

## **11. Familial Fragmentation in Breathing Lessons by Anne Tyler**

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**Abstract:**

*The Novels of Anne Tyler stand apart from other works of fiction that deal with social humor and etiquette, as they explore the question of whether reality is internal or outward. The problems that everyday middle-class individuals face in their families and communities are portrayed by Anne Tyler. In Breathing Lessons, Tyler depicts issues with families. To become who they are, the characters distance themselves from and break up their relationships with their family. The author has painted a fascinating and lovely image of the kind of relationship that exists between parents and their grown-up children. In addition to her skill at depicting children and watching them grow into adults, the author strives to make her fictional characters sympathetic. as they appear to a parent or mother and contrast with the viewpoint of a conventional character. Numerous insightful and helpful theories about the purpose of subjective beings, especially in later life, are suggested by Anne Tyler's novels.*

**Keywords:**

*family, identity, and manners.*

### **11.1 Introduction:**

A new literary genre emerged in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, and women authors started penning novels that emphasized family issues, everyday life, and societal aspects. Novels of manners was the term used to describe this genre.

The author as well as a manners novelist One of the most well-known American authors of the 20th century is Anne Tyler. Critics have categorized Tyler as a Southern writer. Her interest in all things related to family, identity, and the home has increased in her later writings. This importance stems from the writer's interest and her passion for portraying real, honest people and scenes. Tyler's focus on the modern family and their relationships is noteworthy. The writer is also distinguished by her astute and high-resolution writings about fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, and children on the run.

The plot of the novel is more dramatic than any thrilling plot in a thriller film. The fact that *Breathing Lessons* portrays the middle-aged lives of Maggie and her husband, Ira, as Americans makes it significant. Over the course of their twenty-eight-year marriage, this family has managed to preserve both their unique identities and complex relationship. The novel *Breathing Lessons* revolves around the issue of modern American family dynamics. Within the parameters of this discussion, Ann Tyler highlights that a person's identity and early perception of it are generated from his interaction with his family.

One of the main components of postmodernism is how family issues are presented in Anne Tyler's book *Breathing Lessons* as the characters' own separation from their families as a means of forging their own identities and reducing blood ties. The lives of Jesse and Fiona, who separated and divorced, serve as examples of this. The relationship between family members appears to be eroding since Fiona, who was only a year old when she left Jesse with her daughter Leroy, earlier in life. As a result, Jesse finds himself in a pitiful situation when introducing himself to his own children because Leroy had not seen her own father in a number of years.

Its main topics of discussion are marriage, families, transitions, loneliness, conflicts, setbacks, and pain. The majority of Anne Tyler's books portray the problems that middle-class everyday people face in their families and communities. Maggie is the major focus of the book. Maggie makes an effort to build a relationship with her granddaughter, Jesse's daughter, whom she hasn't seen in years, following Jesse and Fiona's divorce and separation. Maggie wants to talk to her grandchild, so part of her plan is to get Jesse and Fiona back together. This serves as the primary driving force behind the action in the book, and it keeps going along this plot thread of Maggie and Ira's friendship. Ira is a practical and unyielding character, while Maggie is a sentimental one. There are numerous humorous arguments between Ira and Maggie throughout the book. Bail (1998), pp. 135–136.

As in the cases of Fiona and Jesse, the main theme of the novel is "Marriage is not always positive." Jesse, a fellow member of his band, and Jesse, a rock star wannabe, fell in love. Maggie made the attempt to get Fiona married and impregnated with Jesse's child because she was worried about her son's safety. However, Jesse's reckless behavior and his negligent handling of their relationships caused Fiona to leave him and his daughter, Leroy. Maggie worries about her son and daughter-in-law, and she even tells her son to stop being careless. However, Maggie can't solve the issue because Jesse doesn't care about his wife or his own children. Maggie overhears a woman talking on the phone in the car, explaining that her previous marriage ended in divorce and that she is getting married again for security's sake. Ira and Maggie are not in agreement with each other when they talk about their decisions, which causes them to feel uneasy in their marriage and often argue about various issues.

