The Stone Angel Study Guide

The Stone Angel by Margaret Laurence

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Introduction

In ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley, the restless, crotchety, and proud protagonist, Laurence creates a memorable character who reveals what it is like to be very old, physically frail, dependent on others, and tormented by memories of the past. Laurence also movingly depicts the sudden dawning of realization in Hagar's mind of where she has gone wrong in life, and what has been the cause of her unhappiness. The novel suggests there is hope that even those most set in their ways can find the inspiration to change for the better, and that change, even at the last stage of life, is never wasted.

The Stone Angel is also a realistic portrayal of life in the prairie towns of western Canada from the late nineteenth century to the Depression of the 1930s and beyond. Laurence went on to write four more books set in the same region, and these, together with *The Stone Angel,* are collectively known as the Manawaka series. Critics regard the series as one of the finest achievements in contemporary Canadian fiction. *The Stone Angel* in particular has continued to win respect for its structure, in which present and past are interlinked, its language, which captures the forms of Canadian speech of the period, and the universality of its theme, which at its broadest is one character's search for self-understanding and redemption.

Author Biography

Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemyss on July 18, 1926, in the small town of Neepawa, Manitoba, Canada, to Robert Wemyss and Verna Simpson Wemyss. Like Jason Currie, Hagar's father in *The Stone Angel,* Laurence's father was of Scottish protestant ancestry. And just as Hagar is raised without a mother, Laurence's mother died when Laurence was four. She was raised by her aunt, Margaret Campbell Simpson.

In 1944 Laurence won a scholarship to study English at United College in Winnipeg, where she published poetry and stories in the college paper. After graduation she worked as a reporter for *The Winnipeg Citizen,* and in 1949 she married Jack Laurence, a civil engineer. In 1950 her husband's work took him to the British protectorate of Somaliland (now Somalia) in Africa. In 1954, Laurence published a translation of Somali poetry, *A Tree for Poverty.* After living in Ghana from 1952 to 1957, the Laurences returned to Canada. Laurence's first novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960), and her collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963) were both set in Ghana.

In 1962, Laurence separated from her husband and moved to England with her two children. Two

years later, *The Stone Angel* was published. The fictional town of Manawaka in which much of the story takes place is based on the Neepawa of Laurence's childhood and youth. *The Stone Angel* was the first of five books by Laurence that have become known as her Manawaka series, which together create a realistic picture of the small Canadian town in the prairies from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. The other four books are *A Jest of God* (1966), which won the Governor General's Literary Award for fiction and was adapted for the screen as *Rachel, Rachel* (1968); *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969); the semi-autobiographical collection of short stories *A Bird in the House* (1970), and *The Diviners* (1974). *The Diviners* was controversial, and in 1976 and 1978 attempts were made by religious conservatives to have it removed from the high school curriculum in Ontario.

In addition to the Manawaka novels that made her famous, Laurence wrote a critical work, *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966* (1968), a memoir, and several novels for children, including *Jason's Quest* (1970), *The Olden Days Coat* (1979), *Six Darn Cows* (1979), and *The Christmas Birthday Story* (1980).

In 1969, Laurence became writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, and in 1973, after accepting a similar position at the University of Western Ontario, she moved back to Canada permanently, settling in Lakefield, Ontario. In 1974, she became writer-in-residence at Trent University.

Laurence died of cancer on January 5, 1987.

Plot Summary

Chapter 1

Ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley, who lives with her son Marvin and his wife, Doris, reminisces about her childhood in Manawaka, a fictional town in western Canada. She grew up in a large house with a stern father, her brothers, Matt and Daniel, and the housekeeper, Auntie Doll. She recalls the day Daniel fell through the ice while skating. He was rescued but developed a fever and died.

The narrative returns to the present. Over tea, Marvin says he is considering selling the house and buying something smaller. Hagar insists that the house is hers. Marvin reminds her that she made it out to him when he took over her business affairs, but Hagar still regards it as her own.

Chapter 2

Hagar is visited by the minister, Mr. Troy, but she has little patience with him. The narrative then returns to Hagar's youth. She recalls being sent to an academy for young ladies in Toronto. She hoped to become a schoolteacher, but her father insisted that she keep the accounts at his store. Hagar met Brampton Shipley at a dance, and married him against her father's wishes.

Back in the present, Hagar discovers that Marvin and Doris are planning to move her to a nursing home. Later, she reminisces again, this time about the death of her brother Matt, and how her father cut her out of his will.

After another episode in the present, in which it is clear that Hagar is forgetful and confused, she gazes at the photographs in her room. This prompts more reminiscence, of shopping trips with her husband, in which Bram's boorish behavior made her ashamed of him.

Marvin and Doris try to persuade Hagar that she will receive better care at the nursing home. Hagar wonders whether they will be able to force her to move.

Chapter 3

In the doctor's office, Hagar recalls how Bram boasted about how successful he would be. He planned to switch from farming to raising horses, but he was not a good businessman and nothing ever came of his plans.

When Hagar sees Dr. Corby, she loathes the physical examination. After supper, Marvin and Doris take her for a drive in the country, but Hagar is alarmed when she discovers they are visiting the nursing home. While there, Hagar finds fault with everything. She

meets two residents of the home, Miss Tyrrwhitt, whom she dislikes, and Mrs. Steiner, to whom she takes a liking. She also recalls the birth of her first son, Marvin, and for a moment thinks a man in the summer house is her late husband.

Chapter 4

As she waits in the hospital for x-rays to be taken, Hagar returns to memories of her marriage. While her life was filled with household chores, her husband would often prefer to spend time duck-shooting or drinking.

The doctor recommends that Hagar be admitted to the nursing home, but she still resists. She recalls her second son, John, who used to get into fights at school and engaged in dangerous games

with his friends. She recalls how, after watching Bram create an embarrassing scene in the store formerly owned by her father, she decided to leave him.

Back in the present, Marvin tells Hagar she must move into the nursing home in a week's time.

Chapter 5

Hagar makes plans to flee before she can be taken to the home. Then the narrative returns to her decision to leave Bram, who had no objections to her departure.

Putting her plan of escape into action, Hagar cashes her old-age pension check, buys food supplies and takes a bus to a quiet place called Shadow Point. Once in the countryside she finds an abandoned building, near to the fish cannery, long since closed. It is in a valley near the sea. She inspects it with approval. Her new abode leads into another flashback, to her memories of her life after she left Bram, when she worked as a housekeeper for an elderly man, Mr. Oatley.

Chapter 6

Hagar wakes in her makeshift home. She shivers in the cold as she lies on a mildewed, damp mattress.

The narrative goes back to Hagar's life during the Great Depression of the 1930s. John found it hard to find work, and returned to Manawaka to live with his father. Two years later, Bram became sick, and Hagar returned to live at the family home. Drought and economic depression had hit the region, and Hagar found their house in poor condition. Bram was so sick he did not recognize her, and it was John who cared for his father until his death.

Chapter 7

Hagar wakes in the morning feeling sore. She drinks from a pail of rain water, and then walks down a path to the sea. She encounters two children playing, but when they see her they run away. She walks through a wooded area and rests on a fallen tree trunk, where she recalls her life with John after Bram died. Their relationship was a quarrelsome one. Eventually, when Hagar returned to Mr. Oatley's house, John refused to accompany her. Returning the following year, Hagar learned that John planned to marry Arlene Simmons. Hagar disapproved of the match.

The chapter ends in the present, with Hagar walking to the cannery.

Chapter 8

Hagar explores the cannery and settles herself on some old boxes. A seagull flies around the room; Hagar throws a box at the bird, injuring it. At night, a man enters the cannery. He is Murray Lees, who says he has come to the cannery for some peace and quiet. As they drink the bottle of wine Lees has brought with him, Lees tells Hagar about how his son was killed in a fire at the family home.

The narrative returns to the past. Hagar relates how John and Arlene were killed when John bet his friend he could drive a truck across a railroad bridge. They were hit by a freight train. Hagar returned to Mr. Oatley's house.

In the cannery, Lees has been listening to her story and commiserates with her. They spend the night together, leaning against boxes. Lees comforts Hagar when she wakes up in the night sick.

Chapter 9

In the morning, Hagar finds that Lees has gone. He returns with Marvin and Doris, who express relief that Hagar is safe. Suffering from exposure, Hagar is taken to the hospital, where she lies in a ward of about thirty women, complaining about the lack of privacy. At first Hagar dislikes the patients in the adjoining beds, but later finds she has something in common with Elva Jardine, who comes from a town close to Manawaka. They exchange news of people they knew. When Marvin and Doris visit, they tell Hagar that Tina, her granddaughter, is getting married. Hagar pulls a sapphire ring from her finger, and asks Doris to give it to Tina.

Chapter 10

Hagar is moved into a semi-private room, which she shares with Sandra Wong, a sixteen-year-old girl who is to have her appendix out. Hagar tries to calm Sandra's fears. Doris visits with Mr. Troy. The clergyman sings a hymn, and the words make

Hagar realize that her unhappiness in life has been caused by her pride. Later, she receives a visit from her grandson. In the night, Sandra is in pain. Hagar fetches a bedpan for her, struggling the few steps to the bathroom and back. A nurse arrives and is horrified to find Hagar out of bed, but when the nurse leaves, Hagar and Sandra laugh together about the incident. Marvin visits, and Hagar tells him he has always been good to her. Finally, Hagar, close to death, holds a glass of water in her hands and is ready to drink. The novel ends at this point.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The Stone Angel by Margaret Laurence begins by describing the cemetery monument that used to stand over the protagonist's mother's grave. The monument is a stone angel brought at great price from Italy. The heroine of the story wonders if the angel is still there, and notes with wry irony that the angel was "doubly blind," not only made of stone, but also carved without eyeballs, yet stands in the cemetery to guide the townspeople to heaven.

The protagonist calls herself "Hagar" and comments on an epitaph for a bland woman named Regina, who had cared for her elderly, ungrateful mother. Hagar comments that Regina is forgotten just as she, Hagar, is. Thoughts of the stone angel remind Hagar of the long walks she used to take through the cemetery, since it was the only place that a proper girl could walk outside without her wardrobe becoming disheveled. Hagar remembers the smells of the flowers and how the wild and native flowers kept impinging on the plots.

The narrator admits that she is "rampant with memory," and she indulges in reminiscences even though this is not her pattern. She is only doing it for Marvin, simply because he expects it from very elderly old women. Hagar admits that she's ninety-years-old and her only two hobbies are remembering past time, "carping," and smoking cigarettes. Hagar Shipley declares she is Marvin's mother, and that she doesn't want to talk out loud for fear that Doris, Marvin's wife, will hear her and say something belittling, like, "Mother's having one of her days."

Hagar Shipley's mind shifts back to the past again and to her "lost men." She swears she won't think about that, because she doesn't want to cry in front of Doris, who often looks in on her at night and takes away her privacy. Again, Hagar goes back in time and memory to when she was six years old, a proud, well-dressed, superior daughter of Jason Currie, a Scottish merchant who ran the town's store. The Curries owned a large house, the second brick house in the town, and after the death of Hagar's mother, her Aunt Doll came to take care of them.

Jason Currie, Hagar's father and owner of the store, would constantly quiz Hagar, making her learn sums and numbers and amounts. He had made a success for himself and his family after coming from nothing. Hagar's brothers, Matt and Dan, did not have the spunk that Hagar had and took after her rather bland and characterless mother. Hagar even looks like her father, big and strong. Jason Currie disciplined his sons harshly, and the boys would then come after Hagar with switches just as they had felt. When she finally told on them, her father let her watch them being whipped, but she was sorry she did.

Hagar continues to remember her childhood and her father's store, particularly recalling an incident when she lifted the barrel lid to sneak a few "sultanas," (small, sweet, seedless raisins,) and saw mice scurrying around. She calls attention to it, "Oh, look! The funniest, wee things, scampering---." Her father, furious at her lack of concern about his reputation, takes a ruler and strikes Hagar's palms over and over again until he takes her in his arms and tells her that it hurt him as much as it did her.

Hagar's reminiscences continue, recalling the other children in town. First, there was Charlotte Tappen, the daughter of the town doctor. Then there was Lottie Drieser, a child without a father since no one ever knew who he was. Telford Simmons was the son of the local mortician, known to drink. Henry Pearl was a heavily-worked country boy who rode into town on his own horse. Henry's infant sister had died at birth, and Hagar remembers Telford Simmons daring the group of kids to come see her corpse in the funeral home, which they did. Hagar did well in school and made her father proud since he valued hard work, and while she thought she had successfully ignored her father's lecturing, she flashes back to the present realizing that she often told her two sons the same things her father had told her.

Jason Currie was not outwardly affectionate, but Hagar knows that when he calls her "daughter," he is pleased with her. She recalls that her father never called her by her name, probably because she was named for a wealthy spinster aunt who had left her money to the Humane Society instead of her father. Jason Currie's father imported silk, but he wasn't a great businessman having been cheated by a partner. Hagar's father, Jason, had had to build up his own business without any help, and he still lived by the gutsy family war cry, which he made Hagar repeat, "*Gainsay Who Dare!"*

Hagar remembers that as a young girl she was jealous of her Scottish ancestors and wished that she could have lived in their castles instead of on the deserted prairie. She continues to flash back to the time when she was eight years old, and the new church opened. Her father had donated silver candlesticks and was recognized by the minister as a generous man who had helped make the church possible. Hagar remembers that her father never missed church and was known to be a Christian man.

Jason Currie never remarried after Hagar's mother died although Hagar believes that Aunt Doll hoped he would marry her. Hagar knows, however, that her father would never stoop to marrying his housekeeper, but one time, when she was about twelve, she did see him in the cemetery with Lottie Dreiser's mother. They appeared to be having an angry discussion, and Lottie's mother died soon after of consumption. Hagar made sure she reported the death to her father who made three simple statements. The first was "Poor lass." The second was "not much loss to the town." The last was "Consumption is contagious, isn't it?"

Hagar remembers her brothers when they were young. Matt was a hard worker who didn't complain. He was skinny and wore glasses and was very clumsy. Matt was always saving his money, and Aunt Doll told Hagar later that he was saving his money to go out on his own. By the time Matt was seventeen, he got discouraged, because he just couldn't save enough, and he spent everything he had on a fighting cock, which lost

in its first fight he had. Hagar saw Matt grieving over the bird before he wrung its neck and buried it. Daniel, Hagar's other brother, loved new clothes, and was not a hard worker, using his delicate health to his advantage. When Jason Currie allowed his children to have parties, Dan would smuggle Lottie Drieser (who was not invited,) into the group and would be the life of the party. Hagar remembers some dancing parties where she dance so hard her hair would fall down and boys would try to touch it.

In the Manawaka winters, the young people would skate on the frozen river. Hagar remembers the day that Daniel fell through the ice when he was skating trying to impress the girls. Matt rescued him and took him home, but Daniel caught pneumonia. The doctor was out of town, and Daniel didn't want Jason to come. Instead, Daniel - in his fever and delirium - tells Matt that he wants their mother. Matt begs Hagar to put on the old plaid shawl that their mother used to wear and to hold Daniel. Hagar refuses, saying she's nothing like their mother and couldn't even pretend to be her. It is Matt who finally drapes the shawl around himself and holds Daniel's head in his lap, staying with him until he died. Matt threatens Hagar with bodily harm if she ever tells their father what he had donned their mother's shawl to comfort his brother. Hagar doesn't understand why she was incapable of holding her mother's shawl and soothing her own brother.

Hagar recalls another incident that happened to her as a teenager. She had walked near the town dump with several other young women. It was a hot July day, and they came upon a large pile of eggs which had been broken and left there. Some of the eggs had chickens that had hatched and were crawling miserably around without strength or food in the hot sun. Some were trying desperately to break through the shells. Hagar recalls vomiting and turning away from the site with some of the other girls, but she specifically remembers that the fair, pale-headed Lottie Drieser had declared that they could not leave the chickens dying like this. When Charlotte Tappen, the doctor's daughter, and Hagar Currie refuse to help her, Lottie crushes the eggshells with a stick and steps on the dying chicks. Hagar, in her old age, admits that at first she was sorry she didn't have the gumption to help Lottie, but then she also declares that she's not sorry she didn't help the chicks to die, because she isn't sure if Lottie just had courage or if there was something else that motivated her behavior.

Hagar's reminiscences are interrupted by Doris appearing at her door. Doris always wears brown and bland, timid expressions. The expressions, Hagar believes, are a ruse, for Doris always gets her way and is not timid at all. In contrast to Doris' drab brown, Hagar wears her lilac silk even though Doris thought the dress was not suitable for Hagar. The lilac color reminds Hagar of the lilacs that used to grow on the Shipley farm. Doris and the present era keep intruding on Hagar's memories, as Doris asks Hagar if she wants tea.

After a peevish exchange between the two women, with Hagar claiming that Doris won't make a second pot if she doesn't want it now, and Doris responding that last time she made a second pot, Hagar didn't drink it, they come to an uneasy truce. On the way downstairs, Hagar falls after having a pain under her ribs. Doris rushes in to find Hagar in tears, and calls for Marvin. Upon hearing Marvin's name, Hagar reflects back to her

past wondering what possessed her to name her son "Marvin," before she remembers that this is a Shipley name, all of which were "squat, brown names, common as bottled beer."

After a pushing and pulling, Marvin and Doris are able to put Hagar to rights, and Hagar musters all her poise to go downstairs to tea. She admits that Doris is a good cook and has prepared special cakes and cookies for the tea today. Marvin looks like he wants to talk to her, but Hagar notes his difficulty in finding words and his general discomfort in talking. The tea is a planned event for Marvin and Doris to tell Hagar that they want to sell the house. Hagar claims that the house is hers, and she is frightened when Marvin reminds her that the house was deeded to him when he took over her affairs. Hagar feels that she, herself, is contained within the house and its possessions. Marvin and Doris have been living with her for seventeen years, and Hagar feels she would be lost without her house. When Hagar protests bitterly, Marvin retreats into his study, and the highly religious Doris goes to church. There, she plans to arrange with her pastor, Mr. Troy, to come visit Hagar if Hagar consents.

Hagar comments that now, past the age of ninety, tact is difficult for her, and she wonders what she can possibly say to the soft, devout Mr. Troy. Even though Hagar acknowledges her own age, when she looks in the mirror, she sees herself as a young woman with the same dark eyes of her youth. Hagar agrees to talk to Mr. Troy as Doris goes off to church to pray.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The imagery and depiction of the cemetery at the opening of the book subtly project one of the themes of the rest of the novel. Hagar notes that the weeds and wild flowers are constantly at the edge of cultivated ground, and that even though they are kept at bay, sometimes the scent of wild cowslips lingers, reminding a person of the "faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown always...." The imagery reflects both Hagar's wild nature and the society rules which contain her.

Another pervasive theme throughout the novel is the inability to act in a prescribed way. Hagar cannot give comfort to her dying brother by donning her dead mother's shawl. She struggles with what she would have liked to have done and how she actually acts. The opening chapter sets up this conflict that will be revisited hundreds of times, often with Hagar commenting on what she wanted to do or say, and what she was actually did or said. Hagar never lets her emotions show, always acting rationally and coolly.

Hagar's narrative reveals that not only is Hagar a strong character, but she despises weakness. The language in this first chapter, (and appearing throughout the novel,) illustrate that the strong survive; the weak do not. The stone angel stands on Hagar's mother's grave to commemorate Hagar's succinct synopsis. Her mother "relinquished her feeble ghost gave up as I gained my stubborn one."

Time "floats" through Hagar's mind. We know that she is telling her story, looking back from the age of ninety, and flashbacks, memories that suddenly resurface, and reminiscences intertwine with the present time to complete the picture of Hagar's life.

