

# **Survival: A Story in Margaret Laurence's**

## ***The Stone Angel***

A project Submitted to Madurai Kamaraj University as part of the Award of the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

By

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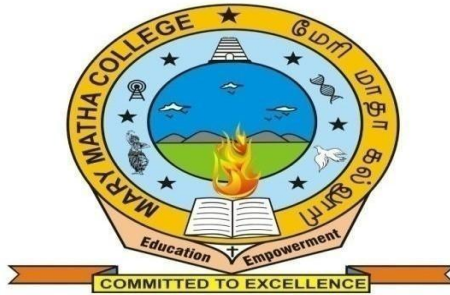
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work entitled, “**Survival: A Story in Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel***” is a research work done by **S. UMA MAHESWARI**(Reg. No. **B8T15956**) under the guidance and supervision of **Mr. J. ROBERT** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mary Matha College of Arts and Science, Periyakulam, and submitted to Madurai Kamaraj University as part of the Degree of Master of Arts in English.

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I hereby declare that the project work entitled, **Survival: A Story in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel***, is the result of the study carried out by me for M.A. Degree in English under the Guidance and Supervision of **Mr. J. ROBERT**, Asst. Professor, Department of English, Mary Matha College of Arts and Science, Periyakulam. This project had not been previously submitted for any degree or Diploma and has not formed part of any Paper or Lecture.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Margaret Laurence, the most prominent writer of Canadian literature seals with the predicament of women in the patriarchal society. She plunges deep into the minds of her protagonists and analyses the inner conflicts experienced by them. This study aims to analyse the journey of the protagonists towards an authentic self assertion.

Chapter I gives a description of Canadian literature with its main themes and also gives an account of the major Canadian writers, It focuses on the women writers and highlights, the life, works and the contribution of Margaret Laurence to the world of literature.

Chapter II talks about the construction of an identity crisis experienced by Hagar in the consumer society. It depicts the inner self of Hagar and how she has been alienated from the society. Women are considered inferior even though they are well qualified. Men try to change women's identity and want them to fulfil their desire with regards to their norms. Marian does not want her identity and individuality to be shattered away. She understands her plight and rises up against all sort of domination to prove herself.

Chapter Four is 'Summing Up' – It sums up the findings of the study.

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# **CHAPTER-I**

## INTRODUCTION

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* deals with the themes of the dangers of pride, problems of growing old, duty, womanhood, resentment, suppression of emotions, and identity crisis that forms the foundation of the quest for survival. The novel clearly depicts the life of an old woman named Hagar who is threatened by the roots of identity crisis. As one grows old, they lose not only their physical and mental health alone, but also their existence or presence in the society. The woman in the novel is totally erased as her presence doesn't matter to anyone.

The country Canada is being portrayed as the land rich with wilderness and closely associated with Canadian population. In the early field of Canadian era, the major theme of Canadian literature was surrounded with the geographical area but on the later years it penetrated its roots towards nature, identity and literature. Canada is a nation distinct by its sole topography and ambiance. Canadian writers acknowledged the land as the central characteristic which shapes Canadian character. Canadian landscape is a region with sprouting culture and history.

Cole Harris in "The Myth of the Land in Canadian Nationalism" explains: "English speaking Canadians tend to explain themselves in terms of land and location". Many contemporary Canadian writers alleged that Canada is a lenient country, a country without any history of subjugation, and prejudice. Sometimes Canada is not only imagined as a rough hard land where nature is opposed to human endeavor, but it is also venerated as a land of decorum and exquisiteness.

Canadian Literature flourished in the twentieth century. F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith are notorious poets. Hugh MacLennan and Sinclair Ross are novelists who changed the course of Canadian fiction. Smith's poetry portrays the spirit of budding national culture and the same consciousness can be seen in the novels of MacLennan. In 1970s and 1980s numerous women writers published their works in Canada. Their works were mostly based on the sufferings and experiences of women in Canada. Some of the great women writers were Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Mariana Engel and Mavis Gallant.



Canadian women writers laid more stress on individuality. Margaret Laurence immortalized the Manawaka world in her fiction. She made extensive travels to Africa and her experiences form the fabric of her fiction. She is best known for her novels, *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Test of God* (1966), *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) and *The Diviners* (1970). Alice Munro's writings revolve around Western Ontario. Marian Engel explores the feminine psyche in an attempt to understand women's experiences.

The Canadian writers move steadily towards the landscape. They also portray the journeys, which take place in the geophysical or cultural context. The interior landscape transcends all local, regimental, nationalistic or cultural concerns. After the Second World War, the Canadian women writers begin to claim the legitimacy of the feminine susceptibility. They also evolve a feminine discourse that is divergent to patriarchal discourse. The Canadian fiction began to take a new turn in the 1960's with the emergence of women novelists like Margaret Atwood who focuses on women's issues of the present age. A close study of her novels reveals that the focus is on the inner world of feeling and sensibility.

