

A Study on the Characterization of Hagar Shipley

Hong Xiao

English Teaching and Research Section, Foundation Courses Department, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, China

Yiwen Gao

Foreign Languages College of Inner Mongolia University, Huhhot, Inner Mongolia, China

Abstract—*The Stone Angel*, the first novel of the Manawaka Cycle, is generally regarded as Laurence's representative work. This novel narrates the story of Hagar Shipley, who struggles to search for her self-identity and freedom all through her life. Hagar's life reflects Canadian ideology and ideological trends during that specific period. Hagar's pride leads to her rebellious life. She seems like the sightless stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery. She cannot realize her pride and prejudice. She cannot understand people around her. People cannot understand her either. Hagar doesn't achieve her self-identity and spiritual freedom until the very end of her life. This thesis intends to analyze the characterization of Hagar and her inner journey towards self-identity and freedom, and further to evaluate Laurence's contribution to Canadian Literature.

Index Terms—Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, Hagar Shipley, feminism, self-identity, freedom

I. HAGAR'S PRIDE

In the Manawaka series, Laurence has used some religious imageries to reveal the various situations of her own heroines, and to mirror their progression from a position of bondage to freedom. Hagar in *The Stone Angel* has a biblical namesake, who is a slave girl whom Abraham took as his concubine. To demonstrate this, it is necessary to look at the story about Hagar the Egyptian in *the Bible*. In Genesis 16, there is a narration about Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, a slave girl (Good News Bible, 1992, p.44):

Abram's wife Sarai had not borne him any children... So she gave Hagar to him to be his concubine. Abram had intercourse with Hagar and she became pregnant. When she found out that she was pregnant, she became proud and despised Sarai...

At last Hagar was expelled into the desert and thus became an outcast because of Sarai's jealousy. While in *The Stone Angel* the modern Hagar is cast out by her own pride. Hagar's pride inherited from her father not only is her strength but also isolated her from her families. Due to her destructive pride, she cannot communicate with people around her. People cannot understand her either. According to Barbara Pell (1972): "like [...] her biblical namesake, Hagar wanders in a metaphoric wilderness and lonely exile because of her pride"(p.90).

A. Hagar's Pride — The Strength of Sustaining

"Titles are important, as they should in some way express the theme of the book in a rather poetic way" (Fabre, 1996). The title *The Stone Angel* comes from the image of the actual stone angel marking the grave of Hagar's mother, who dies in giving birth to her stubborn daughter. Like the stone angel, Hagar seems to be made of stone. Sharing her father's pride, she will not allow herself to express emotions that might be thought of as soft. As cold emotionally as the stone angel, Hagar seems to be made of stone. She bears no sign of femininity and maternity and has no ability to love.

Mr. Currie had bought the statue to mark his wife's grave as well as proclaim his pride in wealth and status.

Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand ...my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to make her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day.

Summer and winter she viewed the town with sightless eyes. She was doubly blind, not only stone but endowed with even a pretense of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank. (Laurence, 1993, p.1)

Where does Hagar's pride come from? Hagar has just inherited the pride from her father. Hagar's mother died early at her birth, leaving Hagar and her two brothers with their stern and high-handed father, who believes in nothing but hard-won financial success. Lacking a mother, Hagar is socialized by her severely proud father. From him, she learns to reject any characteristics that are perceived as weaknesses, both in herself and others. Hagar even equates weakness with women and, thus, recoils from all things female.

"Hagar very naturally wishes to exhibit whatever qualities are consistent with her pride and are admired by others. Her nearest judge is Jason, who encourages the male virtues in her and neglects certain aspects of the feminine virtues which he will expect her eventually to display..." (Rooke, 1982). There is an incidence in Hagar's childhood can illustrate this point well. One day Hagar is punished by Jason, because she does not "mind her manners." Jason uses a foot ruler to beat her hands, expecting she will acknowledge her fault. Yet Hagar is so enraged that she "wouldn't let him see" her cry. "He looked at my dry eyes in a kind of fury, as though he'd failed unless he drew water from them. He struck and struck, and then all at once he threw the ruler down and put his arms around me..." (Laurence, 1993, p.10)

Afterwards, Jason proudly said to his daughter: “You take after me ... You’ve got back bone, I’ll give you that.” (Laurence, 1993, p.10) Encouraged by Jason, Hagar tries her best to be courageous, proud, everything that her father admires, throughout her life. Jason speaks to Auntie Doll about Hagar: “Smart as a whip, she is, that one...” (Laurence, 1993, p.14)

Hagar not only inherits the pride from her father, but also is like her father physically and in temperament:

Only I, who didn’t want to resemble him in the least, was sturdy like him and bore his hawkish nose and stare that could meet anyone’s without blinking an eyelash (Laurence, 1993, p.8).

