Chapter II
The Stone Angel

ABOVE THE TOWN, on the hill brow, The Stone angel used to stand [...] Summer and winter she viewed the town with sightless eyes.

The quest for identity is a continuous process searching for one's own roots, a search into the self and an earnest search for a sense of belonging. Margaret Laurence, in her novels, usually employs the Stream of Consciousness narrative or the self-reflective process of story telling and her fictions portray women wrestling with personal demons.

Margaret Laurence has written novels and stories with an African setting like *This Side Jordan* and *The Tomorrow Tamer* but her more significant novels are the ones with a Canadian setting like *The Stone Angel* and the Manawaka novels. *The Stone Angel* has a sustained Canadian background but its real theme is old age and what old age can be and mean for a woman.

*The Stone Angel* (1964) is the first of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka works. It is about the uneven life of a ninety year old Hagar Shipley. The protagonist Hagar Shipley is a self-righteous old woman who acts her own way. All her life she had been proud and hard like a stone. There are various events in her life which project her as a
woman who is proud, selfish, and stubborn but at the same time loving, generous and longing for freedom. Unable to reconcile with the thought of being sent to a nursing home 'The Silver Threads', where old people are taken care of, she goes to a deserted fish cannery by the sea for two days. She is closer than ever before with nature, silence, her own thought and feelings—all essentials of nature. Finally she is sent to a hospital, where she ends her life.

Laurence's reason for writing *The Stone Angel* was that the character of Hagar had dwelt in her mind for quite a while before she started writing the novel:

The character of Hagar had been in mind for quite a while before I started writing, the novel which took place with surprising ease. I did not really think of making a protagonist into a sort of mythical figure of archetype of the Canadian west. She certainly and isn't. I wrote about Hagar as an individual old woman, not reflecting whether she would be called universal or typical. She did come from my own Manitoba and family background but I felt she was an individual.

At the time when Laurence was working on *The Stone Angel* she was separated from her husband and was living in England with her children. This is not an easy time and there is no other better
representation than the character of Morag Gunn in the semi-autobiographical novel *The Diviners*. England could not provide her with a sense of her own place and did not-as this can be seen only in her book *Jason's Quest* a children's book. Contemporary English life is not mentioned in any of her writings. Laurence had finished writing about Africa and now she had to return to Canada-spiritually, at least, if not physically.

*The Stone Angel* is set in the period of Laurence's grand-parent's generation which was very strict with puritanical values. The men of that generation worked very hard like the men of Somali whom Laurence admired very precisely because they reminded her as her own Scottish-Irish ancestors. Her works, especially *The Stone Angel* enabled Laurence to explore her past.

Laurence, like R.K.Narayan and William Faulkner, invents a fictional setting for all her novels and stories written out of her Canadian background. This she calls as Manawaka. She herself says that it is not any one prairie town but it is a town of the mind. Manawaka setting enables her to create a strong sense of place and moreover enables her to have very lively character so as to place these individuals within the historical context of their time and place. Her desire to create such characters is to recover the socio-cultural and the heritage of her region so as to gain identity. Her fictional world of the
Manawaka novels enables her to see for herself and show to her people the value of the inherited past and to acquire a true perspective within which to locate the present.

The first-person record of Hagar Shipley’s life spanning across ninety-years of her lived life in *The Stone Angel* alternates between two-time levels, the present and the past. The actual time span of the protagonist is only a few days. The narrative brings the story of three generations of Hagar’s family, Hagar representing the second and linking her father’s generation before her and her son’s after through her narration. The present is depicted by the infirmity of Hagar and her determined efforts to refuse to go to the Nursing Home for the old, Silver Threads, although it causes a great misery to her son Marvin and daughter-in-law Doris with whom she stays. She is selfish and she does not realise that her son and daughter-in-law are also getting on in years and that they do not have the necessary strength to take care of her. She, then out of her stubbornness and determination which she has inherited from her father, Jason Currie, runs away to a deserted fish-Cannery from where she is saved and hospitalised.

There are many Biblical references in *The Stone Angel* which are exceedingly significant for the development of the theme. Hagar’s name recalls the wife of Abraham in the Old Testament, the bondwoman Sarah, who was sent out with her son into the desert
wilderness. These Biblical illusions establish Laurence's heroine as a wanderer who is not free but a captive to overpowering forces. Another religions image that defines the image of the heroine is in the Manawaka cemetery. It stands over the prairie wilderness with sightless eyes, for the carver left the eyeballs blank: "stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied forever and a day" (SA 3).

The protagonist's thoughts in the novel move forward and backward into different realms of her childhood, adolescence and adulthood during the course of which Hagar frees herself from leading a more satisfying existence.

Hagar's whole life is dominated by the authority of her father-Jason Currie, a Scots-Presbyterian pioneer. The patriarchal God who reigns as a supreme dictator over the lives of His underlings is a symbol of the European consciousness.