Margaret Atwood asserts the distinctive strain of Canadian Literature and the capacity to fight for survival as Northrop Frye focuses on the 'garrison mentality'. According to Margaret Atwood (1981), much of women's writing can, in fact, be seen not as an attempt to define an isolated individual ego but to discover a collective concept of subjectivity, which foregrounds the construction of identity in relationship.

Canada's literature, whether written in English or French often reflects the Canadian perspective on nature, frontier life and Canada's position in the world, all three of which tie into the garrison mentality. Canada's ethnic and cultural diversity are reflected, with many of its most prominent writers focusing on ethnic life. The two early important novelists were Morley Callaghan in English and Gabrielle Roy in French. Failure is one of the themes in Canadian literature. Failure and futility feature as themes in many notable works for instance *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984) by Timothy Findley is the best example. Humor is often laced with serious subject matter. Often Mid anti-Americanism, in the form of gentle satire is the main theme. Sometimes perceived as malicious, often presents a friendly rivalry between two nations.

Since World War II, multiculturalism has been an important theme. Writers using this theme include Mordecai Richler and Margaret Laurence. Reference to nature is common in Canada's literature. Nature is sometimes portrayed as an enemy and sometimes like a divine force. Satire is one of the main elements in Canadian literature. Canadian culture reflected in Canadian literatures shows self-deprecation. Some Canadian novels revolve around the theme of the search for self identity and need to justify one's existence. The most common hero of Canadian literature is an ordinary person who must overcome challenges from a large corporation, a bank, a rich tycoon, a government, a natural disaster and so on. Another variant theme involves a conflict between urban and rural culture, usually portraying the rural characters as morally superior.

Jack Laurence's profession took the couple to England, Somalia, and eventually Ghana, where Laurence gained an appreciation for Africa and the storytelling traditions of its peoples. It was during the couple's time in Africa that their two children, Jocelyn and David, were born, and when Laurence began to work seriously on her writing. Her book of essays about and translations of Somali poetry and prose was published in 1954 as *A Tree for Poverty*. A collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow Tamer*, as well as a novel, *This Side Jordan* (both focusing on African subjects) were published after Laurence returned home to Canada.

Laurence's fiction was thereafter concerned with Canadian subjects, but she maintained her interest in African literature and in 1968 published a critical analysis of Nigerian literature, *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966*. Present in her African works is a concern with the ethical dilemma of being a white colonialist living in colonial Africa. Laurence and her family returned to Canada in 1957. They moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, where they stayed for five years. In 1962 Laurence and her husband separated, and she moved to London, England for a year, followed by a move to a cottage in Buckinghamshire fourteen years, although. She visited Canada often.

During this period, Laurence wrote her first works with Canadian subject matter. *The Stone Angel* was published in 1964, and was the first of Laurence's group of Manawaka novels, so called because they each take place in the fictional prairie town of

Manawaka, a community modelled after Laurence's hometown of Neepawa, Manitoba. *The Stone Angel* was followed by *A Jest of God* in 1966 (for which she won her first Governor General's Award,) *The Fire-Dwellers* in 1969, and *A Bird in the House* in 1970.

Laurence received a great deal of critical and commercial acclaim in Canada and in 1971 was honoured by being named a Companion to the in the early 1970s, Laurence returned to Canada and settled in Lakefield, Ontario. During this time she continued to write and held positions as writer in residence at the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, and Trent University. In 1974, Laurence completed her final novel, *The Diviners*, for which she received the Governor General's Award and the Molson Prize.

Margaret Laurence started writing when she was young. Her first novel called *Pillars of the Nation* was written at the age of 12 for a contest sponsored by the Manitoba Free Press. A story about pioneer settlers of the West its town was already called Manawaka. It won honorable mention. Throughout high school and college discerning teachers such as Mildred Musgrove and Malcolm Ross recognized in her a fiction writer's talent, but it was not until her African experiences that the talent blossomed.

Intrigued by the extensive oral literature of the Somali people, she searched out and translated examples of the folk tales, love poems, and formal, highly developed gabei, gathering them together in a book called *A Tree for Poverty*, published in 1954. In Ghana she began to write the short stories later collected and published as *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (London, 1963; New York, 1964). Her first novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960), is set in Ghana, and *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), published in the United States as *New Wind in a Dry Land* (1964), is a retrospective account of her experiences in Somaliland.

There she came to a dawning awareness that the themes of freedom, individual dignity, and survival are universal in all literature, applicable to her own Canadian past and present as well as to the desert people of Somalia. Five works set in the Canadian prairie town of Manawaka constitute the major body of Laurence's fiction: *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), *A Bird in the House* (1970), and *The Diviners* (1974). In them, through the voices of five memorable women,

she created a multi-faceted Canadian experience through four generations. In *The Stone Angel* Hagar Shipley tells her story of pride and pain and of learning the meaning of love just before it is too late.