Then where does Jason’s pride come from? In Jason’s time, the Manawaka people, the new-comers and pioneers of the land, take great pride in financial success, in “getting ahead”. Jason’s individual and familial history embody the pioneer myth of the stoic, successful immigrant. Jason is Scottish Highland descent, his family motto is “Gainsay Who Dare.” Jason is the epitome of the hard-working, stern, controlling father figure. He lives the family motto, challenging anyone to forbid him anything. Jason always reminds his children of their once noble origin, and tries to instill in Hagar both the Christian and practical values he himself holds to be true, because he thinks that Hagar takes after him and that Hagar has “got backbone” (Laurence, 1993, p.10). So Hagar inherits from her father a strong sense of pride.

Like the stone angel that is bigger and costlier than all the rest, Jason sees himself as superior to the others in Manawaka, Hagar shares this pride from an early age. She and Jason compare themselves to others in the community with regard to how successful the head of the family is. Charlotte Tappen is worthy to be Hagar’s best friend as she is the doctor’s daughter. Lottie Drieser is at the bottom of the social ladder as she does not have the protection of a father at all. Henry Pearl is ridiculed because his father is poor. The fathers of these children have left them open to scorn in the community. Wealthier males are respected and rule the community and privilege their families with their power.

B. *Hagar’s Pride — The Force to Destroy*

Hagar’s pride, as well as the destruction arising thereof, is “a two-edged sword, striking inward and outward simultaneously” (Laurence, 1993, p.48), not only hurting people living around her, but also making herself suffer from her self-contradiction. Her destructive pride inhibits her relationships with her brothers, her husband and her sons and even causes her alienation from herself. Taylor (1996) comments that “Hagar loses the fullness of her potential self when she cuts herself off from others” (p.162). To drive this point home, five groups of relationships will be discussed, which include Hagar’s detachment from her brothers, Hagar’s separation from her husband, Hagar’s loss of her favorite son John, Hagar’s “escape” from her remaining son Marvin, and finally, Hagar’s deviation from her true self.

Firstly, Hagar has never come close to her brothers. Hagar’s father despises the “feminine” gentleness of Matt and the sickly weakness of Dan. However, as what we have mentioned earlier, Jason takes great pride in Hagar, because she takes after him and has got “backbone” (Laurence, 1993, p.10). Hagar not only inherits Jason’s pride, but also inherits Jason’s hatred of even the appearance of weakness. So she also despises her brothers, although she loves them in her inner heart. There is an incidence can well demonstrate Hagar’s detachment from her brothers:

When Dan is dying of pneumonia, Matt tries to persuade the teenaged Hagar into wearing their mother’s plaid shawl which Dan has kept in his dresser since he was a kid to comfort the dying Dan. However, Hagar refuses to do so for she detests her mother as a “meek woman”. “But all I could think of was that meek woman I’d never seen, the woman Dan was said to remember so much and from whom he’d inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her — it was beyond me” (Laurence, 1993, p.25). Hagar’s pride has prevented her from comforting her brother and loving him freely. Furthermore, she does not know anything about that barrier in her mind. “...I was crying, ... wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough.” (Laurence, 1993, p.25) Yes, “...unable to bend enough”, this is also an acknowledgement of her inflexible pride. And owing to Hagar’s pride, she becomes detached from her brothers.

Secondly, Hagar deviates from her husband Bram Shipley. The marriage of Hagar to Bram is actually a daring defiance against her stern father. In the eyes of the townspeople, Bram is “as common as dirt” and has been “seen with half-breed girls” (Laurence, 1993, p.47); to Hagar’s father, Bram is “lazy as a pet pig” with no “get-up-and-go” (Laurence, 1993, p.46). At a time when “not a decent girl in this town would wed without her family’s consent” (Laurence, 1993, p.49), “Hagar tries a rebel against him [her father] by marrying a source of earth energy, the disreputable but attractive farmer Bram” (Atwood, 1972, p.136). Although Bram is a good-looking man, he is coarse and poorly educated. Hagar “could have been proud, going to the town or church with him, if only he’d never opened his mouth” (Laurence, 1993, p.70). When Hagar marries Bram, she plans to change him to meet her father’s standards. However, after they have lived under the same roof for some time, Hagar cannot put up with Bram’s lack of ambition and success, his crude manners and speech, or his drunken public clowning. When she finds Bram’s conversion to her ways impossible, Hagar gradually deviates from him.

