

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
"The Accidental Tourist"

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AREA 1:

READING & THE STUDY OF TEXTS:

THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST

Chapter 1

GENRE

The Accidental Tourist is an American novel written in the realist tradition of fiction. The text differs from American literature that attempts to map the moral landscape of post-war America. Instead, Anne Tyler captures the moments that shape individual lives. Tyler chronicles human survival of everyday emotions. Her fiction is not historical and does not attempt to incorporate contemporary culture. Both her writing style and choice of subject matter is quite plain, yet intellectual. The inclusion of a male protagonist struggling with his emotions renders her novel appealing to males. *The Accidental Tourist* is both a subtle comedy and a love story, though the focus is on individual emotional growth and healing through the process of grief. In her optimistic novel, Tyler aims to remind her readers of the goodness in ordinary people.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURE

The Accidental Tourist, like many of Anne Tyler's novels, is set in Baltimore and is centred on everyday characters and the events that shape their lives. Anne Tyler takes the reader on a journey through pre 1985 Baltimore, but presents the universal quest to survive the unavoidable experiences in life, such as family, death and love. *The Accidental Tourist* consists of twenty chapters. The development of plot and themes follow the stages of grief: denial, pain, idealisation and transference.

In the first five chapters of the novel, the reader is introduced to Macon and the experiences that have led to his current emotional state. His transient childhood with a flighty mother and family life with his "stodgy" brothers and sister, as well as his marriage to Sarah and the death of their child, Ethan, have all contributed to his existence as an orderly, emotionally restrained man. When Macon breaks his leg and moves into his grandfather's house, though he feels content in being totally unconnected from the outside world, Edward's misbehaviour complicates the inertia of his life. When Muriel begins to train Edward, Macon is forced to look beyond the surface of a different lifestyle as Muriel relates her own experiences to him. Macon begins to change and his family view him suspiciously, however, Muriel and Julian, his boss, accept his personal changes and eventually Macon does too. Though he returns to his marriage and house for a short while, he ultimately discovers his increased personal strength and resolves to continue his different life with Muriel. His final decision in Paris is not an easy one, but provides conclusive evidence that Macon has completed his process of emotional healing.