Hagar, like Grandfather Connor and Grandmother MacLeod (in A Bird in the House), lives in terrifying isolation on account of the attitudes inherited from her father. She regards her state of dependence on her son and daughter-in-law as acutely embarrassing and irritating.

Reviewing her past Hagar arrives at a greater understanding of herself and realises that the sterility of her relationship with her
In this short novel it wears its favourite North American false-faces. It looks like sturdy independence, like courage, like character. The novelist puts us in a position from which we also see that it is pigheadedness, domineering possessiveness, sheer cursedness.²

Hagar is full of pride. This is ancestral. Jason Currie, Hagar’s father was a proud and God-fearing man. Her pride is also historical in the sense that Scottish immigrants like her father, who virtually built the little prairie town of Manawaka, were proud of their accomplishment. On close examination her pride reveals nothing but a mask which she unconsciously wears to conceal her numerous fears. She is filled with the fear of what people might think the fear of being different, and the fear of being isolated.

Hagar strongly believes in the gospel of individualism handed down to her by her father, Jason Currie. Jason who has known hard times as a pioneer, tells his children things like this: “You’ll never get anywhere in this world unless you work harder than others [...] Nobody’s going to hand you anything on a silver platter. It’s up to you,
nobody else. You’ve got to have stick-to-itiveness if you want to get ahead. You’ve got to use a little elbow grease” (SA 13).

Hagar’s snobbishness is inherited from her father. It alienates her from the poorer men and women and the Metis in the town. She is very snobbish when Auntie Dolly Stonehouse expresses her desire to marry her father. Hagar says that she and her brother knew that their Father could never have brought himself to marry his housekeeper.

Hagar marries Bram Shipley, a farmer, much against the interest of her father. This negative approach on the part of Hagar’s that is rejection of the father symbolises a rebellion against the cultural proportions:

Hagar refuses to be his showpiece after receiving an eastern education. She marries the uneducated, coarse but virile Bram Shipley and, carrying with her all of her father’s class prejudices and sexual and emotional restraints, chooses (at least for a while) the prairie farm with its voluptuous lilacs and terrifying horses. ³

It is her father who assumes that Hagar unconsciously opposes him when she marries Bram Shipley.

The spatial journey begins with Hagar making mental journey to and from one house or another, from Currie’s to Shipley’s and then to Oatley’s. Hagar’s journey continues in her house at Vancouver when
she goes to the deserted Cannery and then to the hospital. Her journey is not presented in terms of vastness but a journey towards her quest.

The Stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery is the monument which Hagar’s father constructs in memory of his dead wife. It is also a symbol of Hagar. Like the stone angel which is carved without any eyes, Hagar is also sightless and hard, never allowing herself to express affection nor caring a bit about the feeling of people around her. The stone angel according to Hagar, is a symbol of not her mother or motherly love but pride. She builds a barrier around herself which separates her from others. She is, like the marble stone angel, very cold, without any feelings or emotions.

Hagar being motherless never knew what motherly love is. In addition to this Jason Currie also encouraged her whenever he found a chance. He encouraged her toughness to make her more stubborn. This quality of hers is revealed when Jason strikes her. She is more determined in not letting her father notice her tears than the pain. She controls her tears. When her father comments that she has backbone and is stubborn like him, she accepts it. She is proud and had blind admiration for male virtues. This led her to perceive tenderness and feminine virtues for something disgusting, as meekness and frailty which she detests. This is the reason when Matt asks her to play the role of their mother to provide comfort to their dying brother Hagar's
response is pathetic: “however much a part of me wanted to sympathize [...] wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough” (SA 25).

Jason Currie, can mould the landscape to his liking by building a brick house and by carrying birch trees from Galloping Mountain. He can also try to mould the values of his family and the town. He can mould them according to his Scot-Presbyterian beliefs in self-made men, economy of words and feelings and hard work accompanied appropriately by material success, good manners and education. But he can’t make his daughter love the town. Hagar refuses to be his showpiece after receiving an eastern education.

Hagar’s strong aversion towards her father and the town is revealed in her speech. She says:

How bitterly I regretted that he’d left and had sired us here, the bald-headed prairie stretching out west of us with nothing to speak of except couchgrass or clans of chittering gophers or the gray-green poplar bluffs, and the town where no more than half a dozen decent brick houses stood, the rest being shacks and shanties, shaky frame and tarpaper, short-lived in the sweltering summers and the winters that froze the wells and the blood. (SA 15)

Thus Hagar dislikes the town. She leaves Bram and moves to
Vancouver, becoming a housekeeper for a retired seaman. She returns briefly to Manawaka when her husband is dying. Shortly thereafter her son is killed in a car accident. Thus the town, without her ‘lost men’ has nothing to hold her.