The more popular critical method of examining Anne Tyler's novels is portrayal of the American family. Tyler seems to have a fascination with families, as John Updike observes. According to Doris Betts, her family and instability will serve as a lifelong metaphor for her. Ann Romines describes how Anne Tyler employs the domestic storyline. In addition, pay close attention to her unsettling depictions of failed relationships, child abuse, and shattered marriages. According to several critics, her novels don't accurately depict the realities of modern families.

They portray sexual reality and violence in a different way, and her literature is seen as belonging to the comedy of manners because of this favorable portrayal. (Sheila et al. and Elizabeth Herrera 1997, 217)

Similar to the institution of the family, time is a major contributor to character degradation. A lot of people find it difficult to move on from the past and the effects it has had on their lives. They are still mentally imprisoned and have to actively choose to live in the present because of the things, concepts, people, and choices they made in the past. Nonetheless, one of Tyler's characters' strongest points is how unwavering they are in their refusal to waver from their own morals and beliefs, and how they stay away from anything that would tempt them to do so. On the other hand, this "strength" can also be a problem due of their inflexibility, which prevents them from changing even when the situation obviously calls for it.

According to Mary F. Robertson, novelist Anne Tyler explores internal struggle and family dynamics in her works. Family contact, whether it exists or not, is a key component of author Ann Tyler's writing.

According to Updike, destiny plays a major role in Ann Tyler's books, and her family frequently face the same decision either abandonment or reunion. Additionally, individuals that escape carry their pasts and memories with them, while those who stay are bad. (Kondapally 2011, Journey of 159 Women)

The narrative is broken up into three pieces, the first two of which tell the story from Maggie's perspective and the third from Ira's. Throughout the entire book, Anne Tyler has addressed comedy of manners by depicting embarrassing circumstances that arise from poor behavior. The most embarrassing incident was Ira and Maggie sneaking into Serena's bedroom and having sex during her husband's burial. It is improper for anyone to act in this way on a day of such sorrow.

Serena's portrayal on the day of her husband's burial turns out to be embarrassing when she plays a video of her wedding and invites her friends to dance and sing along to remember their time together. She also looked vibrant in her red, transparent outfit that was encrusted with a sunburst of rhinestones.

Maggie, the protagonist of *Breathing Lessons*, is the central figure centered around the book's events. After being involved in an automobile accident, Maggie becomes preoccupied with thoughts of her daughter-in-law, hearing her voice on the radio during a radio program. This is how the narrative begins. The fragmented nature of Maggie's character and her husband Ira's subtle ridicule are revealed throughout the book. Maggie and Ira leave Baltimore to travel to Deer Lick in order to attend Serena's husband's burial. Maggie intends to stop by her daughter-in-law Fiona on the way back from the trip.

Maggie is requesting Fiona's permission to bring her daughter Leroy to Baltimore to visit with Ira. Maggie starts to make incredibly erratic and convoluted plans. Many moments are essential to the plot, including the moment Serena witnesses Maggie having sex with Ira in the bedroom at the conclusion of Max, Serena's husband's burial. Because of their irresponsible behavior, Serena throws them out. As Maggie prepares to return Fiona and her daughter Leroy with them in an attempt to mediate a reunion between Jesse and his wife Fiona, things go out of hand. Maggie's schemes all abruptly backfire. After a verbal confrontation between Jesse and his wife Fiona and an altercation between Ira and Maggie, Fiona departs the house without saying goodbye. (Bail, 1998, 136).

Another small detail that is included to add a humorous effect to the book is that Maggie is given a shampoo coupon at the funeral so that she can write down any

endearing lyrics for the song *Serena* is telling. However, the situation becomes embarrassing when that coupon is given to a male supermarket cashier to be cashed and he returns it with a kind thank you. The characters of Ira and Maggie are used to convey the idea of humor. Ira whistles, and Maggie recognizes the songs by tone. She responds to his thoughts by interpreting the song lyrics.

