

Hagar in the stone angel



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Hagar in The Stone Angel The novel “ The Stone Angel” by Margaret Lawrence is an interesting piece of literary work. The protagonist of the novel is a ninety years old woman who refuses to adjust herself according to the circumstances. Her stubborn nature takes the story till the end where she dies in the hospital bed unchanged.

The Stone Angel is a tragic tale of an uncompromising woman. According to the tradition of tragic plays set by Aristotle, a tragic tale must deal with a great man such as a king who has a tragic flaw. This tragic flaw appears from a weakness in his nature, which eventually takes him to his downfall. On various occasions the hero of a tragedy is given opportunities to overcome his mistakes. Many modern writers have extended the category of a tragic hero and have included a common man who is equally capable of becoming a tragic hero. Hagar, in The Stone Angel is one such example.

Hagar is a common woman with self-made dignity. She has a misstep, a tragic flaw, which is her unconquerable pride. As she says “ Pride was my wilderness and the demon that led me there was fear... [I was] never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched.” Her pride became the cause of her failed relationships with her father, brothers and sons. On various occasions Lawrence makes us understand her proud nature. She would not pretend to be her mother to console her dying brother. The incident ruined her relationship with her brother Matt. Her proud nature became the cause of her poor relationship with her husband. She felt too proud to show her emotions towards her husband. She refused to let John and Arlene stay in her house for the night. She refused to cry at the death of Arlene. “ I shoved her [matrons] arms away. I straightened my spine... I wouldnt cry in front of strangers, whatever

it cost me". The realization, that her pride came in the way of her son's happiness, came to her very late. Hagar refused to adjust herself to the circumstances. She would not shift to the nursing home and instead told Doris and Marvin to move out of the house. Her stubborn nature came in the way of her happiness. It led her to her destruction.

The tragedy of Hagar is that she refuses to change. Although Hagar and King Lear appear similar in their journey to self-discovery, a major difference becomes evident in the after effects of their epiphanies. Lear is redeemed after his epiphany and pushes away his pride. He reconciles with his daughter and is sent to jail, which does not matter to him. Hagar, on the other hand, remains unchanged till the end. She refuses to accept any help on the hospital bed. She snaps at Doris when she tries to help her with a glass of water. Unlike King Lear, Hagar is not a redeemed character. She is more like Willy Loman. Willy is a failure in life. He has failed as a father and as a salesman. He is blinded by his dreams of success. His fanatic adherence to his dreams led him to his own self-destruction. Hagar, too, is a failure as a wife, daughter and mother. Her stubborn nature and pride led her to her destruction. She, like Willy Loman, refuses to accept the realities of life. Willy never comes out of the world of dreams and false beliefs. Hagar never comes out of her pride. According to Arthur Miller (1949), " the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who ready to put his life aside, if necessary, to secure one thing - his sense of personal dignity." Arthur redefines a tragic hero and suggests that even a common man can become tragic because at times the one thing that he values the most, his self dignity, can be so jaded that he can give up his life to protect his dignity. This is applicable to both Hagar and Willy Loman. Hagar would

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not give up her pride and would rather give up her life.

Hagar does win the sympathy of the readers. According to Aristotle, a tragic hero must arise the feeling of pity among the spectators. We do feel pity for the protagonist who fails to establish her relationships with her family. We do feel pity for her inability to change herself. As Granville Hicks points out in *The Saturday Review*: “ Laurences triumph is in her evocation of Hagar at ninety. . . . We sympathize with her in her resistance to being moved to a nursing home, in her preposterous flight, in her impatience in the hospital. Battered, depleted, suffering, she rages with her last breath against the dying of the light”.

By all means, *The Stone Angel* is a tragic tale of Hagar Shipley whose tragic flaw, her pride, led her to her destruction.

References

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