

原 著

“Pride Is My Wilderness” : *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence

Nobuko HASHIMOTO

*Department of Medical Social Work
Faculty of Medical Social Work
Kawasaki University of Medical Welfare
Kurashiki, 701-01, Japan
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Abstract

The Stone Angel is Margaret Laurence's first novel with a Canadian setting. Hagar, the protagonist of this work, is now 90 years old, dying of cancer and rampant with bitter memory. She is like a blind stone angel at Manawaka cemetery. She is blind to other people's pain and suffering, and her blindness and pride forbid her to feel warmth towards people. But when she is in fear of dying, revelation comes to her : pride is her wilderness and she always wanted simply to rejoice. She recovers human feeling through this revelation.

The Stone Angel was published in 1964 as Margaret Laurence's first novel with a Canadian setting, after a series of works with an African setting. Hagar, the protagonist of this story, is now 90 years old, peevish and stubborn, and she is getting to be a burden to her son and his wife who are in their sixties and no longer healthy. The story covers only a short period, from Hagar's struggle to escape from being sent to a nursing home to her death at the hospital from cancer. But Laurence uses flashback and shows us Hagar's whole life chronologically, beginning with Hagar as a six-year-old. This method effectively presents the common confusion between reality and memory which often occurs in the very old. Hagar in old age

confesses : “Now I'm rampant with memory.” (p.5)¹⁾ She cannot remember most of the memory of the past without bitter feeling. The process of Hagar's coming to terms with her past and facing her death will be the focus of this paper.

Really proclaiming Hagar's father's dynasty, a costly stone angel brought from Italy for her dead mother's memorial stands on the hill of Manawaka. In the beginning of the story, this stone angel's double blindness is stated as follows :

Summer and winter she viewed the town with sightless eyes. She was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even a pretense of sight.” (p. 3)

Hagar can be identified with this stone angel.

The word “stone” refers not only to Hagar’s physical strength but also to her stoney heart. So, these two words, blindness and stone, will be helpful to understand Hagar.

Hagar’s father is a successful merchant and has a strong puritanical sense of values. Hard work and success come first to him. This is clearly shown in his remark when his big donation to the church is praised and also in his almost legendary story of his having started without a bean. He says to Hagar, “You take after me,” (p. 6) and cherishes her and makes her his angel to proclaim his dynasty, just as he uses the stone angel he purchased. His sense of values defines Hagar’s whole life. As a result, she despises frailty. She feels no affection towards her frail mother who died when she gave birth to Hagar. Hagar compares her mother’s frailty with her own strength, “I used to wonder what she’d been like, that docile woman, and wonder at her weakness and my awful strength.”(p. 59) For the same reason, she feels superior to her two brothers : “My brothers took after our mother, graceful unspirited boys who tried to please him [their father] but rarely could.” (p. 7) When Dan was dying, Matt asked Hagar to put on her mother’s shawl and hold Dan for a while, but she was horrified :

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

Later, Hagar is shocked to know Matt, who played their mother’s role for Dan, died quietly without fuss : “I found this harder to bear than his death, even.” (p. 60)

The word “decent” is often repeated as a basic word to express Hagar’s feeling. She imagines Bram being in a decent suit and

believes that he will prosper in the future and live up to her father’s expectation and her father will accept their marriage sooner or later. That is why she arrogantly speaks back to her father, “It’ll be done by me,” (p. 49) when her father is dead set against her marriage with Bram and says, “There’s not a decent girl in this town would wed without her family’s consent.” (p. 49) Therefore, Bram’s indecent behaviour naturally becomes a decisive factor to make her leave him. Evelyn Hinz attributes the failure of their marriage to Bram’s lack of masculine assertiveness.²⁾ But Bram’s indecency and lack of manners must be a more important factor for the failure of their marriage. Bram can be considered to be a Christ-like figure from his remark that both he and Christ were born in a barn. In addition to this, Hagar’s recall that Bram is the only one who calls her by her name, “Hagar,” shows us that the relationship with Bram will give Hagar a chance to live as an integrated woman.

I was Hagar to him, and if he were alive, I’d be Hagar to him yet. And now I think he was the only person close to me who ever thought of me by my name, not daughter, nor mother, nor sister nor even wife, but Hagar, always. (p. 80)

Bram used to think sex is a kind of affliction to an educated person like Hagar, and Hagar’s pride forbids her to make the sexual joy she gets from Bram explicit. Helen Buss points out this aspect of their marriage and observes :

Hagar remains very much defined by the logic and materialism of her father’s world. The transformative effect of sex is resisted. . . . But she admits that Bram had some sense of her wholeness as a human being even if she herself lacked it.³⁾

But that realization comes to Hagar much

later. She is blind to this possibility then and leaves him behind. The dying Bram resembles an ancient child and Hagar feels sick at the sight of him :

He lay curled up and fragile in the big bed where we'd coupled and it made me sick to think I'd lain with him, for now he looked like an ancient child. (p. 183)

Here again, Bram's quiet death is mentioned : "He died in the night, with no fuss and no one beside him." (p. 183) Hagar thinks : "I'd nagged at him in the past, but God knows I'd had my reasons. And yet he mattered to me." (p. 184) Bram stays as her only partner as seen in her love of her lilac-color silk dress because a lilac bush used to be outside their bedroom.

