

## Chapter II

### *The Stone Angel*

Margaret Laurence wrote her novel *The Stone Angel* revolving around the protagonist Hagar Currie, who looks back on the events leading up to her marriage to Bram Shipley. Hagar more particularly sees the way her living followed after her marriage which permanently cut her off from everything she had before or could expect to have in the future. Hagar Shipley, the character steps out of her past to the passage of growth and development. It is analysed that the Hagar's self-realization as it is a prototype of the excellence of survival. The first novel of the novelist Margaret Laurence *The Stone Angel* can be considered as the best of the Manawaka novels. Clara Thomas in her work *The Manawaka Novels of Margaret Laurence* opines: "Its excellence has been widely accepted and it has even been compared to Shakespeare's King Lear" "the story of Hagar is "unwilling, rebellious journey toward self-knowledge, and, finally, a limited peace." (61)

Hagar's life is about resolution and revolution. In order to achieve emancipation in life and to have contentment, Hagar has to let her pleasure and her apprehension. The novel begins with the acceptance of the truth that the narrator of the story is the wilful ghost of Hagar Shipley. Laurence attempts to make the female protagonist follow the ladder of the isolated heroines in the model of growth. The writer puts her sample of growth of understanding and accepting the past for Hagar too. It is the process which the writer describes as freeing oneself from the command of the origin to vanished keenness. The work is an outcome of a boring or unsubstantiated customary but it makes her see the true assessment of life. The certainty shown is that past is unavoidable but it can make the personality reach the depth of understanding self and the others. The past can never be with a pessimistic

manipulated always; it can also help the mind to reach a higher level. The heroine enters into the path of self-knowledge, the definitive objective after being entrapped in the past without understanding it.

*The Stone Angel* unlocks with Hagar Shipley glistening on the stone angel that marks the grave of her mother. The angel is portrayed as an image of continuing strength: “not only stone but unendowed with even a pretence of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank. It seemed strange to me that she should stand above the town, harking us all to heaven without knowing who we were at all” (3).

Hagar’s visualization is restricted and in black and white. She continues this discordant society when her classism orders her vision so that she sees people who are not like her as substandard to her. She imagines that her visualizations will be of use to make her move to Shipley place:

“I thought of Polacks and Galicians from the mountain, half-breeds from the river valley of the Wachakwa, or the daughters and spinster aunts of the poor, forgetting that Bram’s own daughters had hired out whenever they could be spared until they married very young and gained a permanent employment” (51).

From the above quote it is understood that Hagar felt wedding is an economical- based agreement. She speaks with some self-awareness of her earlier prejudice from her condition half a century later, although her language still reproduces an unawareness of her class privilege. Hagar categorizes people according to their race, civilization, or cost-effective position; she does not see people as individuals.

In Hagar’s life, the writer makes the reader move behind Hagar during the last few months of her long life towards her death. It is a journey which leads Hagar from

her childhood to young womanhood as Hagar Currie through her marriage to Bram Shipley. Hagar's life is continued as a married woman, mother, mother-in-law and grandmother. The return to the past every time begins in the present and arises from some simple event, the orderly life she now leads with her son Marvin and his wife Doris. The main point is not that she is close to death but the finding that Marvin and Doris wish to put her in the Silver threads Home for the aged.

Hagar recollects her past slowly in a step by step way. The circumstance faced by Hagar is a universal one - one which sooner or later everyone experiences.

Everybody will grow old; everyone may have to deal with aged parents. In some case, the viewpoint of one would unavoidably be different from the point of view of other. Margaret Laurence only hints at what is going on in the minds of Marvin and Doris. Hagar is so irritable, dissimilar, significant and disdainful that the reader often loses endurance with her. She refuses everything in the beginning but to admit them to anyone, much less to herself, in the end.

The novel is about a woman who is so strong, rigid, and arrogant that her own life, life of her father, her husband and her youngest son are all destroyed. The elder son, Marvin, only survives because he goes away. She is unable to let anyone into her personal being, or to permit anyone into her internal solitude to be attacked. She finds it difficult to tell others how she feels, or to actually say anything loving or kind which might suggest flaw. She is firm and cold, like stone; she cannot see the effect she has on others; she is the stone angel she so scorns yet cannot ignore. Rooke in his book *A Feminist Reading of the Stone Angel* comments:

“Hagar very naturally wishes to exhibit whatever qualities are consistent with her pride and are admired by others. Her nearest judge is Jason, who

encourages the male virtues in her and neglects certain aspects of the feminine virtues which he will expect her eventually to display...”(28).

There is an incident in Hagar’s childhood that illustrates her qualities well. One day Hagar is punished by Jason. He uses a foot ruler to beat her hands, expecting she will acknowledge her fault. Yet Hagar is so enraged that she “wouldn’t let him see” her cry. “He looked at my dry eyes in a kind of fury, as though he’d failed unless he drew water from them. He struck and struck, and then all at once he threw the ruler down and put his arms around me...” (10) Afterwards, Jason proudly said to his daughter: “You take after me ... You’ve got back bone, I’ll give you that.” (10) Encouraged by Jason, Hagar tries her best to be courageous, proud, everything that her father admires, throughout her life. Jason speaks to Auntie Doll about Hagar: “Smart as a whip, she is, that one...” (14)

Hagar fails to express her love and concern for Marvin when he comes to say goodbye before going to army at the age of seventeen. Hagar always suppresses her feelings and does not try to release them. Instead, she yearns for greater will lessen which is indicative of severe neurosis. Hagar has a strong tendency to remove herself from the inner arena in order to relieve her tensions. She does not participate in the act of living and becomes an observer of life. She lacks ambitions, efforts and the will for accomplishment. By stifling her wishes, she feels content at having reached a state of detachment, and she has no expectations from life and others. She shows a fear for her emotional association because she feels that it may restrict her freedom. Thus, by withdrawing herself from her surroundings into a world of her own, Hagar assumes that she saves her individuality, but as this ‘withdrawal’ is not healthy, it leads to “disintegration”. Hagar’s main aim is defeated in itself. Karen Horney in the book *Neurosis and Human Growth: the Struggle towards Self-Realization* opines: “She

does not become conscious that an individual cannot grow in a vacuum, without closeness to and friction with other human beings” (267).

Hagar does not even get acquainted with the qualities in herself at the beginning of the novel. She has certainly not had to look at herself as she was strong and self-reliant, or the effect she has on others. She has lived with Doris and Marvin for sixteen years and does not see that she frightens her daughter-in-law, whom she hates. She estranges her son who hates conflict, is intensely loyal to his wife, and yet longs in his hesitant way for his mother's love and support still. It is her house with her things furnished in it. She never forgets that. The old age and a dangerous disease have slowly but surely made it not possible for her to be independent. The pain and ill-health eat away at her strength. Her memory takes her more frequently into the past and she is slowly led to a self-knowledge which she can scarcely accept. Even at the very last days, she was unable to say if she is repentant or confess that she may have been wrong. Her pride has been her downfall.

Everything is seen through Hagar's point of view, in the way the reader is able to understand her, but the limits of her vision are also shown. Her isolation is a consequence of the circumstances of her extreme age; the people who meant anything to her are long dead. Yet, it is only in the present, that she begins to recognize their value to her life. Her folly lies in not having realized their value sooner. Margaret Laurence exhibits Hagar's extreme firmness first and most visibly in the novel's title, for Hagar truly is a stone angel. Laurence believes that the title of a novel should "in some way express the whole novel, its themes and even something of its outcome.”(183). This is certainly true, for Hagar, like the memorial, she sees much of life “with sightless eyes” (3). As well, she is as cold and sensitively unsympathetic as

stone. She plays the role of angel to Marvin's Jacob, and she is finally able to bless him in order to liberate him, and herself, from the chains of the past.

