

## Chapter IV

### *The Fire-Dwellers*

Margaret Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers* promises the desensitizing, the state of urban existence. Margaret Laurence in this novel represents the problem of Stacey MacAindra, the character, a middle-aged woman, who became a victim of the chaos in which she lives. Her perception of the muddled wide world hits her sensibilities from all sides. The setting is outrageous due to the violation of meaningless fierceness. It looks as though the universe is on the edge of brightness, Stacey is inevitably made to rely on her own core possessions for help, something to act as a bridge between the internal and the external world of her experience. Stacey's problem is that of the disregarded woman. The novelist utilises thoughts, memories and inner soliloquies continuously to keep aware of the action relating within the mind of the protagonist. Appropriately proclaiming the narrative technique employed by Laurence to terminate the bleakness of Stacey, Howells in "Weaving Fabrications" - *Women's Narratives in A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers* comments:

"Throughout her narrative, realism is interspersed with a vivid subtext of fantasy, which provides the breathing spaces for Stacey and is indeed the means by which she survives coming to terms with herself and the world she inhabits". (102)

Stacey, like her sister Rachel, is the product of a Manawakan upbringing, so she bears the same blemish as they mark that have been imposed by the early influence of an extensive puritanical setting which still values the pioneer and protestant ethic. As a young woman she escapes, as indeed the others do at some stage in their lives, but she has not been able to get completely away from this early instruction. She is always very much aware of what she ought to do, according to those standards, even though what she actually does is frequently quite different. The

difference in character between the extroverted Stacey and the neurotic introvert Rachel does not prevent Stacey from emerging, in her adult life, as just as isolated as Rachel.

Stacey MacAindra appears as Rachel's elder sister in *A Jest of God* whom Laurence portrays as a modern housewife who is caught in a swirl of innumerable challenging characters. She struggles with her children and husband who faces a crisis in his profession. She is intensely aware of herself and is a moderately intelligent woman who seems emotionally real. It is set in the background of communal discontent, she finds herself in the midst of a catastrophic world. Stacey fights to identify herself as a separate individual amongst the roles of daughter, wife and mother. She yearns to relish her life at her mother's place and at the same time does not want to fail to recall her role as mother to her children.

Stacey discovers herself and her family confined by the city's power constructions which steal the people of their much-admired identity and disintegrate the family. The accidents, crime, international disasters have become part of everyday existence and make mockery of harmonious family life. The violence described by media creates violence among the younger generation. Stacey is exaggerated by the images of war and violence shown on television and by newspaper headlines which interrelate with her motherly fears for the safety of her own children. Illusions of burning buildings, forest fires and Roman Centurions flash across in her central dream. Stacey fears that her children become victims of sexual violence, murder, accidents, or even war. These are very real fears arising out of her immediate environment. Moreover, the occurrences are reproduced unavoidably in the home situation. Stacey is submitted into a state of anguish by witnessing the behaviour of Mac's violent fits of temper, Ian's sullenness, Duncan's visions and Katie's

insurrection. Even the baby's inability to talk is a suggestion of the more essential problem arising out of modern-day city experience. Shahani in "Family in Fiction: *Three Canadian Voices*" opines:

"Laurence views the MacAindra house as emblematic of the vulnerability of contemporary living where the house, the city, the very world, are on the brink of disaster. Thus, in contrast again to the conventional associations of "home fires burning" are the fires both real and metaphorical that flare up in this novel". (148)

Stacey's separation is possibly even more terrifying than Rachel's because it occurs within marriage, which Rachel sought for a long time as a solution to her seclusion. Stacey is married, but still marriage for her is not a protection from the isolation which engulfs the individual. Stacey, like Hagar before her, seems to believe that the constant demands placed on her by marriage are contributing factors to her loneliness. An obsession with the past is one of the things that isolate Stacey from others because part of her problem arises from the fact that she cannot come to terms with her past. The Manawaka exists only in her imagination, but still has a hold over her. She continues to feel like an outsider in Vancouver even after having lived in the city for twenty years. Not only is Manawaka still her home, but she has never really come to terms with the period of life during which she lived there: "I stand in relation of my life both as child and as parent., never quite finished with the old battles, never let to arbitrate properly the new, able to look. Both ways, but which-: ever way I look, God, it looks pretty confusing to me." (47)

Stacey is unable to deal with the past and put it into a proper perspective, or to discover a clear perception of herself in the present. Instead, she persists in seeing herself in terms of the past. Stacey is unable to realize the changes in herself brought

on by the passing of time. Her dual role as wife and mother continues to seem strange to her, even after all this time, since she attempts to derive her identity from her previous experience. "I'm not a good mother., I'm not a good wife “ I don't want to be.. I’m Stacey Cameron and I still love to dance.”(134). She is having difficulty establishing for herself exactly who she is, she sometimes allows herself to be submerged in the lives of her husband and children: I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac’s wife or the kids. mother. And yet I’m getting now so that I actually prefer to have either Mac or one of the Rids along ..It's easier to face the world with one of them along. Then I know who I’m supposed to be. (95)

Stacey identifies the need to find wholeness in the tyrannical landscape of worthless violence and foolish disintegration. She feels lonely, confused, unfulfilled, desperately trying to find the person she once thought she was - a stray caught up in the universal search for identity. Stacey’s predicament acquires other, more serious levels of conflict and crises where even existence becomes an ordeal and the desire for accomplishment becomes ludicrous. The novelist herself in Woodcock’s work “A Place to Stand on”: *Essays by and about Margaret Laurence*, confesses:

“the heart of Stacey’s problem is that society forces so many roles upon her that she can find no clear line of continuity connecting one posture to another. By turns wife, mistress, mother, neighbour, all she knows is that she is expected to be beautiful, efficient, radiantly cheerful, and she is an abject failure in every department”. (18)

Stacey is dejected against the tight schedule of the domestic activities that takes up most of her valuable individual time. Nevertheless, she likes to establish a cordial relationship with her children but she cannot help working like her own mother. In this process she becomes an autocratic mother. She subjects her children to

the same reserves which she herself was subjected to. This she does in order to become a good mother. That Stacey's uniqueness is marked in her character as housewife and mother is obvious in her remark early in the novel:

“I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac's wife or the kids' mother. And yet I'm getting now so that I actually prefer to have either Mac or one of the kids along. Even to the hairdresser, I'd rather take Jen. It's easier to face the world with one of them along. Then I know who I'm supposed to be”. (81)

Stacey desires for a psychological relationship with her husband, but he does not respond to her. Their relationship is not characterised by trust and understanding. Mac is quiet, while Stacey is talkative. When Stacey wants to share her joys and sorrows with her husband, he asks her to leave him alone. Such disheartening discussion persuades in her the fear of being unwelcome and insecure: "can you imagine what it is like to live in the same house with somebody who does not talk or who can't or else won't and I don't know which reason it could be" (197). Stacey does not expect her husband Clifford MacAindra to help her in her family chores because he comes home very late. Hence, she has to shoulder the family promises all by herself. Even during his short stay at home, he is preoccupied with his own work which creates a dryness in their lives. He would just enquire about the children and then would proceed to concentrate on his own work. Their physical relationship was always under a pressure, developing a sense of dissatisfaction in Stacey. This created a negative feeling in the minds of Clifford and Stacey which in turn resulted in a negative impact in the minds of the children.

In a family relationship when temperamental mismatch becomes insoluble it gives rise to an incapacity to communicate. Speaking of the importance of verbal communication, Laurence in her interview with Michel Fabre, admits:

“This is true. Between human individuals much of our deepest communication is at a nonverbal level, but at the same time. This is the only way we have to exchange views; we can exchange emotions without words but we cannot exchange views. People can make love, people can hold and comfort their children, but in terms of exchanging our views of life and our responses to it we have to use words”. (70)

The lack of communication between the spouses is the curse of all marital relationships. Stacey is conscious that Mac fails to interconnect even with his father. He firmly believed, "there isn't any use in talking. It doesn't change anything" (59). The sense of separation generated by the impossibility of announcement with Mac widens Stacey's sense of crisis.

Stacey's role as wife and mother seems to require her to constantly ensure that everything is always all right. Mac needs to be reassured over and over again that she is all right, the children are all right, that life itself is all right. These two words are a kind of shorthand for innumerable unexpressed feelings, sometimes of concern, sometimes of fear, sometimes of a desire to be free of trouble. They are used as a mantra against the dangers of the outside world. Stacey recognises what they can be is “a total Lie. They are runic words, trinket charms to ward off the evil eye”. (292) As a woman, it is part of her job to provide a sense of stability and safety for her husband and family.

“You don't want to know. You want everything to be all right. Is everything all right. Stacey? Yes, everything is all right. Okay, I get the message. If that's the way you want it that's the way it will be. From now on I live alone in a house full of people where everything is always all right”. (169)

Stacey's strong desire is to have a warm thoroughgoing relationship with other convicts of the house so that they cease to live as strangers and become a "family" in an evocative way. But she lives in continuous dread like the familiar lady-bird, her house "on fire" and "her children gone". These fires, the creative fires of life, not the unhelpful fires of death, also lay buried in Stacey's heart. It is precisely this warm receptiveness that makes Stacey hopeful of reaching out to the core of her family so that the house can become a home. She dreams of the unknown ideal home and feels "there must be, there has to be such a home: out there in unknown houses are people who live without lies, and who touch each other. One day she will discover them, pierce through to them then everything will be all right and she will live in the light of the morning" (90).

