

English 3201

Novel Study The Stone Angel

Student Handbook



Overview of the Novel

The story is told from the viewpoint of Hagar Shipley, the protagonist in the novel. Hagar is seen at the age of 90 years attempting to come to grips and understand her life, as she reminisces about her childhood, her marriage, and her struggle with life through flashbacks in the novel. The story reveals Hagar's attempts to release her inner emotions and feelings in order to gain inner freedom and peace before her death. Hagar is forgetful, spiteful, and effortlessly exudes an endless amount of pride in her recollections as well as her present action. Her father, from whom she inherits her pride, was one of the early settlers of the town. The reader can see Hagar's relationships with the different people in her life, from her father to her husband, and how she responds. The reader is taken on a journey through Hagar's life as she remembers significant events of her past as her life is coming to an end.

Significance of the Title

- ✦ The title *The Stone Angel* refers to the expensive monument that Hagar's father imported to stand over the grave of his wife. The cemetery is a means of proclaiming their family pride and asserting their dynastic aspirations. It is ironic that the monument is an angel.
- ✦ It is symbolic since both Hagar Currie and her father, Jason Currie, allow pride to turn their personalities to "stone".
- ✦ The stone angel is a paradox since "stone" conjures up words like hard, cruel, and cold, and the word "angel" conjures up words like soft, compassionate, kind, warm, and caring. Hagar could have been a compassionate, loving angel because she was a good person inside but let her pride stand in her way, and therefore lived a cold and uncaring life.
- ✦ Also, refer to the imagery of the stone angel to see the comparison between the stone angel and Hagar.
 - Refers to the expensive monument that Hagar's father imported to stand over the grave of his wife
 - The pride in both Jason and Hagar is what turns their personalities to stone
 - It is ironic simply because it is a stone *angel*
 - It is a paradox since "stone" conjures up words like hard, cruel, and cold. The word "angel" conjures up words like soft, compassionate, kind, and caring. Hagar lives a cold, uncaring life because of her pride. Hagar could have been a compassionate, loving angel because she was a good person on the inside.

Setting: *the place and time in which a story, drama, or film is set. The setting is also the scenery and other items used in a play or film.*

- ☀ The novel is set in Manawaka, Manitoba, a town which Margaret Laurence invented but parallels immensely with her own hometown of Neepawa, Manitoba. It resembles Neepawa in several ways, for instance the cemetery on the hill. Also, Manawaka can be looked at as an amalgamation of several prairie towns and has some characteristics of them, for example, the brown river in the novel parallels with the brown river that runs through the Wachakwa valley.
- ☀ The story is told from the viewpoint of Hagar Shipley and the major action takes place within Manawaka at Currie's General Store, Cameron's Funeral Home, Japonica Chapel, the cemetery on the hill overlooking the town, and the Wachakwa (what-ju-qua) brown river.

Character: *a person in the novel, drama, or other work of fiction.*

☀ Hagar (Currie) Shipley

- Hagar is the protagonist within the novel
- She is the daughter of Jason Currie, a strong, self-made, cold man, and the wife of Brampton Shipley, a poor farmer
- Hagar portrayed at the age of 90 years, is cold, vengeful, and repentant but always shows an unconquerable spirit
- Although her character is mostly viewed in a negative light, Hagar's excessive pride is what stands in her way of becoming a loving and caring person

☀ Jason Currie

- Hagar's father
- A man of excessive pride which Hagar herself inherited.

☀ Mrs. Currie

- Died while giving birth to Hagar, and does not appear in the novel as a character.

☀ Dan Currie

- Hagar's brother
- A very fragile, weak, and delicate boy who according to Hagar, "knew very well the advantages of poor health."
- He died at the age of eighteen after he developed pneumonia when he fell through the ice.

☀ Matt Currie

- Hagar's brother
- Like his brother Dan, Matt took after their mother and not their father
- Matt was "skinny and bespectacled" and his clumsiness enraged his father when he worked in the store
- He obtained the name "Miser Matt" because as a child he saved his pennies feverishly
- He later marries Mavis, but they have no children.

☀ Auntie Doll Stonehouse

- A widow who kept house for Mr. Currie after his wife's death

☀ Lottie Drieser

- An illegitimate child who was described by the boys in Manawaka as "No-Name" Lottie Drieser
- She is a close friend of Hagar although Mr. Currie did not agree with their friendship because she was not part of the higher social class in Manawaka.

☀ Brampton Shipley

- Hagar's husband and father of their two children
- He was previously married, and has two daughters from that marriage
- Hagar views Bram as a weak man, and her father referred to him "as common dirt."

☀ Marvin Shipley

- The first born son of Bram and Hagar Shipley
- Hagar lives with Marvin and his wife Doris during the novel, except during the flashback action
- Marvin is a sensitive man even though she showed him little warmth or affection growing up since his qualities resembles his fathers
- By the end of the novel Hagar finally recognizes Marvin as her faithful Jacob.

☀ Doris Shipley

- Marvin's wife
- At the end of Hagar's life, Doris becomes the main object of Hagar's scorn and contempt.

☀ John Shipley

- The second born son of Bram and Hagar
- Hagar considered him a Currie, not a Shipley, and she gave him the Currie plaid-pin.
- Although this is the case there is a connection between John and Bram when John returns to the prairies, he wears his father's clothes, swears like him, and drinks like him
- He is in love with Arlene, Lottie's daughter.

☀ Mr. Troy

- The minister of the church attended by Doris and Marvin.

Style/Structure

Style: a distinctive way of using language which is characteristic of an author, school, period, or genre and is determined by such elements as diction (word choice), syntax (sentence structure), use of figurative language, etc.

- ✦ The structure of the novel is very easy to follow and understand. By using flashbacks, Laurence forces the reader to see Hagar simultaneously as a young woman and an old widow. Hagar recollects experiences of the past in a chronological order as she sits restlessly in her home, on the shore at Shadow Point, or in the hospital as she awaits death. Sometimes the recollections are brief, creating a mood of nostalgia which contrast sharply with the unpleasantness of her present life. The novel, is like two stories woven together, finding unity in the central character, Hagar. One plot deals with Hagar's present situation, living with Marvin and Doris at the age of ninety, while the other is the past events revealed by Hagar about her youth, middle age and, part of her old age before moving into the present situation.
- ✦ There is a lot of imagery within the novel that adds to its style

Symbolism

Important Points

- "The cemetery is a means of proclaiming their family pride and asserting their dynastic aspirations"
- p. 178-179/p. 243-306 - what does it represent in those places?

1. The Egyptian

- p. 40, 43
- p. 96
- p. 111

2. The pin

- Her past - the Currie name, motto
- Ironically thrown away by John as insignificant

3. Seagull

- Her life - at one time she was strong like the gull (p. 217-218)

4. Albatross

- Allusion - "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

5. Mirror

- p. 133
- p. 146
- p. 249

Imagery in *The Stone Angel*

Imagery: *the collection of images in a text; sometimes works include patterns of imagery or related images occurring at various points, which together create a profound mood and infuse the text with a rich complexity of meaning.*

Below are some links that discuss imagery within *The Stone Angel*

www.theenglishtutor.com/laurence.html#SI

1. Flower Imagery

Margaret Laurence uses flower imagery in her novel *The Stone Angel* to represent Hagar's way of life. There is two types of flowers, wild and civilized. These two types of flowers are associated with the educated, controlled way of life and the material way of life.

