CHAPTER II

Quest for the Self:

*The Stone Angel*
Being parochial is to attempt at reading a small history in a universal light. The diverse and over powering landscapes (outer as well as inner) and sharply etched moods, dominate works written by women in contemporary times. Fiction by women today is marked by compelling and authentic “sense of space”. Such a preoccupation is witnessed in Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*, the range of “space” being limited as its field of focus is deep, as Alice Munroe observes “Writing about places (spaces) where your roots are.”¹ This novel, which succinctly delineates the woman protagonist’s indexing of the self, ending with triumph in her own way, Hagar’s diminishing pride, enables her to view the world in a healthy way. It grapples with this situation—the “space” occupied by women in an androcentric world and the effects of phallocracy on their psyche. Hagar fights it out tenaciously until the end to assert herself, to gain control over her and others.

One of the Major themes of the novel is “human relationships” which crystallizes in a redefined novel way. One witnesses an attempt to subvert, tune and change the human behaviour, especially that of a male towards the female, paving way for a perceived and felt human relationships, whether be it between father and daughter, husband and wife, mother and son, mother and daughter, brother and brother. Hagar Shipley, the protagonist of the novel tells us her story in her own
compelling voice and in so doing she brings her own life and, for the first time, the town of Manawaka vividly and unforgettably into being.

*The Stone Angel* is perhaps Laurence’s most revered work, a novel ascribed to as a Canadian classic. Hagar Shipley, the ninety year—old crone of Manawaka, is the obdurate angel endowed with “rage’ for life. The novel opens with Hagar’s reminiscences of her mother’s grave in the Manawaka cemetery:

> 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 mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day. (3)

Hagar recalls that the stone angel used to stand on the hill above the town, and wonders if it is still standing there, as her father’s memorial to her mother who relinquished her feeble ghost as she gained her stubborn one. The angel is the first, the largest, and the costliest in the Manawaka cemetery. As a girl, Hagar used to walk in the cemetery often, seeking her passion for neatness and orderliness “like prissy Pippa as she passed.” (5)

Hagar is ninety-two but she says, “Now I am rampant with memory” (5). Hagar does not usually dwell on the past, for each day now
possesses "rarity" (5). However, for the sake of people like her son, Marvin, she should pretend to be one of those "old ladies feeding like docile rabbits on the lettuce leaves of other times, other manners" (5). She knows she is being unfair in doing this, but carping and smoking cigarettes are now her only pleasures in the face of boredom. Though Marvin thinks it disgraceful that, at the age of ninety, his mother smokes cigarettes she does not care what he or his wife, Doris, thinks of her. "Let them talk. What do I care now what people say? I cared too long" (6). Remembering, Hagar decides not to recall her "lost men" (6). She does not want to be caught crying by "that fat Doris" (6), as the door of Hagar's room has no lock; she says, "Privacy is a privilege not granted to the aged or the young" (6).

Hagar had been, before she started school, a nuisance to her Auntie Doll, a widow who felt that she must live up to the fact that she lived in a big brick house, the home of Hagar's father, Jason Currie. When Hagar was naughty, Auntie Doll would send her to Jason's store, where her father would make her remember weights and measures. A self—made man who did not believe "in wasting a word or a minute" (7), said little when Hagar's answers were correct. He often reminded his sons, Matt and Dan that he had "pulled himself up by his bootstraps" (7). The boys who were graceful and unspirited like their mother tried to please him but failed. Hagar, who did not want to be like him, had her father's sturdiness, his "hawkish nose" (8), and his intimidating nose.
Mr. Currie mouthed moral homilies and beat his children, most often the boys, with birch switches. When Matt and Dan had a beating, they used to beat Hagar. She was frightened to tell her father, but when she learnt things about her brothers they would not like to have repeated, she did inform her father. The boys received a beating, which Hagar witnessed. When her father was getting eggs for a customer, Hagar tried to steal some sultanas from the barrel. She discovered the things crawling in then, and announced the fact with glee. Consequently, her father beat her with a ruler. Hagar accepted the punishment with dry eyes and her action bewildered her father, who embraced her and declared that, “You take after me. You’ve got backbone” (10).

Hagar recalls her school friends. Charlotte Tappen, the doctor’s daughter was her best friend. There was also Lottie Drieser, who did not know who her father was and the boys called her Lottie—“No-Name” (11). Telford Simmons, the undertaker’s son, had only “the occasional corpse in the cool vault” to brag about. On one occasion, he sneaked the children into the vault to review the remains of Henry Pearl’s sister. Only Lottie had the courage to touch the “small puckered white face” (12).

Mr. Currie had come from a good family. Because of her father’s romantic stories about his ancestors, Hagar thought that Highlanders must be the most fortunate men on the earth, and regretted her father’s move to the “bald—headed prairie” (15). Their war cry was “Gainsay Who Dare!” (15) Hagar was about eight years old when the new Presbyterian
Church was built. When the minister read out the names of those who had contributed to the new church, Hagar’s father whispered, “I and Luke Mc Vitae must’ve given the most, as he called our names the first” (16).

Though Auntie Doll declared that Mr. Currie was a God-fearing man, Hagar could not imagine his fearing anyone. Her “father was a self-made man” (17). However, he never missed attending a Sunday service, or saying grace at meals. Hagar never knew her brother Matt very well. He was skinny, bespectacled, and worked doggedly. He also used to save the small amounts for his future. When he was seventeen, he realized that he would never get enough money to go very far and he spent all he had on a fighting cock, which was mortally wounded in a contest.

Her brother Daniel was different. Always delicate, he worked reluctantly. One day, when Daniel was skating with the other children he fell through the ice. They took him straight home after the accident, and he received his father’s admonitions. One night, his fever rose, the doctor was away, and Mr. Currie was working late at the store. Matt tried to nurse his brother and got their mother’s old shawl, which he asked Hagar to wear. She wanted to comply, but found herself “unable to bend enough” (25). Consequently, Matt sat for several hours and Dan’s head cradled in his arms, “as though Dan were a child and not a man of eighteen” (25). When Matt returned to the kitchen, Hagar knew that Dan was dead. He died of pneumonia.
When Hagar was still a girl, walked past the town dump with her friends and saw a huge heap of abandoned eggs. With horror, the girls noticed that some of the eggs had hatched in the warm July sun. The chicks are “feeble, foodless, bloodied and mutilated, prisoned by the weight of broken shells all around them were trying to crawl like little worms, their half mouths opened uselessly among the garbage” (27). Lottie alone had the courage to deliver the chicks from their plight by stamping upon them.

A timid tapping at the door interrupts Hagar’s memories of her childhood. It is Doris who comes to invite her downstairs for tea. Irritated, Hagar rises hastily and in her haste, she falls down and suffers the indignity of Marvin lifting her bulk from the floor. She insists that they leave the room and then carefully makes her way downstairs. In the kitchen, Marvin reveals her that he wants to sell the house and move into an apartment, as the large, four-bedroom house is too big for Doris to look after. Hagar stubbornly fights the suggestion of selling the house.

