

1205

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**FROM NEUROSIS TO GROWTH IN *THE FIRE-DWELLERS*:**

**"I didn't see that at one time, but I see it now"**

**A Pro Gradu Thesis**

**By**

**Anne-Mari Alikoski**

**Department of English**

**1998**

HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA  
ENGLANNIN KIELEN LAITOS

Anne-Mari Alikoski

FROM NEUROSIS TO GROWTH IN *THE FIRE-DWELLERS*:

"I didn't see that at one time, but I see it now"

Pro gradu -työ

Englantilainen filologia

Marraskuu 1998

82 sivua

Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan kanadalaisen kirjailijan Margaret Laurencen romaania *The Fire-Dwellers*. Romaania analysoidaan psykoanalyttisen neuroositeorian avulla. Kirjan päähenkilö, Stacey, on 39 vuotias neljän lapsen äiti ja kotirouva, jonka elämä on täynnä ahdistusta ja ristiriitaisia tunteita. Tarkoituksena on paljastaa Staceyn käyttäytymisen ja ajattelun taustalla oleva psykologinen rakenne ja tämän myötä ymmärtää hänen sekavuuttaan ja ahdistustaan, sekä seurata hänen matkaansa neuroosista henkiseen kasvuun. Tarkoituksena on tarkastella myös neuroosin ilmenemistä hänen ihmissuhteissaan, sekä sitä miten hänen suhtautumisensa kanssaihmiin muuttuu, kun hän alkaa vapautua neuroosistaan.

Teoriapohjana tutkielmassa käytetään Karen Horneyn teoriaa neurooseista. Keskeisintä neurooseissa on Horneyn mukaan täydellisen ideaali-minä mielikuvan muodostaminen ja tätä seuraava pakonomainen pyrkimys tulla täksi ideaali-minäksi. Tämän seurauksena neurootikon spontaanit tunteet ja hänen todellinen minänsä jäävät taustalle. Horneyn mukaan terveessä kasvussa pyritään juuri tätä todellista minää kohti. Täten neuroosi vääristää terveen henkisen kehityksen estäen todellisen kasvun.

Staceyn neuroottisuus ilmenee hänen ihmissuhteissaan. Suhteessa mieheensä hän on alistuva ja anteeksipyytelevä. Hän on riippuvainen lapsistaan ja heidän mielipiteistään. Hän näkee myös muut ihmiset omien neuroottisten tarpeidensa läpi, nähden vain täydellisiä ulkokuoria. Staceyn ideaali-minä muodostuu vaatimuksesta olla täydellinen äiti ja kieltää kaikki negatiiviset tunteet. Tämän ideaalin tavoittelussa epäonnistuminen aiheuttaa Staceylle ahdistusta ja alemmuuden tunnetta. Käännekohtana Staceyn elämässä on suhde nuorempaan mieheen, joka laukaisee kehityksen terveempään suuntaan. Lopulta Stacey luopuu ideaali-minän tavoittelusta ja hyväksyy itsensä sellaisena kuin on. Tämän myötä myös hänen suhtautumisensa muihin muuttuu. Hän ei enää alistu miehensä tahtoon ja osaa ottaa etäisyyttä lapsistaan, antaen heille tilaa itsenäistyä. Stacey rupeaa näkemään myös muut ihmiset kokonaisina inhimillisine heikkouksineen.

Asiasanat:

Margaret Laurence, *The Fire-Dwellers*, Karen Horney, neuroosi, ideaali-minä

<b>CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. MARGARET LAURENCE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.1. Karen Horney.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.2. <i>Neurosis and Human Growth</i>.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. NEUROTIC PHASE.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4.1. <i>The Fire-Dwellers</i>.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4.2. How Stacey feels about herself.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4.2.1. Everything would be alright if.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4.2.2. Stacey's plight.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4.3. Stacey in relation to her husband.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4.3.1. Guilt for being a burden to Mac.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>4.3.2. Agreeing too willingly.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.3.3. No sense of self-worth.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.4. Stacey as a mother.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4.4.1. The perfect mother.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4.4.2. Motherhood as a role.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4.4.3. Fear of punishment for her thoughts and actions.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4.4.4. Stacey's compulsion vs. her children's needs.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.4.5. The children take distance from Stacey.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>4.4.6. The children protect their privacy.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>4.5. Stacey in relation to other people.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>4.5.1. Tess, the neighbor.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>4.5.2. Mac's boss, Thor.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>4.5.3. Other families.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>5. NEED FOR CHANGE.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5.1. Need for something else.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5.2. A glimpse of selfhood.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5.3. Desperation.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>5.4. Trying herself out.....</b>	<b>51</b>

<b>6. RECOVERY</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>6.1. Luke - a healthy point of view</b> .....	<b>54</b>
6.1.1. Luke points out Stacey's neurotic patterns of behavior .	55
6.1.2. Luke's perception of Stacey.....	57
6.1.3. Luke introduces uncertainty into Stacey's life.....	58
6.1.4. Suggestion of choice.....	60
<b>6.2. The inevitable distance between people</b> .....	<b>60</b>
6.2.1. Katie, her daughter.....	61
6.2.2. Matthew, her father-in-law .....	63
6.2.3. Val, a woman from her hometown .....	64
<b>6.3. Independence and coming closer to Mac</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>6.4. Other people revealed as human</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>6.5. Stacey in relation to herself</b> .....	<b>69</b>
6.5.1. Acceptance of negative feelings .....	69
6.5.2. Realizations about herself.....	71
6.5.3. Assuming responsibility for herself .....	73
<b>6.6. Towards the light</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>7. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>80</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When I read *The Fire-Dwellers* by Margaret Laurence for the first time I felt there was a deep sense of confusion and anxiety in the life of Stacey, the protagonist, which reminded me of my own crisis of growing up as a young adult. I could relate to Stacey's feelings of confusion and agony but I could not quite understand what was going on with Stacey. It was not until I found Karen Horney's theory on neurosis that many aspects of Stacey's plight began to unfold and become more understandable. I also became intrigued by Stacey's plight as a mother. Seeing myself as a daughter of my own mother and also as a potential mother I wanted to explore the issue of motherhood. Further on there rose from my research of the novel the issue of dependence - independence as a central part of Stacey's development. As Stacey begins to free herself from the grips of neurotic thinking she also gains independence and responsibility of her own life.

In my analysis of Stacey's struggle I will use Karen Horney's (1951) psychoanalytic theory on neurosis. Horney explicates the psychological structure and motivational system behind neurotic behavior (see Paris 1991:324), which also makes Stacey's confused behavior understandable. Horney (1951:16) claims that a person can truly grow only after she<sup>1</sup> frees herself of her neurosis. We can observe this move towards growth also in Stacey after she begins her recovery.

It is argued by Butery (1982:39-40) that the motivation for reading literature comes from the opportunity to identify with the struggling human beings

---

<sup>1</sup> Confronted with the choice between the male/female 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun I chose to use the female "she" throughout my thesis because the subject of my analysis, the protagonist of the novel, Stacey is a woman. All the references to theoretical concepts are thus intended to be applied to her, which makes my decision seem a natural choice.

portrayed. Literature offers us a unique opportunity to enter into the inner world of literary characters and see ourselves or people around us in them. Through a Horneyan interpretation of literary characters the reader gains a deeper understanding of human nature and is able to transfer this to her real life experiences with people. Thus, Horney's theory helps us experience literature more intensely, both intellectually and emotionally. This applies to literature in general and especially to Stacey's journey.

Horney's theory is also suitable for the analysis of literary characters because she stresses the present structure of the psyche (see Paris 1991: 324). Instead of focusing on childhood origins Horney emphasizes in her theory the character structure and defensive strategies of the adult. In a novel it is possible to establish a causal relationship between childhood experiences and adult behavior if there is enough information provided. But the main focus in the theory is on understanding the present structure of the adult psyche as an inwardly intelligible system and "to explain behavior in terms of its function within that system" (Paris 1991: 324). Therefore, a character's thoughts, feelings, and actions can be explained on the basis of what actually has been given in the text.

Not all literary characters are suitable for psychological analysis (Paris 1984, 161-62). Literary characters are a part of the artistic whole and therefore many of them have merely formal and thematic functions. But some literary characters are well-suited for psychological analysis. Horney's theory is especially applicable to the study of realistic characters that are highly individualized, the so called "round" or "mimetic" characters. These characters function are inwardly intelligible and their behavior and thoughts can be understood in terms of motivation.

Stacey, the protagonist of *The Fire-dwellers*, is a definitely round character. In the novel we mainly see the world through Stacey's eyes. We enter the

private world of Stacey, which is never revealed to other people in her life (Bevan 1983:viii-ix). The narrative techniques with which Stacey's private world is related to us include descriptions of her thoughts, her memories, her fantasies often in science fiction form and the comments of an omniscient narrator that has access to Stacey's thoughts and feelings. The reality around Stacey is introduced as conversations between Stacey and the people in her life and as bits of news from the radio or television. This, consequently makes the character of Stacey especially suitable for psychological analysis.

In a previous study by Nancy Bailey a psychological analysis has already been applied to Stacey. In her article "Identity in the Fire-Dwellers" Bailey (1990) looks at the novel in the light of identity development. She uses the psychoanalytical theories of Carl Jung's followers concentrating on the study of archetypes. Through Jungian terms she gives an explication of Stacey's development. Through an explanation drawing on the notion of archetype the analysis sheds light on cultural expectations, and how Stacey relates to them. In other words, it explicates what kind of role expectations Stacey struggles with but it fails to reveal the inner dynamics of her thinking and the possible origins of her confusion. Karen Horney's theory enables a deeper understanding of Stacey's development by providing a psychoanalytic framework that makes Stacey's confused thinking understandable through exposing an underlying psychological structure and motivational system. It explains *why* Stacey takes these role expectations with such extreme seriousness that her behavior becomes compulsive.

In this study I will attempt to understand Stacey's confused thinking and reveal the underlying psychological structures to further clarify her actions. I will examine how Stacey's neurosis affects her relationships with other people. As Stacey in the course of the novel comes out of her neurosis I will see how her relationships to others change along with it. I will also see what kind of realizations she has about herself.

I will start my study by introducing Margaret Laurence, the writer of *The Fire-Dwellers*, as a writer in section two. In section three I will explicate the theoretical framework of my thesis by giving a detailed account of the central concepts of Horney's theory on neurosis. As an introduction to the novel I will tell about *The Fire-Dwellers* in the beginning of my analysis on section four, in case the reader of this paper is not familiar with the novel.

Because in the course of the novel Stacey goes through a process of gradual recovery from neurosis I decided to proceed with my analysis in a chronological order. Thus, in section four I will first look at Stacey as neurotic and how this affects her relationships with her husband, children and other relevant people. In section five I will look at Stacey finding in herself the need for something of her own apart from the family. I will also explicate the kind of identity Stacey remembers having before her clearly neurotic period. And finally I will depict Stacey's first steps as an individual. In section six entitled "recovery" I will look at Stacey's gradual process of freeing herself from her neurosis with the help of Luke and the realizations she, consequently, has about herself and life.

In my analysis of Stacey's development I will use a format where I will first introduce examples from the novel which are followed by my explications and then by theoretical concepts introduced by Horney so that the structure of the analysis is a dialogue between the material and the theory. This allows an immediate understanding of the links between the material and theory and does not leave them disconnected.



## 2. MARGARET LAURENCE

Margaret Laurence was born in 1926 in a small town in Manitoba, Canada. In 1947 she graduated from Winnipeg's united college and started working as a reporter for the *Winnipeg Citizen*. For seven years from 1950 onwards Laurence lived in Africa, first in Somalia and then Ghana, with her husband, a civil engineer, who was working there. During this time she translated Somali poetry and prose and began her career as a fiction writer with stories set in Africa. After her return to Canada in 1957 she wrote fiction with a Ghanaian setting: her first novel, *This Side Jordan*, and her first collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer*. She also wrote her memoir, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, based on her time in Somalia. (Staines 1991.)

Laurence separated from her husband in 1962, and moved to England and lived there for ten years (Staines 1991). During this time she created five novels set in the fictional town of Manawaka, patterned after her birthplace and its people: *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, *The Fire-Dwellers*, *A Bird in the House*, and *The Diviners*. There are frequent cross references in the novels which creates roots for the characters cutting across from novel to novel (Bevan 1983:vii). Manawaka is ever present in the characters lives through memories.

Laurence's main concern as novelist is the depiction of character and the protagonist of each Manawaka novel is a powerfully realized woman (The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature:435). Hagar in *The Stone Angel* is an elderly woman about to face death (New 1989:247-48). Rachel in *A Jest of God* is a spinster school teacher taking care of her mother. She is also a sister to Stacey, a middle-aged housewife and mother of four in *The Fire-Dwellers*. Vanessa in *A Bird in the House* is a child in the process of becoming a writer. Morag in *The Diviners* is in middle-age struggling between her professional life as a writer and her domestic role as a mother.

In her Manawaka novels Margaret Laurence writes about the lives of women of three generations who are all in their struggles determined to win their independence.

In her novels Laurence raises questions about women's relation to their cultural inheritance but her novels could not be described as feminist in any radical political sense (Howells 1990:94,105). The Manawaka novels are social protest novels of a subtler kind than openly feminist novels in describing the changes within an individual consciousness. Even so New (1989:248) argues that Margaret Laurence's fiction was instrumental in freeing English Canadian prose from its "unthinking male biases".

Laurence settled back in Canada in 1974 and complemented her fiction with essays, book reviews, and four children's books. She has earned numerous prizes, honorary degrees and awards (Staines 1991). Outside Canada her work has been published in England and America and some of her works have been translated to French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish (Thomas 1976, foreword). She was the most recognized and accomplished writer of the 1960's in Canada (New 1976:265). Margaret Laurence died in 1987.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section I will first introduce Karen Horney and her work in the field of psychoanalysis. Then I will explicate the central concepts of her theory on neurosis.

#### 3.1. Karen Horney

Karen Horney is seen as a pioneer in introducing a system of common sense psychoanalysis (Berger 1991:206). Horney attempted to write about psychology in terms that would be understandable to everyone. She intended her books to be read by anyone interested in personal growth, and hoped that everyone would be able to benefit from her books in learning more about themselves and their motives in life.

Horney believed in personal growth continuing all through our lives. Berger (1991:206) quotes Horney writing in *Self Analysis* (1942) that there is no such thing as a finished human product. She sees life as a struggle and striving towards development and growth, and she sees analysis as one of the means that can help in this life long process. Positive accomplishments achieved through analysis are in her opinion important but she also sees the striving itself laden with intrinsic value.

