

Self-Deception in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to underscore the growth of the Canadian personality reflected in *The Stone Angel*. The Canadians' psychological sufferings are largely caused by their country's subordinate position under the imperial power of America. In Canada, the citizen who is trapped between the American technological superpower with its spiritual poverty on the one hand and his own psychological unrest on the other fails to establish a workable balance between his needs and interests and the society's values and expectations. This "colonial mentality" prevents the Canadians from valuing themselves. They withdraw from reality into their inner world and cannot act because they see themselves as acted upon. Consequently, they accept to play the passive role which is extended by their self-conceit. The Canadian citizen who is victimized by different visible and invisible forces is psychologically disturbed, insecure and frustrated. In *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence tries to diagnose and analyze the Canadian characters' psychic conflicts within their social and political framework. Furthermore, she investigates in the consciousness of the characters' personal life to study their relations to each other and to examine their potentiality. Laurence tries to help Canadians create a more positive identity, for she strongly disapproves of the negative destructive self-image created by the Canadians themselves and tries to rediscover their authentic selves.

Key Words: individuation, negative self-image, neurosis, self-actualization

Cite as: Ahmed, A. A., & Hashaad, N. A. (2017). Self-Deception in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (1).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol7no1.7>

Introduction

Although it has been an independent country since 1867, Canada's "psychological transition from a colony to a nation has been extremely slow and painful." This is mainly because of the "colonial cringe" imprinted on the "Canadian sensibility" (Sullivan, 1977, p. 32). The psychological problems which haunt the Canadian people and aggravate their "identity crisis" are mainly because of the Canadian immigrants who belong to various ethnic groups and insist on preserving their cultures and thus fail to respond to the idea of Canada as a whole country. Another cause of the Canadian identity crisis is that in what way Canadians think they are different from their American neighbors? For Americans, who are a vivid symbol of the technological age, Canada is unofficially part of their country. "There is no call for Canadians to fret about their identity, because everyone knows they're Americans really. If Canadians disagree with that, they're told not to be so insecure" (Atwood, "Through," 2015, p.11). Consequently, Canadians have a painful feeling that nobody wants to consider Canada as a country: "There you have the Canadian dilemma in a sentence. Nobody wants to talk about Canada, not even us Canadians" (Moore, 2001, p.2). Thus, Canadians need to rediscover themselves in order to overcome their psychological traumas.

Margaret Laurence's interest in the psychological background of individuals and sympathy with the outcasts and marginalized people has been constantly obvious in all her novels. The novel selected for this study- *The Stone Angel* (1980), has "the essence of Manawaka is that it is a small-town" (Caldwell, 2006, p.64). This small town, in the novel, symbolizes the "divisiveness" rooted in the Canadian society. However, like all other places in Canada it also contains the seeds of man's freedom. Laurence's Manawaka characters try very hard to escape from it but eventually realize that Manawaka is an aspect of their own inner self which must be confronted from within. They also discover that their quest is mainly for finding a meaning and a potential for their lives instead of running away.

The Writer's Background:

Margaret Laurence is "a leading major contemporary postmodern author" (Irvine & Lorna, 1999, p. xix) who is not easily separable from her fictional protagonists. She creates characters whose experiences, like Canadians, bear a measure of resemblance to her. Suffering the loss of her parents at a very young age, Laurence's "loneliness and isolation in which she dwelt nearly all her life" (King, 1998, p. xx) is apparent throughout her works. It also produces a prevailing tone of despair in all of her works. She believes that the aspects of the texts she writes are integral elements of its construction of her sense of identity. Her parents' death when she was young marked both her literary and private life, as she was never able to remove herself from her childhood. Laurence's despair, loneliness and insecurity, are "an emphasis that produces monotony that relentlessly tracks her experience along a single and descending path" (Irvine & Lorna, 1999, 11).