Rachel Cameron of *A Jest of God* is a spinster school teacher, trapped in Manawaka by the demands of her mother and, even more, by her own fears and self distrust. Through the crucial events of one summer she comes to a degree of self knowledge and a limited freedom. Her sister, Stacey MacAindra of *The Fire Dwellers*, lives in Vancouver with her husband and four children. She is battered from all sides by an urban environment that seems monstrously threatening and by the multiple demands on her as wife, mother, and friend. But Stacey is strong, a doer and an activator.

The collection of short stories *A Bird in the House* centers on the young Vanessa MacLeod, her initiation into the mysteries of love and loss, and her gradual acceptance and understanding of Grandfather Connor. As a child she feared and resented him and his tyranny; maturity brings her respect for his strengths and pity for his self-imposed isolation. *The Diviners* is the story of Morag Gunn of Manawaka, a writer of novels. On one level the story unfolds the process of Morag's life from the death of her parents when she was young to the novel's present when she is forty seven, struggling to understand her own life and caught up in a tormenting concern for her daughter, Pique. In its deepest and broadest meaning *The Diviners* is the story of a profoundly religious pilgrimage, the affirmation of faith and the finding of grace.

In 1968 Margaret Laurence published *Long Drums and Cannons*, a study of contemporary Nigerian novelists and playwrights, and in 1976, *Heart of a Stranger*, a collection of personal, often autobiographical essays. She also wrote four children's books: *Jason's Quest* (1970), *The Olden Days Coat* (1979), *Six Darn Cows* (1979), and *A Christmas Story* (1980). Margaret Laurence was a beloved and respected Canadian. She was awarded the Order of Canada, the Molson Prize, and honorary degrees by many universities. The Manawaka novels have been translated into many languages.

Laurence moved to England with her two children and lived there for 10 years. Most of her most influential books were published in this decade: *Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), and *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969).

Beyond the novels and memoir, she published a collection of short stories, *A Bird in the House* (1970), and *Long Drums and Cannons* (1968), a critical study of Nigerian writing in English. Her final novel was *The Diviners* (1974), and her final work was a memoir that she finished before her death, edited by her daughter and published posthumously in 1989.

In 1974 she returned to Canada and resided in Lakefield, Ontario until her death by suicide in 1987. Accolades for Laurence were frequent. She received the Governor General's Award for *A Jest Of God* (1967), Companion of the Order of Canada (1972) and 14 honorary degrees from Canadian universities. She was Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto in 1974 and served as chancellor of Trent University from 1980 to 1983.

The objective is to explore the Canadian Literature and its development in various genres. It explores various writers in Canada and contributions made in the development of Canadian Literature. It also presents the contributions made by the Booker Prize Winner, Margaret Laurence and explores the distinctive features of her novels. An attempt has been made to analyze the various themes of her novels.

## **CHAPTER-II**

## WOMEN IDENTITY

Women are mostly considered as weak and dependent on others by the society. This statement is irrelevant and cannot be agreed upon completely. There are women who fight through their lives all alone, who have to face the obstacles that life has to offer them without anyone by their side, by raising their heads in front of the society unwilling to bow down before them. The character Hagar, created by Margaret Laurence in her work *The Stone Angel* is such a person who does not wish to bow down before the male dominated society. Set in a fictitious town, Manawaka, *The Stone Angel* is a journey through the life and the mind of Hagar. *The Stone Angel* reflects the feministic aspects of the title character.

This paper explores the feminist outlook in *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence. The main objective is to analyze the family relationships, marital life and the downfall of Hagar as a result of her pride. The paper also observes the traits of new woman in the lead character. Feminism is concerned with redefining the world on the basis of the location and experiences of women, noting their oppression and subordination. Feminist criticism has the major object or aim of exposing the mechanism of patriarchy. The feminist outlook of *The Stone Angel* can be described as a kind of back grounding because there is almost no observable consideration of these themes. Laurence admits Hagar's share of responsibility and she urges that men and women alike have been injured by the forces of patriarchal norms which led to Hagar's stubbornness and pride.

Hagar can be identified with the stone which is the central image of the novel, which indicates the pride and blindness in her. Her father, Jason Currie encourages the male virtues in her and neglects certain of the female virtues which he expects her to eventually display. What Hagar forgets is that a lady is first of all a woman. An education which aims at making women decorative and that which will keep her dependent on men can be seen in this work. Her sense of pride plays a major theme throughout the novel.

The events of the past are recovered from a point in time in *The Stone Angel*. Hagar's portrayal throughout the story conveys the extensive difficulty she experiences in communicating with other people, even those closest to her. Hagar refuses her son's

proposal of selling the house because she knows that this would mean her going to Siverthreads, an oldpeople's nursing home. Her refusal springs from her attachment to the house where she has lived almost all her life, and also to face up to her deteriorating physical condition and the thought that she has become a burden for her son and daughter in law.

On the one hand, there is Hagar who was trained in the pros and cons of the importance of appearance, the worldly as well as heavenly rewards of respectable living. On the other hand, there is the Hagar who is driven by the need to unravel 'some truer image infinitely distant'. The clear-cut movement of the narrative is a steady progress across the troubled terrain of the present to a past redeemed, when, during the night spent in the old cannery and in her disturbed state of mind, she mistakes Murray Ferney Lees for John and seeks a fresh understanding. With the arrival of Marvin and Doris at the cannery, we learn that Hagar is dying.