In the beginning of her career Horney, according to Symonds (1991: 301-304), worked within Freudian traditions of the language and structure of psychoanalysis. But she attempted to revise Freud's theory in the area of feminine psychology. She pointed out that masochism and penis envy were neurotic conditions and not the fate of all women as Freud claimed. She disagreed with Freud's concept "that there was no basic feminine identity, that all women wished to have a penis" (Symonds 1991: 303). She recognized that Freud's psychoanalysis measured women by masculine

standards and saw them as "stunted males". Horney's feminist writing revising the theories of Freud furthered the feminist cause towards the liberation of women (Berger 1991:205).

Later on Horney moved away from the focus on feminine psychology and beyond it to developing her own theory on psychoanalysis which was not gender-specific but applied to all human beings (Symonds 1991:304). Horney recognized in her theory that neurotic character is molded by life conditions and not instinctual drives as Freud had claimed. Horney also acknowledged that what is expected of women in a western culture is very close to one of her categories for a neurotic personality, i.e., the self-effacing type, which is compliant, tries to please others and is dependent on other people. Not only is the majority of self-effacing patients women but most women are self-effacing to a greater or lesser extent. On this account Symonds (1991:301) emphasizes the usefulness of Horney's later work in understanding gender issues in today's world.

### ***3.2. Neurosis and Human Growth***

In order to provide a preliminary understanding of Horney's theory on neurosis I will explain in this section the basics of her theory. First I will briefly touch on the origins of neurosis and then I will describe the central concepts suggested by Horney in understanding the dynamics of neurosis.

When a human being according to Horney (1951:13) grows up under favourable conditions she will put her energies into the realization of her own potentialities and will grow up to be a "healthy" human being. This growth is very different and individually defined for every human being. As a result of her particular temperament, faculties and the conditions of her earlier and later life she will grow into an individual who is more or less self-reliant, more contemplative or more outgoing, more cautious or more trusting and

she may develop her special gifts. But whichever direction her growth takes it will be her particular potentialities which she develops. The healthy person will grow towards self-realization, which Horney understands as the realization of the real self. She defines the real self as a central inner force which is the source of growth and striving towards the genuine and individual potentialities of a human being.

If a person is in childhood subjected to unfavorable conditions, as Horney (1951:18-20) puts it, she may become alienated from her real self which is the start of neurotic development. Such unfavorable conditions are numerous but they often result from the people around the child being too wrapped up in their own neurosis to be able to love the child, or even to conceive of her as the particular individual she is. As a result the child does not develop a feeling of belonging, but instead a profound insecurity for which Horney uses the term basic anxiety. The child's desperate search for safety and security caused by basic anxiety prevents her from relating to others with her spontaneous feelings and her relationships to others become one-sided, rigid and compulsive. Horney (1951:19) suggests that the child moves either toward other people by complying, against others by rebelling or away from other people by withdrawing from others emotionally. In a healthy development these moves are complementary capacities necessary for good human relations. But in a development that can be called neurotic these moves become extreme and rigid.

Alienation from the self resulting from the basic anxiety will in time bring out the need for something that will give the person a hold on life, a feeling of identity. Gradually the person builds an idealized image and endows it with unlimited abilities and qualities reaching perfection. She constructs the idealized self from her own special experiences, her earlier fantasies, her particular needs and also her given faculties. The neurotic person starts molding herself into this picture of perfection and then the idealized image

becomes an idealized self. The person tries to become her idealized self through a system of rigid demands on the self, which Horney calls neurotic shoulds. The neurotic person builds a complicated system of what she should be and should not be and then rigidly follows these laws and never questions them. (Horney 1951:21-25.)

Spontaneous feelings are an expression of the real self. The real self is the original force toward individual growth and self-realization, with which we can achieve full identification when freed of the crippling neurosis. It is the possible self in contrast to the idealized self, which is impossible to attain. The real self also seems the most speculative of all. But this quality can be observed in the neurotic when after some important insights there is a release from the grip of compulsive needs. (Horney 1951:157-58)

Further on Horney recognizes three different types of neurotic developments which correspond to the three basic solutions to basic anxiety: move against, towards or away from other people. The expansive type of neurotic completely abandons her actual self with its human weaknesses and faults. She becomes her idealized self with the help of will power and reason. She becomes the picture of perfection. She has to be better than others and she often manipulates other people to make them dependent on her. She abhors the idea of herself being compliant, appeasing, or dependent. (Horney 1951:214-215)

Whereas the expansive type abandons her actual self and becomes the idealized self the self-effacing type hopelessly tries to become the idealized self but she falls short of fulfilling the demands on perfection. She looks at her actual self, which is a term for everything that a person is at a given time, with its human limitations and faults from the point of view of the perfect idealized self and is bound to be disappointed. She tends to subordinate herself to other people, to be dependent on others and to appease them. She

lives with a sense of failure in her inability to measure up to her should and therefore tends to feel guilty, inferior or contemptible.(Horney 1951:158, 215).

Horney points out, according to Symonds (1991: 304-305), that not only are most self-effacing psychiatric patients women but even most "healthy" women in our western culture are more or less self-effacing. If women are not self-effacing they have a great deal of difficulty because they differ from what is expected in our culture. Horney suggests that the culture's idealized concept of femininity is likely to be very close to the idealized image of the woman patient.

The third type of neurotic is the resigned type which withdraws from her inner conflicts altogether. She becomes an observer of her own actions. She lacks any striving for achievement or effort and becomes indifferent to life and detached from other people in the name of freedom. She lives life without pain or friction but also without zest. (Horney 1951:260-64.)

Even though Horney carefully describes the possible symptoms and gives many examples and descriptions of the behavior and thoughts of the neurotic person she emphasizes that every person is an individual and will have her own personal ways of showing neurotic tendencies. She points out that there is much variation in the ways neurosis manifests itself in an individual even within and between the three main categories of neurosis that she defines. (Horney 1951:37)

The line between healthy and neurotic is a difficult one to draw. The healthy person may not be wholeheartedly engaged in realizing his real self nor is the neurotic wholly driven to actualize his idealized self. Healthy and neurotic are then the two extremes of one continuum with an infinite number of points inbetween. (Horney 1951:38-39) For the purpose of this paper

neurotic is defined by the degree to which a person suffers from her neurotic behaviors and thoughts. If a person views her neurotic symptoms as problematic then her condition can be viewed as neurotic.



#### **4. NEUROTIC PHASE**

In this chapter I will first give a short introduction to the novel and then I will look at Stacey's life with the help of Karen Horney's theory on neurosis. Stacey's neurosis can be observed in her feelings about herself and in her relationships with other people. Thus in my analysis I will look at how Stacey feels about herself. Then I will examine her relationship with her husband, Mac; children, Katie, Ian, Duncan, Jen; and finally people outside the family: Tess, the neighbor, and Thor, Mac's new boss.

##### **4.1. *The Fire-Dwellers***

The Fire Dwellers is the story of Stacey McAindra. She comes from a little prairie town Manawaka. Stacey left Manawaka as soon as she had enough money for a ticket to Vancouver where she currently lives with her family. Stacey got married at the age of 23 before which she worked as a typist. Stacey is a housewife with four children: Katie (14), Ian (10), Duncan (7), Jen (2). Her husband, Mac, is a door-to-door salesman.

Stacey seems very confused inside her world. She does not know herself anymore. She is unsure of her rights in her relationships with other people and she repeatedly wonders what other people are thinking about. She often pours herself a large gin and tonic inbetween household chores. She loves her children immensely, but feels that she is no good as a mother.

##### **4.2. How Stacey feels about herself**

By applying Horney's central concepts of the actual self, idealized self and the real self to Stacey's inner world I will clarify Stacey's confusion and reveal the underlying psychological structure by analysing one single passage

from the beginning of the novel. In the second subchapter I will look at other incidents from Stacey's life, which further confirm her character as neurotic.

#### **4.2.1. Everything would be alright if...**

In the beginning of the novel we meet Stacey in her bedroom standing in front of a full length mirror in an old night gown. She looks at herself in the mirror, thinking:

Everything would be alright if only I was better educated. I mean, if I were. Or if I were beautiful. Okay, that's asking too much. Let's say if I took off ten or so pounds. Listen, Stacey, at thirty-nine, after four kids, you can't expect to look like a sylph. Maybe not, but for hips like mine there's no excuse. I wish I lived in some country where broad-beamed women were fashionable. Everything will be alright when the kids are older. I'll be more free. Free for what? What's the matter with you anyway? Everything *is* alright. *Everything is alright*. Come on fat slob, get up off your ass and get going. (*The Fire-Dwellers*, from now on FD: 4.)

Thus we meet Stacey, who obviously enough is not happy with her life. We also get a sense of a struggle going on inside her. She feels that something is wrong but she cannot quite decipher what it is. At the same time she is very hard on herself. It seems like there is two different voices inside her.

In taking a closer look at this passage we notice that Stacey repeatedly thinks that everything would be alright if this and that would be different. She seems to feel that something is wrong and she thinks it could be her lack of education, lack of beauty, her fatness and finally lack of time for herself. She does acknowledge the impossibility of looking like a young girl at the age of thirty nine, but still she feels that there is no excuse for having such heavy hips. There seems to be an incongruity between what Stacey sees in the mirror and what she feels she should be. She feels she is fat and ugly while she should be beautiful and thin. She also feels that she should be more educated than she is.

Stacey's sense of inadequacy could be investigated further with Horney's psychoanalytic theory on neurosis. Horney defines neurosis as the inner struggle between the actual self and the idealized self that the individual has created in her mind. Thus Stacey's actual self is fat, ugly, and uneducated while the idealized self is slim, beautiful and educated. Somewhere inside Stacey knows that something is wrong. Her spontaneous feelings tell her that she is not happy. These feelings represent Stacey's real self. In indicating that something is wrong Stacey's real self is pointing out that something should be done in order to correct an unsatisfying state of affairs.

These spontaneous feelings as an expression of the real self are in Stacey's neurotic development taken over by the idealized self. It is the idealized self that attempts to remedy Stacey's unhappiness by voicing out demands on her. The idealized self says that everything would be all right if Stacey would be better than she is at the moment concerning her looks and intelligence. The idealized self blames Stacey's actual self, her appearance and being at the moment for her underlying unhappiness.

After the first voice of the idealized self there appears a second voice in Stacey's confused thinking which points out the impossibility of the demand to look like a young girl at the age of thirty-nine. From the readers point of view this seems like a valid point to make. This second voice is, however, followed by condemnation by the first voice of the idealized self: "Maybe not, but for hips like mine there's no excuse" (FD:4), thus dismissing the realistic remark on human restrictions. Stacey feels that even though it might be impossible she should be able to do it anyway. Even when the neurotic person does realize through critical thinking that her demands on herself are plainly fantastic, this does not usually change much, if anything (Horney 1951:66). The emotional forces operating in the person demand perfection

beyond human capability and override any rational realizations that momentarily take into account the restrictions on human capability.

In the beginning of the passage we became aware of Stacey's spontaneous feeling expressing that something is wrong. Thus Stacey's real self pointed out that something should be done to make things right. But then at the end of the passage this spontaneous feeling is completely undermined by yet another voice saying: "What's the matter with you anyway? Everything *is* alright. *Everything is alright.*" (FD:4) This voice is sabotaging the attempt of the real self to resolve Stacey's unhappy life situation. The attempt for growth is stopped before anything constructive may come out of it. According to Horney (1951:112-13), undermining the effort for growth shows hatred on the part of the whole neurotic system towards the healthy efforts of the real self.

Then the passage ends with the voice of the idealized self using rather abusive language, pointing out just how ugly and lazy Stacey is and just how incapable she is in fulfilling the demands on perfection. "Come on fat slob, get up off your ass and get going." (FD: 4.) This last sentence is full of self-hatred towards her actual being as a fat and lazy creature. Because Stacey fails to be perfect according to the demands of the idealized self her actual being receives nothing but contempt. According to Horney (1951:110), the actual self in its failure to measure up to the demands of the idealized self is an embarrassing sight when viewed from the godlike perfection of the idealized self. This leads the neurotic person to despise her actual being. Furthermore, Horney (1951:114-115) points out that self-hatred is not only a result of self-idealization but also serves to maintain it. Condemning the imperfection of the actual self further confirms the godlike perfection of the idealized self that the neurotic attempts but fails to become.

#### 4.2.2. Stacey's plight

Stacey feels alienated from other people. She tells Mac, her husband, that she feels like "everything is receding" (FD: 79), as though she is out of touch with everything and everybody and vice versa. This gives the impression of some kind of alienation. Horney (1951:156) suggests that the neurotic is alienated from her real spontaneous feelings with which she relates to other people. Her capacity for conscious experience is slightly impaired and experiences in relation to other people do not penetrate her feelings. As a result the person feels alienated from other people while she actually is alienated from her own feelings.

On another occasion Stacey and Mac have an argument to the end of which Stacey apologizes for being so disagreeable and takes refuge in the headaches that she has been having lately. She obviously uses the headache as an excuse for her behavior because she is not at all certain whether she actually has a headache at all. "I haven't got a headache at all. Yes, I have. As a matter of fact, now that I notice it, it's excruciating." (FD:129.) After thinking for a while she realizes that she has a major headache. Not being aware of her bodily sensations except through a process of thinking reveals an alienation from the self (Horney 1951:156). The inner experiences of the neurotic person do not penetrate to her awareness and even her bodily sensations may be numbed.

Later on we learn that Stacey has felt this way for at least two or three years already. A couple of years earlier she told a neighbor that she felt "like the fall of Rome" (FD: 126). Her condition, then, is not a passing thing but something that has been plaguing her for years. This gives an idea of the length of Stacey's agony and speaks for her condition as a neurotic disturbance.

Stacey thinks about the beat-up old house that is their home and which she likes: "One of these days he'll [her husband] manage a switch and we'll move to a pricey new split-level on the west side, furnished with that kind of sleek teak which will make me feel inferior to my own coffee table." (FD: 31) Stacey feels inferior to a table, an inanimate object. She feels she is less in worth than a piece of furniture. This gives an idea of how low her feeling of self worth is. Inferiority according to Horney (1951:215) is central to the experience of the self-effacing type of neurotic. The self-effacing type hopelessly tries to become the idealized self that she has created in her mind but she falls short of fulfilling the demands on perfection, which makes her feel guilty and inferior for being her actual imperfect self. Stacey fits perfectly into the description of the self-effacing type of neurotic. Whereas the expansive type avoids inner conflict by completely abandoning her actual self and the resigned type withdraws from her inner conflicts by becoming indifferent to life and to other people the self-effacing type lives right in the middle of inner conflicts in between the demands of the perfect idealized self and the humanly imperfect actual self. (Horney 1951.)