James King (1998) considers Laurence "the most renowned writer in [the] Canadian literary history" (King, 1998, p. xix). For King, the richness of Laurence's imagery, "the concreteness in her language," and "the attempt to make harmonies out of disparate elements of human experience" make her one of the most prominent writers in Canada and thus in the whole world (King, 1998, p. xxiv). Mark Cohen finds Laurence "a writer dedicated to exploring human nature in all its various complexities," (Cohen, 2001, p.88) as she is always able to express

something that in fact everybody knows but can't express. Laurence has also a distinctive Canadian voice "though her concerns are of wider significance, they are deeply rooted in the local Canadian experience" (Caldwell, 2006, p. 65).

Laurence is aware of the emotions that lay buried beneath the surface of people's lives and "often casts a gently ironic eye upon the more fundamental absurdities of the human condition, particularly the discrepancy between the idealized and the actual" (Djwa, 1972, p. 43). Her psychological analysis of characters implies a religious perspective; she believes that the "religious experience can be a numinous one, stabilizing old neuroses and so accomplishing a kind of psychological salvation" (Djwa, 1972, p. 44). Laurence uses the Biblical allusion when she names, for example, her character Hagar of *The Stone Angel* after the Hagar of the Bible, "to provide a mythic framework for an essentially psychological study of character" ((Djwa, 1972, p. 46). The Parallels between the two Hagars are intended. Both are destined to roam the "wilderness" which is also "within" the self (Atwood, *Survival*, 206). In one of her interviews with Donald Cameron, Laurence says that in writing her novels she has a great deal with the Bible which moves her very deeply, as it expresses "certain symbolic truths about the human dilemma and about mankind" (Cameron, 1973, p. 112).

As a realistic writer, Laurence is able "to transform the regional into the universal, a marginal country into the world" (Irvine & Lorna, 1999, 12). In each of her works there is a movement from isolation towards order and meaning; "the exploration and revealing of an order that is there and is within the power of seeking men and women to apprehend" (Thomas, 1970, p. 85). "Life", Laurence says, "is extraordinarily and in a way wonderfully formless, and yet the whole world, sort of examined minutely has got incredible form" (Cameron, 1973, p. 107). She implies that though our security is temporarily threatened during the process of self-discovery, we are "awakened" to a "bolder, cleaner, more spacious, and fully human life" (Campbell, 2008, p. 8).

Margaret Laurence's protagonists undergo a struggle to find their real self and because of the painful pressures of anxieties, they lose it. They experience a gap between the higher needs of their inner nature and the unchangeable enormous conditions of existence. The protagonists' personal and past problems play a significant role in exaggerating their neurotic troubles and in bringing about their basic anxiety. Those who are able to comprehend and conquer their personal difficulties, gain a healthy vision of life. However, sick personages are often entangled in personal problems and cannot feel whole, because they are obsessed by neurotic anxiety. Such characters lose their real self, sacrifice human value and create unalterable conditions for themselves.

Laurence believes that the lack of basic needs in childhood cause basic anxiety, but they are not the only cause of later troubles. The characters' social, biological and cultural forces also share in forming their personalities. In her novels, Laurence does not fully expose the childhood of her characters but she frequently uses the flashback technique to help the reader understand the character's background and she uses the first-person narrative form to help the reader enter into the character's psyche and get glimpses of its life. Her characters have much more complex realities behind their inexplicable behaviour, reactions and rigidities. The reader meets them as grown-up individuals, apparently well-settled in life, some of them right into their middle-age, nonetheless disturbed psychologically by forces beyond their comprehension. With the reflective

flashbacks and first-person narrative techniques, the characters' childhood is revealed enabling the reader to relate the present structure of psyche to their past.