Hagar Shipley is characterized by her pride. She carries with her a pride that is adamant and firm. It affects her relationships, her social interactions and her family. She inherited the trait from her father. The first reference to pride is in the second sentence of the novel: Hagar describes the stone angel as "my mother's angel that my father brought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty" (SA 3).

The pride that she felt in her youth is present when Hagar is grown up. She is frustrated at both her lack of coordination and her arthritis, which causes her to fall. Hagar's pride and stubbornness were the causes of her failed relationships and lack of love in her life.

She immoderate pride destroys her relationship with her father, brother and husband. It leads to the death of her own son, John. Hagar's immense pride is the reason she could not show love or affection to those around her. From an early age she always refused to show emotions because she was too proud to let anyone see her weakness. Hagar was too proud to pretend to be her weak mother even for her dying brother. Even though Hagar married Bram, she didn't really feel any love towards him. Hagar's pride towards her husband resulted only from his looks. She never let him know how she felt about him "I never let him know. I never spoke aloud"(SA 81).



Hagar's neurotic difficulties arise due to her spiritual pride. Hagar's pride also destroyed her relationship with her son John. When John brought Arlene home to stay, Hagar was too proud to let her stay and refused. They were later killed in a car accident and then Hagar realized that if she had compromised then maybe they would have been alive. It was too late when she realized that her pride got in the way of her son's happiness and after her son's death she was unable to show any emotions. Here the relevance of the title *The Stone Angel* comes into play. Just like how the stone angel stands rigid, fixed and without emotions, similarly Hagar was unable to shed a single tear. She stood there like a frozen stone. This reminds me of the poem *No Tears* by Alexander Pushkin. It is a beautiful lyrical poem. The speaker of the poem is a lover who comes to know of the death of his beloved. He speaks of the death of his lover with no tears in his eyes.

He was not able to awaken any feelings for his beloved on hearing the news of her death. The messenger told him the news of her death and he heard it like a stone. He reminisces over his past days with her. He does not have tears to shed for her. Here Hagar also listens to the death news like a stone. She also does not lament her son's death. So here the lover and Hagar can be compared to each other and can be related to the stone angel. Sick with a serious disease and instructed to stay in bed, Hagar is still the proud woman she had always been. When a nurse finds her trying to get to the bathroom on her own, she tries to help Hagar always thinks about her life and her pride and sums up by saying:

“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  
With me and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh,  
My two, my dead. Dead by your hands or by mine? Nothing can take away  
those years (SA 292)”.

This is a key statement in understanding Hagar's character at the end since this fully reveals how Hagar sees her life. Lack of Joy Hagar discovers that she has never been able to be joyful due to her pride. Her inability to express happiness is because in herself exiled state she has failed to realize that joy can be obtained from interacting openly with others and from giving and receiving love. In, many ways, pride is the tragic

flaw in her character. A closer look at Hagar's pride reveals that it is nothing but a mask she unconsciously wears to hide her numerous fears. According to Margaret Atwood, Hagar looks at herself as "a woman who has been in some way petrified in all her life - petrified, in the dual sense of turned to stone and terrified"(Survival 205). She sees love as a kind of weakness. For her love involves a state of dependence on others. Thus, she never realizes her husband's love for her.

Hagar's stubbornness was another cause of both her unhappiness as well as her family's. Due to her stubbornness she didn't find true love. As Hagar got old she required more care. Her daughter-in-law Doris always tried to help her, but she was unwilling to rely on anyone's help. Even when Marvin tried to help, she would just decline and reply: "I can manage quite well, thank-you. Goon now for pity's sake" (SA 33). Hagar's stubbornness and refusal to compromise caused much annoyance to Doris and Marvin. In the end, it is Hagar's stubbornness that kills her.

At one time in life, every individual is faced with the horrible fact of death. In *The Stone Angel*, when Hagar faces the reality of the indications of getting old she is faced with a journey not of her choice, but of destiny. When Hagar first learns the truth that she is getting old and not going to be around much longer, her first reaction is one of denial. She cannot believe that this is actually happening to her. In her mind, she more or less considers death as a horrible dream from which she will eventually wake up and everything will be a bad dream and life will be back to normal. Hagar's greatest difficulty is that her memory is fading away and this enrages her more than anything else, but it also allows her to create an illusion that everything will be fine. Even though Hagar accepts her journey towards death she is determined to do it alone.

By retreating into herself from her surroundings into a world of her own, Hagar concludes that she saves her individuality, but this actually helps her defeat herself. The confrontation between her inner and outer selves continues till the moment of her death. Towards the end of her life, Hagar understands that she has so far led a barred, enclosed existence devoid of all human feelings. She realizes that her life has been a waste.