Prior to Bram's death, Hagar and her son John found the stone angel was toppled down. This can be identified with Hagar's situation then. Once she was like a Pharaoh's daughter, but she is only a petty housekeeper now. There is an apparent parallel between John's wrestling with the stone angel and Jacob's wrestling with an angel.⁴⁾ What John is seeking is not only the blessing from his father Bram, which he never gets as a child while his elder brother Marvin always gets it, but also a blessing from his grandfather because he is wrestling with the symbol of his grandfather's dynasty. Hagar buries Bram at her father's family plot in Manawaka cemetery and erects a combined tombstone with both family names, Currie and Shipley. This is not only an act negating her father's rejection of their marriage but also an act of love towards Bram by raising her husband to the level of her father.

By leaving Bram, Hagar made John, her beloved son, homeless. He detests Hagar's vanity of leaving his father because of his indecency and his unprosperous life. John realizes that his father's place is his place and tries to put his own wrong life right. Here

again Hagar is blind to John's need. Hagar, proud just like her father, opposes John's marriage with Arlene and causes John and Arlene's death in an accident. The relation between Hagar and John is similar to the relation between Hagar and Jacob in Genesis. Hinz sees a parallel between Laurence's Hagar and the biblical Hagar :

Just as the biblical Hagar was the Egyptian concubine of Abraham, taken by him because his first wife, Sarah, was childless, so Laurence's Hagar, who likens herself to "Pharaoh's daughter" is the second wife of "Bram," whose first wife, Clara, had provided him with no male heirs.⁵⁾

Hinz also points out that Hagar's belief is tested when she watches Bram "cut a slab of waxen honey and hold it out" to John.⁵⁾ John is not sacrificed then, but later he is because of Hagar's stubbornness. There is no interference from God to stop it. Even in the extreme pain of losing her son, Hagar thinks as follows :

....I straightened my spine, and that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my entire life, to stand straight then. I wouldn't cry in front of strangers, whatever it cost me. (p. 242)

Hagar becomes a real stone and loses human feeling : "The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all." (p. 243) She cannot show any sympathy to Arlene's parents to whom Arlene is everything. It takes many years for Hagar to recover human feeling and to shed tears over John's death.

Hagar sticks to her properties, especially to her house because of her sense of values and because she bought it with the money she got with her many years' labour. It symbolizes her security. She cannot accept Marvin's proposal to sell her house and to send her to

a nursing home. It threatens her security and her dignity. So she takes refuge at a waterfront named Shadow Point. Patricia Morley thinks this refuge at Shadow Point is a descent into Self.⁶⁾ She experiences a kind of transformation there. This pattern is seen in Laurence's later works, too.⁷⁾ Hinz thinks that a trapped and wounded sea gull symbolizes Hagar's situation and the critic sees a ritual meaning when Hagar and Mr. Lees, whom Hagar meets there, share wine and biscuits.⁸⁾ It is also hinted that Hagar's death is coming closer because "a bird in the house means a death in the house." (p.217) Both of them share the pain of losing their sons because Mr. Lees lost his infant son in a fire and Hagar found herself crying while talking about John to the man. When Mr. Troy, the minister, tried to make Hagar understand that she was not the only one who lost her son, she could not accept it. Although Hagar reacts almost the same way to Mr. Lees' words, "These things happen" ; "I know it. I don't need anyone to tell me that. But I don't accept it. . . . It angers me, and will until I die. Not at anyone, just that it happened that way," (p. 245), she mumbles words of apology to John. Morley points out that here Mr. Lees plays the role of John just like her brother Matt played their mother's role when Dan died.⁹⁾

Another chance of transformation comes to Hagar at the hospital while she is listening to a hymn sung by Mr. Troy.

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with joyful voice.
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell ;
Come ye before Him and rejoice. (pp. 291—292)

A moment of revelation suddenly comes to Hagar :

... I must always, always have wanted
that—simply to rejoice.