After an argument with Katie "Stacey reaches for the gin and tonic and drinks it as though she has just stumbled in from the Sahara." (FD: 47) Later on Stacey stashes away half a bottle of gin for emergencies thinking "every other minute is an emergency" (FD: 138). Stacey drinks most of the time to get through feelings of anxiety. According to Horney (1951: 74), the failure to measure up to expectations of the idealized self results in violent emotional reactions such as anxiety, despair, self-condemnation and self-destructive impulses. But reactions of anxiety often escape attention because the defenses against anxiety are set going immediately. One of these defenses is drinking. Thus, Stacey is anxious most of the time and gets through it by drinking alcohol.

Stacey compares herself to Katie, her teenage daughter. Stacey looks at Katie and thinks to herself: " – Katie, baby, how can you be so gorgeous? I love you for it, but it makes me feel about a thousand." (FD:69) and on another similar occasion she says she sometimes feels "like a beat-up old bitch"(FD:14) in comparison to Katie. Stacey compares herself, a 39 year old mother of four, to a teenage girl. Of course she is not as thin and pretty, how could she be. The neurotic person may according to Horney (1951:134) make comparisons between herself and other people that do not make any sense. Why should an older woman who could be proud of her own accomplishments in life compare herself to a young girl who is pretty.

Stacey stashes away half a bottle of gin for emergencies, wondering whether Mac, her husband knows how difficult life is to her:

Every other minute is an emergency. Does he know? He must. Mac listen. Just listen. I have something to tell you. No. It's not up to him. It's up to me. Any normal person can cope okay, calmly, soberly. And if you can't kid, then there's something wrong with you. No there isn't. Everything is okay." (FD: 138)

Stacey needs for Mac to understand how she is feeling and to help her. Then the idealized self takes over and demands perfection. She has to be able to cope alone no matter what, like a normal person. Part of Stacey's idealized self then is the perfect capability to handle life and its problems calm, unruffled and alone. The shoulds extend even as far as making it impossible for Stacey to ask for help. She has felt confused and unhappy for many years, which proves that she is unable to solve this problem on her own. Her thoughts go around in circles repeating the same pattern. She needs help, an intervention to break this neurotic pattern of thought and action but this is prevented by the pattern that in itself is the problem.

### **4.3. Stacey in relation to her husband**

In this chapter I will look at Stacey's relationship with her husband. Firstly I will explicate a feeling of guilt that has defined their relationship from the beginning of their marriage. Then I will look at Stacey's overly compliant behavior with Mac and how she has no sense of self worth in relation to him.

#### **4.3.1. Guilt for being a burden to Mac**

Stacey's relationship with Mac, her husband, is burdened with guilt. Stacey feels guilty for becoming pregnant with their first child unplanned. In the beginning of their marriage Mac quit his job selling encyclopedias because he felt that he was forced to sell books to people who did not really need them. He refused to stay in a job that required him to compromise his moral principles.

At that precise moment, didn't I have to go and get pregnant? I shouldn't have. It was my fault. We were both a little stoned the night it happened. I thought I'd put the damn equipment in, but next morning there it was on the floor beside the bed. After I was certain, Mac didn't say a word. He went to work for Drabble's [his current job], which was the first job that came along. Was it then he started to go underground, living in his own caves?...But it was his kid, too. It wasn't immaculate conception. (FD:22)

Because of the pregnancy Mac had to take the first job that came along to be able to support the family. He had to sacrifice his ideals for the good of the family. Stacey feels it is her fault that she became pregnant and that he did not have a choice where his job was concerned. Even though she rationally realizes that it was a mistake they both took part in she still blames herself. Stacey's idealized self demands that she should have been more careful, a demand which leaves no room for human error. According to Horney (1951:77) this kind of guilt originates from the self effacing person's feeling



of failure in front of the demands of the perfect being. Stacey has failed to be perfect and therefore she is to blame.

After this incident Stacey tried to suggest to Mac that he could try to find another job, but he only said "*I'm not complaining, am I?*" Stacey thinks that she "couldn't very well say *Yes*, but it seemed he was, in some way. I kept saying I was sorry, which must have got pretty boring for him." (FD: 22) Even though Mac denies that he blames her Stacey interprets his behavior and tone of voice to reveal that he does. The issue remains unresolved and Stacey feels guilty, which leads to her apologizing continuously.

Stacey also feels she has no right to demand anything more from Mac than what he has already done, i.e., taken responsibility of her and the children. "Well, he took on the responsibilities, Stacey. What more do you want?" (FD:22) Stacey seems to feel that wanting a connection with her husband is too much to ask. Underlying this again is Stacey's low feeling of self worth, which prevents her from wanting more for herself than the bare essentials. The comment also puts down the spontaneous feeling that expresses a need for something more. The real self voicing out humanly reasonable needs is put down by the neurotic structure just on the verge of a positive move. According to Horney (1951:131) condemning the healthy striving and stopping there when a positive move could set in and further a healthy development is characteristic of neurotic thinking.

Later on when Mac comes home from work late one night his steps on the stairs sound to Stacy like those of his seventy four year old father. Stacey looks at him and sees the lines on the forehead and around the eyes brought on by age. She thinks to herself: " – Worrying about how to support us? If I could only go away and leave him alone, take the sword off his neck. Would he want me to? No good saying he chose me and the kids. He didn't know what he was getting himself into, just as I didn't." (FD: 23) She feels she has

brought this burden on him and wonders whether he would be better off if she left with the children. She does realize that neither of them knew what they were getting into when they started a family, but she still seems to think that he is the only one who suffers or has the right to suffer. It would be equally valid to feel that Mac and the children were a burden to her and that maybe she would like to be free of them. This however does not enter Stacey's thoughts. Stacey is more worried about Mac's feelings than her own even though it is apparent to the reader that she is very unhappy. It is characteristic of the neurotic person according to Horney (1951: 115) not to have any feeling for herself. She has no compassion for her own suffering. This is caused by her alienation from the self originating from basic anxiety and manifesting itself in the struggle towards the idealized self.

Ten pages later Mac comes home earlier than and more cheerful than usual. He says that he has found a new job selling Richalife vitamins. Stacey thinks: "He's got a new job. And suddenly I've got a weird feeling. As though I'd been forgiven after all." (FD: 34) Now that Mac is enthusiastic and interested in his new job she feels she is forgiven for having become pregnant and thus forcing Mac to take the first job that was available without having the chance to find something that he found interesting. Mac's working at Drabble's continuously reminded Stacey of how he had had to compromise his ideals and interests because of her pregnancy. Now she feels the burden of guilt getting lighter.

All through their marriage since the first pregnancy fourteen years ago Stacey has been living with an underlying feeling of guilt in relation to Mac. Mac's silent protest seems an obvious sign of Mac blaming Stacey and Mac's denial of it only leaves the issue open. Stacey has harbored this guilt for a long time and it must have affected her relationship with Mac and with that her whole life. Because Stacey was denied absolution in the beginning she has been trying to make up for it all these years.

### 4.3.2. Agreeing too willingly

Stacey agrees with Mac and discards her own feelings and opinions very easily. Stacey does this for example when she is taking a walk in the city alone and sees the city as threatening and dangerous. She immediately remembers Mac earlier saying that the city is a lot safer than ten years ago. She thinks: "I guess he's right. I always say *I guess you're right*. More fool me, for agreeing so easily, but is it worth the upset not to? I ask myself." (FD:11.) Mac is not even present in the situation and she yields to his opinion although she herself vividly experiences a hostile feeling while walking in the city. Stacey realizes that she yields too easily to Mac's opinion in order to maintain peace between them but she still continues to do it. According to Horney (1951:224-26) the neurotic person yields easily to other people's opinions because she needs others so much that she must avoid friction of any kind. The neurotic person needs other people to strengthen her inner position by making her feel accepted, needed, wanted, liked, loved or appreciated. Because her feeling of self worth is almost non-existent due to her failure to fulfil the demands of the idealized self the neurotic is dependent on other people to provide her a feeling of worth through their acceptance and love. Thus Stacey compulsively agrees with her husband.

Mac thinks Stacey is ruining the boys by babying them, rushing in to console them at the slightest upset. Stacey has mixed feelings. She feels she should not do it, but at the same time she feels compelled. She promises Mac she will try not to do it anymore. "I don't mean to baby him. I'll try not to. Honestly, Mac, I will." (FD:28) Stacey is torn between her own need and Mac's opinion. But she resolves the conflict by agreeing with Mac and admitting her guilt. According to Horney (1951:224-25), the self-effacing

person overeagerly admits guilt when she feels attacked by other people thus trying to appease and take the edge off accusations.

In her mind Stacey thinks: " – I will. I will anything. I will turn myself inside out. I will dance on the head of a pin. I will yodel from the top of the nearest dogwood tree. I will promise anything, for peace. Then I'll curse myself for it." (FD:28) Stacey realizes afterwards that she compulsively agrees with Mac to maintain peace between them. But instead of deciding not to do it again she hates herself for doing it. According to Horney (1951:124), noticing her compulsive behavior has a potential to be the first step toward a gradual recognition of the forces that compel her to appease instead of assert herself. But instead the neurotic beats herself down for doing it. Thus the whole effect of her self observation is making her feel guilty with the result that her further lowered self-esteem makes it even harder for her to stand up for herself the next time.

Later on Mac raises his voice to quiet down the boys' argument at the dinner table. Stacey says: "Mac – leave them. Please. They'll simmer down." (FD:56) Stacey thinks Mac is being too hard on the boys. This leads her into yet another argument with Mac about her spoiling the kids by being too easy on them. Afterwards Stacey thinks.

My placating voice. Running interference again never knowing if rightly or wrongly, or whose side I'm on or why I should be on anybody's side. Am I undermining Mac?...Every time I disagree with him I feel I'm knocking him down. So I agree with him profusely and then it's me who's doing the disappearing act. (FD: 56-7).

Stacey feels she is choosing sides. She is either on Mac's side and agrees with his child rearing methods even though she seems to disagree with them or she is on the children's side against Mac. In passing it also occurs to her to wonder why she should be on anybody's side. This seems to imply that she does not have her own side as the mother, as an individual.

Stacey wonders whether she is undermining Mac as a parent by disagreeing with him. She also realizes that by agreeing with Mac against her own feelings she puts herself down. She seems to choose agreeing with Mac at her own cost. Keeping Mac happy is more important to her than her own feelings and rights.

Stacey is unsure of her rights in her own home. "Matthew [Mac's father] never knocks. He always walks straight in. This has irked Stacey for many years, Although she is not convinced that she has a right to be irked by it." (FD: 65) Stacey spontaneously feels annoyed by Matthew's behavior but doubts her own rights to feel this way. At one time Stacey mentioned her annoyance about the issue to Mac and he said that Matthew did have a right to walk in. Stacey thought "So that settled that" (FD:65). Once again Mac's word overrides Stacey's feelings and Stacey does not disagree with him because she feels she does not have the right to. According to Horney (1951:21) not being sure of her rights originates from the division in the neurotic person between the actual self and the idealized self which not only weakens her in general, but reinforces the alienation by adding an element of confusion. She no longer knows who she is or where she stands.

A feeling of guilt has been with Stacey starting from the beginning of their marriage. And it is probably partly as a continuation of this guilt that Stacey continues to agree with Mac against her spontaneous feelings. She does realize that by profusely agreeing with Mac she is putting herself down but she still seems unable to stand up for herself.

### 4.3.3. No sense of self-worth

Mac forces himself upon Stacey and when making love presses on her collar bone and makes her say it doesn't hurt when it apparently does. Stacey thinks: "Okay, I've aged this man. I've foisted my kids upon him. I yak away at him and he gets fed up and he finds his exit where I can't follow and don't understand." (FD: 29) He abuses her. She takes the abuse even though it is painful. She feels he has the right to do it because she has made him so unhappy and she has to pay for it. Taking the abuse as punishment for the wrong she feels she has done to him eases her guilt. The self-effacing person according to Horney (1951:136) suffers from self-contempt and often takes abuse from others too readily. She may not even recognize the flagrant nature of the abuse. This defenselessness is brought on by her conviction that she does not deserve any better treatment.

Stacey suspects that Mac is having an affair with a young, beautiful and slim girl. She thinks:

I worry. I get afraid. I drink too much. I get unreasonably angry. The valleys under my eyes look like permanent blue-black ink even though I get enough sleep, and my hips are nobody's business. I think Mac has fallen for that girl and who could blame him I guess. (FD: 149)

Stacey thinks it is understandable that Mac has an affair with a young girl, because she, Stacey, is neither perfect nor beautiful. The self-effacing person in her self-contempt, claims Horney (1951:136), is unable to feel conscious resentment for her husband for cheating because she feels unlovable and regards most other women as more attractive.

Stacey's relationship with her husband is haunted by guilt, appeasement and abuse. Stacey's neurosis, which was further strengthened by Mac's silent blame makes her unable to speak out for herself, which in its turn makes her life, in her own words, "hell".

#### **4.4. Stacey as a mother**

The most defining role in Stacey's life at the moment is the role of motherhood as she spends most of her time at home with the children. In this chapter I will look at how her neurosis affects Stacey's relationship with her children. First I will illustrate how Stacey has come to consider the perfect mother as a part of her idealized self and how she sees herself as a mother on account of this. In the third subchapter I will investigate how Stacey fears punishment for her spontaneous feelings and actions in the form of God making something happen to her children. In the fourth subchapter I will analyse how Stacey's compulsive behavior clashes with her children's needs. And finally in the last subchapter I will describe how the children take distance from Stacey and how she feels about it.

##### **4.4.1. The perfect mother**

The reader has earlier witnessed Stacey thinking about a time when she at the age of twelve was visiting a remote cousin for a week. She had hated every minute of it thinking of home "where she didn't want to be, either, the tomb silences between Niall Cameron and his wife." (FD:25) As a child Stacey did not like being home because of the bad relations between her own parents.

Once again Stacey is drinking and she thinks about her own parents not getting along too well; her father, an alcoholic undertaker who spent most of his time downstairs in his office and was never present for the children, and her mother who always had headaches.

Okay, Dad... You couldn't cope either. I never even felt all that sorry for you, way back when. Nor for her. I only thought people ought to be strong and loving and not make a mess of their lives and they ought to rear kids with whom it would be possible to talk because one would be so goddam comprehending and would win them over like nothing on earth, and I would sure know how to do it all." (FD:170)

As a teenager Stacey felt that her own parents failed as parents and was certain that it would never be like that when she would have a family of her own. She would be understanding and talk with her children. She would also be strong and loving and not make a mess of her life.

