Chapter II  CHARACTER AS SIGN: DESTABILIZING MEANING

Character, one of the major aspects of Callaghan’s fiction, has enchanted as well as intrigued readers and critics for many years. The interpretation of characters varies according to different approaches to Callaghan’s fiction. Characters in his fiction have been discussed sometimes as life-like persons, at other times as stereotypes, and still on several occasions as allegorical. The Callaghan criticism has focussed on interpreting his characters as realistic, moralistic, religious, and modern alienated individuals. A close examination of characters in Callaghan’s novels, however, reveals that Callaghan seems to achieve a different purpose by setting marginal and archetypal characters (priest, criminal, outlaw, non-conformist, prostitute, labourer, etc) in a modern society. The purpose of this chapter is to reassess character in Callaghan’s fiction by treating it as a sign and as a subject, functioning in relation to other signs (within the novel). Such a study not only brings out the latent aspects of the construction of character and shows how meaning is generated, but also discloses the norms, codes, conventions and ideologies of a particular culture that go into the making of a character. Before the discussion of characters in Callaghan’s novels, it is mandatory to understand the two, largely debated approaches to character in literary criticism.

Character has been discussed in literature from the time of Aristotle, but since then, it has received varied responses and treatment from the writers and critics as well. Aristotle confined character to one of the elements of tragedy, making it subordinate to action. In his view, “without action tragedy would be impossible, but without character it would still be possible” (12). According to his concept of tragedy, Aristotle designates
four aspects of character: it should be good; it should be appropriate; it should be real; and it should be consistent. As evident in Poetics, Aristotle concentrated mainly on heroic characters that received greater attention in tragedy. The rise of the novel in the eighteenth century and its later developments, however, added significantly to the concept of character and demanded a new theoretical formulation of it in literary criticism. Since E.M. Forster's typology of characters, there has been a wide range of discussion on literary character, beginning with New Criticism and later with formalism, structuralism, semiotics, and post-structuralism. The central debate on character arises from two critical perspectives of looking at character: as a representation and as a construct. Whereas the traditional criticism treats character in a literary work as a representation of a life-like person, the modern theories such as formalism, structuralism and post-structuralism regard character as a linguistic construct, more precisely, a sign and defy any direct connection between the word and the world, signifier and the referent.

The etymology of the word "character" refers back to the Greek kharattein, which is to engrave, a mark or token, the drawn, written, preserved sign. In this sense, character is first a verbal sign, and only later does it signify the human personality, its individuality or essence. The privileged position that character occupies in the novel or in the play is mainly due to the secondary meaning attached to it. In Uri Margolin's view, "literary character (LC) is not an independently existing entity with essential properties to be described, but rather a theory-dependent conceptual construct or theoretical object, of which several alternative versions exist in contemporary poetics" (Margolin 453). He looks at literary character as "polysemy," used by different theorists to designate
different concepts or model objects. By "polysemy" he means the possibility of a number of different meanings, which have to be realized by actual readers in the process of reading. The various approaches to character can be divided into two broad categories for methodological purpose: the "referential" (or "mimetic" or "representational") and the "textual" (or "formalistic" or "aesthetic" or "linguistic").

The referential approach to character aims at connecting the signifier to the signified; that is, as Gerald Mead says: "Characters, and in fact fiction as a whole, are seen to imitate or reflect, to reproduce, to suggest or to allow perception of a meaning or reality that exists somehow outside of or above or behind the fiction itself" (441). In other words, this criticism aims at explaining the presence and meaning of fictional characters by resorting to a non-fictional or to a real world. Referential criticism remains the most popular approach until 1920s, when new approaches began to emerge. The philosophy behind such an approach is that man is a coherent and individual being with an essence. The critics and theorists, who believe in this philosophy, formulate their views on character as an imitation of real life people. Their purpose is to give expression to the identity of a character and differentiate characters according to the simplicity or complexity with which they are portrayed in literary texts. Critics (Pelham Edgar, Desmond Pacey, E.L. Bobak, Patricia Morley, etc), who discern realism, naturalism and determinism in Callaghan's fiction, treat his characters as authentic representation of people in real life. Other critical approaches, which may or may not agree with the realist approach, are discussed later in this chapter. Different critics have provided different models for the classification of characters from different points of view.
An examination of the typologies of character enables us to understand the complex nature of character as a "type" or as an "individual." In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster attempts an early and still popular method of distinction between characters as "flat" and "round." A "flat" character (also called a "type" or "one-dimensional") is understood by a single concept, and is built around "a single idea or quality." The term "flat" suggests something devoid of depth and "life." A "round" character, on the other hand, calls for more concepts to account for its presence; it is complex and is represented with subtle particularity. Forster's account of "flat" and "round" characters does not involve matters of physical distribution (a flat character can be present throughout the book), but only those of conception (how complex or simple a character is). Forster's distinction is of pioneering importance, as it is the first attempt to study character systematically. Critics after Forster, however, have noted some shortcomings in his approach and have proposed new and sophisticated typologies of character.

In *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan points out some of the theoretical weaknesses in Forster's distinction (40-41). According to him, many flat characters, like those of Dickens, are felt as both "alive" and as leaving the impression of depth thus contradicting Forster's distinction. Secondly, Forster's typology is highly reductive, without taking into consideration the "degrees and nuances" found in many fictional works. Lastly, he thinks that Forster's view of flat character as both simple and undeveloping is problematic. This is, because, Rimon-Kennan notes that there are fictional characters that are complex but undeveloping as can be seen in Joyce's character Bloom in *Ulysses*. Similarly, there are other characters that are simple but developing and the example he gives is the allegorical Everyman.
Classification of characters in Callaghan's fiction on Forster's model encounters the same problems that Rimon-Kennan notes above. Many flat characters (according to Forster's definition) impress readers with their distinctive features and refuse to be defined as one-dimensional. Lou, in *Such Is My Beloved*, Steve in *A Broken Journey*, Annie Laurie, and Old Mr. Kon in *Many Colored Coat* are minor characters, but cannot be called flat characters, since they have distinctive function in the development of the plot or act as signifiers in relation to major characters. To describe characters as round also proves inadequate, because it accounts for the conceptual meaning, that is, characters as human beings with essential qualities. Such a method leaves unaccounted for the production of meaning in the contiguous relationship among characters, that is characters as signs in a text.