In summer the cemetery was rich and thick as syrup with the funeral-parlor perfume of the planted peonies, dark crimson and wallpaper pink, the pompous blossoms hanging leadenly, too heavy for their light stems, bowed down with the weight of themselves and the weight of the rain, infested with upstart ants that sauntered through the plush petals as though to the manner born . . . But sometimes through to hot rush of disrespectful wind that shook the scrub oak and the coarse couch grass encroaching upon the dutifully cared for habitations of the dead, the scent of the cowslips would rise momentarily. They were though-rooted, these wild and gaudy flowers, and although they were held back at the cemetery's edge, torn out by loving relatives determined to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized, for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew and had grown always, before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked though only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair. (p. 4-5)

Hagar was the lucky one in her family. She was able to go to college where she learned how to be more cultivated and civilized and how to act like a lady. Nothing seems to be natural about her, she criticizes everything that seems to be wild or out of control. When Hagar marries Bram Shipley, she is content and in love.

It was spring that day, a different spring from this one. The poplar bluffs had budded with sticky leaves, and the frogs had come back to the sloughs and sang like choruses of angels with sore throats, and the marsh marigolds were opening like shavings of sun on the brown river where the tadpoles danced and the bloodsuckers lay slimy and low, waiting for the boy's feet. And I rode into black-topped buggy beside the man who was not my mate. (cp. 50)

After the wedding, Hagar becomes determined to change the way her husband behaves. His manners are rude and unexpected. This only embarrasses her. Later on in the novel, Hagar realizes that she herself is the embarrassing one, having humiliated people like her son, John or her daughter-in-law, Doris.

The references dealing with cultivated flowers are grim. They have the smell of a funeral-parlor and speak of death and emptiness, almost like Hagar's aging life.

"I would not expect her to know that the lilies of the valley, so white and almost too strongly sweet, were the flowers we used to weave into the wreaths for the dead" (p. 33).

In her old age, Hagar realizes that her life was bleak. She did not let anything about herself go free. She wanted to be well known as an educated, independent woman who needed no help from anyone, yet she fails in the end having to depend on her own son, Marvin, and his wife. Her flowers deteriorate just the same as Hagar grows old.

My marigolds were a dead loss by this time, of course. I'd planted them behind the house to use as cutting flowers and they'd kept on seeding themselves, but now only a few wizened ones remained, small unexpected dabs of orange among the choking weeds, dry sheep foot and thistle. The sunflowers had risen beside the barn as always, fed by the melting snow in the spring, but they'd had no other water this year - their tall stalks were hollow and brown, and the heavy heads hung over, the segments empty as unfilled honey-combs, for the petals had fallen and the centers had dried before the seeds could form." (cp. 169)

At the end of the novel, before Hagar dies, she realizes that her life was empty with all the wrong decisions. She faked her whole life being strong and civilized when she should have been alive and spontaneous.

"I take off my hat - it's hardly suitable for here, anyway, a prim domestic hat sprouting cultivated flowers. Then with considerable care I arrange the jades and copper pieces in my hair. I glance into my purse mirror. The effect is pleasing. They liven up my gray, transform me."

At Shadow point where Hagar puts Junebugs in her own hair is a way of escaping. It signifies living.

2. Biblical Imagery

In the novel The Stone Angel, Margaret Laurence introduces a character who seems to evolve her life around biblical imagery. The name Hagar suggests immediately the story of Hagar in the Old Testament. In the Bible, Hagar was an Egyptian hand-maiden of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Sarah was unable to bear a child so she gave Hagar to her husband so an heir could be produced. The plan worked and was accepted by custom and law. Human emotions became a problem as Hagar became disdainful of Sarah and Sarah became jealous of Hagar. Hagar was banished but later returned upon God's command until trouble erupted again. Sarah had a child of her own and eventually Hagar and her son were banished. Like the Hagar from the Bible, Hagar Currie-Shipleigh is a bondswoman trapped in various situations where she is unable to demonstrate a free spirit.

"And Sarah said unto Abraham, Behold now, the Lord that restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abraham hearkened unto the voice of Sarah..."

And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes".
(Genesis 16, 2-4)

Symbolically, Hagar Shipley became a house keeper in her younger years. Hagar has always felt that she was to take care, nurture, serve others, it became her natural position. Hagar saw herself as the "chatelaine," or possibly an outcast when she was married to Bram.

The Shipley house was square and frame, two-storied, the furniture shoddy and second-hand, the kitchen reeking and stale, for no one had scoured properly there since Clara died. Yet seeing it, I wasn't troubled in the slightest, still thinking of myself as a chatelaine. I wonder who I imagined would do the work? I thought of Polacks and Galician's from the mountains, half-breeds from the river valley of the Achaean, or the daughters and spinster aunts of the poor, forgetting that Abram's own daughters had hired out whenever they could be spared, until they married very young and gained a permanent employment." (pp. 50-51)

Hagar is feeling like a prisoner in her own habitat, that she is not "free" in spirit; "I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched" (pp. 292). The imagery that Hagar is enslaved like the prisoners in the early era's, B.C.-A. C., she became a slave of her own emotions which is struggling within her.

Also noted, Hagar also was seen and explained as "a creature of wilderness". Like the pharaoh's daughter, she left the security of her father and went to explore the wilderness. Hagar Shirley shows the same imagery. She leaves from her father's wings so she can pursue a better lifestyle for herself.

As another character, John, one of Hagar's sons. John was Hagar's favorite son. John had a character of lying and deceiving himself. Hagar had hoped that John might be a faithful son as the example given, like Jacob from the Old Testament.

I wish he would have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no. He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble, ear and swore. (cp. 179)

Also Hagar had a son, Marvin, she never adored him, but finally realizes on how honorable Marvin was to her. This opens the doors of acceptance from Hagar to Marvin.

Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and *bargaining*. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me". And I see I am thus strangely cast and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him. (p 304)

There are similarities between Hagar of the Old Testament and Margaret Laurence's. The name Hagar is explained to mean "to flee". For example, the Old Testament Hagar fled from Abraham and Isaac. Margaret Laurence's Hagar's flights were when she fled from the Shipley place, from her husband Bram, taking her two sons, and secondly, she fled home to seek revenge on Marvin and Doris, her son and daughter-in-law, being childlike and ran away to create a scare.

Later on, as the novel progresses, Hagar experiences an epiphany, celebrating the manifesting of Christ's divinity, as Mr. Troy sang hymns when he visited Hagar in the hospital. Hagar realized on what she was missing in her life. "I'll drink from this glass, or spill it, just as I choose" (p. 308). This indicates that Hagar has thirst and smallest imagery of some kind of spiritual thirst, that she

understood some kind of peace between herself. This stubborn woman learned to accept things as they are and cannot change. Hagar had a chance to repent before passing away which lets her rest in peace.

3. Stone Angel Imagery

The statue of the stone angel is symbolic of the Curie family pride, Hagar's inability to relate and share her emotions, and the blindness and ignorance that comes from constantly refusing to see things from another point of view other than your own.

