when Pearl had placed a kiss on the centre of Jenny’s forehead, Jenny went off to bed and dreamed what she had always dreamed: her mother laughed a witch’s shrieking laugh; dragged Jenny out of hiding as the Nazis tramped up the stairs; accused her of sins and crimes
that had never crossed Jenny’s mind. Her mother told her, in an informative and considerate tone of voice, that she was raising Jenny to eat her (54).

Though Pearl did not always behave like this, and though there were times when she played with her children, the children, particularly Cody and Jenny did not retain a favourable attitude of Pearl. They were afraid of her temper. As they all grew up, they became secretive about their personal and social lives. Pearl was against their friendship with classmates or street mates. Their family was a single-parent family cut off from all social connections.

Cody and Jenny developed a sense of guilt with reference to their father’s disappearance. Was it because of them that he left the family? Was it something I said? Was it something I did? Was it something I didn’t do, that made you go away? These were the questions they wanted to ask their absent father. Beck’s disappearance created a void at home and in their minds. It was an absence that they always felt.

Although Pearl was emotionally starved, she raised her children with great courage and determination. She considered it a triumph to bring up her children without their father’s presence. The father was a superfluous person in the family. A woman could manage a family without her husband. She was proud of this achievement and wanted to show this to Beck when he came
back. In her heart of hearts she wanted him to come and see what she had done with their children. Pearl expected Cody to assist her in raising the family. The mother-children relations in this nuclear family fits into to the category of parental authority. Mark Poster speaks of in his *Critical Theory of the Family* (155). Pearl's shrewish temper struck terror in the hearts of the children. They were filled with fear, suspicion, watchfulness, and a sense of guilt. There was an emotional vacuum in them. Pearl saw a stamp of flaw in their mental make up and viewed them with scornful tolerance as they did not possess her efficiency or intelligence. As a woman of strong will and character, she dominated them like a termagant, restricting their movements, and even their friendship. If family is defined as a social space, the Tull family was a very narrow hampering space for the mother and children.

**Family and Society**

Poster stresses the importance of the family-society relation, a category posited by him. A nuclear family with a husband, wife and children is known for its privacy and intensity of feelings. It could be nourishing and supportive of its members. It could also be oppressive to all the members concerned. Pearl Tull and her three children suffered from the suffocating privacy of a prison-life. Pearl shut the door on society. She was furious if the children came home late from school. She was so different from other normal mothers that Cody was disappointed with her for her unsociable habits as the following passage shows:
Look at his two best friends: their parents went to the movies together; their mothers talked on the telephone. *His* mother...He kicked a signpost. What he wouldn't give to have a mother who acted like other mothers! He longed to see her gossiping with a little gang of women in the kitchen, letting them roll her hair up in pincurls, trading beauty secrets, playing cards, losing track of time — "Oh, goodness, look at the clock! And supper not even started; my husband will kill me. Run along, girls". He wished she had some outside connection, something beyond that suffocating house (46).

By the time Pearl realized her mistakes in life, chiefly her life without friends or associates, it was too late. She was a blind old woman on her deathbed by then. Pearl wanted her children to rest satisfied with their home-life starving them of social life. Cody brought his friends only when Pearl was not at home. Nobody knew how Ezra had struck a friendship with Josiah Payson or Scarlatti. As a deserted wife, she invested so much in her children that she was unwilling to share them with others.

**A Harmonious Family**

The unhappy family life of Tull could be contrasted with the poor but happy family life of Josiah Payson and his mother. Mrs. Payson was a widow living in a dark hole of a house with her only son Josiah whom she loved
though for others he was a lanky, long-limbed blubbering moron. Ezra valued the friendship of Mrs. Scarlatti and Josiah. They loved and admired him. When Ezra was drafted for war, he requested Jenny to visit them. On her visit to the Paysons she discovered a home entirely different from hers. She had supper with the Paysons. Their cosy life was like a fairy tale and her own life “seemed brittle by comparison, lacking the smoothly rounded completeness of Josiah’s life” (60).

**Stunted Character of Ezra**

Ezra, dissatisfied with his own home found a happy and homely atmosphere in Mrs. Scarlatti’s restaurant or in the home of Mrs. Payson who loved him as her own son. Mrs. Scarlatti also treated him like a son. Ezra’s aim was to recreate this cosy atmosphere of home in his own restaurant which he named as “Homesick Restaurant”. The one aim of his life was to host a family dinner at his “Homesick Restaurant”. Ironically not a single dinner was successful for one reason or other. It was either Pearl or Cody or Beck who spoiled the dinner and left in anger without completing it.

It was Ezra’s pathetic refrain to plead to his family to have one complete meal at his restaurant. The different meanings of the title of this novel are revealing. Home sick may mean ‘sick of home’ or ‘nostalgic’. 
Twists in the Character of the Tull Children

Parental authority and family society relation lead on to a specific emotional pattern in a family, according to Goode and Poster. The life of the three Tull children took three different directions. However divergent they might be, there was one common pursuit – in search of a satisfying life which they missed in their childhood. Barring perhaps Ezra, they did not carry very happy memories of their childhood. The following passage shows what Pearl thought about her children:

Something was wrong with all of her children. They were so frustrating – attractive, likable people, the three of them, but closed off from her in some perverse way that she couldn’t quite put her finger on. And she sensed a kind of trademark flaw in each of their lives. Cody was prone to unreasonable rages; Jenny was so flippant; Ezra hadn’t really lived up to his potential (19).

Who or what was responsible for the flaws in their character? Cody blamed his father for his own failures and was vehement in his criticism of his father as the following words prove:

And his father: he had uprooted the family continually, tearing them as soon as they were settled and plunking them someplace new. But where was he now that Cody wanted to be uprooted,
now that he was saddled with a reputation and desperate to leave and start over? His father had ruined their lives, Cody thought – first in one way and then in another (46).

Divorce and Single-parent Family

A.J. Cherlin dwells on the consequences of divorce and the overload of responsibility in a single-parent family discussed in Chapter 1. The emotional problems of Slevin, Jenny’s stepson accentuate Tyler’s thesis that children of troubled marriages have emotional problems. Children rarely forgive their parents who desert them. They long for the warmth, support and sustenance from the parents who has left them in the lurch. The separation gives a complex emotional twist which they find it difficult to disentangle.

Slevin was attracted towards whatever reminded him of his mother. He loved the church his mother visited. He stole Pearl’s old vacuum cleaner simply because it reminded him of his mother. It was a sort of mother-substitute. He had adaptation problem with his stepmother and stepbrothers and stepsisters. He had turned cynical and rude. He had problems at school and the school authorities suggested professional counselling. Though he liked Jenny, he was not comfortable with Jenny’s people. His reaction to Jenny’s account of Pearl’s sufferings is revealing as the following quote shows:
“She raised us on her own, you know,” Jenny told him

“Don’t you think it must have been hard? My father walked out and left her when I was nine years old”.

“He did?” Slevin asked. He stared at her.

“He left her, absolutely. We never set eyes on him again”.

“Bastard”, Slevin said. (151)

The marriage of Pearl was a disaster. She had no choice as no one came forward to marry her. Beck Tull, though six years younger to her, picked her up and called her a pearl among women. But what went wrong with her marriage? It is a crucial question raised by Anne Tyler on behalf of her characters. There is no simple answer to this question. Pearl received the shock of her life when Beck announced his decision to leave her. From then onwards she put up a bold fight in educating her children and managing household expenses. Why had her marriage failed? Her thoughts about Beck ran thus:

And Beck: Well, he was still alive, if it mattered. By now he’d be old. She would bet he’d aged poorly. She would bet he wore a toupee or false teeth too white and regular, or some flowing, youthful hairdo that made him look ridiculous. His ties would be too colourful and his suits too bold a plaid. What had she ever seen in him? She chewed the insides of her lips. Her one mistake:
a simple error in judgment. It should not have had such far-reaching effects. You would think that life could be a little more forgiving (19).

Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce and remarriage, Cherlin argues can be far-reaching consequences. Jenny’s first marriage with Harley Baines was a failure too. Like her mother’s, Jenny’s was also an error in judgment. He was a very methodical man to the extent of going mad about imposing his methods on her. She should have known about him earlier. “How did she overlook it?” Jenny questioned herself:

Well, she had overlooked it. She’d chosen not to see. She knew she had acted deviously in this whole business – making up her mind to win him, marrying him for practical reasons. She had calculated was what it was (sic). But she felt the punishment was greater than the crime. It wasn’t such a terrible crime. She’d had no idea (would any unmarried person?) what a serious business she was playing with, how long it lasts, how deep it goes. And now the joke was on her. Having got what she was after, she found it was she who’d been got. Talk about calculating! He was going to run her life, arrange it perfectly by height and color. He was going to sit in the passenger-seat with that censorious
expression on his face and dictate every turn she took, and every shift of gears (79).