The problems that everyday middle-class individuals face in their families and communities are portrayed by Anne Tyler. In *Breathing Lessons*, Tyler depicts issues with families. To become who they are, the characters distance themselves from and break up their relationships with their family. This is the cause of the declining blood cohesiveness ties, which postmodernism views as a crucial component that is amply demonstrated in this book. In Jesse and Fiona's lives, as their compatibility and closeness with their families decline after their separation. When Leroy is just a year old, Fiona abandons her husband Jesse and leaves him with her daughter Leroy.

The terrible and pitiful part of this case is that Leroy was unable to identify her father Jesse since he has not seen her for many years. As Ira is controlled by his wife Maggie and vice versa, his persona can stay unchanged. Ira has a distinct and antithetical lifestyle to that of his spouse Maggie. Ira, Maggie's husband, becomes upset and uneasy when she tells him about her dreams at night. Maggie also possesses the ability to see into Ira's thoughts and understand what's going through his mind. Maggie's personality tends to meddle in her kids' life. Although it is obvious to the reader that author Ann Tyler has a soft place for Maggie's character, she typically declines to step in. When Fiona finally leaves her, Maggie receives her score. (Bail 1998, 139)

Daisy and Jesse, who are the offspring of Ira and Maggie, have traits that mirror the dichotomy of their parents. Jesse's character is like his mother in that he is a dreamy young man, while Daisy's character is like Ira in that he seeks order and perfection. Ira presents kids as reflections of himself. Ira views Daisy, his daughter, as a strong individual who can handle responsibility. Ira worries that she will grow older too soon. Daisy's temperament was very similar to her father's. For his father, Jesse represents a failed youth. Jesse doesn't give up on his aspirations in order to provide for his family, which is why Ira is enraged with him.

The novel can be classified as a work on insecurities resulting from odd circumstances, parenting, and bereavement caused by unforeseen accidents. Despite the fact that these people employ a range of coping techniques, this thesis highlights

daily endurance as the ultimate triumph in these characters' lives and investigates the legitimacy of various answers. The difficulties Maggie Moran encounters in *Breathing Lessons* are merely a result of her children's growing up. Even if she does have good intentions, she frequently crosses boundaries to make sure that everyone in her family is happy with life. Maggie is adamant that she will be welcomed back into her granddaughter's life and that her son Jesse will reconcile with his girlfriend, Fiona. Maggie and Pearl are different in that Pearl quits all communication with Beck, conceals his correspondence, and stops thinking about his presence in her life. She also puts on a front that everything is well in spite of his abrupt withdrawal.

Maggie, on the other hand, finds it impossible to let go of the things or the people who have wronged her in the past, and she even pursues them in an attempt to restore the past. Both women have unrealistic expectations about the world they see through rose-colored glasses, despite the diverse techniques they try to heal their wounds or at least fix their lives. Maggie's only objective, however, is to get Jesse back together with Fiona so that they can reunite with Leroy, her grandchild, and heal Jesse of the unhappiness she has convinced herself he feels. Since Maggie is the family's matriarch and the only one who seems to think this objective is possible, the entire family is consumed by it. Nevertheless, Maggie frequently encounters resistance from Fiona and Jesse, the family members she most wants to assist, who are certain that what Maggie thinks is best for them isn't really the case.

The narrative format of the book switches back and forth between Ira and Maggie's points of view, reflecting their entwined lives. The narrative dives into their marriage, which at first seemed to be similar to Max and Serena's but eventually changed into that of two different people living together. Maggie is shocked to learn that their daughter-in-law Fiona believes she and Ira are not a good fit. Maggie's belief that her marriage was coveted by others is disproved by Fiona's viewpoint. Maggie regards their disputes as attempts to comprehend one another's points of view, despite their differences.

"*Breathing Lessons*" examines the cultural influence marriage has had on the characters as well as its historical relevance. It tells the story of a generation that was raised following social norms but later saw their offspring flouting them. The book examines the sorrow and difficulties that this generation is facing. Maggie and her friends are shocked by Serena's candor and independence in comparison to their own upbringing. Maggie, who is nearing menopause, is worn out from worrying about so many things, like her daughter going off to college and possible job losses at a nursing facility.