To Hagar, her father, Jason Currie, represents an idea of Anglo-Saxon dominance. His Anglo-Saxon past combined with his Presbyterian work ethic a reserve serves as a troublesome model for Hagar's own identity. Hagar is a result of the principle of Anglo-Saxon authority, even though she tries to defy following her father's model by marrying his direct opposite, Bram Shipley. Although Bram is also an Anglo-Saxon, he represents the lower- class rural resident and worker. But what is even more relevant is that he stands for all that Hagar and her father- dread and dislike. He is "lazy as a pet pig" (46), "common as dirt" (47), and related to overload in all that he does. However, much Hagar scorns Bram's character, she still needs him. He is vigorous and filthy and uncontrollable. Looking back on her first dance with Bram, Hagar is spellbound by his body:

"I reveled in his fingernails with crescents of in grown earth that never met a file. I fancied I heard in his laughter the bravery of battalions. I thought he looked a bearded Indian, so brown and beaked a face. The black hair thrusting from his chin was rough as thistles. The next instant, though, I imagined him rigged out in a suit of gray soft as a dove's breast-feathers" (45).

Bram engages Hagar's imagination, and she sees both the details of his body and the potential for him to be anything she wants.

Hagar's vision of Bram is loaded with uncertainty and probable alteration. Hagar transforms Bram into a creature of the earth, a hero of battles an original man of the lowland, and finally, an upper-class businessman. Here both descriptions contain Hagar's greatest desire: a man who is both her father and not her father, a man who feeds her imagination, a hero who can take her back to the land. Hagar does not

apprehend, however that Bram's individuality is as hard as the earth, not something easily changed. Her desire for Bram involve her modernist and feminist whims to recreate her world opposite to the one created by her father.

Hagar's potency is that although she is not in a position of power, she gives up neither her prejudice nor her voice. She holds onto an illustration of herself as influential, determined and strong. She does not give up on the future. She is full of potential, occupying a middle ground between commitments and desires. Hagar is dedicated to her father but she also longs for her own power that is different from his. She cannot break away from the shape in which she was formed and is unable to either converse with others or appreciate their attempts to exchange a few words with her.

Hagar's inability to give love started from her childhood. Her mother died giving birth to her, so she was depressed from the beginning of the childhood, maternal cuddling and touching that would normally have not been given to her. She did not learn to love or show love through being loved. Once, when her father hugged her after he had punished her, she "felt caged and panicky and wanted to push him away but didn't dare" (10). Somehow no one took her very gravely - the poor relation who occupied the social no-man's land allotted to housekeepers and governesses. The household was very much male-oriented with two older brothers and a forceful, caring autocrat father, Jason Currie. The latter's tendency to teach sense into his children made Hagar to perform self-discipline in her early age. There is no doubt she educated all too well not to show her feelings but to foster it all.

Hagar's own nature was inherited from her father whom she at times dreaded, at others despicable, and never loved, was the basis of most of her incapacity to give. She herself identifies this, she "who didn't want to resemble him in the least, was

sturdy like him and bore his hawkish nose and stare that could meet anyone's without blinking an eyelash.” (7-8). Her father too was aware of the resemblance. “you take after me,” he said, “You've got backbone, I'll give you that.” (10) “For backbone we can, of course, read pride, for this was what it was. Both of us were blunt as bludgeons. We hadn't a scrap of subtlety between us” (43) says Hagar. Her own natural tendencies were strengthened by her father's - his pride in his achievements, he was a self-made man, his own sense of superiority because he came from a good Scots family. Hagar is “shaken by torments he never even suspected, wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough” (25). Tanaszi in her work *Feminine Consciousness in Contemporary Canadian Fiction* states: “Indeed, her lifetime involves a whole series of role demands, none of which she is able to meet.” (230) Jason Currie encouraged his daughter to feel that she was better than the rest of the townsfolk in Manawaka. She was “haughty, hoity-toity, Jason Currie's black-haired daughter” (6) and Jason Currie was the town's most prosperous citizen.

Early in life, she was encouraged to be a snob, to scrutinize the social proprieties required of the town's first family. Some children like Lottie Drieser and Henry Pearl were considered inappropriate as playmates or as guests at parties in the big house Jason built. It is an observable sign of his weight in Manawaka and in his own eyes. When Hagar was nineteen she was sent to Toronto to a young Ladies' academy to equip the role her father envisioned she would fill his daughter, hostess to his friends, and then later a wife to a man he looked upon as suitable. Hagar describes herself as a “dark-maned colt, off to the training ring” (42) as though she were to be broken down as horses are. This idea of training either people or nature echoes throughout the novel.

At the time when Hagar meets Bram at a dance, she has constantly disrespected each of the young men her father has brought to the house for her to meet, whether through pure dislike because her father has chosen them or because she found them authentically boring is not sure. Bram could not have been more different. She was enthusiastic by his complete animal liveliness and his happiness.

“Whatever anyone said of him, no one could deny he was a good-Looking man. It's not every man who can wear a beard. His suited him. He was a big-built man, and he carried himself so well. I could have been proud, going to town or church with him, if only he'd never opened his mouth” (69-70)

she recalls later. She remembers too that he was always laughing.

Women have always imagined that they could mould their men into the people they want them to be. If there is common love and respect sometimes they can, but this has to be done by sneakiness, using tact and concession, while being prepared to change too. Hagar had not the faintest beginning of how to do this. She marries Bram, her black-haired pirate, and successfully cuts herself off from family and friends. The course of her life is changed forever, as indeed is Bram's. It is noteworthy that Hagar never once admits her error. She recognises their mutual unhappiness but her pride will not allow her to actually suggest that she had been wrong.

Hagar was totally blind to other people's feelings. She hardly ever saw the effect that her actions and remarks had on others. She was one of those people who find it easy to be critical and rarely give out praise. They have such an innate sense of their own superiority that nothing anyone else does is completely satisfactory. She had married Bram against her father's wishes because she thought she detested the latter's values and aspirations which she saw as pretensions. After marriage, she applied the same yardstick to Bram and later to her sons. On the day of their wedding,

when they arrived at the Shipley place, Bram presents Hagar with a cut-glass decanter with a silver top obviously feeling he is giving her something very grand and beautiful. She scarcely looks at it sets it aside and does not even say thank you then when he suggests they make love she remarks: "It seems to me that Lottie Dreiser was right about you" (51). These two incidents illustrate so very clearly why the marriage was doomed. She criticised his appearance his speech, manners and his day dreams. In the end, she destroyed any spark of ambition he had and quenched his laughter forever. She reminded him so often of the Currie superiority that he once urinated on the doorstep of the Currie General Store in a drunken act of boldness. He was driven more and more to drinking with his cronies and took up with the social outcasts of Manawaka who at least accepted him for what he was. He could always feel superior to the lowest of the low - the Indians the half-breeds and the Poles or Bohunks. It used to anger Hagar to listen to the vain glorious stories of his plans for the future which he told to such people when they came to the farm to help with the threshing. Hagar was humiliated on seeing how these men laughed secretly at what they knew were idle boasting. Bram was a weak man and she made him weaker. Such people as Hagar tend to bring out the worst in people especially those less strong than themselves. In a moment of insight during her memories she admits "...here's the joker in the pack- we'd each married for those qualities we later found we couldn't bear, he for my manners and speech, I for his flouting of them" (79-80)

Hagar's fault was her incapability to say two very important expressions - "I'm sorry" and "I love you". Jason Currie and his daughter had not been able to communicate with one another. The character makes much of the communication less fluent from which so many people create true perceptive of each other so difficult. Hagar was not very good in her relation with her siblings. She knew so little of her

brothers and she was astonished to know about the things she learned about them after they were dead. Even though four of them lived in the house and then three then two people had lived in the same house for a more number of years and it was like a life alone. It was the same with Bram and Hagar. They spoke with one another only on a minimum level living out their parted lives in the same house and only meeting in bed. Hagar becomes aware of this failure to converse with others when she lies fading and she desires she could advise her grandson or anyone but she cannot. "I'm choked with it now, the incommunicable years, everything that happened and was spoken or not spoken" (296). This destructive lack of ability of one human to correspond on an important source with another human being is one of the central themes in the Manawaka novels.

Hagar's blindness and her pride affected the life of her children too. Her first child, Marvin, he felt almost not for anything, because he was what she considered a typical Shipley - impassive, bulge and uninspired. The day Bram took her to the hospital for the birth, she felt "that the child he wanted would be his, and none of mine... that I had sucked my secret pleasure from his skin, but wouldn't care to walk in broad daylight on the streets of Manawaka with any child of his" (100)

Marvin longed for her consent, yet she by no means saw this. When he was a little boy he would report to her after doing his chores, hoping for a word of praise and all she could do was throw him away. The suffering of that strong little figure suspended at her skirts noiselessly demanding for a look or a touch totally escaped her. Bram is aware of how Marvin feels and of the hurt he suffers because of his mother's unresponsiveness. After all he has had some occurrence in this way himself. He thinks, "He'll be as well, away." (129) Even then Hagar does not understand what

is meant, though she confesses to feeling an unknown emotion when Marvin comes to say good-bye before leaving for World War One.