The World of Manawaka

The world of Manawaka in *The Stone Angel* is a fictionalized small Canadian prairie town which resembles Margaret Laurence's hometown Neepawa. It is created by Laurence and is populated by racially and culturally different people including Scots, Irish, English, French, Indians, Metis, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews exactly like the real Canadian society. These ethnic groups do not mix easily as each one has its own respective culture. In *The Stone Angel*, Laurence tries to describe the growth of her character, Hagar, against such a "multiracial, multicultural background" in order to acquire self-definition. She sees that to become an independent individual spiritually as well as externally, Hagar has to understand the "validity of others." To do so, Hagar should overcome her "idealized" image and achieve personal and social recognition by integrating with other cultures giving herself "freedom to love, to share, to meet and to touch. Such a state ... is our spiritual home, the human goal the grail" (Morely, 1991, p. 19).

According to Laurence, Manawaka is not just a town. It has a further part to play in the lives of its people. It is considered "a microcosm of [Laurence's] native country" (King, 1998, p. 95). Hagar is attracted to Bram who looks 'a bearded Indian' with his lack of modesty, but comes to despise this Indian quality soon after their marriage.

Problems presented by Laurence's characters in *The Stone Angel* reveal the fact that "self-actualization" in the Canadian society can be only established in relation to others. That requires affirming the "irreplaceable uniqueness" of each individual at the same time with "common humanity." In other words, the Canadians can overcome their psychological problems and regain psychic equilibrium only if they respect the reality of themselves as well as that of others;

The problem for human beings, however much they differed from one another, was to acquire, not the ability but the will to understand each other. It is as difficult to see something of oneself in all men as it is to accept oneself completely as one is.

(Mannoni, 1991, p. 1)

Laurence's interest in the psychological background of individuals and sympathy with the outcasts and marginalized people are always visible in all of her works. The novel selected for this study- *The Stone Angel*, has "the essence of Manawaka is that it is a small-town" (Caldwell, 2006, p.64). This small town, in the novel, symbolizes the "divisiveness" rooted in the Canadian society. However, like all other places in Canada as well as in the whole world, it also contains the seeds of man's freedom. Laurence's Manawaka character tries very hard to escape from it but eventually realizes that Manawaka is an aspect of her own inner self which must be confronted from within. She also discovers that her quest is mainly for finding a meaning and a potential for her live instead of running away. To do so, Hagar passes through a state of psychological crisis that affects her live. Thus a psychological analysis for Hagar will enable us to understand her conflicts and behavior.

Hagar Shipley

Hagar Shipley, protagonist and central character of *The Stone Angel*, is the ninety-year-old narrator of the novel. She is a snobbish, proud, and tough woman who fears the loss of her

independence by being placed in a nursing home by her son Marvin and his wife, Doris. Hagar's neurotic difficulties arise due to her spiritual pride. In Margaret Atwood's view, Hagar is "the most extended portrait of the frozen old woman" in Canada (Atwood, *Survival*, 1972, p.205). Like Laurence, Hagar's mother died giving birth to her. She was brought up by her father, Jason Currie, a 'stern disciplinarian,' who is deceived by the past glory of his family. His pride in his position, prosperity and success made his life a 'desert.' Instead of satisfying his daughter's neurotic need for love, affection and approval, he detached her from her true self and from others. According to Monkman (1981), a specialist in Canadian literature in English, "Jason Currie plays the role of the imperialist" for Hagar, the same role played by America to Canada (Monkman, 1981, p.37).

At the age of ninety, and only a few days before her death, Hagar realizes that her spiritual 'pride' is the main cause of the barrenness of her relationship with others and her discontent with life. She discovers that she has never been able to delight due to her pride. Her inability to express joy is because in her self-exiled state she has failed to realize that joy can be derived from interacting openly with others and from giving and receiving love. Pride is the root-cause of the "deadly sins" because, as Robertson Davies observes, it can be made to look like something else. "It looks like sturdy independence ... it is pigheadedness, domineering possessiveness, sheer cussedness" (Davies, 1964, p.4). Hagar's pride is ancestry as her father was "a relentlessly proud and 'God-fearing' man" (Thomas, 1970, p. 161). Considering himself to be 'a pioneer,' he strongly believes in the gospel of 'individualism' and hands down this belief to his children. He repeatedly tells them:

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 stick-to-itiveness if you want to get ahead. You've got to use a little elbow grease. (13)

Although Hagar's father observes his religious duties thoroughly, he is fiercely proud of his position in the congregation, "we have to give special thanks to those of our congregation whose generosity and Christian contributions have made our new church possible" (16). Brought up with such ideas, Hagar is extremely conscious of her privileged position in Manawaka society. Her snobbishness, which is apparently inherited from her father, separates her from the poor men and women in the town. Hagar finds the poor people's hired help merely laughable and says that as a young girl she regarded herself as "quite different from Auntie Doll [the house keeper] ... a different sort entirely" (34).

