

# **NEW MILLENNIUM CHRONICLES**

## **A LITERARY ODYSSEY**

*Editors*

Dr. R. Mercy Latha

Dr. Anita Albert



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**Pacific Books International**

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## CHAPTER 10

### **The Complexities of Diaspora in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel***

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* explores various diasporic issues through the lens of Hagar Shipley, an aging woman grappling with her past in a Canadian context. This paper examines how Hagar's experiences reflect the complexities of identity, displacement, and cultural heritage within a diasporic framework. Through an analysis of Hagar's relationships, her struggle with isolation, and her reflections on her familial lineage, the paper highlights how her character embodies the tension between belonging and alienation. Additionally, it delves into the broader implications of migration, memory, and the search for self amidst the backdrop of a changing society. The findings reveal that *The Stone Angel* serves not only as a narrative of personal struggle but also as a commentary on the universal human experience

of seeking connection and understanding within fragmented identities

**Keywords:** Diasporic, Isolation, Alienation, Fragmented Identities, Cultural Heritage, Displacement.

The ground breaking Canadian novel *Stone Angel* (1964) by Margaret Laurence explores the nuances of diasporic identity. The main character, Hagar Shipley, personifies the difficulties faced by Scottish-Canadian immigrants as they attempt to adjust to a new culture and find a sense of identity and belonging. In order to shed insight on the immigrant experience in Canada, this study discusses the diasporic concerns that Laurence investigates. In *The Stone Angel*, a Canadian woman reflects on her challenging existence and her unwillingness to acknowledge its impending conclusion. Ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley resides with her son Marvin and her hated daughter-in-law Doris. The son inquires about moving into a nursing facility with Hagar, who is getting weaker and more confused. Her struggle to stay in her own house brings back memories of her previous disputes, and eventually the realization that they were largely of her own making. This novel is first person narration.

A diaspora is a sizable population of people who shared a common ancestry or homeland but have since dispersed over the globe. The word “diaspora” is derived from an old Greek verb that means “to scatter about.” And that’s precisely what people who are part of a diaspora do they disperse from their own country to various locations throughout the world, bringing their culture with them. The diaspora of Jews who were banished from Israel by the Babylonians is mentioned in the Bible. However, the word is now often used more broadly to refer to any significant language, cultural, or refugee migration.

Isolation is a condition of being separated from other people. It can be used for a variety of purposes. It is useful for many different things. It is used in hospitals to prevent patients from contracting or spreading disease. It is used by parents and educators as a type of “time-out” to discipline misconduct. It refers to separating a prisoner from another for reasons of safety or discipline. It is a term used in psychology to characterize actions that lead a person to purposefully distance themselves from other people and the outside world. Withdrawing voluntarily from social interactions, or “isolating,” can also be a sign of mental health problems like depression. Humans are sociable creatures that suffer from social isolation. While brief periods of seclusion can be an effective form of discipline, longer periods of seclusion, like solitary confinement, can actually worsen or induce mental health issues.

The loneliness of old age the hope of recognition or connection with someone from the past is poignant and realistic. Hagar, who is 90 years old, remembers her history. She finds it difficult to accept life and other things. Hagar’s name is enough to identify her as biblical imagery. The reader is affected by Hagar’s account because many older people who reside in nursing homes face comparable circumstances to hers. Two strong feelings that are felt by everyone are the loss of a home and the sensation of being uprooted. Hagar is described as having a stone-like tenacity and apathy similar to the prairie. She has a hostile attitude toward the outside world and is a defiant, strong-willed woman. She spends about twenty years as a poor farmer’s wife a harsh experience that none of Laurence’s other protagonists, who were born in Manitoba but raised in towns, had ever encountered. Hagar feels greatly threatened and put upon by people in *The Stone Angel* because she has fought to raise her children in challenging and impoverished circumstances and has undergone a deep-

rooted marital argument. Her final days have not just been difficult for her to retain her independence and self-control. By doing this, she finally discovers how much she misjudges the people closest to her and manages to partially escape the cage of her nature.