The preface, Dylan Thomas' couplet about fighting against the end, foreshadows the events of Hagar's life and her attitude in old age. The preface condenses the main theme of the novel into one verse.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter Two begins with Hagar sitting on the lawn on a spring day with Doris' minister, Mr. Troy. Hagar notes that it's not a good day for him to visit her, since her stomach is rumbling. She's bloated and constipated, fearful that she'll have gas. Hagar wears her gray-flowered dress, recalling that everything on the Shipley place was gray, never painted once. Mr. Troy makes conversation with Doris, though, before the memories take over. He asks her about her childhood

Hagar tells him about Jason Currie, her merchant father, who was worth at least two hundred thousand dollars, noting that, "never a red cent of it came to me." Not knowing what to say, Mr. Troy fades into the background and Hagar feels young, believing that she would see her own, dark-haired self before she left for the academy in Toronto if she looked in the mirror.

A flashback begins as Hagar remembers what she wanted to tell Matt when she left for boarding school. She wanted to tell him that he should have been the one to go to college, and she remembers asking her father why Matt couldn't go. Jason Currie replies that it's too late for Matt, and that Matt could learn everything he needed to know right there at the store. For Hagar, however, there was no woman who could teach her all the things a proper lady should know. Hagar goes off to school, only after saying a level-headed good-bye to her brother and crying for him after she's on the train and he can't see her raw emotion.

Jason Currie is pleased with Hagar when she returns from school, claiming that she is a credit to him. She tells him that she wants to teach school, but her father bluntly proclaims that he didn't spend all that money on her for her to take a one-room school. When she argues with him and points out that the minister's daughter teaches school, Jason claims that he would never let her go board with strangers, or go to dances where the boys would paw her. He claims that she knows nothing of men and their "terrible thoughts."

When Hagar's father reaches out and holds her hand, asking her to "stay," she pulls away. Even though she wants to go out and explain to him why she rejected his touch, she doesn't. She only stands there, looking at a picture of cows. Hagar never went out to teach and instead stayed at her father's store, acting as hostess and bookkeeper and thinking to reimburse him for what he'd spent on her.

Hagar snubs all the men her father brings home to meet her, and after three years of working at the store, she meets Bramptom Shipley at a fund-raising dance for a new hospital. She dances with him, finding him light on his feet. Bram Shipley's dirty fingernails fascinate Hagar. His bristly whiskers and black hair are attractive to her, and she imagines him in a beautiful gray suit. Brampton is fourteen years older than Hagar

and has the reputation of being lazy, although he's always seen laughing. His wife, who was fat and smelled like sour yeast, had died of a burst spleen leaving him with two daughters to raise. During the dance, Bramptom presses himself against Hagar, and while she is embarrassed, she dances with him again.

Lottie Dreiser, who is dating Telford Simmons, teases Hagar about being seen with Bramptom who is "common" and loose with women. Coming back from her memories, the ninety-year-old Hagar speculates about whether she would have done what she did had Lottie not said those things. The past takes over again as Hagar remembers telling her father that she is determined to marry Bram Shipley.

Jason Currie is furious and declares that Hagar will never marry anyone and certainly not Bram, using the same phrase as Lottie had, "common as dirt." When he comments that there are no decent girls who get married without the consent of their families, Hagar swears she'll be the first. Again, her father reaches out to her and grabs her arm saying, "Hagar...You'll not go, Hagar." The protagonist declares that this was the only time in her life that her father called her by name, but it didn't stop her. Instead, there were no church bells, no fancy gathering. Aunt Doll does come and tells Hagar that her brother Matt almost sent the old plaid shawl that Dan loved, but had decided against it at the last minute. Charlotte Tappen's mother gave them a small reception, and Hagar is convinced that her father will relent when he sees what a good husband and farmer Bram becomes.

The Shipley house was old, unclean, and common. Upon entering the house, Bram hands Hagar a wine decanter made of cut glass and silver. She takes it without comment and puts it aside. Bram picks it up, looks at it angrily, and then puts it aside too, and comes at her asking to see what she looks like underneath her clothes. Hagar defends herself by saying that what "they" said about him had been right. Bram curses her and tells her it doesn't matter, because she is now his wife. After sex, Bram strokes her forehead and asks if she hadn't known how it was done. Hagar had not known, but since she was practical, she gets up the next day and begins cleaning the house and scrubbing the floors even though she'd never in her life done this kind of work before.

The flashback ends, and Hagar begins the conversation with Mr. Troy again. It's obvious from his reactions that there has been a long lull in the talk, because it looks at amazement with Hagar when she begins to talk again. He asks her if she has many friends, and she admits that most of them are dead, a comment she wouldn't have made if she had been prepared for it. Mr. Troy mentions that people need friends of their own age to talk to. He suggests that perhaps prayer would be comforting to Hagar. Hagar nods in agreement just to get him to leave, but when she's alone, she begins to feel doubt about his intentions, and she goes back into the kitchen when she spies a newspaper lying on the kitchen table with an ad marked in pen. The advertisement reads, "Only the Best Will Do for Mother," and it's labeled Silverthreads Nursing Home. Hagar's chest pain returns, and she flashes back to a memory when John, her son, held his breath in a tantrum until Bram slapped him and made him draw air in. The flashback fades and Hagar sees Doris standing in the kitchen doorway. Both women know about the ad, but Doris tries to distract Hagar by discussing Mr. Troy. Hagar insults him by

saying she thought he was stupid. Doris tries another tactic and tells Hagar how nice her gray silk dress looked. Hagar looks at it, surprised to see how heavy she has become, with wide hips. When she got married, her waist was 20 inches.

Hagar believes that her weight gain occurred only because she never had the money to buy the proper corsets and undergarments. She remembers Jess and Gladys, Bram's daughters, had never had corsets and Hagar likens them to cows and lumps of fat. Hagar would have liked proper underwear, but Bram never had any money to spare, because they spent whatever they earned on schemes he thought would make money. Once, they tried raising honey, but some poisonous weed killed the bees.

Doris' voice pulls Hagar back to the present time, and Hagar is embarrassed that she has been lost in memory and not conscious of her surroundings. She tells Doris that she does not want Marvin to sell the house and declares that she will never leave although Marvin and Doris are free to go. Doris tries to pacify her by taking her to the living room, and Hagar is humiliated when she has gas, causing Doris to ask if the laxative is working.

Once Doris returns to the kitchen, Hagar loses herself in thought, thinking about why Marvin and Doris want her house and her things. She decides Doris is greedy and Marvin is just not ambitious. Hagar believes that the things in the house belong to her, not to her son and his wife, and she looks from one item to the next remembering what they symbolize. The jug that belonged to her mother, a picture of her mother, (one in which Hagar notes her mother appears "perplexed.") Hagar looks at the picture and wonders why her mother gave birth to her two brothers and then decided to die for her. There's a gilt mirror that used to hang in their house, and a picture of Hagar at age 20 that causes her to think that her handsome, strength has far out-lived the fragile beauty of some of the delicate women like Mavis, her brother's wife, that she had known. This thought triggers the memory of the death of her brother Matt who had died from an outbreak of influenza. When Aunt Dolly had come to tell Hagar of his death, she had said that Matt hadn't struggled and had gone quietly. Hagar is frustrated by this attitude, wishing her brother had fought against his death rather than accepted it.

Hagar goes to see her brother's widow, Mavis. She was cordial to Hagar and admitted how fond she and Matt were of each other even though they never had children. Mavis tells Hagar that Matt never spoke badly of her. Hagar recalls that Mavis married a year later and had three children by her next husband, and she's glad that fate wasn't always unkind to her former sister-in-law.

At Aunt Dolly's request, Hagar had let it be known that when Marvin was born, her father would be welcome if he wanted to see his grandson, but he never came. Hagar admits that she felt almost disassociated with Marvin, and then her present situation imposes itself on her as she again notices the objects in her house. She notes a brown pottery pitcher that had belonged to Bram's mother, supposedly brought from England. This pitcher is a favorite of Tina's although Hagar thinks it is ugly. She hopes that Tina finds a man who can stand her fierce independence. The glass and silver wine decanter that Hagar had hardly noticed on her wedding day is now one of her prized possessions,

even though Doris will never fill it with any liquor. Hagar had kept it filled with Chokecherry wine in the past.

Hagar ponders on the oaken armchair and rugs that she had been allowed to take from her father's house after he died. The rest of his estate was left to the town, which made a great legacy for public works, including a town named Currie Memorial Park, filled with mauve and pink petunias that Hagar despises. Hagar resents that her boys never saw their grandfather and that none of his money was left to his descendants. She particularly regrets that he never saw her second son, John, because he was exactly the type of son Jason had wanted for himself.

When Doris asks if Hagar is all right, the memory is pushed aside. Hagar asks Doris if her grandson Steven would like the oak chair. Doris says she's not sure and tells Hagar that she and Marvin thought the chair was promised to them. Hagar denies this and tells Doris that Tina gets the brown jug. Hagar's daughter-in-law tells her not to keep talking about giving away her possessions, because it might upset Marvin, to which Hagar responds that Marv never gets upset about anything - including what happened to his own brother. Doris objects and to change the subject, Hagar asks if Tina will be coming home. Doris reminds Hagar that Tina moved away months ago.

Hagar hears Doris and Marvin in the kitchen having a discussion about her. At dinner, Doris tells Hagar that she has arranged for the girl next door to come in and sit with her for the evening, while Marvin and she go to the movies. Hagar yells and carries on, telling them to leave her alone and implying that they don't care. She immediately regrets her words, but is mortified to learn that she left a cigarette burning the other night, and it fell out of the ashtray. Marvin and Doris feel that she needs to be watched and can't be left alone. The argument leaves them all upset, and Marvin and Doris don't go out.

Hagar retires to her bedroom, taking comfort in her heavy, old chair and all her possessions - especially her photos that Doris doesn't want in the house. There's a picture of Marvin on his first day of school dressed in a navy-blue sailor suit, but after that, Hagar didn't have enough money to dress him decently and took hand-me-downs from Jess and Gladys, Bram's daughters. Hagar does not have a picture of Bram, probably because she never asked. She remembers that he was a good-looking man, and she could have been proud of him "if only he'd never opened his mouth."

The thought of Bram makes Hagar recall an incident when they were first married and had gone to town together to get supplies. Hagar ran into Charlotte Tappen, her former friend who goads Bram into showing his ignorance by asking him a question about Handel's *Messiah.* Right after this, Hagar went into the ladies' wear store, followed by Bram who deliberately fingered the undergarments, told Hagar that there was no difference between the expensive and inexpensive ones, and then explodes when she tries to "shush" him. From that point on, Hagar didn't go to town and Bram goes by himself, often coming home drunk.

This reverie is cut short, when Hagar hears footsteps on the stair. She is alarmed, thinking of intruders, but it's Marvin, urged on by Doris. Marvin tells Hagar that she needs professional care, with Doris commenting that Hagar is wetting the sheets every night, and she just can't keep up with the workload. Hagar is difficult and contrary with Marvin, telling him that John wouldn't put her in the poorhouse. Doris immediately informs Hagar that the place they want her to go is expensive, but Hagar is adamant that she will not go to the nursing home. She is alarmed to hear herself screaming and see her own fat body shake. Marvin and Doris agree to discuss the issue later.

That night, Hagar, worried about wetting the bed, decides to get up. She knocks over the lamp, and Doris comes running. After Hagar assures Doris that she's all right, Hagar looks in the mirror and sees a fat white face with shadows under the eye and yellowish-white hair. The image reminds her of a quarrel with Bram, when she reprimanded him with disgust for blowing his nose with his fingers. She notes that the qualities they'd admired in each other before they married were exactly what they couldn't stand about each other after marriage, but she does recall that Bram was the only person close to her in her lifetime that called her Hagar. Hagar remembers their bedroom and recalls that she was excited by Bram's body and the physical nature of their relationship. She never told him, though, how she felt and was too proud to speak about such things. Hagar puts out her cigarette and goes to bed feeling like she's sleeping in snow.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Flashbacks and memories continue to be integral part of the novel, with the past and the present flowing into one narrative. Hagar's feisty nature and sharp tongue are demonstrated in her discussions with Marvin and Doris, and in her reaction to Mr. Troy. The non-conformist, "wild" nature hinted at in the opening chapter continues to be revealed in Hagar's decision to marry Bram Shipley against her father's wishes.

The use of objects and "artifacts" is important to the structure of the novel. Hagar's possessions, her "things," are important to her because of the past they represent. They are also important to the structure of the novel, because they trigger the memories and create the circular pattern of remembering the past, coming to the present, and going around and around between the different eras of her life. The idea that objects are more important than just their material worth is evident throughout.

Old age and the problems with infirmity and loss of identity are major themes in the book. Hagar's sometimes bitter, difficult comments are often true-to-life, not sugar-coated depictions of the cantankerous elderly, yet most readers will be sympathetic to anyone ninety years old who deals with failing health and the loss of home and forced migration to a nursing home.

The poignancy of the novel is also created by the universal theme of "what might have been." Hagar continually points to instances where she doesn't say what she wants to, doesn't allow her emotions to show, and doesn't do what she should have done. Her departure to boarding school and her cool good-bye to her brother, and her hiding of her

physical response to Bram are just two examples of the feelings she never openly expresses.

The name Hagar is significant. In Chapter Two, she talks about the "Egyptian" name. She refers to Hagar the Egyptian, when compared to the minister. She mentions feeling like Pharaoh's daughter returning to the castle (to her dad's store,) when she comes home from boarding school. Hagar was the name of Sarah, (the wife of Abraham,) who was asked to bear Abraham's child, when Sarah proved to be barren. Hagar tended to run away when she was faced with problems, and she was a proud and arrogant woman.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Doris takes Hagar to Dr. Corby's office for x-rays. While she is there, Hagar inspects a painting hanging on the wall. The picture on the wall recalls the Shipley house where no pictures ever hung until Hagar got there. Hagar loves pictures of horses, even though she didn't like real horses, but she had a picture she kept a long time. Bram loved the real thing, and though he and Hagar argue about how to spend the little money they have, he buys a gray stallion that he loved. Bram named the horse Soldier and loved it. When a blizzard came up, Soldier had escaped from the barn, and Bram goes looking for the horse, almost getting lost in the blizzard himself. When he finally returns, Hagar feels for him, and tells him she's sorry, a comment which surprises him.

That night, when he turns to her, she almost openly welcomes his touch, but he patted her on the shoulder and told her to go to sleep, thinking that leaving her alone was a great kindness to her since he didn't know otherwise. That spring, Bram found the horse that had caught his leg in a fence. Hagar admits that there was a chance that night they could have gone on differently because of that single show of tenderness between them, but they did not. She notes, "Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke. I know that full well, although a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise."

Doris' voice stops Hagar's reverie, and Hagar notices that everyone is looking at her. Doris keeps hushing her, and Hagar realizes that she has been talking too loud, realizing that she is committing the very sin she accused Bram of. She recalls an incident early on when she and Bram had attended the Presbyterian Church and Bram loudly commented, "Won't the saintly bastard ever shut his trap?" a remark that caused Hagar's father (who sat in the front of the church and never looked at or acknowledged his daughter,) to shrug his shoulders. Hagar never attended church again. The ninety-year-old Hagar begins to wonder if she should have kept attending church. Hagar, horrified that she might be as embarrassing to Doris as Bram was to her, swears never to open her mouth again, and then admits that such a feat is just not possible for her.

Doctor Corby calls Hagar in for an exam, ordering her to get x-rays. She does not make his job easy for him by complaining about the barium she must drink when she gets the x-rays taken. On the return home on the bus, a young woman offers Hagar her seat, causing her to cry. Hagar notices the irony of her reaction to a single kind gesture to an old woman. She weeps for a bus seat, but was unable to cry for her "dead men." That evening, Doris and Marvin take Hagar on a drive through the country, making small talk. The car arrives at Silverthreads Nursing Home, and Marvin tells Hagar, after her initial, horrified reaction, that they aren't bringing her here to stay, only to visit and see what it's like. After a tour, Doris and Marvin talk to the director while Hagar is taken to the veranda for a cup of tea, which Hagar sarcastically thinks tastes like hemlock. As Doris is seated on the veranda, she feels the heat, sees the nurse, and remembers Marvin's birth.

The flashback to Hagar's past begins with a memory of the Manawaka hospital, which was new at that time. Bram drove her into town even though she wanted to have it at home since she was sure that the birth would be the end of her. Bram drives the buggy down Main Street which embarrasses her, and then he asks her if she's scared. She denies it, knowing that she couldn't say she hadn't wanted children or that she thought she might die. Hagar is surprised when Bram comments that he hopes it's a boy. She realizes that all men, like her father, had wanted a dynasty, a continuation of name. The old Hagar sees that moment that might have brought her and Bram together, that shared acknowledgement of hope or sympathy for each other, but instead her reaction had been to think that Bram had "nerve," hoping for boy like her own father had.

The memory of Marvin's birth is quickly erased, when a woman comes up to Hagar as she's sitting on the veranda of Silverthreads Nursing Home and relates that a certain lady didn't come down for dinner. The woman complains to Hagar that this particular resident always is favored by the staff, getting ice cream instead of Jell-O. Hagar is annoyed by the woman's prattle and relieved when a Mrs. Steiner comes up, and the other woman leaves.

Mrs. Steiner informs Hagar that the previous visitor is always like that. Hagar tells her that it doesn't matter, because she is not going to stay here, to which Mrs. Steiner admits that that's exactly what she had said two years ago. Mrs. Steiner's daughters had brought her there. Hagar relates that she had two sons, but one was killed in the war, a statement that Hagar acknowledges to herself isn't even true. Mrs. Steiner laughs bitterly and asks Hagar "Do you get used to life?" Hagar immediately understands the comment and wonders how Mrs. Steiner can know so much about her. When Mrs. Steiner departs saying she hopes to see Hagar again, Hagar denies that she'll ever come back. Mrs. Steiner asks if she's got somewhere else to go, a question that causes Hagar to leave the veranda and escape to a small summer house where she sees an elderly man sitting in silence. He looks so familiar to her that she's sure she knows him and waits for him to recognize her. When he raises his head, she sees that he is not who she thought he was at all and is grateful she didn't speak. The man leaves when the curfew bell rings, and Hagar hears Doris yelling for her.

Hagar is irritated by Doris' plaintive cries searching for her, and she recalls a children's verse called "The Prisoner's Song." The verse implies that if Hagar had the wings of an angel or a crow, she could fly up high and spit on the people below. Doris retrieves her, and the three return back home, but this time Hagar says they are going back to Marvin and Doris' house."

Chapter 3 Analysis

A powerful theme which continues in Chapter Three is that of hindsight, the ability to look backwards and see where life might have changed or turned out differently. As an older woman, Hagar can look back and notice the events that might have changed her life if she had acted differently. Faint wisps of regret resonate in Hagar's memories, and

she sees that had she acted differently, her relationship with Bram might not have been so bad.

The theme of hindsight and regret are closely tied to the continuing theme of restraint. Hagar has always withheld her emotions. In looking back on her life, she realizes that that kind of emotional restraint has kept her from being connected and close to those around her.

The loneliness of old age - the hope of recognition or connection with someone from the past - is poignant and realistic. Hagar's story touches the reader since her situation is similar to many elderly who go to the nursing home. The loss of a home and feeling of being uprooted are two universally powerful emotions.

The waning of life, and the unwillingness to give in to death, are obvious in Hagar's outlook. The preface to the book echoes in the lines of "The Prisoner's Song," which Hagar remembers at the end of the chapter. She wishes she had wings and could fly high enough to spit on everyone below. She is certainly not willing to "go gentle into that good night," and her behavior reflects the Dylan quote at the beginning of the book.

The use of "wings" is symbolic throughout the book. The Stone Angel in the cemetery has wings, but it is earthbound and blind, and Hagar often feels imprisoned, wishing for ways to escape.

The literary bridges between the past and the present time periods are often formed by Doris' voice. When Hagar is lost in reminiscences, it is often Doris who calls her back by asking if she's okay, by reminding her where she is, by making comments.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter Four opens with Doris and Hagar sitting in the waiting room before Hagar's stomach x-rays. She is told to drink the barium, which she does until she feels she is going to be sick, and in riling against the doctor, she hears the doctor's gentleness and stops being difficult, waiting for whatever the doctors will do to her.

The act of waiting is something Hagar has done multiple times before, and she begins to remember the many times she waited at the Shipley place. After her marriage, she kept thinking that there would be something more than just work. She didn't' even know what she was waiting for. She remembers Marvin standing around the kitchen after he had finished his chores, questioning her and calling attention to his accomplishments.