Hagar’s pride and her rejection of all things female prevent her from accepting Bram’s attempts at kindness or intimacy. When they are first married he gives her a “cut-glass decanter with a silver top” and Hagar “laid it aside and thought no more about it” (Laurence, 1993, p.51). Valuing a gift of beauty but minimal utility, no doubt, strikes Hagar as something a woman would do. Therefore, she does not allow Bram any pleasure by showing him emotion that indicates “softness” on her part; nor does she outwardly acknowledge the pleasure she gets from having sex with him. This pleasure is another gift from Bram that she is too proud to admit to.

It was not so very long after we wed, when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never let

him know. I never spoke aloud, and I made certain that the trembling was all inner. He had innocence about him, I guess, or he'd have known. How could he have not 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 a thing, and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead (Laurence, 1993, p.81).

Taylor (1996) says, "[t]o show response would be to accept being a woman. Denying her womanliness also means denying her sexuality" (p.163). To exhibit joy in sex or tenderness toward her husband for giving her pleasure is the same "intolerance of weakness". Although Hagar wants to be with Bram in her inner heart, her destructive pride forbids herself to be so fragile. So Hagar's separation from her husband is unavoidable.

Thirdly, Hagar finally has lost her favorite son John forever. Hagar likes her younger son John because he takes after Jason. John is quick to learn and is better spoken than Bram and Marvin. Hagar puts all her hope on John, telling him of the once noble origin of the Currie family, their clan and their motto: Gainsay Who Dare, as well as the Christian and practical values which her father tried to cultivate in her. She passes on the plaid pin of the Currie family to John and tries to instill in him the pride that her father gave her. Ironically, the plaid pin of the Currie family is later traded by John to another guy for a jackknife. She buys a gramophone, and hangs some pictures in their house — for she thinks it "a bad thing [for a son] to grow up in a house with never a framed picture to tame the walls" (Laurence, 1993, p.82) — and she does all these just for the decent upbringing of John. Just as her father once put his hope on her, and as a way out of her failed marriage, Hagar puts all her hope on John. However, Hagar has at last lost her dearly-beloved son for the same reason: her destructive pride.

As a youth, John is embarrassed that his father is known as "Bramble Shitley" (Laurence, 1993, p.131) but, as he ages, he becomes more like his father and does not care what Hagar or others think of him. Hagar is mistaken in her evaluation of John. Hagar recalls that John, since his early childhood, is "wild as mustard seed in some ways" and has "a knack for gathering the wildest crew" (Laurence, 1993, p.127). Although John is an able and resourceful young man, John is a Shipley, not a Currie. He trades the plaid pin for a jackknife, and he later sells the knife to buy cigarettes. So "the emblem of the Currie pride," the plaid pin, "which has no value for John, goes up in smoke" (Baum, 1996).

John and Arlene love each other, but Hagar does not like Arlene and refuses to accept this girl as her future daughter-in-law. Because Arlene was Lottie's daughter, Lottie's "no-name" and her uncertain paternity are not worth Hagar's consideration, though Lottie is Hagar's childhood mate. Therefore, Hagar despises Lottie's daughter, she cannot put up with John's decision of staying with Arlene. Then Hagar and Lottie decide to interfere in John and Arlene's relationship. They plan to send Arlene to go to the coast, Lottie for earning some money for Arlene's marriage and Hagar for separating the young couple at least for the time being. John, seeing his beloved leaving him with no hope of a reunion in the future, ends his life, and that of Arlene's as well, by driving "in a stupid, pointless, drunken dare, hopelessly rebelling against the Depression, poverty, and the hostile environments that Hagar has partially contrived" (Thomas, 1975, p.70).

Hagar tries to rule John's whole life and fashion him in the image that was desirable to her. Hagar's pride blinded her to the real love that existed between John and Arlene. She cannot see that she's had a bad influence on John, and Arlene actually is a good girl. She had never talked seriously to either of them. As a result of her strong objection to the young couple, they leave Hagar's house, which leads to the accident and death of the two. She cannot bend enough to see outside herself, and her concerns are not with the happiness of her son but with what other people would say if they knew what was going on — with her being able "to hold up her head in town" (Laurence, 1993, p.199). As a consequence of her destructive pride, John and Arlene die foolishly and needlessly, and thus Hagar has lost her favorite son forever.

Fourthly, there is distance between Hagar and her remaining son Marvin. Hagar never cares her elder son, Marvin. Hagar ignores Marvin's good qualities because she dislikes his resemblance to Bram's family, her pride inherited from her father makes her feel that the Shipleys are all "common as bottled beer" (Laurence, 1993, p.32). Their manners and grammar do not meet her finishing school standards. Hagar despises Marvin's inarticulateness and his slowness in wit. She "almost felt as though Marvin weren't [her] son" (Laurence, 1993, p.62).