Stacey is incapable to come to an understanding with herself nor is she able to accept a world which she perceives as chaotic and hostile. The title of the novel suggests her dilemma on several levels. The song, in her dream reflects Stacey's fear that providence will punish her for her sins through her children. Her brief extra-marital affair with Luke, tortures her with a sense of guilt:

"Lady bird, lady bird, flyaway home; Your house is on fire, Your children are gone'. Stacey becomes tense [...] I have to go home [...] it's something I can't tell you [...] But neither of them can say anything more. Then she goes. The car responds to her tension, and she drives fast, hardly seeing where she is going, her inner automatic pilot having taken over." (209-10)

Stacey encounters a young man by name Luke Venturi when she takes a lengthy drive to escape from her solitude. The intimate relationship with Luke, his

compassion as a writer and connected dominance as a man force her to recoil before him. She finds herself deliberating and quarrelling with him without any hesitation. The reserves and concerns which she experiences when she is with Max vanishes when she is with Luke Venturi. She forgets her children, her husband and everything else and relishes herself for a short while. Her upbringing from Manawaka renders her guilty even as she is consumed with the fires of lust. When Luke invites her to join with him to the North, the mother in her reminds her of her children and she gets back home, fighting the attraction to go with Luke.

Stacey feels, no one seems to care whether she is all right. In fact, in a moment of real insight, she recognises a similar need for reassurance in Luke... he wants me to say everything's all right. He, too" (201) So, there is no comfort from him either. She is on her own. As Stacey approaches her fortieth birthday, she looks back on sixteen years of life which have not really belonged to her at all. She has no status. As a result, she has lost her self-esteem. She constantly questions her success as a mother and longs for someone to assure her that she is doing a good job. Stacey's confidence being further destabilized by the infinite stream of articles which appear in women's magazines, all in their way definite to make you feel a failure- 'Are You Castrating Your Son?' (15), 'Nine Ways the Modern Mum May Be Ruining Her Daughter'(14), 'Are You Emasculating Your Husband?' (56), 'A Nervous Breakdown Taught Me Life's Meaning.' (165). It is all a matter of keeping score. She constantly promises herself to go on a diet to lose those ugly inches she has gained around the hips, those extra pounds which symbolise the loss of her youth and reinforce the low opinion she has of herself. This loss of self-esteem stems not only from what she considers are her physical shortcomings, but also from the fact that she feels herself to be uneducated.



Stacey left school at seventeen, took a clerical course in Winnipeg and migrated to Vancouver. Stacey also feels sorry for the fact that she is a small-town girl. After twenty years in Vancouver she still does not feel at home there. Only in the period of crisis she takes into the seedier parts of the city down by the waterfront - a tiny step out of the groove in which she is caught. Her eagerness to leave Manawaka is a reflection of what happened to countless young people born and educated in small towns all over Canada.

Stacey has gone to great pains to create a number of other real people too. The MacAindra children are all individuals in their own right, each one possessed of qualities which make him or her unique. Colour of hair and eyes, shape of head, height, age, personality nothing is forgotten. Each one is also a source of individual worry to Stacey. She fears for Katie as, on the verge of womanhood, she goes out into the world where so many traps are set for the young. Yet from her own experience at that age she knows that nothing she says will be of any help. Ian is secretive and unable to express his feelings which, like his father, he hides behind a stern mask of self-control. Slow, dreamy Duncan longs for acceptance by both his older brother and his father. She also feels unable to help her male children. Jen, at two years of age, still does not talk and Stacey is torn between the fear that her daughter is mute and the greater fear that she is being a fussy mother. Most carefully drawn, yet least accessible is tall, Lean Clifford, Mac to his friends, husband of Stacey, father of Katie, Ian, Duncan and Jen, son of Matthew, friend of Buckle.

Stacey recollects her husband as a guy who was "self-assured and... outgoing and full of fun and free from doubts, fond of watching football and telling jokes and knowing just where he was going" (170). At forty-three he looks much the same except for the webbed lines around his eyes and on his forehead. But he seems to have

gone “underground” (22) and to have lost his sense of humour. Now he is tense, over-serious, and touchy. He smokes too much because he has no qualifications and has had to make his living as a travelling salesman, a soul-destroying job which finds him home each week-end after a week on the road, too tired to even talk, and only yearning to be left alone.

Mac has a deep sense of failure that he has not done something that meant something” (256), a fact Stacey only learns when it comes out on one of the rare occasions when they are able to open up to one another. She had accepted that he “didn’t know what he was getting himself into, just as I didn’t” (23) when they married but was unaware of how deeply he felt his responsibilities and how heavy they weighed upon him. He is a man of integrity, his wife is surprised when he takes on the job with the rich, which she regards as a charade and a confidence trick. She is even more surprised that he appears to believe in what he is asked to do. In some fundamental way she is unable to fathom what he thinks and feels, partly because they do not talk to one another on any but the most superficial level. The novel is Stacey's story, we hear her inner dialogue, but somehow, we suspect that there is a similar, complementary dialogue taking place in Mac's mind.

Stacey will long again from time to time for encouragement that she is worthy. But they will rub along. They will still survive together. Marriage is a trap which they both accept. What takes place there that night, between husband and wife, is an act of consolation 'for everything that neither of them can help nor alter' (367). But Margaret Laurence has already spelled out what the new generation think of marriage. Katie says, "It's for the birds!" (368) Stacey makes the mistake of believing that she is a bad mother because she does not know what is going on in her children's minds, but as the novel progresses and she recalls her relationship with her own mother, she

comes to accept that is how it is - nobody knows everything about anybody; we instinctively know more about those we love than we think we do; we understand more when we try to stand in the other person's shoes. In her final summing up of her duty to Katie she recognises "that there isn't much use, at this point, in telling her anything. She's on her own, so help her. So, help her." (302) In a conversation with Cameron, Mrs Laurence declares:

"I feel that human beings ought to be able, ought to be able to communicate and touch each other far more than they do, and this human Loneliness and isolation, which obviously occurs everywhere, seems to me part of man's tragedy. I'm sure one of the main themes in all my writings is this sense of man's from his fellows and how almost unbearably tragic this" (105)

Stacey's parents, Niall Cameron and his wife, were so busy with their private dance of death that they did not see its effect upon their daughters. The author has Stacey wonder why Buckle's mother, a prostitute, allowed him to be born and why he in turn cares for the disgusting caricature of a woman she has become. Although, Mac and Stacey live in the sixties, they have inherited the traditional attitudes towards male and female roles. Mac believes that the man's role is that of provider, that the male must be strong and that a wife belongs to her husband alone. "I won't have anybody else touching you, see." (162) he grinds out when he believes Stacey has been unfaithful. The fact that he is unfaithful is quite another matter! He is constantly reproaching his wife for what he considers her coddling or spoiling of Ian and Duncan. He is terrified that they will not grow up to be manly- in every sense of the word. He fears their 'insufficient masculinity" (26) or that he might have "a pansy for a son."(27). At one point he blows out at Duncan with the words, "Okay- you're going

to get hurt; you're going to get bashed around; that's life. But for heaven's sake, try to show a little guts.”(118)

Mac sacrifices his honour to do a job he doesn't believe in, because of his responsibility to take care of his family. Stacey, on the other hand, recognises in herself an undecided arrogance to her beautiful daughter, Katie. She envies her youth, beauty, energy, freedom, because they all remind her of Stacey Cameron at the same age. Twenty-five years on she longs to be in her “teens again and to dance, because to her to dance is to be really alive. Dance hope, girl, dance hope”. (135) This is clearly portrayed in the novel when Stacey wears tight green trousers, purple blouse, gold high-heeled sandals, and full of gin and tonic, spends a preoccupied afternoon in the basement room dancing with recklessness to her old 78's. More effective is the brief scene in the evening of that same day when she stands unnoticed, watching her fourteen-year-old daughter dancing alone in that same room to her records.

Stacey's conversations with herself sometimes remark on what is happening. It more often reveals her constant hunt for any significance in her life. These reflections can be either in the past or in the present tense, and they swing wildly from mood to mood. In them, the key to know the real Stacey is understood. Her voice rings through the novel and there is a different sound for each of her many faces, public and private. At various instances the flashbacks of events from Stacey's past are offered which sparked off by some event or idea which presents itself in either of the other layers. Many of the time she goes back in time, before she was married, when she was Stacey Cameron, young, happy and alive. This reflects one side of her problem that she cannot accept that she is no longer that young girl. The flashbacks are set back from the margin rather like long quotations and are easily recognisable. There are italicised passages which represent Stacey's fantasies, daydream or nightmare. In Stacey's

nightmares, she sees her house burning and her family destroyed. Her waking moments are equally nightmarish. More than other article of furniture in the house, it is the television, the "Ever-open Eye", which brings the violence of the outside world into the house: "A man burning. His face cannot be seen. He lies still, perhaps already dead. Flames leap and quiver from his blackened robe like excited children of hell" (125).