The Stone angel is symbolic of the Curie family pride because it does not seem to serve its purpose, which is to honor our Hagar's mother who had died giving birth to her. Hagar describes Mrs. Curie to be a "meek woman" and a "feeble ghost", whereas she describes herself to be "stubborn" and "practical". The statue was bought in Italy and brought to the Manawaka cemetery "at a terrible expense . . . in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his [Mr. Currie's] dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day" (p. 3). Mr. Currie bought the angel "in pride" rather than in grief for someone he considered his possession, his "dynasty". The stone angel is also a symbol of Hagar's pride as she inherited it from her father. It was this pride that kept her from speaking up and fighting for her brother when Mr. Currie sent her away to college to become "more civilized". She knew Matt deserved to go more than her, but she never stuck up for either him or herself. In an attempt at freedom, or maybe just to spite her father, Hagar married Bram Shipley soon after she came back from school. From day one, Hagar's marriage to Bram was a complete embarrassment to her and her family: "When I'd listen to Bram spinning his cobwebs, then it would turn my stomach most of all, not what he said but that he made himself a laughingstock" (p. 114). Upon hearing about their plans to wed, Hagar's father disowns her. Bram was not a rich man by any means, he drank heavily, always spoke in slang, and caused a scene on a regular basis. Hagar thought she'd be able to change him and coax him out of his wild ways, but when he proved her wrong, she just accepted the fact that she'd have to live with it or lie about it to save face. When applies for a job to get away from Manawaka and her husband, she lies to her boss as to her real relationship with Bram.

Hagar's pride prevents her from expressing her emotions or relating to other people, and as a result she turns out to be just as hard and unyielding as the stone angel itself. She never reveals her real feelings at the risk of being thought of as "soft" and as a result she misses out on a lot of potentially great relationships. At a very young age, her pride prevents her from comforting her dying brother:

But all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and when from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her - it was beyond me. (cp. 25)

When Abram's horse died, she had a hard time trying to find something soothing to say or do because she always had a stone wall built up between them.

Seeing Abram's hunched shoulders, and the look on his face, all at once I walked over to him without pausing to ponder whether I should or not, or what to say. . . Then, awkwardly, "I'm sorry about it Bram. I know you were fond of him. (p. 87).

Hagar comes to pride herself on her self-restraint and aloofness. Margaret Laurence establishes this though Hagar's refusal to admit to her husband that she enjoys making love with him:

It was not so very long after we wed, when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. he never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud, and I made certain the trembling was all inner . . . I prided myself on keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhood. (p. 81)

The stone angel, in addition to being made of hard marble, is "doubly blind". Not only because it is made of stone, but because the artist neglected to add the eyeballs to his masterpiece. This is also symbolic of Hagar because she is blind when it comes to the feelings of others. It prevents her from having a friendship with Lottie. It isn't until it's too late that she realizes she has more in common with Lottie than either of them had ever imagined. It also prevents her from seeing that Marvin was the son she'd been looking for, that her pride had been holding her back, and that sometimes the problems of others were of more importance than her own.

Allusion in The Stone Angel

Analysis:

"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" By Dylan Thomas

This poem is about fighting against death. Many people die every day with a sense of defeat. They reach a point in their lives where they feel it is useless to fight against a force that is destined to claim them. The strength of their youth disappears leaving them weak. Those who accept death too early die spiritually before they die physically. They grieve a loss that is yet to come. "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" demonstrates perfectly the attitude Dylan Thomas felt his father should have had against his death. "D.J. Thomas had never recovered since having tongue cancer in 1932. Losing his eyesight Mr. Thomas' pride and fire had almost all drained out of him; he was becoming the husk of his former self. He did the crossword puzzles of which both he and Dylan were so fond of and awaited the end. The spectacle of his decline distressed Dylan greatly and inspired this poem." (FitzGibbons 295). Dylan Thomas did not wish to see his dad surrender to his death. In writing this poem, Dylan set out to encourage others to fight against death and to live their lives to the fullest.

The Stone Angel and Dylan Thomas in the novel "The Stone Angel" - Hagar Shipley is a woman fighting against her own death. Her son Marvin and his wife Doris wish to put Hagar in a nursing home because they feel she is too old to take care of herself. Hagar, feeling differently, takes matters into her own hands and flees to a house in Shadow Point. Hagar is fighting against the death she feels will claim her if she is placed in a nursing home. By running away, Hagar is standing up for her right to be able to live her own life the way she feels. Marvin is a representation of the death attempting to take hold of Hagar. In fighting Marvin, Hagar is making one last effort to reclaim her life and, in doing so, is refusing to "go gentle into that good night".

Themes

Theme: the *central idea, focus, or motif in a work of art, especially fiction.*

There are many thematic threads interwoven throughout the plot of *The Stone Angel*, the following list are some possible themes that may be developed if examined more closely. The theme of the novel develops from the central character, Hagar Shipley. In examining memories of Hagar, we see a discrepancy between what Hagar wants and the realities of the situation. We see this when Hagar wants to hug Marvin before he leaves for war but the moment passes. It seems that all the opportunities for Hagar to show emotion pass and she is left to appear as a mean and bitter woman.

Possible themes:

- The release of inner emotions is important in order to gain inner freedom
- An inability to express one's emotions can lead to unhappiness
- A person's pride can affect others
- There is tragedy in potential which is never realized, in love that is never uttered, in people who imprison themselves in the roles expected of them
- Oftentimes, people use escapism as a defense mechanism for dealing with their problems
- Escape is futile
- The process of aging can be very difficult
- In retrospect, one's mistakes can be easily realized
- Everyone must learn to deal with the reality of death

✨ **Pride** - Hagar's pride keeps her from experiencing many types of emotions. She tries to escape her imprisonment but her pride keeps her inner freedom inside of her. Her pride acts like chains. To further examine the theme of pride click on the following link:

Definition of Pride:

Pride n. 1. Inordinate self-esteem; high opinion of one's own importance or worth; conceit. 2. arrogance; haughtiness. 3. honorable self-respect; personal dignity. 4. smug pleasure taken in the success of oneself or another. 5. a person or thing in which one takes such pleasure.

✨ **Isolation and Escapism** - is futile, oftentimes people use escapism as a defense mechanism for dealing with their problems. Hagar uses escapism to run

away from her problems with Marvin and Doris, and the issue of going to a nursing home. To further examine the theme of escapism click on the following link:

✦ **Aging & Death** - the process of aging and death can be very difficult and in retrospect one's mistakes can be realized. Everyone must learn how to deal with death. Hagar is an aging woman who is close to her death and realizing this she is reflecting back upon the mistakes she made in her life. To further examine the theme of aging and death click on the following link:

✦ **The release of inner emotions is important in order to gain inner freedom** - Hagar is a prisoner within herself and will not let emotions show through the stone wall she has built up around her. The only emotions Hagar will allow people to see is her coldness and bitterness because her pride is far more important to her than her emotions. She fears that expressing emotions would show a weakness in her character and the Currie name. By the end of her life she finally comes to the realization that these emotions are meant to be shared. This inability to express her emotions leads to her unhappiness. Examples of Hagar withholding her emotions are when Dan dies and she cannot bring herself to dress up as their mother, when Bram's horse dies and she cannot comfort him, and when John dies and she cannot even shed a tear. Hagar tries to escape this imprisonment but her pride keeps her inner freedom bound up inside her like chains. She finally realizes that emotions are meant to be shared when she is with Murray Lees. Is it too late? She has already bred the life of a prisoner. Not until Mr. Troy's morning singing of the hymn in the hospital was Hagar set free from the captivity forged by her pride. Only then were the chains loosened, so that she was able to free herself and give Marvin the blessing he had sought throughout his life.