Every individual, according to Horney (1951:22), constructs her personal idealized self from the materials of her own experiences, her earlier fantasies, her particular needs and her given faculties. She endows the idealized self with unlimited powers and faculties. Whatever the particular characteristics happen to be they are stretched to the extreme in the idealized self. Stacey's experiences with her own family and her teenage resolution to be a better parent and not fail like her own parents did are the origins of her idealized self as the perfect mother. The idea of the perfect mother then becomes a major part of Stacey's idealized self. As a self-effacing type of neurotic Stacey then desperately tries to become this perfect mother but fails miserably.

Katie consoles Stacey when she cries after having thought that one of her sons was run over by a car. Stacey thinks to herself: " – It's supposed to be the other way around. What a rock of Gibraltar I turned out to be." (FD: 14) Stacey feels she should be stronger and not cry in front of the children and that it should be her who is strong so that the children could count on her to console them when needed. Later on Stacey cries in front of Duncan, her younger son, but denies it when he asks her whether she is crying and says that she is just tired. She thinks to herself: "Mothers don't cry. Only kids. Pull



yourself together, Stacey" (FD:214). Stacey feels she should be strong as a mother. Strength is a should which is part of the idealized self of the perfect mother.

Stacey feels she should be able to control the relationship between Mac and Ian, their son. Ian has built a bug and asks Mac to go and have a look at it with him. Mac is pleased with Ian for having built the bug and he tells Ian that. Stacey thinks:

– It's good when it's like that. Why can't it be all the time? Ian needs it so much. He doesn't give a damn for my approval. He knows he's got it anyway. It's Mac's he needs. And yet they turn around and knife each other with words, both suspicious. I should be able to prevent it, but I don't know how. (FD:57)

Stacey feels she should be able to control the relationship by making Mac to pay attention to and encourage the boys more. To the reader it is apparent that this is impossible for anyone to do at least it does not seem desirable to be able to manipulate others. Horney (1951:66) claims that many of the demands that the neurotic person issues on the self are of a kind that no human being could fulfill. But the person in the grips of neurotic demands is not aware of this and pushes herself compulsively towards perfection. According to Stacey's idealized self the perfect mother should be able to give her children *everything* they need. This is why Stacey feels she should be able to give her children their father's love unconditionally.

#### **4.4.2. Motherhood as a role**

Stacey does not believe in the things that she does as a mother. She acts in ways that she thinks she should act in order to be a good mother. "Funny thing, I never swear in front of my kids. This makes me feel I'm being a good example to them. Example of what? All the things I hate. Hate, but perpetuate." (FD:5) She uses as strong a word as 'hate' to describe how she

feels about the things she does as a mother. She does not refrain from cursing in front of her children because she genuinely thinks that it is good for them. Instead she is fulfilling the demands of the perfect mother while not really believing in her own actions.

Katie, Stacey's teenage daughter, wants to see an A-rated movie, which she is not old enough to see. Stacey tells her that she cannot go and they have an argument. Afterwards Stacey thinks to herself: " – What difference does it make? Why are we going on like this? Do I really believe it's going to alter her out of all recognition? No, I feel it's my duty to appear to be doing my duty, that's all. A farce." (FD: 46) Here again Stacey does not really believe in what she does as a mother. She feels she is only doing something she should do. She is trying to be the perfect idealized mother and she in a way realizes this when she feels she is only a farce. Maybe the perfect mother would believe in what she does and not feel the way she does. She is performing an act the script to which comes from outside of her and not from within. The role of the perfect mother is like a coat that does not fit. Horney (1951:111) points out that the neurotic person may feel she is a fraud, a freak, a bluff when she struggles in between the perfect idealized self and the actual humanly imperfect self.

#### **4.4.3. Fear of punishment for her thoughts and actions**

The very first words of the novel are a rhyme:

*Ladybird, ladybird,  
Fly away home;  
Your house is on fire,  
Your children are gone.*

Stacey has this rhyme in her mind when she is trying to teach Jen, her 2-year old daughter, to speak. Starting off the novel the rhyme is more central to the mood of the novel than it first seems. Stacey comes back to the rhyme when she repeatedly fears a punishment for her undesirable feelings, thoughts and actions in the form of God making something terrible happen to her children.

Stacey takes time off for herself. She leaves Jen with Tess, next door, and drives downtown in the intention of buying nightgowns for herself. But instead she ends up wandering around Vancouver trying to get to know the city she has lived in for 20 years, but still doesn't feel at home in. She loses track of time and suddenly realizes that she should have already been home to make lunch for the children. She thinks of how wrong it is for Katie to be expected to fill in and make lunch for the younger children. She also knows how worried Duncan gets if she is late. "I've got to get home, right now. *Ladybird, Ladybird, fly away home* – now, stop it, Stacey. Just cut it out. They are perfectly alright. Everything is alright." (FD:10) Stacey nearly panics about not being home on time on this one occasion. Her reaction would be understandable if she had been late often, but as a once occurring incidence her reaction seems out of proportion. She is afraid that something terrible will happen to the children because of her selfish behavior. According to Horney (1951:31) the neurotic person has reactions of panic and terror of doom to what is conceived as failure in fulfilling the demands of the idealized self which are entirely out of proportion to what seems to be the actual importance of the occasion.

When Stacey is on her way home from down town she wonders if the children are okay and then thinks: "Damn, I wish I didn't always have to be home at the right time" (FD:10). Then she constructs in her mind a scene of the Judgment Day with God throwing her into hell because she is not sure whether she loved her children during her time on earth. Stacey seems to

interpret wanting to have some time for herself as a sign of not loving her children. Stacey's idea of the perfect mother includes a taboo on putting her own needs before her duty as a mother to be there for her children every minute of the day. Stacey's idealized self demands her to be perfect in her love for her children and discard her own needs for the sake of her children.

On the way to the grocery store Stacey drives past a neighborhood lived in by hippies who are younger than she is. Stacey feels a need to explain herself to them. She feels ashamed of what she is, a housewife with four children, because she would like to be like them, young and free. Stacey is doing her groceries and, triggered by a song from her youth that is playing on the radio, she remembers an affair she had before her marriage at the time when she was young and single. In her mind Stacey is pining for the happy go lucky days of her youth because she does not feel completely comfortable with being a mother. Like the lard that has "imperceptively"(FD:73) gathered on her hips she has become a mother without even noticing it and without really wanting it, it seems. Suddenly she is wakened back to reality by Jen sitting in the trolley looking at her for approval on her singing. Stacey thinks to herself:

Stacey, how dare you complain about even one single solitary thing? Listen, God, I didn't mean it. Just don't let anything terrible happen to any of them, will you? I've had everything I always wanted. I married a guy I loved, and I had my kids. I know everything is alright. I wasn't meaning to complain. I never will again. I promise. (FD:76)

Stacey realizes that she was in her mind dissatisfied with her life as a responsible adult and a mother. When she snaps back to reality it is Jen's eyes that look at her, needing her, reminding her of her role as a mother who loves her children. There is an incongruity between Stacey's spontaneous feelings of not wanting to be a mother and the demand of the idealized self on being the perfect mother who puts her children before her own needs. In Stacey this triggers off guilt for her longing after the life she had before

marriage. Stacey feels she has committed a horrendous deed and fears a punishment in the form of God making something terrible happen to her children. This reaction seems wildly out of proportion to what she has done as in the previous example.

On these two occasions Stacey first becomes lost in her thoughts and has spontaneous feelings that strive to define her solely through herself. Then she suddenly wakes up back to reality and becomes aware of her children needing her. She fears she will be punished for her earlier thoughts and feelings by something terrible happening to her children. She has to rush in to take care of her children in order to avoid punishment and not because she spontaneously wants to take care of them. This points to the compulsive nature of Stacey's behavior. According to Horney (1951:29) the difference between spontaneous and compulsive is one between 'I want' and 'I must in order to avoid some danger'. A compulsive drive is defined as the opposite of spontaneous wishes and strivings, which are an expression of the real self. All neurotic developments have in common their compulsive nature which also separates a neurotic development from a healthy striving towards the real self. Stacey's spontaneous feelings expressing her wish to be young and free are overtaken by a compulsive need to be the perfect mother under the threat of punishment.

#### **4.4.4. Stacey's compulsion vs. her children's needs**

One of the boys cries out at night because of a bad dream and Stacey rushes in to console him. Mac thinks she is ruining the boys by always consoling them even at the smallest upset. Stacey thinks:

Sometimes I see it his way, and I think *How can I ever make up for what I've done to them? How can I ever answer or atone for it?* And yet I keep going to them when they waken and cry out. It's as though I'm compelled. What I cannot bear is the thought that one of them is trapped in his nightmare, alone in there. (FD:26)

Stacey does realize that she might be harming the boys by babying them. But at the same time she feels "compelled" to do it. She feels she has to help them no matter what. She wants to be there for them all the time, even when they are asleep. Stacey is trying to be the perfect mother and tries to "be so goddam comprehending"(FD:170) as she thought she would be as a parent when she herself was a teenager and thought that her own mother had failed in ways that she never would. Stacey's need to fulfill the demands of the perfect mother is a compulsion that she has to obey. Even though she realizes that by doing this she might be harming the children she still has to do it. Her compulsion overrides the needs of her children as individuals.

After the argument with Katie about going to the movies Stacey thinks to herself:

Katie? Listen. Just let me explain. I can explain everything. Sure, Explainer of the year, that's me. How can I explain anything? How can I tell you what you should be doing? I don't know what I should be doing. But I think if I don't tell you, It'll look bad. If I could level with you, would we be further ahead? Do you really want to know what I'm like? I can't believe it. (FD:47)

Katie is angry at Stacey for not letting her go to a movie she is not old enough to see. To the reader it seems valid for Stacey as a mother to forbid Katie to see the movie. But Stacey feels a need to explain herself to Katie. Stacey wants to make herself understandable to Katie and through this prevent Katie for being mad at her. This seems to indicate that Stacey feels uncomfortable with Katie's anger and needs her acceptance. The self-effacing type of neurotic person according to Horney (1951:226) needs other people's acceptance to provide her with a feeling of self worth which she has lost due

to her failure to fulfil the demands of the idealized self. This is why Stacey feels uncomfortable with Katie being angry at her. She tries to make Katie understand her and thus cease to be mad at her. She has a need to level with Katie while she also cannot believe it would be good for Katie to know what she is like. Stacey's compulsion to explain and to be understood and accepted is represented against Katie's needs as a child.

Stacey retrieves her feeling of self worth almost entirely through the role of mother. When Stacey thinks about what would happen if she died. She does not care who Mac would remarry but she does not want anyone else bringing up her children (FD:168). The role of mother seems to be a more important defining factor of Stacey's feeling of self at the moment than the role of wife. Therefore the acceptance of her children is all the more important to her.

#### **4.4.5. The children take distance from Stacey**

On three subsequent pages Stacey realizes the distance there exists between herself and her three older children. Stacey does not seem to understand that it is a normal and healthy development for children to take distance from their mother and to gain independence through that.

Ian complains to Stacey that there is nothing to do. Stacey suggests for him to go and play with Peter. Ian goes quiet and then says that Peter is dead, that he was run over by a car a while ago. Stacey does not know this even though she at the beginning of the novel witnessed the accident. At the time Stacey was too worried about getting home on time and making sure that her own children were okay to stay and find out what really happened. Stacey tries to console Ian in his grief but he rejects her and goes to his hiding place. Stacey thinks:

– What’s he been having nightmares about these past weeks? Why can’t he ever say? How did he get to be that way, or was it born in him? God, how should I know? He gets further and further away. I can’t reach him at all. Was he always that way, only I never noticed so much when he was younger? (FD:117)

Stacey feels Ian is receding from her. She wonders what he thinks and dreams about. She also wonders whether he has always been like that. Stacey thinks only from her own perspective. She needs a connection and acceptance from Ian for her own needs. She does not realize Ian’s need for independence and individuality. According to Horney (1951:291-92), it becomes difficult for the neurotic person to see other people as individuals in their own right because of her egocentrism. By egocentrism Horney does not mean selfishness in the sense of pursuing merely one’s own advantage. In this meaning of the word the neurotic may be callously selfish or too unselfish depending on the person. But the neurotic is always egocentric in the sense of being wrapped up in herself and living by her private religion of her idealized self. As a result she becomes more emotionally isolated and thus removed from people, which makes her unable to take other people into consideration as individuals. Thus Stacey sees Ian only as *her child*, through her own needs and not as an individual who has needs of his own.

Duncan hurts his hand on a rusty nail and is terrified and crying. Stacey consoles him. Mac is home too and gets angry at Duncan for making such a big fuss about nothing. Stacey asks Mac to leave him alone. Duncan goes up to his room and Stacey follows him to make sure he is okay after checking that Mac is watching TV and does not see her. Stacey talks to Duncan and realizes that she can do nothing to console him. Duncan feels that he can never do anything right for his father. He feels he is a failure. Stacey realizes that Duncan needs his father’s acceptance and not hers. ”I’m far from him, too. Far even from Duncan. How did it happen like this?” (FD:119) Stacey feels she has no connection with Duncan either. Here again she sees the



situation only from her own perspective and does not realize the child's needs, only her own. Stacey also notices that Katie has started calling her "Mother" instead of "Mum", thus distancing herself from Stacey by not using the childish "Mum" but a more formal and adult like "Mother". She thinks:" Heavens.....How long? I never noticed before" (FD:119)

#### **4.4.6. The children protect their privacy**

Stacey and Katie have an argument. Stacey asks Katie to be patient with Ian when he goes into her room without knocking. Katie says that that is Stacey's job. Stacey says "just wait, sweetheart, till you've got your own kids" (FD:120). Katie says that she will never have a family, because Stacey always tells the children that they get on her nerves and the way Stacey and Mac go on, not really arguing, but not getting along either. Stacey remembers an exactly same kind of a situation between herself and her mother when Stacey was sixteen years old. The only difference to the situation with Katie is that Stacey said that she would have children of her own, but that it would never be like it is with her mother with all the crying and headaches. Stacey asks Katie if the situation between Stacey and Mac really seems that bad to her. Katie does not answer because she is crying. Stacey moves toward her and Katie says "Go away, can't you?" Stacey thinks:" – It's her age. They're all like that, at about this age. Of course I know that. Katie – talk to me." (FD:121) Stacey realizes she has to leave her alone on the account that that is the way teenagers are – moody. But finishing the thought with "Katie - talk to me" reveals that Stacey still has a need to gain a connection with Katie through talking. She cannot stand Katie being angry with her. She needs Katie to understand her and through that support her in her actions. Stacey is so uncertain in her role as mother that she is looking for acceptance on her actions from her daughter. At the same time she disregards her daughter's need for independence.