With an intention to make Forster's intuitive distinction fruitful, David Fishelov combines it with another distinction. He realizes that there is a basic tension manifest in the creation of character—“the tension between the individuality of a character and the fact that this very individual is an “intersection” of abstract typical traits” (422). Hence, in the essay, “Types of Character, Characteristics of Types,” Fishelov proposes a basic typology of characters in order to determine to what extent, and in what sense we perceive a character as a “type” or an “individual.” Unlike Forster, Fishelov distinguishes between the textual and the constructed levels of the literary text to perceive character. A character may be treated either as a flat or as a round character on the textual level, and may be perceived by the same distinction or by a different distinction on the constructed level. On the textual level, Fishelov includes the formal aspect of the presence of a character, its proper name, its consciousness, points of view from which it is presented.
and explicit or implicit mentioning of its traits (physical and mental). He argues that all
these considerations are identified at the textual level, and the main function of all these
factors is to create “the impression of a lifelike character” (425). As opposed to this, the
constructed level deals with issues that go beyond the questions of linguistic references,
or literary techniques, modes and degrees of representation. This latter level is more an
activity of the reader; it involves the integration and construction of reader’s experience
and knowledge of the world. Fishelov describes this activity as “an attempt to “match”
the various details and patterns provided by the literary work with the conceptual network
with which we perceive and apprehend the world” (425). This constructing activity
results in an imagined fictional world filled with characters.

Equipped with the two distinctions, Fishelov derives four categories to which
characters can belong:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Flat - Construction level</th>
<th>Round- Construction level</th>
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<tr>
<th>Flat- Textual level</th>
<th>“Pure” type</th>
<th>Type-like individual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round- Textual level</td>
<td>Individual-like</td>
<td>“Pure” individual type</td>
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(426).

By “Textually flat,” Fishelov means, “a one-dimensional appearance of a character in the
text; the character is depicted from only one perspective, always says the same things,
attention is called to only one of the character’s traits, etc” (426). In the “Textually
round” category, a character appears in a rich and elaborate manner, is placed in different situations, a number of his traits are narrated, his thoughts are explained, etc. Fishelov describes the “Constructionally flat” characters as belonging to a simple category like moral, social, aesthetic, etc that results after the reader constructs data from various levels of the text. “Constructionally round” is explained as the classification to use when we cannot reach a constructed type. With the help of these four “parameters” of the chart, Fishelov comes up with the four labelling of characters: a “pure” type is a character receiving a short, one-dimensional representation on the textual level and perceived as flat on the constructional level too. An “Individual-like type” results when there is a rich representation of a character on the textual level, but a typical label on the constructed level. The third category, “Type-like individual” is diametrically opposite to the second one: it receives flat treatment on the textual level, but acquires some roundness at the constructed level. The last but the most interesting, “pure” individual gets a rich, lively and round treatment at both the textual and constructed levels.

Fishelov makes it explicit that all four categories are purely descriptive, and to identify a character with one of the above categories is to use the term in a relative, not in an absolute, way. The Erringtons in It’s Never Over and Father Sullivan in A Broken Journey can be described as “pure” type. Whereas the Erringtons are pompous in displaying moral conscience, Father Sullivan is a bashful priest, lacking in experience and knowledge. On the textual level, we see and hear only a short, and stock like appearance of Erringtons, and on the constructed level, they represent a satirical type. The “individual-like type” receives a very rich and elaborate attention on the textual level, but creates a flat impression on the constructed level. Hubert Gould of The Brokern
Journey can be placed under this category. He is presented as an important character in the novel, in his relationship with his brother, Peter, and his lover, Marion Gibbons. Hubert accompanies Peter and Marion to their long-cherished trip to Algoma hills, where Marion’s love towards Peter is tested. Hubert’s steadfast nature proves a contrast to Marion’s uncertain emotions, and he seems to be a moral touchstone to the dilemma Marion faces during their trip. Yet, on the constructed level, Hubert remains as an unimpressive, merely ‘virtuous’ man.

The “type-like individual,” is the opposite of “individual-like type,” since it receives a flat treatment at the textual level, but round treatment at the constructed level. Mrs. Teresa Gibbons of A Broken Journey seems to be a comical and ridiculous character on the textual level, because she is “a sensual, materialistic woman without any morality, whose infidelity was a bit remarkable though ridiculous at her age” (2). She appears only in the first half of the novel, but is unforgettable. On the constructed level, she turns out to be an individual of some complexity with her superstitions, obsessive interests, troubled relationship with her daughter, and religious fervour which place her in the “type-like individual” category. In the last category of “pure” individual, we get a lively and detailed representation of character on the textual level, which generates a complex picture of that character’s personality on the constructed level. The “pure” individuals, despite some of the typical qualities exposed in the course of the novel, defy any simple category into which they could be confined. Many of Callaghan’s protagonists belong to this category with a rich and elaborate representation on the textual level and the corresponding complexity created on the constructed level.
In his concluding remarks, Fishelov tries to bring out the implications of his theoretical framework in the history and theory of the novel. He makes significant observes that in the classical eighteenth-century novel the background is filled with “pure” types, but in the modernist novels, the same role is played by “type-like individuals”—“by eccentric and grotesque characters rather than “solid,” abstract types” (432). To illustrate his point, Fishelov compares the panorama of characters Leopold Bloom encounters during his odyssey in Dublin in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, with that, which Joseph Andrews meets on his way from London in Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*. The characters in Fielding’s stagecoach (the coachman, the lady, the man of law the gentleman and the postilion) are compared and contrasted with those sitting in the carriage in the “Hades” episode in Joyce. The scene, where the passengers of a stagecoach pick up Joseph, provides Fielding an excellent opportunity to depict satirical types. All the characters (with the exception of the postilion), suggest either inhumane action or hypocritical values. The essence of these characters can be summed up in a phrase or two, and thus, readers can term them as “pure” types.