Thinking of work, Hagar recalls that Bram would usually work during the harvest and threshing, but that he'd never continue on with his boasts about how he was going to make improvements on his place. Hagar recalls her frustration with the crew often "half-breeds," and drifters, who would all wash in the same water. She also remembers that they never even had an indoor pump, because Bram wouldn't fix one. As soon as the harvest was over, she wouldn't see him for weeks, because he'd go off hunting or drinking with his buddy, Charlie Bean.

One time, Hagar recalls that Marvin told her that Bram had received a warning from the Mountie, because he had relieved himself on the steps of Currie's store. When Hagar argues with Bram about it, he says he's sorry, but she tells him that being sorry doesn't make it all right. She stayed with him twenty-four years, arguing all the way. The click of the x-ray brings her back to the present, and Hagar worries that her x-ray will be the reason Doris and Marvin and Doctor Corley send her to the nursing home.

Neither Marvin nor Doris tells Hagar what the x-ray reports say. Instead, they are secretive and don't answer her questions. She notes how slow Marvin is and how hard it is for him to think. He tells her that there's nothing wrong "organically," but that she needs more care. When Doris pushes the issue, Marvin tells his mother that she doesn't have to go to the nursing home if she doesn't want to, at which point Doris blows up. Marvin admits to being pulled between "two fires." Doris declares that they need advice, so Hagar is set up to meet with Mr. Troy, the pastor again. Mr. Troy talks to Hagar of accepting she cannot change, and asks her if she's tried prayer. Hagar says that she doesn't have much use for prayer. Mr. Troy continues by asking if she believes in "God's infinite Mercy." When Hagar asks what's so merciful about God, and tells him that she had a son and lost him, Mr. Troy tries to get her to talk, but politely leaves when it's clear that Hagar has nothing else to say. Hagar tells Doris she'll sit in the sun until dinner, and as she sits there, she reflects on the birth of her son, John, of whom Marvin never speaks.

Hagar remembers that she wasn't as scared with John's birth, as she had been with Marvin's and drives herself to the hospital. Hagar is relieved that Bram isn't with her and admits that she would rather "have had forty babies by the roadside than wonder" at what Bram would say to the nurse. John's birth was easy, and Hagar felt connected to him at once. John was different from Marvin, who was thickly built. Hagar tells John how his grandfather would have liked him, because they were alike. She finds herself telling John the same things her father had told him, citing the virtues of hard work and self-motivation. When Marvin hears the discussion of hard work, he asks if they don't work hard enough for her. Hagar points out that Bram spends too much time at the beer parlor, but Marvin points out that he is working hard, a fact that Hagar briskly acknowledges. The two boys start to quibble, something that Hagar hates, because Marvin is ten years older than John.

When John is six, Hagar gives him the plaid-pin of the Curries and tells the boy about his Scottish heritage. John does not understand the significance of the pin and simply puts it in his pocket. Hagar recalls that Bram's relationship with Marvin was always easy and without tension. Bram's relationship with John, however, was tense and uncertain. Hagar remembers one incident that scared her when she saw Bram offering honey from the combs, to John directly off a long, sharp knife.

John is inquisitive, and Hagar searches for books and catalogues and things to stimulate his education. She decides to sell eggs, modeling herself after many other farm women, including Bram's daughter, by gaining a little extra income, and with her earnings, she buys a gramophone and some records. John did not have a natural inclination for music, and he started getting notes from school about the fact that he was fighting. Later, Hagar sees her son being a daredevil and walking across a rickety, abandoned bridge with some of the local boys who were known to be wild. She embarrassed her son by telling him to stop.

Marvin enlists in World War I at the age of seventeen. Hagar thinks that Bram will rebel, but instead, Bram says, "he'll be as well, away." When her first-born son leaves for the war, Hagar wants to tell him to take care, to beg him not to go. Instead, she did not want to embarrass either of them and so is reduced to answering Marvin's question about whether she'll be all right, saying, "Of course we'll be all right." Marvin, too, seems about to say something else, but doesn't, and they part. Marvin's war exploits are chronicled through postcards and poorly spelled letters. Hagar notes that Marvin and Bram had been together so much, that once Marvin was gone, Bram would pay attention to John, but this wasn't the case although Bram would take John to school in the cutter sleigh just so he would have a chance to spend time in town.

Hagar continues thinking about this period of her life, remembering that Bram used to wear an old overcoat that had been given to her by her brother Matt's widow. She recalls that the pockets were filed with jackknives and tobacco and unwrapped, sticky peppermints, but never anything that a gentleman ought to have, like a handkerchief. Hagar's seven-year-old son, John, reports to his mother that the kids in town call Bram, "Bramble Shitley." He cries at the insult but refuses his mother's comfort and runs upstairs to his room.

Marvin had always delivered the eggs to the townspeople for Hagar, but since Marvin was gone to war, she took John to deliver eggs to town. She knocks on a door, only to find a beautifully dressed girl about John's age. When the girl's mother appears to buy the eggs, Hagar realizes that it's Lottie Dreiser who is now married to Telford Simmons, a bank manager. Hagar comments on what a homely boy Telford used to be, frustrated with herself for saying it at all, and John yells at her to "shut up."

A new public restroom had been built in town, and Hagar goes there and looks at herself in the mirror, amazed at how much she had changed and how horrible she looked wearing cast-off clothes and hand-me-downs. The only thing that looked like her at all was her eyes. Hagar decides to get new clothes by going to her father's old store and asking for credit. She begins to beg, but she hears Bram's voice arguing with the clerk. The clerk and the manager are declining to sell him any lemon extract since Charlie Bean is outside and it's known that the men make money by selling stuff to the Indians for drinking. Hagar's pride finally kicks in. She walks down the middle of the store holding her head high and meets Bram at the front. They march out the store together, the last time they walk anywhere together.

As an old woman, Hagar reminiscences that no action can be taken until it's necessary, and this event precipitated the action. Hagar collects her Limoge china, her mother's opal earrings, a silver candelabra and sells them to Lottie Telford for cash.

At this moment, Doris' voice rouses Hagar, telling her it's time to get up for dinner. After dinner, Hagar wants to talk a walk and goes with Doris. She sees a girl wearing black nail polish and comments on this loudly, asking Doris what the child's mother was thinking to allow her to dress that way. The girl in the black nail polish turns out to be a woman, and Doris is extremely embarrassed by Hagar's inability to withhold comment and speak softly. Hagar, too, is humiliated by the incident, and once again she makes the promise to hold her tongue - even though she knows that's something she just can't do.

Upon arriving home, Marvin tells Hagar that everything is arranged. Hagar will go to the nursing home in one week.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Hagar's doting on John and denying Marvin affection are clear in the descriptions of the characters. Marvin is always described as thick and slow, close to Bram as a child. Hagar sees John as the clever boy, the one her father would have loved. He was smart, quick-witted, and prone to trouble, but Hagar feels much more connected to him than she does to Marvin.

Hagar's pride has always been the thing that kept her from connecting with others, but she finally gives up her pride in order to survive. She leaves Brampton Shipley be selling all of her earthly goods to Lottie Simmons. The "things," the silver and fine china don't mean anything to her anymore.

A continual theme throughout is the change in appearance. Even as an old woman, Hagar remembers herself as young. Her eyes are always the same regardless of how her body has changed, and she still wears silk dresses in beautiful colors even though she is now fat. The process of aging causes changes in appearance and habits without even noticing it.

The theme of restraint and reticence is reiterated. Hagar, despite the fact that she wants to put her arms around Marvin and tell him to be careful when he departs for the war, is unable to say what she feels.

The plot of the book has a role reversal. Lottie "No Name" Drieser is now a solid citizen married to Telford Simmons, a bank manager. She has money and social standing, even though the kids used to make fun of her, because she didn't have a Dad, and Hagar's father had called her "common as dirt." Hagar, who was from a rich, successful family and was known to be an attractive, dark-haired girl, is now a social outcast, without name, family connections or money. Lottie is now beautiful and well-dressed with a gorgeous little girl. Hagar is disheveled and unkempt, with a ragamuffin child.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter 5 opens with Doris trying to sooth Hagar by asking her if she wants a sleeping pill. Hagar says she'll sleep, knowing that she won't but trying to be meek and mild. She begins to think about a place called Shadow Point where she once went for a picnic and realizes that since Marvin manages her money, she doesn't have any cash of her own. Hagar remembers, however, that her pension check is on the desk, so she plans to get it in the morning.

The story flashes back to another time that Hagar planned to take action. She remembers packing her and John's things in a trunk and telling John that she's leaving for his sake. In putting together all their belongings, she tries to find the plaid-pin that she had given to John, but he doesn't know where it is. When John asks where they're going and what they're going to do, Hagar tells him that she can be a housekeeper, to which John comments that then she'll be like Auntie Doll. When Hagar tells Bram that she's leaving, he does not react and only tells her to take some hard-boiled eggs with her. As Hagar and John leave on the train, she sees the sightless marble angel guarding the dead and the town. On the train ride out of town, John confesses that he traded the plaid-pin to Lazarus Tonnerre for a jackknife.

When Hagar awakes, the story returns to the present day, when she recalls her plan. When Doris leaves, Hagar gets her pension check, dresses herself, and goes to the bank where she cashes her check. Wondering that she could cash the check so easily and without question, Hagar proceeds to find a bus. Attired in her strong, arch-support shoes, her best hat, and a blue cardigan, she asks several people for help about which bus and where to go. All are polite and helpful to her, and at last she arrives at the bus station and boards for the trip to Shadow Point.

The bus leaves Hagar beside the road near Shadow Point, and she takes pride in knowing that she got this far on her own. Knowing that she needs some provisions, Hagar goes to a service station and buys some chocolate bars, wrapped squares of cheese, (which are too expensive, and she considers an extravagance,) jam, and crackers. All the items are put into a small shopping bag after Hagar has questioned the high price of the chocolate bars. Embarrassed that the clerk has suggested she buy smaller ones, Hagar rushes out, only to have the clerk come after her carrying the goods that she's forgotten. A kind man gives her a lift to the fish cannery road, and once she's dropped there, Hagar continues on her own, remembering an old Keats poem about Meg a gypsy woman who lived in the woods. Amidst her happiness in being on her own, Hagar suddenly realizes that she didn't bring any water.

Hagar continues doggedly up the many steps, even though she's in physical pain. Finally, she finds a building with an open door. She begins to doubt herself, wondering what Doris would say, but she begins to feel a connection to the gray building she's in.

The small building she's found for shelter is without paint, a fact that would annoy Marvin who is a paint salesman. Hagar explores the house and finds little but dust, a crumpled fireplace grate, a small wooden bench with a broken brass scale. For a moment, Hagar is concerned about other wanderers and vagabonds who may come in, but she continues on find an old bedroom with an old four-poster bed and a mildewed mattress upstairs. Instead of being upset by the physical amenities, Hagar takes pleasure in the view of the sea thinking that moving is a great adventure.

The thought of moving and starting over with fresh hopes causes Hagar to flash back to her earlier years. She remembers Mr. Oatley's house where she had found work as a housekeeper after she left Bram. Mr. Oatley was an elderly retired gentleman who supposedly made his money in the shipping of illegal Oriental wives, but who treated Hagar kindly in return for her domestic services. Hagar and John were entitled to unlimited use of the garden, and her salary enabled her to buy some decent clothes for herself. John attended school, but would never bring friends home, describing his two best friends to Hagar as a doctor's son and a funeral parlor owner's son. When Hagar decides to call Mrs. Conner, the doctor's wife and introduce herself, she is horrified to discover that the family has no son. Hagar lets John continue to tell his stories even though she knows they are not true. She constantly reminds him of what her father had said about how anyone can pull himself up with hard work and determination.

Hagar is content with her life. She lives in a lovely home filled with fine things, and her employer never asked questions after Hagar tells him that her husband has died. John goes on to high school, and Hagar watches as his friends come get him in cars. She knows they drink, but when she confronts John, he just smiles and tells her not to worry. Hagar discovers John and a girl tumbling in the bushes in the garden, where John tells the young woman that he's not allowed to have women inside or his "uncle" would be angry. As John's manhood reminds Hagar of Bram and the secret affection she had for his physical presence, Hagar ignores the sexual exploits of her son and continues to stifle her own thoughts of loss or loneliness.

The thoughts of her being alone and in control bring Hagar back to the present. At the age of ninety, Hagar reckons that this period of keeping house for Mr. Oatley was simply a "marking of time," awaiting unexpected outcomes. She recognizes that she may not be able to change what has happened to her in her life, but that she doesn't have to like it or accept it. She sits on the bed in the little building at Shadow Point and watches the darkness come.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The plot is advanced in two concurrent streams. The first is the present-day story of the elderly Hagar and her removal to a nursing home. The second is the piecing together of Hagar's history though flashbacks and memories.

His lying about his friends and his wild behavior foreshadow John's character and future difficulties. Hagar is blind to his character flaws, not even noticing that the friends he

describes are the same as the stories she had told him of her own childhood friends, the doctor's daughter, and the son of the local undertaker.

The blinded stone angel that watches over the family burial plot is symbolic of Hagar's own blindness to her son's character traits and her inability to see the one she's watching over.

There is continued emphasis on Hagar's repression of emotion. She misses Bram's physicality, but fiercely buries the thought and pours herself into her work as a housekeeper. Her prim black and white starched uniform mirrors her repressed emotional state.

Hagar's feistiness and determination not to go to the nursing home depict the preface of "do not go gently into that good night."

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Hagar awakens the next morning to rain. She worries that the rain will enable any intruders to come into her room, and then thinks that if Bram had been with her, he would have taken care of any one. For an instant, she wishes she could float on the sea waters liked one of the drowned, but she pulls herself together and calms herself by having a cigarette. She recalls the last part of the gypsy poem that she couldn't remember the day before, a poem that describes the old woman as wearing an old red blanket cloak before she died a long time ago. Hagar wishes for the warmth of the cloak, and for a moment, she believes that Doris is too cheap to turn the heat on. She thinks of Marvin, who even though he hated smoking, once gave her a small purse ashtray to carry. Hagar continues wondering where everyone is and proclaims that everyone left her instead of her leaving them.

This last declaration propels Hagar again to the past when John was old enough to go to college. Hagar didn't have enough money to send him, but Mr. Oatley got him a job in an office. Upon Mr. Oatley's advice, Hagar saved and invested all her money, only to have it lost in a stock market crash. When she urged John to apply for a scholarship or loan, he refused saying that he was too old and didn't have the brains for school. However, John continued to lose his jobs, sometimes, because they were laying off, sometimes, because they were temporary. Finally, John announces to his mother that he's going back to Manawaka and the Shipley farm. Bram had been writing to Marvin, who lived nearby but who Hagar rarely visited, because she felt uncomfortable with him. Bram had also written to John who confided that Bram's writing was barely legible and that he'd had a half-breed girl come stay with him until she left in the spring.

Hagar bids John farewell, wanting to touch his face but just saying the usual things instead, suggesting that John tell her how Bram really is once he arrives. John writes an occasional letter, and two years later tells Hagar that his dad is really sick. Not knowing why, Hagar herself goes back to Manawaka. There was a terrible drought in Manawaka, one that reduced all the community to the same desperate level, an irony that Hagar doesn't miss. Those who had worked hard all their lives were as impoverished as the Shipleys. John meets Hagar at the station using a car body pulled by horses so they don't waste fuel on the engine. The first words Hagar utters upon seeing her old farmstead is how much Bram has let the place go. The house is filthy, and John's appearance is dirty and disheveled. That's when Hagar notices that John has been drinking. He admits it, telling his mother that he has been distilling his own liquor from potato peelings.

Bram doesn't recognize Hagar and is being cared for by John, whose therapy for him is to let him drink the homemade brew. Bram's own daughters, Jess and Gladys, who didn't live far away, don't help, and it is only John who washes and cleans up after Bram. A few times, Bram will say something of Hagar. One time she heard him declare

that he should have "licked the living daylight out of her, maybe, and she'd have seen I could," and another time when Bram tells Hagar that she reminds him of Clara, his fat first wife. Hagar's reaction is to be angry at God for "giving us eyes but almost never sight."

Hagar begins again to collect the chickens' eggs and sell them in town. John goes with her, and Hagar sees Arlene Simmons, (Lottie Drieser's and Telford Simmon's daughter) flirting with him. When Hagar questions him about Arlene, John says he'd like to "lay her," but nothing else. Hagar tells John that he's talking just like his father even though he's nothing like him, and John argues that she's wrong. Lottie and Hagar meet on the street one day, and Hagar pointedly admits that she's not a "companion" to Mr. Oatley as Lottie has been told, but a housekeeper and that she's come home, because Bram is dying.

John goes out at night frequently and comes home early morning. Hagar never asks about his behavior. She does ask about Charlie Bean, Bram's old drinking companion. John tells her that he died by himself, drunk in the snow. When Hagar comments that his death is no loss, John defends him by saying that he had given him jellybeans and taken him for sleigh rides when he was young. He admits that there are so many other things that he didn't tell Hagar - like the other dangerous games he used to play with the Tonnerre boys, and that the Jason Currie's plaid pin had been traded to Lazarus Tonnerre for the jackknife which is long gone.

One afternoon, Hagar asks John to take her to the cemetery to see the Currie family plot where she finds the stone angel toppled. At Hagar's insistence, John sets the statue up again, but the stone angel has been defaced. Someone has put pink lipstick on the mouth and cheeks until Hagar scrubs her clean. John comments that while he doesn't know who did it, it was probably "some drunk," when Hagar asks who could have done such a thing, she doesn't believe that John doesn't know who did it.

Marvin returns to visit Bram for a few days, and he and his brother fought all the time. Marvin urged John to find a job somewhere else or to come stay with Doris and him. Marvin says he'll find a job for John. The discussion emphasizes that Marvin always found work - no matter what kind of job it was - and John feels that Marvin had been a brave soldier. Hagar suddenly wants to ask Marvin about his war experiences, wanting to soothe him just by listening, but she decides it's too late to offer this. John swears that he'll never go to Marvin's house, because he's sick of living in other people's houses.

Bram never really even noticed Marvin while he was there, but Hagar does hear Marvin saying "I'm sorry" to Bram one night. Bram's attentiveness to Hagar is only to call her "that woman," although once she heard him call out "Hagar" in his sleep. Looking at him in that one moment, Hagar wishes she, too, could say "I'm sorry" like Marvin had. She didn't like him, but she's sorry for the way things had turned out. Bram dies shortly after in the night with no one with him, and Hagar realizes that it wouldn't have mattered whether someone was with him or not. Marvin can't come back to the funeral since

Doris just had their second child, Christina. Bram's daughters came but were angry when they found he hadn't left the farm to them.

Due to the fact that the Shipleys did not have a family plot of their own, Hagar has Bram buried in the Currie plot, with the Shipley named carved on the opposite side of the Currie stone. Bram's daughters were furious about it, but Hagar felt she had to do it. John says that it doesn't matter where Bram was buried, declaring that his father and the Curries were "only different sides of the same coin...they might as well be together there." Hagar wonders who had really cared about Bram Shipley, noting that even though she had nagged at him, he had been important to her. The night after the funeral, however, John was the one who cried.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The title of the book, "The Stone Angel" and its description of a blind, unseeing, cold figure are symbolic of Hagar and all other humans who are blinded by emotions and unfeeling to those around them. Hagar's line, uttered upon seeing Bram near death, encapsulates the major theme of the book, "I could not speak for the salt that filled my throat, and for the anger - not at anyone, at God, perhaps, for giving us eyes but almost never sight." The defacing of the stone angel by applying pink lipstick, is an ill-fated humorous attempt to put some "humanity" into the cold, unseeing marble face by giving the face color and warmth.

The same blind, unfeeling, attitude is reflected in Hagar's life, most particularly in her connection to her two sons. Hagar has little to do with Marvin, who as a young child always strove to win her favor by doing chores and hanging around the kitchen, and who grows up to be a respectable, hard-working man with a family. On the other hand, Hagar completely ignores John's flaws, treasuring him, even though he is the epitome of everything Hagar hated in his father.