Another feature of Hagar is that at times she is inconsistent and sometimes uncertain on her feet. She is sometimes unable to care for herself. She is merciless towards those who try to help her. Above all, she is still capable of merciless honesty towards herself:

I give a sideways glance at the mirror, and see a puffed face purpled with veins as though someone had scribbled over the skin with an indelible pencil. The skin itself is the silverish white of the creatures one fancies must live under the sea where the sun never reaches. Below the eyes the shadows bloom as though two soft black petals had been stuck there. The hair which should by rights be black is yellowed white, like damask stored too long in a damp basement. Well, Hagar Shipley, you are a sight for sore eyes all right. (SA 79)

Hagar goes to Toronto Academy for young ladies to acquire all feminine attributes like, “embroidery, and French, and menu-planning for a five course meal, and poetry, [...] and the most becoming way of dressing my hair” (SA 42-43). Her father plans all this for her in order
to make her a good hostess and a good upper class wife. But she rebels against this, first by wanting to become a teacher and later by marrying the uneducated Bram, who is beneath her status.

The feminine qualities in her are revealed through an incident earlier in the novel. It is when Dan is very sick and is dying, Matt wants Hagar to put on their mother's shawl and make death less painful for Dan. Hagar refuses by saying:

But all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her—it was beyond me. I can't, Matt [...] wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough. (SA 25)

Hagar's refusal is due to her pride which does not allow her to the level of her feeble mother who died in childbirth. Moreover like her father and like most people of her generation, death to her, is a subject which should not be spoken or confronted directly. Also she does not want to cry openly for it may show her weakness and her fear of death. She tries to gain strength by straight arming death. She establishes her strength by touching the dead child at the mortuary.

Hagar is initially infatuated with Bram because of his physical
attraction. He is unlike the other men. The predominant emotion in Hagar-Bram relationship is physical passion. As Hagar puts it: "[...] 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" (SA 79-80).

From the beginning, Hagar is the only one who sees something admirable in him:

I reveled in his fingernails with crescents of ingrown 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. (SA 45)

Her attraction for the physical appearance dies off in due course. The only thing she thinks of doing, on his death, is to bury Bram beside the Currie plot and thus bringing two heritages together. Though Hagar walks out of a marriage, towards the very end of her life, she realises the dire consequences of her pride and calls out to Bram from her hospital bed. This change in Hagar marks the beginning of her self understanding. Hagar shows neither attachment nor affection to her sons. She is blind to their needs. She leaves Bram abruptly and goes away with John Currie. Her stony character and pride are betrayed
even after begetting two sons. Even at the time of her delivery of Marvin, Bram asks her whether she is scared or not. She gives no reply. She says to herself:

what could I say? That I'd not wanted children? That I believed I was going to die, and wished I would, and prayed I wouldn't? That the child he wanted would be his, and none of mine? (SA 100).

Marvin is hardworking but Hagar does not feel attached to him because he is clumsy and awkward in speech. “I almost felt as though Marvin weren’t my son” (SA 62).

Bram Shipley is a rough, crude and uncompromising, farmer. Hagar realises very late in her life that she is too stubborn to take on some of Bram’s qualities. Due to her stubborn and arrogant nature she fails to develop a concern for anybody including her father, her husband and her son.

Hagar Shipley’s life is filled with an unbending pride and this trait of her personality becomes the main cause for her suffering. She, who lives in the womb of her pride, finds it difficult to break open the shell. This she could not do consciously. She knows well that her pride stands for most and goes before her whenever she approaches people and situations. Hagar’s rebellious pride refuses to accommodate the fact of her old age. She refuses to realise the fact that the processes of
time are irreversible, and that she must soon face death. She is cruel to Doris, blind and mistaken in her judgment of Marvin. She thinks that Marvin is a boy who never gets upset, not even at what happened to his own brother. Nevertheless she compels a grudging admiration. Her body is aged, but her spirit is indomitably young, tough and brave. Hager’s unchanging dark eyes symbolises the stubborn, flaming, vitality that burns in her:

for when I look in my mirror and beyond the changing shell that houses me, I see the eyes of Hager Currie, the same dark eyes as when I first began to remember and to notice myself [...] The eyes change least of all. (SA 38)

Hence Hagar has an indomitable spirit and unchanging eyes which identifies her as a stubborn woman.