Mr. Troy, the minister calls on Hagar and she finds the conversation inconsequential. As he talks, she thinks again of the past. Her father had sent her east for two years to a ladies’ academy in Toronto. When she returned, she “knew embroidery and French, and menu-planning for a five-course meal, and poetry, and how to take a firm hand with servants, and the most becoming way of dressing my hair” (43). Jason wanted her look after the accounts and the ordering but
Hagar declared that she wanted to teach in a school. They were both blunt as bludgeons in their views. Hagar stayed at home and kept her father's accounts, determined to reimburse him for the two years in the east.

Three years later, Hagar met Bram Shipley, a rough, unsuccessful farmer, fourteen years older than herself, whose "fingernails with crescents of ingrown earth" (45), intrigued her. Bram was, as Lottie Drieser observed, "common as dirt" (47). Perhaps, Lottie's words encouraged Hagar's stubbornness. She married Bram against her father's wishes. Matt married Mavis Mc Vitie the year before and Mr. Currie and Mr. Mac Vitie had gone halves in building a house for the couple. When Hagar married, neither Mr. Currie nor Matt came to the church. However, she was certain that her "father would soften and yield when he saw how Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar" (50). After the reception given by Charlotte Tappan's mother, Bram took Hagar to the neglected Shipley home. When they entered, Bram handed her a cut-glass decanter with a silver top and she took it so casually, laid it aside, and thought no more about it. Bram initiated her directly into the mystery of sex. The next day she began to scrub the house out. She had never scrubbed a floor in her life, but she worked "that day as though driven by a whip" (52).

Hagar turns her attention once more to Mr. Troy hoping he will soon go. When he leaves, she finds the newspaper with an advertisement
for an old people's home. She declares that she will not go to the old age home. She glances over her possessions and wonders how she can leave them: her mother's picture and jug; the gilt-edged mirror from the Currie house; the picture of herself at twenty. It seems puzzling to her that "she'd not died when either of the boys was born, but saved her death for me" (59). Hagar felt sorry for Matt's death. Mavis marries a farmer and had the children she always wanted. After Matt's death, Aunt Dolly thought that Mr. Currie would make up with Hagar, but even after the birth of Marvin, he did not visit her son. Perhaps, he did not feel that the baby was really his grandson, and Hagar almost felt herself as though Marvin were not her son. The oaken armchair which came from her father's home after a stroke had caused his death. His will had not mentioned the contents of the house; some money had gone for the upkeep of the family burial plot, and the rest was left to the town. Jason Currie had never seen her second son John, or known at all that "the sort of boy he'd wanted has waited a generation to appear" (64).

Doris and Marvin decide they must broach the subject of the home. However, at dinner Hagar again becomes upset when Marvin and Doris mention getting a babysitter so that they can go out to a movie. Doris insists that Hagar needs to have someone with her, because the previous night she had left a cigarette burning and it fell out of ashtray. Marvin and Doris decide not to go to the movie and Hagar retreats to her room. She looks at the photographs. There was no picture of Bram.
Hagar never asked him to have one taken, though he was big, handsome man who wore a beard. He was not good mannered in his speech and behaviour. It did not matter to him, he claimed, what her father or her friends thought of him.

Doris and Marvin come to Hagar’s room and explain her that Doris cannot look at after her any longer. The care is too much and the lifting too heavy. Besides, Doris adds, Hagar has wet her bed “nearly every night for the past few months. It makes a lot of laundry, and we haven’t been able to afford the automatic washer” (74). Hagar is appalled at the last revelation. Hagar crumbles and the matter is postponed. Hagar alone is once more, looks at herself in the mirror. Seeing “a puffed face purpled with veins as though someone had scribbled over the skin with an indelible pencil. The skin itself is the silverfish white of the creatures one fancies must live under the sea,” and the yellow white hair, Hagar concluded that she was “a sight for sore eyes” (79).

She recalls a quarrel she had with Bram over his ugly habits and it went on for years, and nothing had changed it. She says, “—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). Yet, when she thinks of him brings to mind a saying: “His banner over me was love”(80), she had never thought of it as love and says, “His banner over me was only his skin...I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead” (81).
Further, Hagar remembers how Bram was crazy about horses and how she opposed him. He started raising horses though wheat was doing well. When Bram’s favourite horse, Soldier, wandered alone into a blizzard and was dead, Hagar had at last admitted the reality of Bram’s feelings; she said awkwardly: “I’m sorry about it, Bram. I know you were fond of him” (87). But after that night, their emotions had continued to remain unspoken. She remembers, “Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke...although a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise” (88).

Marvin and Doris take Hagar for a drive and she is horrified when they turn into the gates of “Silverthreads”, a home for old people. That place reminds her of her first time in hospital when her first son Marvin was born. When Marvin was born, she realized that Bram, like her father “wanted his dynasty no less than my father had” (101). Hagar did not like the ‘home’; she is taken back to Marvin and Doris’ house.

At the Shipley’s, Hagar waited and determined to have a clean house, and filled her time with work. Nevertheless, Bram embarrassed Hagar by talking foolishly. She often found him drinking with Charlie Bean, and they would return to sleep in the barn, knowing that Hagar would not allow them into the house. She was particularly horrified when she was told that Bram had urinated on the steps of her father’s store. Therefore, twenty-four years passed in wrangling and bickering. Yet when he turned to her in bed, she would receive him compliantly.
When the doctor’s report comes, Marvin and Doris seem to be secretive about the results. Marvin explains Hagar that she just needs proper rest. Mr. Troy the clergyman visits Hagar and says, “Prayer can do wonders, sometimes, in easing the mind” (119), for which Hagar’s reply is “If God’s a crossword puzzle or a secret code, it’s hardly worth the bother, it seems to me” (119). Further she observes, she can hardly believe in a merciful God, for she has lost her son John. She has not meant to mention John to Mr. Troy. Alone in the garden she recalls her younger son. When he was six years old, she gave him the Currie plaid—pin. She remembers that John was “wild as a mustard seed” (127).

When Marvin was seventeen, he joined the army and later never came back to Manawaka. With Marvin’s departure, Hagar had to take the eggs herself in order to sell them in town. Unknowingly, she called with John at Lottie’s home. Lottie’s little girl answered the door, was a picture of good grooming. To raise money, Hagar did what she had so far avoided: she sold the things she had from her family home ...her mother’s opal ear rings, the sterling silver candelabra, and the Limoges dishes. She sold them to Lottie, who asked her if she was taking a trip. Hagar denied that, but that was exactly what she did so.

When John was twelve, Hagar had taken him away from Manawaka. She was determined to leave, even if it meant getting work as a house-keeper, though it seemed a grim joke that then she should think of having the same status as Auntie Doll had. Bram offered no resistance
to their departure. The rail journey was clouded by John's revelation that he had traded the Currie plaid pin for a jackknife.