In contrast to this scene is the “Hades” episode, when Bloom, the main character, attends the funeral of Paddy Dignam along with other minor characters, Martin Cunningham, Mr. Power, and Simon Dedalus, Stephen’s father. These minor characters, who might be regarded as pure types, gain complexity and possess traits that are special and even eccentric, which make them belong to the category of the type-like individuals. Fishelov explains this process in detail, quoting relevant passages from both the novels. For the sake of brevity, however, the passages are not quoted here; it is sufficient to note the significant observation that Fishelov makes regarding the artistic sensibilities and
narrative techniques of these two writers. Both the novelists wrote interesting at the same
time different versions of “a comic epic-poem in prose”: whereas Fielding creates “pure”
types, Joyce confers eccentric, individual qualities to even minor characters that make
them type-like individuals. Taking Ulysses as representative of certain central trends in
the modern novel, Fishelov infers from his comparative analysis that modern novel does
not contain various constructed types. Behind such abandonment, he observes, is a
serious questioning of an assumption about the ability of the novelist “to capture a
character in a known, preexisting category” (436). Fishelov’s inference is relevant for the
study of character in Callaghan’s fiction, since Callaghan’s characters cannot be placed in
“a known, preexisting category.”

The last interesting point that Fishelov makes indicates a radical change in the
conception and the depiction of characters in the modernist novel, but he does not explain
the reasons for such changes. Later theorists such as Harold Fisch and Hélène Cixous,
discussed later in this chapter, give a detailed and convincing explanation. Before moving
on to the other approaches to character, it is necessary to know two more typologies of
color that Fishelov rejects with serious objections.

In Character and the Novel, W.J. Harvey proposed a classification of four types
of characters: protagonist, background, card, and ficelle. His was a more elaborate
scheme than that of Forster’s, as he added two more types of characters. Protagonist and
background correspond roughly to Forster’s round and flat characters respectively. But
Harvey introduces the card to show a character that is relatively “flat” but very vivid and
“realistic.” His ficelle denotes a character that is relatively round but typical and
representative. Fishelov identifies a major fault in Harvey’s scheme: that he fails to focus
on one clear criterion of classification, by confusing the criterion of the *function* of characters. According to the functional criterion, protagonist comes first, then the ficelle in a subordinate role, and then the background. Harvey places card somewhere between the protagonist and the background, close to the ficelle. Fishelov, however, notes that it is not hard to conceive of a card who is also the *protagonist* of a novel. Harvey admits that such cases (Don Quixote) are unique exceptions, but Fishelov rejects this typology on that exception.

Another important typology that Fishelov finds fault with is Baruch Hochman’s elaborate taxonomy of characters in his book, *Character in Literature*, a full-fledged study of character in literature. Hochman comes up with eight categories, and their categories for his classification: Stylization vs. Symbolism; Complexity vs. Simplicity; Transparency vs. Opacity; Dynamism vs. Staticism; and Closure vs. Openness. Despite the fact that Hochman discusses every category elaborately with proper illustration, Fishelov focuses on some of the problems that his categories give rise to. He notes that even though the categories are introduced as “qualities” of characters, they refer to other things as well. For example, he shows that character’s “transparency,” is constituted by the different degrees of narratorial “revelation” than any “quality” possessed by the character. Another objection that Fishelov has is, the elaborate system (though with fine distinction) that Hochman proposes: out of eight categories it is possible, theoretically, to derive sixty-four “kinds” of characters when we combine them. Besides, Hochman claims that his taxonomy is exhaustive, which leads Fishelov to argue that there are many more possibilities of coming up with new categories than confining ourselves to eight of them.
Thus Fishelov's typology, by concentrating on brevity and precision, provides a coherent theoretical framework. By combining the textual with that of the constructed level, he tries to bring together two important factors involved in the comprehension of character: the text and the reader. Yet, the fact that Fishelov uses textual elements to construct a life-like person places him in the referential school of criticism.

Apart from the typologies discussed above, there are three significant models, within the referential criticism, for the understanding and comprehension of character: the biographical model, the realist model and the psychological model. The salient features of these three models are best summarized in Gerald Mead's essay, "The Representation of Fictional Character." As is well known, in the biographical model character is explained by reference to the author's life: Dickens's poor characters with their ambitious dreams are related to Dickens's own hard life; the Oedipus complex that Paul Morel suffers from is often traced back to Laurence's own attachment with his mother. The measuring rod for the characters in this model is the reality of the author's life. Mead observes that although this model lost its appeal by the sixties, it made "a strong comeback in a Freudian or Neo-Freudian idiom" which again sees the coherence (or incoherence) of character in terms of the writer's psychic profile.

The realist and the psychological models are the recent versions of referential criticism. The realist model claims that we understand or recognize characters in relation to people in real life whose actions, appearances, and behaviour reflect or resemble. Callaghan's characters in novels such as They Shall Inherit the Earth, Such Is My Beloved, and It's Never Over are interpreted as representing the sentiments, beliefs and actions of people in the 1930s depression period. A similar realist explanation is offered
for characters from Honoré de Balzac, Anthony Trollope, Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Hemingway. The premise for understanding characters in all the cases is that they seem real.

The focus in the psychological model is completely on characters themselves; they possess meaning, and seem sensible, as "they reflect or are consistent with patterns of behaviour or personality more or less familiar to us through our contact with or knowledge of real people" (442). These characters often seem to have problems and their analysis becomes a kind of case study in a similar fashion it takes place in psychotherapy: the analyst works towards identifying a particular neurosis by which the logic or coherence of a fictional character can be achieved. Mrs. Teresa Gibbons's obsession with her beauty, her hobbies such as cultivating a rose garden and collecting paper clippings of violent incidents in real life, and her faith in religion are related to her psychological make-up; Harry Trotter's (Strange Fugitive) inability to feel happy or free in his new-found career of bootlegging is traced to his relationship with his mother and his wife, Vera; and many of the characters in Callaghan's later fiction are identified as psychologically complex and are read as case studies. The analysis of character, later in this chapter, shows that psychological model alone is insufficient to explain the way characters are constructed in Callaghan's fiction.