One is filled with pathos when one reads the unforgettable passage which is heightened by Hagar’s indomitable spirit and by her bewildered regret for the loss of the youth and strength that once matched her spirit:

Yet now I feel that if I were to walk carefully up to my room, approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise, I would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair, the dark–maned colt off to the training ring, the young ladies’ academy in Toronto. (SA 42)
Towards the end of Hagar’s life, she becomes painfully aware that her main aim in life was to enjoy it, but her own concept of proper appearances always came in her way. When she on her death bed in the hospital, she throws away all pretensions and faces psychic conflict:

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. (SA 292)

Hagar’s pride creates clashes between her conscious and unconscious needs and ruins her relationship with her husband Bram, drives her first son John to his death. It is this pride of Hagar which spoils her second son Marvin’s understanding and love for her. Hagar had been hoping that her first son John Shipley would carry on the proud Currie family tradition. But her hopes were shattered as John fell in love with Arlene. She could not for a moment tolerate John marrying Arlene. She attempted to prevent their marriage but it resulted in their unfortunate death. When she heard the tragic news of John’s death, she was transformed: “I was transformed to stone and never wept at all” (SA 243). Her cold and stony character which is signified by the image of stone in the novel is made explicit by her own voice.
The death of her father Jason Currie has brought little profit for Hager. Jason dies bequeathing a considerable portion of his wealth for the improvement of the township leaving very little for Hagar. Her pride is pricked and she is angry with her father. She is in a dilemma whether to mourn her father's death or to accept the materials bequeathed to her. The pride which she has inherited from her father Jason Currie is the reason for this dilemma.

Hagar lived a life of battle, pitted against everyone who was close to her. What is sad about Hagar is that, she betrayed them all—her father, her brothers, her husband, and her sons. The pride that destroyed her relations with others is established in the first paragraph of the novel:

ABOVE THE TOWN, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my Stubborn one, my mother’s angel that my father bought in pride to make her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day. (SA 3)

Hagar sees her mother's monument as a symbol of her father's place in the town and of his pride:

I think now she must have been carved in that distant sun by stone masons who were the cynical descendants of
Bernini, gouging out her like by the score, gauging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land. (SA3)

Though married to Shipley, Hagar remains a Currie all through her life. She sees the white marble angel imported by Jason Currie from Italy “at a terrible expense” (SA 3) to mark the bones of his wife as clearly superior to the other “petty angels” (SA 4) in the cemetery. Hagar, who resembles the monument, sees herself superior to those around her. Only a few days before her death she realises that the main cause of her tragic isolation in her life is snobbishness. Her snobbishness inherited from her father, alienates her from the people. She has no sympathy for weak, silly woman like Lottie Dreiser’s mother and keeps herself away from her. She does not think much of her “graceful, unspirited” (SA 7) brothers Matt and Dan. The love-hate relationship that she has with her father and the adult ambivalents is the outcome of her experience in her childhood during which she was praised for her ‘masculine’ qualities.

Hagar Shipley often suppresses her fantasies and feelings. She considers that expressing one’s own desire is a weakness. She has a lot of fantasies which are not spoken at all throughout her life. She never has a voice for her fantasies, but imagines herself as a naughty girl wearing “tiaraed with starfish, thorny and purple, braceleted with
shells linked on limp chains of weed” (SA 162). When she is alone on
the beach at Shadow point, she imagines herself being tried by a court
of birds.

Hagar does not totally lack in motherly love and tender feelings.
She is not so stubborn and hard as she appears to be. Her love and
tender feelings are expressed at times. But this sort of attitude, the
love and tender feelings which she expresses is often restricted, every
time, by a sort of unconscious fear of becoming docile like her mother.
In one of the most painful scenes in the novel, she fails to express her
love and concern for her elder son Marvin, when he says good bye,
before going to the war at the age of seventeen. Hagar, unlike the cold,
marble stone angel of the title, is capable of love but does not wish to
admit that she experiences that at all:

I wanted to beg him to look after himself, to be careful [...] 
I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him,
against all reason and reality, not to go. But I did not want
to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I’d taken leave
of my senses. (SA 129)

Even to Doris she wanted to hold both her hands and plead
forgiveness but she is unable to do so as she thinks that Doris would
think her to be an insane person. This is the power of uncontrolled
pride. To her younger son, John, in whom she placed all her hopes, her love was blind and ultimately destructive.

Hagar is mellowed by little acts of kindness. When a girl offers a place in the bus, it brings tears to Hagar's eyes. She is unable to express her emotions and feeling by thanking her openly. This is similar to the situation when the girl who helps Hagar to go to the ticket wicket when she wanted to go to Shadow Point.

Hagar's withholding of her emotions not only estranges her from her family but also causes pain and suffering for herself as well as others. As Hagar later admits: “Pride was my wildness, and the demon that led me there was fear” (SA 292).

Even at ninety years old, Hagar cannot tolerate tears or any other manifestations of weakness. She feels dejected when she thinks about her failing memory. It is only in the hospital when she suffers repeated attacks of gall bladder disorders she feels entirely helpless. But she tells the nurse that she hates being helped. The nurse says in response: “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” (SA 276). Only then does Hagar realise that by accepting one's weakness one is in no way diminished and that at some time or the other in life we all need to help and to be helped by others.