The characteristic feature of the new woman is clearly seen in Hagar. The period in which the novel was written was a time in which women were under the oppression of men. They were treated as mere puppets in the hands of men. She had great prominence

in fictional writings. But in real life she did not have a voice of her own. Imaginatively, she is of highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. Here, Hagar is shown as a representative of the women of that age who were kept under control first by their fathers, then their husbands and later by their sons. But it is shown clearly that she makes a great effort to free herself from the clutches of the male society. She is a woman who does not wish to be dependent on man and wants to face the world by standing on her own feet. So, the character of Hagar becomes a strong and important one during this phase.

Margaret Laurence also deserves applause for her heroic effort in portraying such a strong character during that period. Women of this age exhibit certain traits of Hagar. This shows that Laurence had foreseen what is to come in the near future and has developed her character. This shows that she wants women to be like Hagar, to be bold enough to stand up on their own feet and raise their voices for their needs. It can also be said that the character of Hagar poses a threat to the patriarchal mindset of the society and proves that women are also able to do something productive in their life and are not always supposed to be behind men.

Rachel and Nick begin sleeping together. This is uncharacteristic for Rachel, who is in no way experienced in the ways of love and sex. Nick is gentle with her, and she finds herself blossoming in their relationship. Because of the intensity of feelings the affair generates in her, Rachel is much more serious about Nick than he is about her. She dreams of a future in which they are together, despite his hot-and-cold treatment of her; at one point, he doesn't call her for several days. Still, she cannot deny the heat, the passion, the bliss Nick triggers deep within her; kept from her mother's interference and the prying eyes of the town, only adds to the excitement.

One day, Rachel makes good on her promise to attend church with Calla. The religious fervor of the service is matched by the liberating sexual fervor Rachel feels inside. As the preacher works the congregation into frenzy, Rachel's inner passions collide with the outer world, and she begins speaking in tongues at the service. Terrified by her outburst, she runs from the church. Calla follows and kisses Rachel on the mouth. Unsure of Calla's intentions if they are the result of the service's heightened emotions or the product of unspoken feelings on Calla's part Rachel runs home.

She continues seeing Nick, but when she misses her period, Rachel fears she is pregnant. She knows that her mother and her community will spurn her if she has a child out of wedlock. She debates committing suicide, even emptying a bottle of pills in her hand, but, ultimately, she throws the pills out the window.

Rachel goes to Dr. Raven to see if she really is pregnant. He informs her that she isn't what she thinks is a pregnancy is just a benign tumor. When she tells Nick, he reveals that he is actually married to a woman in the city. Later, Rachel goes to his parents and finds out that Nick is lying, that he has never been married. Heartbroken by this betrayal, she stops seeing him. With Nick out of her life, Rachel takes the sense of freedom she has attained and channels it into leaving town. At the end of the novel, she goes to British Columbia to live with her sister, finally escaping her mother, the detritus of a broken love affair, and the emptiness of an unfulfilling life.

## **CHAPTER-III**

## **THEME OF FREEDOM AND SURVIVAL**

The search for identity is one of the many themes explored by Margaret Laurence in her novels. This paper will examine the themes of identity in the following novels: *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), and *The Diviners* (1974). All of these novels are a departure from Ms. Laurence's earlier works on Africa and the setting, for the most part, is a Canadian one.

In each of the novels, the central character is a woman haunted by a troubled past that can never be totally exorcised; for each, the ties with the past are enduring and inescapable. However, a conscious awareness of the past and the knowledge that it can never be changed instigates both conscious and sub-conscious voyages of self-discovery in each of the novels. In *The Stone Angel*, Hagar Shipley experiences her revelation at the close of a long life filled with bitterness and recrimination. Rachel Cameron, in *A Jest of God*, after a period of self-examination decides to leave behind a restrictive small town environment in favour of a new way of life.

Stacey MacAindra, in *The Fire-Dwellers*, learns to reconcile her individual identity with that of wife and mother. Morag Gunn of *The Diviners* experiences her moment of truth at a time when she thinks she is losing her gift as a writer. Thus, the search for identity is a thematic concern in each of Margaret Laurence's novels. It is hoped that this paper will reveal various thematic insights and serve to clarify the themes of identity and self-discovery in Ms. Laurence's work.

Margaret Laurence is one of the famous women writers of Canada. She is often considered as the writer of feminine sensibility. Her works are nourished by Canadian culture and life style. She was also a founder of the Writers' Trust of Canada, a non-profit literary organization that seeks to encourage Canada's writing community. Laurence began her literary career by writing short stories. Later she concentrated in writing novels. *The Stone Angel*, the book for which she is best known is set in a fictional small town called Manawaka.