Gerald Mead identifies a contrasting approach to all the models discussed above, but located within referential criticism. Fictional characters are no longer seen real-life individuals, "but rather as more or less credible illustrations or exempla of a social, cultural, or philosophic period or condition" (442). He detects in the novels of Kafka, Camus, and Becket characters that are illustrations of modern alienated man. Further,
"contradictions and inconsistencies" in contemporary characters are seen as signs of "fragmentation, decentering or even loss of "self" in the postmodern crisis" (442). The reason we find them convincing, says Mead, is because they are representations of "social or ideological types, or that they reflect or are familiar images and myths of cultural codes" (443). He identifies as influential practitioners of this criticism, Roland Barthes's study of Balzac's "Sarrasine" in *S/Z*, Umberto Eco's studies on James Bond and Superman, and Philippe Sollers in *Logiques*. Although Mead's observations on this last approach are contributory to the present chapter on character, it needs a more detailed formulation. He leaves it unnamed, but it is clear from his description that he is pointing to semiotic approach, which needs to be elaborated more clearly. He provides an opportunity, however, to turn our attention towards the second approach to literary character, textual criticism.

Textual criticism aims at understanding or comprehending character by focussing on factors that occur within the text, that is, it turns away from exterior reference. Various projects within textual criticism have been identified as formalist, structuralist, actantial and so on. The textual approach does not reject the referential world completely, but "it claims that the main source of our understanding and comprehension of fictional characters is to be found in elements that are specific to the text" (Mead 443). More specifically, novel becomes a place where we can study, as Jonathan Culler observes, "the semiotic process in its fullest scope: the creation and organization of signs not simply in order to produce meaning but in order to produce a human world charged with meaning" (Culler 189). In other words, in textual criticism, we may or may not detect a world analogous to the real world, but we certainly confront an alternative world
“charged with meaning.” Characters are discussed and interpreted according to the models of worlds produced within the texts.

Mead discusses textual criticism from a general perspective, by dividing it into two main branches: first, to discover and describe the presence and sense of individual characters through “the unique textual configuration of specific novels”; second, there is an attempt to discover in a particular fictional character elements common to all characters of that type. Accordingly, Philo in Callaghan’s A Time for Judas emerges as a unique individual not by his thoughts, sentiments or actions, but by the focus of narration (first person narrator/character) that allows Callaghan to express Philo’s thoughts and his consciousness in a particular way. Textual criticism stresses the relational aspect of characters and their interaction with other elements of the text in order for the characters to be recognized and understood.

Another model that Mead identifies within textual criticism seeks to explain the coherence of characters and our understanding of them by focussing on the “production” of the characters. The potentials of a character—traits, features, behaviour, etc—have to be “announced, highlighted and made to interact and so define themselves” to enable readers understand it (444).

A more formal approach in the textual criticism is the effort to create an ordered system for fiction. Mead describes this effort as “a search for a finite number of distinctive elements in fiction and a fixed number of rules that govern the use of these elements. It is, in other words, an effort to discover lexical items and syntactic rules for fiction” (445). Such a system would act as a langue and would allow an infinite number of possible combinations, an infinite variety of texts and characters (parole). Characters
become comprehensible as they are governed by finite elements, but they will be recognized as individuals when the combinations are unique. Within this approach, there is another perspective where fictional characters are seen “primarily as action relationships in plot structures. Characters are defined and understood by the position they occupy in the dynamics of plot” (445). To be more precise, they are more or less viewed as “cause-and-effect factors” in plot, while other references in the text work towards naturalizing a character’s role, so that the character could be integrated into the dimensions of cultural context. Another important feature of this branch of textual criticism is that it finds meaning, source of character identification, and understanding in the patterns and relationships themselves.

Mead’s concern in this essay is to understand the two major approaches to character from the point of view of character as a life-like person, those factors that get into our understanding and recognition of characters. Although his views on textual approach are illuminating, they need to be anchored in the respective theoretical frameworks of which they are the manifestations. Such a task will bring forth an entirely contrasting approach to character by those theories.

To begin with, what Mead describes as formal approach and later identifies characters as action relationships in plot structures, are the basic concepts of formalism and structuralism. Mead’s discussion of textual approach is still dependent on the correlation between characters and real individuals in the outside world. A discussion of formalist and structuralist approach to character (which is entirely textual) will reveal a radical formulation of character in these theories. In the first place, structuralism
repudiates the notions of individuality and rich psychological coherence that the traditional approach to character believes in. As Culler points out:

Stress on the interpersonal and conventional systems which traverse the individual, which make him a space in which forces and events meet rather than an individuated essence, leads to a rejection of a prevalent conception of character in the novel: that the most successful and ‘living’ characters are richly delineated autonomous wholes, clearly distinguished from others by physical and psychological characteristics. This notion of character, structuralists would say, is a myth. (230)

This new approach to character is due to the radical changes in the conception of language and its effects on the various aspects of literature.

The mimetic quality of language, that is, language is capable of representing the external reality of the world was the dominant philosophy prevalent until the second decade of the twentieth century. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, theory of art was expounded as mimesis (imitation of life). The rise of the novel in the early eighteenth century was still based on the mimetic theory, with its picaresque characters bearing close semblance with people in real life. Victorian theorists of fiction regarded novel as serious narrative and insisted upon the aesthetics of verisimilitude. They distinguished between romance (light entertainment) and novel (true to life). They expected plot to be coherent and characters to be equally consistent and psychologically rich. With the advent of New Criticism, the mimetic considerations or fidelity to life in the realm of art were disregarded. A remarkable transition occurred when the Russian formalists and the structuralist linguists challenged the mimetic tradition of literary language, founding their
argument on a revolutilonalized philosophical thought pattern—that language was not
mimetic but a system of signs. As this revolutionary conception of language and its effect
on literature have already been explained in the previous chapter, the focus here will be
on its implications for novel and character. Characters in many modern writers such as
Virgina Woolf, William Faulkner, Anthony Trollope, Nathalie Sarraute, and Robbe-
Grillet cannot be treated according to nineteenth-century models. They demand a new
theoretical formulation for their intelligibility.