With the comment "They're all like that, at about this age" (FD:121) Stacey also refuses to acknowledge what kind of influence her and Mac's bad relations are having on the children. She rationalizes to herself that Katie is just going through some phase and there is nothing wrong with the way things are. As if Katie's being a teenager would make her words unreliable as a report of the way their home life seems to the children. Stacey does not seem to have done all that much better as a parent than her own parents even though she promised herself she would. She is refusing to think about this by disqualifying Katie's words.

Duncan tells Stacey that Ian was almost run over by a car when he ran to the street after a football. Right after the incident Ian said he did not want to play anymore and when Duncan went to look for him he found Ian crying in the basement. In the evening Ian refuses to let Duncan into their shared room because according to Duncan he does not want people seeing him cry and is angry with him for it. Stacey goes to the locked door of the boys' room and tries to talk to Ian about the incident and to console him. Ian says: "Can't you leave me alone? *Can't you just leave me alone?*" (FD:215) Stacey is shocked and thinks: "Ian, don't - I can't bear it. And you can't bear the way I try to know, the way I try to enter your locked room, can you? All your locked rooms." (FD:216) Ian rejects her much the same way as Katie did in the previous example. Stacey still has a need to be there for Ian but now she also realizes Ian's need for some space of his own.

Stacey as a mother feels that she has to be perfect and be a better parent than her own mother was. She, however, feels like she is playing the role of motherhood and very badly at that, instead of being a mother. Stacey's concern for her children is revealed to be compulsive instead of genuine when she acts in the fear of punishment and not prompted by her genuine feelings. This compulsive nature of her neurotic needs come into conflict with the children's needs as individuals entitled to independence and privacy.

Stacey notices that the children are taking distance from her while she still needs a connection with them. In her compulsion and neurotic egocentrism she first fails to see her children as individuals with needs of their own. But when Ian and Katie, her two oldest children openly reject her in order to protect their privacy she begins to realize that they need some space of their own. But she still has a need for a connection with her children.

#### **4.5. Stacey in relation to other people**

In this chapter I will investigate how Stacey's neurosis affects her relationships with people outside her family. The people Stacey has contact with most are Tess, the next door neighbor who is a housewife, like Stacey and Thor, Mac's new employer selling Richalife all-purpose vitamins. I will also touch upon Stacey's view of how she imagines other families to be like.

##### **4.5.1. Tess, the neighbor**

Tess lives next door with her husband Jake. Tess has no children even though she is a housewife. Every now and then Tess and Stacey have coffee together in the mornings. Stacey often leaves Jen with Tess so that she can go to the hairdressers or run errands. On one of these occasions Stacey goes over to leave Jen with Tess to go shopping and we see Tess through Stacey's eyes reported by the omniscient narrator and followed by Stacey's thought (in italics), which is interrupted by their following dialogue.

Tess is still in her housecoat, but being tall and slender looks as though ready to receive the peruvian ambassador. Tess's hair is honey-blond and even this early in the day is done in a flawless French roll. Stacey, who is shorter than she would like to be, is wearing her pale-blue last year's spring coat and, because her dark unruly hair needs doing, a small white veil-enfolded straw hat which she dislikes.

*My God I look awful How does she always look so* [sic] (FD: 5)

Stacey sees Tess as beautiful even in her housecoat because she is so tall and slim. Tess has also done her beautiful hair perfectly. In comparison Stacey sees herself in clothes that are old and which she does not like. She is short and she has not done her hair. In Stacey's eyes Tess comes out as perfect and she herself as quite the opposite. Stacey only sees Tess's extravagant exterior. Stacey's almost non-existent feeling of self-worth makes her see other people as pictures of perfection. According to Horney (1951:292-93) the neurotic sees the people around her in the light of her own externalizations. She does not realize that she has created an idealized image of herself that she desperately tries to become. Instead she externalizes this idealized image to qualities in other people, seeing them as perfect and herself as hideous in her imperfection in comparison.

Stacey thanks Tess in advance for looking after Jen. Tess says she is always glad to look after Jen because she does not have children of her own. They talk about Jen, age 2, who has not yet learned to talk. Stacey's thoughts are italicized for clarity.

Tess: My, she's determined not to communicate, isn't she?

*- That's right, rub it in. If you had kids, you'd know it's not such a laugh.*

Tess: Come on, honey, want a cookie?

Stacey: She's just had breakfast.

*- Don't feed the animals. I know your cookies. Shortbread. Last time she threw up when I got her home. God, I'm ungrateful.*

Stacey: Tess, thanks a million - I'm really grateful.

Tess: It's nothing. Now you run right along now

*- What cat noises go on in her head? Maybe none. Maybe only me. Stacey, you rotten old bitch. (FD:5-6)*

While Stacey and Tess exchange these quick words Stacey at the same time thinks rather negative thoughts about Tess. She wonders whether Tess has negative thoughts about her as well but seems to come to the conclusion that she herself is the only one. Stacey feels she should not have these negative thoughts and calls herself "a rotten old bitch". There seems to be a taboo on negative feelings connected to Stacey's idealized self. The self-effacing person often does have a taboo on negative feelings claims Horney (1951:222-23). The qualities of the idealized self are all lovable qualities, such as unselfishness, goodness, generosity, humility, saintliness, nobility, and sympathy. Because the self-effacing type fails to reach her goal of perfection she often feels guilty for her negative feelings.

Stacey's taboo on negative feelings can also be traced back to her childhood experiences. Stacey remembers an incident with her own mother when she was eight or nine years old.

Stacey Cameron, . . . , back from playing in the bush at the foot of the hill that led out of Manawaka. There was this gopher on the road, Mother, and somebody had shot it with a twenty-two and all its stomach and that was all out and it wasn't dead yet. *Please, dear don't talk about it – it isn't nice.* But I saw it and it was trying to breathe only it couldn't and it was. *Sh, it isn't nice.* (I hurt, Mother. I'm scared.) (Sh, it isn't nice.) (I hurt, you hurt, he hurts – Sh.) (FD: 167-68)

Stacey is shocked to have seen an animal been shot almost to death. Stacey is also hurt and scared but her mother says she should not talk about it because it is not nice. The gory details of an animal dying are not nice. And Stacey's feelings of hurt and fear brought on by seeing a scary event are not nice either and should not be talked about.

#### 4.5.2. Mac's boss, Thor

Thor is Mac's new employer. The company Mac works with sells 'Richalife' vitamins which are supposed to help a person gain a richer life, make her better and more efficient. All the employees along with their families are required to use Richalife products. Thor has parties for his employees in order to get to know them on a personal level. In the first party that Mac and Stacey take part in Thor is first described by the omniscient narrator followed by Stacey's thoughts in italics for clarity:

Thor...carries himself carefully straight as though he practices every morning in front of a full-length mirror. His suit is a costly blue-gray, giving the impression of a luminous uniform, a doorman in heaven or perhaps a mace bearer behind the celestial throne. His features have clearly been sculptured by an expert, and his hair is silver. Above the out-jutting jaw and the young face, the silver hair forestedly flourishes, a lion's share of it which he tosses imperially back.

*- How do you like that? How has he achieved that crowning glory? (FD:38-39)*

Thor is described as the image of perfection, handsome in his costly suit. The celestial inferences that are made of his appearance (heaven, celestial throne, lion, imperially) enforce the image of him as a divine creature, beyond normal human capacity. And Stacey seems to agree with that view of him (crowning glory). Also Thor's name, Thor Thorlakson, with the double inference to the God of thunder, Thor, increases this image. To top off Thor's perfection he is described at a later party to have a voice, when talking "not distant or unapproachable. The reverse. He talks with people, not at them. His voice is warm, friendly, sincere." (FD:145) He is perfect in this respect as well.

At the first Richalife party Thor tells about his personal experiences with the Richalife products. He says that since he started taking the vitamins he has stopped smoking, drinking coffee, and having a drink before dinner. He gives the impression that everyone can become as perfect as he is with the help of

Richalife products. Stacey, however, is suspicious of Thor and the products. The next day after the party Stacey has dinner ready and she is waiting for Mac to come home. Stacey pours herself a large gin and tonic and raises her glass thinking.

- Here's to the god of thunder. He's right. If I spent my life pouring myself full of vitamins and tomato juice instead of gin, coffee and smoke, maybe I would be a better person. I would be slim, calm good-tempered, efficient, sexy and wise.

Also beautiful. Beautiful and intelligent. (FD: 45)

Pouring a drink before dinner reminds Stacey of how Thor said at the party that he had stopped having a drink before dinner and that his life improved drastically on starting the richalife program. Stacey distrusts Thor and the richalife products. In having these previous thoughts then she is being ironic and does not really believe that the vitamin pills could achieve a change in her. Thus she is capable of a realistic sense of life. Even so, the qualities that she mentions are the shoulds that she has earlier agonized over not being (see 4.1.1.): slim, calm, wise, beautiful. Stacey externalizes the shoulds of the idealized self to what Thor represents.

#### **4.5.3. Other families**

Stacey comes home from a Polyglam (with sales tactics similar to Tupperware) party at a neighbour's house and pours herself a "gargantuan" gin and tonic and sits in the living room alone looking at the Polyglam booklet that shows happy and untroubled families amid the products. In the novel Stacey's thoughts are in italics to convey their fantastic quality: "*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 alright, and she will live in the light of the morning*" (FD:90) Through this fantasy we can see that Stacey on some level thinks that their family is the only one with problems. She idealizes other people,

other families as perfect and harmonious. She externalizes a demand that she has set for herself of the kind of family she should have to a very vague object of people in "unknown houses". She takes the pictures in the Polyglam booklet to represent real families that actually exist somewhere, which of course they do not. People appearing in commercial publications are most likely hired actors who are paid to look happy and untroubled in order to promote the selling of the product.

Stacey's relationships to people outside the safe haven of her home are colored by her own neurotic needs. She does not realize that she herself has created the idealized self that she tries to become, and that she externalizes the demands on herself to qualities in other people. Thus she feels inadequate in comparison to others.



## 5. NEED FOR CHANGE

I have so far constructed a picture of Stacey as a neurotic. Her relationships with the people around her are controlled by her neurotic needs and compulsions. And most importantly she feels miserable *all* the time. In this chapter we will see Stacey becoming a bit more aware of her situation, slightly more desperate and heavily drunk. Finally she will venture out into the world alone for the first time as an individual.

### 5.1. Need for something else

Stacey finds in herself the need to have something of her own that has nothing to do with Mac or the children. She feels that she is wasting her life in an unbroken series of trivialities of everyday life. She realizes that sooner or later the children will leave home and it would be nice to have something of her own when they do. She realizes that she is completely defined by her roles as mother and wife and has no identity apart from these roles.

I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac's wife or the kid's 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.(FD:95)

It is safe for Stacey to play a role where she knows what is expected of her. But as long as she keeps playing these roles she will not have a possibility to find out about herself and through that to come to terms with her life situation. She has to break out of the safe old roles in order to find something new.

## 5.2. A glimpse of selfhood

The last time Stacey had a sense of identity was when she was young. Now she is in the basement drunk, more than usual, and she listens to music from her youth and dances like she did when she was young, attractive and happy and she thinks to herself:

I think of Katie – maybe Ian, now, too – thinking of me like I’m prehistoric, and it bugs me. I’m sorry, but it does. I’m not a good mother. I’m not a good wife. I don’t want to be. I’m Stacey Cameron [her maiden name] and I still love to dance...I love this music. It’s mine. Buzz off, you little buggers, you don’t understand. No – I didn’t mean that. I meant it. I was myself before any of you were born. (FD:134-35)

Stacey is not comfortable with the role of mother and she has lost the definition of herself that comes from her and not through other people. The only definition of herself, concerning only her, is from the days before her marriage when she was single. Drunkenness alone gives her the escape into this feeling good about herself as a person by letting her return to the happy-go-lucky days of her youth. This identity of her youth is, however, irreconcilable with her current life situation as a 39-year-old mother of four children.

When Stacey is dancing downstairs she suddenly realizes that she is “stoned” and that she has to make dinner for the children. “I’m not fit to take care of kids, that’s the plain truth. God accept my apologies herewith. He won’t. ... What a slut I am. ... Come on bitch. Another cup of coffee. (FD: 136-7) The demands of the idealized self return as she snaps back to reality. She feels she shouldn’t have gotten that drunk. Once again she has failed to be the perfect mother. He apologizes to God who works as her conscience, but doesn’t think he will accept.

Stacey has not been able to adapt her identity along with the changes of marriage and motherhood. The role of mother stays somehow at a distance from Stacey, it is not integrated into her personality. Instead she has created an idealized self which she tries to become. The idealized self demands her to be perfect as a mother, to be there for her children at all times and to have only positive feelings, especially towards her children. Only momentarily through drunkenness Stacey is able to escape from the demands of the idealized self and not care about having failed in fulfilling them.

Stacey herself has a fairly accurate insight on her situation: " – I stand in relation to my life both as child and as parent, never quite finished with the old battles, never able to arbitrate properly the new, able to look both ways, but whichever way I look, God, it looks pretty confusing to me." (FD: 47) Stacey is caught between the two subsequent stages of life. She derives her sense of self from when she was young and single. But at the moment the role of mother largely defines her existence although this role is not integrated in her personality. She acts out the role of the perfect mother that she has created. But she does not feel that she *is* this mother, she feels she is playing a role.

### **5.3. Desperation**

After dancing in the basement Stacey drinks lots of coffee and manages to get through preparing dinner for the children and cleaning up afterwards. Then she drinks some more. At midnight she feels she should sober up and makes some coffee and then decides to heat up a sandwich and puts the cooker on. When she reaches for the frying pan she stumbles and when searching for balance with her hand she burns it on the cooker. She thinks to herself: "I'm not sure I really want to go on living at all. I can't cope. I do cope. Not well, though. Not with anyone. Jesus I get tired sometimes." (FD:141). Then she wonders what it would be like for the children if she

took an overdose and they found her dead in the bedroom. Then she realizes that she could not do it because it would hurt her children too much by making them think that she did not love them. She feels stuck in her life, unable to get out even by suicide.