Jenny’s mistake lay in choosing a bully who dominated her in every single act of hers. Her second marriage with Sam Wiley was also a failure. She had Becky through him. Her third marriage with Joe was a reasonable success. There were discordant notes with him too. Joe had five children of his own. He or she who first thought of divorce must accept the responsibility for the children. This was their tacit understanding which averted a divorce.

Desertion and its Consequences

Desertion creates broken homes. Goldthorpe argues that bitterness caused by desertion or divorce can be disastrous (229). Cody’s life was complex like his character. He never liked Ezra, Pearl’s pet. He played pranks on him when they were young. All his girl friends admired Cody until they met Ezra. No sooner did they meet him than they fell for Ezra. Cody was jealous of Ezra and even wanted to shoot him through his heart. Cody’s worst mischief was to court Ezra’s fiancée Ruth. It was like a battle campaign. Relentless Cody finally succeeded in winning her heart and married her to the dismay of Ezra. It was like the joy of winning a neck to neck fight. His happiness was short-lived. His was an unhappy marriage. He could not tolerate Ezra talking with Ruth. A son was born to them. They named him Luke. The little child bore many resemblances to Ezra, which made Cody burn in envy.
Cody was very successful in his business. He could buy any car he wanted. He worked very hard. Unfortunately, his son grew up like Ezra. Cody even suspected Ruth sleeping with Ezra. Once, Luke as a teenager ran away from home to meet his uncle Ezra in Baltimore. That was after a severe and serious accident which made Cody bed-ridden for weeks.

Ezra’s only girl friend was Ruth. Ruth was a country cook and they played like puppies. It appeared to Pearl that they thought they were the first and best lovers in the world. When Cody saw Ruth, he fell madly in love with her. As he was malicious, he could not rest until he won her away from Ezra. Pearl, if she had thought, could have prevented this marriage. Of course she warned Cody and asked him not to flirt with Ruth.

To Pearl, Ezra was “an eternal boy”. After losing Ruth, he preferred not to date with anyone. There was something monkish about him. He wanted to get through life as a liquid. His one unfulfilled desire was to celebrate one meal from start to finish, “I wish” Ezra said,” We could eat a meal from start to finish”. (84) He failed in several attempts to host the meal at his restaurant. He also failed to learn from it.

It seems fair to conclude that all these failures have their fount and origin in Beck’s leaving his wife and children. Why did he leave them? All the members of the Tull family asked this question at one time or other. Beck alone
could offer an answer to this question. He did answer when he came to attend his wife’s funeral. Jenny and Cody attended the funeral with their children, for which Ezra had arranged the funeral dinner in his Homesick Restaurant.

Beck had to introduce himself to the children as their “long lost” grandfather. He could hardly recognize his own children. He was self-importantly happy about his big family and the way his wife Pearl had brought them up all. He expressed the conventional view of a clan consisting of parents, grandparents, nephews and cousins. Cody corrected him and said that only two of them Becky and Luke, were his grandchildren. Cody burst out giving went to his pent up anger against his father thus:

“You think we’re a family,” Cody said, turning back.
“You think we’ve some jolly, situation-comedy family when we’re in particles, torn apart, torn all over the place, and our mother was a witch”.
“Oh, Cody”, Ezra said.
“A raving, shrieking, unpredictable witch”, Cody told Beck. “She slammed us against the wall and called us scum and vipers, said she wished us dead, shook us till our teeth rattled, screamed in our faces. We never knew from one day to the next, was she all right? Was she not? The tiniest thing could set her off. ‘I am going to throw you through that window’, she used to tell me. ‘I
will look out that window and laugh at your brains splashed all over the pavement" (218).

Cody wanted to settle his account with his father. He narrated an anecdote about his friend to drive home the fact that the father was the least important person in a family. In fact, he did not count at all. He also claimed that he himself was not a member of the Tull family, as he rarely met his brother or sister or his mother. The funeral dinner was spoiled by Beck leaving them in the middle. Everyone went in search of him.

When Cody spotted him, he continued to blame his father for leaving them at their mother’s mercy when they most needed his help and protection. Beck’s reply is the crux of the novel. It shows how much humanity has travelled from indissoluble religiously sanctified marriages to a free liberal society where there are easy divorces and even no-fault divorces.

To the great surprise of his children, Beck explained how he remained married to his mother and attached to his children though away from them. He thought about every one of his children and came to see them one evening and waited in the cold night for them. When he saw Cody grown up into an adult and saw him independent, he left gratified. Pearl had brought them up successfully. He left the family as Pearl was dissatisfied with him and saw nothing but his faults. To quote his own words:
“Oh, at the start”, Beck said, “She thought I was wonderful... I made her so happy! There’s my downfall, son... When your mother and I were first married, everything was perfect. She saw that I was away from home too much and not enough support to her, didn’t get ahead in my work, put on weight, drank too much, talked wrong, ate wrong, dressed wrong, drove a car wrong (222-223).

*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* covers roughly five decades in the lives of a lower middle class American family namely the Tulls. It also registers the transition from bourgeois to neo-bourgeois type of family. Pearl and her children suffer from the privacy of a nuclear family and an intensity of emotion that goes with it. We note the Victorian possessiveness of a mother in Pearl, and the urgent desire to succeed in life at any cost.

In a neo-bourgeois family there is a further break and disintegration. Its members are torn asunder for one reason or other. Here, Beck’s desertion initiates this process. Every member is a world by himself and individualism is carried further. Cody is critical of his father and is in turn criticized by his son Luke. But unlike Beck, Cody learns to value his family and places it above himself and makes sacrifices to keep it whole. The struggle between the forces of disintegration and integration in the family is made clear in this novel.
The value attached to the institution of marriage in the mid 1920s—Pearl and Beck were married in 1924—is missing two generations later. Though separated from Pearl for well over thirty years Beck considered himself married to Pearl until her death. His lady friends wanted him to get a divorce from his wife. He could have married six times over, had he wished for it, but no. He did not want to. After Pearl’s death, he thought he was free to marry again. Jenny, belonging to the later generation was married three times. That marks one of the pointers to the transition. Beck felt he was connected with Pearl and wrote to her only to win her approval for his various successes. His relatedness to her was unbroken.

Alice Hall Petry analyses the impact of Beck Tull’s desertion and Pearl Tull’s rampages on each of the three Tull children—Cody, Jenny and Ezra. Cody the most problematic of the three was a warped character. Petry argues that though he hated his mother, he did everything to win her affection. “So Cody frantically spends a life time trying to win the motherly love he already has… As an adult, he buys her the Baltimore vow house which she has rented for years. But Cody’s motives are always warped; he always is trying to buy her affection, to outmaneuver the non-maneuvering Ezra” (191).

Jenny, also had her share of Pearl’s violence and child abuse. It was a traumatic experience for her. Like Cody, she also wanted to get away from her home and mother. She become a pediatrician, married thrice and finally settled
in her hometown with her third husband and his five children. When she behaved like her mother slamming her daughter, her childhood returned to her. Only then could she understand why her own mother abused her. She changed and reformed herself consciously. Jenny still stands as 'a compelling example of a character's ability to outgrow a destructive background’” (199).

Ezra was the only one who reacted differently to his mother’s ill-temper. As an easy-going person from childhood onwards, he found surrogate mothers in Mrs. Scarlatti and Mrs. Payson. Luke Tull, the son of Cody Tull, took after Ezra in his yellow hair, gray eyes and love of music. He inherited his father’s way of moving his shoulders and from a distance could be mistaken for his grand father Beck. Besides physical resemblances, Luke possessed “clear vision and fundamental good sense” (205) a promise of hope and better life. “But Tyler at least holds out the hope that future generations could, like Luke, be able to break the cycles of ill will, guilt, and abuse (205).