Even though young Marvin tries in every way to please her, he cannot gain her approval. As a child, Marvin has always tried to serve his mother well, doing his chores ably and hanging around her, futilely hoping for words of praise or affection. But he has never been important to his mother, and his childhood is mainly spent helping his father out in the fields.

A startling example of Hagar devaluing the positive in Marvin is seen when she tells us. When Marvin joins the army to fight in France, Hagar does not show much concern or affection. "He fought at Vimy Ridge, and lived through it... He wrote home once a month and his letters were always very poorly spelled" (Laurence, 1993, p.130). Most mothers would take joy in a son's communication. Yet Hagar pays more attention to what she sees as an unforgivable flaw and almost ignores his accomplishments and continued devotion to her. In her later years, Marvin and his wife, Doris, take care of Hagar and by doing so increases her dislike for his "femaleness". When Marvin and Doris decide to send Hagar to the nursing home to get better care, Hagar does not want to leave her house and throws this hurtful barb, "If it were John, he'd not consign his mother to the poorhouse" (Laurence, 1993, p.75). Hagar's destructive pride blinds her to Marvin's worthiness and puts a serious block in their relationship.

Lastly, Hagar's pride deviates her from her authentic self. Hagar leads a life deprived of the recognition of her real

self. Through examining Hagar's relations with her bothers, her husband, and her sons, we can clearly see Hagar's dilemma, she has never had a moment to herself, she is separated from her true self.

There is a typical incidence can demonstrate this point well. Hagar begins to enjoy sex very soon after her marriage, and she has "sucked" her "secret pleasure from his skin" (Laurence, 1993, p.100). She feels her readiness and climax in having sex with Bram, but her pride makes her repress herself and manages not to let Bram know, because she wants to "keep my [her] pride intact, like some maidenhead" (Laurence, 1993, p.81). "Hagar's obdurate nature ensures her survival but isolates her from meaningful human contact" (Thomas, 1975, p.165), yet sometimes the true feelings find their way out to betray herself, despite her overruling pride. When she has finally left Manawaka and Bram, she missed him terribly, though she tried hard not to:

I'd waken, sometimes, out of a half sleep and turn to him and find he wasn't beside me, and then I'd be filled with such a bitter emptiness it seemed the whole of night must be within me and not around or outside at all. There were times when I'd have returned to him, just for that (Laurence, 1993, p.160).

Hagar cannot obtain her self-recognition just because she cannot mediate between the two confronting forces in her. On the one hand, she is driven by the strong force of being Jason Currie's dignified daughter, which requires her to "behave properly" and not to condescend to the common ones. On the other hand, there is a compelling force in her that requires her to be a warm, gentle and loving mother. Hagar is torn up by those two forces for so long that she fails to pull herself together in dealing with others. And finally, she realizes the dilemma: "I've never had a moment to myself, that's been my trouble" (Laurence, 1993, p.93). Hagar's trouble is "a temperament torn between impulses of order and disorder, refinement and toughness, propriety and desire, impulses justified in her own mind by her pride in her family and the urgency of her own passions." (Verduyn, 1988, p.72) In short, Hagar's pride has not only alienated her from all her closest ones, but also deviated her from her true self.

In a word, Hagar's pride inherited from Jason compels her to be courageous, proud, brainy, everything that her father admires. As a result of her irremediable pride, Hagar is gradually turned into a cold and blind woman, just like the sightless stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery. As a result of her destructive pride, Hagar fails to get love, satisfaction or joy from her brothers, her husband, or her sons. As a result of her inflexible pride, Hagar cannot gain her self-identity. She does not understand why there are always conflicting thoughts within her and does not know how to deal with those conflicting forces. The only way out is to rebel, and to seek her true self.

II. HAGAR'S REBELLION

In search for an autonomous life in a male-dominated world, Hagar has struggled against what prevents her in different ways. Hagar's life is her rebellious journey towards self-acknowledgement. Her life is made up of a series of rebellions: to rebel against her rigid, sanctimoniously Presbyterian father, to rebel against her feckless husband, to rebel against the benevolence of her elder son. Hagar struggles to maintain her independence and obtain her self-recognition all through her life. Under the impact of her father, Hagar believes that any evidence of warm emotions, of human dependency, is a sign of intolerable weakness of character. As a result, Hagar cuts herself off from much of the joys of life — joy in marriage, in children, and in social intercourse. Hagar, behaves exactly like a fighter from start to finish. She struggles to seek her true identity and freedom. In other words, Hagar is searching for her proper position in a patriarchal world. In order to achieve these, she has to take on the form of rebellion. To make this point clear, the following passages will elaborate Hagar Shipley's three rebellions which lead to the discovery of her real self and the return to her true identity.