✦ Another possible theme is that **there is tragedy in potential which is never realized, in love that is never uttered, in people who imprison themselves in the roles expected of them**

✦ **The futility of escape** - its characters seem to twist and turn and manoeuvre to evade that destiny that has been thrust upon them. They seek to escape - from family influences, from their own sense of emptiness, from the destiny that faces them implacably - but their efforts, however valiant or however pathetic, are doomed to failure.

The Tragic Mode

Literary Modes

Tragedy as a literary mode has elements such as these:

pain	pathos	death
suffering	remorse	sorrow
sacrifice	retribution	catharsis
death	transformation	
fate	awe	
destiny	exaltation	
pity	sublimity	
fear	pride	

And it comes through in such genres or literary forms as the following:

myth	drama
poetry	short story
novel	essay

And it creates feelings such as these:

- pity
- pathos
- sorrow
- grief
- torment
- suffering
- despair
- rejoicing
- fear
- sorrow
- anguish
- agony
- pain
- remorse
- exaltation
- awe

And it deals with such themes as:

- the fall of the proud and mighty
- sacrifice for an ideal or cause
- struggling to overcome natural disaster
- sacrifice in war
- facing the inevitable
- struggling for survival
- connection between the past and the present
- role of memory
- fate and twists of fate (how things turn out)

Hagar as a Tragic Hero

Tragic hero: *the main character in a tragedy, especially one with a tragic flaw that leads to his or her downfall at the end of the play.*

Definition of a Tragic Hero:

- ✦ **A person of high birth** -Hagar is of high birth since she is born into a very noble family. The Currie's were highlanders, and of high social class.

- ✦ **A person who is good but not perfect** -Hagar is a good person, but not perfect as she lets her pride stand in the way of becoming close to anyone in her life.

- ✦ **A person who brings about his/her own downfall through a fatal flaw or error of judgment** -Hagar's tragic flaw is her stubbornness and pride, and it is this that brings about her downfall. It is because of these two fatal characteristics of her personality that Hagar lives a very lonely life in which she is a prisoner of her own emotions.

- ✦ **A person who learns from his/her suffering by reaching a catharsis (tragic climax)** -In the end after Hagar allows her emotions to surface she gains self-knowledge when she shows Marvin love which he has sought for his whole life. When Hagar tells Marvin, "You've always been good to me, always. A better son than John" (p. 304) she is finally seeing the truth.

- ✦ **Other people are affected by the person** -The audience is greatly affected by Hagar's character in the novel. Reading her life story, one can relate to the emotions she feels and feel a sense of pity for her.

Biblical Archetypes



Archetype: *a recurrent symbol or motif in literature or art, which may be a character type, theme, image, or particular model from which a pattern is formed.*

The name Hagar suggests immediately the connection between Hagar in the Old Testament and Margaret Laurence's character Hagar in the novel. In the Bible Hagar was an Egyptian hand-maid for Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Sarah was unable to bear a child so in desperation she gave Hagar to Abraham so that an heir could be produced. Hagar and Abraham had a son, Ishmael, and he was accepted by custom and law, but human emotions became a problem in the relationship as Hagar became disdainful of Sarah, and Sarah became jealous of Hagar. Hagar was banished into the wilderness of Shur but later returned upon God's command until trouble erupted again. Sarah had a child of her own, Jacob, and eventually Hagar and her son were banished into the wilderness of Beersheba.

Like Hagar from the Old Testament, Hagar Shipley is a bondswoman trapped in a similar situation where she becomes entrapped in the mysteries of sex and the toils of housework. Her physical circumstances demonstrates her real bondage, as she realizes her spirit has always been captive, "I was alone never, anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched" (p.292). Hagar within the novel, like the biblical Hagar, becomes a creature of the wilderness when she leaves her father prosperous home, and moves to the poverty of the Shipley farm with Bram.

To further examine the Biblical Archetypes in the Stone Angel view [A Comparison Between the Bible and *The Stone Angel*](#)

Chapter Summaries

www.theenglishtutor.com/laurence.html#Sum

Chapter One

The novel starts by describing "The Stone Angel". The angel is Hagar's mother's tombstone, and it is the largest and the first of its kind. It stands tall in the cemetery overlooking the entire town. Hagar's father had the large marble statue imported and it cost him a great deal of money. The tombstone reads "Rest in peace. From toil, surcease. Regina Weese. 1886." She died from some obscure maidenly disease while giving birth to Hagar.

All the old Hagar can do is sit and relive her memories. Some say the old live in the past, but she doesn't believe so. She just thinks that they live each worthless day. The only enjoyment that she has is complaining and smoking her cigarettes. Her son Marvin seems to think it disgusting that a woman of ninety smokes. The whole idea of a ninety year old clutching a cigarette between arthritic fingers is absurd. She must also be careful not to speak aloud to herself in fear of what her son and daughter-in-law will think. Hagar seems to think that Marvin's wife, Doris is fat, and Hagar does not like her at all.

Hagar was very clever at school and pleased her father because of it. At times, whenever Hagar would get a star for her work, her father would reward her with candies from the store. Every night for an hour, Hagar and her two brothers would have to sit at the table and do their homework. If the homework was complete before the hour time span was up, their father would set up sums and would help the children to do them. When the time came Auntie Doll would poke her head in from the kitchen and remind their father of the children's bedtime.

The Wachakwa River always froze over very well and was perfect for skating on. It was also perfect for cutting blocks of ice out as Mr. Doherty always made his sons do, because he owned the Manawaka Icehouse. One day when Dan, Hagar's brother, was showing off for the girls, he skated right into one of the holes where they cut a block of ice. Matt came and pulled him out and then, with the help of Hagar, walked Dan all the way across town to their house. The next day Dan came down with pneumonia, and the next night he died. While on his death bed Dan wanted his mother so Matt got out her shawl and tried to convince Hagar to comfort him. Nevertheless, she would not so Matt did it himself.

Hagar, rejoining the present day, trips over her bedroom rug on her way downstairs to have a cup of tea. Doris and Marvin both make an extremely big deal about her falling over. They point out that Marvin is getting too old to continue picking her up every time she falls. While having a cup of tea, Marvin and Doris bring up the idea of selling the house. This really disturbs Hagar because it is her house, and her son wants to sell it. After the subject of selling the house causes a great deal of aggravation, they drop the whole idea so not to aggravate Hagar any more.

This chapter ends with Doris suggesting that Hagar meet with Mr. Troy, the priest at church.