Petry concludes that the Tull children, despite unhappy childhood, outgrew it and found family life not really so very bad. Virginia Schaefer Carroll, like Petry, notes the positive qualities in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant: “As one moves through the homes of families like the Hawkeses, the Paulings, the Emersons, the Pecks, the Morans, the Tulls and the Learys, one finds a recurrent theme: the presentation of kinship as both a nurturing bond and a source of isolation for the individual’” (16).
Joseph B. Wagner quotes psycho-analysts and argues that all three children Cody, Jenny and Ezra suffered from “father hunger” resulting in a flaw in their character (75). Elizabeth Evans, a Tyler scholar views the traumatic experience of the Tull children differently:

In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* all three of the Tull children suffer because their father leaves them. But it is only the rough-edged Cody who expresses his great longing for the absent father and is haunted by guilt. Cody dreams about his father and wonders on waking why his father left. ‘Was it something I did? Was it something I didn’t do, that made you go away?’ (47) This delicate trauma for the deserted child is universal and has found its way into the fiction of many (147).

Mary J. Elkins finds similarities between Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* and *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* at different levels including characterization. Addie Bundren of the former and Pearl Tull of the latter are angry women. Carol S. Manning’s comment on Pearl’s possible revenge on Beck is interesting. She made her husband return home “after 35 years of absence, to fulfill at least one of his obligations as husband and father” (116). When Beck expected a hero’s welcome, his children receive him with indifference. *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* is a three generation novel observes Margaret Morganroth Gullette.
One has to be balanced avoiding extreme stands. The Tull children and Pearl suffered because Beck left the family in the lurch. Ezra was less affected than the rest. However, Cody and Jenny struggled hard to make a success of their lives. Undoubtedly the condition of their family and children was far better than their own. They learnt their lessons from their parents, of course the hard way in the school of hard knocks.

In the last analysis, the novel asserts Anne Tyler’s long-term optimism about the family despite the sufferings experienced by the members of the Tull family.

There are desertions, single-parent families and sufferings. But how to re-establish links with people, bond with them and struggle towards making a happy home and a successful family is the thrust of the novels of Anne Tyler. The Tull children achieved tolerable success with their adaptability. In the next novel, *The Accidental Tourist*, we note how a dog-trainer teaches adaptability to the chief character in the novel.
SECTION 2
The Accidental Tourist

The Accidental Tourist published in 1985 brought compelling recognition to Anne Tyler. It is a typical Anne Tyler novel dealing with a stuffy and eccentric family, the Learys. The men of this family are 'impossible husbands'. Anne Tyler explores the causes behind the eccentric mental make-up of the Leary men, particularly Macon Leary. She presents the education and maturity of Macon under the training of Muriel Pritchett, a dog-trainer by profession and a typical Anne Tyler heroine who is resourceful and intelligent in handling difficult people and difficult situations.

One of the central issues taken up by Anne Tyler in the novels we discuss is the idea of starting life afresh. There is a crucial cause for discontent in the protagonist of each novel. The discontent of the spouses is due to what is glibly termed "marital incompatibility". It is almost impossible for the husband and wife to see eye to eye. In the course of fifteen or twenty years of married life the discontent takes a definite shape and the partners discover that they can no longer live together without quarrelling with one another. One of the spouses leaves home or asks for a separation and/or a divorce. He/she, then, decides to start life afresh.
Disharmony in Marriage

Disharmony in marriage is one of the features of neo-bourgeois life as pointed out by Mark Poster. In *The Accidental Tourist*, Macon Leary and his wife Sarah realized after twenty years of married life that their married life has become loveless. It became clear after the death of their son Ethan. Sarah wanted to divorce her husband. They were so different from each other that even in small matters they could not agree. When the novel begins, they were returning home after a holiday. It began to rain. When it rained harder she wanted him to stop driving. Macon replied that he had a system and wanted to act according to it. When it was absolutely necessary, he said he would definitely stop. Even in this small matter they could not agree with each other. Sarah was disgusted with his "system" and told him to his face so. She reeled out a list of occasions when they disagreed violently. They were opposed to each other in their attitudes and temperament. The death of their son instead of bringing them nearer drove them apart. Instead of mutual sympathy and concern, there arose bitterness and disappointment. The following conversation between Sarah and Macon illustrates their predicament:

"This rain, for instance," Sarah said. "You know it makes me nervous, what harm would it do to wait it out? You’d be showing some concern. You’d be telling me we’re in this together."

Macon peered through the windshield, which was streaming so that it seemed marbled. He said," I’ve got a system, Sarah."
You know I drive according to a system.”

“You and your systems!”

“Also”, he said, “if you don’t see any point to life, I don’t figure why a rainstorm would make you nervous”.

Sarah slumped in her seat.

“Will you look at that!” he said. “A mobile home’s washed clear across that trailer park.”

“Macon, I want a divorce”, Sarah told him....

The above conversation illustrates the serious consequence of the marital disharmony. We need to see yet wherein the husband and wife were disenchanted with each other. After separation from Macon, Sarah met him once in his favourite hotel to discuss their future. Macon had hopes of reunion with her. But in the course of their conversation she listed the eccentric weaknesses of the Leary family:

“They (The Learys) always go to one restaurant, the one their grandparents went to before them, and even there they have to rearrange the silver and set things up so they’re sitting around the table the same way they sit at home. They dither and deliberate, can’t so much as close a curtain without this group discussion back and forth, to and fro, all the pros and cons. ‘Well if we leave it open it will be so hot but if we close it things will get musty...’
They have to have their six glasses of water everyday. Their precious baked potatoes every night. They don't believe in ball point pens or electric type writers or automatic transmissions. They don't believe in hello and goodbye” (138).

**Upbringing**

It is pertinent to ask why the Leary children behave as they do. The reason behind their eccentricities, their inability to satisfy their spouses, their problems with strangers, their difficulty in finding their way back home and many quirks of character, spring from their upbringing and the character of their mother and their grandparents, a feature stressed by Mark Poster. When they were little children, Macon, his elder brothers Charles and Porter, his younger sister Rose lived in California with their mother Alicia, a war-widow. Alicia’s volatile character and mercurial activities conditioned the character of all her children, in an unexpected and adverse way. She married four men one after another and was wild in a flurry of activities as the following passage illustrates:

No, it was her enthusiasm that disturbed them. Her enthusiasm came in spurts, a violent zigzag of hobbies, friends, boy friends, causes. She always seemed about to fall over the brink of something. She was always going too far. Then she turned to something else, and something else, and something else. She
believed in change as if it were a religion. Feeling sad? Find a new man! Creditors after you, rent due, children running fevers? Move to a new apartment! During one year, they moved so often that every day after school, Macon had to stand deliberating a while before setting out for home (65-66).

Alicia married an engineer who travelled around the world building bridges. She thought it fit to leave her children with their grandparents in Baltimore. The children approved their distinguished grandparents who were thin and severe. She visited her children occasionally and found her children comical. “My God! How stodgy you’ve grown!’ she would cry, evidently forgetting she’d thought them stodgy all along”. (66) Often she told her children that they took after their father who was no more. Of course, they knew that it was not meant as a compliment. When her sons grew up and married, she apologized to her three daughters-in-law for what they had to put up with. Rose, their sister put it more clearly. She was of the confirmed view that Leary men proved impossible husbands.

Everyday Life of the Learys

Everyday life, according to Mark Poster, is an important category for a family-analyst. The consequences of Alicia’s reckless whirl-wind life were far-reaching. The four children grew up under the roof of their grandparents. They became very attached to one another. A strong emotional bond bound
them together which excluded intimacy with outsiders. “Their alienation from outsiders is portrayed as both comic and sad... Rose would rather cook for ‘the boys’ than stay with her husband Julian” (Carroll, 20).

They developed an emotional pattern very peculiar for an outsider to understand or appreciate. As siblings they thought and felt at a similar wavelength which strengthened their affection for one another. The intensity of their emotional bondage increased whenever the Leary men met with failure in their lives. In reaction perhaps to their mother’s waywardness, they valued dependability, stability, logic, regularity and a systematic way of doing things. They were cautious and careful in their dealings.

Apart from the habits listed by Sarah while accusing and condemning Macon, they had many more eccentric traits, which created a serious handicap in the business of living. They all suffered from geographical dyslexia. They found it difficult to find their way back, particularly when they were in a new place. They did not believe in answering the phone. They loved baked potato. They valued punctuality. They paid great attention to the choice of words and loved to consult the dictionary frequently. They were uncomfortable when people misused words. It was their habit to hold a debate before deciding even on a minor issue. They wanted to organize, systematize things to improve efficiency. In fact it was a religion with them. So much so, Rose Leary could
not operate a German camera with many buttons. She called it illogical. They were chilly by temperament. They appeared mysterious or queer to others.