“I didn’t know what to say to him. I wanted to beg him to Look after himself,... wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go. But I didnot want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I’d taken leave of my senses” (129)

Her fright of appearing foolish or soft in her words, Marvin ever hears how she feels and he remains away when the war is over. By going away, he leaves behind a home where he has always felt second-best to his younger brother, John. He is certainly better away. Hagar’s approach to John is painted by the fact that he is born while Bram is not present, so she has not had to undergo the embarrassment of his existence at the hospital. John is also physically more good-looking and in total livelier. Immediately his mother tries to set him apart from the Shipley’s. She felt that he is like the Currie side of the family and has his grandfather Currie's get up and go. He'll make something of himself. Right from the start John is estranged from his father and loaded with the accountability of satisfying his mother's objectives for him. She asks too much of a boy who has born more of his father's faults than is noticeable to his mother.

Early in the marriage Hagar has stopped to go into town with Bram because of the disgrace she had because of his manners and speech when they did so. Thus, she cut herself off bit by bit from the people she knew. She had no guests to the farm except loyal Auntie Doll, and as the years went by she was little in touch with what was happening in Manawaka. She was entirely ignorant of the effect her marriage and her behaviour had on her two boys. She did not make out that her sons were figures of mockery and cruelty among the children of richer families. To be fair, she did prevent

sending Marvin to school in a sailor suit, thus marking him out from the rest who all were dressed up in overalls, but as time went on and their financial situation diminished she cared very less of Marvin. She did not understand that the Shipley name set Marvin and John apart, compelling them to play with children from the weaker side of the tracks like the half breed Tonnerres. Marvin was able to bear it steadily and never mentioned it. John was more unstable by nature. His mother used to wonder at the number of fights he seemed to get into and it was from him she learned of the hateful nickname, the Shitleys, which the children had given them. She complains that John “had a knack for gathering the weirdest crew, and when I asked him why he didn't chum with Henry Pearl's boys or someone halfway decent like that, he'd only shrug and retreat into silence”. (127)

After twenty-four years of marriage which she tolerated a condition and was certain that the bad times could not go on forever, a single event roused her from her sleep. When Lottie Dreiser's daughter fails to identify her, Hagar is stimulated to take a good Look at herself- in the Local Rest Room mirror. What she saw shocked her: “I stood for a long time, Looking, wondering how a person could change so much and never see it. So gradually it happens”(133). Frank Pesando in his article “*In a Nameless Land: The use of Apocalyptic Mythology in the Writings of Margaret Laurence*” comments:

“Lottie is still capable of the act. In this second instance their children, Arlene and John, are likened to starving creatures and the prairie that surrounds them is compared to the wasteland which had surrounded the chickens. Once again Lottie will crush the creatures while Hagar watches. The desire to ruin a love affair which they view as impractical and unsightly is merely an extension of

the desire to destroy the mutilated chickens, whose very existence seem to threaten. The crippled birds become crippled children”.(53)

In the following years she sees herself as others see her for the first time.

Hagar does not know the person who stares back at her. Surely that 'brown leathery face' didn't belong to her. “Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant” (133). The sudden consciousness of what both she and Bram had become ruined the curse under which she had fallen. It was time to leave. Bram made no move to stop her. Indeed, we feel that he is surprised that she has stayed so long. So, began part three of Hagar's life. To move to a new place - that's the greatest excitement. “For a while you believe you carry nothing with you- all is cancelled from before, or cauterized, and you begin again and nothing will go wrong this time”. (155) As she lies in bed contriving ways and means she says “I've taken matters into my own hands before and can again if need be revelations are saved for times of actual need and now one comes to me” (139). Taylor in his work “*Coming to Terms with the Image of the Mother in The Stone Angel*” states: “[t]o show response would be to accept being a woman. Denying her womanliness also means denying her sexuality” (163). To exhibit joy in sex or tenderness toward her husband for giving her pleasure is the same “intolerance of weakness”. Although Hagar wants to be with Bram in her inner heart, her harsh pride stops herself to be so delicate. So, Hagar's separation from her husband is unavoidable.

In the midst is the sad story of her life as a housekeeper in Vancouver interwoven into the present, is for an elderly hermit called Mr Oatley, and of the loss of her two men, John and Bram. In becoming Mr Oatley's housekeeper, Hagar obtains a safe, relaxing, even comfortable, environment better fitted to her education and early

acquaintance than the Shipley place. All through the novel the author uses the house as a symbol of Hagar's erratic wealth. As Jason Currie's daughter she resided in one of the finest dwellings in Manawaka. The people live a systematic life well secluded from the wild rural area. After her marriage, she becomes mistress of a tumble down grey wooden house, barren and depreciated over the years. Moreover, the house is out in the open grassland which the solid citizens of the town have bowed their backs on. It is uncovered to the wind and weather. Nature is only moderately kept at bay as wild plants invade the garden and the fields are poorly be inclined. Bram is not complete of the substance necessary. The home which Hagar dwell in with Mr. Oatley is full of the kind of luxurious things which she values, but they have been obtained by rather doubtful means, and neither she nor John feels really at home there. Margaret Laurence makes a significant distinction between the exterior and interior of the Oatley house, a large edifice like the Currie house. Everything inside is arranged but the garden outside is filled with strange unusual growth. It is only in the tumble cannery at Shadow Point that she finally finds harmony and a small amount of grace before returning to the smallest home of all, a hospital bed barely larger than a coffin.

When Jason hits Hagar because she has “no regard for [his] reputation” (9), she refuses to cry. She ultimately refuses to be his commodity. After Dan dies, Matt stays behind to work in the store, Hagar is sent off to Toronto for two years to “the training ring, the young ladies’ academy in Toronto” (42). When she returns in the image of an upper-class lady, Jason looks at her and sees her as a credit to himself. He does not regard Hagar as an individual woman with the identity but regards her as another one of his successes. Like any other merchandise to be purchased and used, Hagar is a product for her father’s progression. Her value to him is that she will advance his fame in the community: “It was worth every penny for the two years,’ he

said. 'You're a credit to me. Everyone will be saying that by tomorrow' (43). Hagar tells Jason that she wants to teach in the South Wachakwa School, he rails against the improper misuse of his property. Hagar slightly concedes because she feels as though she owes him her effort for his spending on her education.

At Mr. Oatley's house she may be bounded by beautiful things, but it does not escape her scornful intelligence that she is now in the same condition as Auntie Doll. It is a destiny she never imagined she could share. She is required to presume an individuality which in many ways fits her well, even if it is thought as a lonesome survival. Once again, she fails to see what is happening to John, who finds the household tasks of being her man too much for him. His desire for some kind of recognition after his experience in Manawaka leads him to visualize first to his mother about his friends and then to his friends about Mr. Oatley and the big house where he lives but does not belong. Finally, life beats him on the whole and he returns to his home town to look after Bram who is dying and with whom he has kept secretly in touch.

Early in the novel Hagar remarks on the closeness which existed between Bram and Marvin, a relationship which is broken when Marvin goes to war. Bram and John appear to have nothing in common as she thinks. Yet it is John who is drawn to his father in the latter's need, and she is too insensitive to see why. When they were all three on the farm, her treatment of John cut him off from Bram. They bear a resemblance to one another in that they are both basically weak men. They are destroyed by a woman of great strength, who asks them both to be other than themselves. When Bram married Hagar, he had no fantasies about himself, but he got by and life was joyful. Hagar killed his joy and gave him none of the respect he needed to continue respecting himself. John's ordinary eagerness for life was soon

driven underground, to surface in wild deeds of audacity, one of which brought about his death. The targets his mother set for him were too high, and he soon accepted his low assessment of himself. He understood his mother better than she knew herself and knew from bitter experience what she had done to her husband.