The plot continues to be two-pronged, running in concurrent streams between past and present. Hagar's character continues to be developed in the present as she finds renewed strength to escape the nursing home, which she sees as a prison. At the same time that her ninety-year old self is evolving, the young Hagar's life is being pieced together for the reader through flashbacks and memories. John's fate has been foreshadowed throughout by the details Hagar gives of his behavior. He lies about school, has wild friends, has sexual encounters with girls, and drinks.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next morning the sun wakens Hagar, and she wonders why she's cold and stiff and sore. She remembers that Doris used to bring her breakfast and for a minute, she thinks about how nice it would be to be home again. However, she doesn't want to give Doris the satisfaction of being right about Hagar not being able to take care of herself. Hagar also fears that once she is shipped off to the nursing home, there will be no escape.

Having renewed her determination to be self-sufficient, Hagar notices her thirst. In a characteristic manner, she recalls a snippet of poetry: "Water, water, everywhere and not a drop to drink." Calling herself a mariner, she wonders what albatross she killed. Feeling happy, though, Hagar finds an old bucket filled with rainwater from which the sparrows are drinking. She carries the pail to the doorway of the little house, and goes to sit beside the water where she watches two young children playing house. Hagar notices the young girl is organizing and always busy, but she is constantly correcting and critical of the little boy. In a moment of self-realization, Hagar longs to tell the little girl that she should praise the boy occasionally, or else she'll lose him, and again, she recalls a verse of poetry that suggests that love can wither dry up and leave you alone. When Hagar calls to the children to offer them some food, they come near, but are frightened and run home. Deriding herself for being stupid, Hagar realizes that the children have simply seen a fat, disheveled looking old woman, but she still enjoyed their youth and vitality and wishes she could have watched them play longer.

Eating a few of the fancy cheeses she had bought, Hagar believes that they aren't as good as they once were. Her bowels haven't moved, and she becomes nauseous, so she stumbles into the woods where she falls and scratches her legs. While her body aches all over, her helplessness and her unresponsive bowels frustrate her. She takes comfort in the fact that no one is around to see her. The sounds and activity of the wildlife in the woods calm her as she plays with strands of moss plucked from the log she's sitting on. She likens herself to the children she saw playing house, and then she flashes back to the long-ago memory of other children playing house in a different way.

Hagar's flashback picks up after Bram's funeral. She told Mr. Oatley that her brother had died and that she needed a few more weeks. In reality, she didn't want to leave John alone. She soothes herself by completely cleaning the old Shipley house, even the attic where she finds a box labeled "Clara Shipley." Inside the box is a small sampler with the saying, "No Cross No Crown" embroidered on it, a bookmark, and a little ring containing the hair of their firstborn child who died. Hagar decides to deliver the box to Jess who lived three miles away. When she got there, she finds John talking to Jess, asking her about his dad. Not being noticed, Hagar stands eavesdropping, amazed at the easy camaraderie and seeming understanding between Jess and John. When John sees Hagar, she is forced to come into the open, where Jess accepts the box in stilted, formal tones since she's still mad about where her father is buried. John prods Jess to admit

that he was right about his mother who he said would come get him if she had known where he was. On the way home, Hagar asks John why he said such a thing, and he apologizes.

One night, Arlene Simmons brings John home, drunk, and this is when Hagar realizes that they have been going out. Arlene suggests that John will feel better if he gets rid of some of the alcohol, and Hagar helps him leave the room. In the morning, John asks his mother how he got home, only to be surprised that Arlene brought him and had stood up to her parents to do so. John tells Hagar that Arlene's parents were there last night, a fact which Hagar finds humiliating. John continues to be amazed that Arlene had stuck by him. When Hagar's time is up, she returns to her job with Mr. Oatley on the coast, bothered by leaving John and not knowing what was going on.

Hagar returns to Manawaka the next summer while Mr. Oatley was on vacation. Upon entering the home, Hagar notes that it's neat and clean, a fact John credits to Arlene who has been laid off from her teaching job. Hagar says it doesn't matter, because Telford Simmons is well-off, but John says that they are no longer so wealthy. A plainly dressed Arlene comes out to the house and confides to Hagar that she has always liked John, and now that they both have nothing, it's time they marry. Hagar argues that they have no money, and that John isn't the right man for her, as painful as it is for her to admit it.

Arlene tells Hagar that she really doesn't know her own son, but Hagar persists in saying they're both too young - even though they're both near thirty, and that they don't have any money. A certain irony exists in the role reversal that Hagar notes. She says that she never would have believed it if someone had said that her son would fall for "No-Name Lottie's" daughter. Hagar tells John that he shouldn't marry Arlene, but he tells her that it's his business before she goes up to sleep in Marvin's old bedroom. The dark doesn't bother John, but Hagar has always found the darkness frightening even though she doesn't admit it to anyone.

One hot afternoon, Hagar lies down on the couch in the seldom-used front room. Arlene and John come into the house, talking about Hagar and wishing to have the house to themselves again. Arlene admits to John that her mother is afraid she'll be like her own grandmother, who had given birth to a child without a father, "No-Name Lottie." However, John tells her that they won't make the mistake of her getting pregnant, even though Arlene tells John she wants his baby. He tells her that as soon as his mother goes back, they'll get married, but that he doesn't want to be pressured into having a baby. The discussion ends in a lovemaking session on a couch in another room while Hagar is forced to listen quietly. Just for a moment, Hagar loses herself in their love, amazed at how much life they seemed to have even in the midst of having nothing, but her gentle thoughts are quickly erased by thoughts of what Lottie would think. These thoughts are supplanted by the knowledge that Hagar still owns the house, and she is appalled that these young people would brazenly make love on a couch in her house in the middle of the day. After John and Arlene leave, Hagar makes her way up to bed.

Hagar seeks out an alliance with Lottie in order to keep their children from marrying. Lottie, too, is fat, and Hagar notices her girth, telling herself that her own physique is only solid, not flabby. After some very roundabout talk where neither woman insults the other's child, Hagar comments that neither of the women would have dreamed this could happen, and then cruelly throws out a comment intended to hurt Lottie. Hagar says that Arlene doesn't look like either of her parents, to which Lottie responds that she looks like her paternal grandmother. She does, however, have the grace to insult herself slightly by remarking that she should know that it's a mistake to marry in haste. Both women think about the hardships lack of money puts on a couple, and both women think of how much they love their children, the one though that makes them amiable and comfortable with each other. Lottie suggests that a cousin in the East will invite Arlene out for several months. Hagar impulsively asks Lottie if she remembers the incident with the chicks in the dump, asking her if what she did made her feel peculiar. Lottie doesn't even know what Hagar is talking about.

About a month later, Hagar complains to John that Arlene is always there, and he then just tells her that he won't bring her at all. Hagar retorts that that would be fine, words she wished she hadn't said but which she wouldn't take back. John is true to his word, and Hagar is left to wonder where the two took refuge.

The reverie stops, and Hagar realizes that she no longer has the strength to get back to the groundskeeper's house that she's been calling home, mostly, because she can't get up the stairs, and because the possibility of intruders is greater in the house than in the cannery itself. After drinking from her bucket, she proceeds to the cannery.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Frequent literary allusions are utilized throughout the novel. Hagar quotes poetry from Keats, and in this particular chapter references Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous poem entitled "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Hagar's thirst brings to mind the desperate condition of the old mariner who had slain an albatross and because of his cold-hearted actions had to face many punishments. Later in the chapter, Hagar again recalls a verse, as she watches the little children play on the beach.

History repeating itself becomes a recurrent theme. Arlene is making the same mistakes that Hagar did. Hagar rebelled against her father and his established authority and financial status, believing that Bram Shipley would change and make something of himself. Arlene rebels against her parents and believes in John Shipley, regardless of his obvious problems with drinking.

Once again, the theme of emotional restraint is obvious. Hagar has never told anyone how she fears the dark, just as she's never said much positive or loving to anyone. Her restraint has made her a difficult, cantankerous old woman lonely in her older age. Pride is Hagar's downfalls. She cannot seem to humble herself or open herself to any kind of emotional scrutiny.

When Lottie Dreiser doesn't remember the incident with the chicks, Hagar's reliability as a narrator is called into question and the validity of her memories loses credibility, causing the reader to ask if this Hagar is lucid or delusional, if she has misremembered events, or if she has distorted the past because of her feelings.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Hagar describes the cannery as a place where the remnants and debris of an old sailor's quarters have been left, including an old fishing boat and piles of old seashells. She is convinced that she has everything she needs, using old crates for a table and a chair. In a moment of pure fancy, she picks up the shells of dead June bugs and decorates her hair with them. She begins to feel the pain in her chest and slips onto the floor when she notices that a sea gull has gotten into the room. Remembering an old proverb that says a bird in the house means a death in the house, Hagar is alarmed, and throws a crate at it, making it fall. Since she doesn't want to get near the injured bird, Hagar wishes for Marvin, who always knows how to handle problems.

To keep herself company, Hagar begins to sing an old hymn, ending with the line, "Lord, with me abide," but she believes the words are doing her as much good as singing directions from a manual on knitting. She hears dogs barking as she sits on the floor amidst the boxes, thinking that if they attacked her, she wouldn't put up a fight. However, she hears a noise and quickly decides that she truly doesn't to give up without a fight. Hagar is frightened when a man comes in and lights a match. Both are startled, and Hagar is also embarrassed by her appearance, and the dead June bugs glittering in her hair. When the man questions her and asks her if she's all right, Hagar makes sure that he hasn't been sent by them to send her away.

The stranger introduces himself as Murray Ferney Lees with Dependable Life Assurance. Hagar makes sure that Marvin hasn't sent him and then introduces her self. Murray Lees says that the watchman's dogs have chased him and would have gotten him if they hadn't found a wounded gull outside. He offers Hagar a cigarette, which she takes, and they share a jug of red wine. Murray F. Lees reveals his story little by little to Hagar. The more wine they drink, the easier the words flow. Murray's grandfather had been an early circuit-rider-preacher, but his mother was embarrassed by her father and avoided him altogether. Murray admits, however, that he often snuck into the Tabernacle to hear his grandfather preach and to listen to them sing the song about dipping hands into blood. Murray talks about meeting his wife Lou at a Bible camp, and about how Lou could coax angels down from heaven when she opened her thighs. Hagar is startled to connect religious talk with sexual action, but Murray points out that that's really what love is about. The man tells Hagar about the birth of his son, Donnie, who was conceived before marriage, about how the child's weight at birth, a hefty nine pounds, twelve ounces, depressed his wife. She begins to throw herself into her church work, but Murray confides to Hagar that he had lost his faith by then.

Hagar suggests that if it was so easily lost, Murray never really had faith, and he agrees that this is a possibility, but he also knows that the talk of the end of the world is what really turned him off. The church they belonged to talked constantly about the end of the world coming "soon," without a definitive date. Murray continues to talk to Hagar, and

they continue to drink with Hagar noticing that Murray is "drunk as a lord." Murray admits that his wife, Lou, was enthralled with the Tabernacle and their vigils watching for the end of the world. One night, he decides to go with her to a vigil, but he hates it when hears the prayers and watches the minister who would be disappointed if the end didn't come. Murray tells Hagar that he didn't expect the end of the world to be so close.

That night, Murray leaves the Tabernacle vigil and gets home to find the house burned to the ground and his son dead from smoke inhalation. Murray searches for someone to blame, and comments that he should have known going to the meeting wouldn't do him any good. He says that his wife believes he uses the tragedy as the perfect excuse to drink.

Hagar admits to Murray that she, too, had a son and lost him. She is shivering in the cold, and declines when Murray offers to give her his coat. Hagar closes her eyes and goes back in time, remembering when John had told her that Arlene was going east to work for her family for a year. Arlene wants to work and earn money, hoping to gain independence from her parents, but John believes that Telford and Lottie will never allow her that freedom. John tells his mother that he is hoping to get Arlene pregnant before she goes, but his mother tells him he's acting like a child. He replies that she never wanted anything badly enough to fight for it. Hagar tells her son that she only wants her happiness, but John informs her that she "always bets on the wrong horse." He tells her that Marvin is the son that was like her, but that she never can see that. Contrary to his words, John never brings Arlene back to the house again. Instead, Hagar is sharp-tongued and impatient with him, believing that he understands her and knows her intentions are good.

One night John was out late, and Hagar is awakened to Henry Pearl banging on the door asking her to go to town, because something had happened to John. Having not been drinking or gambling for the time he was with Arlene, John had taken back to the wild life, being drunk and challenging Lazarus Tonnerre to drive the truck across the old trestle bridge. Arelene couldn't persuade him not to go, so she went with him, and John checked thoroughly to make sure that there were no trains scheduled, but an unscheduled freight train hit them head on, immediately killing Arlene. Henry Pearl drives Hagar to the hospital to see John. He asks if Arlene is okay, and Hagar tells her she's fine. John says he's sorry, and then tells his mother how much it hurts and asks her to help him. When she rises to get a nurse, John tells her that she can't ease his pain. He dies right after putting his hand on hers.

Hagar recalls that the nurse on duty urged her to cry, but instead she stood up and would never allow herself to cry in front of strangers. Even returning home to the privacy of her bedroom, she had held back the tears too long and could not cry. She says that she had turned to stone and is angered by the fact that she had so many things she'd wanted to put to rights with John but was unable to do, because he died too soon. Hagar goes to see Lottie who is utterly destroyed by the death of her daughter. Hagar, however, does not allow herself the luxury of giving into grief because, she declares, she has no husband to help her as Lottie does. Hagar packs up everything of value, particularly the furnishings from her father's house, and moves back to the coast as Mr.

Oatley's housekeeper. The next year, Mr. Oatley died and left her ten thousand dollars with which she bought a house. She recalls reading about the war, and the change in the price of wheat, and how many Manawaka boys were killed. She wonders if John would have survived the fighting or if he had been killed.

Hagar is pulled back to the present times, startled to find herself crying and telling her story out loud. Murray Lees tells her it will do her good, but she admits that she's angry about it and always will be. Hagar and Murray F. Lees fall asleep, huddled close to each other for warmth.

Upon waking, Hagar finds herself very ill and vomits, humiliated by her lack of decorum. Murray tells her that her voice is strange and that she needs a doctor. In a moment of confusion, Hagar confides to Murray the things she hand wanted to tell John, that she needs no one but him and that he could bring Arlene to the house every evening, and she wouldn't say a thing. Murray realizes that Hagar is ill and urges her to sleep.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Symbolism of the stone angel at the cemetery becomes more significant as the novel progresses. The stone angel in the family plot is just like Hagar, turned to stone, unable to see or cry. She is blinded by her love for her son, unable to see his character flaws. Hagar ignores Marvin, the son that is the respectable kind of son she wanted. Finally, Hagar is unable to see that her own actions and sharp words, her inability to comfort or praise, have created distance and hardness between her and her sons.

The futility or disbelief in religion is continued. Hagar has never put much faith in the Lord or the church, and the sense of anger at God pervades. Years after John's death, and the first time that Hagar has ever grieved, she is still angry at God for the tragedy and says she will be angry until she herself dies.

Switching from present to past using the literary devices of flashback and memory, the plot continues to be developed in two parallel lines. These are Hagar's present dilemma, and the story of her past.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Hagar awakes in the cannery covered with a tweed coat remembering that she had slept on the floor and had drunk wine with a stranger. She also recalls some words that made her feel bereaved, but she can't remember exactly what it was. People approach and Hagar sees Marvin and Doris wearing her brown drab dress, along with Mr. Murray Lees. When Hagar accusingly looks at Murray, he mumbles that it was for her own good, and while Hagar speaks sharply to him, she later apologizes and says that she's sorry about his boy. Murray implies that he, too, is sorry about her son before he goes off, and Hagar feels strangely that meeting Mr. Lees provided her with some kind of mercy. When Hagar gives up and tells Marvin she'll go straight to "that place," meaning Silverthreads, Marvin tells her that she'll have to go to the hospital, because there was something that showed up on the x-rays.

Hagar is taken to a public ward at the hospital, noticing that her world has now shrunk to just one large room. The noise and other people make Hagar complain, and the nurse delivers medications to her as the pain under her ribs continues. The voices around Hagar filter into her consciousness. Someone speaks German, someone else complains about a bad back, and another asks for a bedpan. During the night, she keeps hearing a woman asking for Tom, and phrases of prayer. When a nurse comes during the night to deliver another pill to Hagar, Hagar suddenly finds herself crying to the nurse. Soon, a scrawny, friendly woman comes to Hagar, commenting that she knows Hagar had a bad night. Not knowing that she had spoken out loud, Hagar denies that this is true.

The little woman begins to introduce the other patients, a Mrs. Reilly, a huge woman often described as a "mountain of flesh," agrees that she herd Hagar up several times during the night. The skinny little woman continues by pointing out Mrs. Dobereiner, the German-speaking lady who sings beautifully but can't be understood by others. When Hagar again complains about the noise and her inability to sleep, she remarks that Marvin had to put her in the public ward, because there were no semi-private rooms available. The tiny lady tells Hagar what a fine-looking boy Marvin is, and how she and Tom weren't lucky enough to have children. Hagar notes that this is the lady who was calling for Tom during the night. The woman doesn't deny it. Instead, she says that she's sure it's true, because she's used to having Tom around at night. They had been married for fifty-two years. She also asks Hagar if "her man's" name is John, since she heard her calling for him during the night. When Hagar covers her face, the woman tries to comfort her, introducing herself as Elva Jardine. Hagar retaliates by snidely asking the woman to leave her alone.

Marvin returns to Hagar's bedside admitting that Doris isn't feeling well. While pleased to see him, Hagar covers her pleasure and begins to complain about the noise of the women around her and the need for a semi-private room. Marvin says he'll try, and

Hagar begins demanding a list of her things from home before she begins complaining again about the food they've served her. Marvin tells her that the doctor has ordered her a soft diet, but Hagar complains about Dr. Tappen, forgetting that Dr. Tappen was the man from her childhood, not Dr. Corby who is her current physician. When Marvin offers Hagar grapes as an acceptable food, Hagar begins to realize that she's being unreasonable and whining. She asks herself why she always has to find someone to blame.

Hagar asks about Doris, and Marvin admits that her heart's not good, and she's had one of her "spells." Hagar realizes that Marvin cares deeply about Doris, but that kind of feeling is unfamiliar to her. She doesn't understand their connection. After Marvin leaves, Hagar begins to notice Tom, Elva Jardine's husband, sitting beside his cheerful wife. He is asking when he'll get to come back, and she reassures him, telling him that she's making a good recovery. When Tom reminds her that she has to eat and put more weight on her bones, she reminds him that he's always said those kinds of things to her, and Hagar, listening, hears the affection in their voices. When Tom leaves, she hears Elva crying briefly, but the tiny woman pulls herself out of her sadness by singing and then by taking out her dental plate, which she says, she only puts in when Tom is there.

Elva Jardine begins talking to Mrs. Reilly, a huge Irish-Catholic woman. They converse about Mrs. Reilly's overweight daughter and the tendency toward fat. The German woman motions for a bed pan, and Elva Jardine decides to take herself to the bathroom. While Elva is gone, Hagar asks the nurse when Elva will get to go home, and the nurse admits that she has to have two more surgeries first. The nurse offers Hagar a bedpan, but Hagar declines saying she can go to the bathroom by herself. Told in no uncertain terms that she shouldn't get up without aide, Hagar gets sarcastic and says that she's not good for anything but rest. Elva comes back and aids Hagar by suggesting that if Hagar is in pain, she should ask the doctor for a shot at night. Elva knows how to get things done, because she's been here three months, but that's nothing compared to the seven months that Mrs. Dobereiner has been there.