Stacey is contemplative and she continuously questions her insights and involvements. She engages in a dialectic with herself. Often her self-doubt is moderated by her sense of irrationality and sometimes by a sheer, tough spirit of refusal. She is bolstered and supported by her own common-sense defiance of her demon: "I see the dead faces in a mocking procession looking at me, looking again, shrugging, saying there is stability for you. Do I deserve this? Yes, and yet do dammit, not yes." (7) Media reports force themselves into Stacey's realization and upsurge her wisdom of helplessness. Thomas in *The Manawaka Novels of Margaret Laurence* expresses, "Stacey MacAindra is a woman who looks at herself at all time with unremitting honesty and, who sees all of her negatives and a few of her positives." (119)

Stacey argues that God should come back to earth in the likeness of herself is suggestive of God within. This inner discourse occurs just before Stacey meets Luke. She argues:

"Listen here, God, don't talk to me like that. You have no right. You try bringing up four kids. Don't tell me you've brought up countless millions because I don't buy that. We've brought our own selves up and precious little help we've had from you. If you're there. Which probably you aren't, although I'm never convinced totally, one way or another. So next time you send

somebody down here, get it born as a her with seven young or a him with a large family and a rotten boss, eh? Then we'll see how the inspirational bit goes. God, pay no attention. I'm nuts. I'm not myself.” (168)

The words she expressed in the earlier reveal the continuity of time. Stacey very often criticizes that she is leading an aimless life. The recollections relate her to the past which seems at once remote and omnipresent. Her youth, hopes, plans along with her past is gone. It leaves her to be only an older, and an unhappier behaviour. She wrestles with ghosts that are powerful yet light. It is because she drinks and eats too much and is worried about trifle issues. She is able to trace the origin or the cause of her sins or faults. She becomes serious and quite understanding when she meets an old Manawaka acquaintance, Valentine Tonnerre. She hears the stories of another fire-dweller. She blames herself for the social, political and historical mistakes.

In *The Fire-Dwellers* the author gives Edna's wittiness to Stacey. What saves the latter's rationality in the end is her ability to see the absurdity in things. At moments when she is at her lowest recede, she is often able to bring herself back on course by some witticism directed at herself or the world or God. Her wittiness is mocking rather than comic, and she is quick to see the irony in events. Tess Vogler tells her, “I wish I had your way of Laughing at everything, Stacey.” (97). Stacey writes a letter to her mother and it is the same, word for word, as the one Mrs. Cameron reads to Rachel. But there is another letter written only in Stacey's mind, the one she would like to send but dare not because she thinks her mother would neither understand nor be able to help. In it she struggles “I don't know what to do. I worry. I get afraid. I drink too much. I get unreasonably angry...”. (149)

Stacey is having her encounter with Luke Venturi is similar to that of Rachel discovering love with Nick Kazlik. In a way the two men resemble one another in that

they are both of immigrant families and neither wants to become too committed. The time span in the two novels is almost identical - June through summer to September. The final twist comes when Stacey receives Rachel's letter informing the MacAindras of the Cameron's intention to move to Vancouver. Mac's reaction is "Holy Jesus that all we needed". (308) Stacey accepts that life will go on very much the same, but she has discovered that she has inner possessions to call on when the crises come.

"A few more years of this Life, God, and if I'm not demented, I'll have a hide like a rhinoceros. Odd- Mac has to pretend he's absolutely strong, and now I see he doesn't believe a word of it. Yet he's a whole lot stronger than he thinks he is. Maybe they all are. Maybe even Duncan is. Maybe even I am". (285)

Two distressing events acts as reagents to improve the relation between Stacey and Mac. Buckle's death softens Mac and he shares his feelings with Stacey. Then, after a petrifyingly close encounter with Duncan's life, Stacey sees that, like the child's second chance, her marriage has the opportunity for a revival. Mac shows he cares about her when he asks about her father's gun and "she finds it neither easier nor more difficult to explain now than she did when she said the same thing to Luke (279). She comes to know that her husband's nonverbal nature is not meant to shut her out. He shares his anger and grief with her about his job and Buckle. She and Mac make love as friends again, "gently, as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help nor alter" (279).

The valuable thing that Stacey entitles is correspondingly a unified self with both herself and her family as supporters. Because her stimulating self has been accepted and nurtured, Stacey is now willing to "mutate into a matriarch" (281) even if she cannot quite manage to be "a great courtesan" (281). I feel that Stacey surpasses the archetypal enclosure of marriage and ends on a more or less equal level with her

husband. She thinks, "I was wrong to think of the trap as the four walls. It's the world (276)." As well as hostile for her own completeness, she also realizes that Mac does not find his roles as father and husband any easier than she finds her roles.

If Rachel suffered from defective hearing then Stacey suffers from partial dream, for her inner world is a strange place full of graphic revolutions of the ordinary into the extraordinary, where hair dressers' assistants become butterfly priestesses and supermarkets are seen as temples filled with:

"Mounds of offerings, yellow planets of grapefruit, jungles of lettuce, tentacles of green onions, Arctic effluvia flavoured raspberry and orange, a thousand bear faced mouse-leg-ended space-crafted plastic-gifted strangely transformed sprouting of oat and wheat fields. Music hymning from invisible choirs" (64)

Her fantasies enable her to have the inner space which is required to come to terms with the world. Rachel's "I will be different. I will remain the same" is echoed less solemnly by Stacey: "It would be nice if we were different people but we are not different people. We are ourselves and we are sure as hell not going to undergo some total transformation at this point". (247). "The truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now. Although in some ways I'll always be her because that's how I started out. But from now on, the dancing goes on only in the head". (259)

Stacey is the first of the Manawaka heroines to interrogate and understand her association with God at a sensible level. Her own subconscious which is revealed as she talks to herself and to God in practically the same breath. Up to this point, Laurence has presented gods and humans as separate entities. Here the two begin to merge in a woman. Stacey becomes aware in the course of the novel of just how much



her own role as a mother parallels that of God. She too has fashioned children and become their source of love, guidance, and protection. She makes mistakes in raising them, sometimes unaware of, and sometimes hesitant to accept, the huge accountability that goes with the power inherent in mothering. Neither Stacey nor Mac has gathered the energy to access her or his respective sources of higher power. Ironically, though, both seem to reap benefits from their respective Gods and to attain limited accomplishment in the dominions of power they each respect- Stacey through magic, folklore and religion; and Mac through financial prosperity and managerial affluence.

When *The Fire-Dwellers* opens, Stacey is in a state of crisis where she must either learn to cope with her urban world and domestic life or abandon it completely. Stacey's work of mourning is figured as three distinct actions that are carried out over the course of the novel. The first involves Stacey's failed attempts at sadness of her world: in the early chapters of the novel, she spends much of her time anticipating the state of her life, without seeing a feasible way out of her difficulty. The second measure encompasses unambiguous departures from her everyday routine existence: she takes a ride with her husband's friend Buckle in his truck, attempts to have sex with him in his mother's broken-down apartment, and she drives into the countryside outside Vancouver and takes a lover many years her junior to her. These experiences are marked by their fundamental strangeness to her normal existence, and they serve to put her out of her boring and unacceptable life. The final movement in the work of sorrow is philosophical and evaluative: Stacey straightens her view of her life by justifying her grief by mourning effectively, in spite of the state of the present-day world and by articulating it to her husband.

At the beginning of *The Fire-Dwellers*, Stacey is unable to come to grips with her world, seeing no way out of her difficulty: she feels herself to be in a seemingly constant state of grief, and her attempts at working through this feeling are ineffective. Nora Stovelin "Stacey's Choice: Margaret Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers*" remarks: "Stacey is drowning in the confusion of contemporary culture" (36), and Verduynin "Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation" comments: "Stacey's experiences leave her powerless" (131). Stacey's life is marked by reaction to the world that surrounds her, rather than by active engagement with it, as Stovel notes: "Stacey's operative word is 'cope' -- something that she finds it harder and harder to do" (38).

The early sections of *The Fire-Dwellers*, chart the failure of religiously-defined, or externally-ordered mourning for Stacey and it defines her attempts at performing the work of sorrow successfully. Stacey faces the crisis of the rationality of her own voice and the validity of her emotional responses to the world around her, thinking of these feelings as "pre-mourning" and determining them as a condition of life in her era. When she tells the instructor of her "Aspects of Contemporary Thought" class that she had "worried for twenty years and couldn't seem to stop", she is told that "Pre-mourning is a form of self-indulgence" (15). Stacey mistakenly views her instructor as a voice of existing authority by giving her the power to justify her emotional expression. Stacey begins to feel that her nervousness with the world is unreasonable and that one should not lament the state of the world. However, Stacey interrogates these expectations about the rationality of mourning the world: "Why should I think it unbalanced to want to mourn? Why shouldn't I wail like the widows of Ashur if I feel like it? I have cause" (38). As soon as she has made this pronouncement, however, she resists: "Come, come, Stacey, act your age. That's

precisely what I am doing, God, if you really want to know, too much mental baggage... Things keep spilling out of the suitcases, taking me by surprise, bewildering me as I stand on the platform” (38).

