Chapter IV  IDENTITY TO IDENTITIES: A CRISIS

The examination of meaning in a text as a product of interplay of signs (first chapter); the analysis of character as a sign and not as an individual (second chapter); and the interrogation of realist conventions (third chapter) in Callaghan’s fiction compel us to reassess another major aspect of his fiction—identity. Critics in support of realism and humanism have pointed out Callaghan’s preoccupation with the self or with the individual who, most often, defends his identity or individuality, or wholeness in opposition to the expectations of society. A re-examination of the concept of identity in Callaghan’s fiction in this chapter, however, establishes that the self is not portrayed as coherent or as possessing definite identity, but as a split subject, and therefore, as forming a fluid identity in a transitional society. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the nature of identity in Callaghan’s fiction that emerges as a project in a discursive cultural context. (The terms—“project” and “discursive” are explained later in this chapter.) The chapter shows that the quest for identity in Callaghan’s fiction provides a metaphoric analogue for the dialectics of the quest for identity in Canada. Hence, the chapter also aims at locating the means that Callaghan employs to face the dilemma of identity. Further, this study identifies a shift in Callaghan’s views regarding identity in novels written prior to 1960 and in those written after that period, and thus enables me to reassess Callaghan’s place in Canadian literature. The shift directs readers and critics to find an inclination in Callaghan’s writing towards postmodernist strategies and preoccupations, though in a lesser degree, something that has not been explored so far in Callaghan criticism. Before pursuing this objective, it is necessary to survey briefly the
Identity is a largely debated issue in Canadian literature, culture and politics: from the attempts to give expression to a unique and homogenized national identity, identity has been redefined as heterogeneous, discursive, changing and plural in the Canadian cultural context. Canadian filmmaker and critic Laura Mulvey aptly defines the change in the conception of identity in Canadian literature and culture: "Canadian culture is not yet a closed book. The historical anomalies that Canada has grown from make contradictions visible. Uniform national identity is challenged by a pride in heterogeneity and difference" (qtd. in Hutcheon ix). In the post-Confederation years, possessing a definable national identity through literature was a significant aspect of rebuilding Canada. In the wake of postmodernism, however, identity has come to be viewed as constructed, as against the humanist conception of identity as fixed and eternal. In her preface to *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon describes how our reading and understanding of certain conceptions have undergone radical transformation:

Certainly I no longer read books the way I once did: that eternal universal Truth I was taught to find has turned out to be constructed, not found—and anything but eternal and universal. Truth has been replaced by truths, uncapitalized and in the plural. (viii-ix)

Increasingly, Canadians seem to identify themselves, as Frank Davey puts it, with being “female, Albertan, Québécois, black, aboriginal, homosexual, or of Greek, Vietnamese, Ukranian, Italian, or South Asian ethnicity” rather than “with being ‘Canadian’” (vii). Changes in defining Canadian identity that Mulvey, Hutcheon and Davey observe are
concurrent with the changes in a country that has passed through the haunting reminiscences of a postcolonial situation to the pressing needs of a postmodern society; and are reflected in Canadian literature, especially in Canadian novels. It can be said that the evolution of the truly Canadian novel—the process is explained in the subsequent paragraphs—in the second decade of the twentieth century is also the beginning of the search for a distinctively Canadian identity.

Although Canada attained its sovereign status as a Confederate country by the British North America Act of 1867, the prolongation of debate on identity in Canada for more than a century (since Confederation) distinguishes the Canadian problematic from that of other post-colonial nations. The colonial history of Canada, its cultural plurality and disparity, and the influx of immigrants from all parts of the world have disrupted the growth of a homogeneous or monolithic ‘Canadian’ identity and have resulted in the continuation of the Canadian quest for identity or redefinition of Canadian identity. It was only in 1952 that a Canadian was, for the first time, appointed as a Governor General of Canada, and it was only in 1965 that Canada displaced the Union Jack with the Maple Leaf flag, and even at that time the Union Jack was given the official status. Such an imperial connection further problematized and continued the Canadian objective of a distinctive identity into the twentieth century.

The presence of a dominant country like the United States of America to the south of the border, with its more established culture, literature and nationality, has been a continuous threat to the Canadian identity. Canadian writers, however, have tried incessantly in their writings not only to articulate the dialectics of the Canadian quest for identity but also to evolve/assert a Canadian cultural/literary identity as well. It is in this
backdrop that Callaghan, writing in the early decades of twentieth century, first wrote novels that could be described as innovative and iconoclastic, and thus heralded what could be called the Canadian Novel.

Literature produced in Canada before 1900, for the most part, consists of romances or “formula-writing” (to use Northrop Frye’s term 234); whereas the romances provided escape from the actual conditions and were contented with “nostalgia, parochialism and naïve nationalism that fetter imagination” (McPherson 205), formula-writing meant imitating British models in matters of formal structures and thematic patterns. A few exceptions such as Frances Brooke’s The History of Emily Montague (1769), John Richardson’s Wacousta (1832), Thomas Halliburton’s The Clockmaker (1836) and Susanna Moodie’s Roughing it in the Bush (1852) try to capture credible pictures of Canadian life and slightly deviate from the general trend of escapist literature. Although Wacousta is a story of a revenge taken by a savage and bloody-minded white written in the tradition of romance, Richardson’s achievement, as M. F. Salat points out, “lies in subverting the given typology of the whites-as-civilized and the Indians-as-savage of his times” (17). The duplicity of Wacousta leads Salat to name “fabricating an identity” as one of the strategies to resolve the Canadian crisis of identity. Hence, he considers Wacousta a forerunner of a peculiarly Canadian preoccupation that finds expression in later novelists such as Frederic Philip Grove, Grey Owl (Archie Belaney), Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Laurence, Robertson Davies and Margaret Atwood (17-18). In Callaghan’s novels too, fabrication, naming and duplicity are used as effective methods to come to terms with the question of identity, as can be seen in novels such as More Joy in Heaven and A Passion in Rome (discussed later in this chapter). Susanna
Moodie’s novel reflects the ambivalence and ambiguity that resulted from the conflicting forces of mother (other) and native cultures on the colonial mind. The portrait of life in the bush in Upper Canada in *Roughing it in the Bush* is of loneliness, alienation, and disorientation in the New World. The colonial outlook, in addition to inducing nostalgia for the lost way of life in the home country, creates a sense of inadequacy in the new reality and new country. The feeling of inadequacy produced leads to the rejection of self, as it is inferior to what is left behind, and to suffering, because the self cannot perceive or assert itself in a confident manner in a new country.

The ambivalence and ambiguity regarding the self, articulated first in Moodie’s book, recur in novels written in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The nostalgia for the mother culture in Britain and the absence of an indigenous literary tradition in Canada lead many writers of the post-confederation period and early twentieth century to be imitative and conventional in their writings. George Woodcock points out: “Faced by the wilderness, man seeks to assert the familiar, not to evoke the unknown, and so colonial literature generally attempts to reenact against the backdrop of a new land the achievements of an abandoned way of life” (73). In *The Canadian Novel: A Search for Identity*, Salat points out another problem, in the nostalgia and admiration for the culture left behind. Such an attitude, for him,

engenders a sense of insufficiency and/or inadequacy in the colonial psyche. This in turn results in a/anti-pathy towards the self in the form of self-disdain and self-hate and disallows thereby an adequate perception of the Self or a confident assertion of the cultural identity. (3)
Salat finds reasons for this “self-destructive” tradition often reflected in the attitude of writers and critics from time to time as issuing from the British colonial experience and from the “contiguity of a dominating and imperialistic culture such as the U.S.A.” (7). The paradoxical situation, however, is that “self-dismay” has made many Canadian writers and critics to strive to give expression to what could be called Canadian literary and cultural identity, as different from the British and the American cultural and literary identities.

Usually, from an outsider’s view, Canada is the as same as the United States, the linkage based on superficial similarities between the societies and cultures of the two countries. For instance, the waiter in Callaghan’s *A Passion in Rome* is disappointed when his judgment of Sam Raymond as an American proves wrong: “The United States? Canada? Well, what is the difference if there is no difference in the voice?” (48). Anna Connel, an American, asks Sam “How can anyone tell the difference?” (102). Living in proximity to such a dominant culture, Canadians have always struggled to prove their difference and assert their identity. There have been distinctive dissimilarities in the basic principles of the constitutions of the two countries, socio-cultural orders, institutions and literatures. In “Moral Imagination: Canadian Thing” Hugh Hood asserts this difference in terms of culture:

The tendency of American history has been to sink the minority in the mass, all but the one minority that won’t go down, the Blacks. In Canada the minorities, whether cultural, religious, ethnic . . . have always and utterly refused to assimilate. And that . . . is why there’s another country at the top of North America—because this country offers an alternate life-
style to people who don’t want to share the benefits and deficiencies . . . of mass society, who don’t subscribe to the personal and political ethics of neo-Romanticism. (93)

The ‘mosaic’ culture representing the multi-cultural ethos of Canada is in direct contrast with the ‘melting-pot’ culture of America that establishes a monolithic American identity. Such prominent differences have compelled Canadians to resist identification with the United States, as they did with the British. The multi-cultural ethos, however, has problematized ‘the Canadian’ identity.

The first sign of literature that contained distinctive features of the land can be seen in attempts by writers to use Canadian geography and ways of life as setting and locale in their works. Although the novels produced during the first decade of the twentieth century could not be entirely called truly Canadian in the sense that they give expression to Canadian consciousness, a few novelists stand out for their attempt to capture the nuances of Canadian life in a better manner than their predecessors. Sara Jeannette Duncan’s *Imperialist* (1904), even though concerned with the conflicts arising out of the claims of the mother culture (British) and those of Canadian nationalism, does not privilege the former over the latter. In the “Conclusion” to the first edition of the *Literary History of Canada* (1965), Northrop Frye describes Duncan as “a voice of genuine detachment, sympathetic but not defensive either of the group or of herself, concerned primarily to understand and to make the reader see.”

Writers such as Ralph Connor, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Mazo de la Roche are notable among the earliest writers to portray life in different parts of Canada in a manner that draws attention to the regional diversities of the land. Connor’s *Black Rock:*
A Tale of the Selkirks (1898), The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Foothills (1899), and The Man from Glengarry (1901), although religious fantasies, evoke life in the pioneer East and West of Canada during the latter half of the nineteenth century. While Lucy Maud Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables (1908) presents a vivid and detailed depiction of the setting and local way of life in rustic Prince Edward Island, Mazo de la Roche's Jalna cycle of sixteen novels depict the life of an Upper Canadian squarerachical family with the same emphasis on setting and local way of life. Hence, they were considered the authentic portrayal of Canadian life for many years. Woodcock, while tracing the development of realism in Canadian fiction, however, has a different opinion. According to him, books by Montgomery and de la Roche are only examples of "how far the manipulation of authentic detail to give local color to a formulaic kind of romance might be stretched in a direction opposite that of true realism. . . . and the devices of verisimilitude being used for purposes that are essentially non-realistic in their intent" (76). Woodcock names such a tendency among these writers a "pseudorealistic North American local color movement" (76).

