

ANALYSING MARGARET LAURENCE'S *THE STONE ANGEL* IN A FEMINIST
PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

The majority of people in society generally consider women to be weak and reliant on others. This statement is utterly irrational, making it impossible to agree with in its entirety. There are some women who have to overcome their own challenges and struggle through life on their own. Hagar is one such figure that Margaret Laurence created in her novel *The Stone Angel*. Hagar is a woman who refuses to conform to her patriarchal society. The story, which is set in the made-up town of Manawaka, immerses the reader in Hagar's life and mind. It exhibits the main character's feminist tendencies. In light of the social and political context of the women's characters in this book, Margaret Laurence attempts to recognize and understand the inner conflicts of the characters. Laurence works to assist women in creating a more positive identity because she is deeply against the harmful and negative self-image that Canadians have created for themselves and wants to see them reclaim the authentic selves that she feels they have lost.

Key words: Self-actualization, negative self-image, and individualization.

Margaret Laurence was among the most brilliant writers of Canadian literature. The most well-known work by Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, is set in the fictional Manawaka. The story is told by Hagar Shipley, a 94-year-old woman who lives at her son's home. This book illustrates the unique experiences of a woman living in a patriarchal society. The goal is to transition from a state of vulnerability and alienation to one of self-awareness. A subtle autobiographical undercurrent runs through Laurence's novels, a concrete depiction of her quest for self-identity and eventual discovery of her true self. She spent time searching for her true self after having a spiritual experience of self-reflection, which caused her to become isolated. Hagar is a unique protagonist, making her stand out among Laurence's heroines. Because she is not a pleasant person, Hagar is unmatched. She is the snarky, aging woman who appears at the start of the book; she has never experienced love or happiness in her life. Patricia Morley remarks: "Hagar Shipley is the first in a series of memorable women...Laurence presents universal concerns in terms of the Canadian experience over four generations. She allows us to see into the hearts of her individual characters, their society and ourselves" (Morley 8). She is compared to the stone angel that serves as the book's emblem. It turns out that the statue of the stone angel was placed on her mother's grave. The father of Hagar, Jason Currie, did not adore his late wife. But, he only places the statue on her grave to show off his wealth. She ignores feminine traits while praising male virtues. She witnessed Jason beating her, but she was too proud to weep. She rejects the girlish foolishness. Hagar's combative demeanour demonstrates her power and independence, which she inherited from her family and cultural upbringing. Hagar is grieved by any strong proclamation of a woman's freedom. Hagar is the daughter of a successful trader. Her mother passed away while she was a small child. Hagar makes the decision to marry the ones, but her father does not support her because he does not want his daughter to marry a man from a lower social class. The couple faces serious financial challenges. Hagar's union with Bram Shipley is causing her issues. Because of her enormous pride and the characteristic of her father, her life is devoid of joy and love. Like her father, she has a hard heart. Hagar was the wealthy man's daughter from her early years until her disobedient marriage. Hagar struggles for independence as a woman. Hagar's inability to communicate her emotions as a result of growing up without a mother and being raised by her father is another trait she received from her father. Although mothers are crucial in

helping their daughters develop their social skills and raise them, Hagar lacked her mother's guidance when she was a young girl. She has learned and imitates her father's actions. Because of Jason's domineering effect on his wife earlier and daughter later, Hagar's femininity is suppressed. From *the Stone Angel* on his wife's tomb to the inheritance he leaves for his daughter, her father's pride is clear. Hagar develops this pride early in life. Hagar was a brash, stubborn, and stern youngster. She recalls displaying her pride when she was little. Hagar's pride is a prison, but via an inward journey, she escapes it and learns who she truly is. Her father did not visit Hagar's elder son when he was born. Strangely, Hagar shared his view that Marvin wasn't actually her child. Her justifications were similar to his. Because of her background, she acted as though her family and other relatives were better than other people. After being married, she runs into some financial problems. She remembers "Marvin, the day he started school, wearing a sailor suit and a face blank as water. He hated that navy-blue suit...for most of the other boys wore overalls; I soon gave up trying to dress him decently and let him wear overalls too... Bram's daughter used to give me the overall their boy had grown out of - How it galled me ..." (*The Stone Angel* 69).