The traditional model of nineteenth-century novels with their individuated
caracters fails before the complex protagonists of modern fiction or the picaresque
heroes of eighteenth century novels. Interestingly, Culler observes, “the effect of these
modern texts with their relatively anonymous heroes depends on the traditional
expectations concerning character which the novel exposes and undermines” (231). In
most of these texts, characters begin with solid presence, but as the novel progresses, they
begin to dissolve: individuality is rejected. This is the historical distinction structuralism
makes in order to change the notion of rich and life-like characters. Structuralism
challenges the reliance on the traditional notions of “truthfulness and empirical
distinctiveness,” which the novel is supposed to possess. It calls for the recognition of
“artifice in the construction of characters” (Culler 232). It is worth noting the statement
that Culler quotes from Martin Price’s essay, “The Other Self”: “The character we admire
as the result of loving attention is something constructed by conventions as arbitrary as
any other, and we can only hope to recover an art by recognizing it as art” (Culler 232).
In this respect, structuralism intends to go beyond the notion of verisimilitude, and
concentrate on the production of characters. Thus, the focus will be on an investigation of
“system of conventions that determines the notions of fullness and completeness operative in a given novel or type of novel and governs the selection and organization of details” (Culler 232).

Structuralists have followed the lead taken by Vladimir Propp’s theory of the roles or functions that characters assume in fiction and have tried to develop and refine it. Structuralists define character as a participant with an intention to disdain from defining character in terms of psychological essences (as a being). Culler refers to this as moving too readily from one extreme to another, because the roles that structuralism proposes are reductive and are directly dependent on plot. In his opinion, there remains “an immense residue,” the organization of which should be analyzed by the structuralists rather than to be ignored.

As noted already in the first chapter, Propp isolated seven roles assumed by characters in the folktale: the villain, the helper, the donor, the sought-for-person and her father, the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero. Propp did not claim that these roles were universal, but A. J. Greimas undertakes to provide a set of universal roles (actants). Greimas produces actantial model (based on sentence structure), which forms the basis of any semantic ‘spectacle’ (sentence or story). Signification, in Greimas’s view, occurs only when it is grasped as an actantial structure. He reduces seven ‘spheres of action’ of Propp into three ‘actantial categories,’ that is, three sets of binary oppositions, into which all the actants can be fitted, and which will generate all the actors of the story: 1) Subject versus Object (sujet versus objet); 2) Sender versus Receiver (destinateur versus destinataire); and 3) Helper and Opponent (adjuvant versus opposant). Greimas’s model consists of these categories as representing some sort of ‘phonemic’ level of analysis,
thus, proposing the required ‘syntactic’ level of analysis—that is, an account of the ways in which these elements may be joined together to form narratives. Greimas’s ‘grammar’ of the narrative is complete when both the levels are achieved. Culler represents the syntactic and thematic relation of the above actants in the following manner:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Destinateur} & \text{objet} & \text{destinataire} \\
\text{Adjuvant} & \text{sujet} & \text{opposant} \\
\end{array}
\]

He shows Propp’s roles in the same form to obtain the following diagram:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Dispatcher} & \text{Sought-for-person} & \text{Hero} \\
\text{Donor and Hero} & \text{Villian and Helper} & \text{False Hero} \\
\end{array}
\]

(Culler 233)

The actantial model focuses on the object which is desired and pursued by the subject and is placed between the sender and the receiver. Helper and Opponent are treated as projections of the subject himself.

Culler raises some objections to Greimas’s model and points out certain shortcomings, which are worth noting. In his view, although all narratives involve a character seeking something and encountering internal or external help and opposition, the relationship between a sender and a receiver cannot be justified to be of the same nature. Also, he notes that none of Propp’s seven roles corresponds with that of the receiver; Greimas forces himself to argue that the peculiar feature of the folktale is that hero is both subject and receiver. This contradicts the claim that the dispatcher is the
sender, because he generally does not give the hero anything; it is, in fact, the role of the helper or of the sought-for-person's father who in some cases may grant the hero the object of his quest. Thus Culler opines, "anyone using the model to study a variety of stories will need to exercise considerable ingenuity in discovering appropriate senders and receivers" (234). Greimas makes another claim that his model will enable one to establish a typology of stories by grouping together those stories in which the same two roles are fused in a single character. He gives examples of the subject and receiver fused together in folktales. Culler, however, notes that this claim will not take us very far; fusion of subject and receiver will be true of most of the tales and novels, thus prompting us to class them together and distinguish them from any story where the hero is not the receiver. The final objection that Culler raises against Greimas is that his model does not show much evidence as to how it would work in practice. He formulates a principle to identify where exactly the problem lies in applying this model. When uncertainty about actants of each role in a particular novel represents a thematic problem or decision, then the model correctly locates it and thus becomes an appropriate tool; on the other hand, if theme is relatively clear but difficult to state in terms of the model, then these difficulties count against the model. Culler illustrates this with an example from *Madam Bovary*:

Subject – Emma, Object – Happiness, Sender – Romantic literature, Receiver – Emma, Helper – Leon, Rodolphe, Opponent – Charles, Yonville, Rodolphe. The difficulty in deciding whether Rodolphe (and even Leon) is only a helper or an opponent is not related to thematic problem in the novel. In simple terms, it can be stated that Emma tries to find happiness with each of them and fails, but this is difficult to state in terms of Greimas's model. In conclusion, we can agree with Culler's observation:
In reading a novel we do, presumably, make use of some general hypotheses concerning possible roles. . . . But if the claim is that we attempt subconsciously to fill these six roles, apportioning characters among them, one can only regret that no evidence has been adduced to show that this is the case. (235)

Like Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov is concerned with a universal ‘grammar’ of narrative. As the salient features of his model have been discussed in the previous chapter, the focus here is on the role character assumes in his scheme. Character figures as one of the units (treated as “parts of speech”), which makes up propositions and sequences, which in turn are the two fundamental units of structure. Characters are seen as nouns, their attributes as adjectives and their actions as verbs. In *Grammaire du Décaméron* (1969) each character is defined by its combination with either an attribute or a verb. Terence Hawkes points out that all attributes are reduced to three ‘adjectival’ categories; states, interior properties and exterior conditions. All actions are reducible to three ‘verbs’; ‘to modify a situation’; ‘to transgress’; and ‘to punish’ (97). Thus there will be a variety of defining a character as it combines with these subcategories. Todorov argues, “the grammatical subject is always without internal properties; these can come only from its momentary conjunction with a predicate” (qtd. in Culler 235). In other words, characters are subjects of a group of predicates that the reader adds up during the process of reading. Both the models by Greimas and Todorov prompt Culler to raise an important question: “Do we, in reading, simply add together the actions and attributes of an individual character, drawing from them a conception of personality and role, or are we guided in this process by formal expectations about the roles that need to be filled?”
(235). True to his structuralist orientation, Culler prefers the latter possibility in his question, and selects Northrop Frye's categories in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) as the most suitable ones.