John's gentle remark to Hagar, "You always bet on the wrong horse. Marv was your boy, but you never saw that, did you?" (237) his last breath he demonstrated how well he knew his mother. "Never mind. Never mind. He put a hand on mine, as though he were momentarily caught in an attempt to comfort me for something that couldn't be helped". (242). Bram's dirty death in a drink-induced nightfall and of John's equally terrible end is steadily exposed as Hagar wanders about, in and out of the buildings of the old cannery where she was hiding. It is noteworthy that Hagar at last tells her story to someone else - and that she is finally able to weep for her lost men.

Hagar is isolated and she is incapable of making contact with others. Because of her environment, she perceives her isolation as essential, as a basis of strength, which is also a major factor in the barrenness of her life. One effective way to begin a study of the isolation of a character is to investigate her relationships with others. By far the most significant force in Hagar's past, which retains its hold over for so long, is the quality of her father, Jason Currie, whose strict, strong-minded loneliness and incapability, communicate feeling determine Hagar's character's and responses throughout her life. His influence on the young Hagar is manifest at an early age:

"I wouldn't let him see me cry, I was so enraged He struck and struck and then all at once he threw the ruler down and put his arms around me. He held me so tightly I almost smothered ... I felt caged and panicky and wanted to push him away but didn't dare. Finally, he released me. He looked bewildered, as though

he wanted to explain but didn't know the explanation himself. 'You take after me,' he said, as though that made everything clear. I did take after him...God knows he wasn't wrong in that". (9-10)

It is obvious that, Hagar at the later stage is already capable of using wrath to mask her other emotions -- rage is the only emotion she feels it is fitting to experience or admit. It is what enables her to keep hidden her fear and pain at being hit. Her father's effort at closeness, his acknowledgment of their saintly similarity, is already too late Hagar has withdrawn expressively from him, which expands the gap between them that will never be bridged, for both are too proud ever to make the first toward settlement with the other, and Jason Currie dies without being obedient to his daughter. The next time an attempt is made by Hagar's father to bridge the ever-growing gulf which separates them, it is again she who pulls away: He reached out and took my hand- and held it. His own hand constricted painfully, and for the merest instant the bones in my fingers hurt. "Stay, he said. Possibly it was only the momentary pain made me do it. I jerked my hand away as though I had accidentally set it on a hot stove. He didn't say a word. He turned and went outside. I felt I must pursue him; say it was a passing thing, not meant. But I didn't" (44-45).

Neither Hagar nor her father is prepared to take the necessary step towards reconciliation; both are too bound up in stern pride to give expression to their emotions. Even Hagar's marriage is based on her rebellion against her father's authority, spurred on by a slur to her pride by 'no-name' Lottie Dreiser. Her marriage is her first act of open defiance against her father and makes her feel "drunk with exhilaration" at her daring:

"Without warning, he reached out a hand like a lariat, caught my arm, held and bruised it, not even knowing he was doing so."

“Hagar---” he said. “You’ll not go, Hagar”.

The only time he ever called me by my name.

To this day I couldn't say if it was a question or a command.

I didn't argue with him. There never was any use in that.

But I went, when I was good and ready, all the same.

Never a bell rang out when I was wed”. ( 49)

From this time on there was no contact between Hagar and her father, but his authority over her remnants strong. Certainly, it is her father to whom her feelings turn when her son John is born. She thinks of the boy in terms of her father's approval: “Jason Currie never saw my second son or knew at all that the sort of boy he'd wanted had waited a generation to appear.” (64) The only opportunity Hagar had to peek into the reality of her father occurred while, she was still a child and had run home to tell him of the death of Lottie Dreiser's mother, with whom he had had a short-lived relationship:

“He never let on at all that he'd so much as exchanged a word with her. He made three comments. “Poor lass” he said. “She couldn't have had much of a life.” Then, as though recalling himself, and to whom he spoke, “Her sort isn't much loss to the town, I'm bound to say.” Then an inexplicably startled look came over his face. “Consumption? That's contagious, isn't it? Well, the Lord works in wondrous ways His Will to perform.” None of the three made much sense to me then, but they stuck in my mind. I've since pondered -- which was my father?” (19)

If Hagar is ever to discover which of the three comments truly reveals her father and it is only in a synthesis of all three that he is to be discovered it is when she completes her journey to self-recognition and realizes and accepts how much of him is

there in her. As she relives her past, she becomes more aware of the control put forth on her by the past, and especially by her father. "I tried to shut my ears to this word~ and thought I had, yet years later, when I was rearing my two boys, I found myself saying the same words to them." (13)

The failure to speak with others, or to observe their troubles clearly, permeates all other areas of Hagar's experience, as well as her communications with her father. It also manifests itself in her relationships with her brothers, with whom she is not close. Hagar takes after her father, and is his favourite child, while the boys lack his stern stubbornness, and take after their mother. She feels that they blame her for her mother's death, which occurred at Hagar's birth. She has absorbed her father's values, rejects the boys because of what she observes as their weakness, and is able only to think of her mother as "that meek woman I'd never seen ... [Whose frailty I could not help but detest." (25) She looks on those who share such a weakness as "flimsy, gutless ... bland as egg custard" (4) and is unable to sympathize with their suffering.

The two acts of compassion that are demanded of her at this time she is not capable to carry out. She wants to comfort her dying brother Dan by pretending to be their dead mother, and later, to mercifully kill the suffering chicks, but she is "unable to bend enough." (25) This is not the last time that she does not act in accordance "with her true "emotions. The freedom to do so takes a long time to come to her. That she feels no spiritual or emotional affinity with her brothers is frequently underscored by her inability to perceive their motives and feelings. She is even surprised that Dan becomes ill enough to die, since she has believed all along that he was only faking his weakness. "He cultivated illness as some people cultivate rare plants. Or so I thought then." (22). She is also unable to understand Matt. When on her wedding day he almost sends as a present the shawl she would not wear to comfort Dan, she refuses

her initial inclination to reach out to him, because she is unsure of his motives. It is only long after this that she learns of his childhood hopes and ambitions, how he had saved, in vain, to escape the domineering life with their father. As with many things in her life, Hagar “never knew the truth of it until years later, years too late.” (20) It is not only her lack of natural similarity to her brothers which prevents her from becoming close to them; it is also her immovable rejection to expose her emotions to anyone. Many times, she wants to talk to Matt, but finds herself unable to do so: I wanted to tell Matt "I knew" his “should have been the one to go east, but I could not speak of it to him .... Later, in the train, I cried, thinking of him, but, of course, he never knew that, and lid has been the last to tell him”. (42)

The heavy guilt in Hagar’s part for the death of John and Arlene becomes the heavy burden of Hagar, which not only makes her nature perverse and deformed but also influences her relationship with Marvin, her elder son she has deserted before. After John’s death, Marvin and Doris move in with Hagar to take care of her. At that time, Hagar is a proud, bitter, and sick old woman, with a whip-tongue to cut and mock at her son and daughter-in-law, even at herself. It is hard to get along well with such an aging and irritable Hagar for Marvin and Doris.

As time goes on, Hagar’s health condition becomes worse and worse. Marvin and Doris become old as well. They feel that they cannot take care of Hagar well because of Hagar’s falls and memory descends. So, they decide to put Hagar in Silver Thread, a nursing home. However, Hagar’s rebellious pride still refuses to live in the nursing home. She does not want to live in the nursing home because she does not want to lose her own house and all her belongs. To Hagar, these objects cannot be discarded or abandoned. These objects are what define her identity and what link her to her past. Hagar feels that when these controls are removed, she herself will stop to

exist. What's more is that, Hagar is always independent. She cannot imagine that she will be taken care of like a child. Hagar cannot tolerate these, so her uprising against her elder son is inescapable. So, when Marvin and Doris finally decide to send Hagar to the nursing home, she has recognized that the only way to change her fate is to rebel against them, escaping to a remote place so that she can keep her independence and freedom.

Eventually she is not able to fetch herself to reach him, or to appreciate him, and when she learns of his loss and of how easily he slipped away, she finds it hard to bear. "Why hadn't he writhed, cursed, or at least grappled with the thing?" (60) Matt lacks Hagar's "pride and inflexibility, but he also is without her survival instinct", which keeps her going against seemingly insurmountable odds, while he is beaten down by life, unable to "rage, rage against the dying of the light." Paul Pickrel's in the article "The Gods: Their Exits and Their Entrances" comments: "what has prevented "Hagar from living fully is what has enabled her to live at all" (122) seems nowhere truer than here. Hagar has not lived fully, and her isolation and the pride which keeps her chained inside herself extend also to her marriage to Bram Shipley, which ultimately fails. From the first her marriage has been a deed done in defiance of her father's authority, and she does not recognize Bram's true personality. "We'd each married for those qualities we later found we couldn't bear, he for my manners and speech, and I for his flouting of them." (79-80).