#### **5.4. Trying herself out**

Later on the older children are at school and Jen is with the neighbors. Stacey has written a letter to her mother and she is walking over to the letter box. "Stacey is alone and it feels peculiar to her". She reaches the end of the street they live on and looks back feeling "disconnected, younger, separate." She thinks to herself: " – Hey it's a nice feeling. Yet I feel I oughtn't to feel glad." (FD:150) Now that she is alone she feels disconnected from the house, the family and the roles she has to play there and as a result she feels younger. She likes the feeling, but immediately also feels that she should not enjoy something that is separate from the family, the children. It does not fit into the idealized image of the perfect mother to enjoy herself outside the role of mother. The self-effacing type according to Horney (1951:218) often has a taboo on selfishness, that is, doing anything just for herself. The neurotic person feels that it would be selfish to enjoy something alone. Even though Stacey feels the need for something of her own that has nothing to do with Mac and the children she still feels she should not enjoy something that she does on her own. She does not, however, feel outright guilt. She does not immediately condemn the nice feeling. Instead she in a way feels her way in an unknown territory, carefully.

Just then Mac's old trucker friend, Buckle, drives by and offers Stacey a lift. Stacey's relationship with Buckle has always been laden with sexual tension. Stacey thinks Buckle is sexy and on one of the many occasions when he comes over for dinner Stacey thinks to herself: "His jeans are always too tight and they bulge where his sex is, and it embarrasses me and infuriates me

that it does, yet I always look, as he damn well knows and laughs at” (FD:50). Stacey asks him to come in and wonders why she can talk to him only in her "good-wife-and-mother voice" (FD:50) that in her opinion sounds so prim. She also wonders what kind of a person he thinks she is. It seems to bother her that he might think of her only as a person who is prudish, dull and sexless.

When Buckle offers Stacey the ride she hesitates and looks back at (the street they live on) Bluejay Crescent "seeing it recede"(FD:151). Earlier Stacey seemed to be afraid of the world outside her home and felt only barely strong enough to deal with the things that went on "inside the four walls"(FD:15). The physical house and home is representative of the rigid role of the perfect mother. Walking away from the house alone with none of the children along to define her in the role of the mother she is also walking away from the demanding shoulds of the perfect mother. And now that she ventures into the world she discovers that it is liberating instead of overwhelming. In the midst of this intriguing new discovery she "without thinking or knowing she is going to do it"(FD:151) climbs into the truck. They drive to a warehouse to drop off Buckle's cargo. Stacey sits in the cabin of the truck when one of the truckers looks up at Stacey and "grins knifedly". Stacey thinks:

My God. It isn't possible. He looked at me like I'm a whore or something. And I can't say to him, *Listen bud I'm a respectable married woman named thus*. Because here I'm not. They don't know what I am. They only see a woman in slacks and sweater, in the cab on Buckle's truck. My, my. Doesn't that seem strange. Do I mind? Am I offended? Hell, no. I'm delighted. (FD:155)

Stacey is pleased to be seen out of the context of her family. In this situation she is seen in an entirely different context and interpreted through that by someone who doesn't know her. This does not mean she wants to be a

where but this incidence brings out the possibility for other selves, other roles that she could have and the prospect of this delights her.

Stacey goes with Buckle to his place supposedly to have a beer, but it is clear to both of them that the motivation is sexual. On the way there Stacey fantasizes about him. In the apartment Stacey is ready to have sex with him. When she starts to move towards him he suddenly tells her not to touch him and instead masturbates in front of her. All the while Buckle looks at her and says that she "won't get it" (FD:159). Stacey becomes frightened and turns to walk out the door. Buckle throws coins on the floor for Stacey to take the bus home. Thus, Stacey first attempt to do something on her own turns out in the end to be a rather humiliating experience.

When Buckle tells Mac that Stacey has been unfaithful to him with Buckle he confronts Stacey about it. They have an argument which ends in Stacey taking off with the car. She drives recklessly on the highway and after a close call with another car she pulls over and realizes that she could have killed herself. She speculate who Mac would marry if she died and what would happen to the children. "I don't give a good goddam who he might marry if I got wrecked, but I don't want anybody else bringing up my kids. Yeh, you're such a marvellous mother. Great example to the young, you. A veritable pillar of strength, I don't think." (FD: 168) The children are the only reason she has to stay alive. She feels the children need her, but at the same time she feels she does not measure up to the shoulds of the idealized self. She also sees herself more as a mother than a wife. The most important defining factor of her feeling of self is her children who are now receding from her, starting to hide in their own caves where she cannot follow them. The only role that defines her is becoming obsolete as the children are growing up.

## **6. RECOVERY**

After the argument with Mac about infidelity Stacey drives around aimlessly and ends up on a beach where she sits on a log and thinks about her life. Luke, a young man of 29 who is house-sitting a house up the beach, approaches her and they get to talking and Luke invites her in for a cup of coffee. They meet each other three times. They talk, and on two of these occasions they also make love.

### **6.1. Luke - a healthy point of view**

When Luke laughs at Stacey's stories and worries, the omniscient narrator reports Stacey's thoughts: "Luke laughs again, but it doesn't strike her as cruel, only removed from her, as though he were looking at things from some very different point of view" (FD: 178). As an outsider to Stacey's world Luke gives a different perspective on things and she has a receptive mind to his view on life. On several occasions Luke points out Stacey's inhuman demands on herself. He also breaks the illusion of everything being alright by noticing that Stacey is not happy. When he frees Stacey of this illusion he makes it possible for her to look for something different and more constructive.

Horney (1951:306-7) claims that a change of human environment can help a person outgrow her neurotic difficulties. In analytic therapy this view is expressed in the belief that the principal curative factor lies in the possibility of the patient's establishing a good relationship with the analyst, i.e., one in which the factors which were injurious in childhood are absent. This belief follows from the view that neurosis primarily is and remains a disturbance in human relations and therefore can be remedied by an experience of a good human relationship. Following from this then the neurotic need not attend therapy to find more constructive ways to think. She can be positively

influenced by close and prolonged contact with relatively healthy persons. With the feeling of being acceptable there arises the possibility of accepting and benefiting from serious and constructive criticism. Spending time with Luke triggers in Stacey a recovery process that brings with it realizations about life and herself. For the first time in the novel Stacey begins to accept herself as she is and resume responsibility of her own life.

### **6.1.1. Luke points out Stacey's neurotic patterns of behavior**

The first time Stacey meets Luke he says he writes science fiction stories. Stacey starts to say that she often creates sci-fi stories in her mind but then stops in mid sentence. Luke says: "Yeh? You sometimes what? You started to say it, then you quit, like I'd think you were way-out for mentioning it." (FD:180.) Luke points out to Stacey what she is doing and that it is her, not him, who thinks it ridiculous for her to be doing such a thing. According to Horney (1951:220) the self-effacing person usually externalizes her fear of ridicule to other people and assumes that they think it ridiculous for her to have the ambition to write or create something. This fear of ridicule easily arises from any reaching out beyond the narrow confines of the neurotic person because she feels so small and so insignificant. Luke exposes to Stacey her neurotic externalization and points out that it is herself who does not believe in her own capacities and not him.

Luke tells Stacey about his own family. He has five sisters and when he was a child the house was always full of relatives and it was noisy. He tells how he sometimes wished he did not have that many people around, so that he could have been alone in peace. Stacey says she wishes she had a family like that, thus idealizing the picture that Luke gives her the the same way as she idealized other families earlier (see 4.4.3.). Luke tells her: "Everything looks better and worse from the outside, I guess. You think – *How lucky they are or how in hell can they stand it?* Maybe they are not so lucky, but they can



stand it.” (FD: 198) Luke points out that it is never perfect, that there is always good *and* bad sides to every situation. There is no perfect family the way Stacey seems to think. Thus Luke is exposing her neurotic idealization of other people.

Stacey tells Luke about her four children. Luke says: "Four kids, eh? What are you trying to be? A good example?". Stacey replies that she "can't be" to which Luke says: "Well, that's good. So why try?" (FD: 180-81). Luke points out that she does not have to try to be something she is not. He questions the necessity of the demand on being the perfect mother, which Stacey takes as the law never to be questioned. He is pointing out a demand which goes against Stacey's spontaneous feelings. He is giving her room to take into account her feelings which represent her real self. Thus he is supporting a healthy development towards the real self over the neurotic striving towards the idealized self.

Stacey goes out to see Luke for the second time. She apologizes for her "supersensitivity" when talking about her age, Luke says. "Don't be sorry, Stacey. People should never be sorry – it's a waste of time...You keep communicating your own awfulness to yourself, and nothing changes. You just go on in the same old groove." (FD:192). Luke is commenting on this one incident but to Stacey it bares a meaning on her relationship with Mac. As was pointed out in chapter 4.2.1 apologies have been an integral part of the communication between Stacey and Mac since the beginning of their marriage. It is not just a habit but it also helps to maintain Stacey's neurotic condition by keeping her in "the same old groove".

Luke offers a healthy point of view to Stacey's neurotic thinking. He exposes to Stacey her neurotic externalization in relation to others and idealization of them. He also questions her neurotic demands on herself and instead supports a consideration of her spontaneous feelings, thus supporting the

healthy growth towards the real self over the neurotic striving towards the idealized self. Further on Luke points out that Stacey's apologizing serves to maintain her neurosis, which also has a connection with the relationship between Mac and Stacey.

### **6.1.2. Luke's perception of Stacey**

The first time Stacey and Luke meet and talk Luke says: "Come out. From wherever you're hiding yourself. See – if I look very hard, I can just about make you out in there, but miniature, like looking through the wrong end of a telescope." (FD:181) This is the impression Luke gets from Stacey's behavior and being, never having met her before and therefore being an outsider to Stacey's world. Stacey says she knows what he means, maybe having felt that way sometimes. According to Horney (1951:219) the taboos (in Stacey's case the taboo on negative feelings) compose a shrinking process that artificially reduces the neurotic person's stature which can lead to a feeling of shrinking that can establish itself through dreams showing the person physically smaller. Luke's perception indicates the same thing when he says that she appears smaller than she is. Stacey may not have consciously thought that way but when Luke puts it into words she identifies with the feeling.

Luke affirms Stacey's spontaneous feelings that tell her that something is wrong, that she is not happy. In the beginning of the novel Stacey instinctively felt that something was wrong. As was mentioned in chapter 4.1.1 her spontaneous feelings were an expression of her real self. But these feelings were, however, undermined by a thought declaring that nothing is wrong thus crushing the attempt of the real self for a positive move towards a healthier development. When Stacey is leaving Luke's for home she says to him "Thanks for noticing I wasn't so cheerful." Luke replies that "it only stood out all over you" (FD:181). From Luke's point of view he only points

out the obvious, while to Stacey it is like a valuable gift, a recognition from outside of her that confirms her spontaneous feeling that something is wrong. Luke helps Stacey quiet down the judgmental voice in her mind that does not let her continue with her thoughts long enough to actually find out what is wrong, or even to just accept the fact that she is not satisfied with her life. Thus Luke further supports the recognition of her spontaneous feelings and the healthy growth towards the real self.

Luke as an outside observer sees Stacey's neurosis in her behavior of confusion, self-minimizing and apologies. Her being reveals her inner life. Luke also immediately notices that she is not satisfied with her life. Thus he is the first person in Stacey's life who recognizes her unhappiness. This supports Stacey's spontaneous feelings and growth towards the real self, instead of the idealized self.

### **6.1.3. Luke introduces uncertainty into Stacey's life**

Stacey achieves a sense of safety in her life through verbal communication. She does this by keeping peaceful relations with Mac through overly agreeing with him and by being dependent on her children and their acceptance. Luke refuses to give her the same kind of safety. Luke does not let her cling to him. He does accept her physically by making love to her passionately. But he does not accept her verbally, instead he forces her to live with uncertainty.

When Stacey meets Luke for the first time and cries Luke tells her to go ahead and cry. He also says to Stacey that she is not alone. Stacey says that he is wrong about that and he says: "No, baby that's where *you're* wrong". Stacey says: "You're real? You're not real. I'm imagining." Luke replies: "You're not imagining. But maybe I'm not *that* real, so don't count on it." (FD:179.) Right from the beginning Luke is understanding and supportive,

but he remains detached at the same time. He warns her not to attempt to depend on him too much.

When Stacey is leaving Luke's after their first meeting she "hesitates in the doorway, not wanting to go, wanting Luke to suggest that she might like to drive out again sometime. But he only smiles at her, so she finally turns." (FD:181) Stacey is looking for an invitation because she herself wants to come out to see him again. If he invited her to come again she would know that he liked her, that she had his acceptance. Now that he does not say anything he leaves it open, not committing to anything and not creating a sense of security. When she goes out to see him again it is because she alone wants to. Not knowing whether he wants to see her again produces an element of uncertainty and makes her nervous. When she goes out to see him in spite of this she is operating as her own person in a world with no guarantees but in a world with new possibilities.

The second time Stacey goes out to see Luke he asks her to tell about her fears. Stacey says that he does not want to know because it would be boring to him. Luke says "Don't worry. If I get bored, I'll let you know. Things that scare people are hardly ever boring. You could be an exception, of course." (FD: 193) Here again Luke does not promise acceptance. He might or might not be bored and Stacey will just have to see what happens without the promise of an unquestioning acceptance. Luke leaves things open, forcing Stacey to live with uncertainty.

Stacey tells Luke that she worries about the children and that maybe it is her "who's hurting them the most, after all". Luke admits that: "You could be right. You probably are, I'm not much of an authority on the subject. (FD: 196) Luke admits the possibility that Stacey is hurting her children and that being a young single male he does not know much about raising children. Luke is giving Stacey room to face her fears. This possibility to confront her

fears with the help of a relatively healthy person stimulates the healthy growth towards the real self (Horney 1951:307).

#### **6.1.4. Suggestion of choice**

The second and last time Stacey and Luke make love Luke asks her to go away with him up north. He points out to her that she *can* leave if she really wants to, that she does have a choice. "Stacey looks at him, appalled and shaken by the suggestion of choice" (FD: 228). Stacey has been telling Luke how unhappy she is in her life situation and feels that she is trapped. She thinks that there is no choice. She is blaming her situation for her unhappiness. The thought of having a choice means that she can do something about it, that she has the responsibility of her life, the choices she makes and her own happiness. This is why she is shocked by the realization that she does have control over her own life.

When Luke suggested for Stacey to run away with him he asked her what it was she could not leave and Stacey's answer was - her children. Later on when Stacey thinks about this she thinks to herself: "All right - you showed me where I belonged when you said *What can't you leave?*" (FD:277). Luke's question made Stacey realize how different their worlds are, her as a 39-year-old mother of four children and him a 24 year old single male. Even though Stacey so far has seemed a rather reluctant mother she now realizes that she does not want to leave her children and that she genuinely loves them. She chooses her children over Luke. She has been pining for her youth all along but now she realizes that she in fact thinks like a 39-year-old mother of four and not like Luke who does not understand her overpowering love for her children.