The novel is narrated retrospectively by Hagar Shipley, a ninety-year-old woman living in her eldest son's home in Vancouver. It is published in 1964. The novel is of the

literary looks at the entire life of a person. It is a novel of winding down or completion. It focuses on the challenges presented in late life, chiefly to "discover the tension between affirmation and regret." ( en.paper blog .com)

The Stone Angel is a typical novel of Laurence which depicts her knowledge of feminine psychology and feelings. Hager Shipley, the protagonist shows the zest for life in spite of all the problems and difficulties she face in her life. Hagar Shipley refuses to compromise with those things. Which shaped the outcome of her life as well as the lives of those around her? "Pride was her wilderness and the demon that led her there was fear she was never free, for she carried her chains within hers, and they spread out from her and shackled all she touched.(SA 292)

Hagar means a number of related qualities, such as stubbornness, rebelliousness, wilfulness, and a refusal to respond naturally to her own feelings. Pride made her cover up her real emotions and reactions to people and events. She was always too concerned with what others would think. In old age she says, "What do I care now what people say? She cared too long." Hagar's pride and stubbornness were the causes of her failed relationships and lack of love in her life. She lives her life bravely and enjoys every moment of her life even if she is living in a world of alienation and loneliness. The Canadian experience of alienation, freedom, survival and subjectivity has been treated well in the novel.

The theme of freedom and survival functions as an organizing principle throughout The Stone Angel. The novel exposes the two character technique by juxtaposing the younger, remembered persona with the older remembering persona. In the novel, Laurence depicts the theme of survival. Survival not just in the physical sense, but the survival of human dignity and human warmth. Many critics argue that the prevalent theme in The Stone Angel is that of pride. This theme runs predominantly throughout the novel. But when we analyze the novel, we can see that the theme of freedom and survival run parallel to the main theme.

The narrator of The Stone Angel, Hager Shipley, is characterized by her tendency to manipulate her life. The novel progresses through a number of interior

monologues where no other narrating agent interferes with the thoughts of the narrator. This technique helps in bringing out Hager's inner trauma and its outer manifestations. It also plays a major role in highlighting the theme of freedom and survival. In the novel, Hager's life is mainly divided into three phases- girlhood, youth and old age. Laurence uses unusual and complicated techniques to deal with and portray these three stages. The life of the protagonist is not presented chronologically, but through the alteration between past and present, between memory and experience. We travel with Hager's thoughts experiencing her urge for freedom and finally her acceptance of survival.

Margaret Laurence uses another technique to reveal Hager's unending urge for freedom, that is, by setting the events in various locations. Changes in Research Journal of English Language and Literature locations imply radical changes in her personal attitudes and disposition. It also implies chance for a new beginning and also a release from her encumbering past. Hagar's house is one of the major images integrating her thoughts and memories. Hagar's house and its contents indirectly expose her identity.

Later Hagar realizes that these places do not fulfil the promise of freedom they hold. On the contrary, the more she tries to escape from her past, the more she is caught up in it. Hagar understands freedom as a possibility of resisting her surroundings and remaining completely self-reliant. But her pride prevents her from enjoying her real freedom and her self-reliance which is vital for her survival acquires a form of rigidity in the case of Hagar.

In order to understand the theme of freedom in *The Stone Angel*, we have to associate it with the theme of death. Hagar admits the fact that the fear of death has inhibited her life from her childhood itself. The theme of death occupies a predominant place from the beginning of the novel itself. The beginning is marked by its peculiar setting, that is, in the cemetery which refers to the death of Hagar's mother, who died as a consequence of her birth. The novel demonstrates each of Hagar's steps along the difficult journey of death which is at the same time frightening and terrifying. When Hagar first faced the truth that she is getting old and not going to be around much longer, her first reaction is of denial. Hagar becomes angry with herself and with the world. She rejects everything that would shatter her belief that is strong enough to face life. She



rejects others idea that she is getting old. At one point she says, “Doris believes that age increases natural piety, like a kind of insurance policy falling due...” From Hagar’s self centred view, Marvin and Doris function as her executors, trying to deprive her identity by symbolically taking away her home. Thus in *The Stone Angel* the theme of freedom is linked with the question of human mortality.

Thus fear of death that Hagar experiences can be also viewed with respect to the cultural background in which she lived. The harsh living condition of the Canadian prairies is certainly responsible for creating such a fear. For Hagar, it is no longer the physical aspect of survival that plausibly motivates her fear of death. It is her internal fear, which was a consequence of her sociocultural and geographical situations. As Hagar says,

“I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched”( SA 292).

The vivid portraits in time, character and place have made *The Stone Angel* an unforgettable novel. *The Stone Angel* is a story of Hagar’s transformation and reconciliation. Thus *The Stone Angel* offers a portrait of a remarkable character, Hagar Shipley who even at age ninety confronts her life and even in the middle of her personal failures she fights for survival. Laurence looks at an unlovely life built on uncompromising convictions. She explores the spiritual journey of Hagar Shipley. Different themes such as alienation, pride and ageing are handled brilliantly by Margaret Laurence. *The Stone Angel* is a memorable novel which reveals Margaret Laurence’s ability of characterization and in the broadest sense; the novel is one character’s search for self-identity and survival.