Hagar is brought into the present by Doris's call for dinner. Marvin announces that arrangements are made for Hagar to move to the nursing home. Nevertheless, Hagar is determined not to submit to the home without a struggle. She lays awake and tries to recall the name of the quiet place she has picnicked at with Marvin and Doris. She decides to take her pension cheque to the bank and draws the money. Later she goes to 'Shadow Point'. Hagar makes her way down the roughly cut steps to the beach. They are steep and rickety, and Hagar is feeling slightly dizzy. She finds the abandoned cannery buildings and falls asleep. When she wakes up, she is hungry and confused, thinking of Doris preparing tea. However, as she becomes aware of her actual circumstances, she decides she can manage splendidly. She eats some food and begins to explore her new "home." There she finds a pair of old brass weighing scales, but the brass weights are lost. Hagar feels that, "Nothing can be weighed here and found wanting" (154). In one bed—room there was a brass four-poster, and incredibly the mattress was still on it. Hagar remembers the verse from the Bible: "My room has been prepared for me" (155).

Hagar thinks back to Mr. Oatley, for whom she had kept house. He had been good to her and in return, she served him well. Life at Mr. Oatley's had been "a period of waiting and of marking time" (160). She
concludes her reflections decisively: “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” (160).

When John was old enough to go to college, Hagar had insufficient money and so Mr. Oatley got him an office job temporarily. Meanwhile, Hagar saved and invested her money, but the investments turned out badly and she lost her money. She wanted John to apply for a university bursary, but he refused. It was agreed that he would work for a few years. However, he lost his job and employment prospects were poor. It was then he announced that he was returning to Manawaka. Hagar was upset, and just as upset to know that John had written to his father, receiving the reply at Marvin’s house. Unwillingly she let him go as he left to hitch a ride on the railroad to Manawaka.

In the next two years, Hagar grew stouter. Then, John wrote to her that his father was dying, and Hagar returned to Manawaka immediately. John looked after him completely, “performing all these rites with such zeal and burning laughter they seemed both sinister and absurd” (172). His medicine was home made potato-wine. When Bram talked, there was only occasional clarity. One day however, he looked at Hagar with recognition. He declared that she reminded him of Clara...in Hagar’s words, “his fat and cow-like first wife” (173).

John drove Hagar into town to sell the eggs. On the steps of Currie’s store, they met Arlene Simmons, Lottie’s daughter, who was
obviously infatuated with John. Afterwards, Hagar remonstrated with John for his lack of politeness, but he retorted with crude remarks, which reminded her of his father. On another occasion, Hagar met Lottie on the street. Hagar learnt that Arlene, a teacher in the city after having completed university, was home for the summer. Hagar informed Lottie that Bram was dying. One day, Hagar asked John to drive her to the cemetery. The Currie family plot was still cared for, but to her horror, she found that the stone angel toppled and was horrified to discover that someone had painted the angel’s lips with lipstick. As she erased the smear, John said that he did not know who had done it, but she did not believe him.

Marvin came to Manawaka but stayed a few days. Bram did not recognize Marvin. Bram died in the night. Marvin sent money to help with the expenses, and sent word of the birth of his daughter, Christina. Bram’s daughters did not attend the funeral, but came to the farm to collect some things that belonged to their mother. Hagar had buried him in the Currie plot, and had “his family name carved, so the stone said Currie on the one side and Shipley on the other” (184). She was worried whether she had done the right thing, but John assured her that it did not matter, for “they’re only different sides of the same coin, anyway, he and the Curries. They might as well be together there” (184). After the funeral, it was John who cried, not Hagar.
At Shadow Point Hagar feels thirsty but there is no water to drink. She resolves to struggle on, and goes out in search of water. She discovers a rusty and dinted bucket, from which sparrows are drinking rainwater. She “shoos the birds away” (187), and drinks the collected rain water. On the beach she finds two children playing...a boy and a girl, both about six years of age. They are playing house, but are quarrelling in the process, because the girl is being domineering. Hagar wants to warn the girl that she may lose her friend. When Hagar does speak, the children are frightened and leave quickly. Hagar regrets her action. Of course, the children are frightened at the sudden sight of “a fat old woman” ... with “a beckoning leer” (189). Hagar decides to eat, but the food is tasteless to her. Then she remembers that she has not moved her bowels that day. She turns her way back to the forest on the hill and finds a quiet place. As she sits in the forest, the setting seems to suggest a courtroom in which she is being tried. Then she grows weary of the game.

When Bram died, Hagar informed Mr. Oatley of the death and he agreed that she could stay in Manawaka a few weeks more. Hagar did not know that John was going out with Arlene until she brought him home drunk on one occasion. On one sultry afternoon, as Hagar was half-asleep in the front room, John and Arlene came home. They thought that Hagar was out, and they began to discuss their situation. Arlene wanted to get married and to bear a child of John’s. Their talk ended in
lovemaking. Dazed, she was carried away strangely, Hagar thought, "What they lacked in shame they made up for in nerve, the pair of them, doing it here on my Toronto couch in broad daylight" (208).

The next day, Hagar discussed the situation with Lottie. However, it was finally agreed upon that it would be a good idea for Arlene to leave Manawaka for a while. Thus, the two women reached agreement, "no longer haggling with one another, but only with fate, pitting our wits against God's" (212).

With a start, Hagar comes to herself. Suddenly she feels worn out. The pain in her chest cannot be ignored and her feet are swollen. She does not remember what she has done that day. A sea gull flies into the room and Hagar throws a wooden box at it, injuring its wing. In the darkness, the door opens and a man enters. His name is Murray F Lees. He lights a candle and offers her red wine. As the two relax under the influence of the wine, he tells Hagar his life story how he lost his son in fire accident (234).

Hagar recalls that John told her that Arlene was moving east for a year but suspected for a moment about Hagar's involvement in it. Hagar replied that she had only wanted the best for him, and he retorted that she had "always bet on the wrong horse" (237), for Marvin was really her boy, and she had never seen that. That night, before he left to go out as usual, they quarrelled over Arlene. Later, Henry Pearl came to the door and informed Hagar that John was in hospital; he had an accident. John
drunk at a dance accepted a bet and drove his truck across the railroad bridge. However, an unscheduled freight train had arrived and struck the vehicle. Arlene died instantly. In the hospital, John cried out in pain, asking his mother for help. Before she could speak or move, he observed harshly that she could not help him. Then he died. Hagar straightened her spine, so that she “would not cry in front of strangers at the hospital” (242.) She was “transformed into stone and never wept at all” (243). Afterwards she sent everything of value in the house to Marvin and sold the home. She returned to Mr. Oatley’s. The following year Mr. Oatley died and left Hagar ten thousand dollars in his will. She bought a house with the money.

As she remembers these things, she weeps. Murray tries to comfort her. The next day morning, Marvin finds Hagar with the help of Murray Lees and admits her into a hospital as her X-rays reveal a serious illness. On hearing it, she feels “repelled and stunned. Only now do I see that what’s going to happen can’t be delayed indefinitely” (254). In the hospital, Hagar is in the public ward, because Marvin is unable to obtain other accommodation. She feels like “an exhibition in a museum” (255). She resents the patronizing jollity of the nurses and causes difficulties over taking her medication. A different nurse gives her another pill for the pain. Touched by the nurse’s sympathy, Hagar weeps.