Stacey feels trapped by her very existence. She does not trust her emotions, as her social world does not validate their expression. So, she relinquishes authority over herself and her deep feelings of loss at the world. Her sense of confusion at the multiple sermons that strike at her is represented by her thoughts as she tries to manage with the world outside her:

“Everything drifts. Everything is slowly swirling, philosophies tangled with the grocery lists, unreal -real anxieties like rose thorns waiting together the uncertain flesh, non-entities of thoughts floating like plankton, green and orange particles seaweed-lots of that, dark purple and waving, sharks with fins like cutlasses, herself held underwater by her hair, snared around auburn anchor chains”. (34)

These thoughts are set amidst the discrepancy that define Stacey’s life: her identity has been lost in the confusion of modern living, even though her life is, on the surface, a perfect one, for she lives the conservative peripheral life, with a husband, four children, and a lovely house. She wavers between these poles, with a misperception as to where she should situate herself: “What's left of me? Where have I gone? How to get out? This is madness. I'm not trapped. I've got everything I always wanted” (70). Beneath the surface of the suburban utopian fantasy, lies a much harsher reality where meaning is unsure and slippery: “I'm surrounded by voices all the time but none of them seem to be saying anything, including mine” (77)

As all Laurence's protagonists, Stacey also runs her life in the same way. She organizes it through her actions and observations. These two ways provide a means to understand herself. Though the movements are dull and humble they are important sensitively and representatively as self-confident deeds. Stacey has a relation with a young man, Luke Venturi who is an Italian. Venturi lives outside Vancouver in a peaceful, natural setting where only the cry of birds is heard. She finds comfort physically and mentally. Momentarily she escapes into the aboriginal backwoods of British Columbia. This was also the area of Buckler's, but Stacey does not surrender to the impressions that it inspires. There is no escape from self. She is stunned when she finds that Luke Venturi is only twenty-four and that she is as old as his mother. Her childish love simply approves her childishness.

The undesirable self-concept is the product of her small-town background and insufficient education. They make her feel substandard in a city like Vancouver. This attitude makes her doubting of the actions of Mac. Nevertheless, it leads her to fantasising by transmuting the ordinary into the extraordinary where hair dressers' supporters become "beautiful priestesses" and Vancouver street is seen in a more sinister way:

"The buildings at the heart of the city are barsh flashing with colours, solid, and self-confident. Stacey is reassured by them until she looks again and sees them charred, open to the impersonal winds, glass and steel broken like vulnerable live bones, shadows of people fray splayed on the stone like in that other city". (8)

Subsequently, her imaginations are of discharge to a new world or of the devastation of her children by detonations. Even these dreams, fantasies, reminiscences fail to content the longing for self-expression. Nancy Bailey in

“Identity in *The Fire-Dwellers*,” *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence* states: Stacey’s memories and fantasies are indicative of unconscious health and vitality but at the same time they increase her awareness of the multiple selves that go to make up one individuality, without a firm sense of self.”(110)

Stacey is intensely, endlessly, but also reassuringly conscious of the physical self. She is encouraged to action both by the needs of her family and by her own nature. Her obstructions almost subdue her only when her movements cannot be equal to the demands of the situation. She is beset by crowding anxieties and sufferings of the world. Mass media and a consumer-oriented society, which are the outgrowths of city life, challenge and portion family relationships. The more powerful mass communication becomes less powerful in the true communication among human beings. When Buckle tells Mac that he and Stacey had been to bed together and Mac accuses her, she is annoyed and affronted. Her action is, however, not hopelessness. She gets into the car, drives to the seaboard and meets a young artist, Luke Venture. Luke not only gives her physical satisfaction but listens to her tale of anguish also. This drive of escape from the outgrowths of city life gives Stacey the independence and joy for which she has been longing. She asks Luke to lift her as a leaf and help her journey to that fairy land where she lives as an unconstrained prisoner.

Stacey is suppressed by the dread of death. She fears that she might die or she might be driven into thinking of committing suicide that her recurrent irritations are caused by a tumour which would cause her death at the age of thirty-nine. Her fear of death is partly the result of her childhood and youth spent at her father’s home and the remembrance of his funeral. She also grieves from an elbowing pain under her ribs which makes her wonder if death will meet her “with insolent quickness, a growing fashion” (307). Death seems to loiter treacherously close to Stacey and her family.

Many incidents in which Stacey escapes death narrowly. One night, after an argument with her husband when she drives fast to the shore, she narrowly misses crashing with another car. Mac and her daughter Katie fear that Stacey will try suicide, like her friend, Tess. Ian barely escapes being run over by car when he runs on the road after a football. Mac's friend gets killed in an accident. Duncan's sinking in the sea seems his neighbouring encounter with death. Stacey feels as frightened as Duncan himself about the reports of demise in the newspapers, accidents, death in riots and due to starvation, all of which depict the world as a hate-filled world, where "everybody's living dangerously" (193). There is violence everywhere and Stacey is panic-stricken. Her panic is genuine as "anything that could happen to anybody" (212). She feels that it is very difficult to survive in a world in which one needs to work very hard.

Stacey learns to accept more or less uncomplainingly the things that cannot be changed. Moreover, she learns to recognise and use her powers to a substantial extent. This is due to her strength of character. She did not know how to exercise the strength, which she possessed. While other people well-regarded her skill and imagination, Stacey herself felt feeble and inapt due to lack of self-assurance and faith in herself. At last she is able to assert herself in the face of time, age, loss and death: "I can't stand it. I cannot, I can't take it. Yeh, I can though, by god, I can, if I set my mind to it" (289).

Stacey's sorrow is figured as encompassing paradoxical oppositions of loss. She overemphasizes the past and laments its loss, and she predicts the present as a world where traditional forms of comfort offer no pardon. Grief over a happy past is understood through remembrances of a time early in her married life when morals appeared likely and marriage was an encouraging state of existence. Her weakening marriage is definite as an unremitting struggle of separate individuality against male-

controlled structures of domination. Stacey also feels loss through her perception that the world outside her offers no opportunity for relief. She sees the city she lives in, Vancouver, as a cold and hard place where people are incorporated by the confusion of urban life.

The negative city scape represents the loss of ideal surroundings and is opposed by a perfect countryside that exists largely in Stacey's imaginative contemplations. The ideal of meaningful spiritual structures is cancelled in Stacey's rejection of the traditional manifestations of God and religion. The alternate forms of healthy spiritual living, as evidenced in her scepticism concerning the Rich a life formula that Mac appears to be so enamoured with. Stacey is apprehensive about her trust in a Christian God, but also in her fear that, even if God existed, he would make no difference. In effect, she feels sorrow for her own loss of confidence in the face of the dilemmas of the world, yearning for an existence where social and unworldly codes of behaviour provide authoritative and satisfying structures for dealing with loss. Stacey's feelings of loss are aligned along two distinct patterns: urban and rural life, existence in the city is related to a representation of unconstructiveness, and it is in urban life that she feels restrained. City scrapers are seen as individuals consuming and family life and marriage as restricting. Rural life, on the other hand, is equated with happiness in the past and with escape in the future. Stacey's happy memories of marriage all relate to communication with nature and life away from the city. It is to a rural space that Stacey escapes, in search of support, when she can no longer handle with her life with Mac and the family.

Stacey hunts for meaning in the world around her, but only finds further loss. The destructive effects of city life are described when Stacey goes into down town Vancouver and coincidences the city -- a place that is alien to her sensibilities. The

trip is originated by her need to get away from her internal duties. She is shelled with highlights and sounds that seem to come from all sides, rather than finding the means for performing the work of mourning. In this space, traditional forms of meaning no longer have certainty. Stacey wonders at the inscription on the war memorial she passes: "Their Names Shall Live Forever. . . Does It Mean Not thing to You. No question mark" (10). Competing with this vision of unquestioning conviction are other less convincing inscriptions that she encounters in the window of the nearby "Ben's Economy Mart": "Get a Load of This Bargain Only \$10.95, How About This at \$4.75? We're Cheating Ourselves at \$9.95" (10). This association of discourses causes her feeling that hierarchies of meaning have been lost: different levels of everyday discourse have uniformity, rather than one having authority over another. Where the inevitability of the soldiers' names remaining inscribed for eternity. Despite this, the signs manage to displace the lawfulness of war fatalities that the memorial is intended to signal the realigned hierarchies of value in the culture in which Stacey lives.

In contrast, the world beyond the city is more certainly determined by Stacey as a world of freedom and opportunity. It is a world of escape from the noise and movement of city and family life. She feels to get away from her world to a world that will be practicable to handle. Early in the novel she envisages the distant mountains that she sees from her house as a place of escape:

"Sometimes I look through the living-room window at the snow mountains, far off, and I wish I could go there, just for a while, with no one else around and hardly any sounds at all, the winds muttering, maybe, and the snow in weird sculptures and caverns, quiet." (15).