Another group of writers who have received much acclaim as the first to use Canadian landscape and environment without any inhibition or fear are the writers of animal stories at the turn-of-the-century—Ernest Thompson Seton and Charles G.D. Roberts to be followed later by Archie Belaney and Roderick Haig Brown. Woodcock points out the distinctive way in which Canadian animal writers differed from British or American writers.

British animal stories have almost been thinly disguised fables, acted out by men in animal skins to illuminate essentially human problems. . . .
American animal stories . . . are almost invariably stories of antagonism and confrontation, man pitting himself against the animal who becomes the symbol of all that is hostile in nature. But Canadian animal stories are really about animals, and they are about animals with whom we are invited to empathize. (79-80)

Therefore, these writers could be described as truly Canadian in the sense that “It is Canada’s own myths that Canadians must recognize, mediated through the images which at last can begin to be recognized in their true shapes” (Woodcock 80). Yet, here too, we do not find the most “authentic expression of Canada and the Canadian consciousness,” the reason being the failure to create an organic link between man and nature (Woodcock 84). It is only in the late 1920s that we find such writers who began to write novels, which specifically addressed the questions of Canadian identity and consciousness.

In the West, Grove, along with Robert Stead and Martha Ostenso, represent the beginnings of the significant tradition of Western Prairie fiction and were later followed by writers such as Sinclair Ross, W.O. Mitchell, Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, Sheila Watson and Kroetsch. It was on the Great Plains where the English and the immigrant peoples of continental Europe grappled with the harsh environment to establish their roots and gave expression to the collective imagination of English-speaking Canada. It is the consciousness of their background in prairie fiction that holds a special interest to readers in Canada and across the world. The early writers in this tradition were preoccupied with, as Salat observes, “the theme of defining man’s relation with his environment in order to recover an adequate perception of self in a self-effacing cultural and geographical space” (19). Grove, in all of his novels—Over Prairie Trails (1922),
Settlers of the Marsh (1925), A Search For America (1927), Fruits of the Earth (1933), The Master of the Mill (1944) and The Master Mason's House (1976), explored the relationship of man with nature and technology. In his masterpiece, The Master of the Mill, Grove records the transition from a rural to an urban society, analogous to the change from Canada as a colony to a nation, and symbolized in the shift from the prairie farm to the mechanized mill. The dualities, nature/culture and innocence/experience that Grove gives expression to, have also been explored in great detail in many Canadian novels written during the first half of the twentieth century, indicating the struggle to attain a comprehensible identity of the self. The harsh environment induced prairie writers to respond, in Woodcock's words, “with a combination of realistic method and symbolic intent, moving on with later writers like Kroetsch into a kind of superrealistic fantasy” (86). The movement from realistic to symbolic modes in the fictional works of Ross, Mitchell, Laurence and Watson indicates the development of Canadian novel, which later leads to the experimental fiction of the post 1960s.

Callaghan and MacLennan dominated the literary scene in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Critics associate MacLennan's dominance in the 1940s and in the 1950s with a strong sense of political, moral, national and social commitment in his novels—Barometer Rising (1941), The Precipice (1948), Each Man's Son (1951), Two Solitudes (1959), The Watch that Ends the Night (1959) and The Return of the Sphinx (1967). In Two Solitudes, a nationalistic novel, MacLennan thematizes his desire for a unified Canada and resolves, at least in fictional terms, the Anglo-French conflict towards acquiring a single Canadian identity. The dominant features in MacLennan's early novels are awareness of social problems and national context, while the later novels, after the
1950s, focus more on individual search for truth and plausible identity, but within the larger perspective of nation. The exploration of complexities in inter-personal relationships against a rural background, and the emergence of a strong sense of Canada as a place in MacLennan's novels lead Woodcock to describe him as a "Canadian Balzac" trying to construct his "country's special Comédie Humaine" (89).

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed significant events that gave an impetus to the growth of Canadian literature in new directions. The Statute of Westminster in 1949 put an end to the Imperialist connection, a Canadian was appointed as Governor General in 1952, the Canada Council was set up in 1957, and Canada's scholarly journal *Canadian Literature* was established in 1959—these developments helped Canadians acquire a better sense of national pride and prompted writers in the 1950s to enrich Canadian literary tradition. Writers such as Robertson Davies, Ethel Wilson, Ernest Buckler, Mordecai Richler, Sheila Watson and Adele Wiseman who began their writing careers in the 1950s induced a new energy into Canadian fiction by focussing on literary form, literary imagination and creativity; thereby trying to articulate the dialectics of the quest for identity more firmly.

The 1960s, described as the Centenary decade, is the most decisive decade in Canadian cultural and literary history. The revival of nationalistic sentiments upheld the quest for identity as a national objective to set free Canadian culture and literature from the sense of inadequacy and imprecision that had haunted Canadian history. The post-1960s period is usually regarded as the period of Canadian 'literary renaissance,' since more books were published and more publishing houses came into existence. Woodcock observes that there is a significant change in the literary scene with the breaking away
from conventional structures and forms, moving away from the didactic preoccupations and naturalistic theories and changing the rules of verisimilitude for fantasy. The novelists of the post-1960s period, Wiebe, Matt Cohen, Kroetsch, Atwood, Marion Engel, etc. are engaged in a more serious work that is aptly expressed in Woodcock’s words. These novelists, says Woodcock, are concerned with “giving spirit to the land,” which means:

They introduce a new sense of history merging into myth, of theme coming out of a perception of the land, of geography as a source of art. In the process they break time down into the nonlinear patterns of authentic memory at the same time as they break down actuality and recreate it in terms of the kind of nonliteral rationality that belongs to dreams.

These novels embody the difference between realism and a reality that is not merely material, between literal credibility and imaginative authenticity. (94-95)

Confidence to use the myths of the land and blend them into artistic imagination is what Woodcock describes as “a process of maturing into a self-consistent entity” (95). Such radical changes have also resulted in the changes in the quest for identity. From seeking to resolve the dichotomies, or finding a unified self, there is an acceptance that identity is discursive and ever changing. Before concentrating on the change in the conception of identity, it is essential to understand, in a more detailed way, the attempt by the thematic critics in the 1970s to discover ‘Canadian’ metaphors, archetypes and themes with a desire to define Canadian identity.
Salat discerns two broad patterns that emerged in the post-sixties years to face the problems of asserting Canadianness in the literature produced. Firstly, there was a necessity to define "the innate Canadian identity" by locating "archetypal themes and motifs, experiences and images" that were specific to Canada and helped to establish a distinctive Canadian identity both in terms of culture and literature (24). Secondly, there was a desire to possess "a Canadian 'classic'," which could assert Canadian identity strongly and bring international recognition too. Salat rightly points out that these two "longings" were not new in Canada, but they came to the surface with greater force in the post-sixties years to propel the already existing quest for a Canadian identity. Also, commenting on the second pattern, Salat opines that the need for international recognition is linked to "the Canadian uncertainty regarding an assertable identity," an opinion, which many critics and writers have voiced before (24). Thus thematic critics such as D.G. Jones (Butterfly on Rock, 1970), Frye (The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination, 1971), Atwood (Survival, 1972), and Moss (Patterns of Isolation, 1974), successfully delineate "proto-typical Canadian themes to recover an organic sense of a distinctive identity" (25). This body of criticism is largely based on identifying structures of binary opposition in Canadian literature that epitomize the same opposition in Canadian culture and thus define Canadian identity as caught between dual systems of values—starting from the colonizer/colonized, self/other to nature/culture, garrison/wilderness, etc. The resolution of dichotomies, in fictional works, helps the characters to come to terms with their selves and attain a definable identity.

In the "Introduction" to Butterfly on Rock, Jones identifies some of the recurring themes and images in individual Canadian writers that can be considered central to and
characteristic in Canadian literature and therefore, establishes that all these writers share "a common cultural predicament" (4). These writers, in Jones's view, "participate in and help to articulate a larger imaginative world, a supreme fiction of the kind that embodies the dreams and nightmares of a people, shapes their imaginative vision of the world, and defines, as it evolves, their cultural identity" (4). The kind of knowledge that needs to be expressed in literature should be the knowledge of "our origins" by which Jones means "the life of the North American Indians" and not "our European roots" (5). His views are similar to Callaghan who urged in a 1962 interview with Robert Weaver ("A Talk with Morley Callaghan") that Canadians, situated in North America, had a different cultural temperament than those of Europeans: "We have our own idiosyncrasies up here, you know, our own peculiar variation of the cultural pattern, and the job of a Canadian writer is to get that" (119). Callaghan, however, denies sitting down to write a book to carry out a theme and believes in writers seeing the world "with their own eyes" (121). It is the critic who discerns a common pattern in a cluster of writers and arrives at a meaningful comprehension of cultural identity, as Jones does in his work.

In *Butterfly on Rock*, Jones discusses the parameters of Canadian identity. In the first three chapters he deals with a sense of exile from the land, which leaves the individual divided within himself or herself. The rejection of land is treated as synonymous with the rejection of "vital elements" in the lives of the characters. Jones agrees with Frye's explanation for the antagonism between culture and nature as a result of the garrison mentality—colonial culture rejects everything native, including the land. He extends this metaphor, however, to reflect an antagonism towards nature in western culture generally. Jones discusses Callaghan's *The Loved and the Lost* as dramatizing the
conflict between nature and culture. Peggy Sanderson embodies "beauty of terror and beauty of peace," symbolized in the two figures of leopard and church in the novel, while Jim McAlpine represents the garrison mentality and fails to understand the co-existence of the two forces. Jones further analyzes the paralysis that results from a failure to understand the conflicting forces of nature, the need for courage to accept the mystery of nature and to affirm life in order to end exile, and therefore, the abandonment of garrison culture to "let down the walls and let the wilderness in." Only then, says Jones, "can man discover his identity and community with the rest of nature" (8). In Jones's view, it is an all-inclusive attitude towards life/nature that can save man from his predicament of exile and thus enable him to acquire his identity. On the whole, Jones's identification of recurring themes and images helps him arrive at a definable Canadian identity which includes wilderness or nature that was initially excluded because of the colonial mentality. It also aims at acquiring a monolithic or unified identity in the light of resolving the after effects of colonial rule.

Proceeding in the same direction as that of Jones' are Frye, Atwood and Moss, who, in the seventies, together developed "thematic" criticism that believed in the referential function of language, and therefore the fixed meaning of signs—a mirror reflection of the world in language. Hence, greater importance was placed on the content than on the formal elements of language, a factor which led later critics such as Frank Davey to call thematic critics "culture fixing" (5). In his seminal essay, "Surviving the Paraphrase," Davey denounces "thematic" criticism for its tendency to view literature as a mirror reflection of sociology or culture. The sociological approach to literature was, however, as Salat points out: "linked with the genuine desire to carve out a distinctive
identity that had been a sore issue all through the Canadian cultural and literary history, but it was also inevitable in a literature that lacked an adequate sense of an organically evolved and established literary tradition" (25). Jones extends the Canadian situation to the larger predicament of Western culture which faced similar problems of alienation due to exile from the land, antagonism towards wilderness, and its resolution. Such a generalization prompts Jones to equate the Canadian search for identity with the larger search for identity in modern literature. The situation, however, is different in Canada in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s—thematic criticism which aims at grasping a distinctively Canadian identity, has been continually challenged.