Vivid and intact, Hagar’s memories often fuse with present reality to produce a temporal counterpoint which lends the novel its flashback structure. Indeed, at the novel’s climax, past and present coalesce so completely that Hagar relives the night of John’s death and revises its history. She imagines that John has returned safely from his night out and that she is given the opportunity to apologize which, in reality, she missed. Mr. Lees becomes the tangible medium through which this intersection of past and present, of

reality and desire, takes place. Hagar touches him, believing that she is touching her son. Empathetically recognizing her emotional need, Mr. Lees plays along with Hagar's delusion to its conclusion, allowing her to exorcise her guilt. That night, Hagar is at last able to sleep peacefully.

Hagar's peaceful sleep on her last night at the cannery foreshadows her death several days later in the hospital, but her conscious approach to death is by no means peaceful. In the hospital, Hagar begins to struggle with the meaning of her life more tenaciously than ever. She emerges from the cocoon of memory in which she has been absorbed and begins to overcome her alienating pride and to experience life with joy.

While listening to Doris' clergyman sing the verses of a hymn of rejoicing, Hagar has an epiphany insight into her own wilful role in her life's unhappiness: "Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances"(292). Hagar's insight leads to her repentance for her pride ("Pride was my wilderness")(292).and her regret for the misery she had caused her husband and son ("Oh my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years").To the end, Hagar defiantly refuses to pray, even in private, for God's forgiveness, but her internal confession and repentance lend a mood of Christian reconciliation to her final, spiritual journey into herself. Just before she dies, Hagar recognizes two.

Hagar flees when she finds out that her son Marvin and her daughter in law Doris plan to place her in a nursing home. She finds an abandoned cannery in which to spend the night. When she is found the next day, she is suffering from exposure and is so ill she ends up in a hospital. There, she is secured to the bed to prevent her from running again. This is the point at which the narrative begins to include flashback scenes that are also presented in the present tense.

Hagar's relationships with men seem to have defined her life. Hagar is the daughter of Jason Currie, a successful businessman. Growing up, Hagar is always well dressed and was spoiled to some extent. As she gets older, she does not take on the traits

of her mother, who is weak, but rather her father who is intelligent, persistent, and hard working. She has two older brothers, neither of whom have much business ability in comparison with Hagar. Her father attempts to teach all of his children about business and his trade. Hagar is unable to see how much her father loves her, or that he is trying to instill in her the skills she needs for later in life. Skills that Hagar does not seem to acquire include the ability to nurture others.

When one of her brothers suffers an injury from falling through ice she refuses to care for him and he dies. Later in her life, Hagar is close with her younger son, John, in whom she sees a lot of her own personality. She is distant from her older boy, Marvin. It is clear that Jason is setting Hagar up to take over the family business. She is sent to an Eastern finishing school while her brother is not afforded a similar opportunity. When she returns, her father wants her to take on one of the most important jobs in his company: keeping the accounts. Jason knows that this is the first step in preparing her to take over the business. Hagar, however, sees it as her father's attempt to control her, rather than a showing of his faith in her ability. She decides that she wants to become a teacher. As an act of rebellion, she marries a man named Brampton Shipley, whom her father cannot approve of. As a result, Jason cuts her out of his life. Ultimately, she receives no inheritance from her father.

The marriage of Hagar and Bram is not a happy union. His family is considered to be part of the lower class of Manawaka. He is described as being crude in his ways. He works just enough to get by, but has little ambition. He spends a lot of time with his horses and drinking. He does not consider the needs of Hagar or their sons in any decisions that he makes. There is some level of physical attraction between Hagar and Bram, and while he is clearly self-absorbed, he is not without feelings for his wife. Hagar, having experienced higher education, looks down on Bram and is embarrassed by his lower class manner of speaking. Her position in society has dropped and people no longer see her as Jason Currie's daughter, a status she valued more than being Bram Shipley's wife.

As she grows increasingly bitter over her loss of social status, Hagar becomes increasingly verbally abusive to, and controlling of, Bram. When the couple ultimately

separates she leaves town with their younger son John. As John gets older, Hagar begins to act more and more like her father. She wants to control her son but is unable to, and he returns to Manawaka and marries a girl named Arlene. When John and Arlene die in a car accident, Hagar is unable to feel anything. She feels as if she has turned to stone. As the narrative returns to the present day, Hagar fears becoming dependent on others, while Marvin and Doris feel that they cannot care for her properly at home. When she is in the hospital, her surviving son visits and she makes her peace with him, finally able to express her feelings.

## **CHAPTER-IV**

## CONCLUSION

The *Stone Angel* is a first-person narrative that at times almost breaks into stream of consciousness writing as Hagar, the main character, gradually loses lucidity due to old age and illness. The narrative is divided into ten chapters, each of which shifts back and forth between the present time (the 1960s) and an earlier point in Hagar's life.

The novel is set in the fictional town of Manawaka (inspired by Neepawa), a rural part of Canada where conservative values reign and where archaic notions of gender and social class are taken seriously even in the modern era. The central character, Hagar, is a protagonist only by convention. Given her antagonistic behavior toward everyone else around her, which is rooted in her overwhelming pride, the reader would not be wrong to consider her an anti heroine.

