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### **Technique of Symbolism in Margaret Lawrence's *The Stone Angel***

#### ***Abstract***

A work of art gains its importance in the literary scenario only if the work fulfills to the aesthetic needs of the readers. No work of art is complete without the usage of literary devices. Literary devices used by the author helps to aesthetically evolve a story that could otherwise remain just a simple narration of events in the life of the protagonist. In this paper an attempt will be made so as to analyze Margaret Lawrence's *The Stone Angel* as a text replete with literary devices specially symbolism and imagery. The paper would come out with major symbols that has been used by the author to convey her story effectively.

**Keywords:** Literary devices, Symbolism, Imagery.

Literary devices are used by writers to convey their meanings through language and are used for explaining speech beyond its usual usage. These literary devices play a significant role in lending aesthetic beauty to any work of art. "A symbol is something that stands for represents or denotes something else" (Hall 1994). Cudden states, "the word symbol derives from the Greek verb 'Symballein' 'to grow together' and its noun 'Symbolon' 'mark' or 'Sign'. It is and object animate or inanimate which represents or stands for something else" (884-885).

A Symbol thus is a mark, image or any other thing that is used to explain or define something. So, Symbol is anything which signifies something and thus we can say that all words

are symbols as all of them have a hidden context associated with them. Symbolism is a technique used by literary writers to convey their meanings through varied sources and symbols like colours, figures, flowers etc.

In literature this symbolism is used as a technique where a symbol is used to convey an altogether different meaning. The literal meanings have to be overlooked in order to understand the real and hidden meaning that the author wants to convey.

Shamisa (2004) classifies symbols into 2 types that is arbitrary symbols and personal symbols. Arbitrary symbols are common and familiar ones that can be easily recognised by the readers whereas personal symbols are fresh and new that any writer or poet has created for his/her works particularly. Symbols link images with concept and without symbolism any work of art is a bundle of words and nothing else.

Margaret Lawrence a well celebrated Canadian novelist created about five books about the fictional town of Manwaka patterned after her birthplace and its people. She has been honoured by two Governor General awards and more than a dozen honorary degrees. *The Stone Angel* written in 1964 is her first work of fiction set in Manwaka, the fictional town. It is a heartwarming story of a ninety year old protagonist Hagar Shipley. The protagonist has been significantly developed by the writer and portraying physical as well as mental torments faced by and old woman. Hagar is a character who is ruled by her own instincts and pride. She escapes her family, father, brother and lastly her own poor qualities and pride to which she is captive of.

The theme of *The Stone Angel* has been emphasized by the use of symbolic technique and these symbolic presentations move the reader to look past what is directly stated in words and go beyond words to grasp the hidden meaning lying behind the scenes. Lawrence has emphatically developed many symbols in order to narrate a story of an old woman and thus giving this story and edge over her contemporaries.

The first and foremost symbols used in the novel is the one that is there in the title itself 'the stone angel'. Lawrence herself asserts that the stone angel "does dominates the book like an imposing symbol" (qtd. in Valerie 17). This stone angel "acquires significance in the novel not as a monument of mother, but as a symbols of daughter. 'The doubly blind' statue symbolizes

Hagar's blindness since she fails to see life affirming values as a result of which she gets estranged from others" (Prabhavathy 65).

So the stone angel stands for Hagar who is cold and emotionless like the statue. This symbol is also important because it eventually gets knocked over and thus reminds of the tragic nature of life. Hagar is also like a stone because she has also frozen all her feelings and emotions in her heart and acts just like an emotionless being. The angel is without eyes probable because the artist forgot to carve eyeballs out and similar is the situation of Hagar who has eyes but because of her pride she forms false opinions about people and thus is unable to see their true character.

The novel is replete with biblical imagery as well. Name Hagar is the also the name of a hand maiden of Sarah the wife of Abraham. When Sarah was not able to conceive she thought of Hagar to be the producer of their heir under Abraham's name. Hagar bore a son but Sarah became jealous of her and sent her into the wilderness. The Hagar Shipley of the story also becomes a housekeeper to Brampton after their marriage and realised that she was not free. "I was alone never anything else and never free, for I carried my chains within me (*The Stone Angel* 261). The two Hagar's went into wilderness and both had two sons and there is a realization of being with the right son in both the cases.

Lawrence in order to bring out and compare Hagar's life has used the images of two kinds of flowers. Her life is one with the cultivated flowers which are more civilized and controlled compared to wild flowers which can grow and express anywhere. Towards the end Hagar had the realization of beings spontaneous like the wild flowers and she rejects the controlled norms of cultivated flowers.

Water also forms a major symbol in the novel. "I've not had a drop of water since I can't remember how long it's been. A long time . . . water, water everywhere nor any drop to drink. That's my predicament" (*The Stone Angel* 166). Life always surrounds her but because of her pride Hagar was not able to realise what life is all about. In the concluding chapter Hagar's quenching her thirst symbolises her cleansing of guilt of living a life pride and ego.

In the character of Hagar pride has been personified beautifully. She hardly bothers about society and refuses to cry when she was whipped by her father. Her pride always comes is her

way whenever she wanted to be consoled by someone else. At her son's death she refuses to cry because she would not like others to see her real feelings. She wanted to shield her emotions from the world. Images of soilage and dryness also recurs in the novel when Hagar says:

Quietly I lay the paper down, my hands dry and quiet on its dry pages, my throat too I dry and my mouth. As I brush my fingers over my own wrist the skin seems too whiter after the sunburned years, and too dry, powdery as blown dust when the rains failed, flaking with dryness as an old bone will flake and chalk... (*The Stone Angel* 54).

To come to conclusion the paper finds out that symbols and images have been beautifully patterned in the narrative of *The Stone Angel*. These images and symbols render it a colour of their own and without these devised the novel would not have been as powerful as it has been portrayed with the apt and just use of symbols.

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