Hagar looks down upon Henry Pearl for being a farm boy and on Telford Simmons for being the son of a penniless father who owned a funeral parlor. Likewise, she mocks 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). She also scorns 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. Thus, parental indifference, and familial disorder characterize Hagar's childhood. Her incapacity to satisfy her basic needs of love and affection from her family creates basic anxiety. As a result, she withdraws into a world of her own. She glorifies herself as different from people around her. She gets happiness in this state.

But later she faces the problem of separateness, as she sticks to the illusion of being unique in herself.

Hagar has a tendency towards autonomy. She can gain self-sufficiency and strength by such denial of the ordinary ways of life. People who forsake themselves and merge in the non-self, giving up will, freedom, self-sufficiency, self-control and autonomy, suffer from 'self-alienation.' This quest for the self is only achieved when one is able to establish a "communication with the outer world to improve along with the improvement in the development of the personality... i.e. perception of reality should improve" (Maslow, *The Farther*, 1971, p.161-2). Hagar's ironic expressions on the poor people in the restaurant refer to her constant need to indicate her insistent quest to raise themselves by standing superior to others. Hagar sees pride as her wicked spirit. Hagar is hateful and thoughtless and is not capable of relating with those around her with sympathy and generosity of spirit.

Hagar's rebellion against the social hierarchy in Manawaka takes the form of her marriage. To satisfy her neurotic needs for love, affection and safety, she challenged her father's wish of marrying one of the "pliable boys of good family" (48), and married the disreputable but good-looking farmer Bram Shipley who is, indeed, considered below her class. During their wedding reception Hagar says that wanting to be free of her father's influence; she flew around "like a new-born gnat" (50). However, Hagar in her own way loves her father and greatly desires his approval of her husband. She felt certain "that father would soften and yield, when he saw how Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar" (50). Soon after their marriage, she reverts to her "class-conscious self." Hagar cannot understand why Bram and her younger son, John, need to associate with and care for the reactions of wanderers and half-breeds from the wrong side of the tracks. Bram once asserts his hatred for his wife's pride and thus, the Curries' values by urinating on the steps of Currie's store. Confronted by the social affectation of Charlotte Tappen, Bram "hugged surliness like a winter coat around him" (70). It is clear that there is a mutual misunderstanding between Hagar and Bram. If Bram had been willing to verbalize his anxieties and Hagar to comprehend his mentality, neither would have to break up. Laurence is of the opinion that though the potential for "emotional communication between individuals is very great," it is very difficult and can be achieved only if the individuals involved in it go on trying (Fabre, 1983, p. 200).

A few years after Bram's death, John tells Hagar that he was a good natured man who gave him jellybeans when he was a child and let him have rides in Doherty's two-horse sledge. Forced to play hostess and serve breakfast to those she regards as "lowly", Hagar rages inwardly when she thought of "Hagar Currie serving a bunch of breeds and, ne'er-do-wells and Galicians" (114). In Laurence's view, pride is a demon and it implies "the tempting conviction that one is able to see the straight path and to point it out to others." (Laurence, *The Rain*, 1970, p. 125) A closer look at Hagar's pride, however, reveals that it is nothing but a mask she unconsciously wears to conceal her numerous fears. She looks at herself as "a woman who has been in some way petrified all her life – petrified, in the dual sense of turned to stone and terrified." (Atwood, *Survival*, 1972, p. 205). Although she is tough-minded and goes through life "sniffing over bad spelling and impermissible in language" (Cooley, 1983, p. 45), Hagar fears of being different or isolated. Her fear of seeming foolish makes her turn away from human contact thereby resembling the stone angel of the title. After returning from the East, her father holds her by her