Because of her pride, Hagar was unable to interact with her siblings, sons, husband, and other people who may have provided solace to her. Taylor says: "Hagar loses the fullness of her potential self where she cuts herself off from others" (*The Stone Angel* 162). The cause of this issue is her denial of all things feminine. As Dan is suffering from pneumonia, Mat implores Hagar to cover Dan with their mother's shawl to comfort him, but she is unable to get over her dislike of appearing frail in order to assume the role of the mother. She has little regard for her bond with her brothers. Hagar's pride has a significant impact on how she views her kid and husband. She disregards Marvin's positive traits because she doesn't like how much he resembles Bram's family. She believes herself to be far more educated and cunning than her husband. Even though young Marvin tries to please her, Hagar nearly felt as though she was not the mother of her own kid because he is not as quick-witted as she is. John, however, is Hagar's favourite child since she feels that he resembles her late father. He speaks more clearly than Bram and Marvin, and he picks things up quickly. He displays similar familial pride. He has a short fuse and is inebriated. She does not consider this. Hagar's pride is hurt as John prepares to leave Manawaka, Hagar's pride once again prevents her from expressing herself properly. She tells: "I walked to the wrought iron gate of Mr. Dately's house with him wanting only to touch his brown impatient face but not daring to..." (*The Stone Angel* 167).

She was unable to cry after her family members' passing. After John passes away, Hagar remains silent once more and makes no attempt to convey her sorrow. She believes she must endure the suffering on her own and won't allow anyone to console her. An old lady puts her arm around her and exhorts "cry, Let yourself. It is the most things. I have never had to do in my entire life" (*The Stone Angel* 242).

Hagar's union with Bram is another partnership that doesn't live up to its promise as a result of Hagar's pride in her own principles. Hagar defies her father's authority and weds the person she chooses. Due of her husband's violent and short-tempered behaviour, Hagar feels too ashamed to be seen with him in public or at church. He doesn't get angry with her when she goes; instead, he expresses worry for her. But, Hagar's pride prevents her from expressing her own emotions and from experiencing those of others. Hagar is unable to respond to Bram's advances into her space because of her pride and rejection of femininity. Her pride is the primary cause of her failed and unhappy marriage for Hagar. Silence is a by-product of her pride and serves as another prison. Hagar was at a loss for words when Marvin left her to go to war. Hagar is unable to accept John's death. "I wouldn't cry in front of strangers whatever it might cost me" (*The Stone Angel* 242). She was terrified and hardly ever cried. Hagar remained unmoving at the passing of Bram, just as she had done at the deaths of both of her brothers and her father. Simone Vauthier says that "while Hagar's hardness is, in the overall context, largely induced by her milieu and upbringing, the Scottish Presbyterian ethic and the pioneer experience, putting a high premium on courage, independence 'character', the development of the 'rigidity' isotropy underlines the personal, psychic element in Hagar's obduracy"

(Vautheir 57): Spending of her time reflecting upon her life, Hagar sums up how her pride has influenced her life: "... pride was my wilderness and 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" (*The Stone Angel* 292). While lying in bed, very close to death, Hagar reveals her feelings to Marvin with honesty: "I'm frightened. Marvin. I'm so frightened... I think it's the first time in my life I've ever said such a thing" (*The Stone Angel* 303). Hagar's battle for independence is a misadventure. In the course of trying to understand the shape her life has taken, asking forgiveness from neither God nor those around her, she must overcome her own nature. Hagar also is too proud to ask for God's help. She begins to pray, thinking "our Father no. I want no part of that. I can think, bless me or not, Lord, just as you please, for I'll not beg" (*The Stone Angel* 307).

Hagar was terrified and hardly ever cried. She acted the same way she did after both of her brothers and her father had passed away. Hagar has severe anguish as a result of her pride and suffers from fears of requiring and giving too much. She reflects on her life for the most of the time. In a subsequent scene, a hospital nurse helps her from the restroom, a proud woman says "oh, I hate being helped; my voice is pettish and doesn't resemble at all the fury inside me. I've always done things for myself. Haven't you ever given a hand to anyone in your time?" Hagar is a strong woman who doesn't want to give in to the difficulties associated with growing older and losing a loved one. She is dealing with both the trauma of her declining health. She needs to recognise her true self. Her pride had a profound impact on her life.

The Stone Angel is a realistic account of a woman who must confront the fact that she will eventually die. This essay demonstrates how a person develops, transforms, and gets over her pride. Hedrick Sandra looks at how Margaret Laurence's works helped shape the Canadian feminine identity. According to her, Hagar depicts her psychological search for her actual self and desire for her own identity in *The Stone Angel* in a way that crosses gender barriers. Barbara Helen Pells states: "Laurence primarily views 'real' women as a victim of society, man and her own fears and frustrations. She must search beyond her role definition to find a personal identity and freedom" (38). Hagar's life can be described as routine. According to feminism, women in a society where men predominate must be protected and have ways to live. In the hospital, Hagar came to terms with her femininity, but she now realises that her pride is fundamentally based on masculine authority. She discovers that she can unite her male and female psyches, attains wholeness, and discovers her true self. As she graciously pardons others at the end of her life, she demonstrates her progress as a human. Hagar acknowledges the joy that exists in life. Despite the limited time she has, she attempts to be approachable. Hagar is able to reject her father's values because she accepts her feminine features. She now recognises the value of women's attributes. The opposite side of women's power is revealed in this novel.

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