

# Struggle For Autonomy: A Psychoanalytical Study Of Lawrence's The Stone Angel

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## Abstract

This study investigates women's struggle for autonomy through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic analysis in Stone Angel, with a specific focus on Hagar Shipley's journey towards individuality. Also represented in the novel are gender disparities, their impact on women's empowerment, and the role played by men in upholding societal stability. This paper employs a qualitative approach, focusing on the textual content of The Stone Angel. The primary objective of this study is to dissect the aspects related to Hagar Shipley's struggle for autonomy, aiming to unveil the complexities of her character and the external influences that shaped her experiences during her pursuit of autonomy. The study examined these intricacies, particularly within the context of patriarchal suppression. This study will serve as a symbol of the intricate interplay between societal norms, unconscious motivations, and the enduring quest for autonomy.

## Background of the study

In the modern world, there is an increasing interest in psychological analysis and understanding human behavior. Autonomy, an integral part of human psyche remains a

central theme in contemporary society. A study of autonomy in a literary context provides insights into these ongoing discussions. People continue to grapple with questions of self-determination, personal agency, and the influence of external forces on their lives.

Literature continues to be a powerful medium for exploring and reflecting on human experiences. By analyzing a classic work like *The Stone Angel*, this study highlights the enduring relevance of literature in addressing timeless psychological and existential questions. The study of literature through a psychoanalytical lens has interdisciplinary implications. It connects with fields such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy, fostering a holistic understanding of human nature and behavior in the modern world.

Moreover, the modern fiction is replete with the content related to Women's struggles who attempt to establish themselves and break free from cultural expectations and gender conventions are also represented in works like Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Lady Oracle* (1976), and Lawrence's *The Stone Angel* (1964).

*The Stone Angel* epitomizes the ciphers of autonomy within the context of culture and gender, themes that remain highly relevant today. Examining how these factors intersect with autonomy offers insights into contemporary discussions on cultural identity and gender roles. Moreover, themes of challenging patriarchal norms and social conventions are emanated from the text of the novel. Hagar Shipley, the main character, is a strong-willed individual who defies gender norms and confronts her own fragility.

Dudek (2000) argues that *The Stone Angel* is Margaret Laurence's first Manawaka novel, addressing the issues of modern society and perverse gender identities. The term 'Manawaka novel' refers to a genre of Canadian literature associated with author Margaret Laurence. It encompasses a series of novels, including *The Stone Angel*, set in the fictional town of Manawaka. These novels explore themes of identity, place, and the human condition in a small Canadian prairie town.

The novel follows Hagar Shipley, a peasant woman who rebels against patriarchal norms and spends her life in struggle. The novel explores themes of national identity, personal identity, redemption, psychological suffering, lack of communication, gender gap, pride, fear of loss of social image, loss of independence, isolation, humiliation, and material possessions. The main theme is survival with dignity and pride, as Laurence believes that individuals need to recognize and understand the forces governing their lives.

The Stone Angel is a middle-class novel that focuses on the protagonist's struggle with social stability and instability, as well as her connection to the Currie family and her desire for self-justification. The novel highlights the importance of understanding the harshness of circumstances and surroundings, as well as the influence of Scottish roots and the importance of embracing personal history. The Stone Angel is a reflection of Lawrence's ability to integrate her developing social concerns and empathy with the victims and dispossessed in the novel which attract the scholars to view it from Freud's lens of psychoanalysis.

Freud's (1915) theories on human behavior and the unconscious have been influential in various fields, including psychoanalysis, feminist criticism, and feminism. He believed that society and civilization impose constraints on its subjects, leading to discontent and hatred. Freud's work is considered the founding text of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism. Other influential figures include Simon de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Dale Spender, Robin Lakoff, Kate Millet, and G.G. Jung. These figures have emphasized the importance of understanding the unconscious and its role in shaping our lives, as well as the role of societal norms and expectations in shaping our experiences. Their work has influenced the development of second wave feminism in the United States.

#### **Statement of the problem**

This study examines how women struggle for autonomy and self-actualization. It also analyzes the psychological impact of patriarchal subversion in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, focusing on Hagar Shipley's struggle for autonomy. It uses Freudian theory to understand characters' motivations

and complexities, and compares the subversion of patriarchal societies in two novels, highlighting the reasons behind women's dominance. *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence explores themes of challenging patriarchal norms and social conventions, with Hagar Shipley as the main character. Psychoanalytic criticism provides insight into the characters' unconscious minds.