Hagar is shifted to semi-private room. The next bed is occupied by a sixteen year-old girl, Sandra Wong, who is to have an appendectomy.
She is worried over the operation, and Hagar reassures her, falsely saying that she had her appendix out years ago and it is not a serious operation. As they talk, Hagar feels the distance of age between them.

The next day Mr. Troy visits Hagar and sings “All people that on earth do dwell” (291), firmly and surely. Hagar is deeply affected as the last line rings out: “Come ye before Him and rejoice.” She knows then that she has wanted to rejoice all her life, but has been held back by “some brake of proper appearances.” Pride has been her “wilderness” and “fear” has been the demon, which led her. (292) She thinks of Bram and John, both dead and wonders whether they are dead by their own hands or by hers. Hagar weeps and her tears disturb Mr. Troy, who thinks that his trip has failed. She wants to reassure him, but she cannot find the words.

Later her grandson, Steven, visits her. He reveals that Tina is to be married down East. The date was undecided, and Hagar realizes that the arrangements are dependent upon her death. As they talk further, Steven reminds her of how she used to give him “jaw-breaker” when he was a child. She realizes that that is all she is to him—a grandmother who gave him money and candy. The weight of all the “incommunicable years” (296) pressed upon her, and she could not find the right words to utter. When she asks him if he is all right he seems startled and she realizes that he is troubled by things she does not know about. However, she cannot take on extra burdens now. Before he leaves, he kisses her. She
wants to tell him how dear he is to her, but she feels that that would embarrass both her and him.

Sandra, another patient has undergone the operation and at night, she wants to go to the bathroom. The nurse does not answer her call when, Hagar decides to get her a bedpan. In the days that followed, Hagar has confused awareness of Sandra's concern for her. She comes over the bed often, bringing a drink of water or pulling the curtains when Hagar wants to sleep. On one occasion, she dabs Hagar's wrist with cologne. When Marvin comes, Hagar confesses that she is frightened. Marvin apologizes for any harsh thing he has said over the years. He reaches for her hand and holds it tightly. She thinks of asking his pardon, but she knows that that is not what he wants at that moment. Instead, she assures him that he has "been a better son than John." (304) Though it is a lie, Marvin believed her. As he leaves, the nurse remarks on Hagar's strong constitution. He replies that his mother is a holy terror. On hearing these words, Hagar feels that she has more out of life than she could have reasonably expected, for Marvin has spoken with "such anger and such tenderness" (305).

Hagar recalls the last time she visited Manawaka, on a trip with Marvin and Doris. The Shipley place had vanished, replaced by a smart new green house and a new barn. At the cemetery the angel was still standing. A young caretaker, not knowing them spoke enthusiastically about the cemetery. He pointed to the unusual stone bearing the two
names of Currie and Shipley. They are two of the earliest pioneering families in the district, he declared. Therefore, Hagar thought, both families were at last the same: “Nothing to pick and choose between them now. That was as it should be” (306).

Hagar goes to her cocoon. Young nurses come to loosen her bonds with the soothing needle. Sandra appears to announce joyfully that she could go home in a few days. Hagar tries to recall something “truly free” that she had done in her ninety years. There are only two things, she concludes, and they are both recent. One is a joke, and the other is a lie. Yet it has not really been a lie, “for it was spoken at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love” (307).

As the pain increases, Hagar asks impatiently for the needle. She also asks crossly for Doris to help. Doris brings her a glass of water, which Hagar insists angrily on holding herself. Then she dies.

Hagar thus is a metonymic paradigm of the *femme,* in a phallocratic world. The tough, obdurate, acerbic, granite-spirited yet vitally alive and intensely human ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley is one of the most fascinating figures in Canadian literature. Hagar, lives in a terrifying isolation on account of the attitudes inherited from her father. A self-appointed champion of order and decorous behaviour, Hagar desires a crudity-free existence of quarantine and goes through life “sniffing over bad spelling and ‘impermissibles’ in language.” Impatient with meekness and frailty in any guise, she regards her present state of
dependence on her son and daughter—in—law as acutely embarrassing and irritating.

The opening description of the Manawaka cemetery with its “doubly blind” (3) stone angel is a striking passage, which provides a series of alternatives. Commenting on this passage from The Stone Angel, Dennis Cooley perceptively remarks that Laurence “opposes what is foreign and what is native, what is imposed and what is discovered, what is artificial and what is natural. In psychological terms she contrasts conscious and unconscious experience.” Further Hagar is seen walking only “on paths” (4). There is an early indication of the repression of natural instincts by Hagar who is totally subsumed by the values of the Currie household.

Such an attitude alienates her from her husband and children. Though she derives pleasure from being with Bram, she never lets it out. Such a repression cancels her rebellion against her father in marrying Bram, for she has internalized her father's value system. Instances of this kind abound in the novel. To cite but one, Hagar fancies Rosa Bohneur's painting, The Horse Fair (83), whereas she hates the very sight of Bram's horses. Bram thinks she objects to them because they are smelly. But reason is that she “was frightened of them, so high and heavy they seemed, so mascular, so much their own masters—I never felt I could handle them” (83). As Dennis Cooley points out, this incident shows Hagar’s “avoidance of the powerful, even sexual, forces embodied...
in horse and in Bram, who identifies with them. Art enables Hagar to evade of control the dark side of life."4 Such a negation of her own natural instincts makes her rigid and totally submerged behind the mask. The instances of the bees and the chicks further point out her withdrawal from natural things. Her pride in preserving her joy during her intercourse with Bram distances her normal reactions. Commenting on this pride, Helen Buss concludes that Hagar “has no true sense of her womanhood... [or] her own genitalia...Typically she names her vagina “a second head” thus translating her Eros into Logos—her body into head—refusing to accept her womanhood... To show response would be to accept some part of the feminine.”5

In her relationship with Bram, she also faces the conflict between her persona imagines him to be and what he really is. She says, “Love I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets, not like the things he did sprawled on the high white bedstead that rattled like a train” (80). This is why she expects Bram to become sophisticated though she is internally aroused by his coarseness. The restraint, which she exercises with Bram, extends to her relationship with Marvin, whom she mistakenly identifies as a Shipley. Her inability to speak the usual things mothers say, when Marvin leaves for war is an instance, which points out how tightly she has bottled up her emotions.

Another problem, which Hagar faces, is her inability to accept her motherhood and maternal instincts. This is seen in Hagar’s rejection of
her feeble dead mother, her weak effeminate brothers, her sharp tongued attacks on Doris, her daughter-in-law who literally mothers Hagar, and her contempt for Clara, Bram's first wife. In her article, Stephanie Demetrakopoulou describes Hagar's problem as "animus bound" pride that makes her reject feminine relatedness and describes Hagar herself as a "Persephone trapped forever underground with the depressing, disconnecting masculine values of Hades." This unrealized femininity becomes evident in Hagar's use of negative animal images. For instance, she refers to Doris as a "broody hen" (29), Arlene as a "pouter pigeon" (173) the old women at Silverthreads as "ewes" and Bram's daughters as "lumps of unrendered fat" (56).