Hagar experiences solitude, identity loss, and illness as she ages. The majority of readers will be sympathetic to any ninety-year-old who struggles with deteriorating health, losing their home, and being forced to go into a nursing home, even though Hagar's occasionally harsh and challenging remarks are frequently true-to-life rather than sugar-coated images of the ill-tempered elderly. Hagar is not fond with how she looks. She looks at her overweight, untrustworthy body with contempt, and when she casts a sidelong glance in a mirror, she notices:

A puffed face purple with veins as though someone had scribbled over the skin with an indelible pencil. The skin itself is the silverfish white of the creature 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.(STA - 280)

Her father, Jason Currie, is a chauvinistic man, and her mother passed away. He has a daughter named Hagar and two boys named Matt and Dan. He feels that slapping them will help them learn and grow. Dan and Matt were dead. Following the death of her sibling. Jason only had one daughter, Hagar. Hagar departs from her father due of his insistence that she remain at home. She dislikes living a life that is so regimented. She marries widower Brampton Shipley and moves in with him after falling in love with him. She leaves her father behind. Hagar, who was working as a housekeeper for Mr. Oatley, a wealthy man, adopts John. Her husband's illness worsened over

the days before his death. John lost his life in a vehicle accident. Hagar's relationships were all broken. Hagar had been experiencing severe arthritis at the time. She chose to send her son and daughter-in-law to a nursing facility. She declined to enter a nursing facility. At last, she consents to stay in a nursing facility. Hagar is admitted to the hospital's public ward, where she can hear the whispers and conversations of the other ladies. Hagar requests that Marvin find her a semi-private room since she can't stand the noise. She needs so much attention from others in her elderly age. Yet no one shows her any concern.

After the flashback concludes, Hagar picks up the conversation with Mr. Troy once more. When Hagar starts talking again, he looks at her in wonder, making it clear that there has been a considerable pause in the conversation. He inquires as to how many friends she has. She also acknowledges that the majority of her numerous friends had passed away, which she would not have spoken if she had been ready for it. Mr. Troy points out that people need to talk to friends who are similar to them in age. He makes the suggestion that Hagar might find solace in prayer. Hagar nods in agreement to get him to leave, but once she's alone, she starts to question his motives and returns to the kitchen after noticing a newspaper with an advertisement written in pen resting on the kitchen table. The advertising for Silver threads Nursing Home is titled "Only the Best Will for Mother." When Hagar's flashback fades and her chest ache reappears, she notices Doris waiting in the kitchen doorway. Both ladies are aware of the advertisement, but Doris tries to discredit Hagar by bringing up Mr. Troy, to which Hagar responds that she felt he was foolish. Doris tries something different again, complimenting Hagar on her gray silk outfit. Hagar appears as it, shocked to discover how plump and heavy she has grown. Her waist measured twenty inches when she married.

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 perception 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 deep estrangement, stemming from a closed heart, occasionally yields unforeseen consequences. She expects rejection from others because she rejects them, so even a small act of kindness from someone else can bring her to cry unexpectedly like when a girl gives up her bus seat to Hagar.

Hagar's attitude toward God and religion is a manifestation of her isolation. She never claims to be an atheist, but she does not think that a loving God is in charge of the cosmos. She mocks the literalistic Christian vision of heaven and confesses to the minister, Mr. Troy that she has never been able to pray: "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" (STA-154).

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" (STA-196).

Hagar makes two little but important changes at the book's conclusion to lessen her estrangement. She no longer only considers her own wants, so she tells Marvin that he has always been kind to her because she feels that is what he needs to hear. And although though it takes a lot of work, she goes to get Sandra Wong, a sixteen-year-old patient in the hospital, a bedpan to help her feel better. Hagar passed away at a hospital while lost.

Through the character of Hagar Shipley, *The Stone Angel* poignantly addresses diasporic issues of identity, belonging, and cultural memory. Hagar's journey highlights the universal quest for connection and understanding in a world marked by displacement and fragmentation. By examining these themes, Laurence not only crafts a deeply personal story but also contributes to the broader discourse on the diasporic experience, revealing the enduring struggle to find one's place in an ever-evolving landscape.

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