Hagar is unable to move outside herself enough to perceive his point of view, and truthfully thinks that she will effect a change in him. Her ambitions for her marriage still reflect the stern Presbyterian values of her father, and it is he ultimately whom she aims to please and impress. She is certain that her father will "soften and yield, when he sees how Bram Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and

grammar.” (50) It is pride which leads Hagar into this marriage and pride which prevents her from allowing it to work. She makes no attempt to reach Bram and his own terms and fails to recognize his attempt to approach her:

“When we entered, Bram handed me a cut-glass decanter with a silver top.

This here's for you, Hagar. I took it so casually, and laid it aside, and thought no more about it. He picked it up in his hands and turned it around. For a moment I thought he meant to break it, and for the life of me I couldn't see why. Then he laughed and set it down ...” (51)

Only long after, when it is too late, does Hagar begin to appreciate something of the strength in which the gift was given. “I never thought much of that decanter at the time, but now I wouldn't part with it for any money.” (62). Though, it is too late to use her knowledge now, Hagar hangs onto the decanter as if it were Bram himself. It is all she has left of him and the love that she failed to show him is now displaced onto his gift. It is like this with all of the objects in Hagar's house. It is in that her life is revealed: “If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purpose, then I do not know where I am to be found at all”. (36)

She even wonders now, having never thought of it at the time, whether Bram “would have liked me to ask for a picture of himself, even once?” (69). This is what makes Hagar an outsider to life's feast because it is too late for this thought now. Hagar's pride never allows her, in any instance, to show her fears or weakness to her husband. “I never cared for horses. I was frightened of them. I didn't let Bram see I was afraid, preferring to let him think I merely objected to them because they were smelly.” (83) Her reflective panic at Marvin's birth is also not communicated, although Bram gives her the opportunity to express it:

“You're not scared, Hagar, are you?”

he said, as though it had just occurred to him

I might be.

I only shook my head. I couldn't

speak, nor reach to him in any way at all.

What could I say?” (100)

Further, she is taken aback to notice that: “he wanted his family no less than my father had. In that-moment when we might have touched our hands together, Bram and I, and wished each other well, the thought highest in my mind was -- the nerve of him” (100). This seems to Hagar an expectation suitable to a man like her father, whereas in Bram it appears only as an unbelievable haughtiness. She does not see, as John will later, that “they're only different sides of the same coin anyway, he and the Curries.” (184)

Even in what should be their closest moments, in their marriage bed, Hagar hides her feelings from her husband:

“It was not so very long after we wed, when I first felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud and I made sure the trembling was all inner ... I prided myself on keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead.” (81)

Hagar is humiliated by Bram's love and by her pleasure of it, and “never spoke of it to anyone.” (81). After years later when, near the point of death, she talks with Murray F. Lees, does Hagar finally become conscious of the value of what she and Bram could have shared -- that Bram's banner over her, although “only his own skin” (81) was also the banner of love spoken of in the Song of Solomon, from where comes the line she so painfully recalls. “I never thought it love” she says, but later learns

differently from Lees. “You call that love?” “Lady,” he says, “if that wasn't, what is?” (228). When the occasion presents itself for her to accomplish out to Bram and let him see her true feelings, she backs off and continues to hide: “I felt so gently inclined that I think I might have opened to him openly. But he changed his mind. He patted me lightly on the shoulder. “You go to sleep now”, he said. He thought, of course, it was the greatest favour he could do me.” (87-88).

Hagar's coldness, and her pride in her coldness that stifles and eventually kills her marriage. Years later, she still tries to comfort herself by rationalizing that even if she had opened herself to Bram on that night; it would not have changed things substantially. Hagar's pride, as well as the destruction arising thereof, is “a two-edged sword, striking inward and outward simultaneously” (48), not only hurting people living around her, but also making herself suffer from her self-contradiction. Her negative pride inhibits her relationships with her brothers, her husband and her sons and even causes her alienation from herself. Taylor in the article “Coming to Terms with the Image of the Mother in *The Stone Angel*” comments: “Hagar loses the fullness of her potential self when she cuts herself off from others” (162). To drive this point home, five groups of relationships will be discussed, which include Hagar's detachment from her brothers, Hagar's separation from her husband, Hagar's loss of her favourite son John, Hagar's “escape” from her remaining son Marvin, and finally, Hagar's deviation from her true self. W.H. New in his article “Every Now and Then: Voice and Language in Laurence's *The Stone Angel*” observes:

“Hagar as hiding behind language in an attempt to conceal her true feelings.

Hagar is contrasted with Brain who despite his uneducated language always declares his mind. He therefore leaves no doubt about how he feels. He is also

not ashamed to show his appreciation for lovemaking unlike Hagar who is at pains to hide the same, hence her stone like facade” (82).

Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke, “I know that full well, although a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise.” (88). The cold and proud Presbyterian influence of her father continues to exert itself in Hagar's life once her sons begin to grow up. Hagar falls into the authoritarian footsteps of her father and finds herself diverting her sons with all the epithets he had thrust at her and her brothers. Just as she has been unable to reach out to her father, her brothers, or her husband, so she is unable to really establish contact with her sons. She cannot recognize them for who they are, and dotes on John while leaving Marvin, “a Shipley through and through” (64) in his father's hands or to his own devices. She does not recognize the boy's need for her approval when “he'd hang around the kitchen, and everywhere I'd turn, there he'd be, getting under my feet, until it got on my nerves” (112) She does not distinguish either that John is not the person whom she insists on believing him to be. He needs his father's support and love just as Marvin needs Hagar's, but she is blind to this: “You're talking just like your father,” I said. “The same coarse way. I wish you wouldn't. You're not a bit like him. “That's where you're wrong,’ John said” (174)

The similarities between Hagar and Marvin go unobserved by her but are apparent and commented upon by John. “Marv was your boy all along, but you never saw that, did you?” (137) Marvin is, like his mother, also a survivor, while the recklessly independent John is killed by his own carelessness. Hagar sees “Marvin as a boy who never gets upset, not even at what happened to his brother” (65) “forgetting that she is the onewho was transformed to stone and never wept at all” (243) when John was killed. It is Marvin, she finally realizes, who “is truly Jacob, gripping with

all his strength, and bargaining” (304). Ann Thompson in her essay “The Wilderness of Pride: Form and Image in *The Stone Angel*” recognizes: “the connection between the killing of the chicks in the town dump and the much later deaths of John and Arlene. She says that Hagar and Lottie “connive against the life urge of their children” and that “often the natural life forces and desires of the young are snuffed out by their pragmatic elders.” She sees the Manawaka dump as “a sulphurous hell in which the life force, embodied in the frail new born chicks, can only shrink to nothingness. And Lottie, with her little black-patent leather shoes, stamps out life while Hagar looks on.” (99) Anne continues:

“It is no accident that Hagar, much more imaginative than Lottie, makes the connection between the horrors of that day at the dump and the plot against their children. The same principle is at work. The helpless chicks in the dump – their children trying to eke out their existence on the drought-stricken prairies – they refuse to permit the struggle. They have pitted their wits against God. Life has denied life. Than such there can be no more barren wilderness. The image of fire and brimstone associated with the dump implies the nature of their crime. John's death comes as a mercy and Bram's comment on Marvin's departure from the farm applies equally to his second son. "He'll be as well away.” (100)

On her deathbed, Hagar impresses on her grandson, Stephen, that he, like his father, is “a Shipley through and through” (296) but this instance it is seen by Hagar as an optimistic quality. Her principles are no longer those of her father, and the manacles of the past are being dropped, one by one. Hagar's role as a stranger is highlighted earlier in the novel, when John and Arlene make love in the kitchen while she, Hagar, rests on the living room settee. Nowhere is she more sadly presented as a

mere witness of and not an accomplice in life. This incident also serves to point out the emptiness of Hagar's love making with Bram. John and Arlene celebrate their love together as a mutual practice; Bram and Hagar took their enjoyment individually, and, in her case, secretly. The remoteness that makes Hagar a stranger is self-imposed. It is only by recitation her experiences and reliving her past that Hagar is at last able to increase a sense of freedom. She comes to a consciousness of the worth of the precedent and begins to comprehend that her stubborn nature in communication has been a fault. So many things have been left understood, and now "there is no-one to speak to." (81)

Hagar tries to take control of John's whole life and fashion him in the form that was advantageous to her. Hagar's arrogance stopped her to realise the real love that existed between John and Arlene. She was unable to see that she's had a bad influence on John and failed to understand that Arlene actually is a good girl. She had never talked seriously to either of them. As a result of her strong objection to the young couple, they leave Hagar's house, which leads to the accident and death of the two. She cannot bend enough to see outside herself, and her concerns are not with the happiness of her son but with what other people would say if they knew what was going on — with her being able "to hold up her head in town" (199). As a consequence of her pride, John and Arlene die idiotically and unnecessarily, and thus Hagar has lost her favourite son forever.