A. *Hagar's Rebellion against Her Father*

Born with a privileged childhood as the daughter of Manawaka's only merchant Jason Currie, Hagar grows up in a Scottish Highlander family with the absence of a mother. Being a self-made man, Jason has "pulled himself up by his bootstraps" (Laurence, 1993, p.7). Hagar's first recollection of her father is a stern taskmaster who makes her learn weights and measures, scolds her for her inattention, but never praises her when she recites correctly. Jason Currie can be regarded as a God image in this novel who wants to establish and proclaim a dynasty of his own. Jason Currie symbolizes authority, the patriarchal power. He always tries to control Hagar's life. However, what Jason forgets is that Hagar resembles himself very much. Hagar dares to gainsay.

Both as a child and as a young woman, she repeatedly challenges her father's authority.

When Jason hits Hagar because she has "no regard for [his] reputation" (Laurence, 1993, p.9), she refuses to cry. And she ultimately refuses to be his commodity. After Dan dies, Matt stays behind to work in the store, Hagar is sent off to Toronto for two years to "the training ring, the young ladies' academy in Toronto" (Laurence, 1993, p.42). When she returns in the image of an upper class lady, Jason looks at her and sees her as a "credit" (Laurence, 1993, p.43) to himself. He does not regard Hagar as an individual woman with the identity but regards Hagar as another one of his successes. Like any other merchandise to be purchased and used, Hagar is a commodity for her father's advancement. Her value to him is that she will improve his image in the community: "'It was worth every penny for the two years,' he said. 'You're a credit to me. Everyone will be saying that by tomorrow'" (Laurence, 1993, p.43). Hagar tells Jason that she wants to teach in the South Wachakwa school, Jason rails against such improper misuse of his property, and Hagar slightly relents because she feels as though she owes him her labour for his expenditure on her training. So she

continues to work at her father's store. Two years later, Hagar begins with a deliberate act of rebellion against her father. This time her desire and will are stronger than his; Hagar announces to Jason that she intends to marry Bram Shipley:

Instead, I looked at him just as hard as he was looking at me.

"I've worked for you for three years."

"There's not a decent girl in this town would wed without her family's consent," he said. "It's not done."

"It'll be done by me," I said, drunk with exhilaration at my daring.

"I'm only thinking of you," Father said. "Of what's best for you. If you weren't so pig-headed, maybe you could see that."

Then, without warning, he reached out a hand like a lariat, caught my arm, held and bruised it, not even knowing he was doing so.

"Hagar —" he said. "You'll not go, Hagar."

The only time he ever called me by my name. To this day I couldn't say if it was a question or a command. I didn't argue with him. There never was any use in that. But I went, when I was good and ready, all the same (Laurence, 1993, p.49).

Jason disowns Hagar for her act of defiance, her marriage to Bram. Hagar separated herself from her family forever. The significance of Hagar's rebellion is that she gets rid of the control of Jason Currie. Hagar is provided the possibility of finding and being herself, not just as Jason Currie's daughter. She can lead her own life. However, Hagar's marriage to Bram just makes Hagar move from one patriarchal pioneer figure to another.

B. *Hagar's Rebellion against Her Husband*

Hagar's second rebellion is against her husband Bram. Hagar's marriage to Bram can only be seen as a daring rebellion against her father. Hagar does not realize that her choice is not a meaningful one. Her marriage to Bram is impossible to secure for her the kind of life she desires. The illusion of a romantic yet tidy life she cares much about are alien to the coarse farm house of Bram, let alone the fulfillment of Hagar's searching for her self-identity.

Soon after their marriage, the Currie pride and academy education Hagar has received cause her to look down the very qualities in Bram that she has been drawn to. Hagar always tries to polish Bram, to instill in him the respect for institutions, according to her father's image. Their battle of wills hurts him, her, and their relationship, which finally causes Hagar's second rebellion against her husband.

There are some incidences which finally urge Hagar to make her decision to leave Bram to start a kind of new life.

On the day before the birth of their first child, Hagar asks Bram whether he likes it to be a boy or a girl, and he answers:

"I sure hope it's a boy," he said.

...

"Why should you care if it's a boy?" I asked.

Bram looked at me as though he wondered how

I could have needed to ask.

"It would be somebody to leave the place to," he said.