Chapter Two

Chapter two begins with Hagar meeting with Mr. Troy. While meeting with Mr. Troy, although she thinks he does not care much, Hagar starts telling him her life story. She begins her story with her going to the young ladies' academy in Toronto. When Hagar found out that she was going to the

Young Ladies Academy she did not think that she should be the one going to college. She thought that Matt should be the one getting the College education. She did not want to say anything because she wanted to go, but was afraid that if she mentioned anything to her father, he would send Matt instead of her.

Hagar's father did not let her go to many dances. Nevertheless, one time under the supervision of Auntie Doll, Hagar was permitted to go to a dance only because it was a fund-raiser to build a new hospital. At the dance Hagar met Bram Shipley. He was a great dancer. As heavy as he was he was light on his feet. Bram was previously married but his wife, who was fourteen years younger than he, died. After their dance Lottie told Hagar that Bram was not the person she should be seen with she explained to her that he had been seen with half breed girls. Hagar wanted to marry Bram but her father refused but none-the-less she married him. No one came to their wedding except Auntie Doll. Auntie Doll said that Matt had given her mother's shawl to give to Hagar as a present but at the last minute he changed his mind and took it back. After the wedding Bram took Hagar to his home where Bram gave Hagar her wedding present, a cut-glass decanter with a silver top.

After recollecting this portion of her life to Mr. Troy Mr. Troy noticed that a great deal of time had passed and he must be on his way so he left. Following Mr. Troy's departure Hagar notices a circled add in the paper but she cannot make it out. She makes her way to the kitchen table to read the add. It reads, "Only the Best Will Do for MOTHER," the add goes on to describe a nursing home. Doris notices that Hagar has read the paper but avoids talking about the subject altogether. After a bit of small talk Hagar states that there is no way she will go to the nursing home. Doris causes Hagar to drop the subject saying that she is getting worked up so Hagar goes and sits where all her things are around her.

Throughout Hagar's life everyone has called her several things, but they have never really called her Hagar. Bram was the only one that ever called her Hagar not mother or daughter or even wife just simply Hagar.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three begins with Hagar and Doris waiting in the doctor's office, while waiting Hagar notices two pictures in the doctor's office. Hagar remembers that when she first went to the Shipley house, her husband's house, there were no pictures. Throughout the time that she lived in that house she had succeeded to put up a couple of pictures. One picture Hagar particularly liked was one entitled, "The Horse Fair."

Bram never really cared for the picture. He much preferred real horses, which Hagar was terrified of but never let Bram know. Hagar let Bram believe that the smell was what bothered her. One year when Bram made some money, as did everyone else, because wheat was doing well, he invested in buying horses. Bram bought a strong gray stallion that he called soldier, from Henry Pearl and a few mares. In the spring they had colts but when it came to selling them Bram never got a good price for them, mainly because he was not a very good business man.

One cold winter day Bram left the gate to the horse's stall unlatched. He thought he would only be gone a few minutes but he forgot all about it. When Bram went to check on the horses, they were nowhere to be found. A little while later the mare that was in the stall had returned but Soldier was still missing. Bram loved the horse so much that although it was minus forty outside he took the storm lantern and went out to search for the horse. Bram returned a while later but he did not find the horse. The next spring they found Soldier's body. He had caught his leg in a barbed wire fence and the cold killed him.

After eating supper Marvin and Doris take Hagar for a ride without telling her where they are going. Suddenly they pass through a set of iron gates with SILVERTHREADS written across the top. Hagar suddenly realizes that she is going to the old age home. Hagar really does not want to go to the home and causes a big fuss in the car. Marvin and Doris assure her that they are only visiting to look around. While taking the tour Hagar is very uncooperative but at the end of the tour Hagar agrees to sit on the veranda and have a cup of tea.

While sitting on the veranda, Hagar remembers when she gave birth to Marvin. She remembered how Bram drove down the main area of the town and said hello to people on the way to the hospital. She remembers how cross she was with him when he said that if it were a boy it would be someone to leave the place to. Suddenly out of nowhere an old lady came up to Hagar and starts complaining about how Mrs. Thorlakson did not come down for supper and how Mrs. Thorlakson gets the best of things. Then after the old lady that was talking to her left another came and was a little friendlier toward Hagar. They sat and talked about family and looked at some pictures. They also talk about where Hagar is going to go if she does not go to the home and after a quick word about that Hagar leaves in a hurry.

Before she leaves Hagar notices that there are also men at this home after seeing a log cabin with the shadow of a man standing within. Doris runs outside to get Hagar and they get back into the car to go home.

Chapter Four

As the chapter begins, the elderly Hagar complains to herself about the barrage of X-rays she's had to undergo. After, she is finally called in for the X-rays and proceeds without the accompaniment of Doris. While she is in the X-ray room, she is forced to drink Barium, which Hagar dislikes thoroughly. As she waits for the procedure to commence, she lapses into another flashback. She recalls her earlier life at the Shipley place, and the effort she put forth to keep the house spotless. Also, she remembers her husband Bram, whom she recalls as being a hard worker, but none too bright. He was caught by the R.C.M.P. "relieving his self" on the steps of Hagar's father's store. Although the X-rays reveal nothing "organically" wrong with Hagar, Doris thinks that Hagar would be better off in a nursing home, while Marvin disagrees, and tells Hagar that she can stay at home if she wants. To settle the issue, Doris schedules a meeting between Hagar and the clergyman, Mr. Troy. Ultimately, the meeting ends in a stalemate. Hagar then remembers her son John, and his relatively easy birth. She recalls how much she loved John, and how much Bram disliked him. Hagar also recalls how she earned some money for herself from the egg money Bram took in. In addition, she remembered the time when Marvin joined the army at the age of seventeen to fight in the First World War. Meanwhile, John suffered embarrassment over Bram, whom the kids made jokes about. As time passed, Hagar's relationship with John became strained. In the present, Hagar wakes up and goes for a walk with Doris, during which she sees a girl with black nail polish. She makes a comment about it, and draws an evil stare from the girl, making her feel miserable. At the end of the chapter, Hagar is told by Marvin, in no uncertain terms, that she will be going to the nursing in one week.

Chapter Five

As chapter five begins, Hagar is plotting her "escape" by using her old-age pension check to get her to Shadow Point. When Hagar falls asleep in the middle of her conspiracy, she recalls the day she

and John left Bram and Manawaka behind them. While on the train, John confesses to Hagar that he traded his plaid pin for a jackknife. When the elderly Hagar awakens, she recalls her plan to sneak away to Shadow Point. She furtively obtains the check from the den desk, finds her way to the bank, and eventually manages to travel to her destination. She happens across a convenience store, and buys some food items. Hagar then hitches a ride to the "old fish-cannery road." She descends the steps to the Point, and once there she finds an abandoned building. She then establishes the building as her new "home." The scene then switches to the past, and Hagar's stay at Mr. Oatley's house. She served as a maid / cook for Mr. Oatley. John also stayed with his mother at Mr. Oatley's. He led Hagar to believe that he was doing well in school, and that he had acquired many friends. However, Hagar discovered that John was lying about having any friends. Nevertheless, she encouraged John, telling him that he would take after his grandfather, and be successful. When John entered high school, he made real friends, as well as girl friends. The chapter ends with the elderly Hagar lying on an old bed in the abandoned house, trying to pray but finding it no more useful now than it was before.