## **6.2. The inevitable distance between people**

In her neurosis Stacey frantically wondered what other people thought about. Now that she is on her way to recovery and becomes more independent she realizes that she cannot know what others think, and that she does not need to either.

### **6.2.1. Katie, her daughter**

When Stacey meets Luke for the first time she comes back home late at night. Mac is furious and Katie has stayed up worrying too and is upset. Later Stacey feels a need to explain herself to Katie and make her understand: “Katie, wait. Let me explain.” But then she thinks: “No, I guess I can’t. And if I did, it might be worse for you than not trying.” (FD:184.) At first Stacey feels a need to explain herself to Katie like she did before, as I pointed out in chapter 4.3.3. But then she realizes that if she did explain it might be worse for Katie to know than not to know what Stacey is up to. Stacey is capable of thinking from Katie's perspective and realizes that it would not be good for her to even try to understand Stacey. Stacey is sensitive to Katie's needs as a child. Stacey realizes the gap there necessarily has to exist between herself as the mother and Katie as her daughter.

After Stacey leaves Luke's the last time she goes on a peace march expecting and hoping to see Luke there. She sees him there with a young girl of twenty. When she gets home she says to her daughter, Katie, that maybe she should have gone to the march instead of Stacey. She means that Katie would have belonged there more than she did. She perhaps also means that Luke is closer in age to the boys Katie will be seeing in her coming years than to the people Stacey herself associates with.

“Katie looks up, smiling but not in a way which Stacey finds possible to decipher with any certainty.

K:       you mean – athletic me?

Stacey wants to touch her, to hold fast to her and at the same time to support her. But she expresses none of these, having to be careful, unable to gauge accurately, having to guess only.

S:       yeh. Athletic you.” (FD:278)

Stacey has her own meaning and Katie has hers. Stacey doesn't know what exactly is Katie's meaning and she no longer wonders about it either. She accepts that they both have their own worlds and that they can live together and communicate without needing to know each others meanings.

Katie tells Stacey that the boy that she is going to the movies with was turned over to the police by his father when he was caught smoking marijuana. What is relevant to Katie is that it seems low for a father to turn his son over to the police. In contrast to Stacey the pertinent point is that the boy that her daughter is going out with *smokes* marijuana. Stacey realizes that she sees things differently from Katie and she remembers how her own mother misunderstood her in exactly the same way when it came to drinking alcohol. She finally understands her mother. Stacey thinks about how every generation has had its acceptable drugs: To her mother it was codeine (painkiller) and phenobarb (tranquillizer); to Stacey it is alcohol and tobacco and to Katie's generation it is marihuana. On account of this Stacey feels that: "I'm a stranger in the now world" (FD:301). Stacey realizes that there inevitably exists a gap between her and her children because they have grown up in very different times.

Later on Stacey thinks: “I have the feeling that there isn't much use, at this point, in telling her anything. She's on her own, so help her.” (FD:302) Stacey is sending Katie off to the world realizing that it is Katie's own life and from now on it is up to Katie to live it. Stacey finally truly accepts her

role as a mother and she realizes that there are things that belong to Katie now. One of these things is dancing. In an earlier chapter (5.2.) I described Stacey dancing in the basement drunk reminiscing her youth as the last time she had a feeling of identity. Now Stacey thinks that: "From now on the dancing goes on only in the head. Anything else, and it's an insult to Katie, whether or not she witnesses the performance." (FD:303) Stacey has to give up certain things for her daughter, to give her room to grow up to be a woman. Stacey takes her daughter's needs into consideration. She is no longer neurotically egocentric and is able to see other people as individuals and take them into consideration, which according to Horney (1951:16) is a result of coming out of neurosis.

#### **6.2.2. Matthew, her father-in-law**

Matthew, Mac's father, opens up to Stacey and tells her about his doubts as a minister and as a father. He feels he was not a good father because he had doubts. He should have had perfect faith. He thinks Mac must have sensed his imperfection. Stacey tries to give him Mac's point of view by saying that he would have been relieved to know that Matthew was not perfect either. "Matthew hears her words but not their meaning. He has to continue in his own groove." (FD:283) Matthew interprets things from his own perspective and that is the only perspective that is meaningful to him. Stacey has her own perspective which is meaningful to her through her own life history. This applies to Stacey's relationship with her children as well. Stacey cannot fully and totally understand her children or Matthew. In this respect everyone is basically alone in this world. Even though this is the case it does not mean there can be no love or caring. Maybe only after this realization love becomes truly genuine and altruistic when love is freed from selfish needs.



### 6.2.3. Val, a woman from her hometown

Stacey meets a woman from Manawaka, Val, who went to the same school as she did. Val is a half-breed and Stacey thinks of her as a second class citizen which was the general opinion in Manawaka in her childhood. Val looks ten years older than her years, which is caused by all the years of alcohol, drugs and what Stacey perceives as a suspicious way of life. Val says that she will take off on the last trip. When Stacey asks her what she means by that Val says: "Don't ask, Stacey. You don't want to know." Stacey thinks to herself: " – Heroin? Booze? Sickness? A knife under the ribs? Luke was right. You can't ask. You don't have the right. You haven't lived in that particular cave." (FD:266) Stacey understands that she has no right to pry into Val's life. Even though Stacey is about the same age as Val and they come from the same town they have lived very different lives and therefore cannot understand each other. They have lived at the same time historically and geographically at the same place but within different social environments.

All through the novel Stacey has been suffering from a lack of connection with other people. Now she realizes that there necessarily has to exist a certain gap between people which is created by people's independence and responsibility over their own lives. Most clearly this is seen in Stacey's children who are trying to establish their independence from their mother. They are starting off on their life's journey as individuals in their own right. They already have interpretations of the world different and independent of their mother. To round it up there is also Matthew, of the previous generation, who is starting to have serious problems with his health and who is finishing his life's journey. As Stacey notices he has his own way to interpret life as well. He has his own meanings that are meaningful only to him and that is all they need to be. There exists a generation gap on the one

hand between Stacey and her children and on the other between Stacey and Matthew. But there also exists a gap between Stacey and her former schoolmate, Val, even though they are of the same generation. They have led very different lives and therefore have different interpretations of life. It is important to see individuality in others in order to be able to see that in oneself.

### **6.3. Independence and coming closer to Mac**

In this chapter I will look at how after meeting Luke Stacey first takes distance from Mac. Then as she gains independence she is brought back to Mac through his need for support at Buckle's death and they become closer than ever.

Luke has broken Stacey's illusion of everything being alright. Earlier Stacey's confused thoughts often ended in a calming "everything is alright" when apparently something was wrong. At home the routine conversations with Mac are filled with apologies and reassuring "it's alrights". Stacey thinks that Mac does not want to know even if something was wrong with her. He, too, wants everything to be alright. "You don't want to know. You want everything to be all right. *Is everything all right, Stacey?* Yes, everything is all right." (FD:169.) Stacey and Mac keep up a front of everything being all right which does not support Stacey's feelings. Luke gives her reinforcement on her suspicion that something is wrong. Stacey's hell is not just a figment of her imagination anymore.

After seeing Luke for the first time Stacey cleans the house for three days compulsively and in the evenings she goes to bed before Mac comes home. She avoids speaking to him. She is taking distance from him. By avoiding a conversation with Mac, and the pattern that their conversations usually take she is making room for herself. Now that Luke has given Stacey

confirmation on her feeling that something is wrong she is taking distance from the way she perceives the world influenced solely by her family life. She has realized that there are other ways of communicating and being. And she does not want the old ways anylonger.

When Stacey comes back from seeing Luke for the last time Mac meets her in the yard and tells that Buckle, Mac's friend, has died. Mac puts his arms around her even though he never usually touches her in public in case someone might see. But now he is "holding her not for her need but for his own"(FD:233). Mac is shocked and Stacey drives him to the morgue to identify the body. They drive home in silence. Later in bed Mac cries in Stacey's arms. In his newly found openness Mac tells her about the war and how Buckle saved his life there. Buckle's death brings Stacey and Mac closer to each other. Mac needs her, he cries and talks to her for the first time, really talks to her, confides in her. Thus when Stacey stops asking and prying into Mac's thoughts and takes distance Mac comes to her for support.

Mac finally believes that Stacey did not sleep with Buckle. Stacey thinks about whether she should tell about sleeping with Luke, but decides not to. Thinking that it would do him no good if he knew. She realizes that sometimes it is better not to know everything. "In the meantime, we carry our own suitcases. How was it I never knew how many you were carrying? Too busy toting my own." (FD:241.) Stacey realizes that she has been too wrapped up in her own thoughts to notice that everyone, including her husband, has problems too. Stacey has been very restricted to her own thoughts in her neurotic egocentrism (Horney 1951) but now she comes to see other people as multidimensional beings.

Stacey also decides not to tell Mac about the fake appearance of Thor that he was intimidated by. She thinks that: "at least there is some dignity in being scared of genuine demons." (FD:269) She is protecting Mac by not telling

that he was in fact intimidated by an impostor. She realizes that: "The silences aren't all bad. How do I know how many times Mac has protected me by not saying?" (FD:289.) She remembers how at one time when she staggered drunk in the kitchen and burned her hand on the stove Mac did not say anything about the bandage even though he probably saw it. She understands now that sometimes it is better not to talk.

Jen utters her first sentence and Stacey calls Mac to let him know, expecting him to be as excited as she is. When Mac is not all that excited she thinks: " – What the hell. It may be nothing to him, but when you've listened to this child's garbled gargling for the past year, and all the other kids talked before they were two, then it's like brass bands and banners to me." (FD: 299) Stacey is happy and proud of Jen and her first reaction is to look for someone to share it with. When this doesn't happen, she does not suppress her own feelings of happiness and does not yield to Mac's opinion on the matter any more. She is independent enough to enjoy it by herself.

As Stacey gains independence she at the same time comes closer to Mac. She is no longer dependent on Mac and this enables them to have a relationship with two adult individuals in it. This view is further supported by a scene of Stacey and Mac making love "gently, as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help nor alter." (FD: 307) For the first time in the novel making love is described as a positive and gentle interaction. Also for the first time Stacey and Mac are facing the world together and helping each other in the troubles of life.

#### **6.4. Other people revealed as human**

In this chapter I will look at how Stacey's view of people outside her family changes now that she is coming out of her neurosis. She used to see others as pictures of perfection paying attention only to their exteriors and

externalizing the demands of the idealized self into qualities in them. But now that she is on the road to recovery and she no longer externalizes her neurotic needs to others she begins to see the real people behind the exteriors of Thor and her neighbours and even feel compassion for them.

Stacey finds out from Val that Thor is from their hometown and his real name is Vernon Winkler. At school he was just an ordinary boy who was beaten up by other children. (FD: 266) Val suspects that Thor has a new face reconstructed with the aid of plastic surgery and that he probably wears built-up shoes to make him appear taller. Now that the imperial perfection of Thor's being is exposed to be a fake Stacey thinks to herself "I'll bet...he puts vodka in that tomato juice of his". (FD: 269) Stacey is talking about the tomato juice that Thor always drinks at the Richalife parties instead of alcohol, which he claims not to need anymore, after starting the Richalife program. As was earlier pointed out (see 4.4.2.) Stacey, at an earlier party, externalized her inner demands of the idealized self to Thor in an ironic tone of voice. Now that she sees through Thor's shiny but false exterior she realizes that there is no reason to feel inferior to him.

Stacey finds out from Jake Fogler, Tess's husband from next door, that Tess has attempted suicide with sleeping pills and whiskey. Stacey thinks of how she did not notice something was wrong with Tess. Stacey only "envied her for being so glamorous...[and] couldn't see anything else" (FD:271). Now she realizes that Tess is human too, that she has had her share of problems as well. She realizes that there is no reason to feel inferior to Tess. As Stacey comes out of her neurosis she is according to Horney (1951:16) freed from her neurotic egocentrism and becomes able to see others as they are and feel concern for them.

Stacey is consoling Jake for his self-accusations by saying that Tess' suicide attempt was not his fault and that "Everything starts a long time ago"

(FD:271). Jake hangs on to her words for dear life, clutching "at any naïve theory that might totally exonerate him" (FD:272). Stacey remembers how she told Jake a couple of years ago that she wanted to go up to the mountains by herself to get some peace and quiet. Jake told her that it meant that she had a death wish. After that Stacey felt that she had no right to think about it anymore and allow herself even the fantasy of escape from her hell (see FD: 11). At that time Stacey took Jake's words as the ultimate truth and trusted his words over her own feelings. Now that Jake is lost in self-accusations Stacey sees in him the human need for consolation, which lowers him from the pedestal that Stacey put him on and shows him as human, no better or worse than anyone else.

Stacey used to see only the extravagant exteriors of other people. Now she has come to see others as human in their faults and weaknesses. She realizes that she "was wrong to think of the trap as the four walls. It's the world." (FD: 303.) Stacey realizes that others are not that different from her, they are only human. It is not just Stacey who is struggling with life, everyone is. Hence the plural in the title of the novel *The Fire-Dwellers*. Stacey thought that she was the only one living in hell, but now she realizes that everyone lives in the same world with their own personal definitions of hell and this makes it a little less of a hell for them all.

## **6.5. Stacey in relation to herself**

### **6.5.1. Acceptance of negative feelings**

Before meeting Luke Stacey was able to escape the shoulds of the idealized self and to accept her negative feelings only when she was dancing in the basement extremely drunk. Now after the encounter with a healthy view through Luke she is able to accept her spontaneous negative feelings as they are sober, without the help of alcohol.

Stacey is bathing Jen and she thinks about how she loves her and how she at the same time resents her because she has to take care of her and cannot get away to meet Luke again. She thinks: "I love you – and resent you. No, I don't. That's an awful way to feel. It may be, but I feel it all the same." (FD: 211) Stacey has mixed feelings about Jen. She feels she should not feel resentment towards her own child, but at the end she gives herself the right to feel it anyway. For the first time Stacey accepts her spontaneous negative feelings even though they violate the taboo that she has on negative feelings and also the idealized self of the perfect mother as having only positive and loving feelings towards her children.