Frye's categories—Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, Irony and Satire are worked out with respect to the four generic *mythoi* of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Frye argues: “All lifelike characters, whether in drama or fiction, owe their consistency to the appropriateness of the stock type which belongs to their dramatic function. That stock type is not the character but it is as necessary to the character as a skeleton is to the actor who plays it” (172). In other words, when Frye speaks of typical characters, he is not trying to reduce life-like characters to stock types, but uses them as the means to recognize the function (being the most important aspect of characterization) of various characters within a particular narrative structure. He identifies four types of comic characters: The *alazon* or impostor, the *eiron* or self-deprecator, the *bomolochoi* or the buffoons, and *agroikos* or the churlish, literary rustic. The contrast between the *eiron* and the *alazon* forms the basic of comic action, and that between the buffoon and the churl polarizes the comic mood. For each of these categories Frye identifies various stock figures, of which cultural codes contain models: for the *alazon* group there is the *senex iratus* or heavy father, the *miles gloriosus* or braggart, the fop or coxcomb, the pedant. The characterization of romance, according to Frye, follows its general dialectic structure (good/bad, black/white, etc), and characters tend to be either for or against the quest, which is the form of romance. Thus “every typical character in romance tends to have his moral opposite confronting him like black and white pieces in a chess game” (195). Frye identifies four poles of characterization in a similar fashion to that of comedy. The
struggle between the hero and his enemy corresponds to the comic contest of eiron and alazon. The nature-spirits (such as nymphs, half-wild creatures, etc) of romance find parallel to the buffoon or master of ceremonies in comedy; they function to intensify and provide a focus for the romantic mood. The last type, which can correspond to the agroikos in comedy—the refuser of festivity or rustic clown—is left for future attempts. Similarly, in tragedy the tragic hero belongs to the alazon group, for eiron, there may be a variety of agents, from wrathful gods to hypocritical villains, or it may be an invisible force known only by its effects, the tragic contrast (in the sense of increasing or focussing the tragic mood) to the buffoon is found in the suppliant, and lastly, a tragic counterpart of the comic refuser of festivity may be the plain dealer (in the form of a faithful friend of the hero or the chorus figure) who refuses the tragic movement toward catastrophe.

Frye’s claim, as Culler points out, is not that each character in a play or novel will precisely fit into one of the above categories, but rather that these models guide the perception and creation of character, enabling us to compose the comic, romantic or tragic situations and attribute to each character an intelligible role.

Unlike Frye who provides basic roles for characters, Roland Barthes provides an account of the process of constructing a character with the help of textual elements and the codes operating through the text. Character figures in his discussion of the semic code in S/Z (1970). During the activity of reading, readers combine various details and interpret them to form characters. Barthes shows how it is possible to select from each sentence or passage the elements appropriate to construct character. The cultural codes manifest in the text help us derive the connotations from these elements that will in turn
involve naming such connotations. Naming is crucial to the process of reading; as Barthes says:

To say that Sarrasine is ‘alternatively active and passive’ is to commit the reader to finding in his character something ‘which does not take’, to commit him to naming this something. Thus begins a process of naming: to read is to struggle to name; it is to make sentences of the text undergo a semantic transformation. (98-9)

The process of naming is like sliding from one name to another as the reading continues and as new semantic features are revealed. Character is formed when one succeeds in naming a series of semes that are capable of establishing a pattern. For example, Sarrasine becomes a combination of turbulence, artistic ability, independence, violence, excess, femininity, etc. Thus the proper name given to a character becomes the sum of various series of semes. In Barthes’s words: “the proper name permits the character to exist outside of semantic features, whose sum nevertheless wholly constitutes him” (197).

As noted already in the previous chapter, connotation forms an important element within Barthes’s semiotics. He identifies it as an agency of ideology, because what is involved in deriving connotations out of denotations is our previous knowledge of codes and norms prevalent in the society. As Culler observes:

The process of selecting and organizing semes is governed by an ideology of character, implicit models of psychological coherence which indicate what sorts of things are possible as character traits, how these traits can coexist and form wholes, or at least which traits coexist without difficulty
and which are necessarily opposed in ways that produce tension and ambiguity. (237)

Although these notions are often drawn from non-literary experience, Culler warns us that we should not forget the extent to which they are literary conventions. Different models of characters (in the sense of broader cultural models), as shown in Frye's categories, are literary constructs, which assist the readers in selecting semantic features to add to a proper name. The operation of semic code is dependent upon the literary stereotypes that provide its elementary modes of coherence, but the code itself remains open-ended. Barthes stresses the fact that seme is only an avenue of meaning, it is not possible to decipher what lies at the end. The models proposed by Propp, Greimas, Todorov and Frye are reductive, since character, for them, is merely one of the constituents of the grammar of plot. They are more interested in deriving the grammar of plot rather than explaining the process through which characters produce meaning in a text. This process can be explained through a semiotic approach to character.