One of the aides speaks a little German and told Elva that Mrs. Dobereiner prays to die, something that Elva admits she could never do. The conversation leads Elva to tell Hagar that Mrs. Reilly is a great one for prayer, and the two kid each other about which one prays most. As Elva talks, she mentions that she used to attend church in Freehold, and Hagar is immediately interested since Freehold is not far from Manawaka. Elva asks if Hagar knew the Pearl family, and they exchange facts about Henry Pearl's son in Freehold. Keeping the conversation going, Elva asks if Hagar had farmed, and Hagar admits that her husband had. In her insightful way, Elva suggests that living so long without a man was a hardship for Hagar, and Hagar begins to warm up to her, telling her that her husband had been very handsome.

Hagar's comments about her handsome husband makes Elva confide about her relationship with Tom, telling Hagar that they had never been apart until she came into the hospital. Elva offers to help Hagar at night by telling her that if she needs a nurse, she can call one for her. Hagar finally introduces herself by name and when Elva

Jardine leaves, she calls Hagar by name, causing Hagar to remember that it has been a very long time since anyone called her by her proper name.

Another night in the hospital ward, and Hagar again hears the murmurings and voices of the women around her. The pain causes Hagar to call for the nurse, who tells her that she doesn't have orders to give her an injection, but she will bring her a pill. Hagar accuses the nurse of not caring, but eagerly takes the pill, and then apologizes to the nurse for her harsh words. As Hagar begins to drowse again, she hears the voices around her muttering, awakening herself with own scream of "Bram!" Another voice is yelling for a nurse, claiming that Mrs. Shipley is out of bed on the way to the bathroom. Hagar is stopped by the nurse, infuriated, because she hates having to depend on someone else. The nurse replies that surely she must have given others a helping hand, so now it's Hagar's turn to be helped. Hagar thinks about her words, unable to recall many people she's ever given a hand to. Elva asks if Hagar is okay and tells her that she'll remind Hagar in the morning to ask the doctor for a "hypo" at night. Elva is as good as her word, and the doctor leaves instructions to give Hagar a shot so she'll be more comfortable.

Marvin and Doris come in to see Hagar bringing florist's roses and all the other things that Hagar has requested. Doris offers to do Hagar's hair, and while Doris is helping Hagar, Hagar is internally mocking Doris' wardrobe. The discussion turns to Marvin and Doris' daughter, Tina, who has announced that she's getting married. Hagar suggests that Tina is old enough to know her own mind. Hagar, wanting to tell her grand-daughter something of import, pulls her mother's sapphire ring off of her finger and tells Doris to send it to Tina. Hagar admits that it's of no use to her and that she probably should have given it to Doris years ago. As Marvin and Doris leave, Marvin relates that he has done as she asked and Hagar can be moved to a private room. Hagar, instead of being grateful to Marvin for doing as she asked, is peeved. She likes her surroundings. She remarks to Marvin that he can do with her whatever he likes, because it doesn't matter. Marvin is frustrated, commenting that he just can't win, and when he leaves, Hagar pretends sleep, only to hear Elva Jardine tell the others that the sleep will do her good.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The structure of the book is now centered more clearly in the present. Hagar, in her old age and close to her death, is now more aware of her own words and actions and how they've impacted her. She even apologizes to a nurse.

The flashbacks have stopped. Instead, she consciously admits to Elva that she had a husband, and the only references to the past are in her subconscious when she calls out for her two dead men, her husband, Bram, and her son, John. Her mind is no muddled by drugs and pain, and the voices around her are what connect her to the present.

Hagar - at long last - begins to notice that she is different from other people. She is amazed by Marvin's affection for Doris, and unable to understand the tenderness and

affection between Tom and Elva Jardine. For the first time, she feels amiable to another person, the friendly Elva, but her own actions cause her to be taken away from the woman who may have given her some comfort and sympathy.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Hagar opens the chapter by admitting that her world is even smaller now. She's in a well-decorated, semi-private room, and she worries about the cost of it and whether she has enough money for it or whether she has demanded that Marvin and Doris pay for it. A slender young nurse comes in, and Hagar comments on her slight build. The nurse responds that it's obvious Hagar was an extremely handsome woman in her youth. Hagar tells her that she's lucky to be young to which the woman replies that Hagar is the lucky one, because she's "had those years. Nothing can take them away."

Hagar retreats once again to sleep during the night. It's so quiet here without the other women, and breathing is painful. She feels as if she's waiting for someone to call her name just beyond the door where the light shines. Hagar wonders what's taking him so long to say "Hagar." She is suddenly awakened by the young nurse who has found her wandering the halls and must put her into a strait-jacket for her own safety. When she apologizes to Hagar, Hagar apologizes back, telling her she's sorry for putting her to so much trouble. The next morning she awakens to find a young, Asian woman in the other bed, and Hagar's first thought is that this girl is probably the descendant of one of Mr. Oatley's illegally imported women. The girl tells Hagar that she's going to have her appendix out, and Hagar tells her that there's nothing to worry about, even though she's never had an operation in her life.

The young woman assumes that, because Hagar is old, she has been very ill. The two converse a little, finding that both their father's had been storeowners, but the talk soon stops when they come in to wheel the girl to surgery. Without appetite or interest in food, Hagar is aware of someone giving her another shot, and she drifts back into memory of the woods and someone named Ferney until she is called by to the present by Doris' voice who has bought her pastor, Mr. Troy, back to see Hagar. When Mr. Troy asks Hagar if she'd like to pray, she tells him that she's waited this long, so she can wait a little longer still. However, he is welcome to pray. Mr. Troy, in a bland monotone, begins to murmur until Hagar requests the phrase "all people that on earth do dwell..." Mr. Troy suggests that these words are usually sung, and Hagar tells him to go ahead and sing it then. When he finally works up his nerve, Hagar is amazed that Mr. Troy has a beautiful, melodious voice, much better for singing than for prayer. The song's lyrics talk about feeling joy, serving the Lord with mirth, and giving praise.

Moved spiritually, "so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before," Hagar recognizes that she has always wanted to feel joy. A sudden self-awareness occurs as she admits to herself that she has purposely thrown joy aside, that everything she could have felt for her husband, her children, the world around her, was killed by the need for proper appearances, pride, and fear. She believes that the two men she loved who died were killed partly by her restraint.

Mr. Troy is bewildered by Hagar's tearful response, but Hagar thanks him for singing alone, but when Doris comes in and asks if they had a nice chat, Hagar retreats to her usual response, telling her daughter-in-law that she and Mr. Troy had had nothing whatsoever to talk about. Immediately, she is sorry for her sharp-tongued response, and tells Doris that what she had said wasn't true. Mr. Troy was, in fact, very helpful.

Moments later, Hagar's grandson, Stephen, comes in for a visit. He is thirty and an architect. Hagar attempts conversation by talking about Tina's upcoming marriage, and Steven relates that his mother will fly East for the wedding. Hagar feels left out until she begins to understand that Doris won't go until they know what's happening to Hagar in the hospital. She feels frustrated by the fact that she is causing the family such inconvenience. She asks Steven to share his cigarettes with her and tells him that he looks like his grandfather, a Shipley. Steven's response is to tell Hagar that he appreciates her and that she's a "great old girl," reminding her of the times she gave him pennies to buy candy. Instead of being pleased at the memory, Hagar is angered by the fact that she has not spoken openly of so many things and feels that Stephen should know things about her that he never will. She asks her grandson if he is content, a question which surprises him and which she notes he does have his own doubts about. Hagar notes the she would have liked to tell him how much he means to her, but she doesn't, because he'd be embarrassed.

Hagar's roommate reappears after her surgery, angry with Hagar for telling her that it wouldn't hurt. The nurse soothes the girl by muttering something about Hagar, but still the young woman requests to be moved, and Hagar is left wondering if she is a burden to everyone.

That night, Hagar hears her roommate, Sandra Wong, moaning and complaining that she needs to go to the bathroom but she can't reach her light, and the nurse won't come. Hagar puts her light on instead, but the nurse still doesn't appear, so Hagar decides that she'll get the bedpan for Sandra herself. After huge physical effort, Hagar makes it to the bathroom and retrieves the bedpan for Sandra, even exchanging slang words like "okay" and "guy." Hagar is having intense pain, but she is also determined to get the bedpan, as much to prove that she could do it as to help Sandra. When the nurse finally comes into the room to answer the light, she is horrified that Hagar is out of bed. The girl and Hagar share in hilarious, painful laughter, at their shared venture, and in the following days, they develop a quiet rapport with the Sandra sharing her cologne.

When Marvin visits Hagar the next day, she is in pain and admits that she is frightened. Focusing on Marvin who is covering his eyes at her words, Hagar realizes that this is the first time in her life that she ever admitted such shameful words, but she also notes the relief it brings. Marvin apologizes for being crabby with her, taking her hand and causing her to recall the Biblical line, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Hagar's response is that he hasn't been grumpy and that he's been a better son to her than John. Marvin is moved by his mother's words, without ever wondering if she's telling the truth. On his way out of the room, the nurse comments on the strength of Hagar's heart that just keeps going, and Marvin remarks that his mother is "a holy

terror." Hagar hears him, grateful that such a response from him is more than she could expect, because he has said with words with both tenderness and anger.

Hagar recalls her last visit to Manawaka with Marvin and Doris. A tour of the old Shipley home place demonstrated a new split-level house and a nice car. The stone angel, was still there but standing crookedly. The caretaker thought they were tourists and told them about the unusual headstone, which bonded two pioneer families together, a fact which Hagar finds ironic since no matter the status or wealth during life, everyone is equal in death.

From her last recollection of Manawaka, Hagar floats back into sleep, aware of the constant needles and their connection to the relief of pain. She thinks about the Irish customs she'd like to have at her funeral. Her roommate tells her she will be leaving in a few days and hopes Hagar will get out soon. Hagar wonders about anything truly free she's done in ninety years, and can recall only two things. First is her retrieval of the bedpan for Sandra, which so horrified the nurse. Second is her response to Marvin, telling him he was a better son than John. They are words spoken after a long time, with a kind of love.

Hagar's painful breathing reminds her that John had trouble taking his first breaths as an infant, and she calls out for the needle. She yells for Doris, and then complains that it's taken her too long to get there. Hagar is in a hurry to get to the cocoon of sleep, and when Doris asks her if she'd like water, Hagar impatiently and rudely tells her that she can do it herself, grabbing the glass, all the while knowing that she's hurting herself by alienating Doris. Hagar simply can't give up and holds the glass for herself, and stops remembering, dying.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Hagar suddenly decides to be helpful, trying to soothe her roommate's fear of the upcoming appendectomy by claiming that it's not anything to worry about, and she'll feel fine after it's over. Her desire to help is prompted by the recognition that she can't recall helping many others in her entire ninety years of life.

Doris' voice, as early in the novel, again acts as the bridge between Hagar's memories and inner mind and the present. The final scene brings the two women together again, completing the cycle from the first of the story to the end. Doris is constantly trying to please Hagar and help her. Hagar is constantly berating and alienating Doris, just as she had done to the other people in her life, who had wanted to be close to her.

Certain events act as structural signposts for the novel. The early part of the book is connected to the end of the novel by another repetitive incident - the final visit from Mr. Troy, Doris' spiritual counselor.

The ultimate epiphany and climax of the book occurs as Hagar discovers her own faults, recognizing that her inability to express joy and love has imprisoned her. Even with her

newfound realization, however, Hagar is unable to put expression of emotion into practice, never telling her grandson how much he meant to her.

The beautiful, expensive, white marble "stone angel" in the family cemetery is now toppling, cold, and uncared for. Hagar, too, in all her strength suffers her demise unable to connect much with those around her. She, herself, has been as unseeing and blind as the angel she had mocked from the first page of the novel.

The Dylan Thomas preface has permeated the plot. Hagar, after all, does "rage, rage against the dying of the light." She definitely does "not go gentle into that good night," refusing to accept help from others and insisting on doing it her own way, until the last possible moment.

Characters

Daniel Currie

Daniel Currie is the son of Jason Currie. He is four years older than his sister, Hagar. Called Dan by his family, he is delicate, lazy, and often in poor health. He dies at the age of eighteen of a fever after falling into an icy river.

Jason Currie

Jason Currie is Hagar's father. He was born in Scotland to a good family but his father lost all his money in a business deal. Currie immigrated to Canada from the Scottish Highlands with nothing to his name. However, he worked extremely hard, and as owner of Currie's General Store in Manawaka, he became wealthy. Stern, authoritarian, and a harsh disciplinarian, Currie prides himself on being a self-made man and he expects others to conform to the high standards he sets for himself. He is impatient with his sons, and refuses to let Hagar become a schoolteacher. He regards Hagar's husband, Bram, as lazy, and cuts Hagar off without a penny in his will. While stern at home, he is public-spirited, donating money for the building of a new church, and leaving all his wealth to the town.

Matt Currie

Matt Currie is the first son of Jason Currie, and Hagar's brother. He works hard in his father's store but he is clumsy. Ambitious, he dreams of becoming a lawyer or buying a ship and entering the tea trade. He marries Mavis McVitie and moves away from Manawaka. He dies of influenza while still a young man.

Lottie Dreiser

Lottie Dreiser is Hagar's childhood friend. She was born out of wedlock and is mercilessly teased because of it. The boys call her "No-Name." Lottie and Hagar never really like each other. Lottie marries Telford Simmons and she meets Hagar again when Hagar pays her a visit to express disapproval of her son John's plans to marry Lottie's daughter, Arlene.

Elva Jardine

Thin, tiny, and old, Elva Jardine is a patient in the same ward of the hospital that Hagar is admitted to. She talks a lot and tries to befriend Hagar, who slowly warms to her.

Murray F. Lees

Murray F. Lees is a middle-aged man who goes to the fish cannery at Shadow Point to find some peace and quiet. He meets Hagar there and they share their experiences of life. Lees has worked for an insurance company for twenty years. He tells the story of how his son was killed in a fire at the family home when he and his wife were out at a meeting of the Redeemer's Advocate, a Christian sect that preached the end of the world was imminent.

Mr. Oatley

Mr. Oatley is the owner of the house that Hagar lives in with her son John after she leaves her husband. He is a kind, elderly man, and Hagar is his housekeeper. When he dies he leaves Hagar some money in his will.

Henry Pearl

A big farm boy, Henry Pearl is one of Hagar's childhood friends. He marries and has three sons. He brings Hagar the news of John's accident and drives her to the hospital.

Mrs. Reilly

Mrs. Reilly is a patient in the hospital ward with Hagar. She is very large, and speaks in a melodious tone.

Bramford Shipley

Bramford Shipley is a widower who marries Hagar. Bram is tall, black-haired, and bearded, and a good dancer, but he is also vulgar in speech and manner, and largely uneducated; he never reads a book. Fourteen years older than Hagar, he has two daughters, Jess and Gladys, by his previous wife, Clara, and he fathers two sons with Hagar. He has plans to prosper and start a business raising horses, but he is lazy and never applies himself consistently. Nor does he have a good head for business. Eventually he makes himself a laughingstock because his big plans never come to anything. However, Bram does not care what others think of him and he acquires a low reputation in Manawaka. On one occasion he is threatened with jail by a policeman for relieving himself on the steps of Currie's General Store. Bram has more affection for his horses than for the people in his life. He is deeply affected by the death of his favorite stallion, Soldier, but cares nothing when his wife leaves him. Several years after Hagar's departure, Bram becomes sick, and his son John looks after him. When Hagar returns to live at his house, he is so ill he does not recognize her, saying only that she reminds him of Clara, his first wife.

Doris Shipley

Doris Shipley is Marvin's wife, and Hagar's daughter-in-law. In her early sixties, Doris has the principal responsibility for looking after Hagar. She finds this increasingly difficult, and takes every opportunity to point out, with as much tact as she can manage, that Hagar has become a burden. It is Doris who has to push Marvin into moving Hagar into a nursing home. However, while she is caring for Hagar, Doris fulfills her duty as well as she is able, and she finds comfort in religion. Hagar regards Doris as unintelligent and rarely has a good word to say about her.

Hagar Shipley

Hagar Shipley is the ninety-year-old narrator of the novel. Irascible, uncharitable, and impatient with the faults of others, she fears that she is about to lose her independence by being placed in a nursing home by her son Marvin and his wife, Doris. Although tough-minded, she is physically frail, often in pain, forgetful, and confused. She speaks impulsively and sometimes regrets her harsh words even as she speaks them. She often surprises herself by crying without warning. Hagar lives as much in the past as the present. Her memories go back as far as when she was six years old, being brought up by her father, Jason Currie, a stern disciplinarian, who would on occasion beat her with a ruler or a birch twig. Hagar's mother died giving birth to her, and the female influence in the house came from the housekeeper, Auntie Doll. Although Hagar was brought up in a religious household, she has always been skeptical about religion. She received a good education at an academy in Toronto, and she prizes the ability to speak correctly, criticizing and correcting those who do not. As a tall, black-haired, handsome young woman she had pride and willfulness. She married beneath her, to the coarse Bram Shipley, in defiance of her father's wishes. After twenty-four years of marriage, during which she gives birth to two sons, Marvin and John, she once again asserts her independence by leaving her husband and taking a job in another town as a housekeeper. Although she dotes on her younger son, John, Hagar's negative attitude towards others eventually alienates him, and he returns to live with his father. Even as a ninety-year-old, Hagar retains her independence of spirit, fleeing her home and taking refuge in an abandoned building near the sea. But at the end of the novel she realizes that it is her pride that has stopped her from achieving happiness or peace of mind. Her son Marvin sums up Hagar's character when he calls her a "holy terror."

Jess Shipley

Jess Shipley is the daughter of Bram Shipley by his first marriage, to Clara. Hagar does not get along well with her, and they argue about where Bram should be buried.

John Shipley

John Shipley is Hagar's second son. He is nearly ten years younger than his brother Marvin, and is Hagar's favorite. Handsome, with straight black hair, John is inquisitive, a quick learner, and possesses a lot of energy. As a child he often tells lies and gets into fights at school. When he is a teenager he makes friends with the Tonnerre boys whom Hagar distrusts. As a young man, John tires of putting up with Hagar's negative frame of mind and returns to Manawaka to live with his father, Bram Shipley, whom he takes care of until Bram's death. John plans to marry Arlene Simmons but they are both killed after he takes on a bet that he can drive a truck across a railroad bridge. The truck gets hit by a freight train.

Marvin Shipley

Marvin Shipley is Hagar's son, married to Doris. A plodding, unimaginative man of nearly sixty-five who has settled for a quiet, respectable life, Marvin makes a living selling house paint. He dislikes conflict and tries to keep the peace in the family, but he often feels caught between Doris and Hagar, who sometimes exchange sharp words. He has to summon all his courage to inform Hagar that she is being moved to a nursing home. Marvin was never very close to his mother as a boy. Hagar hardly regarded him as her own child, and he has none of her restless and cantankerous spirit. When he was seventeen, Marvin joined the army and fought in World War I. After the war he did not return to Manawaka but worked as a logger on the coast, and then as a longshoreman. He and Doris have a son, Steven, and a daughter, Tina. Hagar frequently thinks disparagingly of Marvin. In her eyes, he is a slow thinker who finds it difficult to express himself verbally.

Steven Shipley

Steven Shipley is Hagar's grandson. He is an architect and visits Hagar in the hospital. Hagar is fond of him.

Tina Shipley

Tina is Hagar's granddaughter who has recently moved out of the family home. She does not appear directly in the novel, but Hagar refers to her with affection.

Arlene Simmons

Arlene Simmons is the daughter of Lottie and Telford Simmons. Fair-haired and pretty, she becomes the girlfriend of John Shipley, and they plan to marry. Arlene is killed along with John when the truck John is driving across a railroad bridge is hit by a train.

Billy Simmons

Billy Simmons is the owner of the funeral home in Manawaka when Hagar is a child. He is poor and has a reputation for drinking too much.

Telford Simmons

Telford Simmons is the son of Billy Simmons. As a boy he has curly hair and a slight stammer. Later he becomes a bank manager and mayor of Manawaka.

Mrs. Steiner

Mrs. Steiner is a talkative resident of Silver-threads Nursing Home. Hagar meets her when she visits the home.

Auntie Doll Stonehouse

Auntie Doll, a widow, is Jason Currie's housekeeper while Hagar is growing up. She takes care of the three Currie children, acting as a surrogate mother.