Later, when she thinks about Mac's job as a travelling salesman, she considers his travelling in idealized terms.

Vancouver is colonized by the psychologically deceased people. When Stacey witnesses an accident near her home, she dashes home to see if Ian and Duncan are safe even after knowing that the victim to be a young boy of seven or ten. This haughtiness of Stacey shows that she is like a woman who is full of nervousness and anxiety. She is like a person who lives on the fire. Stacey is isolated from herself because of the certain impressions which she develops viewing the promotion in the media. She tries to resist the greediness widespread in her society. She tries to act in accordance with her own judgements and feelings, but she falls a prey to the pressures of society.

Stacey's dread and worries are reared and continued by her ideas about womankind. She fears that she is surrounded by nothings all through her life. She has a very robust hold on her mind and imagination. She lives her life for others and exists only "as Mac's wife or the kid's mother" (95). Stacey's affair with Luke Venturi helps her to prove her individuality. The confusion which exists between her and Mac is further broadened by Buckle Fennick's lies about taking her to bed. Though she is not guilty she is not able to make Mac understand this. This concern becomes strong to Mac only after the demise of Buckle. It is because of this biased indictment of Mac, Stacey finds an excuse for her affair with Luke. Luke is young and fresh and is a welcome change to her after Mac. Her curiosity to know about a new man in her life is expressed much earlier in the novel: "I want some other man, someone I've never been with. Only Mac for sixteen, years. What are other men like?" (21-22). Stacey is not deprived of any sexuality. But Luke's relationship is "like the rain in a dry year" (174).

Stacey gives a wind in her configuration towards her twin countryside by recovering the negative aspects of involvement by initiating change at a personal level rather than at the level of society. She lowers herself to accept her own kind of sensitivity, her own ways of catching things or occurrences:

“I used to think there would be a blinding flash of light. Someday, and then I would be wise and calm and would know how to cope with everything and my kids would rise up and call me blessed. Now I see that whatever I am like. I’m pretty will have stuck with it for life. Hell, of a revelation that turned out to be. Will the fires go on inside and out? Until the moment when they go out for me, the end of the world. And then I’ll never know what may happen in the next episode.” (298-307)

Luke sees Stacey completely as a woman and she is temporarily freed of the roles wife-mother, housekeeper roles. Her relationship with Luke is unadulterated by the happenings of the daily life:

“I’d like to start again everything, all of life, start again with someone like you-with you- with everything simpler and clearer. No lies, No recriminations. No unmerry-go-round of pointless words. Just everything plain and good, like today, and making love and not worrying about unimportant things and not trying to change each other”. (189)

Her affair with Luke also serves as an auxiliary for her recollections about her love-life as a young girl in Manawaka. This situation helps her to enter into her married life with sureness. Later she realises that Luke is no less a substitute for Mac and that he does not offer any magical explanations to life’s difficulties as she expected he might.

Stacey is portrayed as a mother of four children who is incessantly thinking about them, their welfare and also about her husband Mac's lack of warmth for their son Duncan. Katie is her daughter, through whom she recollects her own past. This discloses that she occupies a middle position between mother and child.

Stacey has a strong motherly nature. Though she appears at times as a harsh mother yet her nature shows that she is very defensive. She tries to protect her son's need for privacy. This motherly concern does not stop with her children alone. It spreads even to Buckle's mother. She even goes to the extent of helping Mac's father whose confession she hears and to whom she is very substantial. Stacey's children occupy the world which is represented as the critical fire world. It is the world which does not have the qualities of philosophy and art. It also represents death and demolition by violence. Stacey does not have any accurate way of changing the external world.

Stacey's existing suffering is to maintain the actual part of herself. This is indispensable if a woman is able to value separate associations. It helps one to have a fulfilment of personality. There is a strong relationship between Stacey and her daughter Katie. This relationship demonstrates that this mother-daughter bond is essential to keep going the strong line of love from mother to daughter, from woman to woman. Stacey remembers the real part of herself. She even keeps alive the erotic self in her. For instance, towards the end of the novel she is closer to Mac than she has ever been since those honeymoon days when she could say "You know something, Mac? What? I like everything about you" (38). She recognizes Mac in a superior way and attempts to observe Mac's obscured need and his real strength. This offers renewed hope for their marriage. She finds her children spoilt and in trouble by the time Stacey arrives at a compromise with her married life. Her elder daughter Katie is

gone in an immoral way of living; her sons Ian and Duncan are abandoned by her unnecessary embracing; her younger daughter Jen who is two years old is unable to speak. Finally, it ends with her having a strong belief that at least momentarily, her family is more or less settled.

Stacey feels incapable to remain with her life as it is. She finds herself in a state where she wishes a past that she cannot return to, while she finds the present condition to be unsustainable: "I am not sure that I want to continue on living at all. I can't cope"(130). She fears that she will become one of the living dead by consumption herself into a lethargy, as her father did: "It's the ones who say good-bye before they're dead who bug me"(129). She wonders if her life will remain the same: "Sometimes a person feels that something else must have been meant to happen in your own life, or is this all there's ever going to be, just like this? Until I die" (120). The sense of a worthlessness in life, could be described as a sort of existential life, brings Stacey, to the point of anticipating suicide. Stacey's actions stalk from somewhere deeper than the sensible mind. The physical pain is endeavouring to penetrate her mind already numbed by the incorporating discourses of her life and, now, by alcohol as well. Stacey identifies the burn marks on her hand as 'My brand of stigmata' (130). A sense of feeling her life had not lived effectively and feeling disgraced, Stacey sees few options for her sustained survival.

Uncertain about how to reach out to change her life, Stacey appeals to her husband in a mental dialogue:

"Mac -- I'm scared. Help me. But it goes a long way back. Where to begin? What can I possibly say to you that you will take seriously? What would it need, with you, what possible cataclysm, for you to say anything of yourself to me? What should I do?" (130).

Stacey's sense that the appeal to Mac would only end in failure leads her to question her very existence: "I'm not sure I really want to go on living at all"(130).

Stacey's interpretation of God is rare. She continues to live her life without the help from God. Rachel basically regards God as a ruthless joker. God created man in his image, but Stacey is disordered as she forms God in her view:

"At the Day of Judgment, God will say Stacey MacAindra, what have you done with your life? And I'll say, Well, let's see, Sir, I think I loved my kids. And He'll say, Are you certain of that? And I'll say. God, I'm not certain about anything anymore [...] Maybe He'd say, Don't worry, Stacey, I'm not all that certain, either. Sometimes I wonder if I even exist. And I'd say, I know what you mean, Lord. I have the same trouble with myself ". (14)

Stacey repeatedly feels that she is living an unreal automatic life devoid of meaning and that she is wrought by a force beyond her control.

Stacey is principally stimulated by the decision unknown to her. The first occurrence in her work of sorrow where she actively discovers the areas of bareness in her life. Her encounter with Buckle and Luke are efforts of satisfying the emptiness of closeness with her husband. With Luke, Stacey returns supernaturally and materially to her youth and the ultimate likelihoods of the rural world. It is apparent in the experiences that Stacey's desire to perform the curative work of sorrow by substituting what she has lost with new relations. There is no sensible effort at the reimbursement of loss here. Stacey's first big step outside her tamed life is when she goes for a ride with Buckle. The drive with Buckle is an attempt by Stacey to find the lost elements of her marriage, such as caring and the ability to communicate effectively. In this arrangement, Stacey imagines a new and hazardous, but also frightening, life for herself. Buckle lives on the superiority when he drives his truck;

Stacey is captivated by that energy, and she enjoys being perceived as a dangerous woman by being related with him.

In *The Fire-Dwellers*, Mac shows the boys little fondness, thinking that it will damage them as men if he does. When Duncan has nightmares and Stacey gets out of bed to soothe him, Mac reacts negatively: "Leave him, You're going to ruin that kid, Stacey. Boy of that age shouldn't have his mother tearing in to see what's the matter every time he wakes up" (27). Mac does not console Duncan when he cries, but tells him "you're going to get hurt; you're going to get bashed around; that's life. But for heaven's sake try to show a little guts" (111). Mac's love is not unlimited, Duncan must learn the right responses in order to gain Mac's approval, and he laments to Stacey that "I never do anything right" (111). Stacey's connection with the boys is the opposite: she loves them unconditionally, and later the boys take it for granted. She comments: "Ian doesn't give a damn for my approval. He knows he's got it anyway. It's Mac's he needs" (56). The Westerns which Mac and Buckle watch on television assert the importance of a male, humanizing process:

"The Ever-Open Eye. Western serial. Sing yippee for the days of the mad frontier. Boys were sure men in those days all right and men were sure giants. How could they miss? Not with them dandy six shooters. Tak! Tak! Splat. Instant power. Who needs women?" (57)

Stacey is conscious of the dreadful probable essential in the civilization, and her apparitions of the future of this civilization: Stacey looks at the buildings downtown, "brash, flashing with colours, solid and self-confident" (14) and "sees them charred, open to the impersonal winds, glass and steel broken like vulnerable live bones, shadows of people frog-splayed on the stone like in that other city" (14). "The woman was holding a child about eighteen months old and she was trying to

pluck something away from the scorch-spreading area on the child's face". (90).