In the discussion of all of the formalist and structuralist approaches discussed above Mead's formulations on textual approach to character can be discerned, but there is one more approach that seems to bridge the gap between the representational and textual approaches by imbibing the salient features of both. This last approach, often classified under textual criticism, Mead names as semiotic approach. Although structuralism is built on the concepts of semiotics, it pays more attention to structure and tends to view character as performing certain identifiable roles. Semiotics, on the other hand, focuses on the character itself, as a linguistic sign, and studies its mode of production and ways of signification.
From the Theophrastan characters to those characters in Shakespeare, Fielding, Sterne, Jane Austen, and Dickens, we can detect the awareness of distance between sign and fact. We find characters in these writers corresponding to the original meaning of the Greek term, *kharattein*, defined as a mark made by writing or engraving instrument. Harold Fisch notes that Theophrastan characters are built upon the principle of antithesis, almost on the Saussurean concept of linguistic sign as resulting from the system of differences. In the eighteenth-century novel, too, we find evidence of character sketch as creation of a sign; the picaresque characters are built upon the principle of binary opposition, as can be seen in Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*. Sterne’s characters in *Tristram Shandy* are a direct challenge to the notion of character as a possible, human, three-dimensional entity. Nineteenth-century novel is said to be against the “types” of earlier novels, and creating life-like characters; yet, there too, we can find characters that are created as signs, especially, in the novels of Dickens, Jane Austen, Eliot, and so on. The modern novel radically challenges the nineteenth-century “round,” coherent and real life characters by characters that are defined solely by semiotic means. Just as man is a sign producing and sign-using animal, according to Peirce, character in a novel is understood not as an autonomous and individual being, but as an entity whose overall understanding is grasped through its relation to other signs within the system, and whose identity is unstable. With the postmodernist novel, the conception of character undergoes even more a radical change; character is “dismantled” in novels by writers such as Nabokov, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, etc. These writers question the assumption that signs yield definite signifieds, and draw attention to the “polysemic” nature of character just as novel is thought to be “polysemic” (Barthes’s term for infinite play of meanings). Fisch’s essay,
“Character as Linguistic Sign” provides illuminating insights into the notion of character as a linguistic sign.

Fisch is of the opinion that “character,” though used to signify human personality, is still used as a verbal sign in literature. In such usage, there is essentially the notion of “character” as belonging to “écriture,” “to a linguistic ordering of reality” (593). He illustrates this in various characters from plays and novels of different periods. In the character of Angelo in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, he identifies the problem of finding a correlation between the externality of mere inscription (“Angelo”) and a reading of the inner self. In the play, there is no way of discovering the inner self of Angelo, and this leads Fisch to conclude that there is no assured relation between sign and inward condition, between signifier and signified. In his second illustration, Fisch points to the system of differences operating in characterization in Joseph Hall’s (in the tradition of Theophrastus) *Characterisms of Virtues and Vices* (1608). Each character is not only defined by contraries (“the absence of the present, the presence of the absent”), but such contraries also “constitute the mode of interaction between characters” (Fisch 595). Hall’s procedure of setting characters in parallel groups (Virtue/Vice, Honest man/Hypocrite, etc) where the positive characters are solely defined by their opposites reflects the two divided sets of signs. The writer’s intention here, says Fisch, is not to record the human scene, but to give “order and distinctiveness to the scene through language and thus make it available to our understanding” (596). It reflects a tendency in human beings, not only to “know” people, but also to classify them according to “a system of signs.” Thus Fisch concludes: “Hall and his followers provided their generation . . . semiological handbooks—guides to the grammar of characterization. . . . Character
studies formalized in this way give us a kind of *langue*, with the concreteness, the adventitiousness of *parole* almost totally absent” (596).

Fisch proceeds to show this tendency among novelists too. According to him the principle of binary opposition is clearly identifiable in the characters of Trulliber and Adams in Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*—opposed and labelled as “Nature and Culture or Faith and Works” (598); and in the black-white contrast of Tom Jones (“picaro on the outside and a pearl within”) and Master Blifil (“hypocrite, fair on the outside and corrupt within”) in *Tom Jones* (598). Similarly, Fisch observes that Jane Austen, in the characters of Marianne and Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* is not evidently seizing their “human essence,” but the contrast of Sense and Sensibility—“two signs differentiated by a neat phonemic divergence” (598). In Callaghan’s fiction, too, we find characters constructed on the principle of binary oppositions—sacred and profane in the characters of Father Dowling and Ronnie and Midge in *Such Is My Beloved*; nature and culture in the characters of Peggy and McAlpine in *The Loved and the Lost*, and so on—where each character is not only defined by its opposite, but also by its interaction with other characters who form the signifying chain. Callaghan, however, does not stop at delineating characters as binary oppositions; he also brings in opposed meanings in a single character to reveal the ideology behind the construction of binary oppositions. The study of character in Callaghan’s fiction, in the later pages of this chapter, illustrates this point.

The most significant illustrations that follow Fisch’s argument are found in his discussion of Sterne’s use of hobbyhorses and Dickens’s use of caricatures. Fisch identifies the hobbyhorses Uncle Toby (fortification) and Walter Shandy (speculative
knowledge) are obsessed with in Tristram Shandy as “a literary or linguistic tool, a mode of identifying by means of a sign. It has, in short, a semiotic rather than a psychological function” (599). He rightly points out that Sterne, by his theory of “hobbyhorses,” reduces “to absurdity the notion of characters as a mode of description capable of truly defining and representing human person” (598-599). Whereas Sterne defines his characters by hobbyhorses, Dickens achieves it by a phrase or a gesture. Fisch recognizes Dickens’s mastery of the art of caricature as directly related to semiotics. “The art of caricature” as Fisch observes:

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\text{does not signify what is already in the world; rather it imposes a mark on the world, and that mark is henceforward going to be indelible. When the caricature artist has picked the sign of the figure he is drawing—a furled umbrella, a beaked nose, a twitch of the mouth—we henceforward see that person as we had not seen him before. The world does not yield these signs, it is rather the signs which come to designate and define the world. (emphasis added 599)}
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The words in emphasis highlight an important concept which Barthes put forward in Mythologies (1957): what go into the making of a sign are, individual’s intention and society’s conventions. Accordingly, Fisch notes that after reading Dickens’s novels we tend to discover such characters as Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Podsnap, and Mr. Wemmick in the real world. Thus literature, especially language, is not only capable of signifying but is also capable of marking people and things in the world.

