CONCLUSION

The thesis has attempted to demonstrate that meaning in Callaghan’s fiction is generated through differential relationships among both linguistic and cultural signs. The study of signification of signs indicated that there was not a fixed meaning; instead, his fiction prompted us to discern plurality of meanings, as evident in the analysis of character, realism and identity. In studying these aspects of Callaghan’s fiction, we came across certain codes, conventions and practices of culture about which he wrote, thus making it explicit that culture and language were signifying practices. The linkage between the texts and the culture enabled us to reconstruct Canadian identity, which emerged as plural and fluid in Callaghan’s fiction.

We find the necessity to approach Callaghan’s fiction in a new way, as his fiction portrays the ideological conflicts in a transitional society. He makes use of such techniques as defamiliarization, parody, subversion, and so on. Since these techniques are prominently used in recent theoretical and critical approaches to destabilize many essentialist views about the text, the author, and the reader, we traced briefly the different approaches to comprehend meaning in a text. From New Criticism to formalism, structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, and post-structuralism, there is an attempt to dissociate the text from subjective interpretation, which always depends on pre-existent history and biographical details of the author and the reader. In contrast to subjective approach, the theories mentioned above explore the methods through which readers enter into a dialogue with the text and actively participate in producing “readerly texts,” to use Barthes’s terms. Theories such as New Criticism, formalism and structuralism treat the
text as ahistorical and autonomous, making the formal features or the structure as central
to derive meaning in a text. On the other hand, the later theories such as post-
structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis (from Lacan onwards), and deconstruction not
only take into consideration the cultural codes, discourses, contexts present in the text,
but also the reader’s cultural as well as critical disposition. Poststructuralism attacks the
notion of stability of meaning, upon which the binaries of structuralism and its belief in
the surety of knowledge are based. It deconstructs the very notion of stable structures of
language. Meaning is unstable, being always deferred. Since there is destabilization of
meaning in certain culturally established signs, interspersion of genres, exploration of the
subtle line of demarcation between reality and illusion, and the presentation of man as a
sign in Callaghan’s fiction, we approach his fiction with the above theoretical insights.

An examination of character as a sign leads us to discover the means through
which we understand and comprehend characters in Callaghan’s fiction. It shows how
meaning is not inherent in a character’s personality, but is produced in a contiguous
relationship a character shares with other characters. It makes use of Saussure’s
formulations on a sign’s syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships in a system. Such an
examination deconstructs the notion of character as a life-like individual with a coherent
self. The interrogation of how characters produce meaning in novels such as No Man’s
Meat, It’s Never Over, Such Is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth, A Broken
Journey, and A Time for Judas reveals the ways in which Callaghan uses character as
linguistic sign and denaturalizes meaning attributed to certain cultural signs with an
intention to reveal the ideological conflict in them, and the reasons for creating such
signs. Hence, some of his marginal characters are described as subversive. Further, the
examination of character as a split entity (subject) demythologizes the notion of coherent or unified self. When characters in Callaghan’s fiction are treated as subjects, they reveal the distance between conscious expectations of the symbolic order in which they live, and their unconscious desires. Especially, women characters in Callaghan’s fiction can be explored further, since they are presented, especially in the later novels, as figures of unconscious desire for men characters. Further research can also be taken up on prostitutes in Callaghan’s fiction, who are treated with respect, sympathy, and understanding compared to other women characters. Since they are also endowed with grace at times—Ilona Tomary (An Enchanted Pimp), Mary of Samaria (A Time for Judas), Annie Laurie (The Many Colored Coat)—a comparative study of such figures in other Canadian novelists can be undertaken to discover, if there is a tradition of such figures in Canadian literature. If so, the significance of constructing such figures can be examined in the Canadian cultural context.

A reassessment of realism in Callaghan’s fiction leads us to discover certain important aspects in his narratives that do not encourage a realistic reading. Just as character is not used as a life-like individual, so are the other components of fiction such as space and time, which are not used to represent reality, but to create illusion of reality. The analysis of space in The Loved and the Lost reveals that the clearly demarcated areas in different geographical locations of Montreal are used to create the dialectics of centre/margin, black/white, sacred/profane, etc, and also to explore the tendency to transgress such demarcations in a system. An examination of self-reflexive and self-conscious moments in A Fine and Private Place directs us to discern transgression, embedding, undermining oppositions, and theatrical elements in the novel. Such an
examination proves that Callaghan’s fiction resists a straightforward realistic reading; instead, it reveals a tendency to install realist conventions and subvert them. This tendency links Callaghan with the later postmodernist movement in Canadian literature, a fact that has not been explored enough in Callaghan criticism. In *A Reader’s Guide to the Canadian Novel* John Moss refers to the narrative in Callaghan’s *A Time for Judas* and regrets that Callaghan does not explore the postmodern concerns in an otherwise complex novel. As he observes:

Callaghan misses a fine chance to compound the formal and thematic complexity of his narrative by closing his account with the sealing of the jar, rather than returning (with it) to contemporary times and the presence of the present narrator, and us, reading. . . . Perhaps, though, he is even more taken up with the spiritual implications of his account and does not want such essentially postmodern considerations to interfere. (54)

The analysis of fiction/fabrication, destabilization of such absolute concepts as truth and identity, problematization of the concept of “the author” in *A Time for Judas* in the last chapter of this thesis indicates that Callaghan is not resisting completely postmodern considerations in his later novels.

A re-examination of the concept of identity in Callaghan’s fiction reveals that Callaghan does not propose identity as an absolute thing with essential qualities to be discerned; rather, identity emerges as a discursive construction in a given cultural situation and found through signification or through discourses. Such a proposition for identity is analogous to the changes in the conception of Canadian identity. A brief survey of the dialectics of the quest for Canadian identity from the pre-confederation
years to the present situation discerns a significant shift in the conception of identity: the attempts to create a homogenized National Identity give way to the construction of a discursive and pluralistic identity. The study of Callaghan’s novels, too, locates a shift in Callaghan’s views regarding identity. His early novels (up to 1960) articulate the crisis of identity in a split subject caught in the power structures of society, whereas his later novels affirm the enigmatic, unpredictable, and fluid nature of the self. The shift directs us to treat Callaghan’s novels as metaphoric analogues for the dialectics of the quest for identity in Canada. Also, the shift identified in Callaghan’s fiction prompts us to examine the means and strategies Callaghan employs to deal with the issue of identity. The examination of novels such as *Strange Fugitive, A Broken Journey, More Joy in Heaven, The Loved and the Lost, A Passion in Rome, Close to the Sun Again,* and *A Time for Judas* compel us to reassess Callaghan’s place in Canadian literature, since we discern an inclination in Callaghan’s writing towards postmodernist strategies and preoccupations, though in a lesser degree.