Throughout the novel, Stacey is captivated in the diffident, intermediate nature of the subject-position into which she is consistent by the society. Her relationship with Mac and her position are unyielding by the division between public and private spaces.

Mac's life takes place within the public compass, Stacey's within the private sphere, and communication between the two is difficult and for the most part artificial. Stacey notes that Mac "doesn't want to know anything difficult about me or the kids.

Nothing. Okay, and now I don't want to tell him, either" (193).

Stacey has an unconfirmed position in the order of family power as the head of the private area. During family arguments Stacey finds herself "running interference again, never knowing if rightly or wrongly, or whose side I'm on or why I should be on anybody's side" (55). It is Stacey's task to "keep these kids quiet for one minute"(55), but it is Mac who possesses the authority that from Stacey's lips "sounds corny" (55). Stacey notes that "I stand in relation to my life both as a child and as a parent" (46). Stacey's position is unresolved not just in terms of family power, but also in terms of authority in society in general. In one of her dreams, Stacey sees the world on fire, and "all the men around have to go and fight it. That is the law of the land.... But only the men are forced to go. The children have no business there" (30). Stacey, neither a man nor a child, is unsure on a connection, forbidden to join in the fight to douse the fire and is incapable to lead her children to a better world. She is helpless either to outcome a change in civilization or to escape it.

Stacey is conscious of the socially mediated in the past allocation nature of the family romance. The fragment in the description between Stacey's inner decision and outer speech often prove that, while she may be externally compatible to her role, she is sceptical about its status as the universal structure of desire. When displaying

affection for her boys, Stacey consciously “restricts herself to putting a hand on their hair” (17), having read a magazine article entitled 'Are You Castrating Your Son?' (17). While troubled by these types of articles, Stacey is doubtful of them, and comments that the article "Nine Ways the Modern Mum May Be Ruining Her Daughter" (17) was probably written by someone in a “Jazzy office stuffed with plastic plants and never a daughter in sight” (17).

Stacey expresses an additional estimate and structure of desire for herself, her son, and society, based on wishes. She ratifies when Mac expends Duncan's emotions to the masculine ideal. When Duncan cries because he has cut himself on a rusty nail, Mac actively expresses his disapproval, and Stacey thinks “I could kill you, Mac. I could stab you to the very heart right this minute” (110). She questions the masculine ideal to which Mac is forcing Duncan to conform. She knows that “the one thought Mac can't bear” (28) is “the insufficient masculinity of one of his sons” (28), but still thinks that “lots worse things could happen to them than to be queer, and that when they're away and on their own, in some ways it wouldn't matter to me at all who they held as long as there was someone and they could bring themselves to cry out” (28).

Stacey's descriptions express her perception of the present civilization as one in which “the Roman legions are marching” (85) and “strange things are happening, and the skeletal horsemen ride” (85). The narratives exemplify Stacey's desire to “pierce through” (85) to the “unknown houses” (85) in which live “people who live without lies” (85). Throughout the novel, the alternative structures of desire that Stacey imagines remain within her own private sphere: she is quietened by the professor from whom she is taking the Creek Classics course, by Mac, and by her own historical circumstance. The silencing is often affected covertly by the ever-present threat of institutional cruelty. Stacey's urge to explain to the young girl on the



bus that “under this chapeau lurks a mermaid, a whore, a tigress” (15) is contained by the fear that “she'd call a cop and I'd be put in a mental ward” (15).

The nature of noble or upper-middle-class society is clearly depicted wherein there are servants to achieve domestic duties. When a child has passed out of the nursery she or he can depend on the servants to meet her or his needs, and so, any remaining authority the mother possesses is merely a token given to her by the father. Stacey organizes the program into the public sphere every morning, preparing her children and her husband for school and work. She recognizes: although scorned by those who go out into the public sphere, the mother preserves their egos from failure. Stacey's extraordinary implication in holding the family together so that there can even be such a thing as a family romance is demonstrated by the different ancestral responses to occasions when Mac or Stacey is late. When Mac is late, only Stacey observes, but without worry; when Stacey is late Mac contemplates calling the police—but at least she's "back in time to make breakfast" (168).

Stacey's experience is displayed by Laurence in the insufficiency of the complex to account for the totality of the undercurrents of her wish. Elements in Stacey's knowledge challenge the logic. Her father, far from being present and the giver of authority, was a figure of absence in Stacey's childhood, more troubled with the dead than the living. Stacey's relationship with her daughter, Katie, bears little resemblance to the primarily hostile mother-daughter relationship. Thoughtful on her children's confidence in her, Stacey comments: “Katie lost it long ago. And yet in some ways not. Look at how she was that day with Tess. She thought I would have known what to say” (223). Her relationship with Katie is decided by desires other than opposition for the requirements such as their mutual love of dancing. Through her indebtedness of their mutual love of dancing, Stacey recognizes a complex

association with Katie. It comprises love and sorrow, durableness and discontinuity, features and distinction, without using the language of discrepancy. “You won't be dancing alone for long, Katie. It's all going for you. I'm glad. Don't you think I'm glad? Don't you know how beautiful you are? Oh, Katie love. I'm glad. I swear it” (127).

Stacey's perception is planned by desires that move in channels other than those of the family love. Stacey decides to continue her relationship with Luke because it supplies her with a sense of self that independent from her family: “I would know once again the feeling of another man, and I would have done something that belonged only to me, was mine only, related only to me, nothing to do with any of them” (193). Through her affair with Luke, Stacey sees the likelihood of changing the pattern of her longing and her personal relationships. Nancy Bailey in her article “Identity in *The Fire-Dwellers*” argues: “Luke can be seen in terms of the internal self of the protagonist, as an animus” (116). Luke can be seen as an organizer of requirements that have been overlooked by the feminine subject-position in the society. Luke forces Stacey to break down the disagreement between public and private that has silenced the expression of her desires. He asks her “What scares you, my woman?” (178) recognizing the soundness of Stacey's concerns about civilization and her children and recognizing a feature of Stacey beyond her role as housewife.

Stacey has the occasion to structure her longing according to her own dream. Her choice is deliberate and made out of a sense of responsibility to her own children and to all children: she chooses to go against what she wants, not in order to be conservative to her role, but to work together with it. She does this by trying to bridge the gap in between herself and Mac, to do away with the opposition between public and private spheres that constructs their relationship. At the novel's end, Stacey and

Mac are able to talk about distinct concerns and then “make love after all, but gently, as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help nor alter” (279). No longer a battlefield in which the hero overcomes and the woman succumbs, their love making has become a congestion in which strength and weakness, love and sorrow, are shared.

Grosskurth in “Wise and Gentle.” *A Place to Stand on: Essays by and About Margaret Laurence*” opines:

“Stacey is portrayed by Laurence as lonely, bewildered, frustrated, desperately trying to find the person she once thought she was in other words, a waif caught up in the universal search for identity.... but she is a person worthy of respect for her valiant fight simply in coping from day to day,” (227)

a characteristic which her husband fails to be accustomed with and becomes the cause of Stacey’s dissatisfaction. The real problem that Stacey come across lies in the fact that society forces too many roles upon her in terms of wife, mother, neighbour and mistress. All that she knows is that she is predictable to be beautiful, efficient and radiantly cheerful. In portraying Stacey, Grosskurth further says “Laurence has managed to scratch through the cutaneous layers to the essential core of a human being” (227).

Stacey is ragged by the increasing sound from the pages of periodicals and throbs from the television and radio. The voices outside tell Stacey how to protect her children and control her burden. The internal voices bang with the outside world as she exercises the force on herself and the fight is led by the world that encircles and symbolizes her. These voices are another challenge at humility put into play by the assemblies that disturb Stacey's activities throughout the day. She both extricates and faces these interferences: “Listen, God, I know it's a worthwhile job to bring up four

kids. You don't need to propagandize me. I'm converted. But how is it I can feel as well that I'm spending my life in one unbroken series of trivialities?" (89). She speaks to God in an ultimate unadventurously patriarchal voice and express the problems of the assembly that destroys the charge of everyday. This inexorable assessment of these structures is both empowering and compelling. If mass culture is a feminized enemy of modernist authority, then Stacey distinguishes this influence and tries to increase the insignificances. By the end of the novel, she says "trivialities aren't so bad after all. They're something to focus on" (280).

Laurence creates an equivalent evaluation to a genuineness through which her heroine confronts. When Stacey fights to reduce through this rough expression, Laurence stylistically examines communal nuisances. Laurence persistently discusses her stylishness by joining together a valuation of narrative as a rebellion of agreements with disintegrations, multiple-voicing and intrusions. She goes more in her failing of an inner and outer world by bringing noises and events of the world into the home and of the city into Stacey's consciousness. In this act, Laurence problematizes hierarchical differences. Clark intricate on this impossible departure of politics from the home:

"Lest we think that the modernist separation of literature from the kitchen was politically innocuous, at worst resisting the influence of a mass culture that was all too powerful outside the domain of literature, consider what else was lost, along with the sentimental" (14).