I saw then with amazement that he wanted his dynasty no less than my father had. In that moment when we might have touched our hands together, Bram and I, and wished each other well, the thought uppermost in my mind was — the nerve of him. (Laurence, 1993, p.101)

From these words, Hagar sees that both Jason Currie and Bram Shipley possess a dream of dynasty and a strong desire to establish a world of their own where they can control everything. Hagar's marriage to Bram just makes Hagar move from one patriarchal pioneer figure to another.

When Hagar finds it hard for John to bear the bad reputation of Bram Shipley, she decides to leave Bram with John. Because she wants to provide a better living surroundings for her favorite son John, who does not get along well with Bram either, and make John receive better education. She plans to turn John into a decent man like his grandfather, Jason Currie. So she has to leave Bram.

Finally, the last thing which urges Hagar to leave Bram to obtain her "truer image", to keep searching for her freedom happens on a trip into Manawaka one Saturday. Hagar goes into town with John to sell eggs, so she can have some money of her own. She goes to one house which belongs to her childhood acquaintance, Lottie. Lottie's daughter, Arelene, answers the door and announces Hagar as the "egg woman." Lottie's husband, Telford Simmons, who is also Hagar's childhood acquaintance, now is a bank manager. After leaving bank manager's house, Hagar begins to try and elevate herself by speaking deprecatingly about Telford Simmons: "Such a homely boy he used to be... and none too clever, either. He's got there more by good-luck than good management, if you ask me" (Laurence, 1993, p.132-33). When John tells her to shut up, she realizes that she has lost sight of herself and needs to look closely at who she has become. Hagar enters into a public washroom. She needed a mirror to look at herself closely. "How a person could change so much and never see it. So gradually it happens" (Laurence, 1993, p.133). She sees a person clothed in men's apparel, with an altered body, and a face that does not belong to her.

I was wearing, I saw, a man's black overcoat that Marvin had left. It was too big for John and impossibly small for Bram. It still had a lot of wear left in it, so I'd taken it. The coat bunched and pulled up in front, for I'd put weight on my hips, and my stomach had never gone flat again after John was born. Twined around my neck was a knitted scarf,

hairy and navy blue, that Bram's daughter Gladys had given me one Christmas. On my head a brown tam was pulled down to keep my ears warm. My hair was gray and straight. I always cut it myself. The face — a brown and leathery face that wasn't mine. Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant (Laurence, 1993, p.133).

After leaving the public Rest Room, she becomes acutely aware of her present situation of her life. She thinks that she firstly need to buy some clothes that would "render [her] decent" (Laurence, 1993, p.134). She must return to her father's space where no longer belongs to her father any more in order to remake herself. However, she hears her husband's voice in that store. Through the rest of the noise she hears Bram asking for stale doughnuts, but the clerk understands Bram's request as a request for lemon extract to sell to Charlie Bean. The clerk says to the manager, "They get three times the price for it, from the Indians, for drinking" (Laurence, 1993, p.135). Hagar does not care about whether the clerk's assessment is true. She sees her life magnified before her, and it is a life that she knows she must leave.

All these urge Hagar to rebel against Bram's control and leave Manawaka with John to begin with a kind of new life.

C. *Hagar's Rebellion against Her Elder Son*

The heavy guilt in Hagar's part for the death of John and Arlene becomes the heavy burden of Hagar, which not only makes her nature twisted and distorted but also influences her relationship with Marvin, her elder son she has neglected before. After John's death, Marvin and Doris move in with Hagar to take care of her. At that time, Hagar is a proud, bitter, and sick old woman, with a whip-tongue to cut and mock at her son and daughter-in-law, even at herself. It is hard to get along well with such an aging and irascible Hagar for Marvin and Doris. As time goes on, Hagar's health condition becomes worse and worse. Marvin and Doris become old as well. They feel that they cannot take care of Hagar well because of Hagar's falls and memory lapses. So they decide to put Hagar in Silver Thread, a nursing home. However, Hagar's rebellious pride still refuses to live in the nursing home. She does not want to live in the nursing home because she does not want to lose her own house and all her belongs. To Hagar, these objects cannot be discarded or abandoned. These objects are what define her identity and what link her to her past. Hagar feels that when these possessions are removed, she herself will cease to exist. What's more, Hagar is always independent. She cannot imagine that she will be taken care of like a baby. Hagar cannot bear these, so her rebellion against her elder son is unavoidable.

So when Marvin and Doris finally decide to send Hagar to the nursing home, Hagar has realized that the only way to change her fate is to rebel against them, escaping to a remote place so that she can keep her independence and freedom.