### **Review of the Literature**

Bradbury (1987) analyzed the protagonist Hagar Shipley's inner personality, focusing on feminist aspects and women's struggles to attain self-fulfillment in male-oriented environments. Bradbury praised Laurence for her sympathy for the protagonist despite her unconventional personality. Hagar's self-sufficiency and manlike qualities, such as courage and submission, were influenced by her decaying age and her determination to control her home.

Davies (1998) examined the causes of women's depression in *The Stone Angel* and *Shield's Stone Diaries*, comparing it to a colonial mentality. Davies argued that Hagar's depression is driven by relational disconnection and the violation of female image in a patriarchal society. Hagar's attempt to find meaningful life and new opportunities is a product of societal influence and her own experience. Through Hagar, Laurence depicts human relational needs, her dysthymia, recurring cycles of its elements, and the advantages.

Linda (1989) in a thesis *Writing Female Body in Three Canadian Women's Novels* has depicted women bodily experience with distinction among various feminist perspectives as French and American feminist approaches. It has been tried to depict relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism through various opinions of critics especially focusing on Le-can theory of psychoanalysis, language and sexual differences. Hagar personality has been analyzed through multidimensional lenses. She argues that many Canadian women, novelists, as Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood and Marian Engel, have written novels about women and their responses to their female bodies. In *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence portrayed the experience of a woman in an aging body.

Preetha (2012) explored the feminine quest for selfhood in Canadian and Indian culture, focusing on the personalities of Hagar Shipley and Sarita in *The Stone Angel* and *The Dark Holds no Terror*. She found that their rebellious nature and pride led them to marry men against their family's will and cut ties to confirm their independence. This unconventional behavior caused mental disturbance and the suppression of guilt, leading to the need for an authentic identity.

The study investigates women's attempts to empower themselves against masculine forces, focusing on Hagar Shipley and her father. Both women were bold, educated, and sensible, violating patriarchal norms to establish authority and separate identities. Critics argue that gender gaps create a lack of understanding and energy, consuming women's energies and endangering their image. Both men and women are necessary for societal stability.

### **Research Method**

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the hidden personality and motives of Hagar Shipley and Margaret Laurence's characters in their respective novels. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for delving into the complexities of characters' actions and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The primary source of data is the textual content of the novels *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence and *Hagar Shipley*. Researchers will conduct a comprehensive textual analysis to identify and interpret the characters' actions and motivations.

The study employed psychoanalytic literary criticism as the analytical framework. This approach allows for the exploration of unconscious desires, fears, unresolved conflicts, and the psychological aspects of the characters (Freud, 1900; Lacan, 1977). Content analysis will be used to categorize and code textual data related to the characters' actions, motivations, and interactions with important figures in their lives. This analysis will uncover patterns and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **Theoretical Framework of the study**

This study uses Sigmund Freud's idea of psychoanalysis which significantly influenced our understanding of the human psyche and his complex behaviors. Freud's psychoanalytic theory presents a complex landscape for understanding women's struggle for autonomy and empowerment. It proposes that individuals develop their gender identity through various stages (Chodorow, 1989). Freud's concept helps us understand how women's desires and autonomy are often suppressed by societal expectations (Mitchell, 1974)

Freud (1905) supports women's autonomy, such as exploring unconscious desires and repression. Self-examination and introspection can also be seen as tools for women's empowerment, allowing them to reclaim agency over their lives. Freudian self-analysis can be a powerful tool for women to reclaim autonomy and challenge oppressive norms" (Horney, 1939).

Women contest patriarchal subversion where established gender roles are challenged and altered, often resulting in individuals who were traditionally perceived as weak or subordinate seeking to break free from socially constructed identities (Bly, 1990). Patriarchal subversion challenges oppressive forces and sometimes employs patriarchal rules, linked to societal changes like feminist movements in the 1960s and beyond (Hooks, 1984). It represents an effort to eliminate male supremacy and challenge traditional norms and gender roles.

This thesis aims to recognize that labeling societies as purely patriarchal or homophobic can oversimplify the complexities and nuances of cultural systems (Foucault, 1978). By adopting a more multifaceted perspective, this study intends to shed light on the multifarious nature of patriarchal subversion in literature and society at large.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of The Stone Angel**

In this literary work, Hagar's character serves as a canvas to project complex themes, including pride, masculinity, guilt, and the repercussions of her actions. Her continuous quest for autonomy and empowerment is often in conflict with her past

experiences and her relationships with family members, particularly the men in her life.