Child-rearing plays a vital role in the emotional structure of the children. Freud’s remark on the intimacy of the family members is relevant here: “The more closely the members of a family are attached to one another, the more often do they tend to cut themselves off from others, and the more difficult it is for them to enter into wider circle of life.” (Poster, 14) The Learys substantiate this finding.

Marriage

Marriage and separation are the two central categories in the study of the family. Sarah was fascinated by the ‘mysteriousness’ and aloofness of Macon Leary when she met him first in a mixer party. They were both seventeen years old then. Macon generally disliked parties, dances and strangers. However he fell in love with the bubbly, round-faced, blue-eyed, copper-haired Sarah. She loved him for his mysteriousness, and he loved her for her liveliness. They dated and courted until they completed their degree and then married. It was not long before Sarah discovered that there was no mystery in his mysteriousness. It was nothing more than his chilly, unemotional temperament. Seven years after marriage they had a son. Ethan, their son, was killed when he was twelve by a gun-toter in a hamburger joint while he was on a camp.
Separation

The death of their son brought things to a head as discussed earlier. Twenty years after marriage Sarah wanted a divorce and left Macon Leary alone. "...Macon Leary leary of life cannot confront the experience of a lost son and a failed marriage" (Zahlan, 86). Already a dejected recluse, he suffered from severe depression after his wife left him. In an accidental fall at home, he broke his leg, which forced him to move to Rose's house, where his brothers Porter and Charles lived. The brothers were divorcees. Now he joined them as an estranged husband. They were not shocked by Sarah's leaving Macon. Rose said, "Everybody knows the Leary men are difficult to live with" (13).

Ethan had a pet dog by name Edward and Macon kept it in memory of his son. He brought it with him to Rose's house where he settled after the accident. Edward was a disobedient Welsh corgi which grew more and more unruly causing anxiety to the whole Leary family. While his brother wanted Macon to get rid of the dog, Rose suggested that a dog-trainer's help should be sought. Muriel Pritchett the dog-trainer came and tamed Edward after several sessions.

The story of the novel is the story of the transformation of Macon Leary into a sociable human being emancipated from his sense of unrelatedness under the careful training of young Muriel Pritchett, a divorcee and dog-trainer. She cured him of his depression, loneliness, fear of life and death,
over-cautiousness and over-carefulness in his everyday affairs. Edward represents Macon’s suppressed emotions which were complex. He had a guilty sense that he did not take enough care of Ethan. Ethan’s accidental death did not find a place in the logical and systematic thinking of Macon and so he found it difficult to come to terms with it. “...it is Edward who expresses the rage and confusion that Macon so carefully represses...Edward is the id in canine form” (Zahlan, 88).

The novel is also a study in contrast where the family life of the Learys is contrasted with the everyday life of Muriel Pritchett. The sharp contrast between the methodically organized, responsible life of the Learys with the disorganized, irresponsible but colourful and joyous life of Muriel in Singleton Street brings to the fore the two different model families of neo-bourgeois society and the positive values of one over the other. Although the contrast between the two is as sharp as black from white, the transition from one to the other is not impossible. Nevertheless, these two types of families despite their weaknesses, complement each other as illustrated in the fun-loving playboy Julian’s marriage with Rose.

In the case of Macon and his wife Sarah, they were poles apart. He was cold and unsociable. She was sociable and cheerful. He was methodical and systematic whereas she was disorganized and careless. In the words of Anne Tyler. “They were like people who run to meet, holding out their arms, but
their aim is wrong; they pass each other and keep running. It had all amounted to nothing, in the end” (10).

Twenty years of marriage could not bring them closer. Even the death of their son Ethan, and their sorrow could not bring them any nearer. Often she was critical of him and accused him of insensitivity and self-centeredness. There was rarely anything on which they could agree. When she left him, Macon became more and more depressed, suffered from loneliness and the hangover of separation. When he saw himself in the mirror, he appeared like a neurotic patient to himself. “Matters worsen”, Alice Hall Petry observes, “as his behaviour slips from eccentric to neurotic to compulsive” (213).

Macon was a writer of tourist guides for businessmen. He hated travel but wrote books on them explaining how to make one’s travel comfortable so that one never felt that he was away from home town. Instead of the name of the author there was his logo a winged armchair. Sarah criticized him that it was not merely his logo but himself. The accusation goes like this: “You’re not holding steady; you’re ossified. You’re encased. You’re like something in a capsule. You’re a dried-up kernel of a man that nothing really penetrates. 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” (142).
Everyday Life of Muriel Pritchett

One day she invited Macon for a dinner. Macon was unwilling to go as it was almost impossible for him to dine with strangers. He wrote a letter of apology, went to Singleton Street where Muriel lived to hand it over to her in person. After reading the letter, she ushered him in gently. His long conversation with her about his sufferings and conflicts was the beginning of a new relationship. Carroll’s interpretation of this significant event is as follows:

That moment of self-recognition allows him to go beyond his kin once again. And in his longest speech of the novel, the moment of vulnerability when Macon allows Muriel to hold him and listen to what it means to “experience... a loss”, Macon’s description of his life, his marriage, his grieving all builds to this revealing final line: ‘And now I’m far removed from everyone: I don’t have friends anymore and everyone looks trivial and foolish and not related to me.’ Muriel recognizes his need to be taken in, to be rescued, and to be reassured, ‘You are not the only-one’ (Carroll, 21).

Macon shifted his residence now to Muriel’s house in singleton street. Though a murky street with threats from muggers, Singleton Street was full of bustle and life. He started liking it and established an acquaintance with the
people of the neighbourhood. It was the first time he could relate himself to
strangers.

Muriel had a lot of friends who visited her for a gossip. Sometimes they
had breakfast with her or watched TV programmes. Muriel’s sister used to
visit her whenever she had problems with her parents. Muriel’s son,
Alexander, was a sickly boy allergic to many things. Macon took interest in his
welfare, education and taught him how to fix a faucet. Sometimes he sat with
him till Muriel returned home.

“Inside Muriel’s house is all the chaos and clutter which Macon
had so carefully excluded from his own life. Though he initially
feels that this neighbourhood is a foreign country. Macon
gradually comes to appreciate the vitality of the place and the
people who live there. He has a vision of his life in this place as
‘rich and full and astonishing.’ Of course, he continues his own
habit of attempting to bring order to the world by making an
effort to clean up the clutter of Muriel’s house and fixing some of
the things that need mending. But what is significant is that he
finally chooses her house and her way of life – more messy, but
also more vital and spontaneous and open to possibility – over his
old house and old way of life – more regular and more peaceful
but more muffled and closed off from possibility. (Shelton, 45)
“Muriel Pritchett’s life” notes Humphrey, “is a series of unplanned events and accidents, the antithesis of the controlled lives of the Leary family” (150).

Transformation

Muriel Pritchett tamed the unruly Edward slowly. Similarly she cured Macon’s fear and anger with her wit and wisdom. Macon oscillated between Sarah and Muriel unable to decide whom to choose. Though Sarah was separated, she was unwilling to leave him permanently. Macon changed his residence once again and went back home to live with Sarah. When he went to Paris, Muriel followed him to his great surprise. He fell ill and Sarah came there immediately to take care of him. However, in the end, he chose Muriel for the resourcefulness, unexpected possibilities she could offer.

Julian, a bohemian who was bored with his freedom and independence married Rose for the stability and order she offered him. After marriage Rose could not live long with Julian in his apartment. She preferred her own home and loved to cook for her brothers and take care of the old neighbours. Undeterred by this, Julian came to live with Rose. In this respect, he was the opposite of Macon who renounced his regularity and peace. Shelton, registering this interesting feature of the novel, observes that “he (Julian) desires the regularity and routine of a stable household. For Macon, the opposite is true; routine has become deadly, and he needs the richness of
possibility Muriel offers him” (45) Macon “loved the surprise of her and also the surprise of himself when he was with her” (212).

The novel ends on a happy note although it began with the accidental death of Ethan and the separation of Macon and Sarah. The family nurtures providing warmth and stability which could deaden one. Nearness and knowing each other too well as in the case of Macon and Sarah could drive them both mad. They irritate each other beyond endurance with their fault-finding nature. Their relation can be summarized in the words of Quiello thus: “Tyler’s men crave order with all the symptoms of addition, and her women defy it with the same intensity” (60).