The modernist exclusion of everything but the forms of high art acted like a machine for cultural loss of memory. By placing culture on the other side of the dual from politics, women are both ineligible from politics and named as hazardous. Neither culture nor politics is made available for women as a positive identity, therein leaving

women without a subject position: “The modernist reversal includes both the un warranting of the sentimental and the chance for cultural change.”(14). Stacey's voices intervene between household anxieties and prevalent culture, inside documentation and external disremembering.

She defines herself through her role as wife and mother and moves through the world with more straightforwardness wearing these masks because then she knows who she is supposed to be. It is the remembered passion and freedom propelling her past that she does not know how to embody. Her language displaces her from her family, who speak through silence instead of in “full technicolor and intense detail. And that's okay .... Ian gets the message. It's his language, too. I wish it were mine. All I can do is accept that it is a language, and that it works, at least sometimes. And maybe it's mine more than I like to admit" (269-70). The occupancy regularity that Stacey undertakes collapses even as it rebuilds in her internal dialogues. Through unconscious speech, she attempts a movement away from the sites of her imprisonment. Helene Cixous in *Sorties: Out and Out Attacks way Out/ Forays*, states:

“Through the same opening that is her danger, she comes out of herself to go to the other, a traveller in unexplored places; she does not refuse, she approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be.”(15).

Stacey approaches the unfamiliar positions and glimpses the opportunity of reimagining. But her modernist condition is one of tragedy. Though Stacey writes herself as heroine, she “ends” her story in interruption between death and dancing. Seeing the world as trap and not travel, she condemns even while she consoles herself: “Well, in the head isn't such a terrible place to dance” (276). Stacey is becoming “appropriate subject for ... a new story ... that makes visible all the plural

arenas that are suppressed when history is written with the representative man as its subject.” (16). She imagined herself away from the family where her children and her husband attack her space. She lived alone in her body, forcing her to say there is no pain.

Stacey pays attention to the movement inside her belly and inside her head and tries to believe that inside is not such a dreadful place to be. Determinedly, inside pursues outside. Though Stacey may have suspended dancing, she has not stopped questioning: “She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow?” (281) is a final line of the novel implying association. For Stacey, her connotation brings outside to the internal where, objectified outer city rhythms inside her house and her body. She is joined both to the city and to her family by uncertain bindings. The question of tomorrow coincides with her slip into sleep where all tomorrows and past tomorrows occur instantaneously. The ambiguous "it" both reveals and disguises whether she is speaking of her sleep or the city or the quietly secured house and family. The ending disturbs conclusion and integrates frailty into prolonged regenerating of likelihood. Margaret Laurence writes into a gendered Canadian modernism by using revolutionary feminist and modernist aesthetics as a way to invent stories with a female prejudice. Through disintegration and memory and movement, Stacey MacAindra's experiences resists with which Canadian women must connect if they are to continually review outdated social conventions. *The Fire-Dwellers* is a novel that resists stasis and interrupts a formal modernist practice that names woman as disapproving. Instead, the female character that questions power structures that threaten to keep her body colonized. This heroine handles away from finale in activities toward uncertain futures. Stacey MacAindra resists departure by moving through time in her memory and through space with her body.

At the beginning of the novel, she is living with her four Children in Vancouver, British Columbia. She exposes herself at the age of thirty-nine, she feels unpleasant, surrounded by the stresses of motherhood, chaotic by the absence of communication with her husband. Laurence has adopted the method of interior soliloquy to narrate the story of Stacey and her reaction to the present situation:

“Everything would be alright if I only was better educated... Listen Stacey, at thirty-nine, after four kids, you can't expect to look like a sylph... Everything will be alright when the kids are older. I'll be more free. Free for what? What in hell is the matter with you, anyway? Everything will be alright... Come on, fat slob on down town, get up off your ass and get going... All the thing I hate. Hate, but perpetuate”. (8-9).

Margaret Laurence creates her to study the role of wife and mother in a modern family in which the mothers both maintain the family and are believed by their children. Even though Stacey does all the repetitious works related with life as a mother, she fears that she is for all time sacrificing her life in this succession of trifles. Although she accepts that taking care of children is a priceless job, she needs a little for herself to be spent. She desires to talk with her husband, her children, and the world. Stacey has reached all of her society's appreciation as a happiest woman as her sister think so, she is married, mother of four children and gains respect in the humanity of middle class. But there is a longing inside her which likes to come outside. From her confidential place to the communal place. So, she continually approaches within and against the limitations of home, which is both her house and body. The fulfilment which she finds through taking night courses, drinking, daydreaming, and having an affair which brings only distress and sense of senselessness of modern life.

Women are predictable to find out other replacements to fight against these public and private spaces where common management is degenerated as mythological. Stacey at least tries her best to escape from the inner world but most of the women not even distinguish it and narrowed themselves inside their home. Stacey chooses reminiscence of her past. She arrives at her past through her recollection; she senses a music inside her which makes her dance as Stacey Cameron but not a wife of MacAindra. She sees dance as a way to get better her prejudice. She finds dance and memory as an outer world where she feels relaxed. This is discontinuous that makes her live both in the present and in the past. But she is not aware that she has found way to survive in the present. An approach that resists a patriarchal formation which frees the human being over shared involvement. Stacey took a key to open the gates of her new world which helps her to escape from the burdens of the present world.

Stacey tries to join her into a not equivalent self and into a real-world subject where she can end time over memory. This approach is both modernist and feminist arrangement. As she has found her comforting world, she tries to take her children to her world. Though she can find uniqueness for herself in her synchronized selves in the memory, she cannot differentiate inside from the outside. So, she redefines her approach by distinguishing the nothings no longer the bad ones and stabilizes her inside and outside rapidly. At the end of the novel, she realises her power of will malformed. In conclusion, she states:

“Okay so in some ways I’m mean as all out. I’m going to quit worrying about it. I used to think there would be a blinding flash of light someday, and then I would be wise and calm and would know how to cope with everything and my kids would rise up and call me blessed. Now I see that whatever I’m like, I’m pretty well stuck with it for life. Hell of revelation that turned out to be”. (272)



She distinguishes that she is a moral mother and possesses an inside reservoir of strength and resolution. Stacey appears at her fortieth birthday with a unlike intelligence of reaction and silence but not submission. She fights detachment by moving through time in her memory and through space with her body. She re-establishes herself in a poetics of dance and pronounces herself in a variety of terms. Stacey and Mac's communication usually end up in a conflict as far as the children's well-being is troubled. They are afraid that their son might go wrong. Mac reprimands Duncan for crying over an impairment and irresponsibilities Stacey for pampering him when he has nightmares. He shouts, "Ruin them, for all I care" (198) making her feel like a "Kid-ruiner" (29). The present situation contrasts with that of Mac visiting Stacey in the hospital after Jen's birth, bringing her two dozen yellow chrysanthemums. Mac's act of saving the almost drowned Duncan is an act of reclamation. Growing finally Mac's idiom of silence, she comments "The silences aren't all bad. How do I know how many times Mac has protected me by not saying?" (264) and finally she concludes, "yet he's a whole lot stronger than he thinks he is. Maybe they all are. May be even Duncan is. May be even, I am" (260).

Mac's father, Mathew MacAindra, retains his independence when he admits that he has glaucoma. His helplessness is exposed vividly when he falls down the stairs. He acknowledges that he has glaucoma. Admitting his physical feebleness leads him to acknowledge his spiritual weakness as well. Stacey calls him "Dad" realizing the flaw in him It is "Mathew's despair" (257). The name "Dad" is reserved for her own long-dead father, Niall Cameron. Mathew's fall finally makes her invite him to her home. Katie is fourteen, Ian and Duncan are ten and seven respectively and Jen is two. The characters represent their creator's characters. Similarly, MacAindra's children characterize aspects of their parent's characters. Katie establishes equivalents

with Stacey and Ian with Mac. Stacey and Mac have contradictory viewpoints of child and its background. Mac seems to be more an authoritarian whereas Stacey is a tolerant parent.

Laurence plays headlines from television news programs, broadcasting war, turmoil and unrest around the world throughout the novel. In one sense, the headlines are contrasted with the domestic, but it is soon understood that these are parallel, that the home-front is no safe haven after all.

“I can’t forget that piece in the paper. Young mother killed her two-month-old infant by smothering it. I wondered how that sort of thing could ever happen. But maybe it was only that the baby was crying, and she didn’t know what to do, and was maybe frantic about other things entirely, and suddenly she found she had stopped the noise. I cannot think this way. I must not.” (69)

Children are hit by cars and killed, neighbours attempt suicide, Stacey and her husband worry about money, she fears that Mac is sleeping with his secretary, her youngest still isn’t talking and what has she done to her to make this go wrong, Stacey wonders, and just as frightening as the overpowering demands of parenthood is considering who she will be. The demands are rescinded, when the children are older. Stacey’s green slacks are dated, and so is her slang, but completely nothing else are in this novel which forty five years later is a challenge to and a reflection of the world at once.

