Louis Savinien Dupuis Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 2026: V(4) 115-118
DOI: 10.21839/lsdjmr.2025.v4.264

**Research Article**

# QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S THE STONE ANGEL AND THE DIVINERS

**M. Suwedha** *

*Department of English Immaculate College For Women Cuddalore*

*(Received: XX-XX-XXXX; Accepted XX-XX-XXXX; Published Online XX-XX-XXXX)*
* Corresponding author

**Abstract**

This project presents a comparative study of Margaret Laurence's novels *The Stone Angel* (1964) and *The Diviners* (1974), focusing on the theme of female identity and self-discovery. Margaret Laurence (1926–1987), a historical figure in Canadian literature, is known for her psychological realism and her sensitive portrayal of the internal struggles of women in society. *The Stone Angel* starts Hagar Shipley's pride and emotional rigidity lead to loneliness and inner conflict, while *The Diviners* traces Morag Gunn's journey to personal and artistic fulfilment. Despite the differences in age and life experiences, the two protagonists share a common struggle for independence, self-understanding and the affirmation of their identity. Using a comparative and thematic approach, this study highlights Margaret Laurence's portrayal of women's growth, identity, and self-discovery, emphasizing itssignificance in Canadian women's literature.

**Keywords:** Self-discovery, female-identity, inner conflict, personal growth, independence.

## Introduction

Margaret Laurence was one of the most significant figures in Canadian literature. She was born in 1926 in Neepawa, Manitoba, a small town that later became the model for the fictional town of Manawaka in her novels. Her early life was marked by personal loss, which deeply influenced her writing. She completed her education at the University of Manitoba and later worked as a journalist.

Margaret Laurence is widely regarded as one of the most influential voices in Canadian literature. Her writings often focus on the psychological experiences of individuals, particularly women, who struggle to understand their place in society. Laurence had a remarkable ability to portray human emotions with sensitivity and realism. Through her characters, she explored the conflicts between personal desire and social expectations. This quality made her works both relatable and intellectually engaging for readers across different cultures.Another important aspect of Laurence's writing is her deep interest in memory and personal history. She believed that understanding the past is essential for shaping one's identity. Many of her characters revisit their memories in order to understand their actions and relationships. This narrative technique allows readers to see how experiences influence personal development. Laurence uses memory not only as a storytelling device but also as a tool for exploring emotional growth.

Laurence's literary career gained recognition through her Manawaka series, which includes several novels and short stories focusing on human relationships and identity. Her writing is known for its psychological depth and realistic portrayal of characters, especially women. She often explored themes such as isolation, memory, cultural conflict, and self-discovery.

Laurence's literary style is known for its clarity, introspection, and emotional depth. She skilfully combines realistic settings with complex character development. Her novels often depict ordinary people facing inner struggles, which makes her

stories feel authentic and meaningful. By presenting characters who question social traditions and cultural expectations, Laurence highlights the challenges individuals face in their search for independence and self-definition.

Her experiences in Africa also played a significant role in shaping her perspective on identity and belonging. Laurence's works reflect a strong feminist voice, emphasizing the struggles of women in a male-dominated society. Her contribution to literature earned her numerous awards and recognition. Even today, her novels remain relevant for their exploration of universal human experiences.

Even after her death in 1987, Margaret Laurence's works continue to be studied and appreciated in universities around the world. Her novels remain important in discussions of feminism, identity, and Canadian cultural history. Scholars often praise her ability to create strong female protagonists who challenge societal limitations. Through her writing, Laurence has left a lasting legacy in modern literature.

### *The Stone Angel*

*The Stone Angel i*s a powerful novel that presents the life of Hagar Shipley, an elderly woman reflecting on her past. The story moves between present and past, revealing her memories, relationships, and emotional struggles. Hagar is portrayed as a strong-willed and independent woman whose pride becomes both her strength and her weakness.

Another significant element in *The Stone Angel* is the theme of memory. Much of the novel is told through Hagar's recollections of her past, which appear in fragmented and non-linear forms. These memories reveal the emotional barriers that Hagar built throughout her life. As she remembers her childhood, marriage, and relationships with her sons, the reader begins to understand the reasons behind her pride and stubbornness. Memory becomes a powerful narrative tool that exposes the complexity of her character.

Throughout her life, Hagar struggles to express her emotions: "pride was my wilderness, and I walked there alone" (*TSA* 43). Her relationship with her father shapes her personality, making her rigid and emotionally distant. Her marriage to Bram Shipley is marked by conflict, as she feels superior to him and fails to understand his simplicity. This pride leads to a lack of emotional connection, not only with her husband but also with her children.

Hagar's relationship with her son Marvin also plays an important role in the novel. For many years she fails to recognize Marvin's loyalty and care because of her own emotional distance. Her pride prevents her from expressing gratitude or affection toward him. However, as she grows older and becomes dependent on others, she gradually realizes Marvin's devotion. This realization highlights the tragic consequences of emotional restraint and misunderstanding within family relationships.

Another important theme in the novel is aging and human vulnerability. Hagar struggles to accept the physical weakness that comes with old age. She tries to maintain her independence and dignity even when her health declines. Laurence uses Hagar's physical condition to symbolize the limits of human control. Through this portrayal, the novel emphasizes that strength does not always lie in pride but sometimes in accepting help and acknowledging vulnerability.