hand and begs her to stay but Hagar pulls it away from him without a word. Aware that her sign has greatly hurt him, she feels that she must follow her father out and "say it was a passing thing and not meant" (45), but could not bend enough to say so. Similarly, she wants to hold Doris's hands and beg forgiveness for acting rude over a pot of tea but holds her tongue afraid that Doris would think her "daft entirely instead of only half so" (30). Her inner self makes her want to take care of Dan and the dying baby chicken but her glorified self which exercises rigid control on her emotions, does not allow any display of warmth and affection.

Hagar constantly restricts her life to "narrow borders." She doesn't seem to simplify her life to join a simple order. She is a neurotic who feels that she doesn't need anybody. She is a "resigning individual" who believes that she is perfect. In psychology, 'resignation' leads to peace and wisdom. But a neurotic's strive for resignation signifies a peace born out of "the absence of conflicts." For a neurotic, "resignation" means "giving up struggle ... and settling for less". It is a process of reducing life and growth. For Hagar, resignation implies restricting her life and living. Wrongly, she thinks that she achieves peace. Since she does not develop a "healthy self-esteem", she reaches for false glory based on "neurotic pride". (Horney, 1965, pp. 111-112)

Hagar sees love as a kind of weakness. For her, love implies a state of dependence on others. Thus, she never realizes her husband's love for her. The tragedy of their relationship is clearly seen in the moment when they are alone together for the first time after their wedding:

When we entered, Bram handed me a cut-glass decanter with a silver top. "This here's for you Hagar." I took it so casually, and laid it aside, and thought no more about it. He picked it up in his hands and turned it around. For a moment I thought he meant to break it, and for the life of me I couldn't see why. Then he laughed and set it down and came close to me. (51)

Though married to Bram Shipley, Hagar remains Jason Currie's daughter all her life. She sees the monument of the stone angel imported by her father from Italy "at a terrible expense and was pure white marble" (3) to mark her life as clearly superior to other marbles which are "lesser breed entirely, petty angels" in the memorial park. Hagar (4), who resembles the stone angle, likewise, sees herself as a cut above those around her. She avoids any show of emotions even with her husband. She never reveals her love for him, even when she enjoys sex with him.

It was not so very long after we were wed; when I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never spoke aloud, and I made certain the trembling was all inner. He had 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 intact, like some maidenhead. (81)

In response to Bram's love, she feels her body rising 'to meet his,' but she refuses to "betray" herself. By her unspoken and unexpressed love, she makes Bram feel guilty for desiring sex with her for she herself says: "Sometimes, if there had been no argument between us in the day, he would say he was sorry, sorry to bother me, as though it was an affliction with him,

something that set him apart, as his speech did from educated people" (116). 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 of love at all. As a child, her elder son Marvin seeks love and approval from his mother. "He would hang around the kitchen, after doing little chores for, awaiting her approval. But Hagar never spoke the words he wanted to hear" (113). Not until Mr. Troy's moving singing of the hymn in hospital was Hagar set free from the captivity forged by her pride; only then were the chains loosed, so that she was able to give Marvin the blessing he had sought throughout his life.

Similarly, in one of the most painful scenes in the novel, Hagar fails to express her love and concern for Marvin, when he comes to say goodbye before going to army at the age of seventeen. Hagar always suppresses her feelings and does not try to release them. Instead, she yearns for greater 'will-lessness,' which is indicative of severe 'neurosis.' As mentioned before, Hagar has a strong tendency to remove herself from the 'inner battlefield' in order to relieve her tensions. She does not participate in the act of living and becomes an observer on life. She lacks aspirations, efforts and the will for achievement. By stifling her wishes, she feels satisfied at having reached a state of 'non-attachment,' happy that she has no expectations from life and others. She shows a fear for 'emotional involvement,' because it may restrict her freedom. Thus, by withdrawing herself from her surroundings into a world of her own, Hagar assumes that she saves her individuality, but as this 'withdrawal' is not healthy, it leads to "disintegration". Hagar's main aim is defeated in itself. She does not realize that an individual "cannot grow in a vacuum, without closeness to and friction with other human beings" (Horney, *Neurosis*, 1965, p. 267).