Hagar recoils from the disaster of John and Arlene's deaths, which so clearly mock all her calculations, just as she had recoiled years earlier, to her mortification, from Lottie's act of mercy-killing. Mercy-killing is the supreme case of covering impure motives with the odour of sanctity. It allows the will perfect power over another living creature while excusing a very imperfect knowledge of cause and

consequence be claiming that the deed is done solely for the sake of the thing killed. When Hagar recollects Lottie's initial act of killing the chicks, she comments wisely, "I am less certain than I was then that she did it entirely for their sake. I am not sorry now that I did not speed them" (28). And then, when she and Lottie conclude their conspiracy to separate John and Arlene she ominously recalls the event again, without, pondering its bearing on her present action.

When her insight changes, she becomes ever more, aware of her aloneness, and of the failure of others to understand her position, not only because of her extreme old age, but also because of her strict denial ever to explain -- something she gradually wants to do more. But description is almost not possible; because of her long silence it is difficult for her to open up to others. She manages to express herself to Murray F. Lees, -- he makes her see herself and her life from the exterior in its place of through her own skewed and biased position. However, it is not the only path to salvation for Hagar. Others will also allow her an opportunity to act with liberty and majesty and save her at the end. When Mr. Troy tells Hagar that she is not alone, she replies "That's where you're wrong." (121). This is both true and false, and this problem will present itself again and again in Laurence's work. Mr. Troy's attempt at comfort implies that Hagar is not alone in her suffering but others suffer too. However, Hagar's reply shows that she cannot yet appreciate shared suffering -- she is still asserting her proud independence even at this late date. "Who do you think you are? Hagar. There is no-one like me in this world." (250) At the same time, she is growing more aware that perhaps there is a common element of experience which can be shared; others have 'suffered and felt the same feelings. "Do you get used to life? ... It all comes as a surprise I peer at her, thinking how peculiar that she knows so

much.” (104) consciousness that life and experience can be flickered comes to an understanding that it should, indeed, be so.

Hagar moves from thinking “Who would understand, even if strained to speak?” (38) and her pride in keeping her feelings to herself, to the sudden regret of:

“What does he know of me? Not a blessed thing. I am choked with it now, the incommunicable years, everything that happened and was spoken or not spoken. I want to tell him. Someone should know. This is what I think. Someone really ought to know these things”. (296)

It is understood that justification no longer matters. Hagar must listen to the way of abiding herself for all those years she had been in the state of despair. She is alone, since the search for deliverance and self-understanding is finally an individual effort, which must be sought alone. Hagar has spent all of her life alone, shut up within herself, the attainment of salvation. Under these circumstances is possible even at this late date.

Hagar achieves freedom initially when she opens herself to Murray F. Lees about facing the most difficult memories of her life, her responsibility in the death of John. After all the years of stern withdrawal, she is “glad Lees is here. I'm not sorry I talked to him, not sorry at all, and that's remarkable.” (245). Having mistaken him for John, she achieves the forgiveness she has sought from him. She is even able to forgive Lees and offer him a blessing of sorts, of the kind she offers Marvin. In a setting of religious symbolism, in which Lees plays a kind of Christ figure to Hagar, Laurence allows us to see that Hagar receives a form of salvation; Lees really does, in a sense, allow her to save herself and acquire a beginning sense of meaning. Hagar's second experience of grace comes at the end of her life, after hearing the gift of Mr. Troy's song, when she suddenly reaches the brink of realization:

“I must always, always, have wanted that –simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances -- oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?” (292)

The responsibility for Hagar's isolation is on her own shoulders. Her own view of the situation is not much different:

“Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or mine? Nothing can take away those years.” (292).

Hagar has faced her demons and grappled with them on her own as Marvin struggles with her. “And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from: the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him.” (304) It is only through her act of kindness to Sandra Wong that Hagar is finally released from the chains of her past. She is still the proud and undaunted, “unchangeable, unregenerate” (293), but she is also more fully human and at peace with herself at last. It is significant that the salvation she has sought, as symbolized by the water she takes on her deathbed, she has always held “in my own hands.” (308)

Hagar's arrival at such liberty, the most significant movement in the isolated heroine's pattern of self-discovery, occurs in outcome of her own approaching death. Through her conversation with Lees and her participation in the death of John, she comes to realize, painful though this is, that those things which trapped her were of

her own making. It is sad that much of the seclusion which makes the strangers to live the life of their own creation. In Hagar's case, the attempt that individuals may make by sharing love to overcome isolation, is denied by her pride. She does not really understand love or the ability to reach out to others, and so has been prevented all her life from living fully. Only at the very end of her life, by facing her evil spirit and recognizing its existence, does Hagar come to the verge of self-realization. Her endurance in character and inner strength permit her to admit the sight that her new revelation gives her and allow her to throw off the restraints of conventionality at last. This permits her to die, with distinction and shows that recovery for the isolated outsider figure is possible to the last.

Hagar Shipley, in her isolation, which is both circumstantial and self-imposed. In her increasing vision of this isolation, its effects on her life and her realization of life's sanctity she changes the perception at the end of life. Her enthusiasm at last to seek mercy and to act with freedom, follows the prototype of increase to self-realization set out -in the introduction to this discussion. These things consider the existentialist outsider figure. Hagar is able to find meaning and achieve salvation at the very end of life is a reaffirmation, both on her part and on Laurence.

When Hagar buries Bram in the Curie plot with her mother and father, "on the red marble name stone that stood beside the white statue I had his family name carved, so the stone said Currie on the on the one side and Shipley on the other" (184). Later, Hagar and Marvin go back to visit the plot and find a young caretaker at the cemetery. He shows them the grave: "This here's the Currie -Shipley stone. The two families were connected by marriage. Pioneering families, the both of them, two of the earliest in the district" (306).

Hagar cannot tolerate tears or any other pointer of weakness, even at the age of ninety. She longs to catch a glimpse in the mirror of her earlier, self-governing self. She chafes over her dependence on Doris and the nurses in the hospital and feels betrayed by her obese body, stiff bones and weak memory. To add to her embarrassment, she has no control over her bladder and suffers repeated attacks caused by gall bladder disorder during which she is entirely helpless. At the hospital when she enviously tells the nurse that she hates being helped, all that the nurse says in answer is "Haven't you ever given a hand to anyone in your time? It's your turn now. Try to look at it that way. It's your due." (276) At this time only, Hagar realizes that by recognizing weakness, one is in no way moderated and that at some time or the other in life all need to help and to be helped by others. This brief moment of self-realization enables Hagar to know her real personality. This is her overvalued self who is afraid of disintegration in the encounter with true self.

In life Jason and Bram were so apart that they didn't even speak to each other, in their death their names are associated by Hagar. Hagar's imaginations and her realities never coincide. During the inter-war period, Hagar tries to make her life new, a life in which she leaves behind her exceptionality as wife as she beforehand shed her role as daughter. Both of these leavings are ineffective, and her final modification can only take place when she realizes that she needs to join up these roles with the men she can never leave. When Hagar arrives at the comprehension that she cannot leave her father or her husband behind, the past and the present touch, then she can settle her offended and rebuild her identity to incorporate both anguish and celebration.