Chapter Six

As chapter six begins, Hagar awakens in the abandoned building, and realizes that it is raining outside. She is cold and sore, and fears moving lest she fall with no one nearby to help her. She worries momentarily that the rain would mask the footsteps of a possible intruder. Hagar then becomes confused, thinking that it was Marvin and Doris who left her, and not the other way around. Hagar then enters into another flashback in which she recalls John trying to earn enough money to attend college. Eventually, he decides to return to the Shipley place to work there. When Hagar cries that Bram might be dead, John replies to the contrary, and reveals that he and Marvin have been communicating with Bram through letters. John hitched a ride on a train back to the Shipley place. Two years later, John wrote to Hagar telling her that Bram was dying. She immediately traveled to the Shipley place. When she arrived, she found Manawaka stricken by drought, John a shadow of his former self, and Bram an invalid. John looked after Bram, while Hagar didn't do much to aid him. It becomes apparent that John has become a great deal like his father, both in the way he talks and the way he acts. Hagar and John later travel to the cemetery to see if the Currie plot has been cared for. When they arrive, they notice that the stone angel has been toppled over. With a great deal of effort, John managed to place the angel upright, and cleaned off the lipstick someone had applied to the statue. A short time later, Bram died. Hagar had him buried in the Currie plot, the grave stone reading Currie on one side, and Shipley on the other. In the end, it was John who cried for Bram, not Hagar.

Chapter Seven

Awaking one morning, Hagar strolls down to the beach to get some water. On the beach there are two children playing house around six, Hagar noting their playing decides to warn the girl to stop being so bossy to the boy, when she speaks up, the children are frightened and run away.

She then decides to eat but the food is unappealing to her. She takes a stroll in the forest and sits in her quiet place and notices her surroundings and reviewed the incident with the children on the beach.

When Bram died, Hagar informed Mr. Oatley of the death and decided to stay in Manawaka for a few more weeks.

Upon her return, Hagar becomes board, and decides to clean up the attic. She comes across a wooden box which belonged to Clara, Bram's first wife. Hagar decides to deliver the box to Bram's daughter Jess. When she arrived she noticed that John's car is parked there and she listens in on their conversation. Being annoyed by the intimacy between them, Hagar walks in finally and gives the box to Jess and takes John home with her.

Hagar, unaware of the relationship between Arlene and John until she brought him home on one occasion when John got drunk and got into a fight (Hagar was convinced that this was a mocking gesture towards her).

At the beginning of summer, Hagar returned to Manawaka and noticed how clean the house was, finding out that Arlene was responsible for the cleaning. Arlene had lost her job as a teacher and spent the year with John. Arlene was in love with John at this point and wanted to marry him. Hagar hated the idea because John was a drunk and neither of them had two nickels. Arlene argued that Hagar did not know John the way she did.

Hagar discussed the situation with John that night, trying to convince him that Arlene family was nothing special. John made it clear it was none of her concern. She retired for the night.

One day Hagar was eves dropping on the conversation of John and Arlene and their plans to marry when Hagar leaves for the coast. Arlene expressed to John about bearing his children, the thought of John and Arlene making love in her home fumed Hagar.

After discussing this with Lottie, they agreed Arlene should leave Manawaka for a while. A month passed and finally Hagar objected to her visiting John. John did not bring Arlene to the house for some time after this.

Hagar decided she could not return to the old house again, the stairs were too much for her. She would move to the canary building.

Chapter Eight

The cannery building seems to be a place of remembrance and oddities. A Large room cluttered with boxes, fishing nets and an old boat. She used the boxes as table and chair and was quite content.

Suddenly she fell to the floor, she could not remember what she had done that day and the pain in her chest kept bothering her. A sea gull flew into the house, Hagar remembered the old saying about a sea gull flying onto the house meant death.

At that point Murray Ferney Lees an insurance salesman barged in and lit a candle, the two shared a bottle of wine were Murray shared his life story with Hagar. Murray had gotten his wife pregnant before they were married and he being an active member envagelical Advocates. Felt that the death of their child was punishment for his sin. Hagar shared her experience of losing a child.

Murray could not decide whose fault it was: his grandfather for being a "bible puncher", his mother who drove him to evangelical religion, his wife or his own. Hagar and Murray settled down to sleep.

Hagar recalled that John had mentioned Arlene was moving east for a year. John suspected that Hagar knew of the plan for john to get Arlene pregnant before she left. Hagar never brought back to the Shipley home again.

That night, Henry Pearl came to the door, John had been in an accident, he was in the hospital. John got drunk at a dance and took a bet that he could drive across the railroad trestle bridge. An unscheduled freight train hit John's truck. Arlene was in the truck with him, she was killed on impact. In hospital, John cried out for his mother's help. Before she could speak or move, John looked at her realizing she could not help him. And then he died.

Hagar refused to cry in front of stingers, when she got home, she could not cry. She felt a "transformation to stone". She could only think of all the things Hagar never set right. After John's funeral, she would not go back to the cemetery.

She tried to talk to Lottie but she was too ill. Hagar found comforting the presence of Telford. She sent everything of value in her home to Marvin and sold the home. She returned to Mr. Oatley.

The following year he died, leaving Hagar ten thousand dollars in his will. With this she bought a home.

Murray sought to comfort her, but insisted that John's death was senseless, and would be angry over it until she died. Again they both settled down to sleep.

Hagar awoke vomiting and Murray settled her down so that she could sleep again.

Chapter Nine

In the morning, Hagar awoke stiff and sore, Murray had left but covered her with his jacket to keep warm. She could hardly believe she had gotten drunk with a perfect stranger and then spent the night beside him. She also felt recently bereaved; she did not know why.

Murray had brought Marvin and Doris, Hagar was relieved to see Marvin even though she despised her own weakness in rejoicing at being captured. As per usual, Hagar refused the help of Doris. Hagar then apologized for the other night.

In the car, there was no doubt that Hagar was going to the old people's home. It had been discovered that Hagar was seriously ill. In hospital, Hagar lay in public ward because he was unable to attain any other accommodations. She felt like a "museum exhibit". The nurse on duty gave Hagar her pills. Touched by the nurse's sympathy, she wept.

The woman in the bed next to her was Elva Jardine, she rattled on incessantly. Hagar got rid of her attention by being rude and the aid of more soothing pills, she settled into a "hazy lethargy".

When Marvin visited, she was happy to see him, it seem though all she could do was complain about the accommodations. Marvin assured her that he would find a semi-private room. Hagar felt ashamed: she knew that Doris was not well.

When Mrs. Jardine came back from the bathroom, Hagar learned that Mrs. Dobereiner's words in German were in part a prayer of death. Mrs. Reilly prayed a great deal.

Mrs. Jardine revealed that her and her husband lived only twenty five miles from Manawaka. Hagar warmed to the interest on Mrs. Jardine

When the doctor visited the next day, Hagar asked for a hypo when she needed it, the doctor readily agreed. Then Marvin and Doris came to visit, Hagar felt her old contempt for Doris, thinking how ridiculous Doris' hat looked with fake flowers in it. Doris informed her that Tina was getting married.