On reviewing her past, Hagar arrives at a greater understanding of her and realizes that the sterility of her relationship with her father, brothers, husband, friends, sons and daughter-in-law has been because of her Satanic spiritual pride. Pride is the foremost of the deadly sins because, as Robertson Davies observes, it can be made to look like something else. "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 a position from which we also see that it is pigheadedness, domineering possessiveness, sheer cussedness." Hagar's pride is ancestral as "Jason Currie, her father, was a relentlessly proud and 'God-Fearing' man, and the battle cry of the Currie clan which Hagar took as her own was 'Gainsay Who Dare.'" Her pride is also
historical in the sense that Scottish immigrants like her father, who virtually built the little prairie town of Manawaka, were inordinately proud of that it is a mask she consciously wears to conceal her numerous fears. Hagar is filled with fear of what people might think; fear of being different; fear of being isolated. Her fear of seeming foolish and becoming vulnerable makes her turn away from human contacts thereby resembling the stone angel of the title.

Hagar dives deep into wreck of her fragmented personality and surfaces with the liberating through painful realization that she has been able to “rejoice”, not because of a wanton God, as she has believed all along, but due to her animus-bound pride. Her inability to rejoice is because in her self-exiled state she has failed to realize that joy can be derived from interacting openly with others, from giving and receiving love and from being able to love, play with and exult in the power within oneself.

Hagar's alienation from her true self and from others is because of her uncritical acceptance of the life-denying values of the town and of her father. According to Leslie Monkman, “Jason Currie plays the role of the imperialistic Prospero...Hagar is a defiant but blind Miranda in her apprehension of the ‘brave new world’ around her.” Hagar is not what she seems to be to those around her. Her tragedy lies in the fact that for ninety long years she has lived an amputated life keeping her inner self securely apart from her socially conditioned self. A product of pioneer
upbringing, 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, repeatedly tells his children things like, “You’ll never get anywhere in this world unless you work harder than others.... Nobody’s going to give you anything on a silver platter. It’s up to you, nobody else. You’ve got to have stock-to-itiveness if you want to get ahead. You’ve got to use a little elbow grease” (13). Clara Thomas notes that Jason Currie’s unremitting drive for financial success and his pride in it is linked to religion. Canadian Presbyterians believe that “the elect of God, the saved were shown forth by their works, and therefore, that the man succeeded in the world’s terms by his own labors had also succeeded in God’s terms, his outward success the sign of his favoured status among the elect.”

Personal effort, hard work, order, respectability, self-control, propriety, wealth and social position were seen as absolutely necessary to ensure election. Brought up with such ideas, Hagar is extremely conscious of her privileged position in Manawaka society. Her snobbishness, which is plainly inherited from her father, alienates her from the poorer men and women and the Metis town. She finds their hired help, Auntie Dolly, merely laughable and says that as a young girl, regarded herself as “quite different from Auntie Doll... a different sort entirely. Mocking at Auntie Doll’s desire to marry her father, Hagar says that she and her brothers knew that their father “could never have
brought himself to marry his housekeeper" (17). As a youngster, Hagar jeers at Lottie "No name" (11), looks down upon Henry Pearl for being a farm boy and of Telford Simmons for being the son of a penniless father who owned parlor. She similarly scorns her daughter-in-law, Doris for coming from a large family, "with nothing to speak of" (34), and her younger son's girlfriend Arlene, for being the daughter of Telford and Lottie. Likewise, she also dismisses her hard-working but poor step—daughters Jess and Gladys as unworthy of her serious attention.

Hagar's sole rebellion against the social hierarchy in Manawaka takes the form of her marriage with the coarse but vital farmer, Bram Shipley. Soon after their marriage, she reverts to her class-conscious self. Hagar cannot understand why Bram and John need to associate and care for the reactions of drifters and half-breeds from the wrong side of the tracks. She strongly disapproves of Bram's friendship with Charlie Bean. A few years after the man's death John tells her that Charlie was a good-natured man who gave him jellybeans when he was a child and let him have rides in Doherty's two-horse sleigh. Forced to play hostess and serve breakfast to those she regards as lowly, Hagar rages inwardly at the very thought of "Hagar Currie serving a bunch of breeds and ne'er-do-wells and Galicians" (114). Though married to a Shipley, Hagar remains Jason Currie's daughter all her life. She sees the white marble angel imported by her father from Italy "at a terrible expense" (3), to mark the bones of his wife as clearly superior to the other "petty angels"
(4), in the cemetery. Hagar, who resembles the monument, likewise sees herself as a cut above those around her. Only a few days before her death she realizes that her snobbishness is the main cause of her tragic isolation and the resultant discontent with life. The protestant work ethic does not take kindly to weakness in any form among the individuals. Hagar contemptuously dismisses weakness and eulogizes strength. She has no sympathy for weak, silly women like Lottie Dreiser's mother and keeps away from such women as far as possible. Like her father, Hagar does not think much of her "graceful, unspirited" (7), brothers Matt and Dan.

Even at ninety, Hagar experiences an admixture of guilt and contempt in her attitude towards her dead mother. She wonders why her mother did not die when her brothers were born but "saved" her death for her. It is primarily because of her mother that Hagar associates womanhood with weakness. She refuses to "mother" her dying brother Dan, says she is unable to "bend enough" (25), and help weaklings like Dan. Similarly, Hagar detests Bram's frailty before his death and does nothing to alleviate his distress. Hagar associates death with weakness as in the case of her mother, Henry Pearl's baby sister, Dan, Matt, and later, even Bram. It is because of this attitude that she is unable to aid feeble, foodless, dying chicks in the Manawaka garbage dump. Aware of her lack of agility at ninety, she fears death at the hands of a smotherer. So greedy is she for life, so that she cannot believe that she has grown
weak enough to die. It is only after she enters the hospital that she comes to terms with her imminent death.

Hagar sees love too as a kind of weakness as it implies a state of dependence on others. With a black trunk marked 'Miss. H. Currie' in one corner of their bedroom, she unconsciously keeps reminding herself that she is a self-reliant Currie woman. Thus, she does not tell Bram that she enjoys sex with him though she confidingly tells us:

It was not so long after we wed when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud, and I made certain that the trembling was all inner. He had an innocence about him, I guess, or he'd have known. How could he not have known? Didn't I betray myself in rising sap, like a heedless and compelled maple after a winter? But no. He never expected any such thing, and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride in tact, like some maidenhead.

(81)

Similarly, in the most painful scenes in the novel, Hagar fails to express her love and concern for her elder son Marvin or Bram when he is on deathbed. Hagar, unlike the cold, marble stone angel of the title, is
capable of love but does not wish to admit that she experiences the emotion at all.