Hagar is a well-educated woman who greatly values correct speech and good behaviour. For example, she finds colloquial, idiomatic and ungrammatical speech unacceptable. She hates the way Bram talks with a lot of sprinkling of offensive words and phrases and incorrect grammar. She constantly corrects the speech of her sons, Marvin and John. Doris's speech nearly drives her mad and she tries to hide when Doris, Marvin's wife, says things like: "I dasn't give a good loud rap these days or you know what she'll say" (28), "Marv and me are having a cup of tea" (30) and "You always said the oak chair was to go to Marv and I" (64). In addition, Hagar feels irritated with Marvin for placing his elbows on the dining table and angrily tells the reader: "High day or holiday or Judgment Day - no difference to Marvin. He would put his elbows on the table if he'd been an apostle at the Last Supper" (34).

By insisting on criticizing others, Hagar again isolates herself from social life and substitutes her 'real self' by an 'actualized self-image.' By doing so, she feels assured of her non-involvement with others, which in fact is unhealthy for her real self. She tries to "close life out, to impose on others, notably her husband and children, her own rectilinear sense of what should be allowed." (Atwood, *Survival*, 1972, p. 205). William New strictly criticizes Hagar's behaviour, saying "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" (New, 1983, p. 175).

On the day Marvin started school, Hagar made him wear a sailor suit hoping to make him appear different from the rest of the boys. Similarly, she spends her first few months' salary

earned from Mr. Oatley, entirely on clothes in order to appear civilized. Convinced of the correctness of her own tastes, she finds Doris's choice of clothes terrible. She feels that her daughter-in-law looks more of a frump than nature intended her to be. According to Hagar, Doris "whose tastes and looks resemble a broody hen ... wouldn't know silk from flour sacks" (29). She is also likely to criticize Doris quickly for thinking that "dignity depends upon vestment" (28), although she herself believes in that. Hagar does not actually acquire the well-mannered behaviour which is necessary for social suitability.

On the contrary, Hagar feels "different" from others, as she clings to the illusion of being unique in herself. Defeating "others in personal relations" is a neurotic way to feel "great" and "free" (Horney, *Neurosis*, 1965, p. 27). That is why Hagar is confronted with the problem of separateness from others. She never tries to analyze herself and apprehend her demands. The clash between her inner and outer selves continues till the moment of her death. The fast scornful self and the withdrawing contact with outer world, leave the core of her integrity impaired. Hagar's 'basic anxiety', again, lies in her incapacity to relate herself to others. She lives a cut off life keeping her inner self securely apart from her socially conditioned self. Hagar wants to master her life and fate, get over her difficulties alone. But she is not a strong and healthy person. She strives to maintain a subjective feeling of superiority with compulsive rigidity. As readers, we may consider Hagar perfectionist and vindictive at the same time as she wants to achieve the highest excellence in everything she does, and has a compulsive need for vindictive triumph.

What gives rise to Hagar's self-hate is her refusal to acknowledge all softer feelings as a threat to her whole structure of living. She does not expect others to give her anything. She wishes to stand by her own vision of life and fight all softness. These characteristics also comprise the "aggressive" neurotic type of people. Aggressive types tend to keep people away from them. They only care about their needs. They would do whatever they can to be happy and continue hurting others. For Hagar others exist only to serve her aggressive needs and so, they should bow down to her. Hagar always has a neurotic need for power, for control and exploitation. Under Horney's assertions the aggressive individual may also wish for social recognition, "narcissism," in terms of simply being known by subordinates and peers alike. Hagar has needs for a degree of personal admiration by those within her social circle.