Chapter Ten

Worried at the cost, Hagar lay in a semi-private room. In the night, Hagar half asleep, left her bed. She was making for a light, confident that if she reached it Bram would call her name. A Nurse led her back to her room and insisted on restraining her. Hagar apologized and went back to bed.

When Hagar woke, the bed next to her was occupied by a sixteen year old girl named Sandra Wong, she was to have an appendectomy. Hagar reassured the girl that everything would be fine.

The next day went by slowly, Sandra was recovering from her operation and Hagar was drifting in and out of drugged sleep. Hagar was visited by Mr. Troy, to which she requested he sing a hymn. The visit caused Hagar to cry. Mr. Troy assumed he failed but Hagar could not assure him that she enjoyed her visit. Doris came by to pick up Mr. Troy and Hagar expressed thanks to Doris and Mr. Troy but Doris did not believe her.

Hagar was later visited by her grandson Steven who reminded her of the jaw breakers she would give him. She realized she was nothing more than a grandmother who gave money and candy.

When Sandra awoke, she was feeling pain. Sandra was upset at Hagar for lying to her and asked the nurse to be moved. The nurse quietly informed the nurse of Hagar's condition. Sandra then wondered if would happen if Hagar died in the night. In the days that followed Hagar was confused of Sandra's concern for her. She would come over to the bed, bringing water, or pulling the curtains to when Hagar wanted to sleep.

When Marvin had visited, Hagar confessed she was frightened. Marvin apologized for the harsh word he said to her, he took her hand and Hagar thought of asking for his pardon but she knew that is not what he wanted at that moment.

Hagar recalled her last trip to Manawaka with Marvin and Doris. The Shipley place had vanished and replaced with a new house and a new barn. At the cemetery, the angel was still standing. A young care taker not knowing who they were was enthusiastic about the cemetery. He pointed to the stone bearing the names Currie and Shipley. They were the earliest pioneering families in the district.

Hagar lay in her "cocoon", Sandra announced she could go home in a few days. When she left Hagar tried to remember something "truly free" she had done in her ninety years. There were only two things that came to mind. One was a joke, and another was a lie. Yet it had not really been a lie "for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love.

As the pain increased she asked Doris for a glass of water in her usual tone and insisted on holding it herself. And then she died.

Chapter Questions

Chapter 1

1. Give an account of the Currie stone angel.
2. Describe the personality of Mr. Currie, as it is revealed in Chapter 1.
3. Describe Hagar's personality as a child.
4. Describe the history of the Currie family.
5. What were the three puzzling remarks Mr. Currie made after the death of Lottie's mother? Why do you think they puzzled Hagar so much?
6. Compare and contrast the personalities of Hagar's two brothers.
7. Describe Marvin and Doris. Is Hagar's irritation with them justified?

Chapter 2

8. What does Hagar's attitude towards going to school in the East reveal about her character?
9. Describe Bram Shipley. Why was Hagar so attracted to him?
10. Give an account of Hagar's relationship with her brother, Matt.
11. Explain the reasons why Marvin and Doris want Hagar to go to a home.

Chapter 3

12. What did Bram's affection for horses reveal about (a) Bram and (b) Hagar?
13. Describe Hagar's reaction to visiting the home.
14. Describe Hagar's visit.

Chapter 4

15. Discuss Hagar's relationship with both Marvin and John.
16. Explain the importance of Hagar's chance encounter with Lottie and her daughter.
17. What does Hagar's conversation with Mr. Troy reveal about her view on life?

Chapter 5

18. Describe:
 - (a) Hagar's flight to the coast with John
 - (b) Her escape from Marvin and Doris
19. Describe the outside of the house Hagar stays in at the shore. What possible significance does it have?
20. What surprising item did Hagar discover in the storage bench in the living room? Of what possible significance was it?

21. Describe John's behavior when he lived with his mother at Mr. Oatley's.

Chapter 6

22. Give an account of the circumstances which lead to John's return to Manawaka.
23. Discuss how John is growing more in likeness to his father.
24. What comment does Hagar make about God's role in marriages?
25. How does Bram's condition mirror the state of the farm?
26. How does Bram die? How would you explain John's reaction?
27. Who do you think toppled the stone angel in the cemetery? Explain your reasons for thinking the way you do.

Chapter 7

28. What ironies are there in the scene with the children?
29. What is painful to John and Hagar in his conversation with Jess?
30. Choose four details from the meeting with Lottie that show irony and character. Explain your choices.

Chapter 8

31. Who is Murray Lees? Why is he there?
32. Discuss the similarities between Hagar's life and Murray Lees' life?
33. Describe the circumstances which lead to the deaths of John and Arlene.
34. With whom does Hagar confuse Murray Lees at the end of this chapter? Why do these words bring her comfort? What does this tell us about Hagar?

Chapter 9

35. Discuss Hagar's early behavior in the hospital. Describe the indications that there is a softening of her behavior by the end of the chapter.
36. What causes the change in Hagar's behavior?

Chapter 10

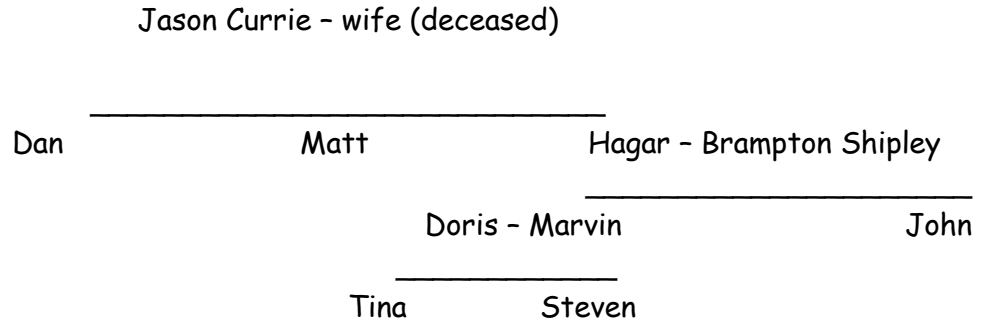
37. Describe Mr. Troy's visit to Hagar. What important revelation had the visit brought Hagar?
38. What does Hagar learn from the visit with Steven?
39. What happened during Marvin's last visit with his mother?
40. What was the joke Hagar had enjoyed? What was the lie she told? Why did she regard them as significant?

The Stone Angel

Note-taking sheets

Protagonist: Hagar (Currie) Shipley

Family tree



They live in the prairie town of Manawaka where Hagar's father is the merchant. This placed the family in the "upper class" of the community. It seemed to foster the idea that somehow they were better than other members of the same community.

Chapters 1-3

Pick out at least three references to this viewpoint either by Hagar or others.

-
-
-

Hagar has many "character faults," especially her pride. Pick out three references to this aspect of her character.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Already in the first chapters, we can see that Hagar realizes her faults and desperately wishes she could be different. This is an indication of her remorse. Give three examples to support this.

- 1.

2.

3.

Relationships in Hagar's life do not exactly seem to be easy and she seems to despise certain aspects of others. List details of the nature of her relationships with the following people as well as her opinion of them respectively.

Jason Currie:

Auntie Doll:

The school children:

Lottie Drieser:

Charlotte Tappen:

Matt Currie:

Dan Currie:

Brampton Shipley:

Marvin Shipley:

Doris Shipley:

Tina & Steven Shipley:

How does Hagar see herself?