She also has menopausal symptoms and battles with body image. She gives in to her cravings for fried chicken and chips while trying to stick to a strict diet.

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Characters created by Anne Tyler are capable of learning to converse with people outside of their family, even total strangers. Ann Tyler's characters discover that they have to be aware of and skilled at adjusting to change, adversity, and experience. experiences that enable them to mature and purge themselves of anything that could endanger them by shrinking, dying, or attempting to exile them from the world. Her characters pick up the skill of appreciating novel experiences while navigating a challenging, intricate, and dynamic world.

Families are a significant subject for author Anne Tyler because of the way they interact and the things they do that piques her interest. The title of the book, *Breathing Lessons*, describes the breathing exercises the expectant mother does to be ready to give birth. Within its pages, the tale contains a variety of situations that are random, joyful, and illogical. In the book *Breathing Lessons*, Tyler advances to a new level of maturity while experiencing several joys that are not balanced against a number of painful memories. Rich (1988, 20)

This passage from the book *Breathing Lessons* was noted by Ann Tyler:

"I mean you're given all these lessons for the unimportant things piano-playing, typing... how to balance equations, which Lord knows you will never have to do in normal life. But how about parenthood? Or marriage, either, come to think of it. Before you can drive a car, you need a state-approved course of instruction, but driving a car is nothing, nothing compared to living day in and day out with a husband."(qtd. in Leeds, Gerard and Terrence et al 2008, 4)

Tyler highlights the idea that the past continues to influence the present. Memory continues to impact the characters' lives over time. Ira, for example, reminisces about his granddaughter and their familial links. The novel ends with Maggie going to bed, prepared for a lengthy vehicle travel and seeking comfort. Tyler shows that the connections we value are more important than memory itself. While memories are difficult, the characters must go on and accept life. According to Alice Petry, Tyler's novels, which are replete with disappointments, disintegration, and unexpected death, are nevertheless worthy literature for life because of the dignity and intelligence of her black characters. Barbara A. Bennett highlights Anne Tyler's sense of humor. She clarified that Tyler's use of comedy adds enjoyment to everyday people and their routines. (Gale 2001, 22–23)

Tyler believes that the family exerts influence over the person in both positive and negative ways. Every character in the book *Breathing Lessons* has a unique way of understanding what family means.

The way the characters perceive themselves is consistent with this style. Ira's persona feels that his family is in charge. Ira believes that in an effort to save the victims, his sisters' hands have guided him down a path that drowns them. Ira's perception of his family remains that he is being tricked by his dreams, which depict a joyful, affectionate, and boisterous family. However, Ira's perception of his family shows that they are a trap.

Regarding his profession as a photographer, Ira believes that the image is unchangeable, unmatched with his ideal perception of it, and immutable. Maggie's meddling in her daughter-in-law Fiona's life is portrayed as an attempt to maintain her family's unity. (Gale 2001, 14)

The funeral in *Breathing Lessons* seems to be a get-together of friends. After many years of being apart, friends unexpectedly reunite after Serena's spouse passes away. This novel is regarded as humorous. Tyler adds her humorous twist to the talks and the minutiae of daily living. JoAnn Dermott adds that everyone has changed, but in a positive way. The novel *Breathing Lessons* uses the powerful word *obsession* to describe the subconscious counterpart of resisting old age.

The book *Breathing Lessons* makes reference to the way marriage patterns and rituals are repeated, often taking the form of romantic jokes or passwords. The same expressions of support and condolence. According to Ira and Maggie, the novel's



title has a metaphorical connotation. teachings on breathing Life is the taking and giving of gasses. Similar to this, marriage involves a lot of giving as well as taking.

In one day in the story, Maggie and her husband, Ira, manage to sort through the various classes they have been living through for the past twenty-eight years. Maggie and Ira lead quite different lives; they quarrel frequently and reflect on their wonderful joys and small grudges.