Psychoanalytic literary theory provides a valuable lens through which to delve into Hagar Shipley's psyche and her unconscious motives. This approach helps us understand the deep-rooted psychological forces at play within her character. As Sigmund Freud, a foundational figure in psychoanalytic theory, posited, individuals are often driven by unconscious desires and conflicts that influence their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Hagar's struggles with her father, brothers, and her inability to empathize with her deceased brother Matt can be seen as manifestations of her unresolved inner conflicts. Her interactions with these family members are not merely surface-level encounters but are deeply influenced by her unconscious desires and fears.

For instance, her strained relationship with her father, Jason Curry, may be seen through the lens of Freud's Oedipal complex. Freud's theory suggests that individuals, especially during childhood, may experience conflicting feelings of love and rivalry toward their same-sex parent. Hagar's struggles with her father may be rooted in these complex emotions, which continue to shape her interactions with other men in her life.

However, Hagar's difficulty in expressing sympathy for her deceased brother, Matt, may be analyzed through the prism of unconscious guilt. Freud's theory posits that individuals may harbor unconscious feelings of guilt related to unresolved conflicts from their past. Hagar's inability to show sympathy for her brother could be a manifestation of this deeply buried guilt.

Hagar's journey in *The Stone Angel* is, therefore, a complex interplay of her conscious and unconscious motivations. Her desire for autonomy and empowerment, her struggles with her family, and her inability to fully express her emotions are all deeply rooted in her psyche, waiting to be uncovered and understood.

Through the lens of psychoanalytic literary theory, we gain insight into Hagar's powerlessness and the significance of comprehending her multifaceted personality. The novel invites readers to embark on a psychological exploration of its protagonist, shedding light on the complexities of the human psyche and the enduring impact of past experiences on one's present actions and relationships.

### **Hagar's Response to Masculinity**

In *The Stone Angel*, Hagar Shipley and Elva Jardine are separated from their close relationships, leading to feelings of alienation and lack of emotional attachment. They struggle with bonding ties as a sacrifice to appease themselves and achieve a favorable wind through pleasure principles (Laurence, 1964). Their characters' actions are influenced by various motivational factors, such as attacking patriarchal notions to secure independence and gain respect." (Laurence, 1964). They develop mixed feelings of love and hate for their husbands, especially when their masculinity demands conformity to social norms. Hagar realizes her mistake in her final days and expresses her love towards Marvin." (Laurence, 1964)

In the hospital, Elva Jardine, a source of affection among other patients, is revealed to Hagar through her wife's dying of cancer (Laurence, 1964). Despite her painful operation, Elva's life of joy with her husband Tom is confirmed, but the alienation of life is depicted through the dreadfulness of sea. Hagar's character has a heart and understands the importance of love and relations, with Elva as an active model.

Hagar Shipley responds to Elva Jar Dine's example in two decisive actions. "She imitates Elva's self-sacrificing act when her teenage companion needs a bedpan, despite her fragility." (Laurence, 1964, p. Page). She also sacrifices her relations' emotions of attachment and love. Hagar's son Marvin visits her, demonstrating sincere attempts to stabilize his relationship with her." (Laurence, 1964)

In her final hours, Hagar reflects on her actions, admitting they are the only moments of release from her pride. Her spirit never obtains its psychic release, and conversion would involve submission to reason. The psychic condition of both



Hagar and Shipley is complex and ambivalent, with glimpses of it evident through their actions. Hagar Shipley, a character in Margaret Laurence's novel, is ambivalent due to her dual roles as the mother of her children and the societal pressures of her patriarchal upbringing. Her love for her mother and her unconscious fears about her relationships with other women create a complex situation. Hagar's sacrifice for her marriage was driven by her uncompromising will and hostile patriarchal authority, which posed a direct threat to her ego." (Laurence, 1964). Her attraction to Bram, a masculine force, further fueled her ambivalence, as she felt alienated from him.

Despite her deprivation, Hagar ultimately realized the importance of good-term relationships and happiness. In Margaret Laurence's novel, *The Stone Angel*, the characters Hagar and Hagar are depicted as arrogant, proud, and haughty (Laurence, 1964). The characters' actions are not based on their disposition or one particular factor, but rather on their desire for power and dominance. The presence and influence of numerous psychological forces and factors on the minds of the characters.

According to the psychoanalytic study of Hagar Shipley and, their decision to forgo their close relationships was driven by an unconscious wish to maintain their dominance over their husbands and houses and status as unrivaled powerful forces." (Freud, 1961)

### **Hagar Shipley's Psychological Complexes**

In Margaret Laurence's "The Stone Angel," Hagar Shipley and Paul are indeed complex characters from feminist perspectives, and their psychological makeup is not easily determined (Laurence, 1964). Both women grapple with their perception of masculine image and power, which ultimately leads to their disappointment in controlling their own lives and affairs. Their relationships with the men in their lives, including husbands and sons, hint at a crucial psychological issue known as the Oedipal fixation (Freud, 1961).