List examples of the two sides of Hagar's character:

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

Taking all things into consideration, explain the tragic nature of the story of Hagar Shipley so far (i.e. How does it fit into the tragic mode of literature?)

Chapter 4

List examples to support the following statements:

Hagar does not like to be controlled by others.

Hagar does, in fact, recognize her own weaknesses.

No matter how many times she learns a lesson, she never changes.

Marvin needs the approval of his mother.

Hagar's foolish pride.

Hagar will not let herself be vulnerable and weak.

Hagar has a contrary disposition.

Hagar is like the "stone angel."

In a way, Hagar wanted or wished to be close to Marvin.

Hagar maintains her own sense of importance by putting others down.

Retribution: Hagar paid her whole life for her fault/tragic flaw.

What elements of tragedy do you see in Chapter 4?

Chapter 5

This chapter seems to present at least some shift in Hagar's character as it presents parallel stories of times of change in her physical surroundings. What are the physical changes and how do they affect her life in other ways?

Find at least one example to support the idea that Hagar is constantly in agony over the circumstances of her life (as an old woman) but realizes her own part in making it as it is.

It has often been said that you cannot love or hate something about another person unless you love or hate that thing about yourself. Find some examples of this quality in Hagar and explain.

Find textual references to Hagar's likeness to the stone angel.

How is Hagar's journey as an old woman symbolic?

How is Hagar's view of John ironic?

What do the last two paragraphs on page 160 tell you about Hagar?

Chapter 6

The story is also about the tragedy of life as we grow older; indignity and injustices of a once strong body and mind which seems to betray you. It is about the dependence upon others when once you were so independent and the loss of your dignity. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons.

Why do the words of the poem give Hagar courage?

Find examples to support the following ideas.

Fear is also an aspect of this tragedy.

Hagar figured she deserved more.

John is not as much like the Curries as Hagar thinks.

Hagar still wants and desires Bram even though she's too proud to live under his conditions.

Hagar is unrealistic in her expectations of herself and others.

Hagar could never give Bram what he needed.

Relationships are often determined by the expectations that people place on each other.

Hagar seems to recognize the irony of her own life.

Hagar finds it impossible to resist doing that which she knows she shouldn't.

Hagar really does not know her own children.

Hagar can't be weak. She seems to have no feelings. She even acknowledges and wonders about the motivation of those who feel. Hagar lacks empathy; that's part of her problem with tarring everyone with the same "Currie" brush.

Chapter 7

Find examples to support the following ideas.

Hagar's pride.

An indication of remorse or at least recognition of her past wrongdoing (maybe symbolic).

Hagar seems very enlightened on her own situation.

John needs to talk about his feelings. He needs warmth and love.

Hagar is not willing to relent, forgive, or even acknowledge that she's wrong...ever.

An example of irony which emphasizes Hagar's stubborn pride.

Hagar cannot let go of the past.

Why is Hagar afraid of the dark?

Hagar places other people in uncomfortable positions.

Remorse.

Hagar's relationships have always been strained. She's selfish without meaning to be. She just can't bring herself to be humble. Pride drives her even though she

recognizes it and seems not to want to let it control her. That's what creates the sadness - we cannot hate her, just pity her...she's pathetic. Do you agree or disagree. Give reasons.

Chapter 8

This chapter presents us with a picture of Hagar that seems very 'out of character,' as we have come to know her. The problem for her is that our point of view is also the picture of those who are close to Hagar. She has made a life of being difficult and hard to please and is paying the price. The theme of the novel is beginning to take shape here and the tragic elements of pity, pathos, fear and remorse are apparent for both the reader and the characters. Before Hagar meets Murray Lees she seems to be a little "batty" and perhaps it is this shift in mentality which opens her up to learn her lesson. The thing is that Hagar has learned her lessons a million times before but never seems to be able to do anything about it.

Find examples to support the following ideas.

How is it ironic when Hagar says, "I have everything I need"?

What does singing the verse symbolize?

She is still blind to her true self.

List examples which show that Hagar is able to share things with Murray that she never could with those that were close to her.

What does Hagar's detailed description of her imagination reveal about her?

The families of Murray and Hagar are similar.

They have been 'stripped' of an outer layer and are human with each other.

What is John's wisdom about humanity and what do you think he means by saying it? How did he gain this knowledge?

We are presented with opportunities to 'learn lessons' but do not always learn from them.

How is this pathetic and sad?

Reference to her tough, stone existence.

What is your major thought after reading p. 246-248?

Chapter 9

Every person comes with their own peculiar set of beliefs. You are a combination and result of all of your past experiences: acceptance and tolerance are what is needed, not change or fixing. Hagar seems to be enlightened, or at least leaning towards feeling that way. When you wrestle with your own mortality, you sometimes tend to overstate your importance. After all, the reality is that everybody is equal in death as in life. As the last chapter gave us an insight into the Hagar-John story, this chapter gives us a look at the Hagar-Marvin saga.

Find examples to support the following ideas.

The effect Hagar has had on Marvin.

Hagar realizes that she is only mortal.

The encounter with Murray has changed her forever.

She'll never change.

Hagar is aware of the changes needed.

Contrast Hagar's situation with Elva/Tom.

Hagar cannot abide human contact.

Her pride.

She wants to resist humanity but cannot.

There's a glimmer of hope for Hagar.

A big step for Hagar towards change.

The misunderstanding. One of the most ironic scenes in the novel.

What is your major impression at the end of the chapter?

What tragic elements do you see in this chapter as Hagar's life is obviously changing?

Chapter 10

Give two examples of irony presented here by referring to evidence in other parts of the book.

Throughout the novel we see Hagar struggle to overcome her tragic flaw of pride, but she seems to be able to accept others or circumstances which cast her in an unfavorable light. Is there evidence in this chapter to suggest that she is able to finally accept rather than change things?

Read page 292. In your own words, and with support from the novel, what does she want and what kept her from getting it?

Taking the events and thoughts of chapter 10 into consideration, how do you feel about Hagar, her life, and her circumstances?

Discussion Questions

- What is the significance of the title "The Stone Angel"?
- When Hagar is visiting the old age care facility (against her will), she has a conversation with a Mrs. Steiner who lives there. In the ensuing discussion, Hagar reveals that she "never got used to a blessing thing" (p. 104). What things does Hagar never get used to and what effect does it have on her life?
- Hagar's daughter-in-law Doris tries to care for her in many ways and she invites the local minister, Mr. Troy, to visit. On page 120, Troy asks if Hagar believes in "God's infinite mercy." In what ways does Hagar feel alone? What do her comments about God reveal about her beliefs?
- Hagar has struggled all her life to be independent and "right, no matter the cost." When her son John dies (she knows in her heart that she drove him to it), she closes up. When a well-meaning nurse tries to comfort Hagar, she responds with an old resolve. Comment on this passage, located on page 242-243.
- While she is in the hospital, near the end of the book, Mr. Troy comes to visit. He is surprised that she asks him to sing a version of the doxology. When he does, she reacts very emotionally. Discuss her revelation as she listens to Mr. Troy's singing.