In the journey of life, Macon, wanted safety, stability, regularity, and predictability. But accidents do occur despite all the precautions one takes. Macon was unnerved by his son’s death. For Tyler, accidents are a part of life and she asserts in this novel that one has to face them with patience and wisdom.

There is also the question of failure in marriage and separation after twenty years. Painful married life inevitability leads to separation. If it is the husband Beck Tull who desires separation in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, it is Sarah the wife who wants a divorce in this novel. Life does not end with separation or divorce. There is a life of rich possibilities
afterwards. Macon discovers it in Muriel Pritchett. The theme of separation is again explored in *Ladder of Years* where the heroine leaves her family for a year and returns a transformed woman.
SECTION 3
Ladder of Years

Published in 1995, *Ladder of Years* is a novel about a forty year-old run-away wife Cordelia Felson Grinstead. She was given to reading romantic pulp fiction and felt snubbed by the supercilious attitude of her husband Dr. Samuel Grinstead and the humiliating indifference of her three adolescent children Susan, Ramsay and Carroll. This oppression in her family was unendurable for her. Her suspicion that Samuel married her for her property was the last straw on the camel’s back. During a family vacation in the Ocean city, Delia left her family impulsively and went to Bay Borough a small town. It was an unpremeditated act. Without any idea of where she was going and what she was going to do for her livelihood, Delia left her family.

Marital Discord

*Ladder of Years* is again a study in marital discord and its consequences in the family of Dr. Samuel Grinstead. It is a study in the different familial situations Delia lived in before and after she ran away from her family.

At forty Delia Grinstead discovered that her children were indifferent towards her. They took her for granted. They were busy with their personal preoccupations and had no time or patience to listen to her. Delia accused her husband thus, when her suspicion grew strong:
"You had your eye on Daddy's practice, that's why", she told him. "You thought, 'I'll just marry one of Dr. Felson's daughters and inherit all his patients and his nice old comfortable house'."

"Well, sweetheart, I probably did think that. Probably I did. But I never would have married someone I didn't love. Is that what you believe? You believe, I didn't marry for love?"

"I don't know what to believe", she told him (44).

During a midnight visit to a patient, Delia accompanied Sam Grinstead. The patient's husband an old man referred to Sam's marriage with Delia and the above conversation took place while Delia and her husband returned after the visit. Impulsive woman that she was, Delia left her home in the middle of the night peevishly. She had a feeling that her children would not miss her as they were immersed in their own preoccupations.

Delia left the house only for a day. This was a kind of precursor to her next move when she left home for a year. Of course, she did not plan then to run away for a year. Delia was going through a mental crisis.

In every one of the novels chosen for study here, the central character goes through a serious mental crisis in his/her 40s or 50s leading to a separation from the family. The family circumstances make a major contribution to this
separation. The psychological situation prevailing in the family over a long period of time prompts this separation.

There were four different family-situation stages in the life of Delia. They represent four different types of family structures. They are:

1. Delia's life before marriage in Baltimore.
2. Delia's twenty years of married life in Baltimore.
3. Her independent life in Bay Borough after separation from her family.
4. Her return to her family.

We shall now study these four family situations applying the various categories and types of model families constructed by Mark Poster. Of these four, the second and third stages are discussed in detail.

**Family Situation before Marriage**

Delia was the youngest of the three daughters of Dr. Felson. She lost her mother when she was quite young and so her father petted her. Her life was cosy and comfortable. All the daughters assisted their father. It was a happy family.
Family Situation after Marriage

Twenty years after marriage Delia experienced frustration and dissatisfaction. All her economic needs were fulfilled and so there was no question of financial worries. Emotional pattern and psychological structure of the family form the key to the understanding of the family, according to Mark Poster. The indifferent teenage children, the supercilious and patronizing husband are the cause of the dissatisfaction of Delia. There were the remnants of bourgeois obedience in her. She took care of her husband and her children. She had no quarrels with her sisters or even her mother-in-law. Nevertheless, the sense of waste was so acute that she spent a lot of time in reading romances and in drawing vicarious pleasure from them. As she felt that she was virtually a 'nobody' at home she dreamt a lot.

Though aged forty, Delia day-dreamed like an adolescent, especially after her two accidental meetings with Adrian Bly-Brice. Her clandestine visits to Adrian came to an end with the shouts of accusation from Adrian's mother-in-law. It was a very trying moment for Delia. They were at dinner. It was an annual dinner given by the Grinsteads in honour of Delia's mother-in-law. Dinners play an important role in this novel. It was a rare occasion too, as all the members of the family were present. Delia's two sisters, her twin-nieces, Ramsay's girl-friend and her sickly large-eyed daughter were there. A cordial, but superficial conversation was going on. The telephone rang at that time. Her son Carroll answered it. It was from Adrian who mentioned about 'Time
Machine’. When Sam joked if Delia wanted to buy one, Delia wanted to attend the call, but sat down asking Carroll to tell the caller that they did not need one.

Then there came the unexpected visitor--Adrian’s mother-in-law, who asked Delia to leave Adrian alone. The following excerpts tell us a lot about marriage, problems in marriage, separation, extra-marital relations and how people viewed them all:

The woman asked, “Are you Mrs. Delia Grinstead?”

“Well, yes”

“I want you to leave my daughter’s husband alone.”......“You know who I mean! My son-in-law, Adrian Bly-Brice. Or don’t you even keep track? Have you collected so many paramours you can’t tell one from another?”...“That is a happy marriage you’re destroying”, the old woman told her...“They may have their ups and downs, like any other young couple,” she said, “but they’re trying to work things out, I tell you! They’re dating again, has he mentioned that? Twice they’ve gone to dinner at the restaurant where they got engaged. They’re thinking it might help if they started a baby.

Delia protested that the old woman was confused and declared that she was making it up. The old woman pulled out a photograph to prove her charge.
It was a Polaroid snap shot showing nothing but a patch of darkness. Dr. Sam politely and chivalrously saw her off. The younger people took the whole affair as a joke. Eliza, (Delia's sister) had her own suspicions about Delia. Sam casually enquired about it two days latter, when they were in Ocean City on vacation. He believed that Delia was incapable of adulterous affairs. She assured him that Adrian was no more than an acquaintance of hers. It appeared to her that he disbelieved her. The following crucial conversation between Delia and Sam explains what exactly was it that dissatisfied her in her relation with Sam:

"All right", he said. "Delia No, why don't you just calm down".

And he leveled the air between them with both palms, in that patronizing gesture she always found so infuriating, and turned away from her and walked toward the water.

Every quarrel they had ever had, he had walked off before it was resolved. He would get her all riled up and then loftily remove himself, giving the impression that he, at least, could behave like an adult? (89-90).

All the accumulated resentments and ancient hurts got revived in her. The above illustration is one among many such quarrels between the husband and wife. Her relation with her children also was not satisfying. She was no more important to them. Even the occasional visit of her mother-in-law and her conversation was a silent criticism and disapproval of Delia’s disorganized
household and her spend-thrift character. Delia was painfully aware of her limitations before Eleanore, her mother in law. Hence she saw to it that Eleanore did not join their annual trip to Ocean City. The annual dinner, hence, was a placating dinner. Her brief romance with Adrian Bly-Brice also failed as she learnt to her dismay that she was no more than a pawn in his relation with his wife Rosemary. On all fronts she was dissatisfied and frustrated. What could she do? She wanted to run away from her family and start life afresh. She did run away and enter the third stage of her life.

There is one significant theoretical reason behind the reaction of Delia, called Age and Sex Hierarchy in the theoretical formulation of Mark Poster (143). It is one of the categories that determine the emotional pattern of a family. Dr. Samuel, by virtue of his age, sex and upbringing by a hardworking mother, dominated Delia as well as his teenage children. Delia took revenge on them all by suddenly leaving them without any notice or warning. Delia’s relation to society was also marked by a sort of defiance tempered by an accommodating spirit, a circumstantial compulsion.

Family Situation at Bay Borough

The third stage of Delia’s life was determined by a new set of acquaintances like her landlady Belle Flint and her friends, the hotel keeper’s family her lawyer-boss Mr. Pompfret and finally the Millers. Surprisingly, Bay Borough was a city of runaways, deserters and estranged people as Belle Flint
put it. With a meagre salary as secretary to Mr. Prompfret, Delia started an independent life. She wanted to prove to others, especially her husband, that she was capable of managing her life. In this respect, Delia was like Becky in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* the husband who ran away from his wife Pearl and three children only to prove to her that he was worth something. She never wanted to leave her family for long. She was like a child that runs away from home for a short while knowing well that it would rejoin its parents soon.