Hagar cannot tolerate tears of any other manifestation of weakness from herself. At the hospital when she petulantly tells the nurse that she hates being helped and all that the nurse says in response is: “Haven't you ever given a hand to anyone in your time? It's your time now. Try to look at it that way. It’s your due” (276). Only then does Hagar realize that by acknowledging weakness, one is in no way diminished and that at sometime or the other in life we all need to help and to be helped by others.

Evil is shunned not on moral or ethical but on social grounds. Thus, Hagar greatly values good manners, grammatically correct speech, good clothes and good furniture. Language conscious to the extreme, she finds colloquial, idiomatic and ungrammatical speech unacceptable. She feels irritated with Marvin for placing his elbows on the table and angrily tells us in what sounds like an aside: “High day or holiday or Judgement Day-no difference to Marvin. He would have put his elbows on the table if he'd been an apostle at the Last Supper” (34). She hates the way Bram talks with a generous sprinkling of crude words and phrases and incorrect grammar and constantly corrects the speech of Marvin and John. Doris' speech virtually exasperates her and she shrinks from her presence when Doris says things like, “I dasn’t give a good loud rap these days or you know what she’ll say” (28.) William H. New remarks: “The
linguistic tension, between formal and informal, enacts a social tension that exists both within Hagar and within the social structure of the world she inhabits."\textsuperscript{11}

Besides clothes, Hagar also greatly values things. Her "mistaken association of herself with external physical creation dramatizes Jung's warning that while one can achieve individuality through the persona alone, nevertheless, because this mask-like personality centers around the ego and the conscious part of the self, its area is perfecly limited."\textsuperscript{12} Since the house and most of the furniture in it are hers, Hagar cannot bear the thought of moving into a smaller apartment and selling some of the things and putting others into storage. Threatened with the loss of her house and property, Hagar flings her absurd notions of gentility to the winds and gains self-awareness.

Lottie Drieser is the shadow projection of Hagar. The scene at the dump assumes great significance in the novel. In refusing to join Lottie in the killing of the chicks, Hagar quite successfully represses her destructive instincts. However, she carries the negative instincts for a long time afterwards and is satisfied only by her successful plotting with Lottie to separate John and Arlene. This ends in the tragic deaths of their children. By not shedding tears at John's death (John can be seen as an extension of the animus figure, Bram) and by pretending that he died in war, Hagar evades her shadow. Nancy Bailey interprets the scene at the dump in positive terms. Bailey sees Hagar's refusal as,
The rebellion of her unconscious against the destruction of the fertility symbol even though when she remembers the incident later in life and is convinced that her reaction was right, she has no awareness that in the incident she was revealing her truest personality. It is this same unacknowledged inner self that accounts for her marriage to Bram who, like her mother, represents Hagar's "otherness," and whom, like her mother, her conscious ego rejects and denies.13

During her flight to Shadow Point, Hagar is dressed bizarrely out of necessity in a common-looking beige cotton housedress, hideous shoes, a cardigan with a mended spot on the cuff and a shiny black straw hat. It is at Shadow point that Hagar gradually begins realizing that her insistence on proper appearances, correct speech and decorous behaviour has prevented her from enjoying herself by participating in life fully. Possessed by a fierce animus, Hagar "wraps herself in her sanitary persona"14 and quickly denies thoughts and feelings from the unconscious area of her self. The romantic side of her nature with its base in her unconscious is revealed to us repeatedly. Those around her however, see no manifestation of it and are not even remotely aware of its existence, as Hagar never speaks to others about her desires and
fantasies. The clash between Hagar's inner and outer selves continues till the moment of her death.

Consciously, she wants to appear different from other old people who invariably live in the past, but she is forced by her unconscious to relive her own past and resembles her contemporaries. Her unconscious prompts her to think about her "lost men" (6), but her conscious self—rejects the thought. Her inner self, makes her want to 'mother' Dan and the dying chicks, but her social self, which exercises rigid control on her emotions, does not permit any display of affection. Her rebellion against her father in marrying Bram rather than the "pliable boys of good family" (48), is the result of the temporary ascendance of her inner self. Hagar in her own way loves her father and greatly desires his approval of her husband. She felt certain and says, "Father would soften and yield, when he saw how Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar" (50).

Hagar's marriage fails mainly because of her emotional and mental blocks, desperate to make Bram into "a Currie houseboy respectfully and artfully anti-macassared against the dirt of living."¹⁵ She nags him for his manners and speech and does not reveal even a stray trace of gentleness. One night however, seeing Bram return home grieving over the disappearance of his favourite stallion, Soldier, in forty below weather, Hagar feels deeply moved and acts tenderly. She tells us that she walked over to him "without pausing to ponder whether I should or not, or what
to say" (87) and utters words which console Bram. Bram is even more surprised when she tells him that she feels “sorry” for the loss. This event clearly shows that their marriage would have not ended the way it did, had Hagar chosen to reject her socially-conscious ego and act spontaneously, in tune with her inner self.

Hagar seems a verbal person to us but when interacting with the people around her, she opens her mouth mainly to carp; seldom to say something gentle. She resolves to hold her wayward tongue but knows that she cannot do so. Hagar finds that her mouth speaks by itself and that her speech often seems contrary to her intention. At times, she says things laden with self-pity in a whining tone, which irritates and humiliates her more than anyone else. At other times, she speaks with more sharpness than she intended to and hurts those around her.

Jason Currie and other Manawakans practised the religion based on fear, but not on love. In this connection Hugh MacLennan says that his mortal quarrel with Calvinism

was not that it denied realities, but that it inculcated into children the idea that God was each man's personal enemy, and that a man committed a sin by merely existing...Calvinism as understood by many of its practitioners, shifted the balance of the Christian gospel from a message of hope, love and redemption, to one
of guilt, death and damnation, backwards from the Christ of the New Testament to the Old testament God of wrath and retribution.\textsuperscript{16}

Brought up on homilies, Hagar learns to see God as "a punishing unmerciful father-figure, on the one hand, and his Son as an ineffectual sacrificial victim, like her mother, on the other."\textsuperscript{17} "The death of the Mother principle in the Protestant religious and secular ethos"\textsuperscript{18} is what accounts for the rigidity of Hagar's nature. She sees the deity as an old man in the sky and rebels against God the Father all her life until she is able to find God in the form of the woman energy within herself.

"In the history of American fiction, the publication in 1850 of \textit{The Scarlet Letter} has a landmark place: \textit{The Stone Angel}, published in 1964, holds a comparable place in the lineage of Canadian fiction. Both are not only impeccably crafted works of literary art, but they are also studies of the religion that supported and often distorted the spirit of their people. In both, the religion in question is a form of Calvinism—the Puritanism of Arthur Dimmesdale and Salem, the Presbyterianism of Jason Currie and Manawaka. And the overwhelming question at the heart of both these works is one of many—prismed conflict, between the individual's needs and demands and society's, between God's law and man's understanding and interpretation of that law, between the rule of the community and the rule of the heart, between pride and love."\textsuperscript{19}
The integration of Hagar's ego and shadow takes place at Shadow Point. Her descent and her re-birth are described by Laurence in Jungian and sacramental terms. The steps to Shadow Point "lead down and down" (148), indicating the plunge Hagar must take into her unconscious self. The path however is not clear as each person's quest takes a different form. The beginning of the stairway leading to Shadow Point is concealed with fern and bracken and Hagar finds the roughly made stairway with steps notched into the hillside, a bit of a problem. The salmonberry branches press their small needles against her arms indicating that the descent into the unconscious is partially a painful process as it involves accepting things one would want to deny. (151) The Christian and Pan images describing her descent point to her spiritual rebirth in the wilderness.