Soon after her arrival in the old cannery, in the grey dwelling which she successively calls a fortress, my house, my castle, she finds an old bed awaiting her rest and says "My room has been prepared for me" (155). An old rusty bucket in

which she finds water becomes “a well in the wilderness” (187). As darkness begins to fall on her second night, Hagar sings “Abide with me”. Beeler in his essay “Ethnic dominance and difference: The post-colonial Condition in Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, and *The Diviners*” states: “imperial centre that she [Hagar] creates out of the land of her Scottish ancestors causes her to value this world of experience over Canada in a typically colonial fashion” (26). Through memory, Hagar experiences first as a child, and later as an elderly woman, a much deeper sense of insideness to a place explored through second-hand knowledge, than to her own post-colonial hometown. Laurence’s representation of Hagar’s touching attachment to borrowed recollections of a location-based age provides foundational support for the expansion of Hagar’s superior sense of self and blind pride.

Laurence’s assessment of Hagar’s early childhood through placed-based memories presents the prospect of a six-year-old Hagar and her two older brothers sitting “around the dining-room table,” as they did every evening, finishing homework under the watchful eye of their father” (13). Initially, the memory appears to demonstrate Hagar’s close attachment to her home and her family, yet the scene is not idyllic either; instead, it is one in which Hagar remembers the children being frequently cautioned by their gruff and overbearing father. Hagar’s connection to her home was shaped by her relationship with her abusive brothers who whipped her with maple switches. Her emotionally detached father who chose “propriety and financial gain over his children, and her father’s housekeeper, Aunt Dollie who served as a form of surrogate mother, although was regarded mainly as just the “hired help” (6). What the elderly Hagar gains from reliving this stage of her life is an affirmation of self. The fact that her early home life was somewhat she ultimately chose to escape, renders her accessory to her own home as an adult all the more important and

emotional. Laurence portrays her character associating her home with her identity, in a relationship that is contrary as Hagar's own emotional association to her home and the invoked place-based memories, increases.

The idea of Marvin and Doris selling her home, the home that now officially belongs to Marvin and moving into a bungalow, threatens Hagar's sense of individuality and existentiality: "the house is mine. I bought it with the money I worked for, in this city which has served as a kind of home ever since I left the prairies. Perhaps it is not home, as only the first of all can be truly that, but it is mine and familiar" (36).

Her life space has so greatly diminished with old age that she is unable and unwillingly to relinquish her only remaining physical source of place-based identity: her home. W.H. New in his essay *Margaret Laurence and the City*, 'in *Margaret Laurence Critical Reflections* comments: "Hagar takes Manawaka into her son Marvin's suburban home and then into the multicultural hospital in Vancouver" (66). Ann Barnard in her article "A North American connection: Women in prairie novels" states: "Hagar spends her life seeking a place, only to find it in herself, never in 'the Shipley place' or even the Vancouver house that passes to her son Marvin and his wife" (25), but Hagar's self-identity is so fundamentally linked to place, to her birthplace of Manawaka, to the houses in which she lives, and to her own body that she categorizes more with her place-based memories and her possessions than with any of the other characters in the novel.

Laurence captures the essence of Hagar's self-identity as Hagar worries about having to store her belongings, her "shreds and remnants of years," as she states: "If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purposes, then I do not know where I am to be

found at all” (36). Helen M. Buss in her essay “*Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence*” opines: “Hagar is a woman who in her childhood has learned to value things above people” (27), by extension, Hagar continues throughout her life, to value things and places above any relationships with people, to the extent that she derives her self-identity from her surrounds rather than from the other characters in the novel. Hagar associates leaving her home with the perception that she would no longer exist, that her relationship to any other place would be one of complete outsidership and death.

Sarah Maitland in *Margaret Laurence’s The Stone Angel* appreciates:

“Laurence has solved this problem the only way it can be solved. In the creation of Hagar Shipley she has given us a character with exactly the right degree of self-knowledge to make this form work a character who is not, by her nature, either self-indulgent or easily fooled not even by herself, but who is also not so self-knowing that the reader has to take her every observation as the ultimate and perfect truth indeed she is a character of such obtuse cruelty, whose life has been so badly managed at times that one is never tempted to feel that her view of the universe is the only one.”(44)

Hagar marries Bram Shipley, resulting in Hagar’s emotional and physical detachment from her own family, her former home, and the town of Manawaka itself. Hagar mistakenly believed that Bram’s own outsidership from society was something she could change, one day allowing them access into the most popular places of the social elite. Instead, Hagar became more and more reclusive, as Bram’s unrefined language, lack of manners, and general discount for other people’s attitudes towards him made her too embarrassed to accompany him to town on shopping errands:

“After the first year of our marriage, I let Bram go to town alone, and I stayed home”

(71). Eventually, even attending church became too embarrassing, and Hagar states: “I never went to church after that. I preferred possible damnation in some comfortably distant future, to any ordeal then of peeking or pitying eyes” (89-90). Marriage for Hagar represents much diminished sense of attachment to place, creating a reduced sphere of living space, that of her new home. Hagar’s reminiscences of her new home, though, depict it considerably as a poorly kept house, one that was “square and frame, two-storied, the furniture shoddy and second-hand, the kitchen reeking and stale” (50), that remained “an unpainted house” (84), full of promise, that was never fulfilled, reflecting and symbolizing Hagar and Bram’s association that too was colourless, unfinished, and raw. In terms of Hagar’s relationship to the surrounding farmland, George Woodcock in the essay “*Possessing the Land: Notes on Canadian Fiction*” comments:

“Earth in the sense of land is also important to her, and it is as much to live on his farm as to be ploughed sexually by him that she marries the socially impossible Bram Shipley; she resents the fact that Bram wastes his land on grazing horses, instead of tilling it and making it productive” (57).

Hagar had opportunity to transform her relationship with Bram, making it more emotionally and sexually intimate, but chose as an alternative to keep “her trembling...all inner” (81), eroding their relationship and marriage. She endured him because he fulfilled her hidden sexual desires, but as a substitute, she suppressed her self-identity, allowing herself to become conventional in society, while basically punishing herself in a very restricted and imperfect place. The elderly Hagar, reflecting on the suppressed intimacy of her marriage, remarks:

“Now there is no one to speak to.... My bed is cold as winter, and now it seems to me that I am lying as the children used to do, on fields of snow... The

icy whiteness covers me, drifts over me, and I could drift to sleep in it, like someone caught in a blizzard, and freeze” (81).

Hagar equates emotional outsidership and detachment with the imagined landscape of a frozen wasteland. In *The Stone Angel*, in spite of her self-imposed separation from her homeland, Hagar’s sense of being bound to place kept her entrenched in her grind down marriage and shared house with Bram for nearly a quarter of a century: “Twenty-four years, in all, were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of our wrangle and bicker” (116), until her sudden departure to Vancouver, where Laurence creates a new sense of identity for her character, keeping house for Mr. Oatley, an elderly man. Here Hagar was able to regain a deeper sense of connection to place, similar to her feelings towards her childhood house: “Life was orderly and conducted in a proper house filled with good furniture, solid mahogany and rosewood, and Chinese carpets of deep blue” (158). At this time in her life, in her late forties, Hagar was still vigorous and mobile, for her life space was still at its fullest risk. This expansion in Hagar’s personal characteristics promoted an increased sense of self-identity, allowing her the opening to ignore unwanted events and settings, obvious in her discharge of her years with Bram when she informed her employer that she “came from a good family” and that her “husband was dead” (158). This place-based memory give power to the elderly Hagar, lending her a false sense of independence at a time when her aged corpse has removed these feelings from her identity.

With Hagar’s escape to Shadow Point where she mistakenly believes she can live independently and free, Laurence displays that the elderly Hagar’s sense of her independent and viable self is essentially linked with the need to claim a place of her own. It is here that Hagar persists to expand her diminished personal life space by

recalling significant place-based memories of her life. In *The Stone Angel*, Hagar is eventually admitted in the hospital, her body too weak and sick to survive on its own in a remote and antagonistic environment

Here she comments several times how her life space continues to diminish, bringing her closer and closer to death:

“how the world has shrunk. Now it’s only one enormous room, full of high white iron cots, each narrow, and in each one a female body of some sort,” and referring to her space again, she calls it “the shrunken world,” that becomes even more restrictive when she moves to a semi-private room, “The world is even smaller now. It’s shrinking so quickly. The next room will be the smallest of all. Just enough space for me” (264).