Stacey’s innovative information about herself, after being a refugee of blighted landscape, gives to her a nagging urgency to find completeness in a tyrannical landscape. She gives scope for positive obsessions of life. Nicholson in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence* aptly expresses:

The world outside is much the same as it was in the beginning and the conclusion focuses on personal and family survival within the nightmare world. It is a precarious position but the only one available outside the self-enclosed worlds of fantasy which Stacey has successively inhabited. Yet her fantasising has given her the necessary inner space to come to terms with world she inhabits as forty-year-old Stacey MacAindra, a world constituted for by human relationships as mother, wife, friend, sister and daughter. (104)

Mac's lack of belief in Stacey induces her to really look for luxury and comfort in the hug of Luke Venturi, a young writer who is more or less ten years younger to Stacey. Three days after having met Luke, Stacey begins to frame plans to enable her to see him again. She confesses to God

“Okay, God, say what you like, but I damn well wish I could get away just sometimes by myself. But no, it's a criminal offense, nearly. What makes any of them think they've got the right to tell me own me have me always there not that they notice when I am only when I'm not” (170).

All that she needs to do at the second is get out of the house. On her next meeting with Luke, they discuss Stacey's uncertainties and scares. Luke was very eager to give a hearing to her problems. Finally, their conversation ends up in a sexual relationship as if that was the end of it all and the only thing that Stacey was looking forward to.

Stacey was “surprised by the force of her own response, the strength and explicitness of her pleasure” (185). After having a taste of Luke's hospitality, Stacey feels “If only I could get out seeing him more often... I'd like to start again everything, all of life, start again with someone like you” (189). Stacey is not successful in comprehending the fact that life's cycle goes on and so does Stacey's

life. This sort of a clumsiness does not come so early to Stacey but at the end of the novel she tells herself “Even if you’d [Luke] been older, or I’d been younger and free, it wouldn’t have turned out any simpler with you than it is with Mac. I didn’t see that at one time, but I see it now” (253).

Luke advises Stacey on their third reunion that she should go with him up to the Skeena River. To this, Stacey says “If I had two lives, I would. You think I don’t want to?” (209). Luke very well understands that Stacey cannot leave her children and go and hence with an undercurrent of mockery he sings: “Ladybird, Ladybird, Fly Away Home, Your House is on fire, Your children are gone” (209). It is then that Stacey appreciates that Luke is mocking her dependent condition and also, he makes public to her that he is twenty-four and not twenty-nine. Stacey understands that she is aged enough to be his mother and that puts her to embarrassment. She vows never to see him again. That was the end of the Stacey–Luke relationship. In a way, Luke’s entry into her life helped Stacey understand life better.

Buckle urges Stacey to take a quick journey with him to Coquitlam on one of his transports, Stacey is provoked by something beyond the morally sensible, for she notes: “Then, without thinking or knowing she is going to do it she climbs into the truck beside Buckle”(140). The ride with Buckle is figured as a disloyalty towards Mac, as Stacey thinks when she reveals her disappointment with Mac's long hours: “Traitor. How can you speak about Mac to anyone else? It’s no one else’s business” (141). Stacey imagines her world dropping apart, strengthening the chief theme of the novel: “The house is burning. Everything and everyone in it. Nothing can put out the flames. The house wasn't fire-resistant. One match was all it took”(141). The domestic sphere destroyed because Stacey imagines Buckle and herself out on “The northern highway, uncrowded,” in a sexual scenario: “He is poised above her -- hard,

ready, taut -- and she can hardly wait for him”(141). Buckle tells her a story about his games of “chicken” on the highway, and, along with the sexual fantasy, Stacey is enchanted by the risky nature of her association with him. When they arrive at the warehouse, Stacey is pleased that she is theoretical by the labour as a woman as far separated from being "a respectable married woman" (143) as possible.

When Stacey goes to Buckle's apartment, however, the fantasy of a sexual union in the countryside is overwhelmed by the wickedness of life. Buckle's mother is a ludicrous former prostitute, living a sensory-deprived drunken existence. Stacey willingly submits to Buckle's advances, only to find that he is using her in his imaginary. Rather than connecting physically with him, Stacey is deprived of any triumph or get in touch with: “What he is doing now concerns only himself, his sex open and erect in his hands” (147). As a final refusal of closeness, Buckle tosses 'bus fare’ to Stacey, literally and symbolically paying for her “services.” Stacey becomes the character of a prostitute, reflecting to some degree the figure of Buckle's ridiculous mother. This experience does not fulfil her need for more evocative intimate involvements. It offers Stacey the element of danger and adventure that she seeks, but in this sense, her step outside her customary and repressive life is a dismal failure. It also signals Stacey's deeper need to discover the areas of herself that she feels are sadly wanting.

The news of Buckle's death and Mac's sorrow for him makes Stacey becomes thoughtful rather than responsive, and her choice to help Mac in his time of necessity supports her. When Mac wanted to tell the story of his connotation with Buckle, and he influences out to Stacey by asking her to be his listener: “Stacey -- you don't mind my saying?” (216). In this moment of connection with Mac, Stacey acts as a sort of specialist, motivating Mac to continue his story, just as Luke prompted her,

she consoles him –“Shsh it’s all right” (217) -- and prompts: “What was it?”; “Go on – say it”; “Say it” (218). Then, imagining Luke’s question, “What scares you, merwoman?”(178), she asks, “Mac -- what bugs you?” (219). At the end of the novel, Stacey has clearly moved beyond the crisis of individuality that overwhelmed her and that was hastened by her inability to deal with loss: “I was wrong to think of the trap as the four walls. it’s the world. The truth is that I haven’t been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now. Although in some ways I’ll always be her, because that’s how I started out.” (276)

Stacey senses that she has no life, apart from her roles as a wife and mother. She has to look into the mirror, “to make sure [...] (she is) really there” (132). She often asks herself: “What’s left of me? Where have I gone?” (70). Stacey questions her very self: “Who’re you? One of your other selves. Help, I’m schizophrenic” (106). In a nightmare, Stacey sees herself as carrying her own detached head. “The head she has been carrying is of course none but hers” (115). Stacey recognizes herself with the paper photograph of a mother holding her dead child: “The woman’s mouth opens wide-a sound of unbearability but rendered in silence by the camera clicking. Only the zero mouth to be seen, noiselessly proclaiming the gone-early child” (254).

Stacey ultimately does realise that compassion is the solution to the toxic of personal conflict: she questions: “Wouldn’t it be strange of I could ever stop thinking in terms of them and me? (189) Stacey has sympathy for Buckle Fennick. She confesses: “I never before in my life felt sorry for Buckle Fennick” (59). After his death, Stacey sheds tears for him. Later her sympathy extends even to Mac. For she recognises Mac’s “acceptance of the responsibilities he took on long ago when he never suspected what they might mean” (62). It is the responsibility for the growing family. Stacey later says: “Mac has to pretend he’s absolutely strong, and now I see he

doesn't believe a word of it and never has. Yet he's a whole lot stronger than he thinks he is. Maybe they all are. May be even Duncan is. May be even I am" (260). Stacey tries to rediscover her true identity. This makes her want to escape from her role as wife and mother and she declares: "I'm trapped" (194). For her the strong home becomes a prison for her "My boundaries are four walls" (69).

Stacey finally comes to terms with her life and recognises herself as a survivor. She learns to accept life as it is. She realises that she should accept herself as she is and stop wanting to be like others for, as Luke rightly says: "Everything looks better and worse from the outside" (198). She decides to remain with Mac and her children and rather than go forth with her young lover. She decides to take life as it comes and to quit fearing the unknown. She prefers to have her own identity. She finally attains self-realisation. With characteristic irony Stacey declares:

"I used to think there would be a blinding flash of light someday, and then I would be wise and calm and would know how to cope with everything and my kids would rise up and call me blessed. Now I see that whatever I'm like, I'm pretty well stuck with it for life. Hell, of a revelation that turned out to be".(298-99).

The novel ends on a note of understanding and reception of those things which cannot be changed. Stacey's four earlier dreams are conquered by one of the four elements. Fire, water and earth appear in her dreams as destructive forces while air appears as an escape device. Stacey's development in her connotation with Max and the others, and her last dreams syndicates the four elements and indicates the opportunity of finding peace and freedom despite the social unrest around her. The trap Stacey realises, is not the four walls of her home but the world. She realises that the fire born are at home. Stacey born to this element, learns to survive in it with self-

respect and the aptitude to give and receive love. She is brave and is determined to face life for she realises that the others around her are *Fire-Dwellers* too. She finds her own individuality and identity by enduring the flame. Her search for individuality comes to an end.

The life of Stacey MacAindra voiced an undisputable truth that women, who can't separate themselves from the outside world, must know the policy of complementary. This is the message conveyed by the feminist modernist Margaret Laurence through her novel. A fine balance is anticipated from the women to uphold their inner and outer world. She has examined everywhere and finally finds it inside her and gains the confidence to balance both the world simultaneously. While she has clearly changed over the course of the novel, the struggle has been hard-fought and has been indicative of the dangers of living in the modern world. Through her work of mourning, Stacey is somewhat consoled in the face of the troubled world, but the larger conclusion she reaches is that complete consolation may be an unattainable goal.