Charlotte Tappen

A doctor's daughter, Charlotte is Hagar's best friend when they are children. She and her mother put on a wedding reception for Hagar.

Tonnerre Boys

The Tonnerre boys are three brothers who become friends with John Shipley. Their father, Jules, was friends with Matt Currie. The Tonnerres are "half-breeds," a mixture of French Canadian and Indian blood.

Mr. Troy

Mr. Troy is a young clergyman who visits Hagar several times at the request of Doris. He attempts to chat politely, but Hagar is impatient with his religious platitudes.

Sandra Wong

Sandra Wong is a sixteen-year-old girl of Asian ancestry. She shares a room in the hospital with Hagar, and undergoes surgery for the removal of her appendix.

Themes

Pride

The dominant theme of *The Stone Angel* is that of pride. As Hagar herself realizes in a moment of insight near the end of the novel, "Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear." By pride, Hagar means a number of related qualities, such as stubbornness, rebelliousness, willfulness, and a refusal simply 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? I cared too long."

The novel is strewn with examples of Hagar's pride. As a girl, she refuses to cry when she is whipped by her father, and he grudgingly admits she has "backbone." As a young woman, she is unbending. When her dying brother Dan, delirious, calls out for his deceased mother, Matt tries to persuade Hagar to don her mother's old shawl and pretend to be her, in order to comfort her brother. But Hagar, although she wants to, cannot bring herself to do this. She cannot bear to imitate the frailty of the woman who died giving birth to her, because she prides herself too much on her own strength. Later, pride also stops Hagar from enjoying sexual relations with her husband. She never lets him know when she feels pleasurable sensations, because she is ashamed of such feelings. "I prided myself on keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead," she says.

Hagar is very concerned about keeping up appearances in front of other people. She is always aware that she received an education at a private academy and therefore knows how to behave. She looks down on those who do not speak or behave well, and this includes her own husband. She refuses to go to church after Bram has embarrassed her there with his rude comments. And in old age Hagar recalls how on countless occasions she would say to Bram, "Hush. Hush. Don't you know everyone can hear?"

Hagar's pride also results in the suppression of her real feelings. When her son John dies, she refuses to cry in front of the nurse; she will not allow a stranger to see her emotions. But then when she is alone, she finds that she is unable to cry at all. Similarly, she will not show her emotions to her first son, Marvin, when he departs to fight in World War I: "I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go. But I did not want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I'd taken leave of my senses."

Aging

The indignities, infirmities, and fears associated with old age are continually present in the novel. Hagar must bear many things. Her memory, although razor-sharp when she recalls the events of her youth and middle age, falters when it comes to the immediate past. She forgets, for example, that her granddaughter, Tina, left the home more than a

month ago, and asks Doris whether she will be home for supper. She confuses the name of her doctor with that of the doctor who practiced in Manawaka when she was a child.

Hagar has many physical problems, including an unexplained pain under her ribs which is sometimes so severe it takes her breath away. She falls frequently and also suffers from constipation and incontinence. Unaware of the latter, she accuses Doris of making it up. Her physical problems and senility have made her a danger to herself, although she does not know this until Marvin points out that one night she left a cigarette burning and it fell out of the ashtray. When Marvin and Doris tell Hagar they plan to get a sitter so they can go out one evening, she reacts so angrily to the notion that, like a child, she needs a sitter, that they change their minds about going out.

In her old age, Hagar dislikes her appearance. She regards her overweight, unreliable body with disgust, and as she glances sideways in a mirror she sees:

[A] puffed face purple with veins as though someone had scribbled over the skin with an indelible pencil. The skin itself is the silverish white of the creatures one fancies must live under the sea where the sun never reaches. Below the eyes the shadows look as though two soft black petals had been stuck there. The hair which should by rights be black is yellowed white, like damask stored too long in a damp basement.

Alienation

As a consequence of her pride, Hagar has cut herself off from the natural flow of human sympathies. In her old age, trapped in her own negative perceptions and long habits of mind, she is unable to relate harmoniously with others. She is suspicious of people's motives and rejects their attempts to be pleasant. Sometimes she would like to be more reasonable, but a bitter or sarcastic remark will escape her mouth instead, in spite of herself.

Hagar's extreme alienation, the product of a closed heart, sometimes produces unexpected effects. Because she rejects others, she expects them in turn to reject her, so a simple act of kindness from someone else may produce a sudden burst of tears, as when a girl gives up her seat for Hagar on a bus.

Hagar's alienation finds expression in her attitude to religion and to God. She never declares herself to be an atheist, but she has no belief that the universe is under the care of a loving God. She admits to Mr. Troy, the minister, that she has never been able to pray, and she pours scorn on the literalistic Christian picture of heaven: "Even if heaven were real, and measured as Revelation says, so many cubits this way and that, how gimcrack a place it would be, crammed with its pavements of gold, its gates of pearl and topaz, like a gigantic chunk of costume jewelry." Nor does Hagar accept the religious belief that everything that happens in life is for the best: "I don't and never shall, not even if I'm damned for it."

Towards the end of the novel, Hagar makes two small but significant steps that lessen her alienation. She tells Marvin that he has always been good to her, because she senses that that is what he needs to hear; she no longer thinks entirely of her own needs. And though it costs her considerable effort, she fetches a bedpan to ease the discomfort of Sandra Wong, her sixteen-year-old fellow patient in the hospital.

Style

Setting

The present-day setting of the novel, in an unnamed town in Canada, is unremarkable, but Hagar's memories of Manawaka over the years presents a rich portrait of small-town western Canada in the early days of settlement and in the Depression era.

While Hagar is a child, Manawaka is just being established. Hagar's father built the first store in the town, and the house Hagar grows up in is only the second brick house to be constructed in Manawaka; most of the other houses are still poorly built shacks and shanties. Early Manawaka is bleak and isolated. Hagar describes the immediate environment: "the bald-headed prairie stretching out west of us with nothing to speak of except couch-grass or clans of chittering gophers or the gray-green poplar bluffs." It is a harsh, unforgiving environment, in which the temperature in winter sometimes drops to forty degrees below zero.

There are many glimpses of life as it was lived in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In the absence of modern techniques of refrigeration, for example, Manawaka has a town icehouse, where ice blocks cut from the river in winter are stored all summer under sawdust.

Manawaka is a farming community, and in the 1930s there is a drought which has a devastating effect on the town. Machinery stands idle and rusting, and the whole environment presents a sad sight:

The prairie had a hushed look. Rippled dust lay across the fields. The square frame houses squatted exposed, drabber than before, and some of the windows were boarded over like bandaged eyes. Barbed wire fences had tippled flimsily and not been set to rights. The Russian thistle flourished, emblem of want, and farmers cut it and fed it to their own lean cattle.

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person, and is narrated by Hagar. This means that everything is seen from her point of view. It is her thoughts, memories, and impressions that make up the novel; there is no direct information about what other characters are thinking and feeling. They must be understood by their words and actions as Hagar reports them. Of course, Hagar is often a biased witness. It is clear that Marvin and Doris, as they try to do what is best for Hagar, are worth more than the contempt that Hagar heaps upon them.

The limitation of the first-person point of view is that it can only relate events in which the narrator is a direct participant. In *The Stone Angel,* the author overcomes this limitation on several occasions by having Hagar overhear conversations between

others. One example is when she takes some family treasures to Jess, her husband's daughter by his first marriage. She stops outside the kitchen and overhears a conversation between Jess and John, Hagar's son.

Structure

The narrative weaves back and forth between the present and the past through the technique of the flashback. Usually, the transition is prompted by something in the present that triggers Hagar's memory. For example, the nursing home she is taken to visit reminds her of a hospital, which prompts a reminiscence about the birth of her first son.

Hagar's memories are presented in chronological order. Many critics found fault with this aspect of the novel, pointing out that memories are more random and haphazard; they do not usually occur strictly in chronological order. Laurence was aware of this problem. She wrote in an essay, "Gadgetry or Growing: Form and Voice in the Novel":

In some ways I would have liked Hagar's memories to be haphazard. But I felt that, considering the great number of years these memories spanned, the result of such a method would be to make the novel too confusing for the reader. I am still not sure that I decided the right way when I decided to place Hagar's memories in chronological order.

Imagery

The imagery in the novel is frequently drawn from the animal world. Often this is used by Hagar to present a person in an unflattering light. One of Hagar's main targets is Doris, "who heaves and strains like a calving cow"; or is seen "puffing and sighing like a like a sow in labor." Doris gapes at Marvin "like a flounder"; her voice squeaks "like a breathless mouse."

Sometimes this type of simile is used to comic effect, as when Hagar recalls that her husband "used to snort and rumble like a great gray walrus." Sometimes it is directed at Hagar herself, as when she describes herself as a "fenced cow meeting only the barbed wire whichever way she turns," or when she glares at the doctor "like an old malevolent crow, perched silent on a fence."

Symbolism

The recurring bird imagery sometimes acquires symbolic importance, as when Hagar injures a sea gull and it lies on the ground beating its wings helplessly. The sea gull symbolizes Hagar's own state of non-freedom. The bird batters itself "in the terrible rage of not being able to do what it is compelled to do," an apt description of the reality of Hagar's life, in which her desire to live independently, which her pride demands, is no longer possible.

Another symbol is the stone angel that stands over the family plot at the Manawaka cemetery. The novel opens with a description of how this white marble statue was brought from Italy by Hagar's father at great cost. It dwarfs all the other monuments in the cemetery, and is a symbol of her father's pride, which Hagar inherited.

The stone angel also symbolizes Hagar herself. Like stone, Hagar is hard and will not bend. When her son dies, she is "transformed to stone" and cannot weep. Like the stone angel, which was carved with blank eyeballs, Hagar is blind, in that she can view things only from her own self-centered point of view. She lacks insight into herself.

Historical Context

An Authentic Canadian Literature

Laurence once declared that Canadian literature came of age around the time of World War II. It was then that Canadian writers ceased to look to British or American writers for models, but created stories based on Canadian themes and Canadian identity, using specifically Canadian language. One notable example was Sinclair Ross, whose novel *As for Me and My House* (1941) is set in a prairie town during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Laurence, who thought of herself as a prairie writer, acknowledged Ross's work as an influence on her own.

Laurence also named Hugh MacLennan as belonging to that first generation of Canadian-inspired writers. MacLennan's first novel was published in 1941, and he is also noted for his strong sense of place and Canadianness.

Laurence placed herself among the second generation of these specifically Canadian writers, but commented that during the 1960s and 1970s, which includes the time when *The Stone Angel* was written, it was still a struggle for such writers to gain appreciation. She said in an interview with Alan Twiggin 1981, "[I]nthose days we never valued what we had as a nation. For instance, when I was in high school we never read one Canadian book. Then at university I studied the contemporary novel but all the writers were American. This was when Hugh MacLennan and Gabrielle Roy were writing some of their finest work."

By the 1980s, this had changed. In the same interview, Laurence said, "Now there's a whole new generation of Canadian writers who can almost take this 'valuing' of ourselves for granted. I like to keep reminding them that we owe a lot to that generation of writers before me. They worked in terrific isolation. A book wasn't considered any good if it didn't get a seal of approval in London or New York."

The Origins of Manawaka

The Canadian quality of Laurence's work is most noticeable in the flashback portions of *The Stone Angel* that take place in the fictional town of Manawaka. Manawaka is based on Neepawa, the prairie town in southern Manitoba that Laurence grew up in during the 1930s.

Neepawa was established in the late nineteenth century by Scottish settlers who made their way west from Ontario. The first general store was built in 1880 (in the novel, Jason Currie builds the first general store in Manawaka), and the decision of the Manitoba and Northwestern Railway to build a station in Neepawa ensured that the town would flourish. Laurence's own grandfather was the lawyer who incorporated the new town in 1883. The population then was 308.

Although Laurence commented that Manawaka is an amalgam of many prairie towns and is not to be wholly identified with Neepawa, two Manawaka landmarks which appear in *The Stone Angel* do have their real-life counterparts. Neepawa's Whitemud River, where Laurence skated as a child, becomes in the novel Wachakwa River, where Hagar's brother Dan falls through the ice. And the cemetery on the hill where the stone angel stands is based on the Riverside Cemetery in Neepawa.

Early Neepawa, like Manawaka, was a close-knit community steeped in its Scottish Presbyterian heritage that emphasized hard work and religious faith. In the novel, this heritage is embodied in Jason Currie, who was born in the Highlands of Scotland. Like many of the early settlers of Neepawa, he made his way from Ontario without a penny to his name, hoping for a new beginning in the West. Hagar recalls the "Scots burr" of his voice, and the rigid work ethic to which he adhered. Currie, who never missed a church service, embodied the qualities of self-reliance, self-discipline, orderliness, social conservatism, and dour, Calvin-ist religious faith that characterized these settlers of the Canadian west.

Such hardiness of body and soul served Neepawa well in the early days. By the mid-1890s the town was thriving. The area was a wheat-growing region□Neepawa is a Cree Indian word meaning "land of plenty"□and Neepawa served as an agricultural trading center. In *The Stone Angel,* a few years after Hagar marries, "all the farms had bumper wheat crops ... the Red Fife growing so well in the Wachakwa valley." Local industries in Neepawa included lumber milling, farm equipment manufacturing, and dairy goods production. In the novel, Hagar sells eggs for extra income to the Manawaka Creamery and to town families.

Critical Overview

When *The Stone Angel* was first published in 1964, most reviewers recognized it as a major achievement. Robertson Davies, in *The New York Times Book Review,* praised Laurence's insight into character as well as her "freshness of approach . . . her gift for significant detail." The most notable quality of the novel, according to Davies, is "her form and style. . . . She has chosen to relate the story of Hagar in a series of flashbacks, and in the work of writers whose sense of form is defective this device can be wearisome and confusing. Mrs. Laurence slips in and out of the past with the greatest of ease, without arousing any doubts of chronology." Davies also admires the language of the novel, its "good firm vocabulary, congruous with the mind of Hagar herself." Honor Tracy, in *New Republic,* bestowed equally high praise: "It is [Laurence's] admirable achievement to strike, with an equally sure touch, the peculiar note and the universal: she gives us a portrait of a remarkable character and at the same time the picture of old age itself." A reviewer for *Time* described *The Stone Angel* as "one of the most convincing□and the most touching portraits of an unregenerate sinner declining into senility since Sara Monday went to her reward in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth."*

One of the few dissenting voices was an anonymous reviewer for London's *Times Literary Supplement,*

who wrote: "It is a bleak, forbidding book. The life-denying qualities of the character which dominates it spread a chill over its pages, and in choosing to tell the story in the first person□a vast, senile soliloquy□Mrs. Laurence puts a strong check on her genuine creative gifts."

More than any other single work, *The Stone Angel* established Laurence's reputation not only in her native Canada but in the United States and internationally. The novel has stood the test of time. In 1981, Patricia Morley, in her book *Margaret Laurence,* referred to it as "Laurence's best known and most deeply respected work, a novel hailed as a Canadian classic."

The portrayal of the character of Hagar has generally been the most admired aspect of the novel. William New, in the introduction to the 1968 edition of the book, wrote: "So sympathetically has Margaret Laurence created Hagar that we see the world through her. In following the track of her mind as it travels back and forth in its personal narrative, we are moved□not only with her, but also by her□and we come at least to understand a little more about being alive."

More recent critics have explored *The Stone Angel* from a number of different angles. Feminist critics have been attracted to it because of the strong character of Hagar. Brenda Beckman-Long, in"The *Stone Angel* as a Feminine Confessional Novel," has identified the novel as a "feminine confessional narrative that gives voice to a peculiarly feminine experience." Helen M. Buss, *I nMother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence,* has taken the approach of archetypal criticism, examining the novel in terms of the mother archetype as first identified by Carl Jung:

"As Hagar moves toward the unconsciousness of death she reaches for acceptance of the mother on three levels: her memory of the personal mother; the rescue of her own repressed feminine self; and the experience of the numinosity of the Great Mother."

In addition to the accolades of critics, *The Stone Angel* has had an influence on later Canadian writers. David Staines, in his essay on Laurence in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* points out that writers such as Jack Hodgins and Dave Godfrey saw in Laurence a model for what they were trying to achieve in their own work: "Hodgins acknowledges the importance of the novel as the first he read with a voice and a world directly related to his western sympathies."

Because of its compelling portrait of the problems associated with old age, *The Stone Angel* has also been used as a training text in geriatric nursing schools.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century litera-

ture. In the following essay, he explores the spiritual journey ofHagar Shipley in The Stone Angel.

Poor Hagar Shipley. Unreconciled to old age and approaching death, relentlessly critical, unable to reach out to others, always ready to think the worst of people, Hagar is a stone angel indeed. Imprisoned in her own mind, she is unable to bring light to herself or to those around her. However, although the weight of the novel is on the negative aspects of Hagar's behavior, she eventually goes some way towards breaking down the walls she has built around her, and finding redemption.

The word *redemption* is appropriate because there are biblical echoes that suggest the novel may be interpreted as a spiritual journey. In an interview with Rosemary Sullivan, Laurence commented, "My novel in some way or other parallels the story of the Biblical Hagar who is cast out into the wilderness. . . . The natural frame of reference [is] the Biblical one."

In Genesis, Hagar is an Egyptian slave who bears a son to Abraham, then quarrels with Abraham's wife, Sarah, and is temporarily cast into the wilderness. The story is turned into an allegory by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians (4:22-31), in which Hagar represents bondage to the flesh, without the knowledge of divine grace, whereas Sarah represents freedom.

Seen in this light, Hagar in *The Stone Angel* is a wanderer in exile, cut off from the experience of connection to God and to others. Her task, although she may not consciously realize it, is to break out of her isolation, to return to true human community that will take her beyond the confines of her own skin.

Hagar's difficult, halting spiritual journey begins about halfway through the novel, when she concocts a hare-brained scheme to thwart Marvin and Doris's plan to put her in a nursing home. She flees to a quiet place in the country. As she sits down on a toppled tree trunk she realizes that she likes this spot in the open air and muses, "Perhaps I've come here not to hide but to seek. If I sit quietly, willing my heart to cross over, will it obey?"

This is the most urgent question for Hagar to consider. Although consciously she may be referring to her own demise, her heart must "cross over" in another sense□to express compassion for others□before she can reach the safe oblivion of death. Only then will she have learned the lesson of how to live in freedom.

These lessons initially come to her obliquely through several incidents involving the natural world. As she looks down at the moss-covered tree trunk on which she sits,

Hagar notices some fungus, "the velvety underside a mushroom color," and reaches down to touch it. She finds that "it takes and retains my fingerprint." After a long reverie, she comes to herself and finds that she is holding "a hairy slab of coarse moss in one hand." At her feet, a "blind slug hunches itself against one of my shoes." In these small symbolic ways, Hagar is reconnecting herself to life through the forms of the natural world.

Shortly after this, when she takes shelter in an abandoned fish cannery, Hagar notices half a dozen june bugs at her feet. They are dead, but they retain their natural beauty: "Their backs are green and luminous, with a sharp metallic line down the center, and their bellies shimmer with pure copper. If I've unearthed jewels, the least I can do is wear them." She arranges the june bugs in her hair, looks into her purse mirror and finds the effect pleasing: "They liven my gray, transform me."

The effect is rather like the garland of flowers that adorns the head of Shakespeare's *King Lear,* when he too goes through a painful experience of spiritual rebirth. Significant also is the fact that in order to put the bugs in her hair, Hagar must first remove the "prim domestic hat sprouting cultivated flowers" that she is wearing. She casts off the artificial in favor of the natural. This positive step harks back to the beginning of the novel, when in the description of the neatly kept cemetery, the artificial, civilized world of Manawaka's respectable citizens is contrasted unfavorably with the wild freedom of nature. The "wild and gaudy flowers" that grow untended, and have always done so, are more alluring than the "pompous blossoms" of the "portly peonies" that have been planted there. Man's desire to control his environment, to be "civilized" and orderly, leads only to rigid conformity and repression of the natural impulses of life.