Again, emphasizing the relationship between memory and identity, Laurence presents the notion that Hagar believes she could continue living in an expanded life-space through her place-based memories for as long as her body stays alive. *The Stone Angel*, she might emerge from her “cocoon” with a greater connection to the characters around her. Hagar, in fact, has been like the stone angel that gives the book its title, a title which is middle to the nucleus of the book, as image and symbol. During the novel, in the course of developing this symbolism, the author uses words like stonily, transformed to stone, unable to bend, cold, unseeing, terrible strength when referring to Hagar. Indeed, she uses them about herself. The very first paragraphs of the novel draw our attention to this symbol of Victorian respectability and sentimentality. Hagar's father has imported the monument from Italy to stand over the grave of his wife in the family plot. The statue is “the first, the largest, and certainly the costliest” angel in the cemetery. (3) Jason Currie had “bought it in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty as he fancied, forever and a day.” (3)

The most unusual feature of the angel in Hagar's sight was that it was sightless. Therefore, the magnificent memorial stood on a hill overlooking the town inaccessible and shades an observable but hard-hearted recap of her father's supremacy over the town. She regards the angel as the public expression of her father's pretension, his pride in family, the importance placed on appearance. She suspects that he really despised his wife for her Lack of spirit yet he has raised this showy tombstone to her. It was hypocrisy.

Later she like the angel was modelled into the young woman her father felt would do him credit just as the sculptor had shaped the statue. She recalls the day when she arrived back from the East; how delighted he was with the result of his investment and how she wished he would not nod and nod as though I were a thing and his" (43). When she makes the grand gesture and carries Bram it could seem that she had discarded all this but her nature was as unbending as the statue her warmth sealed away and her insight into the value of human beings blurred by a set of standards assimilated from her father and her education. Even though her marriage would seem to reject this she still cared for proper appearance. She was cold, hard and blind and like the statue she is all that is left of the Currie family to announce Jason's dynasty. Yet the author's way of permitting Hagar to tell her own story makes it possible for the readers to recognise from the old woman's words and deeds. The passionate and sensuous nature only finds outward expression in her love of bright colours, especially in her clothes, in her response to the feel of things, and in her satisfaction of food.

When Bram dies his daughters Gladys and Jess object but Hagar insists on his being buried with the Curries beneath the angel. She does not understand clearly herself why her father and the son-in-law refused to acknowledge end up as names on

either side of the red marble name stone on the Currie plot in Manawaka cemetery. John makes a sensitive comment which his mother only comes to understand at a much later date. To him “they’re only different sides of the same coin, anyway, he and the Curries. They might as well betogether there”. (184)

*The Stone Angel* is full of the irony large and small which make up the web of Hagar’s life. But smile at her showing such material of how to lever men when she is commenting to herself on the game of mothers and fathers two small children are playing on the beach at Shadow Point. “Stupid girl. She knows nothing. Why won’t she praise him a little? She is so sharp with him. He’ll become fed up in a minute. I long to warn her- watch out watch out you’ll lose him (188) who better than Hagar would know that! Even Hagar laughed at the irony she saw in her becoming a housekeeper like Auntie Doll "Like Auntie Doll" I said. “That seems peculiar. You never know what’s going to happen to you in this life” (141)

However, it is the larger ironies that form the important strands of the story. Hagar struggles with her communication after she gains insight. She makes amends in small ways such as when she takes back the harsh words she flings at Doris. When one form of communication fails, she acts; the light does not bring the nurse so Hagar gets the bedpan for Sandra. The most important “truly free” (307) communication of Hagar's life is when she lies to Marvin. First, she admits to him that she is afraid. This brings her down to a level where she can give him what he needs. Then she tells him that he has been “better son than John” (304). Even though this communication is a false one, it is done in love and kindness. Her new appreciation of kindness allows her to be maternal and say the words her son desires to hear.

Berenice Fisher in his work “Hero” comments: “Hagar shows us how to struggle more successfully . . . and teaches others.... what she has learned from her

experience." (189). Hagar has newly come to value the community of women and she wishes this communion to continue because she leaves her mother's ring to Tina. In making a connection between generations of women, Hagar metaphorically passes the new female strength that she has come to admire on to those who follow her. Hagar takes stock of the personal problems that overwhelmed her and through her pain and fear; she finds the gift to change and to make compensation to those she has wronged. She appears to go out as uncompromising and bad-tempered after all she has learned, she still speaks abruptly to the nurse and fails to help her.

Hagar uses her new-found involvement when it counts and does not pass around banter willy-nilly, we believe her legitimacy. Chris Verduyn in his book *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation* remarks: "Hagar's trouble is "a temperament torn between impulses of order and disorder, refinement and toughness, propriety and desire, impulses justified in her own mind by her pride in her family and the urgency of her own passions." (72). Hagar uses her innocent skill of positive communication to show compassion to those closest to her. Through Sandra, she makes amends for rejecting the women in her life. Through Murray Lees, she makes an apology to John. Most significantly, she speaks directly to Marvin and gives him a lasting gift one of love. Even though she remains a "holy terror" (304), Hagar does soften her strong, isolated personality. She allows people to touch her and she touches them in return. She teaches us all that change has no age restriction and that change, in itself, is demystifying.

Hagar's inherited pride from Jason compels her to be courageous, proud, brainy, everything that her father admires. As a result of her irremediable pride, Hagar is gradually turned into a cold and blind woman, just like the sightless stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery. Hagar fails to get love, satisfaction or joy from her brothers, her husband, or her sons. As a result of her inflexible pride, Hagar cannot gain her self-

identity. She does not understand why there are always conflicting thoughts within her and does not know how to deal with those conflicting forces. The only way out is to rebel, and to seek her true self.

Hagar has wriggled against what prevents her in different ways. Hagar's life is her noncompliant journey towards self-acknowledgement. Her life is made up of a series of rebellions: to rebel against her rigid, virtuously Presbyterian father, to rebel against her ineffectual husband, to rebel against the compassion of her elder son. Hagar struggles to maintain her freedom and obtain her self-recognition all through her life. Under the impact of her father, Hagar believes that any authorization of warm emotions, of human dependence, is a sign of excruciating weakness of character. As a result, Hagar cuts herself off from much of the joys of life such as joy in marriage, in children, and in social communication. Hagar, behaves exactly like a fighter from beginning to the end. She struggles to seek her true identity and freedom. Hagar is searching for her proper position to establish herself in the patriarchal world. In order to achieve this, she has to take on the form of rebellion. Hagar Shipley's rebellions led to the discovery of her real self and the return to her true identity.

Hagar's argumentative style leaves no question about her formidable strength and insistence on independence that flow from both cultural background and personal predisposition. Simone Vauthier in his article "Images in Stones, Images in Words: Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*," delineates:

"While Hagar's hardness is, in the overall context, largely induced by her milieu and upbringing, the Scottish Presbyterian ethics and the pioneer experience, putting a high premium on courage, independence, 'character', the development of the 'rigidity' isotopy underlines the personal, psychic element in Hagar's obduracy" (57).

Hagar's individuality is demonstrated early when she was a child. She embarrasses her father by drawing attention to the bugs in his bin and then endures his consequent chastisement without tears. Even he recognizes his style of strength and independence in her.

Morley in his book *Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home* has described this journey "as the road sign "To the Point" indicates, leads right to the revelation of her authentic self," and this "jailbreak is a descent into self which is healing" (78). On her way and during her staying there, she finds that she cannot control her bodily functions: how she needs to stop to compose herself again and again, how long and how difficult it is for her to recover from a fall to the ground, and how forgetful she is to go there without bringing a single drop of water. She recalls the services Marvin and Doris have provided her when she was trapped in the improper functions of her body. She once thought that they are too fussy in offering their family duties, yet she knows now how important and necessary their care means to her.

At the age of ninety, when at the mercy of her physical weakness and her revolting against its manifestations, Hagar argues with Marvin and Doris who try to help her. She makes a desperate attempt to flee to the Shadow Point, a deserted fish cannery, fearing that they might send her to the nursing home. Laurence believes, that it is necessary for her protagonists to know that, before they can rise up to set themselves free, they must achieve confidence in themselves; before they can express themselves and communicate with others, they must first know themselves. The novelist wanted Hagar to achieve her spiritual freedom before she knows herself. Therefore, she struggles to search for her self-identity and spiritual freedom throughout her life.