Pride was my wilderness, and the

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

And the moment of her simply rejoicing from bottom of her heart comes when a dying Hagar manages to bring a bedpan for a young girl named Sandra. Hagar goes out of her way to do this to the girl because she, who fears her own senility, thinks Sandra should not suffer from pain and humiliation at her age. This act for the girl becomes the act for her : "And now I wonder if I've done it for her or for myself." (p. 301) A simple bedpan becomes "the shiny grail" (p. 301) which reminds us of the Holy Grail. Both Sandra and Hagar laugh at the way how the nurse is stunned when she looks at a walking Hagar : "Convulsed with our paining laughter, we bellow and wheeze. And then we peacefully sleep." (p. 302)

When Hagar reveals her fear of death to Marvin, she is ashamed but she feels relief at the same time. When Hagar becomes honest, Marvin can also be honest and show his true feeling. What he truly wants is a blessing from her. The relation between Marvin and John is similar to the relation between Esau and Jacob. There is no reason to deny a blessing to Marvin, the first-born, when Hagar's beloved son John does not live any more. Hagar gives what Marvin always wanted and never got before : "You've been good to me, always. A better son than John." (p. 304) because she thinks : "The dead don't grudge nor seek a blessing. The dead don't rest uneasy. Only the living." (p. 304) She thinks what she does is a kind of love :

I lie here and try to recall something

truly free that I've done in ninety years. I can think of only two acts that might be so, both recent. One was a joke. . . The other was a lie—yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love.” (p. 307)

Laurence says Hagar's tragedy has been the inability to give or to receive affection and love and the inability to allow herself to experience joy.¹⁰⁾ But towards the end of her life, Hagar learns how to be joyful and how to please others and her heart somewhat rests at peace, yet she stays as Hagar used to be, strong and independent. As Peterman observes, Hagar's pride both blinds and sus-

tains her and makes her stay a fighter.¹¹⁾ She, who gives a blessing to Marvin, never begs a blessing : “Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg.” (p. 307) Even at the last moment, she is nasty to Marvin's wife Doris and thinks, “it's my nature.” (p. 308) Just before her death, Hagar recalls John's breathing difficulty at his birth and wonders if it is that way to transit from one world to another. This hints to us that Hagar's death is not an end but a rebirth.¹²⁾ Hagar's snatching the glass of water from Doris means that she now tries to move to another world with her own strong will.

Notes

- 1) All citations with pages are from Laurence M (1989) *The Stone Angel*. McClelland & Stewart Inc., Toronto.
- 2) Hinz J (1988) The Religious roots of the feminine identity issue : Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. In : Verduyn C, ed. Margaret Laurence : An appreciation. *Journal of Canadian Studies/Broadview Press*, Peterborough, pp84.
- 3) Buss H (1986) Margaret Laurence's dark lovers : sexual metaphor, and the movement toward individualization, hierogamy and mythic narrative in four Manawaka books. *Atlantis*, 11(2) spring, 99.
- 4) For further biblical connotation, see Willams D (1988) Jacob and the demon : Hagar as storyteller in *The Stone Angel*. In : Gunnars K, ed. Crossing the river : essays in honour of Margaret Laurence. Turnstone Press, Winnipeg, pp81—98.
- 5) Hinz J (1988) The Religious roots of the feminine identity issue : Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. pp85—87.
- 6) Morley P (1981) Margaret Laurence. Twayne Publishers, Boston, pp78.
- 7) See Hashimoto N (1992) Stacey's growth in *The Fire-Dwellers* by Margaret Laurence. In : *Kawasaki Medical Welfare Journal*, 2 (2), 221—226.
- 8) Hinz J and Teunissen J (1986—1987) Milton, Whitman, Wolfe and Laurence : *The Stone Angel* as elegy. *Dalhousie Review*, 65(4) winter, 487.
- 9) Morley Patricia (1981) Margaret Laurence. pp80.
- 10) Laurence M (1972) A Conversation about literature : An interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton. *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1 (winter), 68.
- 11) Peterman M (1988) “All that happens, one must try to understand” : The Kindredness of Tillie Olsen's “Tell me a riddle” and Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. In : Verduyn C, ed. Margaret Laurence : An appreciation. Broadview Press, Peterborough, pp76, 80.
- 12) Hinz and Teunissen think that water Hagar requests is a form of amniotic fluid. Hinz J and

Teunissen J (1986—1987) Milton, Whitman, Wolfe and Laurence : *The Stone Angel* as elegy. 489.

誇りが私を孤独にさせた

——マーガレット・ローレンスの石造りの天使——

橋 本 信 子

川崎医療福祉大学 医療福祉学部 医療福祉学科

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要 約

マーガレット・ローレンスの「石造りの天使」はカナダを舞台とした作品としては初めてのものである。主人公ヘイガーは今や90歳で、病のために死が真近に迫り、自分のために不幸になった愛する夫や息子のことを思い出し、慙愧に堪えない。マナワカ墓地に建つ、目の無い石造りの天使に象徴されるように、ヘイガーは他人の苦しみ、痛みに対して盲目で、彼女の誇りが人に優しくすることを許さなかった。死の恐怖に捉えられているヘイガーは突然、「誇りが私を孤独にさせてきた。私はいつも心から喜びたかったのだ。」と悟る。そう悟ることによって石のようだったヘイガーも人間的な気持ちを取り戻し、心の安らぎを得ることができた。