Moss, one of the prominent thematic critics, writing in “Bushed in the Sacred Wood,” realizes that thematic criticism, which is “in response to content, to fulfil a social need, to fill a critical vacuum and construct a coherent literature of our own” is inadequate (26). Although it served the important social and national needs of the time, it is time for Canadian literary criticism to “serve the literature itself, time to stop considering literature a map of our collective consciousness; a mirror of our personality . . . It is time to consider Canadian literature as literature and not another thing” (Moss 27). Moss’s concern is for the literary excellence of the writers after 1960s that might be camouflaged in the cultural generalization of thematic criticism. In addition to the “necessity of explication or aesthetic evaluation” that Moss desires for in Canadian literature in his essay, it is still essential to give expression to the changing definition of identity in Canadian literature. Long after colonial rule and coming to terms with the land and what it signifies, the problem of defining one’s identity still remains in Canada. It does not arise from the predicament of a country trying to free itself from the colonial
clutches but from a nation that has inherent ambiguities and contradictions in its own culture and literature.

The existence of two nations and the failure to merge them culturally led writers to give expression to regional identities in their fiction, evident in the fictional works produced in Prairies, Maritimes, Quebec, etc. The influx of immigrants and the presence of ethnic communities forming a ‘mosaic culture’ (as against the ‘melting pot’ of the United States of America) further problematized the forging or emergence of a distinctive Canadian identity. Such developments in Canadian culture and literature have resulted in a fluid, pluralistic identity. New theories such as phenomenology and structuralism, along with semiotics, deconstruction, feminism and postmodernism have radically influenced the Canadian novel and its concerns. When the thematic critics dealt with the crisis of identity in terms of man/nature, garrison/wilderness, emotion/reason, etc., they seemed to be forging a pan-Canadian identity. In recent years, however, voices of various ethnic groups have gained predominance; they regard themselves as doubly marginalized or colonized and demand redefinition of what it means to be a Canadian.

Recent critical and creative works have shown that the existence of binaries is an ideological set up and their resolution in a unified self is a myth. They propose to define identity in a different way that is best summed up in Chris Barker’s words: “Identity is not a thing but a description in language. Identities are discursive constructions which change their meanings according to time, place and usage” (166). Such a shift in understanding identity is the root cause for changes in analyzing and understanding the quest for Canadian identity. The study of Callaghan’s novels in this thesis subscribes to these views, as shown in previous chapters, and prompts us to examine the quest for
identity in the present chapter. Such an examination not only enables us to discern a shift
to the conception of identity in Callaghan’s fiction, but also compels us to restate
Callaghan’s importance in Canadian literature.

The protagonists of Callaghan’s novels are involved in several kinds of quests: In
the early novels it is the quest for individuation and self-actualization in a transitional
society; an exploration of the tension created in understanding the relation of one’s self
with the structures of power in society; and in the later novels we find characters’ quest
for an understanding of the mysterious nature of human self. Although the quests, in
fictional terms, provide metaphoric analogues to the crisis of identity in Canada, the
study does not purport to mirror external reality in literature. As discussed in the first
chapter of this thesis, language constructs its own reality, which is interpreted and
understood according to the reader’s critical disposition. The quest begins in Callaghan’s
fiction with an urge to grasp one’s identity in inter-personal as well as in inter-societal
relationships. The characters seem to be struggling to attain a holistic identity—which
means the union of the self with the other—but the struggle, as presented in the novels,
remains unfulfilled.

As readers we understand that Callaghan’s novels do not conceive of the subject
as unified agent having a fixed essence or identity. Various aspects of his novels propose
identity as constructed; something like what Giddens proposed: “identity is something
which we create, something always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival”
(Barker 167). One of Callaghan’s characters, Peter Gould in A Broken Journey, points to
the constructed nature of identity: “It’s funny to feel and hear and see a person’s identity
dissolving, going to pieces, and you can’t do anything about it” (250). Another dimension
of identity is that one’s perception of what others are, becomes fundamental to the constructedness of one’s own identity, which again is susceptible to changes. Peter’s brother Hubert is a character confident of himself and sure of people closer to him, including his brother’s girlfriend, Marion Gibbons. His sense of integrity is shattered when Marion, who is pivotal to Hubert’s notion of what a fine woman is, changes suddenly, and thus leaves Hubert perplexed and unsure of himself. Callaghan’s novels show that any intention to have a fixed or certain notion of identity, in personal or social terms, is fluid in nature; thus, the quest for a centred Canadian identity becomes problematic.

That Callaghan is obsessed with the nature of self is beyond doubt. Ina Ferris rightly points out:

Callaghan, clearly, is fascinated by the self alone. His interest is obsessive, having little to do with a conventional sense of isolation as the modern existential condition and even less to do with any humanistic, democratic or Christian concern for the individual. What matters is less the value of the individual than the sheer experience of individuality. (14-15)

Ferris is of the opinion that “the underlying structure of a Callaghan novel is the linear drive of an explosive ego toward a self-assertion requiring increasing isolation” (12). As the second chapter of this thesis has shown, more than the assertion of “an explosive ego” it is coming to terms with the nature of self that is of utmost importance in Callaghan’s novels. Most of his novels enact the conflict between self-identity and social identity. Chris Barker defines self-identity as constituting what we think of ourselves, and social identity as referring to the expectations and opinions of others. The encounter between
self-identity and social identity shatters the illusion of a unified identity and points to the divided self, which forms the concern of early novels such as *Strange Fugitive, It’s Never Over, A Broken Journey, Such Is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth, More Joy in Heaven* and *The Loved and the Lost*. In these novels characters’ identities emerge as, in Stuart Hall’s words, “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (6).

Harry Trotter in *Strange Fugitive* is a dominating husband at home and a bullying boss at the lumberyard where he works as a foreman. He is fired for beating up an Italian employee. The loss of his job is coupled with his growing discontentment in his life with his wife Vera. He craves for self-importance in all of his relationships. Through a chance encounter he turns to bootlegging and leaves Vera for women of lower morals. After a career of successful operation, that involves hijacking and murder, a rival gang guns him down in the street. Throughout the novel, Harry is presented as a character with conflicting emotions: his inflated ego seeks power outside legal borders, while his inner self yearns for the domestic security and constancy presented in the figure of Vera. Unable to resolve the contending pulls of self-identity and social identity Harry becomes a strange fugitive in his own town.

In *Strange Fugitive*, his first novel, Callaghan draws attention to a significant issue that problematizes the Canadian quest for identity. Harry’s desire for self-importance is constantly opposed by the ethnic community that occupies an important place both in the structure and the action of the novel. The Ward district, consisting of Jews, Italians and Chinese, is clearly alienated from the middle-class, “Anglo-Saxon” areas of the city. Although situated at the margin, this section of the city with its
menacing forces is a threat to the centrality, moral complacency and the domestic security of the Anglo-Saxon Torontonians. As Justin D. Edwards argues, “Categorization [borders and boundaries] based on ethnic difference subsequently relegates the immigrant communities to a position of otherness” (223). Harry’s entry into the Ward and his life there, ruptures the boundaries and erases whatever identity or sense of self that Harry had with Vera:

[Restless and uncertain of himself he wanted to run and feel himself lurching along, his feet thudding, going on, further away from all his thoughts that had bothered him. But instead, stopping on the opposite corner, he leaned against a post, suddenly tired and hungry and unimportant, so that his thoughts seemed trivial. He had lost all identity, nothing he did was of any consequence. (114)

In order to overcome his sense of loss, Harry tries to build his strength and power in the Ward. By turning to crime, Harry wants to establish himself in the other space he is in now. After murdering Cosantino, another bootlegger, Harry feels that he has regained his identity through power: he “became confident and sure of himself . . . He felt impressive, and began to talk authoritatively to some one” (157). The feeling, however, does not last long and Harry remains divided in his yearning for Vera and the tangled web of power, money and influence that the Ward offers.

The significance of Harry’s movement away from domesticity into a space of crime and isolation enforces the mysterious attraction of the space that is termed the “other,” and the futility of escaping from it or completely merging with it. The narrator’s language reinforces the otherness of the immigrants: the Italians are referred to in
insignificant words ("the big wop", "the big Italian", "big dirty wop"), the Jews are presented with effeminate characteristics ("slim", "graceful" and "lipsyled" with "oiled hair" and "rouged cheeks"). Such language and description are strategies not only to disempower the immigrants but also to diffuse their individuality when they are on the other side of the boundary. Within the boundaries of the Ward, however, the immigrants are powerful and mark their identities by occupying a definite geographical space. They do not hesitate to retaliate when Harry breaks the codes of their marked area. In his greed to become the don of the Ward district, Harry encroaches upon the immigrant domain of bootlegging and is killed brutally in the feud. He goes back to thoughts of Vera and to the world left behind whenever the sinister forces of the Ward threaten to shatter his sense of self. The grand funeral ceremony of the Italian Cosantino drives him to construct two tall granite tombs for his parents in Maydale, thus satisfying his ego and bringing him a momentary feeling of elevation. The ruptured sense of identity, however, haunts Harry until the end. He makes a brave attempt to connect to Vera by calling her just before his death, but the union remains unfulfilled.

The duality between the self and the other symbolized in Harry and the Ward is concurrent with the Canadian thematic pattern of the conflicting identities of the self and the other. What is remarkable, however, is the deployment of the spatial metaphor of city within the fictional space to represent the potentiality of the margin. As Edwards states: "Callaghan’s text, in fact, exploits an intermediary space between the traditional nineteenth-century conception of "Toronto the good" (through the domestic spaces of the city) and the twentieth-century American impression of the modern city as a transgressive terrain" (225). For Callaghan, giving expression to the tension caused by transgression,
and what induces the desire to transgress is as important as the articulation of divided self. The language chosen to describe the immigrants when they are in the other parts of the city constitutes, in Edwards's words, "markers based on ethnic and national identities . . . distinguish between the regions of the city" (223). What is explored within the city in Strange Fugitive is true of Canada: "the regional-national dialectical opposition in regard to the search for identity is the fall out of the vastly varying regional differences in terms of both the geography and the topography of different regions as well as of socio-cultural milieus of the regions" (Salat 13). The suggestion is, Canadian identity is not monolithic, just like the characters' identity is not unified around a coherent 'self'. Another implication of the divided self is that subjectivity and identity (which are inseparable) are "formed through difference, constituted by the play of signifiers, so that what we are is in part constituted by what we are not" (Barker 171).