Hagar's marriage fails mainly on account of her aggression and emotional block. Desperate to make her husband into "a Currie houseboy respectfully and artfully antimacassar against the dirt of living" (Cooley, 1983, p.35), 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 horse, Soldier, Hagar feels deeply moved and acts affectionately. She tells us that she walks over to him "without pausing to ponder whether I should or not or what to say" (87) and utters words which comfort him. Bram is even more surprised when she tells him that she feels "sorry" for his loss. That night Bram behaves tenderly with her. This event clearly shows that their marriage would not have ended the way it did, if Hagar had chosen to reject her idealized self-image and act instinctively in tune with her real self.

Moreover, Hagar communicates openly with Murray Lee. He tells her of his frustrations over the death of his son and prompts her to do the same. Murray and Hagar confess their

mistakes, repent and find peace. It is only after 'confession' and 'repentance', Hagar is awakened to her true self, but not converted. 'Conversion' implies giving up powers while awakening implies gaining of power. The entire scene between them is laden with religious overtones and 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" (Buss, 1985, p. 27). For Hagar, this is her time of freedom. But, what she considers freedom is just a flight from conflict. Real freedom implies ceasing all conflicts and liberating from all fear, "unless the mind is absolutely free from fear every form of action brings about more mischief, more misery, and more confusion." (Krishnamurthy, 1973, p. 31).

Hagar undergoes a deep psychological change. She does not get freedom because she does not acquire self-knowledge yet. Hagar's quest "is away from a tradition that offers her the values of light, logic and paternal godhead and towards the values of darkness, emotion, instinct and materiality" (Buss, 1985, p. 27). Thought and sensation she realizes must be balanced by feeling and intuition. Only when she "accepts her shadow" and achieves "union with the positive animus," Hagar finds support in a fuller life as is seen from the way she relates with the old women, particularly Elva, 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 soft 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 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. (292)

Believing herself independent-minded and free all her life, Hagar has in fact never been free of Jason Currie's legacy. Burdened with guilt and self-hate, 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" (Gibson, 1973, p. 206). Self-deception has 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.

(Labonte, 1980, p. 175)

At ninety Hagar accepts her humanity and wonders if she is at least partly responsible for the deaths of John and Brant. It is obvious here that the guilt Hagar feels for her mother's death giving birth to her may explain her inability to comfort her brother Matt when he is dying, as Laurence "herself may also have felt responsible at an unconscious level for the deaths of her parents" (King, 1998, 162), that is why Laurence's desire for privacy and for escape from the demands of her family is because of her fear of "day-to-day intimacy." Laurence knows that "if she withdrew from others and into a secret world of writing, perhaps she could escape further catastrophes descending upon her" (King, 1998, 295). Trying to think of the free acts performed by her in ninety years, she can think of only two "recent" acts - a "joke" in fetching the potty which she ironically refers to as "the shiny steel grail" for Sandra and the other, a "lovingly-

spoken lie" to Marvin telling him that he has been a better son than John (301). 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 and gives Doris her mother's sapphire ring for Tina.

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: "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"(Morley, 1991, p. 79). 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; "nothing is ever changed at a single stroke" (88). In a final rage of spiritual pride, Hagar employs "aggression" against the nurse in the hospital, she exhibits basic hostility to her. She does not want the nurse to hold the glass of water for her at the moment of her death. Hagar's movement from a state of alienation to spiritual survival, despite her cultural baggage, indicates her limited triumph a short while before her death.

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

As the nurse speaks to Hagar, the latter awakens to a greater truth about her life; she has so far led a barred, enclosed existence devoid of all human feelings. The truth unveils still greater reality that her life has been a waste. A terrible struggle ensues between her glorified and real selves. There is a too late frenzied search for feelings and emotions. So far, Hagar's realization was directed inward but its centre was false. Now, in the light of the outer world, she comprehends the inner reality. All her "grandiose fantasies" about herself as a detached person of "steady wisdom" perish. Self-hate emerges with the realization that she has been an escapist. She has run away from the realm of feelings. So far, she lacks human warmth. She reproaches herself; the consciousness of having been emotionally crippled and the inability to share feelings with others on human level, isolate her.