Another moment of catharsis arrives when Hagar, still in the fish cannery, relates to Murray Lees, her unexpected visitor, the story of the death of her son John. She finds herself weeping over an event that took place over thirty years ago, something she was unable to do at the time. It is clear that Hagar is on a painful road of healing by coming to terms with her past and her true feelings.

When Hagar enters the hospital, her world shrinks to a single hospital ward, then to a semi-private room. She makes a dark joke about the next room (her coffin) being the smallest of all. And yet as her outer world shrinks, her inner world, painfully, in fits and starts, begins to expand.

But progress is slow. When Marvin visits, Hagar is surprised at how pleased she is to see him, but is unable to tell him so. What comes out of her mouth instead is a long list of complaints. A short while later, she complains about the bland diet she had been put on. But this time she is more reflective, wondering why she always needs someone to blame when things are not as she thinks they should be. Then in another moment of calmness she realizes that Marvin is concerned about Doris's health problems simply because he is fond of her. Hagar knows that this is only natural, "But it seems unfamiliar to me, hard to recognize or accept."

Another significant moment comes in the hospital ward. Initially, Hagar loathes being there, but eventually she discovers that Elva Jardine, the patient in the adjoining bed, comes from a town close to Manawaka, and they have some acquaintances in common. The fact that when Hagar is moved to a semi-private room she feels a sense of loss, as if she has been cast out, suggests that her brief friendship with Elva has served as a reminder of the links formed by human community, the barrier such community erects against the utter solitude of each human life.

Hagar also finds it in herself to recognize the links between generations. In an act of sudden generosity, she gives her mother's sapphire ring, which means a great deal to her, to her granddaughter.

There is nothing sentimental in any of these small steps that Hagar takes toward freeing herself from her mental prison. For most of the time, she remains her usual crotchety, unregenerate self. A few moments after giving the ring, she gets impatient and regrets her generosity. Never for a moment does the novelist imply that transformation is easy, or that the long habits of the past can simply be discarded without a trace.

Whatever are the forces that are gathering to aid Hagar in these last days of her life□and the agnostic Hagar would not be one to speculate□they finally produce a moment of self-realization. As Mr. Troy, whom she has always ridiculed, sings a hymn to her about rejoicing, she realizes that that must be what she has always wanted to do, but has never been able:

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. . . . When did I ever speak the heart's truth?

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me on 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 that I touched.

This realization is bitter because Hagar knows that nothing can erase the errors of the past. But it is a breakthrough nonetheless.

Hagar's redemptive journey culminates in two incidents. First, she befriends Sandra, a sixteen-year-old girl who shares Hagar's hospital room. When Sandra needs a bedpan in the middle of the night, and cannot summon a nurse, Hagar struggles the few steps to the bathroom to fetch it for her. She shuffles and lurches, gets out of breath, almost falls, and ignores stabs of pain. But she is determined to succeed. Nothing compels her to do this, other than concern for another person. After a nurse arrives and reproaches her, Hagar and Sandra laugh together over the incident. As Patricia Morley points out *in Margar etLaurence,* the pronoun "we" occurs four times in as many lines (such as "Convulsed with our paining laughter, we bellow and wheeze. And then we peacefully sleep") which makes it clear that at least for a moment, Hagar has overcome her sense of separation from others.

The second incident is a moment of rare intimacy between Hagar and Marvin. Her son apologizes for being impatient with her and clasps her hand. Hagar realizes what he needs to hear and tells him that he has always been good to her. She is at last able to see a situation from a point of view other than her own, understanding that "I ... can only release myself by releasing him."

Later Hagar decides that these two acts—helping Sandra and comforting Marvin—are the only two free acts she has performed in all her ninety years of life.

As the novel closes, there are hints of metamorphosis. Earlier images of Hagar in the hospital suggest entrapment: she is caught "like a fish in a net"; she feels "like a trussed fowl." But now she lies in a "cocoon," which suggests the possibility of transformation, of rebirth.

Another hint of a subtle alteration in Hagar's condition is the cluster of references to angels. Hagar's words to Marvin quoted earlier allude to the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the angel and demanding a blessing. Hagar views Marvin as Jacob and acknowledges that she is casting herself strangely as the angel. A flashback follows in which Hagar recalls a visit to the cemetery where the stone angel presides over the family plot. Then she speculates about whether life in another realm after death will be surprising in ways that she cannot imagine, just as a newborn baby must be surprised when he discovers that life on earth requires him to breathe. "If it happened that way, I'd pass out in amazement. Can angels faint?" Hagar asks herself, a question which seems to associate her at long last with the other half of the stone angel image of the title. Hagar has been like stone, hard and impenetrable, for long enough; now, perhaps it is time for her to reflect the other side of the image— messenger of truth, symbol of the eternal operation of divine love and light in the human world. It is not that stubborn Hagar herself becomes angelic, but she has pushed open a door just wide enough for light to penetrate. No longer stone, she expresses something more fluid, and it is appropriate that the final transformative image is of water. Hagar's last act is to hold in her hands a full glass of water, wresting it away from a nurse who tries to hold it for her. This is much more than a final affirmation of independence and dignity; for the glass of water held freely at life's end surely also symbolizes the inexhaustible "living water" of the New Testament that signifies divine grace, for grace, like Hagar's glass of water, is also "To be had for the taking."

Source: Bryan Aubrey, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Rooke analyzes The Stone Angel *from a feminist perspective, focusing on Hagar's male relationship.*

The Stone Angel is a carefully organized novel which operates on two obvious levels: the present time of the novel which takes us through Hagar's last days on earth, and the past time of memory which moves us in strict chronological order through the major events of her life to explain the old woman whom we see now. In support of this structure, we are made to sense the physically decrepit Hagar as a mask behind which the true Hagar continues to reside. The novel is also elaborately based upon the biblical stories of Hagar and Jacob and upon sacramental patterns of confession and communion, so that the reader may well arrive at yet another sense of the novel's two dimensions: in the foreground (both past and present) we have the realistic tale of a woman's pride, and in the background (where confirmations or hidden meanings are supposed to lie) a Christian context within which we are to measure the significance of that pride. Thus, we might suppose that Hagar's pride is something like Eve's and that it is seen by the author as reprehensible, the cause of her fall from the garden. Yet here we falter. In the realistic fore-gound we feel that Hagar's pride is not merely her downfall, but also her salvation—and we may question what sense to make of that within the religious context. Our difficulty is compounded by Hagar's refusal to capitulate finally to that insistent religious dimension. While she does clearly make certain accommodations, it is equally apparent that Hagar approaches her death still in the spirit of those lines from Dylan Thomas which Laurence employs as epigraph: "Do not go gentle into that good night. / Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

The difficulty which has been described here comes from our expectation that background and foreground should cohere, and perhaps from an assumption that any extensive use of the Bible and sacraments will very probably signal belief. Some of this difficulty can be resolved if we approach *The Stone Angel* from a feminist perspective. If we consider the role of Christianity in Hagar's life as a woman, we may find another justification for the weight which is given to Christianity in this novel and a partial explanation for Hagar's resistance to it. We will also discover another significant area of backgrounding, an area of feminist concern which explains or corrects our vision of the foreground in which a woman is chastised for her mistreatment of men. These various backgrounds—the past time of the novel, the religious and feminist dimensions—must be considered together if we are to understand *The Stone Angel* as a whole. They cohere as an historical explanation of how Hagar came to be the woman she is at the point of death.

The feminist dimension of *The Stone Angel* can be described as a kind of backgrounding because there is almost no overt consideration of these themes, and because the foreground may seem to be occupied with antithetical ideas. If Hagar is Everywoman, she is apparently a woman on trial for her crimes against men. Indeed, Hagar sees in the woods of Shadow Point the imaginary props and players for a jury trial in which she will summarily be found guilty; her sense of guilt is also indicated when

she finds an old scale with its weights missing. But if the trial were a fair one and her attorney as eloquent as Margaret Laurence, there is little question that Hagar would be let off on compassionate grounds. *The Stone Angel* is told in the first person, by Hagar Shipley□so that Laurence must do all her pleading behind the scenes. In that background she prepares a devastating brief, a full-scale feminist analysis which operates as counterweight to the crime of pride. While she admits Hagar's share of responsibility, Laurence also cites patriarchal society as a kind of instigating culprit; and she argues that men and women alike have been injured by the forces which lead to Hagar's intractable, compensatory pride. The novel avoids polemic by this fortunate circumstance, that Hagar cannot herself articulate (because historically she does not know) the feminist view of her case. Thus, Laurence is compelled to embody these ideas rather than to discuss them, and she does so ultimately in defence of her heroine.

Hagar is consistently identified with the stone angel which is the central image of the novel, indicative obviously of her pride and blindness. But the angel is in fact a monument to Hagar's mother, "who relinquished her feeble ghost as [Hagar] gained [her] stubborn one." The association between angel and mother will require our careful attention, for it is obscured by Jason Currie's evident lack of interest in his dead wife and by our knowledge that the stone angel is essentially a monument to his own pride. Indeed, so thoroghly has she been obliterated that even her name is missing from the text. Hagar has supplanted her mother, rejected her image, and chosen instead to mirror her father's pride. But in the shadow of that stone angel which she becomes is another angel, ministering and mild□the kind of woman we take her mother to have been.

This stone angel is an imported creature, not anything original to the Canadian soil. The would-be pharaoh Jason Currie has purchased it from Italy, presumably because he thinks he can establish his pre-eminence in Manawaka only through an image crafted abroad. Clearly his is the colonial sensibility which looks to the old world for its values and for a continuation of class privilege. By the time Hagar is an old woman, Jason's pretensions (like those of Ozymandias) will have turned to dust: the Currie-Shipley stone will be recognized by a new generation as simply Canadian, marking the graves of two pioneering families with little to choose between them. The angel itself is "askew and tilted"; and even marble does not last forever□ as we know from the description of Hagar's aged skin: "too white ... too dry, powdery as blown dust when the rains failed, flaking with dryness as an old bone will flake and chalk, left out in a sun that grinds bone and flesh and earth to dust as though in a mortar of fire with a pestle of crushing light." In the light of truth, which is partly the recognition of our common mortality, the proud marble angel will finally be dissolved. But there is another angel which also must be laid to rest. And that is the image which Jason Currie seems to have imported from Britain: the Victorian image of woman as "The Angel in the House," a seminal conception of the Victorian era which is celebrated in Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name. This angel is soft, but it is ironically as rigid in conception as the marble image which Jason Currie erects over the corpse of a wife driven to an early grave□a woman puzzled, we may suppose, that her accommodation to the feminine ideal has served her no better than this. The stone angel in this sense expresses Jason Currie's privilege as a *man,* as well as the privilege he enjoys as a man of substance. Jason had little use for women,

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and little reverence for those feminine virtues which inspired men like John Ruskin or Coventry Patmore to such absurd heights of idolatry; but he shared their more significant belief in male superiority, and he accepted their notions of what behaviour and what education were appropriate for a lady.

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 of the feminine virtues which he will expect her eventually to display. Proud of her refusal to cry in the scene where he beats her with a ruler, Jason remarks that she has a "backbone" and takes after him. He is proud also of her intelligence, but wishes it had been granted to his sons instead. So Hagar is courageous, proud, brainy□everything that her father admires; and she is also female, so that these virtues are perceived as useless. Moreover, they prevent the subservience which Jason ultimately expects of her. The tender virtues are not developed in Hagar: she perceives them only as weakness, a malleability which is unacceptable to her sense of self. She repudiates the silliness of other girls, dislikes anything flimsy or gutless. Only when she becomes aware of the standard which holds Lottie Drieser's china doll prettiness superior to her own strong-boned handsomeness does Hagar begin to share her father's view that a genetic irony has transpired in the Currie family: *she* should have inherited her mother's "daintiness", and the "graceful unspirited boys" should have had their father's ox-like strength. Symbolically, however, Hagar's backbone and other insistent bones preserve her from the repulsive formlessness which is stereotypically assigned to women, even as they condemn her in another sense to the rigidity of a stone angel.

In particular, Hagar loathes the vulnerability which she associates with the image of her mother, and which she perceives is equally despised by her father. Jason Currie would occasionally squeeze out a tear at the thought of his late wife, for the edification of "the matrons of the town, who found a tear for the female dead a reassuring tribute to thankless motherhood." Margaret Laurence reminds us here of the perils which attended childbirth in the days before antibiotics, and which required that women be rather forcibly locked into a notion of themselves as mothers to the race. Hagar has no wish to be a martyr; thus she approaches the birth of her first son reluctantly, convinced it will be the death of her. Often in the novel, images of the birth process seem repulsive□as when Hagar observes the "mammoth matriarchal fly ... labouring obscenely to squeeze out of herself her white and clustered eggs." As a child Hagar refuses to be lulled by her father's crocodile tears; she knows that her mother was "the brood mare who lay beneath [the monument] because she'd proved no match for his stud." So Jason Currie pays his token dues to womankind in pretending to honour his wife for her status as victim, but Hagar□instead of feeling compassion or anger on her mother's behalf□merely shares in his contempt for the biological slavery of women.

Jason's wife, in the daguerreotype which Hagar keeps of her, is "a spindly and anxious girl. . . [who] peers perplexed out of her little frame, wondering how on earth to please." That little frame is, of course, the straitjacket which Hagar wishes to avoid in her own life. It requires of women that they live to please others, and it is clearly pernicious. But Hagar reacts too extremely, becoming hidebound in pride□so that only at the point of

death can she engage in "truly free" acts of maternal tenderness. The first of these, involving the pursuit of a bedpan for her young room-mate in the hospital, is possible only because Hagar has been liberated from an actual straitjacket. The second of her free acts also signifies a release from constriction and a motherly reaching out to others, as Hagar breaks the death hold of her wrestling match with Marvin (in the role of Jacob) to give her son the angel's blessing. Although she does not remember her mother in these last hours of life, Hagar as she approaches her own grave has achieved something like a reconciliation with that other angel. So it is that Hagar's last thought, as she holds the glass of water triumphantly in her own hands, taking what is there to be had, is "There. There." These are the mother words, which she has failed to supply for others in their deepest need—and which should have been as free as water. At least three times before in the novel these words have appeared, once when she thought but could not say them to Bram, once when she was trying to calm herself into remembering the name of Shadow Point, and once when she congratulated herself for standing upright in the woods: "There. There." Motherless, Hagar has for nearly all her life been unable to give a mother's love and consolation to the people who needed her. In these last words, she appears as mother to herself: it is a beautiful resolution of her independence and her need. . . .

We come now to one of the most insistent themes of the novel. Hagar is unable to let Bram know the satisfaction she feels in their lovemaking; her pride as a lady forbids any admission of that kind, so that ironically she cannot profit fully from her choice of a virile man. Immediately following her memory of this forced coldness in Bram's bed, Hagar is seen as an old woman lying flat on her back and "cold as winter" in another bed, remembering how children lie down in snow to make "the outline of an angel with spread wings." Significantly crafted in childhood, this snow angel recalls obviously the whiteness and chill of marble as well as the chastity of the Victorian angel. The root cause of Hagar's dilemma is religion, by way of Jason—for her father's dour Presbyterianism holds that sexuality is evil. Accordingly, his affair with "No-Name Lottie Drieser's mother" is perceived as dirty, something to be concealed from decent folk. Jason's partner in crime is a Victorian stereotype, abused and dwelling in shadows: "her face soft and blank as though she expected nothing out of life ... she began to trudge up the hill." Because women like this exist, others may remain pure ... so absurdly pure in fact, that Hagar is condemned to enter marriage with absolutely no information about what will happen on her wedding night. The sum of Jason's teaching is that "'Men have terrible thoughts,'" a notion which explains in part (for there are also economic motives) the Victorian allocation of chastity to women: as angels they must compensate for the bestiality of men, keeping humanity as far as possible out of Satan's grasp. Particularly was the lady to be unimpassioned, while women of a lower order (harlots and half-breeds) might be lascivious in the service of any man who chose to risk perdition. Hagar is not devout, but she is Presbyterian and Victorian enough to associate sex with stable beasts and the lower classes, with men who cannot help themselves, and with ladies least of all. In this way is her body victimized—not that she must endure her husband's embrace, but that she may not labour in love for their mutual satisfaction. She is paid for her sacrifice in being known as a lady. Again and again. Hagar relinquishes her claim to a full humanity—always in order that she may remain a lady, always failing to perceive that this apparent superiority is a ruse.

Hagar's exposure to genteel poetry and art have also contributed to her view of love as asexual: "Love, I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets, not like things he did sprawled on the high white bedstead that rattled like a train." Bram has proven more rough Indian than Hagar had any reason to suspect. She brings to his house a print by Holman Hunt which she had acquired in the East (always the avenue for Victoriana): "I did so much admire the knight and lady's swooning adoration, until one day I saw the coyness of the pair, playing at passion, and in a fury I dropped the picture, gilt frame and all, into the slough, feeling it had betrayed me." Significantly, this picture is juxtaposed against another of horses□which Bram dislikes, despite his passion for horses, because he is annoyed that Hagar prefers the picture of the thing to the reality. The horses here (recalling Jason as stud to his wife's broodmare) obviously signify the truth of sexuality, in contrast to the myth which is perpetrated in Holman Hunt's picture. But Hagar knows that she has been betrayed, is angered not by the harsh reality of love so much as by the fact that lies such as these pale images of Holman Hunt have cut her off from authentic passion.

Hagar enters in her marriage to Bram a new kind of subjugation. She has escaped the destiny of Victorian females who sacrifice everything to their parents, a fate like that of the poor Manawaka spinster whose tomb inscription reads: *"Rest in peace. From toil, surcease. Regina Weese."* But sexual experience is not liberating for her, and the work site must perform for a houseful of men is still drudgery. That ox-like strength she would once have exchanged for daintiness takes her through twenty-four years of hard labour in which she becomes increasingly like Bram's first wife. Clara Shipley, "inarticulate as a stabled beast," was fat, her voice gruff as a man's; likewise, Hagar gains bulk (for lack, she believes, of a proper lady's corset) and wears a man's overcoat without remembering to object. But internally she remains Hagar Currie. She is contemptuous of Bram's daughters by Clara, coarse women who cannot in any way transcend their condition. At the same time, she is reduced in the fashion of all such farm wives to cheating her husband on the egg money and never questions that what little Bram's farm makes is not his own entirely.

She is Hagar the Egyptian bondwoman of *Genesis,* no happier in her servitude than was that other Hagar. Always she rejects the satisfactions of martyrdom, the support which Clara Shipley received from what Hagar calls her "morbid motto": *"No Cross No Crown. "* Even as an old woman, Hagar will recoil from the martyrish attitudes of her daughter-in-law, despising that slavish Christianity which looks for its reward in another world. Hagar is too proud to grovel for profit, and we may honour her for that□even as we deplore her failure to appreciate the labours of Doris, and of those other women with whom she denied kinship.

Finally, Hagar decides to leave Bram. The offence of her pride has become unendurable, and she is anxious to provide another sort of environment for John, the favoured son in whom she believes the Currie heritage will flower. Ironically, she must become a servant in earnest□a woman in uniform, no longer veiled as daughter or wife□in order to earn money and to live in the sort of house she thinks is appropriate for a Currie. Also ironically, her new position echoes that of Auntie Doll, housekeeper to the Curries, in relation to whom Hagar had supposed herself "quite different... a different

sort entirely." That she has gone from bad to worse is suggested by the peculiarly unsavoury manner in which Mr. Oatley, her employer, has made his fortune: he has shipped Oriental wives into Canada, allowing them to plummet through the false bottom of the vessel whenever Immigration became suspicious. This grisly practice obtrudes oddly in the book, until we realize that it announces the author's concern with the wrongs which have been perpetrated against women by male society.

In a male fortress, then, a house founded on the death of women, Hagar lives quietly with John and at night (but only then) yearns for the body of her husband. She has resumed a version of the place she held in Jason Currie's house, and in her retreat to such spurious prestige has re-created for John the prison of her own childhood. John is deprived of Bram, as the Currie brothers were deprived of their father's love; and he is raised to hold himself aloof in pride, in circumstances which reveal the foolishness of pride. When the Depression strikes and his prospects are reduced to zero, John returns to Manawaka. There he presides over the death of Bram, caring for him as Matt had for Dan□again as a substitute for Hagar, who comes finally but is not recognized. This is a kind of retribution for her unwillingness at Dan's death to bend and assume another's role: now Bram, the one person who called her Hagar, mistakes her for "his fat and cow-like first wife," Clara.