In Strange Fugitive, all the ethnic communities become one marginalized entity without having any distinctive identity of their own. In The Loved and the Lost, however, Callaghan goes a step further to explore the hierarchical positions within such a community. In a French dominated society, the English feel economically safe on the Mountain, while the other ethnic communities such as the Polish, Jewish, Irish and people of mixed races associate their identity with material prosperity and push the Negroes to the marginalized position. Peggy Sanderson's sense of identity, both in terms of geographical space and mental affiliation, is confined to the marginalized territory of the blacks in St. Antoine. Peggy's desire to be with the blacks is not fuelled by a strange attraction of power as in the case of Harry Trotter, but by a glimpse of strange beauty, vitality, spontaneous joy, and affection she had received from a black family when she
was young. The third chapter has examined the polemics of centre/margin, man/woman, and white/black in *The Loved and the Lost* by analyzing the manipulation of urban space in the novel. Space in Callaghan’s novels also becomes an important signifier of characters’ sense of identity. Peggy willingly moves away from her given social identity as the daughter of a white Methodist minister to construct her self-identity with the black community. Her response to Jim McAlpine’s love is only an extension to what she thinks of herself. Taking into consideration Peggy’s background and the kind of life she chooses, we infer that her concept of identity is mediated through social values and roles, thereby reinforcing the idea that identities are constituted through the processes of acculturalization. In Jim’s case, however, he moves away from the accepted social identity to discover his self-identity. He had aspired to belong to the class the Carvers represent in the novel; instead, he is obsessed with Peggy’s life, which is opposite to what the Carvers stand for. For Jim, Peggy represents the mysterious ‘other’, having an attraction that is so different from his. The irony is, as he becomes deeply involved with her, he tries to construct her personhood to suit his expectations and desires and wants to take her away from the world of the blacks. Although he is in love with Peggy, Jim seems a reformer in his wish to bring her back to the pattern from which Peggy has drifted away.

Both Peggy and Jim, however, realize at the end that their conception of self-identity is inadequate. Peggy’s faith in the black community, and therefore, her sense of self, falters after the final brawl at the Café in St. Antoine. Similarly, Jim’s faith in his constructed view of Peggy fails him at a crucial moment (the night when Peggy is raped and murdered) when he had to believe in her. The two incidents indicate that identities
are strongly influenced by social forces and pressures that are in turn determined by time
and place. Another significant point that emerges from most of Callaghan’s novels is that
identity of an individual is shaped in the discursive space he/she shares in a society. As
Jonathan Culler points out, “the idea of personal identity emerges through the discourse
of a culture: the ‘I’ is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed
by and relates to others” (*The Pursuit of Signs* 33).

In the novels set in the Depression period of the thirties, the influence of the
changing values of the transitional period on the perception of human identity is
presented more acutely. As discussed in the third chapter, the fixed meanings of certain
socially accepted roles, positions and relationships undergo changes, eliciting new
responses from readers. Novels of this period not only reflect changes and the spirit of the
times but also accelerate the search for definable Canadian identity in terms of individual
lives. Society and its institutions try to confer certain social identities on their members
who resist authority and construct their self-identities even if they are against the
accepted codes. Characters in the novels of the 1930s examine, interrogate and transform
their relationship with structures of power in order to assert their individual identities.
The dualities or contraries are not resolved in the fictional space; the characters remain
anarchistic in asserting their non-conformity. Thereby, they indicate a split sense of
identity. The anarchistic spirit that most of Callaghan’s characters share by remaining
within the system is also true of Canadian situation, which is best summed up in Linda
Hutcheon’s words: “Canada can in some ways be defined as a country whose articulation
of its national identity has sprung from regionalist impulses: the ex-centric forces of
Quebec, the Maritimes, the west. Its history is one of defining itself against centres” (4).
The "marginal ex-centrics"—to use Hutcheon's term, already discussed in the fourth chapter—such as Father Dowling, Kip Caley, and Peggy Sanderson enact the Canadian dilemma of possessing their individuality within a system that wants to treat them merely as entities in an already established pattern.

*More Joy in Heaven*, which deals with the rehabilitation of Kip Caley, an ex-criminal, dramatizes a marginal character's difficulty in defining himself against the centre that wants to assimilate him in its pattern. Kip is released on parole and given an extravagant welcome by the society that sees in Kip a confirmation of the good motifs the system stands for. His welcome proves ironic and hypocritical, since society makes him a nine days' wonder, quickly tires of him, loses faith in him and even expects him to return to his former identity as a criminal. Within three months of his release, Kip is shot while preventing two convict friends from robbing a bank. His society feels betrayed and enraged: "It was necessary that he be hanged in order that their pride and self-respect might be redeemed, that they might be cleansed of their humiliation, and that the patterns of law and order be fully imposed on him" (159). The irony is, Kip dies, having made his peace with Julie and all the good things in life, and denies the people their intention.

The significance of the novel lies in allowing Kip to possess his sense of self, without having to conform to the system. Kip passes through, as Patricia Morley notes, "three stages of innocence, from a childlike belief in the possibilities of human goodness, through cynicism, to recovered faith" (34). Each stage is significant, as it indicates Kip's attempt to assert himself and move towards a tangible identity. In the first stage, Kip is eager to prove himself as a good human being and show his gratitude to the society which has given him such an opportunity.
Kip is released from the prison on the dawn of a Christmas day, and seems to “become the prodigal son of the whole country” on New Year’s eve (66). At this stage, Kip’s notion of what he is correlates with the given social identity; he fails to understand that society is oblivious to the lives of not so prosperous and powerful men like him. In the second stage, he realizes that his sense of self is different from what his society thinks of him. Members of society want him to be a symbol of their good will and soon forget the man he is. Kip realizes that the grandeur he felt soon after his release has nothing to do with change of his heart. He also realizes he is made use of by society. He becomes cynical and recognizes his role as: “clown,” “town’s whore,” “the greatest freak in the history of show business” (125, 121). As the masks of people around him fall, so does his own mask of egotistic self that had become blind to the reality of his position. In the final phase, however, Kip understands that the virtue in him is not dependent on society, but lies within him. He regains his confidence, as he comprehends his identity in the discursive space he has formed in his relationship with his mother, Father Butler, and Julie. Kip’s resurgence of confidence makes him defiant to the power structures, and he even shoots at the cops (the agents of power), who conspire to kill “jailbirds” such as Joe Foley and Ike Kerrmann. Society confers on Foley and Kerrmann the identity of “habitual criminals” and wants to kill them, when it could have given them a chance for repentance.

Kip’s final act of shooting a cop is an assertion of his defiance of the expectations of society: “He wanted to make one final, anarchistic rejection of the force he felt to be the only thing that held people together. Pointing the gun at the cop, he fired” (151). Kip finds the same spirit in Father Butler. As Kip tells Julie of Father Butler: “He’s against
the field, he plays it his own way—a guy like him has to be against the field. If they catch
up to him, they’ll destroy him” (126). Hence, Callaghan’s concern is with the
marginalized people who struggle for their identity within a larger system. He uses
marginalized characters such as Kip as signs for submerged voices in a system, the rules
of which are designed by the dominant class. Callaghan is of the opinion that it is always
the individual who is betrayed by the expectations of the society and not the society that
is betrayed. As he says in an interview with Robert Weaver about a real life bandit, Red
Ryan, whose life comes close to the incidents in Kip’s life: “what made me tired during
that period was that everybody went around saying society is betrayed—you know, that
Red Ryan betrayed society. This always bores me. I don’t think society is ever betrayed”
(137). The established system and its members are akin to the colonial power that
submerged the voices of the minorities and tried to construct a homogenized culture in
Canada. The paradox of asserting Canadian identity is that it is caught between the
national identity and the regional or ethnic or minority identities that seem to be
submerged in an overall nationalistic identity.

The novels up to The Loved and the Lost, deal with the characteristic features of
Canadian identity—the split sense of self, defending against the centre or established
system, and the impossibility of uniting the inner self with the external reality. Here
characters’ innocence is equated with ignorance that prevents them from seeing the
separation. There is, however, the moment of awareness that proves decisive for
understanding the concept of selfhood, which is attained in a small, private circle. Harry
Trotter dies yearning for Vera, which constitutes an important part in defining his self.
Marion Gibbons leaves the country that becomes instrumental in destroying her carefully
constructed selfhood; she realizes that what she has been trying to avoid is very much within her. Her lover Peter Gould and his brother Hubert Gould are left in the small white room of the boarding house in the country to come out of their shattered faith in Marion’s character and reconstruct themselves within the confined space of the room. Father Dowling finds peace in his madness, which is the ultimate anarchistic gesture against the institution of Church and its corrupt officials. He goes further in this gesture of defiance by writing a commentary on the biblical text, Song of Songs, thus contextualizing canonical text for his present circumstances. In his madness, Father Dowling is able to acquire a new self that does not come under the masks of society, an “ex-centric/eccentric” (to use Salat’s terms) identity. In these novels, Callaghan explores the dualities—centre/margin, culture/nature, garrison/wilderness, reason/emotion, etc—but does not resolve the contraries inherent in these dualities, except provisionally, as explained in detail in the third chapter. The dualities continue to appear in the later novels with more subtlety along with some of the recurrent images, symbols and metaphors that will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

It is important to note that Callaghan chooses the parable form, invokes biblical symbols, and brings in biblical allusions by inserting sentences and words from the Bible in his exploration of the dualities mentioned above. Critics (Frye, Jones, Woodcock and others) have noted the importance of the Bible and biblical structures in Canadian literature, but Callaghan is not merely using his images, symbols and allusions for religious or moral purpose. He makes a parody of them, as evident in novels that have been interpreted largely in religious terms. The theme of the prodigal son is frequently parodied in More Joy in Heaven—the senator and the bishop are parodies of the
welcoming father. The magnanimity and sacrifice of Christ are parodied in the pride, vanity, lack of self-knowledge and imprudence of Father Dowling and Kip Caley. In the context of a transitional society depicted in Callaghan’s fiction, the use of parody and irony, as Hutcheon points out, “become major forms of both formal and ideological critique” (7). Irony and parody, in Hutcheon’s view, are “more disguised forms of subversion, which only implicitly question the prevailing authority” (7). In Callaghan’s later novels, subversion is an important strategy for questioning the authoritative, central and fixed, including the conventional concept of a unified self.

Characters in the later novels are in favour of vast spaces like sea, lake, and desert which are signs for unpredictability, mobility, fluidity and mystery. This is in contrast to the characters in early novels who are often presented as confined within the limited space of a cage, room, mountain, or club which denote the fixity, surety and stability of the enclosed space. Significantly, in the later novels, Callaghan’s focus is on exploring subjectivity in inter-personal relationships, even though society or the structure of power still plays an important role in the construction of subjectivity.

Hutcheon points to how subjectivity has been treated in the humanist tradition in the West: “Subjectivity in the Western liberal tradition has been defined in terms of rationality, individuality, and power; in other words, it is defined in terms of those domains traditionally denied women, who are relegated instead to the realms of intuition, familial collectivity, and submission” (5). Callaghan’s male characters believe themselves to be endowed with all the dominant characteristics of a liberal humanist tradition, while his women characters, even when they enact the roles that Hutcheon points out above, subvert them at the end. Interestingly, many of Callaghan’s male
characters (Harry Trotter, Jim MacAlpine, Sam Raymond, Al Delany, Ira Groome) feel inadequate without women who seem mysterious, and are compelled to construct a reliable identity and subjectivity of their women in their minds. This is manifest more in the later novels which characterize women as ambiguous, capable of signifying new things at various times, mysterious, and yet belong to men in some part of their lives. The women are there, but not there—part of the Canadian dilemma of belonging yet not belonging. The ironical rendering of this quest by male characters to define themselves by grasping the identity of their female counterparts culminates in a never attainable definition of identity.