"Underneath, she realized now, she had expected Sam to come fetch her long before then. She resembled those runaway children who never, no matter how far they travel, truly mean to leave home" (154).

Before long her name appeared in the Missing column of the newspaper and Eliza, her sister came to fetch her. Delia refused to go with her. She expected her husband to take her back. Instead of visiting her, he wrote a letter to her which terribly disappointed her with its obtuseness. At the same time she acted out the role of an imaginary, self-reliant executive-secretary in professional grey dress. She always imagined that people watched her and admired her.

She continued to read novels. The only difference was that they were more serious ones. At the beginning of her life in Bay Borough Delia thought
much about her family and cried at nights. In due course, she got used to her life at Bay Borough. It is interesting to note that her children, deeply engrossed in their work and everyday activities, did not bother much about her, at least in the beginning. Eliza and Sam wanted to leave her alone to recover from her depression. They believed that her independent life would be a kind of vacation for mental recuperation.

In about four months' time, Delia became an accepted citizen of Bay Borough. She did not talk about her past to any one and this made her popular. Soon she joined the Miller family as a living-in woman with a better salary. Her life was a great success as she was admired, loved, and respected by Joe Miller and his son Noah. Above all she became indispensable to the Millers. She achieved self-sufficiency, the ability to handle people and situations with confidence. She radiated warmth and a sense of well-being. People basked in her company. She was not only a successful individual but also a success in relation to society at large in Bay Borough. However, problems at home demanded her return at the end of a year.

**Family Reunion**

The novel is actually the education of Delia through ups and downs which make her fit to face and solve problems, accept responsibility as well as her own limitations. What is more, she became mature enough to accept her husband and children for what they were. It was an emotional adjustment for
her husband and children too. They learnt to respect her. Also, they discovered her central role in the family.

*Ladder of Years* illustrates the crucial role of the mother in the family, a role far more important than that of the father in its emotional well-being. The significant role of the father in a family is illustrated in Tyler’s *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* where the father runs away from the family leaving the wife and children in the lurch.

In *Ladder of Years*, we find Ramsay the son of Sam and Delia cohabiting with Velma a married woman with a daughter. The more shocking thing is nobody found fault with the behaviour of Ramsay. Society got used to such experiments and had become very permissive.

Belle Front, Delia’s landlady in Bay Borough, always preferred to fall in love with married men. When her attempts failed, she was so dejected that she agreed to marry Mr. Lamb a very unimpressive and uninspiring tenant-lodger. Obviously, she married him to escape loneliness.

Adrian’s experiment to reunite with his wife, was to flaunt Delia as his girl-friend. He hit upon this idea of “hiring” a girl-friend on the spur of the moment in a shopping mall. He carried on his romance right under the nose of his mother-in-law to expedite the process of reunion. His estranged wife
Rosemary had a boy friend by name Skipper. He was her accountant and she owned a catering firm named ‘The Guilty Party’ and sold “Sinfully Delicious Foods for Every Occasion”(6).

About his marriage with Rosemary, Adrian expressed it in the form of a Wildean aphorism thus: “The very thing that attracts you to someone can end up putting you off. When Rosemary and I first met, she was so ... cool, I guess you’d say, so cool-mannered I was bewitched, but now I see she might be too cool to be a good mother” (77).

Contemporary society is characterized by the alarming divorce-rate or growing number of broken homes or single-parent families. Ladder of Years presents a string of dissatisfied spouses including the central character Delia. The list given below is representative of the 1990s.

1. Ramsay’s girl friend is a single-parent with a six year old girl child named Rosalie.

2. Vanessa, the friend of Belle Front is another such single parent.

3. Joel Miller is estranged from his wife Ellie and is burdened with a 12 year old son Noah.

4. Belle Front was deserted by her husband. She was searching for a suitable husband.

5. Binky the girl friend of 65 year old Nattie was a divorcée with teenage sons. She married Nat who was old enough to be her father.
Marriage and Estrangement

In the neo-bourgeois society, marriage is viewed differently from that of a bourgeois society, which sanctified it as indissoluble. Mark Poster observes that young people of neo-bourgeois society approached marriage hesitantly. Anne Tyler’s characters took marriage with a pinch of salt. In the case of Ellie Miller, her attitude to marriage was extremely pessimistic. To her it was like an oppressive prison. She observed:

“Three months after our wedding”, she said, “Joel went to a conference in Richmond. I said to myself, ‘Free!’ I felt like dancing through the house…” “In a way, the whole marriage was kind of like the stages of mourning”, Ellie said. “Denial, anger... well, it was mourning. I’d go to parties and look around; I’d wonder, did all the other women feel the same as me? If not, how did they avoid it? And if so, then may be I was just a crybaby. Maybe it was some usual state of affairs that everybody else gracefully put up with” (315).

This attitude of Ellie is not an exception. There are many such characters in the world of Anne Tyler.

Hardened ego is an important feature of the spouses which prevents them from taking a flexible stand. Ellie realized that she was mistaken in her
attitude to Joel, her husband. She went to the extent of confessing to Delia that she should have stuck to Joel. However, when Delia suggested that she could any time get into her car and go back to Joel, ‘Never’ Ellie said, and she dabbed beneath each eye with her napkin. ‘I would never give him the satisfaction’, she said” (316).

This ego and combative spirit differentiates Ellie from Delia, who is willing to get back to Sam gracefully. This grace and maturity came out of her one year stay in Bay Borough. “She seemed to have changed into someone else – a woman people looked to automatically for sustenance” (227).

The novel Ladder of Years underscores the easy possibility of the nuclear family breaking into pieces. The privacy offered by the neo-bourgeois family is inadequate. It seems to be inherent in the neo-bourgeois family that the members of the family leave their homes. It is also possible that they may come back as it happens in the Grinstead family. Delia was the first person to leave followed by her sister Eliza, then her sons and daughter. Even Nat (Noah’s grandfather) leaves his wife and baby son in a huff.

Nevertheless, when there is a meaningful reunion after a separation, as in the case of Delia, family structure or man-woman relationship carries value. Delia was not a drab woman when she was in Bay Borough. This change and the possibility for a change towards better human relation is one of the major
themes of Anne Tyler. However, separation is not final. For that matter, even reunion is not final. Even after twenty years of married life one may separate and enter into a fresh marriage. Her view seems to be that there is no finality about marriage. It may last one's life time. Perhaps it may not. A separation or divorce may be followed by a second marriage and then a third marriage and so on. There is always the possibility of coming back to the earlier wife too.

There is disintegration of the family. But at the same time, there is a possibility for reunion. Anne Tyler highlights this conflict between the two forces which resolve in a state of "unstable equilibrium". In spite of the changes, and fluctuations, there emerges a positive reassembling of people into one or more families. Her recurrent thesis is that the family asserts itself like a phoenix born out of its ashes. Despite chaos and disintegration, the characters group into families.

This same theme of marital disharmony, estrangement is played in a different key in *The Amateur Marriage*. Family reunion is made possible in this novel too; but it occurs after a good deal of suffering.
SECTION 4
The Amateur Marriage

Published in 2004, *The Amateur Marriage* covers roughly eight decades in the life of Michael Anton, the hero of this novel. Like all other Anne Tyler novels it is about the extraordinary sufferings of ordinary people. The questions of marital incompatibility, shocked children of a troubled marriage, are sensitively dealt with in this novel. The focus is on a quarrelsome couple—Michael and Pauline, whose thirty years of married life were a long series of relentless fights with brief periods of respite—and the sensational life of their runaway daughter Lindy who disappeared at the age of seventeen and resurfaced after about three decades.

**Romantic Love and Marriage**

Michael Anton was a quiet twenty-year-old young man who had never had a girl friend. When Pauline was brought to his grocery shop with a bleeding cut wound in her forehead, Michael dressed her wound. World War II was raging and every young girl had a boy friend who was going to the war. Pauline had none. As a romantically inclined girl, she wished she had a boy to send. She chose Michael impulsively and asked him if he would go. He needed no persuasion. Without considering the fact that he had lost his father and brother in seven years, and without considering his grocery store, spurred by
his first love, Michael got enlisted. Knowing well that his mother would not
approve of it, he never told her about it until the last minute.