The book consists of two narrative arcs. The present day story shows us the life of Hagar as an elderly woman of at least 90. Hagar lives in an upstairs bedroom in what used to be her house but which now belongs to her son Marvin. When she discovers that Marvin and his wife Doris are planning to put her into a nursing home, Hagar runs away to a rural spot called Shadow Point. She stays overnight in an abandoned house and is eventually found by her son and daughter in law, who immediately take her to the hospital where she is literally belted to the bed at night so that she cannot wander. From time to time, she lapses into the memories that define the second narrative arc. These memories are related to the reader in the present tense, as though they were actually happening simultaneously with the present day narrative.

Hagar spends most of her life being defined by the men to whom she is connected. She is the third child of Jason Currie, a successful self made businessman who has built a thriving shop up from nothing. Her mother died in Hagar's birth, and thus Hagar is raised by a housekeeper whom she calls Auntie Doll. From an early age, it is clear Hagar takes after her stern, calculating, emotionless father; this is evidenced in the way Hagar does not even cry when her father gives her a beating. Hagar's two older brothers, on the other hand, show less aptitude for business, although their father takes pains to teach each of them the basics of the trade. Although Hagar superficially takes

after her father, she is also aware of how his loveless nature has shaped her own stony demeanour.

Hagar is neither particularly maternal nor nurturing. When one of her brothers is injured by falling into a frozen pond, she refuses to nurse him through his subsequent illness on his deathbed. Later, Hagar is also a distant mother toward her two sons, unable to show emotion when Marvin, for instance, goes off to fight in World War I.

The reader can infer that Jason Currie is grooming Hagar to run and possibly inherit his family business. She not her surviving elder brother is sent to a finishing school in the East. Upon her return, her father wants her to keep the account books in the store. This job is vital to the success of the company. But instead of interpreting the gesture as an expression of trust and respect, Hagar regards it as her father's effort to control her. Hagar exclaims that she wants to be a schoolteacher instead, displeasing her father. And then, in a fit of rebellion, Hagar chooses to marry the crude and lower class Brampton "Bram" Shipley. Jason Currie retaliates by cutting Hagar out of his life. Hagar, who was previously positioned to run the store, ends up not receiving any inheritance from him whatsoever.

Hagar's marriage with Bram turns out to be very unhappy. Bram speaks poorly, blows his nose with his fingers, and has the tendency to go out drinking with his lower class friends. He is not particularly hardworking, doing only enough work to survive. Whether Hagar or their two sons are well provided for is not a factor in his decision making. However, Hagar is physically attracted to Bram, at least initially, because of his handsome appearance, his skill as a dancer, and the fact he seems somewhat forbidden from Jason Currie's perspective.

Bram also occasionally shows himself to have a warmth of character, demonstrated when he is heartbroken after his horse disappears. Bram's character creates a difficult predicament for Hagar, who feels it nearly impossible to relate to someone so unrefined. She often feels embarrassed by Bram and realizes her marriage has made it so she is no longer regarded as the highly esteemed Jason Currie's daughter.

The couple mostly spends their time apart, except at night when Bram frequently comes to Hagar for somewhat forceful sexual encounters. The two eventually separate, and Hagar leaves town to live on the coast as a housekeeper, taking her younger son, John, with her. As John grows to adulthood, Hagar starts to turn into her father. She resents that she cannot control her son, who eventually abandons her and returns to Manawaka, where he pairs up with a woman named Arlene, who is the daughter of Hagar's childhood friend, Lottie Dreiser. Hagar visits her hometown after hearing news of Bram's poor health. After Hagar has stayed with him for a few weeks, Bram passes away Hagar decides to stay a few weeks more to provide company for John. But the tragedies continue as John and Arlene are killed in a car accident.

Upon hearing news of her son's death, Hagar is unable to show any emotion. Later, when she is alone, she cannot weep at all. She believes she has turned to stone metaphorically, like the large, blind stone angel in the church cemetery. In the present day, Hagar runs away when she overhears Marvin discussing the possibility of placing her in a nursing home. She associates the nursing home not only with death but also with being controlled. Having spent a lifetime controlling others and getting her own way, Hagar does not wish to become a patient. But Marvin and Doris are no longer capable of caring for her in their home.

Hagar wanders around for a while at Shadow Point, reminiscing, and she meets a stranger named Murray Lees who also spends the night in the abandoned cannery. They speak for a while, and Hagar shares some of her experiences. Later in the morning, the stranger sneaks away to bring help. After a night outdoors, Hagar is sick and suffering from the cold and damp. Marvin and Doris immediately bring Hagar to the hospital a worse destination than even the dreaded nursing home.

Marvin, Hagar's surviving son, visits her in the hospital. Aware that she is death's doors, she finally apologizes to him and starts to express her feelings, even forming relationships with the other patients in the hospital. She drinks a glass of water and her train of thought cuts out, leaving the reader to imagine what is next.



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