Talking things out aloud doesn't indicate that Maggie and Ira are fighting; rather, it indicates that they are gathering information. Marrying someone means that you are sharing a sense of daily life with them. (Gale 2001, 14–15) The comedy of Anne Tyler is invariably tragicomic. Certain characters exhibit extremely pitiful levels of detachment. However, since none of the personalities suffer any harm or devastation, the circumstances and happenings are humorous. For example, the opening scene of the book, in which Maggie is hit by a Pepsi truck, is regarded as humorous because no one is hurt.

## **11.2 Conclusion:**

As a result, while the novel appears to be about a single day in the life of average middle-class individuals, it actually includes a number of flashbacks to earlier incidents that are brought up here. The central issue that the narrative revolves around is marriage. Everybody's views on marriage are diverse. Based on their experiences inside their society, each perspective is unique. In terms of postmodernism, the novel strongly defends itself with unique features that align with the postmodern interpretation of the work.

In this book, Tyler explores the characters' reluctance to stick together and sustain relationships in spite of their disagreements and differences in viewpoints. Maggie, for example, tries to keep her son and his wife's relationship intact, but she is unable to do so and continues to resist until the very end. Despite their divergent ideologies and inclinations, Ira and Maggie manage to stick together till the very end. Tyler attempts to explain readers' mistakes by presenting a variety of social scenarios, individual behaviors, and family-related issues.

The key theme of *Breathing Lessons* is the affirmation that marriage is not a prerequisite for happiness all the time. One may observe Maggie and Ira's connection in the book; they don't always have the same viewpoints and make different decisions. Due to their various situations, this object has given them both

comfort and instability in their marital lives, resulting in numerous arguments. Additionally, Jesse's life with Fiona: after their marriage and divorce, Fiona departs with her daughter Leroy due to Jesse's lack of accountability and his poor handling of their marriage.

Maggie, Ira's wife, ensures that nothing in life is like transformation that is genuine in *Breathing Lessons* 1988. A person can switch wives, but the circumstances won't alter. Maggie is totally at ease with the determinists who say that although we can have what we desire, sometimes we just don't want it. This implies that although we have the freedom to select from among our desires, these are only second-degree desires. Because these are external factors, the first degree's wants are encoded with forces outside the purview of Will. Maggie concludes by considering her capacity for change, which appears dire and unavoidable. Carson (2002), 305. Tyler's book *Breathing Lessons* centers on a day in the lives of Ira and Maggie.

Unlike many of Anne Tyler's books, the concept of this book—that marriage is a historical institution—and the book *Breathing Lessons* are more readily recognized in the community. because it captures the sorrow of a generation that reached adulthood at the close of the 1950s. He discovers that his children are growing up in a world where norms have been abandoned, despite having previously agreed upon and lived by them. Vogelker (1989) p. 174

Maggie and Ira leave Baltimore to visit their estranged daughter-in-law, who resides with her seven-year-old kid, and to attend the funeral of an old friend. Maggie questions her identity and her family, as well as the events, comedic turns, and adventures that have led her in this direction. These books, like all of Tyler's novels, highlight the complex differences that come with being a family member. Additionally, the author discusses astounding randomness and occasionally even finds humorous solutions. Carroll (1998) p. 87

*Breathing Lessons'* story structure mirrors the pair's image when the report splits the day's retrospective between Ira and Maggie. As in the twenty-nine-year marriage of Max and Serena, they are together, each taking a residence, and they remain together after that. This narrative structure actually implies that no one can evaluate a marriage from the inside out or even from the inside.

Maggie is shocked by Fiona's perception of her and Ira being incompatible, on the contrary they think that these differences, which are declared as a point of convergence between them:

"Just stop, both of you," she said. "I'm tired to death of it. I'm tired of Jesse Moran and I'm tired of the two of you, repeating your same dumb arguments and niggling and bickering, Ira forever so righteous and Maggie so willing to be wrong." "Why... Fiona?" Maggie said. Her feelings were hurt. Maybe it was silly of her, but she had always secretly believed that outsiders regarded her marriage with envy. "We're not bickering; we're just discussing," she said. "We're compiling our two views of things." (qtd. in Voelker 1989, 174)

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