Michael fell in love with Pauline at first sight. They did not know that
their love was no more than the first flush of mutual attraction of two young
and immature people who did not know each other enough to marry. Michael
was in the army for a year and he was angry when Pauline referred to young
handsome soldiers in her letters. In a fit of anger he attempted to stifle his mate
who irritated him with his constant coughing. In what appeared to be an
accident, the mate shot him in the hip and caused a permanent limp. His
associates in the army called it "a million dollar wound". He was relieved from
the army.

Though they exchanged love letters daily and sometimes twice daily,
Pauline intuitively felt that Michael was not her type of man. She wanted to
state it clearly and end their relationship. The unexpected wound, sudden
release from the army, and Michael's immediate proposal after return to
Baltimore in quick succession did not give her the time to consider his
proposal. Though she accepted him, till the wedding day, she had many a doubt
about marrying him. Just before the wedding she had her misgivings as
reported by her friends in fragments in the following passage: Says she doesn't
know what she was thinking... Says all they do is fight... Says he never wants
to go any place and... Always so unsocial and ... such a different style of person from her, so set in his ways, won’t budge... (36)

Michael – Pauline’s marriage was one of the many slapdash marriages at the time of the World War II in 1942. Theirs was a romantic love of the bourgeois society. Romantic love has as many dangers as attractions. Both of them were twenty one years old when they got married. They were not old enough to foresee the perils ahead of them in this journey. Only later did he realize that he had no preparation for marriage. The irony in their marriage can scarcely be missed by the reader of the following passage: “They were such a perfect couple. They were taking their very first steps on the amazing journey of marriage, and wonderful adventures were about to unfold in front of them” (36).

Everyday Life of the Antons

Michael’s married life with Pauline was one long battle followed by long silence, guilt, reconciliation and fresh fights. Very soon they discovered that they were never made for each other. Their quarrels issued from their difference in temperament. He was slow, deliberate, unsocial, though kind, unforgiving whereas she was spirited, passionate, lively, social, fun-loving and forgiving. Both of them had mentally prepared a long list of each other’s faults and she would quarrel at the least provocation, sometimes without provocation too. Michael had the magic of making her hysterical.
On one occasion when he forgot to make much fuss about her birthday, Pauline became moody and unresponsive, and left the dinner table. Michael followed her and tried to assuage her hurt sentiments. In such moments, the more he tried to calm her, the more she shouted and exploded. Here is an interesting description:

He had no means of controlling her. However he tried to quiet her it only made her louder. “Sweet heart”, he tried, and “Poll, hon”, “Be reasonable, Pauline”. But she advanced, both fists clenched tight. She grabbed the baby, who was crying now, and she hugged her to her breast and shouted, “Go away! Just go! Just take your stuffy pompous boring self-righteous self away and leave us in peace” (47).

Often, Pauline was the first to forget the quarrel and appeal for reconciliation. She was changeable and fickle, in the estimate of Michael. Then it was Michael’s turn to be vicious and nasty. Anne Tyler captures their tone in all its subtlety.

There were many such violent quarrels. They had their bitterest fights in the presence of their three children Lindy, George and Karen. The bitter quarrels forced him to ruminate over his unhappy marriage. The perennial
questions raised by Tyler heroes or heroines are almost similar. Michael contemplated thus:

He wasn't certain, though, how much of Pauline's moodiness was due to pregnancy and how much just, well, things going wrong between the two of them. Oh, women were so mystifying! And he was so inexperienced! "What did I say? What did I do? What was it?" he always seemed to be asking. Did other men have this problem? Was there anyone he could discuss this with? If he somehow had the right words – the right touch, the proper instincts – would his wife be a happier person? (41).

Pauline also felt the same way, of course, much later when Michael left her permanently. She too found men mystifying and difficult to understand. The major difference between the two was that Michael discussed his problem with none, whereas she discussed it threadbare with her friends and sisters. Strangely enough their fights continued up to their thirtieth wedding anniversary. These endless battles, arguments, counter-arguments, rancour made Michael often feel that he should have fallen in love with one of Pauline's friends, Anna or Wanda.

Their long married life was no more than an amateur marriage – a vain attempt to understand each other and make a tolerable success of their married life. The title of the novel acquires significance in the context of their inability
to compromise after all the disasters they have faced together, in the context of several broken homes, divorces and remarriages around them.

They spent their lives listing each other's faults and weaknesses. Pauline had a very long list of Michael's faults which were the cause of her total disenchantment with him: In her view, he didn't get her jokes. He sacrificed her feelings for his mother's feelings. He lacked imagination. He was rigid and cautious. His literal-mindedness and his ponderous style of speech disappointed her. He was reluctant to spend money. He was suspicious of anything unfamiliar. He had a tendency to pass judgment. He had a limited understanding of his own children. He disliked all social occasions. He was stodgy in bed. He had a magical ability to make her seem hysterical. His patient, "Now, Poll", was infuriating.

But the real problem, setting aside this list, was that they were mismatched, Pauline thought. She wondered if all wives believed that they had chosen the wrong course as she did.

The bickerings, rancour coloured their everyday life to such an extent that the three children grew up in a hot and tense atmosphere. The throwing of cups, the smashing of plates, their shouts and sullen silences, her tantrums, his self-righteous attempts to pacify her took so much time that they hardly spared time for their children.
Upbringing of Children

Child-rearing is responsible for the future conduct of the child according to Poster. Michael did not go to church and his first daughter Lindy took after him as Pauline put it. She too did not go to church. Lindy was critical of everything including religion and humorously referred to Heavenly Comforter Church as Heavenly quilt. Himself an honest and upright man, he wanted his children to be like him. He was virtuous to a fault which made him inflexible and unforgiving. While Lindy revolted against all his principles, the other two children were quiet, desiring to show that they were not bad like Lindy. They were so quiet and obedient that Michael sometimes wanted to tell them “Show some life”.

The frequent fights between Michael and Pauline alienated the children from their parents. Lindy rebelled against them openly by always dressing in black, and flouting the curfews. Her poor performance at school, violation of school rules, her dubious group of friends, her tantrums indicated that she was not sufficiently taken care of. Warmth of feeling, affection for one another, particularly from the parents was missing conspicuously. The school authorities suggested counselling for Lindy. She was taken to a psychologist. There Lindy did not open her mouth. Once or twice Lindy stayed away on Saturday nights and returned on Sunday mornings. George and Karen who knew about this kept mum. One Saturday she disappeared after dinner. The parents knew about it only during Sunday lunch.
When Lindy ran away, nobody knew where she went or who went with her. A complaint was lodged with the police and they could not trace her at all. While the whole family was totally upset over missing Lindy, the police saw it as one among many cases of absconding teenagers addicted to liquor, or drug. Everybody hoped that Lindy would be back in a day or two.

Michael rightly judged that something was seriously wrong with their upbringing. However the parents blamed each other for Lindy’s outrageous behaviour. Pauline thought that Michael’s lack of faith in religion was a bad model for Lindy whereas Michael found fault with Pauline’s indulgence as the root cause of Lindy’s bad uncontrollable behaviour. Even George and Karen had a poor opinion of their parents. “Her parents were such a couple! So self-centered.” (121) Surprisingly, George and Karen knew better about Lindy and their generation. What with their knowledge of their peers, they thought their parents innocent and scary.

The agony and dread caused by Lindy’s disappearance never gave Michael a moment of pure joy. It was an agony which everyone in the family shared. However this did not bring Michael and Pauline any closer. Tyler writes: Yet it didn’t bring them closer together. You certainly couldn’t say that sometimes Michael thought it might very well be the end of them. Lindy’s defection, he imagined, was a pronouncement upon their marriage: you two are
putting on an act. You’re not really a couple at all. And this is not really a family (142-143).

Emotional Pattern of Michael Anton’s Family

The emotional pattern of a family issues from the parents. It depends almost entirely on how the husband and wife are related to each other and how they are together related to their children. The Antons used to celebrate the Labour Day with a barbecue dinner in the yard. Pauline on such occasions would work frantically like a possessed woman. Whenever Michael found her unmanageable, he would either withdraw or keep out of harm. This time he went out to give a check to his old employee Eustace. Pauline got mad with him when he returned and was angry till after the party was over. Here is a painful description of Pauline’s rage and how she taunted Michael:

“Even when your own daughter ran away from home”, she said,”
where were you? At the store! The everlasting store!”