All through the novel Stacey wonders what other people, especially Mac, think about. Stacey and Mac have yet another argument about how to raise the children and Mac says to Stacey in front of the children: "Ruin them, for all I care" (FD:216). Stacey becomes angry at Mac for giving the children the impression that she is no good as a parent, and that he does not care about them at all. Stacey thinks:

What ever you're like, whatever you're thinking, whatever you're going through, I don't want to know, see? I just don't want to know. Not any more. All right, I don't have the guts to say it to you. But there it is. I hate you. I wish to God I'd never laid eyes on you. There it is. (FD:217)

Stacey is angry at Mac and she no longer wants to know what he thinks about. She accepts her anger without feelings of guilt and no longer tries to preserve the peace with him. Even though she does not express her anger directly to Mac she no longer denies her spontaneous feelings. She finally gives herself the right to be angry. Horney does not explicitly discuss anger in relation to healthy growth. However, hate can be seen as a way to draw a line around the self, to separate the self from others (see, for example: Turunen 1987). Through expressing negative feelings towards other people we protect our own rights, our own self. As long as there is the

inability to feel or accept anger the self remains unprotected from the outer world and other people walk over us, because we let them. By accepting her feelings of anger towards Mac, Stacey is taking herself the right to feel angry and at the same time asserts herself as an individual independent enough to feel anger towards Mac without the fear of abandonment. She no longer frantically needs his acceptance.

Stacey and Mac take Mac's father, Matthew, to live with them because he is getting old and losing his eyesight. Stacey is annoyed when Matthew follows her every footstep around the house all day needing someone to talk to. To have peace from him she suggests that he could go outside and sit in the sun. Matthew expresses his gratitude to Stacey for being so nice and thoughtful. Stacey thinks to herself:

I never know whether he's being delicately ironic or genuinely grateful. If it's the latter, I ought to warn him. Thoughtful, hell. I just don't want him under my feet all morning, that's all...Okay, - so in some ways I'm mean as all getout, I'm going to quit worrying about it. (FD: 298)

Stacey feels she should let Matthew know her true motives for suggesting him to go outside. Even though she feels she is being mean when she selfishly wants to get rid of him for a while she in the end accepts her spontaneous feelings no matter how negative they are. She no longer automatically follows the taboo on having negative feelings. But she still thinks it through in her mind, consciously deciding to stop worrying about it. Stacey is well on her way out of neurotic patterns of thinking.

### **6.5.2. Realizations about herself**

As Stacey begins the recovery process she realizes things about herself in relation to other people. She begins to accept herself as the wife and mother that she really is. She also gains independence from Luke and her own parents.



Stacey goes out to a peace march hoping to see Luke there. She does see him, not alone though, but with a young girl of about twenty years old. "Even if you'd 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." (FD: 278-9) She realizes that it would not be any different with a different man because she would always be herself and she could not escape that by running away with Luke. She realizes that every relationship has its problems. By this remark she also seems to be accepting her life situation as it is, marriage with Mac and being a mother to her children.

Earlier in the novel Stacey did not know what to call Mac's father, Matthew, when he came over for dinner. "She cannot bring herself to call him dad, for this still to her means Niall Cameron [her father], long dead." (FD:67) But now after all the changes that have taken place outside and inside Stacey triggered by Luke's influence she notices herself calling Matthew "dad" when she tells him that he should move in with them now that his eyesight is getting worse.

Dad. I've never called him that before...Strange – it's only a name now, that, only a way of identifying Matthew. Niall Cameron has been dead a long time. If someone else needs the name, no point in not using it. It doesn't mean anything to me any more. I never knew until now." (FD:281)

Stacey no longer identifies "Dad" with her own father. She does not identify herself primarily through being a daughter of her parents anymore.

Stacey takes the children and Matthew to the beach. Duncan nearly drowns, but is saved by a lifeguard. Afterwards Stacey remembers that when she was next to Duncan who was laying on the beach turning lifeless and she did not know what to do she thought that if it was anything that she did God should take it out on her and not on her children, because that would be too much

punishment for her. She thinks: "Judgment. All the things I don't like to think I believe in." (FD: 296) Now she realizes that she has feared judgment on her actions and thoughts on many occasions, unconsciously. Earlier she noticed superstition only in other people but now she realizes that she too is "superstitious as a caveman" (FD: 296). She realizes that she is not that different from others, that she, too, is only human.

The words that Stacey uses in these examples show that she feels she has changed: "I didn't see that at one time, but I see it now", "I never knew until now". Her observations are divided into "before" and "now" in between which there has occurred a change in the way she feels about herself and perceives the world around her. She is beginning to come to terms with her life situation by realizing that running away with Luke would not solve anything and by noticing that she does not identify herself with being a daughter of her parents anymore. She also discovers her superstition.

### **6.5.3. Assuming responsibility for herself**

Stacey realizes that: "the truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now" (FD:303). For a long time she was reluctant to accept the fact that she is not young anymore and never will be again: "Everything will be alright when I'm eighteen again" (FD:..) . But now she accepts herself as she is as a middle aged woman "Now I see that whatever I'm like, I'm pretty well stuck with it for life" (FD: 298-9). She also thinks that: "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." (FD: 289.) Stacey finally accepts herself as she is. It is precisely this recognition of herself as she is without minimizing or exaggerating that Horney (1951:169) sees as a sign of a person coming out of her neurosis. When a person is freed from the grips of

neurosis she becomes able to assume responsibility for herself, which means plain and simple honesty about herself and her life.

In her neurosis Stacey felt inadequate and expected a miraculous change to occur. "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" (FD: 298-9). Stacey expected time to solve all her problems without having to do anything herself. She now realizes that: "The fun is over. It's been over for some time, only you didn't see it before. No - you saw it alright but you couldn't take it. You're nearly forty. You got four kids and a mortgage" (FD:289) Now she realizes that it is herself who has to do something about her difficulties without expecting others, or fate, or time to solve them for her, which is one way of assuming responsibility for herself (Horney 1951:169). She is finally willing and capable to bear the consequences of her actions and decisions without trying to "get by".

#### **6.6. Towards the light**

In the last ten pages, despite all these revelations and realizations, Stacey is still half ashamed of her relief when summer is over and the children go back to school after the summer vacation. And she still worries about things and reads an article "Mummy is the Root of All Evil?" She still does these things, but not as much and not with the same kind of despair as before. She has learned a lot and due to that she is not quite as anxious as before. Her reality seems a little easier to take. She is also determined to survive "I will not let this get me down" (FD:282). She has decided not to give in for desperation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this study I have made the case of Stacey first as a neurotic and then as coming out of her neurosis triggered by Luke's influence. As neurosis is as much a disturbance in human relations as in an individual psyche I examined Stacey's relationships to other people first during her neurotic period and then again as she begins her recovery. As a result of her recovery her self-image also changes.

My analysis of *The Fire-Dwellers* revealed Stacey as a neurotic of the self-effacing type. She is dependent on other people and is appeasing towards them. Characteristically she is caught in a struggle between her imperfect actual being and the idealized self, which to her is mainly the image of the perfect mother. Her idealized self also includes a taboo on negative feelings. Stacey's failure to become her idealized self results to feelings of guilt and inferiority, which furthers the compulsive nature of her thoughts and actions.

During her neurotic period Stacey is very dependent and appeasing towards her husband and accepts the abusive nature of their sex-life as a continuation of the seed of guilt planted early on in their marriage. Stacey is also dependent on her children and their acceptance. In her selfish preoccupation with her own inner life she fails to see her children as individuals with needs of their own. In following her compulsive neurotic needs she fails to understand her children's need for independence. Stacey also fails to see people outside her family as multidimensional beings and instead pays attention only to their appearances and sees them through the externalization of her own neurotic demands. Stacey's relationships then are all affected by her neurosis and this prevents her enjoyment of these relationships and life in general.

Stacey has an affair with a younger man and is affected by his relatively healthy point of view. Luke observes Stacey and tells her what he sees and also points out her neurotic behaviors. He supports Stacey's growth towards the real self by affirming her spontaneous feelings. His influence triggers in Stacey a recovery process, which affects Stacey's view of and relationships to other people. Stacey recognizes the recovery process first in her relationships to others and only after that in herself.

As Stacey starts the recovery process out of her neurosis also her relationships to other people change. In her neurosis Stacey was dependent on and looked for acceptance from others and therefore constantly wondered what other people thought about. Now as she is coming out of her neurosis and gains more self-confidence she realizes that she cannot and need not know what goes on in the minds of others. She no longer compulsively needs to know what her daughter thinks about and means with her words. As Stacey's neurotic behaviors lessen she is capable of seeing her daughter as an individual. She understands that Katie has a need and right to independence from her and for a life of her own.

Stacey also realizes that she cannot fully understand other people simply because she is not them. On a more general level Laurence seems to be saying here that every person has a unique life history, which creates the individuality of that person, which also makes it impossible for anyone to fully understand anyone else. But she is also pointing out that this does not mean that there can be no love or caring between people. In fact she seems to be saying that only after this realization can love be truly selfless and genuine, when it is freed of selfish needs.

In her neurosis Stacey also idealized people around her. She externalized her neurotic demands of the idealized self to qualities in other people. Now that her externalizations begin to lessen through the process of recovery she sees

others as they are: imperfect and human. She realizes that it is not just her who is struggling with life, everyone is. According to the title all of the characters in the novel and not just Stacey are indeed fire-dwellers, living in their individual definitions of hell.

Finally, Stacey assumes responsibility for herself by accepting herself as she is, a 39-year-old mother of four. She no longer pines for her youth nor does she expect a miracle to occur and make her perfect. She abandons the pursuit of the idealized self as she learns to accept her spontaneous feelings and thus comes closer to her real self. She is finally ready to see herself as she is and make the best of what she has. Stacey is determined to survive.

Horney's theory was excellent for examining Stacey's neurotic phase because it explicitly depicts various ways in which neurosis manifests itself in thought and behaviour. By revealing the psychological structure behind Stacey's confused thought and action the theory enabled a deeper understanding of her situation. But the theory gave very little help with analyzing the recovery process since the theory so heavily emphasizes neurosis and places little weight on recovery.

While doing research I noticed a partial resemblance between Stacey's journey towards growth and Esther Kleinbord Labovitz's (1988) definition of the female bildungsroman heroine. Central to the female bildungsroman heroine is her search for self. She has experienced a loss of self and tries to gain control over her own mind. This applies to Stacey perfectly, as she struggles with herself, her neurosis and finally manages to come to terms with herself. Also Horney's concept of the real self can be equated to Labovitz's idea of self. In Horney's theory healthy growth is directed towards the real self, which is the source of spontaneous feelings, and the female bildungsroman heroine strives towards her self in order to further her self-development.

In defining the female bildungsroman genre Labovitz also looks at the presence of patriarchy in the heroine's life. She concludes that the heroine often conducts her search for self away from the male world and with other women. Stacey does gain her independence on her own, in her thoughts, but she has no supportive relationships with other women. In this sense Labovitz's theory is clearly feministic, which Stacey's journey does not seem to be.

Labovitz also sees issues of sexuality and sexual identity important in the heroine's journey. Sexuality is also clearly connected to Stacey's awakening sense of self. The affair with Luke is vitally important as a catalyst for further development. Also the earlier encounter with Buckle as well as Stacey's memories of her youth are sexual and meaningful to her growth.

Reading books and educating herself is important for the self-development of the female bildungsroman heroine. For Stacey reading is solely limited to articles in women's magazines. Instead of furthering her self-development these articles are more of a hindrance in enforcing her neurotic demands on herself: *Nine ways the modern mom may be ruining her daughter, Are you castrating your son, Are you emasculating your husband?, Salad days - Here's how to be slim in the swim.*

The final characteristic of the female bildungsroman heroine is that she rids herself of excess baggage as she proceeds in her life's journey. Labovitz calls this shedding. In the course of the novel Stacey sheds her pursuit of the perfect idealized mother which has caused her so much confusion and anxiety. She abandons her neurotic and compulsive way of thinking with its shoulds and taboos on her thoughts, feelings and actions. The shedding of these demands enables her to worry less and enjoy life more and it gives her the possibility for future growth.

Labovitz claims that the cultural conditioning of women is a training in self-sacrifice and working for others to the neglect of their own development. As I mentioned in the introduction, Horney talks about the same thing when she points out that women in modern western culture are more or less self-effacing, i.e. compliant and try to please others, thus trying to fulfil cultural expectations of what it is to be a woman. Because of this, Labovitz claims that shedding often involves some guilt when the woman goes against cultural expectations. The heroine has to learn to shed her guilt rather than accuse herself of selfishness when she decides to pursue her own ends. Stacey manages to rid herself of this guilt. At the end of the novel she no longer feels guilty for her attempt to pursue her own individuality.

Labovitz's definition of the female bildungsroman genre has many links to Stacey's journey and also to Horney's theory. Therefore it would be interesting to look at Stacey's development from this genre perspective. It would give new points of view from which to look at *The Fire-Dwellers*. Especially the clearly feministic quality of this genre would help in placing the novel in literary tradition genre-wise.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary source:

Laurence, Margaret 1969 (1983). *The Fire-Dwellers*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited.

### Secondary sources:

Bailey, Nancy 1990. Identity in *The Fire-Dwellers*, in Colin Nicholson (ed.), *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence*. Great Britain: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 107-118.

Bevan, Allan 1973. Introduction to *The Fire-Dwellers*, in Margaret Laurence, *The Fire-Dwellers*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited.

Butery, Karen Ann 1982. The Contributions of Horneyan Psychology to the Study of Literature, *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 39-50.

Horney, Karen 1951. *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTd.

Howells, Coral Ann 1990. Weaving Fabrications: Women's Narratives in *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers*, in Colin Nicholson (ed.), *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence*. Great Britain: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 93-106.

Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord 1988 (1986). *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. American University Studies 19. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

New, William H. 1976. Fiction, in Carl F. Klinck (ed.), *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, Vol 3., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

New, W.H. 1989. *A History of Canadian Literature*. MacMillan History of Literature, Great Britain: MacMillan Education Ltd.

Ollenburger, Jane C., and Helen A. Moore 1992. *A Sociology of Women: The Intersection of Patriarchy, Capitalism and Colonization*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Paris, Bernard J. 1984. Third Force psychology and the Study of Literature, in Joseph Natoli (ed.), *Psychological perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Non-Freudians*. Archon: Shoe String Press, 155-180.

Paris, Bernard J. 1991. A Horneyan Approach to Literature, *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 319-337.

Staines, David 1991 (1963). About the Author, in Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc.

Symonds, Alexandra 1991. Gender Issues, *the American journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 301-312.

*The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* 1983. Toronto. Oxford University Press.

Thomas, Clara 1975 (1976). *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*.  
Canada: McClelland and Stewart Limited.

Turunen, Kari E. 1987. *Ihmissielun Olemus*. Vaasa: Arator Oy.

Walby, Sylvia 1990 (1994). *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Cambridge, USA:  
Blackwell.