Hagar thinks that all who live in castles are gentlemen. Based on
the stories told by her father she imagines:

the Highlanders must be the most fortunate of all men on
earth, spending their days in flailing about them, with
claymores, and their nights in eightsome reels. (SA 15)

Hagar takes to Bram as Desdemona to Othello. Her first
impression of Bram is similarly tinged with romantic ideas as
depicted in her words: “I fancied I heard in his laughter the bravery of
battalions. I thought he looked a bearded Indian, so brown, and beaked
a face” (SA 45).

Hagar meets Mrs. Steiner at the old folk’s home. Mrs. Steiner
takes the initiative to talk to her. She maintains her aloofness from
Mrs. Steiner, but Mrs. Steiner’s words give Hagar the first tentative
understanding of what has passed in her life: “Do you get used to life?”
Mrs. Steiner asks. “Can you answer me that? It all comes as a
surprise” (SA 104).

Murray F. Lee, the local insurance sales man is close to Hagar.
Like Hagar, he is also a refugee from the problems of the everyday
world. He also comes to the cannery in an attempt to escape facing the
fact of his child’s death. Hagar drinks wine with him and for the first
time she outwardly shows her emotions when she openly cries for the
death of her husband and her son. She expresses her concern by finally
saying: “I didn’t mean to speak crossly. I-I’m sorry about your boy”
(SA 253). She reaches and touches his wrist as a show of affection and regard for a fellow human being. Murray Lee brings a change in Hagar's character. It changes her to the extent of converting her into a humble, humane and a pious woman. She confides: "I would even beg God's pardon this moment, for thinking ill of Him some time or other” (SA 248). When she converses with Mr. Troy, the minister, she baffles him by questioning God's mercy and the worth of prayer. Perhaps this might be due to her dejection since all her prayers were unanswered. Moreover Hagar's alienation from other would have led her to see God as a hostile figure.

On seeing Marvin along with Murray Lees, Hagar is exceedingly happy and she remarks, "In my heart I have to admit I'm relieved to see him. Yet I despise my gladness” (SA 252). Her new experience at the Shadow Point has released emotions in her life. Her new experience has made her to remark to Marvin when she sees him: “You've not been cranky, Marvin You've been good to me, always. A better son than John” (SA 304).

Hagar becomes very humble and human and her humility is revealed in three acts. First when she wants her granddaughter's perfume brought to her, next when she requests her ring to be given to Tina, her granddaughter, overlooking Doris, her daughter-in-law and lastly in her relationship with Sandra Wong, who becomes her
surrogate daughter. The first act of Hagar reveals her new role as a kind woman. The second act depicts her sorrow and apology which she does openly. The final act reflects her new maturity as a woman.

There is similarity between Hagar and Murray F. Lees. Lees is a version of Hagar herself, a version that she attempted to deny while reconstructing her life through memory but finally she confronts. Hagar confronts both externally in her conversation with Murray and internally in her confession, of her grief of having been responsible for the loss of her younger son John. It is through Murray that Hagar must find, her identity, through her perception of an alternative and generally submissive self through telling of her story. Hagar, by realising her guilt, re-emerged with a new knowledge about herself.

In the end she emerges out of her self-inflicted isolation and alienation and is able to reach out and have a meaningful relationship of give and take with fellow humans. This is revealed by the bedpan incident in the hospital. Hagar has never acknowledged Marvin before inspite of Marvin’s abundant love and sacrifice for her in contrast to John’s selfishness and indifference.

In *The Stone Angel*, Lottie Drieser is the shadow projection of Hagar. The scene at the dump assumes great significance in the novel. Hagar in refusing to join Lottie in the killing of the chicks, quite successfully represses her destructive instincts. However, she carries
these for a long time and is satisfied when she successfully plots with Lottie to separate John and Arlene. This ends in the tragic deaths of their children. Hagar does not shed tears over John's death and by pretending that John died in the war, she evades her sorrow. Moreover, her descent from her house to a dark cannery by the sea shore is symbolic of her psychological descent.

Hagar's confession to Lees, her rejection of Bram and her role in John's death, frees herself of the complexes that have plagued her for so long. Her final realisation, however, depends on her acceptance of motherhood. She is aided in this process by a series of surrogate mothers, characters who act as mother figures. They are Doris, Mrs. Sterner, Elva Jardine, Mrs. Dobereiner and Mrs. Reilly. The positive effect of all these mother figures is seen in the three acts of Hagar.