By remaining unattainable for any final definition, the female characters add to the multiplicity of meaning in the text as well as to the vitality of life: characters such as Liisa Tolen, Anna Connel, Peggy Sanderson, and Gina Bixby are happier remaining in the shadow—and readers are, most of the time, offered the protagonists’ view of these women—than being understood completely. It gives them power over men (as well as readers who want a straightforward/realistic understanding of characters), who look at them with wonder and curiosity. The subversive power women characters exert on male characters is analogous to the power marginal characters have on dominant groups in society. So, in many of Callaghan’s novels, characters are first seen as having a definite sense of their selfhood, which corresponds to their conscious ego and super ego (as explained in the third chapter). During the course of the novel, the definite sense of selfhood alters and seems unstable, as the workings of the unconscious, which remain undefinable, influence the conscious. There is a secret knowledge, however, in accepting the mysteriousness of life and yet feeling confident within. In the later novels, after The
Loved and the Lost, women characters either leave their male partners or die, instigating a desire in men to reflect upon their selfhood. As Milton Wilson has pointed out, "the peculiar quality of Callaghan's characterization [is] his subtle, agonizing, and remarkably sustained sense of how conjectural and unjudgeable human identity really is" (80).

Two ideas emerge strongly from the later novels, which define identity as a project: a man who loses faith in the mystery and intensity of life loses himself; writing or narrative is a mode to construct one's identity. Art becomes self-reflexive in the sense that it affirms through language the unpredictability or infinite signification of everything in life. Language used to construct one's narrative of self-identity is itself infinite in its signification, never offering 'the meaning;' identity is mainly the product of narration through language. Giddens describes self-identity as a project: "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (53). Ira Groome (Close to the Sun Again), Sam Raymond (A Passion in Rome), Philo and Judas (A Time for Judas) believe in such an ability to construct a narrative of their past, present and future and thus develop their self-identity. Significantly, most of Callaghan's protagonists are artists or writers. Sam Raymond rejects ideologies as insufficient to give man any sense of freedom or confidence in himself: "All the ideologies changing from day to day, right under his eyes, so how could a man look to any one of them for an enlargement of freedom? It was all too wearying. Look somewhere else. But where?" (127). The faith in the story or narrative or art, even though with contradictions and multiple significations, is a viable mode of thinking about oneself with confidence. Judas says: "people liked retelling good stories. The story lives on" (124). The implication for the Canadian search for identity, as in Kroetsch's novels, is to narrate or make up the story of absence of a
single identity and affirm multiple identities. In his novels, Kroetsch moves away from the hegemony of given fictional forms with an intention to evolve a fictive identity (instead of desiring for a Canadian identity by describing archetypal Canadian metaphors) by discovering new structures to “tell” or “make up” the Canadian story of absence of a single identity (71). Among Callaghan’s novels, *A Passion in Rome* begins this new preoccupation with art, reality, meaning and identity, while *Close to the Sun Again* and *A Time for Judas* provide a neat ending to this preoccupation.

The previous chapter of this thesis has explained in detail the self-reflexive and self-conscious moments in Callaghan’s *A Fine and Private Place*. It has also analyzed how the disguised presence and absence of Callaghan in his own work plays with readers’ expectations. In the present chapter attention is paid to the implication of such moments in relation to identity in three novels which are representative of the later period.

*A Passion in Rome* is an account of Sam Raymond, a frustrated Canadian painter turned newspaper photographer, who, in his chance meeting with Anna Connel (Carla Caneli), an American singer of Italian descent turned destitute, understands the intricacies of finding meaning for his life and artistic impulses. Carla becomes a manifestation of his artistic desires, as he tries to bring her back to her former self as a singer and satisfy his desire of creating a better live masterpiece than that of Michelangelo. Through their mutual love, Anna is eventually restored as a woman with dignity. In re-creating Anna, Sam ends up fabricating an identity for himself. At the end, however, she leaves Sam in order to possess her self and also to allow Sam to possess his.
The central passion of Sam and Anna is set in the Eternal City at a crucial moment when the spiritual heritage of Christianity is contrasted with the pagan glories of the past and the tourist haunts of the present. The techniques of creative work are enacted in the novel in such a subtle manner that readers actually witness the process of creating a work. The occasion of the Pope's death is a collage of many experiences—watching a movie, a film within a film, and death and birth as the two faces of a coin. Watching the cortege, Anna feels, "It's like watching a story book opening up . . ., like all that has happened here in Rome in the last fifteen hundred years; it's like having it all in a parade from long ago and having it all come slowly toward you" (252). To this the London correspondent of the *Weekly*, Koster, replies, "The ages creeping back to us. Now that's imagination!" (253). Callaghan brings together two ideas here that remind us the constructed nature of art: the reality of the procession within the novel and the imaginative response to it. Sam works busily catching fine shots of the procession with his camera. His shots provide a picturesque narrative for Koster's verbal narrative of the cortege on the pages of the *Weekly* in Canada.

The effective montage of the past, present and future of Rome skilfully conveys the shifting identities of the city and the traces of the past that get carried to the present and the future. After its ruined glory, a dead Rome "was born again under the popes" (31). The city is unique in retaining its stature, the only capital of the ancient empires. To Sam, it is "the city that conquered time" (231), having a strange beauty even after many transformations. Carla is Rome for Sam, displaying a tenacious spirit to survive after "humiliation, brutality and despair", all giving the feeling of "summer ripeness" (195). Carla's beautifully irregular face resembles Michelangelo's "Sibyl of Delphi" whose
design Sam had traced out with his hands in the Sistine Chapel. Alberto, Carla’s former boyfriend, has the same feeling about her lineaments: “You see such faces in the old cities, sometimes in the slums; the patrician and peasant bloodlines crossed. Something done in a quick passion in a dark alley a thousand years ago” (70). Such analogies are established throughout the novel, suggesting a mysterious beauty in the shifting identities that both Rome and Carla have in common.

For Sam Rome becomes the place where his abandoned identity as a painter haunts him when he looks at Michelangelo’s paintings in Sistine Chapel. Unable to understand the strong urge to create the best painting even after fourteen years of failed attempts, Sam feels lonely and miserable. On the first night in Rome he realizes he is a lonely man, a failed artist, and a photographer who does not know where he is going. For Anna, Rome is a refuge to forget her failure as a singer and her past nomadic life. In her fantasy she becomes a Roman woman for Sam and she is contented with performing different roles of mythical characters as she takes Sam around the old ruins. Although born an American she chooses a fabricated identity as an Italian woman, revelling in the memories of glorious city under the disguise of Carla Caneli. Her fabricated identity has three objectives: to counter her chaotic past, to allow her to escape from the grip of Alberto and to give her a hold on Sam who saves her from Alberto. As the narrator says: “Among the ruins, telling him lively and intimate stories about dead old Romans, she could have him with her, yet forget her abject need of him. . . . The place where they seemed best able to meet each other was in the timeless past” (133). The significant aspect of her fabricated identity is to bring the characters from the past alive as though she will meet them “around the next corner,” as though she is “gossiping with relish
about her neighbours"; sometimes, she becomes these characters, drawing a similarity
between her life and theirs. It is her desire to remain elusive to Sam and deny his male
superiority over her degenerated condition that prompts her to make up stories.

In the first part of the novel, the main characters are seen hanging in a middle
state—past failure and present ambiguity make them uncertain about their identity. Sam
Raymond is desolate about his failure as a creative artist in Canada; Carla is drowning
herself in liquor, fantasy and her adopted Italian name to forget her failed singing career
in the States; Francesca, the interpreter, doubts her sexual inclination; Alberto Ruberto,
the film-maker, looks back at his first successful film and struggles to regain his creative
ability for a second film. Callaghan chooses an appropriate background of the eternal city
of Rome suspended between the old ruins of Rome, the dying Pope, and the present
tourist Rome, anticipation of a new Pope. Passion, while referring to the sexual encounter
on the surface level, connotes a number of meanings—the passion and intensity of Sam’s
artistic impulse, Carla’s passion to live despite her degeneration, and the emotion of
people in Rome for the dying Pope and the feeling of ecstasy at the election of the new.

Callaghan records the outsider’s views on Canada and Canadian literature that
indicate the still unknown recesses of his nation as well as a desire on Callaghan’s part to
destroy such anonymity. He mocks at the opulence that American tourists display in
Rome and the inability of outsiders to distinguish between Canada and America. The
waiter in a restaurant, after hearing Sam’s voice, enquires if Sam is from New York and
is disappointed when Sam’s answer is Canada: “The United States? Canada? Well, what
is this difference if there is not difference in the voice?” The waiter’s response reinforces
the necessity to come out of that other subtle colonization of Canada by the Big brother
America—pointed early in this chapter. Fransesca is surprised that Sam has so much passion: “I didn’t think North American went in for Passions. From what I’ve read it doesn’t get into your literature at all” (297). A similar observation by Alberto and Sam’s reply to it indicate the outsider’s view of Canadian literature as having no vitality, creative genius and significance. During their conversation about Italian and American writers, Alberto asks:

“Perhaps I should know some dramatist from your own country. Who is the man in Canada?”

“Shakespeare,” Sam said gravely.

“Shakespeare? You are joking.”

“You do not joke about Shakespeare in my country.” (56)

It is left to readers’ interpretation whether to understand Sam’s acknowledgement of absence of a master artist in the light of his failure as an artist of some class or to understand it as Sam’s criticism of Canadians still admiring British writers. Sam’s landlady has a nephew who had migrated to Canada and had lived in boxcars in the bush. She asks Sam, if his countrymen still lived in boxcars, an opinion that prevailed for long about Canada as a New Found Land. In the backdrop of such opinions on Canada and its culture, Callaghan’s own novel, with its exploration of an artist’s identity crisis, becomes important.

The first chapter in the novel establishes the split sense of identity in Sam. Although a photographer, he had secretly worked as a painter for fourteen years, and “his whole private life had been built around the painting” (8). On his journey to Rome, Sam remembers the advice of an old Canadian painter, James Streeter, that he should see
Michelangelo’s work in Sistine Chapel in Rome. His present Roman assignment on the occasion of dying Pope revives his long buried desire:

The bus headlights, cutting through the shadows, appeared to be reaching toward the old city now, as he had been reaching for the satisfaction of some gnawing need in himself. And Sam wondered if there couldn’t still be some one place in the world where a man’s life might take on meaning.