“Well, naturally it was a weekday. Where would you expect me to be? While you, on the other hand, who had nothing on this earth to do but keep track of our three children – “

“Oh, that is low, Michael. That is low and base and unjust. You’re going to try and blame me for Lindy’s leaving? How about you? How about a father so cold and remote that his own
children can’t wait to get away from him and find some affection elsewhere? (185).

Michael often felt that the greatest blunder in his life was to choose Pauline for his wife. He wished he had chosen a sweet, and kind Polish girl. Pauline was an impossible woman. He asked himself, if he was really cold and remote without friends? Michael once rightly reflected that Pauline and he individually and separately were nice people; but together they were not nice at all.

While Lindy ran away from home because of her parents, George and Karen kept away from home. Lindy, with her reading of Albert Camus and with her new-fangled ideas on religion and love inflicted untold grief on herself and her family.

**Consequences**

The Anton family was worse than a broken home resulting in Lindy’s defection. She severed all connections with her family for more than twenty five years. She lived a hippie life addicted to all sorts of drugs, ruining herself and her son Pagan whom she abandoned at age three.

Lindy perhaps inherited the faults of both the parents. Apart from upbringing, the everyday life of the family created in her a rancorous
emotional pattern. The Antons were worried about Lindy’s defection. They made many guesses about it. Anne Tyler brings out the poignancy of the situation in studying this issue like a social investigator- turned novelist. She writes:

All these years, more years even than Lindy had been gone, Michael had spent wondering where they had made their mistake. Had they been too permissive? Too harsh? Or maybe their attention had been spread too thin among the three children. Or they’d showered Lindy with too much attention– focused on her too closely, expected more of her than they ought to. What was it? What? What? What?

Drugs, though. Drugs were so … chemical, so physical. They were really not an interesting explanation. The mystery of Lindy Anton should arise from something more complex than a more handful of pharmaceuticals (173-174).

**Peer Pressure**

Anne Tyler seems to discount the role of social pressure which has a telling, decisive influence on the minds of teenagers. The anti-war campaigns, sexual freedom, collapse of the family, communes like the kibbutz, hippies, drugs, iconoclastic books, greater permissiveness, loosening of traditional family holds, emancipation of women, feminism, the Korean war, the Vietnam war and a score of social events contributed to the making of a Lindy.
Lindy was not a lone example of a teenager running away from home. 'Smoke' and Ames went with her and then left her to her designs. 'Retreat' in San Francisco treated a large number of Lindys. Lindy did not remain at the 'Retreat' long. She left it and afterwards married an English teacher with two children. The case of Pagan abandoned by his mother is as painful as Lindy’s.

Consequences

Pagan at three was abnormally silent. He spoke little. Whenever Michael spoke to Becoming of 'Retreat', on the phone, Pagan came and stood by his side attentively. It took years for him to be rehabilitated. Even at twenty-five, after his marriage with Gina, Pagan was not keen on meeting his mother Lindy. He wanted to avoid her, even any reference to her name. He could not forgive his mother for abandoning him and throwing him away to chances.

Separation and Divorce

On Michael’s thirtieth wedding anniversary in 1972 George and Karen presented them with a photograph of Michael and Pauline taken just before their marriage. A dinner was arranged for the occasion. When they recalled their past, Pauline referred to several past events remembering one quarrel or another. George and Karen glanced at each other meaningfully. Michael and Pauline had their worst fight that night. They were preparing to go to bed. Pauline recalled how funny their life had been. Their crucial conversation is as follows:
"... So what if we fight a bit? I just think that proves we have a very *spirited* marriage, a marriage with a lot of energy and passion! I think it's been a fun kind of marriage!"

But he said, "It has not been fun".

She dropped her hand. "It's been hell", he said.

"Why don't you leave, then", Pauline said. He stopped speaking.

"If you are miserable, leave! If I make you so unhappy. If your life is such a torment. Go! What are you waiting for?"

He looked at her a moment longer, and then he snatched his car keys from the bureau and turned on his heel and walked out (195).

Many a time Michael had left her and returned soon after. But this time he did not. Their children were shocked to hear of a fight on their wedding anniversary. George found nothing wrong with his father's leaving. Anne Tyler's questions are:

1) Why is there a misunderstanding between the husband and wife even after twenty or thirty years of married life?

2) Why does it invariably end in separation and/or divorce?

3) Is there no way to avert this disaster?
The same questions are raised by family analysts and the findings of their investigations are presented in terms of percentage of rise in divorce rate, broken homes, children born out of wedlock.

**Separated and not Separated**

Interestingly, in spite of all their differences, disagreements, fights to death, separation and then divorce, there was something which bound Michael and Pauline together. With the telephone as her lifeline, Pauline spoke to her sister, “I don’t know what I’m going to do, Donna. How will I live? How will I get through the days? He is the centre of my life!” (212) She wanted George to intervene and patch up. George’s reply shows how their children viewed the separation: “One would expect him to realize as much after thirty years of this” (217).

Several reasons are attributed to Michael – Pauline separation. Anne Tyler’s paradoxical statement is, “Really their problem was that they knew each other too well now” (209).

Michael obtained a divorce and lived alone until he married Anna. Pauline died in a car accident while driving wrong. Michael lived up to eighty and still remembered with pleasure Pauline and her ways of speech. After Pauline’s death Michael and his children including Lindy, his grandchildren met once or twice a year. The quirk of Pauline was a staple subject of their
conversation. Their conversation was mostly superficial spiced with conversational crashes when Lindy spoke out her heart very plainly to the embarrassment of Michael.

*The Amateur Marriage* is a four-generation novel and similar to *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* in many respects. Michael Pauline unhapp marriage contributed considerably in the running away of Lindy. Theirs was more or less a broken home. George and Karen, the other two children too were dissatisfied with their perennial quarrels. They were like shell-chocked children.

As in the case of Tull children, the Anton children made a reasonable success of their marriages. Cody, the worst affected, was a warped character. Lindy, the rebellious girl, made a mess of her life to as much as her parents’ life by running away to lead an unconventional life. Her life was a series of misadventures—addiction to drugs of all sorts; reckless cohabitation with a man from Texas; temporary stay in an asylum for addicts; the ‘husband’ abandoning her and she abandoning her little son Pagan – finally ended when she married and settled with an English teacher with two children.

Lindy accused her parents for making their home a hell. But on her part, she caused incalculable agony to her parents as well as the siblings. The agony and anxiety of Michael and Pauline in particular ended only with the arrival of
their grandson Pagan. Her son Pagan could hardly forgive Lindy. So was the feeling of George for her.

Nevertheless, when Lindy reappeared after about thirty years it was a family reunion of sorts. There was no sentimentality or celebration about its though it was ritualistic as family get-togethers usually are. When they parted and bid farewell, they exchanged customary polite words: "Wasn’t this nice? and "Didn’t you think that went well?...Must do this again" (329). They met once or twice a year and Pauline was invariably one of the subjects of their conversation.

Lindy could still make a jarring note in their conversation with her acid remarks about their home-life in her childhood: Lindy had announced that their family used to remind her of an animal caught in a trap". (335) "Your were ice and she was glass, Lindy had told him recently, in one of their conversational crashes. ‘Two oddly similar substances, come to think of it – and both of them hell on your children’” (340).

Like the other three novels examined earlier in this chapter, The Amateur Marriage also ends realistically, – in the sense, the life of the chief characters continues with a better self-knowledge. After the turmoils in their family life, they achieve a better bonding with people, and a kind of unstable
equilibrium. One can confidently say that the family in Tyler’s novels does not go to pieces.

Michael’s life with Anna, his second wife was not free from tussles. But they do not separate. In his old age the memory of his past, especially the distant past and his young married life with Pauline warms his heart. Incidentally, like Pearl in Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, Michael cherishes the epiphanic moments of his life.

This novel, like the other three novels of Tyler, deals with the forces of family disintegration namely marital disharmony, estrangement, divorce and remarriage. Though these forces almost destabilize Michael Anton and his family, his marriage with Anna, the return of Lindy enforce a kind of family reunion and stability.

Marital disharmony and frequent and violent quarrels of the husband and wife poison the happiness of the children so much that one of them runs away from home, marries a nobody, becomes a drag-addict, leads a happy life and ends up as a mental wreck. However, the novel seems to assure that the future of the family is not altogether bleak. There is always a return to normally after a violent storm in the family. Lindy’s rehabilitation, Pagan’s recovery from shock, Michael’s maturity go to prove that there is always a ray of hope.