The greatest paradox in Hagar's life is that she loses the love of her father by breaking the norms to marry Bram. She loses the love of her brothers, of Bram and of her sons by adhering to the very norms she herself broke. At the Shadow Point, Lees performs the task of educating her regarding the fact that more than one cause determined an event. She comes to know that John's death is determined by a number of factors. They are: Her conspiracy with Lottie to separate John and Arlene; Another reason is the unscheduled train that brings food for people on relief crossing the bridge at the same time and thus,
causing the accident and the deaths of John and Arlene. Hagar accepts her position and tells comfortably: "No one's fault. Where do causes start, how far back?" (SA 240). This serene acceptance is extension of her earlier statement:

I can't change what's happened to me in my life or make what's not occurred take place. But I can't say I like it, or accept it, or believe it's for the best. I don't and never shall, not even if I'm damned for it. (SA 160)

One instance of Hagar where there is a change in her, from pride to humility is that in the end when she recollects her last visit to Manawaka cemetery. The monument and the cemetery become symbols for Hagar. For her these are symbols of the masculine society which she can neither totally accept nor avoid. Hagar does not attend John's burial.

Hagar's rejection of the cemetery represents the rejection of masculine control which symbolises the two names on the monument. Hagar is identified as one among us. She is proud, stubborn, selfish, generous, fearing love, needing love and seeking freedom. She, through her sufferings attains psychic self-knowledge in the end. It is this knowledge that breaks the bonds. She is released into love, death, and the new life suggested by images of rebirth and transformation.

Hagar is described as an essentially tragic figure. It is her moment of
truth which is regarded as the deepest point of her tragedy.

The closing chapters depict Hagar’s gradual reconciliation with the world and herself. At Shadow Point, when she hears Murray Lees’s story of losing his infant son in a fire accident she is reminded of her son John’s death. Hagar speaks in an apologetic tone. Sensing her confusion Murray plays John’s role just as Hagar’s brother Matt had taken on their mother’s role when Dan died. The novel ends with repentance, confession and peace:

My shreds and remnant of years are scattered through it visibly in lamps and vases, the needle point fire bench, the heavy oak chair from the Shipley place, the china cabinet and walnut sideboard from my father’s house. There’d not be room for all of these in some cramped apartment. We’d have to put them into storage, or sell them. I don’t want that. I couldn’t leave them. 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. (SA 36)

Hagar fears dispossession. The image of the ‘house’ can be interpreted as an image of the ‘self’.

Hagar is not able to accept reality. Her memories are involved in chronological order. When she is on the verge of death, she looks back.
Laurence here uses the house image. Hagar claims that the house is her own house and that she has no inclination to sell it. Hagar lives in a house in Vancouver which she worked for and bought. The house is the sum of all her achievement. Her only achievement has been in the gathering together of a few things but she did not bother to expand her relationship with people:

The house's familiarity, its possessions, and the tokens it holds from her past the oak chair that belonged to her father, Jason Currie, and the cut-glass decanter, her wedding gifts from Bram Shipley—these are the only solid evidences of identity that Hagar now possesses.  

Hagar initiates a response compounded of pity and wonder at her stubborn gallantry. There is a recurrent double exposure image of Hagar which is filled with pathos and irony. On the one hand she is old, ugly, chained and earth-bound by her physical disintegration and on the other she is young, vivid, strong and untamed as a hawk:

Then I fall [...] I gasp and flounder like a fish on the slimed boards of a dock [...] then, terribly, I perceive the tears, my own they must be although they have sprung so unbidden I feel they are like the incontinent wetness of the infirm. Trickling, they taunt down my face. They are no tears of mine, in front of her. I dismiss them, blaspheme against
them—let them be gone. But I have not spoken, and they are still there. (SA 31)

Thus Hagar’s diabolic nature is revealed. This passage is full of pathos and it reveals Hagar’s character.

The pathos of the above mentioned passage is unforgettable. This pathos is further heightened by Hagar’s indomitable spirit and by her bewildered regret for the loss of youth and strength that once identified her with her spirit:

Yet now I feel that if I were to walk carefully up to my room, approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise, I would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair, the dark-maned colt off to the training ring, the young ladies’ academy in Toronto. (SA 42)

Hagar’s search for a new sense of personal identity is integrally related to the sufferings and death of the Metis family. The Metis family of Jules Tonnerre becomes the focus of suffering and death, acceptance and endurance. This is related to the experience of Hagar. For instance as Hagar recalls her childhood walks through the Manawaka cemetery, she reflects on the wild flowers which marred the graveyard in the eyes of Manawaka’s Presbyterians:

They were tough-rooted, these wild and gaudy flowers, and although they were held back at the cemetery’s edge, torn
out by loving relatives determined to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized, for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown always, before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair. (SA 5)

Thus Hagar remembers her childhood days in the Manawaka. In the novel Hagar is antagonistic towards the Tonnerre boys with whom John plays as a child:

Once when I was out picking saskatoons near trestle bridge, I saw him with the Tonnerre boys. They were French half-breeds, the sons of Jules, who'd once been Matt's friend [...] they were boys with strange accents and hard laughter. (SA 127)

Hagar is full of pride about the Tonnerres:

The pride and intolerance revealed in this initial appraisal of the Tonnerres more subtly govern all Hagar's relationships throughout her life. 5

According to David Williams, Pride is Hagar's refuge. Pride keeps the demons at bay. "Pride saves Hagar, as it saves her father, from the taint of the dead mother. Weakness, she sees is fatal. No
Wonder she cannot put on her mother's shawl to comfort her dying brother.”

