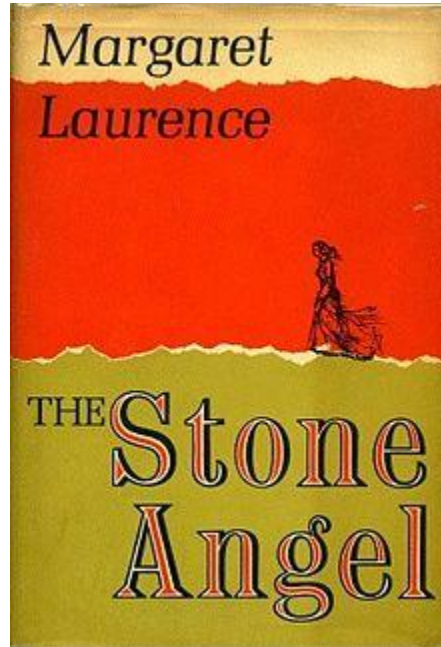


**Feminist Outlook in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel***

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Courtesy:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Stone\\_Angel\\_\(Margaret\\_Laurence\\_novel\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Stone_Angel_(Margaret_Laurence_novel).jpg)

**Abstract**

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.

**Keywords:** women's suppression, Hagar, *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence, Manawaka, feminist outlook, new woman, family relationship, pride.



**Margaret Laurence (1926-19870**

**Courtesy:**

[https://www.thestar.com/life/2014/09/23/margaret\\_laurences\\_cottage\\_is\\_for\\_sale.html](https://www.thestar.com/life/2014/09/23/margaret_laurences_cottage_is_for_sale.html)

### **Feminist Outlook of *The Stone Angel***

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

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 17:6 June 2017

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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.

### **Hagar's Extensive Difficulty in Communicating**

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 old people'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. (*The Stone Angel* 36)

### **Two-sides of Hagar**

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's Pride**

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”. (*The Stone Angel* 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. Her 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”. (*The Stone Angel* 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 any 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 who reacts by saying: "Oh, I hate being helped... I've always done things for myself". (*The Stone Angel* 276) 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. (*The Stone Angel* 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 her self-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**

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... Go on now for pity's sake". (*The Stone Angel* 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.

### **Old Age and Fading Memory**

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.

### **Confrontation between Her Inner and Outer Selves**

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. 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 a few years before her death,

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's Portrayal of a Strong Character**

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.

The world of Manawaka in the novel is the fictionalized small Canadian town which resembles Margaret Laurence's hometown Neepawa. According to Laurence, Manawaka is not just a town, but it has a part to play in the lives of its people. Towards the end of the novel, the author uses the third person narrative to underline the fact that this is not just Hagar's story but the story of many people in Canada. The novel depicts Hagar's psychological journey across time in an effort to discover her present in a realistic frame of mind. In Margaret Atwood's view, Hagar is "the most extended portrait of the frozen old women" in Canada. (*Survival* 205) The novel is a realistic tale of a woman's pride and in the background of a Christian context within which the significance of that pride can be measured.

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