In the final stages of her life, Hagar experiences a moment of self-realisation. She understands her mistakes and begins to accept her vulnerability. This late realization represents her search for selfhood. Although she cannot change her past, she gains a deeper understanding of herself. Laurence presents Hagar's journey as a reflection of human pride, regret, and the need for emotional connection.

### *The Diviners*

*The Diviners* presents the life of Morag Gunn, a young girl who grows into a successful writer. Morag's journey is not about reflection but about growth and self-discovery. She is an orphan raised by foster parents in a small town, and she struggles with her sense of identity from an early age.

Morag's relationship with her foster parents, Christie and Prin, also contributes significantly to her identity. Although they

come from a lower social class, they provide her with emotional support and guidance. Christie's stories about Scottish history and heritage inspire Morag's imagination and creativity. These influences shape her understanding of cultural identity and encourage her to pursue her ambitions despite social limitations.

Morag's life is shaped by her desire to understand her past and define her future. She faces challenges related to class, relationships, and personal ambition. Her relationship with Brooke Skelton represents her attempt to enter a higher social class, but it ultimately fails, leading her to realize the importance of independence.

Later, her relationship with Jules Tonnerre introduces her to a different cultural background and helps her understand the complexity of identity. "The past is a country, and I am its ghost, haunting the places I once knew" (*TD* 378). Through these experiences, Morag learns to accept her past and build her own identity. Writing becomes a crucial part of her self-expression, allowing her to shape her life story.

Another important element of the novel is the exploration of social class and cultural differences. Morag often feels uncertain about her position in society because of her background. Her experiences with people from different social classes help her understand the inequalities that exist in society. Through Morag's journey, Laurence examines how social environment can influence personal confidence, opportunities, and relationships.

The novel emphasizes themes of feminism, independence, and creativity. Morag does not wait for self-realisation in old age; instead, she actively creates her identity. Laurence presents her as a symbol of modern womanhood, who challenges societal expectations and seeks personal freedom.

## Comparative Analysis

*The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence use different narrative techniques to shape identity in their protagonists. *The Stone Angel* follows a retrospective and non-linear narration through Hagar's memories. In contrast, *The Diviners* uses a more flexible narrative with storytelling and reflection. Hagar's identity is shaped by memory and regret, while Morag's develops through growth and self-expression. Thus, narrative technique plays an important role in presenting identity in both novels.

In *The Stone Angel*, Laurence uses a retrospective first-person narrative combined with memory shifts between past and present. Hagar Shipley's identity is shaped through fragmented recollections, revealing her pride, emotional restraint, and eventual self-realisation. The non-linear structure reflects her inner conflict and gradual understanding of her life.

In contrast, *The Diviners* adopts a more flexible and evolving narrative style. Through shifting perspectives, flashbacks, and metafictional elements such as Morag Gunn's writing, the novel presents identity as something actively constructed. Morag's storytelling becomes a tool for self-definition, allowing her to reinterpret her past and shape her future.

While Hagar's narrative is confined by memory and regret, Morag's narrative is creative and transformative. Laurence thus uses different techniques reflection in *The Stone Angel* and narration as creation in *The Diviners* to show that identity can either be discovered late or consciously developed over time.

## Conclusion

The comparative study of *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* demonstrates Margaret Laurence's deep understanding of human psychology and personal identity. Both novels explore how individuals attempt to understand themselves through their relationships, memories, and life experiences. Laurence presents identity as something complex and evolving rather than fixed or predetermined.

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* offer profound insights into the concept of selfhood and identity. Through the characters of Hagar Shipley and Morag Gunn, Laurence explores the complexities of human life, relationships, and personal growth. Both characters face struggles that shape their understanding of themselves.

Another important similarity between the novels is the focus on female experience. Through Hagar Shipley and Morag Gunn, Laurence portrays women who struggle against social expectations and personal limitations. Although their circumstances and personalities are different, both characters attempt to assert their individuality. This emphasis on female identity reflects Laurence's contribution to feminist literary studies.

At the same time, the novels highlight different paths toward self-realisation. Hagar's story is largely shaped by regret and reflection on past actions. In contrast, Morag actively shapes her future through creativity and independence. This contrast shows that identity can develop in multiple ways depending on personal choices and life circumstances.

Hagar's journey highlights the importance of emotional expression and the consequences of pride. Her late realization serves as a powerful reminder of the need for self-awareness. In contrast, Morag's journey represents growth, independence, and the courage to define one's identity.

In conclusion, Margaret Laurence successfully portrays the journey of self-discovery through powerful narrative techniques and complex characters. Her novels encourage readers to reflect on the importance of memory, emotional expression, and personal freedom. The enduring relevance of *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* lies in their ability to capture the universal human search for identity and belonging. Together, these novels show that selfhood and belonging is a continuous process influenced by experience, memory, and personal choices. Laurence successfully portrays the struggles and achievements of women in their search for identity. Her works remain significant for their realistic portrayal of life and their exploration of universal themes.

**WORKS CITED**

Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. McClelland & Stewart, 1974.

---.*The Stone Angel.* McClelland & Stewart, 1964.

"Margaret Laurence." Encyclopaedia Britannica.
https://www.britannica.com/biography/Margaret-Laurence

JETIR. https://www.jetir.org