The narrative time is divided between the past and the present. In recollecting the past and the present, Hagar ruminates and tries to discover what made her what she was. So unique, so lonely. Hagar remembers her father's lesson too well; she decides to reject Bram. Bram offers her to be free of her relational identity: “I was Hagar to him, and if he were alive, I'd be Hagar to him, yet and now I think he was the only person close to me who thought of me by my name, not Daughter, nor sister, nor mother, not even wife but Hagar always” (SA 80).

Hagar, the protagonist, remains her old self till the end of the novel. She is silent, and full of anxieties and fears, because she wants to remain and portray herself as a self-made woman. She infact reveals the two sides of her personality. The two-sides are contrary to each other. Hagar though she wants to show love and affection to Dan and the dying chicks, acts against her motherly feelings. Her social self which exercises rigid control over her emotions does not permit her to be friendly and affectionate. Hence she remains as a rigid, cold, blind and as hard as the 'Stone Angel” forever. She changes and overcomes her repression only when she hears of the death of John and the Biblical story.
Hagar by sharing her grief with Murray Lee releases her own suppressed guilt regarding the death of her son. She fails to reciprocate John’s love towards her. Later she mourns: “Oh my lost man” and she realises her failure to show others this love.

Hagar’s earnest desire is about John’s love and his behaviour. She wants John to be identified with Manawaka. Hence she shows deep interest in him. She tries hard to win his love and labours to make him resemble her father Jason Currie. She is very particular that John knows to count up to hundred and recognise letters in the pre-school year. Moreover she tells him that he resembles his grand father and is worried over his friendship with the half-bred Tonnerre boys:

They lived all in a swarm in a shack somewhere—John always said their house was passably clean, but I gravely doubted it. They were tall boys with strange accents and hard laughter. (SA 127)

Hagar’s wish to see John inherit the gentle manly behaviour is shattered. John acts and speaks like his father Bram Shipley. He speaks in a coarse-way like Bram. His thoughts against Hagar is evident from his struggle to set right the marble angel. As soon as John sets the marble statue upright, Hagar stares in disbelief at the lipstick on the marble mouth and cheeks of the angel. Hagar assumes that
John has painted the statue in rebellion against the personality of his mother who resembles it.

Arlene, John's lover is a symbol of spontaneity. John finds in Arlene the spontaneity and naturalness which he has missed in his mother. Arlene is depicted as a person who accepts John as he is. She never attempts to change him. She accepts John to overcome his alcoholism by merely being besides him. She redeems John with her love. Hagar is envious of Arlene, plans to send Arlene to Toronto for a few years. John is terrified at the thought of losing Arlene. He loses self-control and in a drunken state, takes on a bet with Lazarus. John and Arlene die in the car accident and the shocked Hagar never weeps for John's death.

Hagar has suppressed her grief for so many years. She is relieved of her emotions, which she had withheld, with Murray about her son's death. Hagar feels relieved after her confessions. The expression of love transforms Hagar the stone angel to a warm hearted, sensitive human being.

Even in the hospital when Sandra Wong wants to go to the bathroom but could not, Hagar, in spite of her sickness, volunteers to get her bedpan. This act of Hagar depicts her love for her companion. This act shows Hagar as a warm hearted sensitive human being.

According to Hagar it is "yet a joke only as all victories are the
paraphernalia being unequal to the event's reach" (SA 307).

Hagar's little act of kindnesses enables her to develop a wonderful relationship. Her helping tendency shows her gradual acceptance of sickness. In her case healing takes places with her experiencing human togetherness with the sufferers in the hospital.

Hagar is not devoid of motherly affection. It is only her blind pride that suppresses all the tender words to herself and never lets her to speak with love and affection to others. As she tells herself: "Pride was my wilderness [...] "And they spread out from me and shackled all I touched" (SA 292).

In The Stone Angel suffering and pain teaches the protagonist's humility. It is through suffering Hagar is able to understand that only humility and human love would remain forever and pride would not help in anyway in her life.

The protagonist is an independent woman who leads a self-centered life without anybody's help. Through nature she understands that life is short and only universal love and humility are everlasting. This Hagar realises not through any suffering but through her illness and her loneliness in Shadow Point. The experience she undergoes in this place helps her to become humane. Hagar finally understands that love is permanent and that happiness lies only in serving and making others happy.
In the novel **The Stone Angel** out of four elements such as air, water, ire and earth, earth predominates. The wilderness portrays the earth element. Laurence named Hagar after the Biblical figure, handmaid of Sarah. Hagar bore Abraham his first child, Ishmael and she was expelled into the desert. This was due to Sarah’s jealously. She became an outcast and wandered in the wilderness. Hagar, in **The Stone Angel** also wanders like the Biblical Hagar: “Like her biblical namesake, Hagar wanders in a wilderness, and like the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery.”