Laing (1973) points out that pure violence erupts as an ultimate form of self-analysis. Such "isolation is greatly in danger of passing over into psychotic alienation" (Laing, 1973, 140). So intense are her feelings that she despises the idea of being herself. It is a tremendous terror for her to have a clear perception of her identity. This brief moment of introspection for Hagar makes her suffer intensely. Suffering leads to self-analysis which is the preconscious process that

gives a person orientation. But for Hagar, it's too short to allow any constructive thinking. Overpowered by self-reproach, she feels like Sartre's Roquentin, "my thought is me... at this very moment- its frightful, if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existence" (Sartre, 1966, p.135).

Technique:

Hagar's tragedy lies in the fact that her revelation comes at ninety. If Hagar had been awakened to her true self earlier, she would have been able to live a healthy, natural life for several years instead of the few days before her death. The hour of Hagar's death is also the hour of recognition. Laurence ends *The Stone Angel* with the phrase "And then-" (308) which reflects the open-endedness of the writer's vision, leaving the ending to be interpreted by the readers according to their own individual perceptions. Laurence, a champion for the cause of human liberation, visualizes a society in which all of us can "experience our deepest needs and our deepest requirements for survival as sanity rather than insanity" (Gelpi, 1975, p. 117). Margaret Laurence claims that when writing *the Stone Angel* she felt "an enormous conviction of the authenticity of Hagar's voice" (Laurence, "Gadgetry," 1983, p.82), as the form of *The Stone Angel* "foregrounds the isolation of the main character" (Spriet, 1981, p. 107). Hagar's character is revealed in the succession of events that the present brings back the past. In other words, what the novel depicts is Hagar's psychological journey across time to her origins in an effort to locate her present in a true perspective. The manifestations of Hagar on her past emerge as a series of different portraits at these stages of her life. In fact, the narrative, told from Hagar's point of view, develops very much as an unfolding.

By the end of the novel, Laurence uses the third person voice to underline the fact that this is not absolutely Hagar's story but the story of many people in Canada. The wide-ranging narrative of the novel, in fact, documents Hagar, the narrator-protagonist's journey towards self-discovery and quite deliberately aims at defining and projecting a specifically Canadian identity by fusing together personal and national history so that it finally emerges not merely as Hagar's individual story but a story of the Canadian nation as well. It is "about Canada as well as Manawaka, about the need to give shape to [Canada's] own legends, to rediscover what is really ours" (Atwood, "Face," 1983, p. 26). Actually, this technique serves as a particular kind of catharsis for Laurence herself. She was, at the time of writing *The Stone Angel*, separated from her husband John Laurence and was living in England with her young children. These were obviously not easy times for her as England, an alien country for her, could not and did not provide her with the much-needed sense of 'place,' 'belonging' and 'rootedness' so that she could face her personal predicament in a bold manner.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research paper attempts to uncover the fact that Laurence's selected character, Hagar, is a well-developed reflection of the Canadian personality. The growth from her first stage of life to her latest is a steady process towards self-realization. Hagar may not be fully healthy, but is not totally morbid. In the process of individuation, she reveals self-strength and a tendency to emerge out of her isolation, insecurity and anxiety, and gain a kind of closeness and solidarity in her march from neurosis to full humanness. Hagar gains considerable self-awareness at Shadow Point and from her short stay in the hospital, although her insights come too late to be of use to her. When the process of self-actualization is complete for Hagar,

her death becomes an essential as it holds the promise of new birth. Her growing process for "self-actualization" reflects the potential growth and the developing vision of Laurence herself as a writer. Symbolically, Hagar's growing process mirrors the growing process of Canada as a nation not as a fragmented whole inhabited by immigrants and culturally occupied by America.

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