(10)

When he looks at Michelangelo’s depiction of the Creation, the Fall and the Flood on the ceiling frescoes and “The Last Judgment” covering the wall behind the altar, he finds a deep significance in the “Creation of Adam”: “Rapt and still as if he half expected the creative force in the finger of God to touch him as it was about to touch the hand of Adam” (36-37). The painting, however, confirms Sam’s awareness of his own lack of talent. It reminds him of all the years he was obsessed with painting as was Michelangelo and “how it had emptied his life, bit by bit” without any fulfilment (39).

In his second meeting with Carla, her face with its irregular features has a wild beauty, which inspires Sam as an artist. He discovers a potential radiance even in her degenerated state that haunts him and brings in him a longing to resurrect her back to her self. Illuminated by his vision of Carla, Sam draws a pencil sketch of her, and the image becomes a reality for him. He thinks Michelangelo would only use her as a material for his work and would never care for what she really is. In contrast, he wants to recreate a living spirit with the power of love, not with paint but with flesh itself, and surpass the greatest artist. As Sam reflects: “But maybe it’s as big, even a bigger thing to do something with a life—if it moves you—as it is to do something with a hunk of clay or
some tubes of paint or some bits of cloth for a uniform. I think I know what Carla should be like” (65). Sam’s compassionate love mixed with his sensual longing restores Carla’s self-confidence in her life and in her singing; however, he tries jealously to keep her within the mould he has shaped her.

Throughout the process of restoration, Sam watches her as an artist watches his painting developing under his imagination, expectation and nervousness and finds delight in his work. Carla becomes his living painting, but he does not want the painting to be finished, just as he had done with his earlier paintings in Canada. When she resumes her singing within the limited space of their room, it is almost like watching the completion of his creative project giving pleasure to him alone. He is not confident, however, when she sings for an audience. When her first attempt to sing in a Night Club without his approval fails, he criticizes her in a tone that expresses his terrible disappointment in his work. Later, Sam arranges for her second come-back at an Italian restaurant on Trastevere. This time, Carla does not disappoint him, but he loses his confidence when she gets the applause: “Slumped in his chair, almost morose in his sudden dejection . . . The thing was done. Taken out of him. Leaving him empty and alone. There it was. He could hardly bring himself to speak” (305). Sam is panic stricken when she behaves like an individual with a mind of her own, and seems mysterious and unknowable. His anxiety and fear are set appropriately against the backdrop of the same anxiety and expectation in people in Rome during the funeral of Pope Pius XII and the election of the new. His sense of selfhood depends entirely on what he has created out of Carla and it seems to falter whenever he cannot understand completely what is going on in her mind.
The decisive moment to break the false identity that Sam has been building around him in his jealous possessiveness comes when Carla decides to leave him. She revolts against Sam's constant need to feel sure of her identity as shaped by him, as a painting's meaning determined by its artist:

My God, if only I could tell all about myself, absolutely everything, once and for all. . . .I’d toss it all to you. . . . and then maybe you’d stop wondering what’s going on in me. How can I do it, Sam? Oh, hell. . . . Each day it has to be different, hasn’t it? Each day I think different things. Isn’t everybody changing all the time? For God’s sake, Sam, what am I doing to you? (326)

When Sam continues to go downhill, Carla finally makes it apparent that Sam is clinging to a fixed thing in their relationship—his imagined picture of her even though it brought her back—and is not willing to go ahead. The implication is apparent: life does not stop at one beautiful moment but goes on with innumerable significations of human beings and things around them. She rightly points out that at such moments Sam will lose faith and destroy himself and his creation, that is, Carla.

When Carla leaves, Sam struggles once again with his sense of loss, failure, loneliness and lack of faith in his talent and judgment. He realizes, however, his mistake in becoming the owner of his creation. He feels “a fierce pride in her” and gains complete confidence in his ability as an artist as well as a human being. He understands that both life and art are rich with signification and mystery. Carla’s decision to go away and yet be in his memories leads Sam to the final realization that the distorted figures of “The Last Judgment” were “only Michelangelo’s best judgment of the matter. Never the last
He admits to Koster that he is the best photographer Koster ever met and he is not afraid of going anywhere in the world. It is this confidence that makes Sam "fiercely exultant" at the end of the novel, not like what Wilson has interpreted: "At the end of the novel Carla's decision and Sam's fierce exultation manage to seem both desperate and consoling" (81).

In Sam's realization two important ideas are conveyed: the work of art (here Carla) has its own existence with innumerable meanings to offer; the artist is not the originator of meaning, but only a restorer of meaning that is already there through the exercise of his imagination, language, knowledge and other accessories. Michelangelo's paintings provide the intertextual context for Sam's creative work just as the montage of Rome provides the necessary insights to bring out the best in Carla. Life and art (literature) emerge as two important intertexts. Sam, quite often, interprets his life in Rome through the captions of an artwork: "The provincial in Rome" (23), "A Room in Rome" (191), "A girl alone in a room in Rome" (260). The scenes that bear these captions are like miniature paintings within the novel. Callaghan ruptures the generic boundaries by turning his novel into a collage of narrative, painting, film, and photograph. He fuses the Roman myths with those of Orpheus and Pygmalion in his narrative of Sam's restoration of Anna.

Close to the Sun Again (1977) affirms once again the mystery and the unpredictability of both life and human beings. Metamorphosis and the processes of transformation are the principal concerns of this novel. The linear movement of time is abandoned and an achronological time scheme is maintained in order to assert the discontinuity, changeability and incoherence of incidents as they happen in life, thereby
revealing the constructed nature of narrative and therefore, the changing phases of
identity. The central concern of the novel is to dis-cover the process by which Ira
Groome, beginning with his identity as Commander Groome, moves to unnaming himself
and inventing who he really was and revealing why he adopted fictitious identity. In other
words, he is made to relive his past, to come to terms with that part of his self, which was
destroyed during his life as a naval officer.

Ira Groome, fifty-three years old, lord of the Brazilian Power Corporation in Sao
Paulo, is called “The Commander” in spite of thirty years in civilian life. He is also called
“Ribbons Groome” owing to his success as a naval officer and the continuity of that
success even after war. His identity has not changed long after the war years: he has “all
the war marks of a superior officer”; the “relaxed assurance of the naval man”; and is
“utterly impersonal” (1). Horler, the bosun on the corvette, who accompanies Ira
everywhere, is an extension of that wartime identity. This identity, however, is fictive or
invented for in the very next page we learn that Ira had been a different kind of man
“with another kind of nature, a young man full of curiosity about people, an archaeology
student . . . But in his way of life now, he was this other man, this Commander who might
never again be able to hear the voices in his own heart” (2). The word “might” introduces
doubt about whether he remains a Commander or will change. It also leaves a gap
regarding Ira’s identity as a naval officer during the wartime. The quest is for Ira Groome
the man, beyond all the signifiers attached to him as “The Commander,” “Ribbons
Groome” and “Lieutenant Groome.”

The decisive moment for the search comes when Julie Groome reveals to Ira, just
before her death, that he did not live with her as Ira Groome: “Why were you such a
stranger to me . . . after you married me?” . . . Where did you go, Ira?” (3). Julie’s questions point to one more strange aspect of Ira’s personality as a husband. Ira ponders over what his wife had missed in him or what he had missed in himself. The quest begins when Ira wonders, “life would go on passing him by until . . . until what . . . until when?” (3). At the meeting of the directors, he realizes that they aren’t his people: “Then who were his people? Where were his people? . . . he thought of lawless men and women, holed up somewhere, nursing passions that made life so real” (5). He wants to know where he lost them and why he was doomed to stay where he was. The questions—“Yet Why? What had he done? Where had he done it? When?”—lead Ira to construct a narrative of identity which is akin to what Giddens proposes for the constitution of self-identity (5).

For Giddens, identity is a project that an individual constructs taking into consideration of his past and present circumstances as he “forms a trajectory of development from the past to an anticipated future” (Giddens 75). Giddens’s argument removes the project of identity from the conventional sense of recovering an essence, a true self, a possession of unchangeable traits, and instead, proposes that self-identity is a project that changes according to the circumstances, in the constraints of time and space. Such a project is relevant to the Canadian quest for identity in a multicultural nation where every group constructs its self-identity by sustaining a narrative.

The progressive shift in time and space occurs when Ira resigns his job in Sao Paulo and returns home (presumably Toronto), following a “hunch about a pilgrimage to a place where he could learn why life had been passing him by” (29). Leo Cawthra, the popular columnist of the World, who calls himself “an Ira Groome watcher,” is waiting to counter Ira’s narrative. Cawthra’s narrative is prejudiced by envy and anger at Ira’s
success and at Ira’s indifference to their mutual friendship during the war. He gives a pre-existent identity (through his experience with him) to Ira even before readers go through Ira’s own project of self-identity. Both the narratives coincide and differ at some points, thereby suggesting, “identity is about sameness and difference, about the personal and the social” (Barker 168).

Ira is a dominating presence in the City Police Commission, as he was in corporate boardrooms. He reminds people of impersonal but socially beneficial values and makes them feel always deficient in what he himself has gained. Yet, Cawthra’s story about Ira points at a significant transformation he and his friends witness after Ira escapes a near death naval encounter. Ira, who was “a warm, friendly, open, easy-going fellow with soft blue eyes, an archaeology student who was a bit of a poet,” undergoes incredible changes after his hospital days: he becomes strict and unsentimental, and no longer has time to sit with “those aimless, undedicated, good-natured men who liked to sit ashore and talk about life” (27). Just after he reads Cawthra’s story, Ira faces his new mistress, Carol Finley’s view of him as “a monster” who doesn’t throw a shadow, because he is “a man without past,” referring to his utterly impersonal nature (30). Ira’s state is similar to Canada’s problem of establishing its history in order to reckon with the problematic of the quest for identity. The resurgence of nationalist sentiments in the Centenary year referred to earlier in this chapter inspired many writers, Rudy Wiebe important among them, to recover the cultural and mythical heritage in their literature. In Close to the Sun Again, Carol’s insights push Ira further in his project of self-identity that now recognizes an emptiness filling his life: “All the years of being utterly impersonal, the years of iron restraint, of discipline, were a suffocating grip on his throat. . . . Why am
I like this? What happened to me?” (31). It becomes necessary for Ira to know his past to assert his identity.

The metamorphosis that Cawthra refers to no doubt wins Ira promotions, both during the war and later in his civilian life. Despite his prominent position as the Chairman of the Police Commission, he is restless and eager with anticipation for some mysterious revelation to make him understand why his life “had been going downhill” and when was the highest point. He becomes convinced that even the important people in the city are not his own people, because “they had no real passion” and “they were there out of a shared sense of keeping up appearances,” including Carol. Ira is in the same plight as that of Sam Raymond in *A Passion in Rome* when Sam realizes with horror “No one was close to him. All the way down the hill Sam kept wondering how he had come this far in life without one close friend” (16). When the moment of revelation is prolonged, unable to hide his boredom, he seeks refuge in alcohol. He becomes a regular visitor to Maplewood, a luxurious nursing home to cure the ailments of rich people. During one of his visits, Ira meets with a severe accident and is admitted to a hospital. Lying in the hospital, holding Horler’s hand, Ira sees his past as clearly as if it was happening in front of his eyes. He relives his life as Lieutenant Groome on a wartime convoy in the North Atlantic.