Men often cope with this complex by adopting a "good-girl/bad-girl" attitude towards women, which can sometimes be resolved through sexual relationships with women who are unconsciously different from their mothers (Freud & Riviere,

1935). In Hagar and Paul's cases, their struggles with their masculine personas contribute to their difficulties in forming successful relationships with other women.

Unconscious guilt plays a significant role in Hagar and her sons' lives, leading to failures in their relationships with other women (Freud, 1961). They are reluctant to embrace love fully and instead tend to cling to their mother figures. Hagar and her mother are particularly burdened by guilt and resist allowing their sons to become involved with other women.

John and Paul's attempts to persuade their mothers to stay away from other women are met with resistance and emotional detachment, which ultimately has tragic consequences (Laurence, 1964). John's death, for instance, can be attributed to his deep emotional attachment to his mother, while Paul's emotional enslavement to her creates a barrier between him and other women, leading him to commit a horrific act of matricide.

In psychoanalysis, defense mechanisms often come into play to deny the existence of certain psychological issues and to conceal them when external forces attempt to expose them (Freud, 1961). Hagar Shipley, however, eventually succumbs to external pressures and societal norms, which highlight the complexity of her character.

Hagar Shipley and Paul in *The Stone Angel* are complex characters who grapple with issues related to their masculine identities, unconscious guilt, and complicated relationships with others, especially the opposite gender. Their struggles and eventual outcomes reveal the intricate psychological aspects of their personalities and the impact of external forces on their lives.

#### **Unconscious Motives of Hagar Shipley**

"It is ironic that both apparently powerful female characters are put in a helpless situation by hostile forces." (Laurence, 1964, Page)

the irony in the powerful is that it underscores female characters, such as Hagar Shipley, being rendered helpless by external forces. It suggests that their strategies may have gone awry, challenging the notion that they are mere victims

of fate. This complexity adds depth to their characters and contributes to their enduring popularity.

"Hagar Shipley and Morel actions and decisions are primarily motivated by their unconscious struggle to present their persona as a powerful force, securing enough strength to control the lives of other concerning people." (Laurence, 1964, Page)

Both Hagar and Morel are driven by an unconscious desire to project themselves as powerful figures capable of controlling those around them. They are compelled to appear strong and masculine, especially within their households, as reflected in their dialogues and actions

"The demonstration of strength and masculinity requires an exhibition of machismo... exhibitions of this strength are shown." (Laurence, 1964, Page). It explains that the display of strength and masculinity, often characterized as machismo, involves controlling household affairs. Hagar Shipley's actions and behavior can be understood in this context as she strives to exhibit power and dominance.

Both Hagar Shipley and had those fears that are deep-rooted in the human psyche... unconscious fear is at work in their mind. Hagar Shipley and the unnamed character harbor deep-rooted fears that influence their behavior. Their defiance of social norms makes them feel guilty, as they challenge a society more powerful and vengeful than themselves. This unconscious guilt persists throughout the novel. Hagar Shipley and are susceptible to emotional blackmailing... remain adamant on their earlier decisions." (Laurence, 1964)

Both Hagar and the unnamed character can be emotionally manipulated, but their pride and defiance compel them to present themselves as emotionally immune. They also have an unconscious motive related to their role as rebellious characters – an unwavering commitment to their stated beliefs and decisions. "Both women are not willing to leave their sense of undone and revenge to patriarchal society... disturbance either mental or physical." (Laurence, 1964, p.222)

Hagar and the unnamed character are determined to seek revenge against a patriarchal society that disrupted their lives and families. Their persistent efforts to challenge opposing forces lead to mental turmoil, ultimately resulting in disturbance, whether mental or physical. Ultimately, they admit that adopting a violent attitude towards the opposite gender resulted only in the form of disturbance either mental or physical.

Eventually, both characters realize that their aggressive stance towards the opposite gender only leads to disruption, be it psychological or physical. Hagar Shipley's realization toward the end of the novel underscores this point. Mentally Hagar seemed to spend her last days under water..." (Laurence, 1964, p.44). It metaphorically describes Hagar's mental state in her final days, highlighting her psychological struggle and emotional isolation as if she were submerged in water. Hagar and decision to walk on the path of rivalry antagonized masculinity.