Hagar sleeps in the dust in the old gray building. Finding a bedroom with a brass four-poster and a mattress, she repeats the words of Christ—"My room has been prepared for me" (155). However, she finds that Keats' poem "about a strong wandering woman, a colourful non-conformist, a social outcast like herself," gives her more courage than the twenty third Psalm. The next morning she gets up, feels very thirsty but knows she cannot drink seawater. Having roamed the desert wilderness, Hagar is anxious to receive grace as symbolized by water. Her predicament reminds her of Coleridge's ancient mariner but she wonders: "What albatross did I slay, for mercy's sake?" (186) It is only
after her "confession" and "repentance" in the presence of Murray Lees that the albatross drops from her neck. Hagar then imagines that the stones lying at the bottom of the sea “which are actually dun and dull olive and slate have been changed underwater and shimmer wetly as though they were garnets and opals and slabs of jade”(187). Hagar herself undergoes a similar transformation and things, which she regarded as common and shunned, suddenly seem precious. Hagar unconsciously realizes this when she tells herself, “Perhaps I have come here not to hide but to seek” (192). The two six—year old children playing house remind her of her dead younger son John and his girlfriend Arlene but in actuality, they mirror her relationship with Bram and in particular, her refusal to praise him. In the derelict cannery Hagar unintentionally injures a captive sea gull and is indirectly responsible for its fate as she is for the death of John and Arlene. It is perhaps because of the gull that her guilt surfaces and demands confession in Murray’s presence.

Hagar’s fear of the night sea, an archetype of the unconscious, and her fear that her descent may not be followed by an ascent are typically Jungian. Murray Lees, whom Dennis Cooley regards as the Jungian figure of the Wise Old Man, whose insight, understanding and good advice is of great help to Hagar. He communicates openly with Hagar, tells her of his fears, needs, frustrations and guilt over the death of his
son and unwittingly prompts Hagar to do the same. Dennis Cooley brings to our attention the symbolism in Lees' name that Hagar is in the 'lees' of life makes his surname appropriate. "Murray" is a Scottish name "by the sea" and "Ferney," of course refers to some of the plants found in the forest around the cannery. The Christian names indicate the "wilderness" Hagar has entered.21

In confessing to Lees, her rejection of Bram and her role in John's death, Hagar confronts and frees herself of the complexes that have plagued her for so long. The entire scene between them is laden with religious overtones. Murray and Hagar partake of the communion of wine and soda crackers, confess their mistakes, repent, and find peace. Hagar is awakened to her true self, but not converted. Conversion implies giving up powers while awakening implies gaining of power. According to James Baird: "To rediscover the gods as psychic factors is simply to be stripped of allegiances to existing symbols of God and to proceed to make new symbols in agreement with one's psychic condition."22 Hagar does precisely this. Her quest "is away from tradition that offers her the values of light, logic and paternal godhead and towards the values of darkness, emotion, instinct and maternity."23 She realizes that thought and sensation must be balanced by feeling and intuition. Having accepted her shadow and achieved union with the positive animus, Hagar finds
support in a fuller life as seen from the way she relates with the old women in the hospital ward and with the young half-Chinese girl, Sandra Wong. Her awakening reaches the conscious part of her mind and gets verbalized only when she hears Mr. Troy sing the first verse of the Doxology in a firm and sure voice. The last line of the first verse- "Come ye before Him and rejoice"—ushers in a vital moment of insight and Hagar acknowledges the destructiveness of her self-conscious pride with the words:

This knowing comes upon me so forcefully so shatteringly, and with such bitterness as I have never felt before. 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 standstill by some brake of proper appearances—oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?

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)

Believing herself independent—minded and free all her life, she has
in fact never been free of Jason Currie's legacy that runs in her veins.
Hagar tragically realizes that her life—long battle against God and man
has been in vain and that all her life she has been “labouring mightily
against a door which actually is not locked.” Self-denial and self-
deception, have prevented her from rejoicing. “The irony of the pathos...is
that the whole damn problem of making contact with other people is so
easy, so human if only one will take the risk of exposing his or her
emotional jugular and admit to the uncertainty of being human.” At
last, Hagar accepts her humanity and wonders if she is at least partly
responsible for the deaths of John and Bram.

Her final realization, however, depends on her acceptance of
motherhood and she is aided in this process by a series of surrogate
mothers. Citing Doris, Mrs. Steiner, Elva Jardine, Mrs. Dobereiner and
Mrs. Reilly as mother figures, Helen Buss makes an interesting remark
that Hagar is helped in her identification of womanhood through the
Keatsian figure of Meg Merrilies.
It is the image of woman outside the civilized order whose “house was out of doors,” whose “bed it was the brown heath turf,” that Hagar needs to touch in herself. Meg is also “brave as Margaret Queen” and “tall as Amazon” thus representing a womanly strength based on a female tradition rather than a denial of femininity. The fact that Meg’s “bed” is the “brown heath turf” connotes not only the earthmother aspect of the figure, but also indicates the old gypsy’s connection with the mother as the archetypal female figure that welcomes the individual to death.²⁶

The positive effect of these mother figures is seen in three of Hagar’s “recent” acts. Hagar asks for Tina’s perfume ‘Lily of the Valley’ (263), which shows her acceptance of her imminent death. She passes on her prized possession of a ring to Tina and has a funny, yet moving relationship with Sandra Wong whose pain she relieves by fetching the bedpan which she ironically refers to as “the shiny steel grail.” (301) Finally, a lovingly-spoken “lie” to Marvin telling him that, “You’ve been good to me, always. A better son than John” (304), though Hagar does not realize it, her free acts after the night in the cannery are more numerous. She forgives Murray for breaking his promise to her by
leading Marvin and Doris to her hide—out, tries to console Mr. Troy by saying that the hymn has not upset her, tells Doris that the hymn sung by her clergyman did her good. Hagar questions her earlier repression in a true and honest confession: "When did I ever speak the heart's truth?" (292)

Such a realization enables her to help the other patients in the hospital, to accept Marvin as her son and to use the mothering words for the first time in life: "There, there" (308).

Hagar finally transcends the dichotomies in her thinking and realizes that the values of both the Curries, and the Shipleys are necessary for making the most of life. Having come to terms with her past, Hagar ceases to be the Stone Angel of the title and comes close to becoming a flesh—and—blood angel. However, Laurence respects human nature enough not to show her as converted and says, "Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke" (88). In a final blaze of spiritual pride, she does not want the nurse to hold the glass of water for her now of her death. Citing Erich Newmann, Helen Buss is of the view that in holding the cup by herself, Hagar is accepting "the vessel character of the feminine [which] not only shelters the unborn in the vessel of the body, and not only the born in the vessel of the world, but also takes back the dead into the vessel of death, the cave or coffin, the tomb."27 The final acceptance comes when in her half-conscious waking dream in the hospital she calls out to Bram. Thus, "Bram becomes the final symbol for
Hagar's own lost self, her animus or 'soul-image.'