The flashback is a complex one, revealing an ambiguous triangular relationship that involves Ira, Gina Bixby and her strange escort, Jethroe Chone, a wild pair that Ira’s corvette picks up from a ship wreck. Like Kip Caley, Jethroe is an outlaw hero, the bodyguard to Gina’s professional gambler father, a powerfully built man with red hair, wild staring eyes, fierce energy and reckless courage. Interestingly, he has evolved a
fictive identity as a refined man fighting his way up from the New York slums, and following the manners of Mr. Bixby, has educated himself and changed his manner of speaking. As Ira says, "Chone [was] bent on making himself another man" (125). Unlike Ira, Jethroe is comfortable in his invented identity. His notion of identity calls to mind the monolith of "the American" despite the vast regional/racial differences prevalent there. Although a new found land like Canada, America has constructed a notional identity to which Americans subscribe without facing the necessity to define it. In contrast, the Canadian Ira Groome cannot submerge his history and continue in his fictive identity; he feels compelled to dis-cover his self.

Jethroe's confidence in his new identity with "the careful speech, the big, powerful manicured hands, the clothes like her [Gina's] father's, and the growing pride in his bearing" add to the threat people feel in him and make him a precious possession to Mr. Bixby. Gina, who first regards Jethroe as a clown, is compelled to take him seriously when he expresses his displeasure at not being taken for the man he is. During her narration of this story to Ira, Gina asks herself "I don't know why I stopped laughing. I should have kept on laughing," indicating her growing perplexity over Jethroe's transformation. At the outbreak of a gangster fight in New York, Jethroe is in charge of taking Gina safely to her father in England. During their hideout he rapes her but shows no remorse over his act; in fact, his sense of self is strengthened by it. Gina aims at taking Jethroe back to England so that he will be killed and avenged for his brutal act of killing an important part of her being. Despite her story of rape and revenge, Gina has an easy relationship with Jethroe. These two wild, passionate people disturb Ira's sense of self; he cannot decide whether she loves Jethroe or is just pretending so as not to let him escape.
Wilfred Cude rightly describes them as “wild and lawless and yet terribly, awesomely alive, matching in their own excesses even the excesses of the Second World War” (70). Ira is awed by Jethroe’s confidence in his imagined identity, his reckless love for Gina and Gina’s own taste for the wild, lawless life of her father. He is also deeply intrigued, because he feels the sensual attraction between himself and Gina, her favourable signals whenever he and Gina are alone, and her attempt to mask her feelings for Ira in the presence of Jethroe.

Callaghan deliberately keeps Gina and Jethroe in the shadow, focussing on their mysterious nature and its effect on Ira’s sense of self, which is the central aspect of the novel. We are offered limited knowledge, as we see the character and incidents in the novel through the omniscient narrator whose point of view, most often, coincides with that of the leading character. Even when we are offered the characters’ own narration, it is coloured by their mental make up. For instance, Ira analyses Jethroe’s sense of power coming out of the passion Jethroe had nursed for Gina. He reflects on Jethroe’s act of raping Gina: “he [Jethroe] knew he had reached the core of her being, and he thought now she knew it, too, and so he was sure everything would fall into place for them” (130). Readers, although convinced to accept Ira’s point of view, know that they do not have enough evidence. The uncertainty about understanding characters leads Wilson to say, “the special talent of Morley Callaghan is to tell us everything and yet keep us in the dark about what really matters” (81). Such ambiguity suits the nature of the quest and also gives more scope for readers’ interpretation and analysis.

Ira is both attracted and confused by a sense of mystery in Gina’s personality; her eyes, for instance, bring to his mind “the shade of a dark, threatening forest he had seen
in Central America” (97). They remind him of the mystery of Mayan civilization during the excavation at Yucatan when he was an archaeology student. His narration to Gina of digging in Yucatan, the mystery and sensation that both of them feel during the narration, charges it with sensuality. Jethroe, however, mocks Ira: “You’ve got the cold hand, Mr. Groome”; “Archeology, my ass. You’re a gravedigger” (130). His passion defines him and gives him a strange sense of power. Ira thinks of Jethroe with grudging, wondering admiration: “This crazy faith! Where did he get it? Where does anyone get it? Out of the depths of his own being? The right reading of some signs? . . . his new-found faith that he had seen the ultimate pattern of things, had a kind of criminal grandeur” (125). True to his archaeological bent of mind, Ira feels the necessity of probing into human beings and understanding their core, while Jethroe has tremendous faith in his aggressive passion. Both Jethroe and Ira are presented as antithetical signs for having and not having confidence in their identities. This contrast is similar to the aggressive spirit that gives a sense of assurance to Americans in possessing their identity and the absence of the same spirit in Canadians to come to terms with their crisis of identity. In the novel, Jethroe gives the impression of a confident man, a fact that Ira acknowledges grudgingly: “And look at his bearing! This pool hustler [Chone], this gambler’s bodyguard, guilt of criminal assaults and God knows what crimes in the past, now had an air of dignity and security”; “Chone gave off a sense of certainty about his own power. It was in his solid shoulders, in the set of his head” (125, 130). In contrast to Jethroe Chone, Ira struggles with uncertainties and doubts about himself as well as the people around him: “he [Ira] felt an incredible doubt of himself, as though the thing he had seen might not actually have been there in the water but only in his own mind”; “‘Who are my father and
mother? What is my name?’ as if it was all that had to be known now, all that was really important, this personal identification. It was absolutely necessary now . . . to know who he was and where he came from’ (134, 141). Ira’s need to get to the core of things is the desire to get to the ‘centre,’ a notion that does not help in defining Canadian identity due to the paradoxes (mentioned early in this chapter) inherent in the culture.

The scene, in which the corvette takes a torpedo, spilling everyone into the sea, becomes decisive in Ira’s metamorphosis; it shatters the fragile intimacy which is developing between Ira and Gina. Ira and two other sailors, Boseley and Mason, rescue Gina and Jethroe on a Carley float, waiting for the rescue ship. Both Ira and Jethroe are badly wounded in the mishap. On the float across the frigid night sea, when the survivors sit close for warmth, Gina and Ira share a kiss. Jethroe, who has been watching them, warns Ira that no one wanted and loved her as much as he did, and says contemptuously, ‘You were nothing’ (157). Ira reveals his knowledge of Jethroe’s story with an intention to intimidate Jethroe. Soon after Ira’s revelation, Jethroe slips out of the float and drowns himself. Gina, watching, screams angrily, ‘Jethroe, come back here . . . come back, you bastard’ (158). She dives after him, and Ira is left “bewildered by his stunned moment of indecision” (158-159). Later, when he gathers his thoughts he is confused, but convinced that “he had been betrayed” (165). Jethroe’s deliberate attempt to die may be interpreted as his decision to put an end to the life, the secrets of which are now known to Ira. The scene, however, transforms Ira forever.

Ira’s thoughts as he lies recovering in the rescue ship, revolve around grasping meaning in what happened on the float. He cannot decide whether Gina loved him or Jethroe. Muddled, he remembers his first brush with death on the previous crossing and
the wonder he had felt about the secret worlds of people that gave them "their own faces too . . . Their own faces! . . . he believed that even the jungle terror of deep personal involvements could be wonderful, could bring him more of the intoxication of life" (166-167). Listening to him, the old doctor had advised him: "You got too close to the sun. . . . But if you get too close to people, you'll find they eat you up, and there won't be anything left of you" (167). Ira had accepted the doctor's advice and had "shut his heart to his wonder about Chone, and to the voices in his heart" (167). From then on, he concentrates on seeing himself in his lieutenant's uniform, later Commander's and in all the high posts he holds in the industrial and corporate world.

The repetition of "Their own faces" is relevant for understanding the concept of identity the novel proposes. It is the private, secret world of passion that gives man his "own face," but Ira chooses to remain in different costumes and thus lose his face when he shuts himself to the voices of his heart and tries to forget the "agony and bafflement" that Gina and Jethroe had created. He finds freedom from the "shore stuff" by adhering to the freedom that impersonal relationships offered, but life, as Cawthra realizes early in the novel, "caught up with him [Ira]" (10). He is compelled to examine his life and understand where he lost his self.

When Ira relives his past lying on the hospital bed, he understands what had happened to him on the day when he stood on the deck: "watching himself in that scene committing his high treason against himself, a man bent on overthrowing his own nature" (169). The protective layers or masks of his medals are removed to show his "withering heart" (169). Ira knows now why he had started going downhill: "he had turned his back on the perplexity and the mystery of people that made up the real adventure in life" (170).
There is a “terrible void” as well as “brightness,” as the street of life with its crew of “monkeys and dancing bears and many clowns” along with all kinds of faces brings the circus back into his heart. This time too, he is close to the sun again, but he accepts the mystery, wild passion and the jungle of faces as he sinks in the sea of death, the ultimate sea of knowledge. In this knowledge, Ira regains an identity that signifies not just the Commander, and all the roles he had performed, but the secret worlds he inhabited during his lifetime. In possessing his “own face,” Ira understands that the core of people cannot be reached by.

Many of Callaghan’s recurrent images and symbols from his earlier novels are brought up in the last page of the novel—circus, jungle, black/white, leopard, street, etc. Just before Ira dies, he sees “a sunlit clearing at the edge of a jungle and into that clearing came a white leopard to sit in the sun” (171). The ‘white leopard,’ combining two antithetical qualities of peace and violence, is the continuation of the leopard and the church in white snow that Peggy had showed to Jim in *The Loved and the Lost*. The meaning that Peggy had tried to convey is apparent in this novel, for the combination suggests jungle beauty, and the circus of life with its wild crew. Ira acknowledges “the terrible beauty in the excess” that enabled Chone and Gina to know “the truth about himself in the power and intensity of his passion” (170). Identity becomes fluid, multiple like the faces of the circus and the jungle. The profound message—antitheses are not resolved but co-exist—in Callaghan’s novels is conveyed in the final image of the white leopard. In the affirmation of mystery, ambiguity, and unpredictability, lies the truth that man is a sign who has infinite or multiple significations. Hence, death puts an end to the process of signification. To a certain extent, the antithetical, irresolvable, and
incomprehensible nature of characters in Callaghan’s novels is analogous to the antithetical, paradoxical and elusive characteristics of Canadian culture and landscape. Hence, the best way to define Canadian identity seems to be by affirming its fluidity, plurality and indefinability. Recent novels in Canadian literature explore this fluidity in a number of ways—by disclaiming centred or definable identity and situating themselves at the border as the characters in Kroetsch do, by revealing the constructed nature of identity, and by inventing narrative structures that enact multiple meanings in a text.