During this and a subsequent visit to Manawaka, Hagar observes the love which is growing up between John and Arlene Simmons, who is Lottie Drieser's daughter. Arlene's position in Manawaka society is superior to John's, a neat reversal of the time when Hagar could hold herself superior to Lottie. Thus, John thinks at first that he is Bram-like for Arlene, illicit and therefore attractive as an opportunity for rebellion. But Arlene is free of such considerations. She has abandoned the sense of class superiority and with it the sense of sex as something a woman cannot enjoy without demeaning herself. She loves John and is capable of redeeming him for a life of joy□not of changing him exactly, as Hagar (thinking of Bram) warns her that she cannot, but of being open to him in such a way that John will change and grow of his own volition. That "stiff black seed on the page" of her *Sweet Pea Reader,* at which Hagar had stared as a child, hoping it would "swell and blossom into something different, something rare," shows signs of doing just that in the relationship of Arlene and Hagar's son. Seeing how freely Arlene can show her passion to John, Hagar finds it "incredible that such a spate of unapologetic life should flourish in this mean and crabbed world"□incredible perhaps, but for an instant she believes in this new, miraculous life for men and women.

Then she conspires with Lottie to separate their children, symbolically to stamp out their life, just as once before she stood by as Lottie trampled on the chicks emerging from their shells; in both cases death is accomplished presumably for the good of its victims. In the same punishing spirit, Jason Currie had claimed that he beat his daughter for her own good; thus he forbade her marriage to Bram. In fact his motive was self-interested, and the motive is what counts. Hagar, in need of water (her well in the wilderness) at Shadow Point, will quote Coleridge and ask "What albatross did I slay, for mercy's sake?" She will wound a gull (the spirit of love) and think "I'd gladly kill it, but I can't bring myself to go near enough." The significance of this seems to be that Hagar's fastidious pride keeps her from an act of mercy, as it had when she refused to wear the

plaid shawl to ease Dan's death. In causing the separation of John and Arlene, however, their mothers do not kill "for mercy's sake," but for their own. John (whose mother will not allow him independent life) regresses to the recklessness of an embittered child and kills both himself and Arlene in a car crash. Their life is coolly stamped out. And Hagar's albatross, the guilt she feels for John's death, will be appeased only when Hagar in the role of the ancient mariner can look into her heart and admit the failure of love.

The circumstances surrounding John's death are repressed by Hagar (and kept from the reader) until the turning and gathering point of the novel, which occurs at Shadow Point. Hagar has run away from her house in Vancouver because Marvin and Doris intend to put her in the nursing home which Hagar the Egyptian thinks of as "a mausoleum": she is running still from incarceration, from any imposed image of herself as feeble or subject to another's will. Twice before Hagar had fled—from her father's mausoleum to Bram's house, and from there to Mr. Oatley's death-like mansion in Vancouver. Her destination now repeats the flight to Bram's house. The abandoned house in which she first seeks shelter is unpainted, as the Shipley place had been; but now Hagar takes satisfaction in its weathered state, thinking how Marvin (the proper son, who sells house paint) would disapprove as once she relished Jason Currie's disapproval. Her second shelter, the cannery, with its "rusted and unrecognizable machinery" and the "skeleton" of a fishboat, also recalls the Shipley place, where "rusty machinery stood like aged bodies gradually expiring from exposure, ribs turned to the sun." These connections are important, because at Shadow Point Hagar will confront the deaths associated with the drought-plagued Shipley place— Bram's death, and finally John's. Hagar, we may remember, is herself a figure of the drought: her aged skin is "powdery as blown dust when the rains failed . . . left out in a sun that grinds bone and flesh and earth to dust as though in a mortar of fire with a pestle of light." But she will also, when she has suffered enough of such fiery enlightenment, be granted the mercy of water before her own death comes in fact.

Significantly, she must descend a stairway to arrive at the place where her genuine freedom will begin. There may be echoes here of that staircase she climbed up in Jason's house to begin her tenure as his chatelaine. Now, as the stone angel topples, as a lady would come down from her pedestal, so Hagar laboriously descends the half-rotted steps which lead to the beach. "It's not a proper stairway, actually"—it is returning to its natural condition, just as Hagar, "feeling slightly dizzy," abandons propriety to enter the depths of her own nature. On the way down these steps she feels the "goatsbeard brush satyr-like" against her—as Bram had done when they met; and she sees a kind of wildflower called the Star of Bethlehem, which (together with the Pan images) implies the spiritual rebirth which is waiting for her at Shadow Point. She delights in thinking of herself as Meg Mer-rilies, from the poem by Keats—an old gypsy woman (common, by the world's reckoning) whose house was "out of doors," whose "book" (like Hagar's) was "a churchyard tomb." It is as Meg *Mer-rilies* that she will encounter *Murray Lees,* her spiritual double, and drink the wine which is referred to in Keats' poem. They will exhibit toward one another something of that easegiving generosity which is also contained in the poem: "She plaited mats o' rushes, / And gave them to the cottagers /

She met among the bushes." Old Meg is compassionate; she sings and decks her hair with garlands (as Hagar does with June bugs); she rejoices in nature; and she dies. The model of womanhood she offers to Hagar on the eve of her own death is also one of independence and of undiminished pride: "Old Meg was brave as Margaret Queen/And tall as Amazon." This is the resolution of compassion and pride which Hagar seeks.

On the beach, Hagar sees a small boy and girl playing house. These children are later compared to John and Arlene, and there is also a connection with Hagar and Murray Lees, who take up residence together in the cannery. The girl is nagging at the boy, fussing about appearances; and Hagar wants to warn her that she will lose him if she continues to be so critical, so niggardly of praise. Again, the drought metaphor is employed: *"The branches will wither, the roots they will die, / You 'll be all forsaken and you 'll never know why."* When she intervenes, however, the children cling to one another□and this show of unity makes Hagar think that she has underestimated them, as clearly she does in the case of John and Arlene. Rather strangely, Hagar has claimed that she was herself forsaken: "I never left them. It was the other way around, I swear it." In any case, she is at last beginning to know why. She acknowledges here that love is the water required for growth, and that false pride can kill as surely as the drought. When love fails, each partner is forsaken; both lose, and blame is not the crucial issue.

The turning point comes with the arrival of Murray F. Lees. Almost her first remark to him is " 'I hope you'll excuse my appearance,'" but soon Hagar relaxes enough to share his wine and listen to his tale. What she hears is essentially her own story: a tale in which religion plays an important role, where the chief villains are a concern for appearances and the denial of sexuality, and where the catastrophe involves the loss of a son. Murray's story is about two women, his mother and his wife. Rose Ferney was his mother's name, "'A delicate name, she used to say,'" but Rose was in fact as tough as a morning glory vine.

Ironically, Hagar fails to see herself in Rose: " 'Fancy spending your life worrying what people were thinking. She must have had a rather weak character.'" The point, of course, is that the proverbial clinging vine takes many forms, both strong and weak; the frailty of women can be deceptive (as in the case of Rose or Lottie), and the tenacity which is shown in an obsessive regard for appearances is also weakness.

Murray's grandfather was a circuit rider, an evangelist who greatly embarrassed his Anglican daughter-in-law; yet Murray preferred " 'hellfire to [his mother's] lavender talcum,'" and became himself a Redeemer's Advocate. The passion of that sect became still more attractive when he met Lou at Bible Camp, for here it seemed was a religion in which "'prayer and *that'"* were not the "'odd combination'" which Hagar thinks they are. Then Lou got pregnant and began to worry (as Murray's mother always had) about her reputation. They married, but her concern grew with the arrival of a child too big to be premature□and her heart went out of sex. She thought that God was punishing her, and her religion became (like Jason's Presbyterianism) a denial of the flesh. But the real punishment came for Lou and Murray, as it had for Hagar, in the *death* of their son□and not his birth, which was the fruit of love. Thus, the child is killed in a fire while Lou is in

the tabernacle with Murray, " 'begging for the keys of heaven.'" They are punished symbolically, as Hagar is throughout her life and especially in John's death, for the denial of sexuality which Laurence opposes so vehemently in this novel. In Lou's original sensuality and its demise, we see clearly what Laurence believes has been done to women in the name of religion and propriety; in Murray's deprivation at the change in his wife, we see how this process has worked also to the disadvantage of the male.

Hagar does not come to any conscious realization of her error in listening to Murray's story. But it works on her subconsciously, as in a sort of dream she admits the guilt which is parallel to Murray's, and he assumes the role of John in order to forgive her. She also exhibits forgiveness toward Murray, first in trying to assuage his guilt over the fire, and second in pardoning him for the broken promise which brings Marvin and Doris to the cannery. Strictly speaking, Hagar is wrong when she tells Murray that "'No one's to blame'" for his son's death. Yet there are times when compassion requires us to act and speak not strictly in accordance with some ideal of truth, but with a clear sense of the other's plight. That same generosity in which Hagar has failed so often, and which she is learning with such difficulty now, must in the end be applied to her. We judge her less harshly than we might because we acknowledge the power of those forces which have worked against her. At the same time, we admire Hagar's pride precisely because it is a form (however twisted) of resistance to those forces□a statement, in fact, that Hagar Shipley is her own woman. She will not beg at heaven's gate, or cite excuses; if there is a God, he must take her as we do□for better or worse.

With the arrival of Marvin and Doris at the cannery, we learn that Hagar is dying. She is taken to a hospital, where her pride seems to be thriving still as she insists that Marvin get her a private room. A ward full of helpless women, where you sleep "as you would in a barracks or a potter's field, cheek-by-jowl with heaven knows who all," is not the place for Hagar. Although she has just been comforted by a night in the proximity of Murray Lees, "Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke." In fact, the ward is exactly what Hagar needs, and she is kept there long enough to make friends with Elva Jardine, a common *woman*□as if to repeat in another key her experience of comradeship with Murray Lees. It is at this point in the novel that the theme of sisterhood becomes apparent. After a lifetime of despising women, Hagar is at last compelled to join the ranks of her own sex. Her democratization (the lessening of class pride) takes the form of a movement toward her fellow women in order to suggest that Hagar has turned to pride of class partly as an escape from the humiliations of her sex.

Elva Jardine recalls Mrs. Steiner, the woman at Silverthreads Nursing Home who had seemed briefly to hold out the promise of friendship for Hagar. It was she who spoke of the comfort to be had from daughters (a point also made by Lottie), and who articulated Hagar's own astonishment at the way a woman's body can travel from puberty through childbirth to menopause with such harrowing speed that the *mind* seems left behind at every stage, aghast and wondering. Hagar liked Mrs. Steiner immediately, but saw her as a trap designed to make Silverthreads and resignation seem attractive. She ran from that "oriental shrug" which accompanied Mrs. Steiner's ironic question: " 'Where will you go? You got someplace to go?'" Having run from "oriental" (or submissive) womanhood

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as far as she was able, Hagar at last can run no more; the body is insistent, and now what it insists upon is death. Thus, she confronts her *human* fate simultaneously with her identity as woman, which she recognizes through Elva and other women in the hospital. It is important for Laurence that Hagar should make this connection before she dies.

Hagar doesn't like Elva immediately, for her pride interferes, and she recoils as usual from the sort of woman who seems "flimsy as moth wings." But Elva is tough in spirit, as well as compassionate toward other women and tender in the love she exhibits toward her husband. All of this is a lesson for Hagar, one that strikes to her roots because Elva (by a fortunate coincidence) is from Manawaka. Thus, Hagar can return in imagination to claim Bram instead of Jason (whom she might have used to impress Elva) and to admit through Elva her kinship with those common women of Manawaka she had once denied. Like Mrs. Steiner, Elva Jardine faces her own imminent death as a woman and with courage, revealing to Hagar that the two are not at odds. And she offers another lesson in the way she handles the indignities of bowel and bladder which have been so oppressive to Hagar in her infirmity. She struggles to the bathroom on her " 'own two pins,'" but will accept help when she needs it—as well as *offer* help, in the shape of a bedpan for Mrs. Dobereiner. Hagar proves that she has learned what Elva has to teach when (valiantly, but with an appreciation of absurdity) she gets the bedpan for Sandra Wong, her final room-mate. Those bed-sheets which Doris washed so frequently, without complaining to Hagar until the end, are recalled by these events—so that we have a sense of many women joining together to admit the realities of the body, and to deal with the indignities that oppose them.

In Sandra Wong, Hagar confronts the changes which have occurred in women's lives. Laurence makes her Chinese so that Hagar can imagine her as "the granddaughter of one of the small foot-bound women whom Mr. Oatley smuggled in, when Oriental wives were frowned upon." But Sandra "speaks just like Tina," Hagar's own liberated granddaughter—which places Hagar squarely in that generation of women whose feet were bound. The corset of a lady was more appealing to Hagar, and would seem more natural; but it is not dissimilar in function, as both forms of binding work to restrict the movements of women and reduce their size. And all of this occurs for the delectation of the male, whose vanity is flattered by an implicit comparison to his own superior mobility and stature, while ironically the vanity of woman is provoked to make her collaborate in the process of diminution. In effect, woman turns to self-love in order to avoid self-hatred; she defeats herself in order to save herself when she embraces pride of class or personal vanity as her defence. This image of constriction (the footbinding) connects with that straitjacket of pride from which Hagar must be released in order to get the bedpan for Sandra and to bless Marvin—her two "truly free" acts—and so reveals the deep interpenetration of these themes in the novel. Hagar's own complicity is further implied when she thinks, "Maybe I owe my house to her grandmother's passage money. There's a thought." She does not pursue that thought, but we may—and we realize that Hagar's mistake has been to join forces with the oppressor (all that Jason Currie has represented in the way of patriarchal, Victorian arrogance), and that she has done so for her own profit, although that profit has been illusory. In fact, she has been deformed as badly as those other women from whom she had hoped to dissociate herself. As their

feet were crippled, so in her compensatory pride Hagar has been kept from the natural, healthy development of feeling which was her birthright as a woman and as a human being.

Hagar welcomes the changes which have come about for women, that the young nurse has training which allows her independence and that Sandra Wong can refer knowledgeably to hysterectomies, but she knows that nothing changes all at once: "The plagues go on from generation to generation." With Tina, however, it seems that progress has been made, for contrary to her grand-mother's expectation, Tina has found "a man who'll bear her independence," and Hagar sends her a sapphire ring as a wedding present. With this ring, the novel comes a full circle. It had belonged to Hagar's despised mother, and should have gone (as Hagar tells Doris in a gesture of reconciliation) to her despised daughter-in-law first of all. It might also have gone to Arlene, of course, if Hagar had possessed the wisdom then that she shows now in sending the ring to Tina. Hagar does not envision here a future for women without men, but a situation in which both men and women will be free to love one another and to respect each other's needs. She cannot undo the past. She will not deny the person she has been. But in the act of ring-giving, Hagar succeeds in linking four generations of women with some faith that whatever plagues continue, of pride or other oppression, there will also be increasing joy.

Source: Constance Rooke, "A Feminist Reading of *The Stone Angel,"* in *Canadian Literature,* Vol. 93, Summer 1982, pp. 26^1.

Adaptations

A version of *The Stone Angel* on audiocassette is available from Northwest Passages, 628 Pen-zer Street Kamloops, BC, V2C 3G5, Canada. Web site: www.nwpassages.com

Topics for Further Study

Research the topic of elder care. What are some typical problems that arise when people care for an elderly parent, and how are these shown in *The Stone Angel?*

Investigate the aging process and how it affects short-and long-term memory. How are these changes reflected in *The Stone Angel?*

Research the history of Manitoba and describe how it was affected by the Great Depression in the 1930s.

How accurately is this reflected in what happens to Manawaka in *The Stone Angel?*

Describe your response to Hagar Shipley. Does your reaction to her change during the course of the novel, and if so, in what way?

Compare and Contrast

1890s: Presbyterian clergyman Ralph Connor, one of the earliest of Canadian writers of the West, writes best-selling novels that draw on his Scottish heritage.

1940s: Distinctive Canadian fiction, celebrating Canadian identity, begins to emerge in the work of Sinclair Ross and Hugh MacLennan.

1960s: Margaret Laurence writes most of the Manawaka series.

Today: Canadian writers such as Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood are in the forefront of world literature.

1890s: The economy in Manitoba is based on agriculture, with manufacturing and transportation later becoming important.

1930s: One out of every four workers is unemployed, and Manitoba is devastated by drought.

Today: Agriculture remains the backbone of rural Manitoba, where wheat is the most important crop, followed by barley and canola.

1890s: Educational opportunities for women are very limited. Like Hagar Shipley, women typically work unpaid in the home, looking after the children and performing household tasks.

1930s: Fewer than four percent of Canadian women work outside the home.

1960s: The women's movement emerges, calling for equality with men.

Today: Over ten percent of women in Canada hold a university degree. Women make up more than fifty-three percent of full-time undergraduate students at Canadian universities, and account for forty-five percent of the Canadian labor force. However, in many jobs they continue to earn less than men.

What Do I Read Next?

When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple (1991), edited by Sandra Martz, is a collection of prose, poetry, and photographs that explores the aging process in women in a positive light.

Barbara Pym's novel *Quartet in Autumn* (1977) explores with wry humor and gentle irony the lives of four single people in their sixties. In the face of solitude and aging, they do their best to construct meaningful lives.

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605-06) is a harrowing play about an eighty-year-old king who is cast out by two of his daughters, and through extreme suffering finally attains a measure of wisdom and redemption.

"Today Is Sunday," one of the stories in Peter Ho Davies' collection *Equal Love* (2000), is interesting because it revolves around a situation that occurs twice in *The Stone Angel,* when a character pretends to be a cherished relative of a delirious or dying person in order to offer the sick person comfort.

The Jest of God (1966), the second novel in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka series, is about Rachel Cameron, a lonely teacher who eventually learns how to come to terms with her anxiety and confusion.

Aging 00/01, 13th ed. (1999), by Harold Cox, is a collection of press articles that discuss a variety of problems and solutions related to aging in today's society.

Betty Friedan's *The Fountain of Age* (1994) presents a new look at how society views aging. It shows that myths of inevitable decline are outdated, and that life can continue to be full of growth and happiness even as people age.

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Further Study

Cameron, Donald, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists,*

Macmillan of Canada, 1973.

Includes "The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom," an interview with Laurence.

Coger, Greta M. K. McCormick, ed., *New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence: Poetic Narrative, Multiculturalism, and Feminism,* Greenwood Press, 1996.

Eighteen essays on all aspects of Laurence's work, including three on *The Stone Angel,* suitable for advanced students.

Gibson, Graeme, *Eleven Canadian Novelists,* Toronto, 1973. This includes a wide-ranging interview with Margaret Laurence, as well as with other Canadian authors, including Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Mordecai Richler.

Kuester, Hildegard, *The Crafting of Chaos: Narrative Structure in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel and The Diviners,* Rodopi, 1994.

The chapter on *The Stone Angel* is scholarly but readable, and includes an interesting section on the genesis of the novel, in which Kuester examines an earlier typescript version and compares it to the final version.

Lennox, John, and Ruth Panofsky, eds., *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman,* University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Laurence conducted a forty-year correspondence with her friend and fellow novelist Adele Wiseman, and nearly four hundred of those letters are included here. There are numerous comments about *The Stone Angel.*

Morley, Patricia, *Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home,* McGill-Queens University Press, 1991.

A biographical and critical study which shows the links between Laurence's African and Canadian writing and her evolving sociopolitical concerns.

Thomas, Clara, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence,* McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

This readable survey of Laurence's fiction is one of the best introductions to her work.

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Morley, Patricia, *Margaret Laurence,* Twayne, 1981, pp. 78, 81.

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Sullivan, Rosemary, "An Interview with Margaret Laurence," in *A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Mar-*

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamedfor instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as The Narrator and alphabetized as Narrator. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name Jean Louise Finch would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname Scout Finch.
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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