III. HAGAR'S AWAKENING

Laurence believes, before the characters can rise up to set themselves free, they must achieve confidence in themselves; before they can express themselves and communicate with others, they must first know themselves. Before Hagar achieves her spiritual freedom, she must first know herself. So she struggles to search for her self-identity and spiritual freedom all her life.

At the age of ninety, when at the mercy of her physical debility and her revolting against its manifestations, Hagar wrangles with Marvin and Doris who try to help her. Fearing that they might send her to the nursing home, she makes a desperate attempt to flee to the Shadow Point, a deserted fish cannery. This journey, as the road sign "To The Point" indicates, leads right to the revelation of her authentic self, and this "jailbreak is a descent into self which is healing" (Morley, 1991, p.78). On her way and during her staying there, she finds that she cannot control her bodily functions: how she needs to stop to compose herself again and again, how long and how difficult it is for her to recover from a fall to the ground, and how forgetful she is to go there without bringing a single drop of water. Trapped in the improper functions of her body, she recalls the services Marvin and Doris have provided her. She once thought that they are too fussy in offering their filial duties, yet she knows now how important and necessary their care means to her. The two levels of narration — the present that carries Hagar from her determination to avoid the nursing home to the cannery and then to the hospital after her rescue, and the past that carries her retrospection upon her life — come to fuse together "here in the cannery and all the errors [her errors] have been laid bare and admitted" (Thomas, 1975, p.65).

During her stay in the cannery Hagar encounters Murray F. Lees. Lees produces a jug of wine, with Hagar making her offering of soda biscuits, the two enjoy their banquet. Hagar drinks a lot with Lees, and listens to his story of losing his infant son in a fire. Lees lives with the tragedy of his son's death; the child was burned to death in a fire at his home, while his parents were praying at the Redeemer's Advocates' Tabernacle for a revelation about the coming of the New Kingdom. From time to time he escapes with a jug of wine. Here, Laurence's immediate point is that Hagar is not alone in her grief. Lees, his wine, and his compulsive telling of his tragic life story propel Hagar towards her final enlightenment and her only possible escape from guilt and self-torment: she comes to confess to him the part of her life she has always been unable to face — her responsibility in John's death. In her confusion, Hagar mistakes Mr. Lees for her lost son, John, and tells him that she won't come between John and Arlene. Mr. Lees pretends to be John and forgives her. This allows Hagar to forgive herself. For the first time, she cries about how she has hurt her son, John. Hagar never cries for her dear deceased ones — Dan, Bram, John — because she despises female weakness, and also because her pride inherited from her father has taught her never to show her emotion in public. Her confession and cry make her return true and female, and also face her past.

Lees is Hagar's guide, even though he is not a good example himself, he guides her towards the proper attitude toward life. Hagar comes to learn that "how you see a thing — it depends which side of the fence you're on" (Laurence, 1993, p.224) and that "things never look the same from the outside as they do from the inside" (Laurence, 1993, p.229), Hagar is more inclined to consider other people's feelings.

Later, Lees reports Hagar's whereabouts to Marvin to rescue the old woman. Lees explains, "It was for your own good." Hagar replies, "Can't stop... Born in us — meddle, meddle — couldn't stop to save our souls" (Laurence, 1993, p. 252). But then Hagar realizes that Lees saves her life. And "compulsively, hardly knowing what I'm doing, I reach out and touch his wrist" (Laurence, 1993, p.253). "I didn't mean to speak crossly. I — I'm sorry about your boy." Speaking these special words is a breakthrough for Hagar. Lees helps Hagar to forgive herself. Now Hagar offer gesture and words to help Lees live.

Hagar is sent to the hospital. At first she is again too proud to accept the company of women. She is cantankerous, her thoughts and words are hurtful weapons, and she has no tolerance for those around her on the ward. She feels superior to women, such as Mrs. Dobereiner who speaks German, as they are "foreigners" (Laurence, 1993, p.260). For Hagar, simply being a woman is foreign. She does not believe that she is calling out in pain and delirium in the same way that they are (Laurence, 1993, p.261). Her pride does not accept this picture of herself. Luckily for Hagar, a Good Mother is there to help her continue her search for her self-identity and spiritual freedom. Elva Jardine guides her to the final stage in her journey towards her spiritual freedom. For Hagar, this community must be a female one where she can learn to value her own female qualities. Hagar learns from Mrs. Jardine because Elva is tough in spirit, as well as compassionate toward other women and tender in the love she exhibits toward her husband.

Hagar has believed in female weakness and she has embraced what she sees as male strength until it has become the core of her pride. With the guidance of the women in the hospital, Hagar discovers that she can integrate the male and female parts of the psyche and achieve wholeness and complete her voyage. She must accept that women's qualities are as valuable as men's qualities.