Hagar's movement from a state of alienation to spiritual, despite her cultural baggage indicates her limited triumph a short while before her death.

Hagar's disturbed mind, her long past and her bewildering present, and the chasm between her social self and her true self are brilliantly revealed through the first person singular narrative in the present tense. Laurence says that she was forced to write the novel in the first person in order to be able "to convey sufficiently (Hagar's) unvoiced thoughts (and) her rage against the fate." When writing the novel Laurence was fully aware of the limitations of the device but felt that in case of The Stone Angel, it provided an opportunity to reveal to the reader more of Hagar than she knew about herself, as her judgements about every thing are so plainly and strongly biased. The form succeeds because of the kind of person Hagar is. Sara Maitland is right when she says,

In the creation of Hagar Shipley (Laurence) 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 not so self-knowing that the reader has to take her every observation as the ultimate and perfect truth.
Laurence has also "created secondary characters of such solidity, that even though they are seen only through the eyes of her narrator, they take on an independence of their own." ³² While Laurence's use of the first person singular narrative in the present tense has been received favourably, the chronological order of flashbacks has been severely criticized. Leona Gom regards it as "the most serious artistic flaw in the work"³³ as memory does not follow a temporal, logical sequence. Talking about following a character's mental processes, Peter Midlow observes "flashes of the past jerk in and out of his present consciousness, telescoping, coalescing, disintegrating, breaking out of sequence, starting off chains of unpredictable and sometimes untraceable associations."³⁴ Laurence herself admits she is "not at all sure that the flashbacks ought to be in chronological order."³⁵ She expands on this uncertainty and says she is aware that people do not actually remember the past in linear order. She says that in some ways she would have liked Hagar's memories to haphazard but adds that

...considering the great number of years those memories spanned, the result of such a method would be to make the novel too confusing for the reader...One can say that the method... diminishes the novel's resemblance to life, but on the other hand writing-however consciously unordered its method- is never as disorderly as
Art in fact, is never life. It is never as paradoxical, chaotic, complex or as alive as life.\textsuperscript{36} Laurence feels that the trigger mechanisms conveniently setting off memories in sequence “is probably straining credulity.”\textsuperscript{37}

The technical prowess of the novel has proved very attractive to the critics. Commenting on the shifts from the present to the past and back to the present, George Robertson says he would have preferred “the jumps when they came to be abrupt and disconnected.”\textsuperscript{38} Robertson Davies on the other hand feels that the shifts are done with the greatest of ease without arousing any doubts about chronology.\textsuperscript{39} Reingard Nischik finds the parallel movements of the past and present narratives in the novel very effective. According to her, the “resonance technique” shows “not only what kind of person Hagar is but also how she has developed into what she is.”\textsuperscript{40} Critics like George Robertson disapprove of the tidiness of the novel and find it too consciously written. For example, Hagar’s third flight from home and Marvin’s and Mr. Troy’s third visit to the hospital prove liberating. Responding to such critics, Clara Thomas contends: “Any questions about a forced tidiness of form are hushed as Hagar takes shape and authority; this we are convinced, is the way she would speak and remember, strongly biased in all her judgments, forcing order on her own mind as she has tried always to force her own order on all those around her.”\textsuperscript{41}
Helen Buss opines that the flashback technique is not at all mechanical as Hagar's recall operates on at least two associative levels—the surface level which is mainly characterized by her memory of things and the introspective level with her memory of herself. Pierre Spriet interestingly observes that the form of the novel "postulates and foregrounds the isolation of the main character." The discourse greatly emphasizes Hagar's alienation from Self and others for even the author is nothing more than an impartial stenographer recording her inner soliloquies, conversations and dialogues. In his opinion, the title sums up the whole structure of the novel that is founded on binary polarities. David Jeffery draws "structural parallels between the inner rhetorical structure of The Stone Angel and that found in The Book of Isaiah in the Bible." With reference to the narrative voice, Laurence states that when writing the novel she felt "an enormous conviction of the authenticity of Hagar's voice" as phrases from her grandparents kept coming back to her. Simone Vauthier notes, that the novel is told not by one voice but by at least four and that the narrator's narrative and the locutor's discourse energizes the narrative. Besides conveying, Hagar's passage from alienation to spiritual survival, the form and voice enable us as readers to slip under the skin of Hagar at times and empathize with her completely, while at other times we slip out of her skin, and sympathize
with those around her and detest her for being the sinister Hectate crone she seems to be at such times.

One obvious religious framework commonly observed in the novel is that of the Old Testament story of Hagar, Abraham's second wife, a bondswoman and the child born of the flesh, Ishmael. The parallels are as follows—Hagar-Agar; Clara-Sarah; Bram-Abraham; Marvin-Isaac and John-Ishmael. In the final scene between Marvin and Hagar resembles Jacob in wrestling with Hagar, the stone angel and bargaining "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (304). Biblical echoes in the novel include, for example, Hagar's quotation from the *The Song of Solomon* "His banner over me was love" (80) to describe Bram's sexual passion for her. Similarly, Hagar's cry "If he should die, let me not see it" (241) echoes that of the Biblical Agar who says, "Let me not see the death of the child" when she fears the death if Ishmael in the desert for want of water.

Elisabeth Potvin finds another Biblical echo and points out that "in a parody of apostle Peter, Hagar denies her faith in patriarchy three times, fleeing first her father, then Bram, and then her son Marvin." As Claudette Pollack observes:

The effect of such references is to allow the reader to accept the archetypal associations without hesitation.

Although the Biblical references and analogies in *The Stone Angel* strengthen our
feelings for Hagar and contribute importantly to the atmosphere and tone of the novel, they do not much affect our understanding of her character or her situation.\textsuperscript{48}

The Biblical references emphasize one thing: the wanderings in the desert by agar correspond to Hagar’s quest for self—realization. For Hagar’s quest, Laurence “transmogrifies a hospital bedpan into the grail of medieval legend.”\textsuperscript{49}

The final attempt of Hagar to hold the glass of water can be interpreted in different ways. In the Christian sense of redemption, it is the cup of grace which Hagar has humbly accepted, thus asserting the continuation of life.
REFERENCES


30. Margaret Laurence, “Gadgetry or Growing ” 82.

31. Sara Maitland, “Margaret Laurence’s The Stone Angel," Canadian Women Studies/les cahiers de la femme 8.3 (Fall 1987): 44.


36. Margaret Laurence, "Gadgetry or Growing" 83.

37. Margaret Laurence, "Gadgetry or Growing" 83.


42. Helen Buss, "Hagar: The Dispossessed" 28.


45. Margaret Laurence, "Gadgetry or Growing" 82