During an interview with Michel Fabre, Laurence says that when trying to think of a name for the protagonist, the name Hagar came to her because of Biblical history:

Though there are certain parallels between the Hagar of the novel and the Hagar of the Bible, Laurence says she “did not want the parallels to be too exact” [...] as she did not want to create an allegory. The parallels in the novel are intended only as echoes. Both the Hagars are destined to roam the desert wasteland but in the case of Laurence's Hagar the wilderness is also “within”. In other words, Hagar, an outcast in the wilderness, is also the wilderness [...] Laurence uses the Biblical allusion to provide a mythic framework for a essentially psychological study of
character [...] The myth becomes “an analogue for the journey of the human spirit out of the bondage of pride, which isolates, into the freedom of love, which links the lover to other humans.”

Margaret Laurence does not deliberately introduce the earth element in the novel. Hagar’s attitude towards Mrs. Elva Jardine in the beginning is one of aloofness. But when Hagar finds Mrs. Jardine very jovial and when she moves freely with her, Hagar gradually develops an acquaintance with her. Moreover when she hears that Jardine is from Freehold, she thinks, “I warm toward her, despite myself” (SA 271). When she informs Jardine that she too is from Manawaka her love and attachment for her place is revealed. Her memories brighten Hagar. Her love for Manawaka which is rekindled by Mrs. Jardine, helps her to develop an attachment with Mrs. Jardine. This understanding and new relationship make Hagar more humane. Hagar says this in her own words: “I poke my hand out from the sheet and put it on her skinny hand. I’m obliged to you, Mrs. Jardine” (SA 273).

Hagar’s room in the hospital at Shadow Point is symbolic of earth. Hagar comments: “THE WORLD is even smaller now. It’s shrinking so quickly. The next room will be the smallest of all” (SA 282). This reveals that Hagar is to become one with the land as the
Margaret Laurence makes Merriles, the old gypsy a vital person. Hagar finds a new found freedom in Meg Merriles. Murray F. Lees, a local insurance salesman acts as Hagar's refugee from the problems of the world. Hagar attains salvation in the presence of Murray Lees. Hagar's revelation at the Shadow Point is of great importance. It is important because it opens Hagar to the possibility of forgiveness and change even within her own personality. Moreover Hagar reveals simultaneously an entire range of emotions, which she could think as only exclusively. She is revealed throughout the novel as a person who is in a dilemma between the internal and external world, between the past and the present, between the masculine and the feminine.

Laurence tries to reveal that a woman's public identity is figured only by and through men. Hagar renounces the cemetery, she rejects all versions of masculine and feminine society. These rejects affects and obstructs her ability to avoid death. She is seen as a person who can never avoid death. She is constantly being imposed by death-death of her mother's, her father's, Bram's, John's-in her life.

In the fiction there are many autobiographical elements Hagar's identity as a child of one's parents is revealed in the novels:

It is that kind of impulse, that autobiographical impulse, to realize one's life, one's identity, by incorporating its
characteristic pattern in creative endeavours that I wish to deal within some of Margaret Laurance’s works.  

The ‘theme of identity’ or ‘identity theme’ is like musical notes. Norman compares, “this identity theme” or patterning to the “mingling of sameness and difference as (in) a musical theme and variations.”

The theme of identity depends on the past events. Holland asserts as well that: “an ‘identity theme’ is determined by past events, yet paradoxically it is the only basis for future growth and, therefore, freedom.” The past events pave way for future generation to grow but with a freedom.

**The Stone Angel** is based on the flashback technique, oscillating between the past and the present. There is a clash between Hagar’s inner and outer selves till her death. She is faced by her unconscious mind to revive her past and resemble her contemporaries.

Hagar is of rebellious nature. She rebels against her oppressive father:

In anger she confronts her equally choleric father and insists on marrying Bram. In anger she finally leaves Bram, in anger she drives her son John from the house and thus indirectly causes his death, in anger she flees to her illusory seaside refuge in the deserted canning factory when her other son Marvin proposes to put her in an old
people's home.  

Hagar finally becomes the mother for all. She is able to give a mother’s love and consolation to the people who needed her. Her experience at Shadow Point is her self realisation. It allows her to release her emotions, and to realise her own arrogant self. A slow change takes place which dissolves arrogance and pride into love and humility. Finally at the end of the novel Hagar instills her identity in her place. She becomes a successful personality at the end of her life. Laurence uses the journey as the metaphor of the quest for identity. It is a quest for self discovery of Hagar and she successfully asserts her identity against the male dominated society.