Initially, she does not respect Elva because she represents women as "flimsy as moth wings" — exactly what Hagar has loathed throughout her life (Laurence, 1993, p.269). When Hagar sees that Elva shows strength and kindness for others in the face of death, her opinion changes. Sandra is strong and weak at the same time. She admits to being afraid of an operation, yet, she has the courage to stay with Hagar though she is initially afraid to be with someone who is dying. Through the examples of these women, Hagar is able to reconcile being "hard" and "soft" at the same time. In accepting these representatives of her mother, she can deny the hold that her father's values have had on her.

During Hagar's staying in the hospital, Mr. Troy comes to visit Hagar again. Until now she has seen the minister as not strong enough to be worthy of her respect. When she hears him sing she realizes that having joy is more important than having power. Joy allows one to cherish life and love.

This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always, have wanted that — simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or in 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 — oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years. (Laurence, 1993, p.292)

This admission by Hagar shows that she has successfully completed her quest. With nothing to fear, with her self left alone, she gains a new understanding of her free and authentic self. She makes amends in small ways such as when she takes back the harsh words she flings at Doris.

"Doris — I didn't speak the truth. He [Mr. Troy] sang for me, and it did me good" (Laurence, 1993, p.293).

Hagar apologizes to Marvin: "You've not been cranky Marvin. You've been good to me always, a better son than John" (*The Stone Angel*, 304). Marvin shows abundant love and sacrifices a lot for his mother. Marvin emerges as a credible character.

Here at the end of her life Hagar learns that sometimes a lie spoken with "a kind of love" (Laurence, 1993, p.307) is better than the truth.

Something truly free that I've done in ninety years. I can think of only two acts that might be so, both recent. One was a joke — yet a joke only as all victories are, the paraphernalia being unequal to the event's reach. The other was a lie — yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love (Laurence, 1993, p.307).

The joke here refers to her clumsy and unsuccessful fleeing to the cannery away from the care of Marvin and Doris, and the lie at last told by her is that Marvin is to her a better son than John. Here, Hagar breaks through her self-imposed toughness and begins to express her human and maternal response more openly, more compassionately. By the end of the novel, Hagar is not a stone angel again but a woman with love. She dies peacefully, with a measure of self-recognition, freedom, and joy. She acquires the objects of her life's quest.

REFERENCES

- [1] Atwood, M. (1972). *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd.
- [2] Baum, R. M. (1996). Self-Alienation of the Elderly in Margaret Laurence's Fiction. In Greta M. Coger (Eds.). *New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence: Poetic Narrative, Multiculturalism, and Feminism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 153-60.
- [3] Fabre, M. (1996). The Angel and the Living Water: Metaphorical Networks and Structural Opposition in *The Stone Angel*. In Greta M. Coger(Eds.), *New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence: Poetic Narrative, Multiculturalism, and Feminism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 17-28.
- [4] Good News Bible.(1992) New York: American Bible Society.
- [5] Laurence, M. (1993). *The Stone Angel*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- [6] Morley, P. (1991). *Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press (Revised edition).
- [7] Pell. B. H. (1972). *Margaret Laurence's Treatment of the Heroine*. M.A. Thesis, University of Windsor.
- [8] Rooke, C. (Summer, 1982). A Feminist Reading of the Stone Angel. *Canadian Literature*, 93: 26-41.
- [9] Taylor, C. (1996). Coming to Terms with the Image of the Mother in *The Stone Angel*. In Greta M. Coger(Eds.), *New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence: Poetic Narrative, Multiculturalism, and Feminism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 161-172.
- [10] Thomas, C. (1975). *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- [11] Verduyn, C. (1988). *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation*. Peterborough: Broadview.

Hong Xiao, female, Han Chinese, was born in the City of GuiYang, GuiZhou Province in 1980. She got her Bachelor's degree of Art at School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Beijing Normal University, in 2003, and her Master's degree of Art at School of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, P. R. China, in 2005.

Lecturer Hong Xiao has been teaching English in English Language Teaching and Researching Section, Foundation Courses Department of Sichuan Fine Art Institute from July 2005. Her researching fields are English Literature, Cross-culture study and Art Education.

Yiwen Gao, female, Han Chinese, was born in Baotou, Inner Mongolia, P. R. China in 1981. She graduated from Inner Mongolia University and got her B.A. of English literature in 2003 and obtained M.A. of English literature in Inner Mongolia University in 2008.

Lecturer Yiwen Gao has been teaching English as a college teacher of EFL at Foreign Languages College, Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, P. R. China from July 2003. Her research interest is Canadian Literature.