Hagar's decision to challenge and compete with masculinity further exacerbates the antagonism towards her. This decision is pivotal in the narrative, reflecting her pursuit of power. Another point where the influence of unconscious motives becomes explicit in the initial pages of the novel is the confrontation with reality..." (Laurence, 1964, p.130)

This highpoints the characters' confrontations with harsh realities that bring their unconscious motives to the surface. It underscores how their actions are influenced by deeper psychological factors.

### **Hagar Shipley Failure in Social Relation**

Hagar Shipley and could be justly termed as the captive, exile, blind to their selves and to the needs of others and so they were unable to find a fitting for themselves in the society. Margaret Laurence have conceived of their heroine as a tragic figure, women who unknowingly bring about their own unhappiness. Their great flaw is pride, and instinct to rebel. Their stubborn refusal to yield to the wishes of others proves as destructive to themselves as to those around them.

Their old age and particularly of Hagar Shipley is a purgatory in which they are tormented by their memories of a wanted and unhappy life. For us, the readers, their lives unfold in a series of scenes in which they obstinately held their selves apart from others, refusing to give or accept love. Margaret Laurence points out the condition of Hagar Shipley in her last days that she is "hauled out of sleep, like a fish in a net."(Laurence, 1964, p.257) and she drifts "like Kelp"(Laurence, 1964, p.286) floating through the shadow world she's recently entered. Realizing the importance and reality of relations, now she is getting to the bottom of things, lying there waiting for release, transformation and rebirth.

Hagar Shipley struggles with their emotional and ethical lives, influenced by their Presbyterian and Catholic upbringing. They seek justice from patriarchal traditions but face alienation from their family members. Hagar constructs a courtroom from her natural surroundings, revealing her desire for both prosecution and defense. However, they struggle to assign responsibility or guilt to their family members, causing disturbance in their social life. Margaret Laurence focuses on creating characters, while Hagar aims to breathe fresh air and transcend the limitations of masculinity. Hagar's exclusion of the metaphor of the house in *The Stone Angel* highlights her mistake of separating herself from family relations.

### **Interpretation of the analysis**

The study showed that Hagar's character is deeply influenced by her response to masculinity. She experiences feelings of alienation and emotional detachment due to their relationships with men. She struggles to balance societal expectations with her own desires for independence and respect. Hagar, in particular, battles with her love-hate relationship with the men in her life, as their demands for conformity to social norms clash with her strong-willed nature. She grapples with her perception of masculinity and power, which affects her ability to form successful relationships, especially with women. Her unconscious guilt and fear also play a significant role in her life, leading to emotional detachment and tragic consequences for her sons, John and Paul.

Hager's defiance of social norms and her refusal to conform to patriarchal expectations which lead to her sense of guilt and a deep-seated need for revenge against a society she perceives as hostile. Ultimately, she realizes the futility of her aggressive stance toward masculinity. Her pride and stubbornness prevent her from forming meaningful connections with others. Her refusal to yield to the wishes of others leads to her isolation and unhappiness. In her old age, she is tormented by memories of a lonely and unfulfilled life. However, in her final days, she begins to recognize the importance of relationships and waits for release and transformation.

### **Conclusion**

The study explores that Margaret Laurence's novel *The Stone Angel* is filled with complex themes, including pride, masculinity, guilt, and the consequences of actions. These themes are complicatedly interwoven into the character of Hagar Shipley. It also finds that the use of psychoanalytic literary theory is suggested as a valuable approach to understanding Hagar Shipley's character. It also examined that Hagar is often driven by unconscious desires and conflicts that influence their behavior. Hagar's struggles with her father, brothers, and her difficulty in empathizing with her deceased brother Matt are presented as manifestations of her unresolved inner conflicts, shaped by unconscious desires and fears. The study also reveals Hagar's inability to show sympathy for her deceased brother, Matt, is attributed to unconscious guilt, which is explained as an unconscious feeling of guilt related to unresolved conflicts from the past. The study unveils Hagar Shipley's ambivalence, particularly in her perception of masculine identity and power. Their struggles in forming successful relationships with the opposite gender are connected to these issues. This defense mechanisms often come into play to conceal psychological issues when external forces attempt to expose them. Hagar Shipley eventually succumbs to external pressures and societal norms. It also traces how Hagar Shipley is motivated by unconscious desires and fears but remain steadfast in her beliefs and decisions. Moreover, Hagar Shipley's pride and instinct to rebel are identified as significant flaws that lead to

her unhappiness. Their stubbornness to yield to the wishes of others is seen as destructive.

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