*A Time for Judas,* published in 1983, reiterates the most dominant ideas of the post-1960s period—creating, inventing and fictionalizing. With regard to form, Callaghan breaks away from his third person narration, and for the first time, chooses a first person narrator. The narrative moves back and forth, accentuated with Philo’s reflections in present time, his questions, his insertion of comments on past incidents at the time of narrating, and his signals for the future in the present time of the narrative. After the self-reflexive novel *A Fine and Private Place,* Callaghan explores temporal dimensions in *Close to the Sun Again,* and returns to his experimentation with form in *A Time for Judas.* There is a growing confidence in evolving new forms in fiction to deal with such issues as reality, fiction and identity. Salat describes this confidence in Canadian literature in the post-1960s as a shift in emphasis “from content-oriented self-definition to form-oriented fictional identity” (xx). In the context of the present chapter, this shift is significant, as in *A Time for Judas,* Callaghan takes a radical departure in terms of evolving a new form for his novel in which narrativity becomes the focus, because identity is always forged in the narrative.
Callaghan deconstructs the notion that there is a pre-existent ‘I’ or the subject to be represented through language. Rather, his novel enacts how the ‘I’ is constituted through the processes of signification, whether language or any signifying system. Callaghan does this by introducing a Foreword that contains the details (explained in Chapter Three) of how the author came across the manuscript, which becomes the novel, *A Time for Judas*. After a long time, Owen Spencer Davis, the television producer, converts the notes he made from the original Greek manuscript of Philo into a story entitled “According to Philo of Crete.” When the envelope containing Davis’s manuscript reaches the author of the novel we are reading, there is a note enclosed with the manuscript from Davis: “My dear friend. About the language I’ve had Philo use! I feel I know him well, and I couldn’t bear to try and have him sound stiff and archaic. So the language here is direct—as in natural speech—sometimes even verging on the colloquial” (6). Davis’s note, although meant to create authenticity, subverts the very notion of ‘authentic.’ The sentence “the language I’ve had Philo use!” indicates that this is Davis’s version of Philo’s story and that Philo as subject is created through the language that is used in the story. The Foreword ends with the sentence: “But here is the manuscript” as though the author has just recorded the manuscript he received in the envelope. The text we read, however, is entitled *A Time for Judas*, not Davis’s own title, “According to Philo of Crete,” thereby casting doubts about whether it is Davis’s story that we are reading or Callaghan’s. The title gives the impression that it is the story of Judas, yet it is Philo’s story, because he is the scribe who takes notes when Judas tells his story and then gives the narrative form. Besides, Judas’s story is only a fragment within the larger narrative of Philo, who writes this story in Rome, after many years of his life in
Jerusalem. In making the source and author of his story dubious, Callaghan deconstructs any notion of ‘the meaning,’ ‘the author’ and ‘the identity.’ The insertion of a Foreword, and details about different manuscripts signify the interplay of the dialectical opposition between writing/recording and inventing/fabricating. The ultimate faith is in the story, and by extension, in language, and what it signifies. As Judas tells Philo: “It’s the story—only the story that lives, Philo—if people like the story” (112).

A Time for Judas is a brilliant parody of the canonical and mythical texts that narrate the story of Jesus Christ and claims to tell ‘the truth’. As readers go through Philo’s narration (vis-à-vis Callaghan’s narration) they realize that they are in the presence of two conflicting, parallel stories: the story in the scriptures about the messiah and the actual incidents that Philo recollects in Jerusalem are paradoxically fictive, dramatic and ‘real’ and blur the line of demarcation between reality and fiction. All the major characters, Philo, Judas, and Jesus, realize the terrible necessity of allowing the story to live, a story that may elude/reveal truth and thus the identity of people who figure in it. The message of the novel seems to be that the entire mankind, from time immemorial, has been subjected to creating itself through stories in the form of scriptures, epics, myths, religious commandments, etc. After a few years, these narrative texts set the standard pattern for a particular community or religion or nation and confer pre-given identities on the members belonging to such groups. Pre-given identities are fictive, because they never denote the real person. People who are in possession of canonical or religious texts dictate the central power structure of the community and guard the structure, so that no one breaks it. Paradoxically, the urge to dismantle or challenge the centre is always there, giving rise to new texts, new forms, and new stories.
In his analysis of Jewish religion and culture to Pontius Pilate, Philo conveys how the law book in Jewish religion is structured upon a fixed relationship between the signifier and the signified. Various codes, rituals and practices in Jewish religion stand for definite meanings and confer such meanings on the members who belong to the religion. In his comparison of Jews and Romans, Philo reflects upon the structural differences in Jewish and Roman cultures.

The contrast between the Jews and the Romans is symbolically represented in terms of desert and sea, which in turn stand for closure and openness. As Philo says:

The Greek mind is so full of curiosity, I said. It is always reaching across seas. But the Jewish mind . . . always turns inward. It's land-locked. Its hungers and satisfactions are born of desperate desert thirst; a mind from the beginning locked too long in the desert, a spirit molded in isolation.

(143)

The Jews want to feel chosen even “in their desert isolation” and have their special god Yahweh, equated with that of Israelites. Philo analyzes Yahweh as “merely the collective consciousness of the Jews” and never residing in a temple like gods in Greece or Rome. Yahweh’s law book that the priests have dug up allows them only to control themselves to bring “all of life, all human behaviour, under a tribal rule” (144). Philo, being a scholar, knows that codification was invented when the kings in Jerusalem had pagan gods and found them in “sacred groves.” The presence of codes set the pattern of right and wrong things, but Philo’s mockery (similar to Callaghan’s mockery against law and order in many of his novels) is evident when he reflects on the code of law: “What a
fascinating discipline for holding the tribes together. What a drill. What a subjugation of all that's spontaneous in the heart. The perfect captivity” (144).

Pilate, after listening to Philo’s analysis of Jewish religion, realizes that habits give rise to a pattern, and pattern becomes a prison where spontaneous or excess emotions are curbed. Jesus or the Galilean (as he is called in the novel) preaches against such rigid laws and codes, and draws a large number of crowds. It is significant to note that Jesus’s disciples are poor, insignificant, powerless people belonging to different tribes of Jerusalem bearing no identity or recognition during the rule of the Jewish chieftains or priests. To them, more than the freedom from the codes of Jewish religion, as suggested in Jesus’s stories, it is the overthrowing of the Jewish customs that becomes important, because it gives them a sense of identity. Hence, they want Jesus to prove that he is a messiah. The Jewish priests sense a threat in Jesus, because he seems to be usurping their power, if he becomes the messiah.

Significantly, Jesus does his teaching with stories, because “the story lives on” (124). It is paradoxical, however, that Jesus too feels the necessity of enacting according to the scriptures, otherwise people do not believe in him. He realizes that mere liberation from strict rules is not enough. He tells his disciples that he will die and on the third day rise from the dead, as written in the story about the messiah in the scriptures. Judas asks in anguish: “Did he [Jesus] know people wouldn’t go on believing in him unless he fitted into the great myth of death and resurrection?” (124).

Callaghan’s parody of the New Testament is evident in the way he makes the betrayal, trial, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus an enactment of pre-designed drama, merely to prove what is written in the scriptures, so that Jesus becomes the messiah. Jesus
the man, however, remains elusive throughout the novel. From the moment Judas betrays Jesus, all the incidents that follow have a rhythmical pattern. At the time of the Galilean’s trial, Philo observes that everyone is “behaving as if they were in a ritual dance” (159) and asks in anger, “Was this his [Jesus’s] magic? Making them all act out a story. . . . all this silly talk in Jerusalem about “as it was written.” . . . Well, who wrote it and why?” (159-160). Just as life is compared to a storybook, so is there a question on the authority of meaning in the written word and on the identities of characters that figure in the written text. In the scriptures, there is a messiah and a betrayer, but Philo’s text does not make Judas a betrayer. The interplay of meaning in the binary opposition of two signs, ‘betrayal’ and ‘love,’ is discussed in Chapter Two, wherein it emerges that betrayal causes death of love (as the scriptures interpret it), but betrayal also affirms love (as Judas sees it). With regard to identity, betrayal also becomes a way that leads to truth.

Interestingly, the identity of all the major characters is centred on the word “betrayal.” The word both defines and denies Judas, Philo, Simon, Jesus, the Senator, and Pilate. Although an outlaw, Simon does not betray his friendship with Philo even in his death, because his faith in Philo is related to his sense of self. Judas’s sense of self is caught between accepting the role designed in the scriptures and asserting the man he really is. If he does not do as Jesus expects him to do, it will be a betrayal of love; on the other hand, if he becomes the betrayer of Jesus, it will be a betrayal of his self. Ultimately, the sense of self takes priority and leads Judas to tell the truth to Philo. The truth being told, he realizes with horror that he has betrayed Jesus’s faith in his silence. Tormented by the contending pulls of love and betrayal, Judas commits suicide. Both Judas (before his death) and Jesus (appearing before Philo after his death) urge Philo not
to disclose the truth and keep their faith in him. Keeping the truth is against Philo’s sense of self, but revealing it would be a blasphemy and dangerous to his life.

After many years of conflict and struggle, Philo devises a plan to satisfy his need to tell the truth. In the last two pages of the novel, he informs readers that he will write what happened to him in Rome and will add to it Judas’s story, written in Judas’s voice, but actually compiled through the notes Philo had made at the time of Judas’s confession. Philo puts the manuscript in a beautiful Greek jar, bearing the picture of a girl in flight from her lover, and buries it in his ancestral house in Crete. The picture on the jar symbolizes the ever-elusive nature of truth. In acting so, Philo listens to his “secret domain,” which has been the ruling force in every man’s life, including the most corrupt man as the Senator. To Philo’s question about why the Senator did not try to get rid of him, the Senator replies: “In every man there must be a secret domain. It’s a mysterious thing. Isn’t it?” (235). The Senator, a corrupt man in worldly matters, remains faithful to Philo in his personal relationship with Philo. In contrast to the Senator, Pilate betrays his “secret domain” when he depends on the crowd’s judgement of Jesus during the trial.

In Callaghan’s novels, the “secret domain, refers to the self, which in turn, is related to other concepts such as truth, identity, love, betrayal, and so on. These concepts are treated as mysterious, as the secret domain of human beings, because they are unfathomable. Concepts such as self, truth, and identity become tangible only through narration. Philo’s conviction at the end of the novel that his story in the beautiful jar “would be there, existing, though hidden, waiting to be seen and read” (246) refers to his faith in language. Philo’s hope for readers to discover the truth in the story suggests the
open-ended nature of the narrative. Philo believes that his story, when read, will release Judas from his identity as a betrayer and restore him as a beloved disciple of Jesus.

In *A Time for Judas* Callaghan seems to propose fiction/fabrication as constituting a metaphoric analogue for Canada's crisis of identity, because language becomes an efficient means to tell and make up the Canadian story. In a multi-cultural society like Canada, it is not possible to attain a monolithic identity, but each group can evolve a fictive identity by discovering new forms to narrate its story. In his early novels, Callaghan problematizes the search for self and self-hood within the framework of the dialectics of binary opposition. The protagonists of these novels are figures in flight from given social identities. In the later novels, while the dialectics of opposing pulls still exists, the self is asserted as enigmatic and infinitely signifying sign. The assertion of mystery, indefinite meanings, disorder, ambiguity and plural significations are suggested in the most powerful sign, man—alogous to the mysterious quality of the landscape and the diversity of different communities in Canada.