With the advent of the modern novel, notes Fisch, there is less confidence in our capacity to “read” the signs correctly in both fictional characters and living persons. The
reason for this is found in the fact that the meaning of sign is shifting and unstable. He chooses Nathaniel Hawthorne’s two novels—*The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter* to illustrate the above point. In the former novel, Holgrave is a kind of engraver working in fixed impressions, the old stereotypes of the Puritan period. But he lacks reverence for what is fixed and unsettles everything. Similarly, in the latter novel, the Scarlet Letter (Fisch considers it an embroidered or engraved “character”) is initiated as a clear sign for Hester’s sinfulness, but it is later imprinted on Dimmesdale’s flesh, thus giving rise to multiple interpretations. Fisch explains the reason behind destabilization of single or fixed meaning of signs:

> For the signs formerly imposed on the human scene no longer possess the neatness and permanence they once had. There is as a result less confidence in the stable identity of those human forms of personality which seemingly inhabit the world. They too have become little more than wandering signifiers. (601)

Such a view indicates that there are no fixed identities, but “only signs suspended in a void” (601). In other words, it is what postmodernists have called as “the death of the hero” (Cixous 387). Character who once occupied a privileged position in the novel or the play, as the centre of a stage, is not immortal anymore. Attention in the postmodern era has been drawn towards unmasking the character and studying the language which creates subjectivity, which in turn, is multiple and changeable as well. Closely associated with the idea of character is subjectivity, as understood after Lacan’s innovative theory of the split subject. Later in this chapter, characters in Callaghan’s novels are approached as subjects, since they enact the dilemma of a subject caught between conscious
expectations and unconscious desires; thereby, his characters disavow the ideas of coherence, autonomy, and consistency usually attached to literary character. The critique of Saussurean linguistic sign as a stable entity changes the conception of character too. Cixous explores the reasons for the radical changes that have taken place in understanding character. For a better understanding, her argument can be divided into two parts: "character" as conceived in the traditional criticism, and character as seen now.

Cixous treats "character" from Lacanian psychoanalytic point of view. She denounces the very conception of "character," declaring it as an adjunct of traditional discussions on literature, and explains how such a conception has taken place. To understand her explanation, it is necessary to know briefly four important terms (taken from Lacan) that find prominent place in Cixous's argument: imaginary, ego, symbolic, and subject. Imaginary refers to an early state in the infant's development, a condition where there is no clear distinction between subject and object, itself and the external world. In this pre-Oedipal state, the child lives in a 'symbiotic' relation with its mother's body. Within this imaginary state of being, the child's first development of an ego, of an integrated self-image occurs which is referred to as "mirror-stage." The child, who is physically uncoordinated, finds in the reflection a satisfying unified image of itself—although its relation to this image is still of an imaginary kind, a blurring of subject and object—it begins to construct a centre of self. This self-recognition, Lacan insists, is misrecognition; the subject apprehends itself only by means of a fictional construct whose defining characteristics (coherence and unity) it does not share. The sense of arriving at an 'I' is by finding that 'I' reflected back to ourselves by some object or person in the world. Hence, the imaginary for Lacan is precisely this realm of images in which we
make identifications, but in the very act of doing so we are led to misperceive and misrecognize ourselves.

The *imaginary* state of being leads to the development of ego. As the child grows up, it will continue to make imaginary identifications with objects, and this is how its *ego* is built up. Terry Eagleton describes what is ego for Lacan: "the ego is just this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify" (143). In the *imaginary* phase, the self is 'dyadic' in structure (child, and the mother who represents external reality), but soon, it gives way to a 'triadic' one. This happens when the father enters upon and initiates the child into the *symbolic* world of which he is the first representation. By accepting the sexual difference that is signified by father the subject undergoes the process of socialization. Another important feature of this process is the acquisition of language that further emphasizes the differences—the child unconsciously learns that signs have meaning only by differences with other signs and that signs presuppose the absence of the object they signify. Through this, it learns that its identity as a subject is comprised by its relations of differences and similarity to the other subjects around. This denotes the passage from the imaginary world to what Lacan calls the "symbolic order," which Eagleton describes as "the pre-given social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society" (145). The *subject* formed by this process is a 'split' one, as it is divided between the conscious existence of ego and the unconscious desire. The child learns that it cannot possess anything fully, cannot have direct access to reality; all that it has is language where one signifier implies another, and that another, and so on. Eagleton best describes this state:
the 'metaphorical' world of the mirror has yielded ground to the 'metonymic' world of language. Along this metonymic chain of signifiers, meanings, or signifieds, will be produced; but no object or person can ever be fully 'present' in this chain, because as we have seen with Derrida its effect is to divide and differentiate all identities. (145)

Lacan describes this endless movement from one signifier to another as 'desire,' with the hope to fill the lack (loss of unified identity with the mother's body, the 'real' which lies outside the symbolic order).

Cixous makes use of the above-defined terms of Lacan for her explanation of what is a character. As we know, the imaginary state of being enters the symbolic and becomes not only its material, but is also subordinate to the symbolic. In her view, 'socialization' is attained when the production of the imaginary is controlled, by repressing the unconscious and by relegating the Ego to its "civil" place in the social system. In the semiotic sense, Eagleton describes the unconscious as "a continual movement and activity of signifiers, whose signifieds are often inaccessible to us because they are repressed" (146). Thus the unconscious is always indefinite and continually signifying, without ever arriving at the final meaning. If the same process takes place with regard to conscious life, then human beings cannot function or speak coherently at all. That is why, consciousness or the Ego represses the unconscious, and provisionally associates words to meanings. Consciousness strives to achieve some sense of human beings as reasonably unified, coherent selves, but this process takes place only at the imaginary level of the ego, because "any attempt to convey a whole, unblemished meaning in speech or script," says Eagleton, "is a pre-Freudian illusion" (147). Cixous
expresses a similar view when she tries to define what the concept of character means to her:

A "character" is always in store for the subject along the chain where everything is coded in advance. . . . Now, if "I"—true subject, subject of the unconscious—am what I can be, "I" am always on the run.

It is precisely this open, unpredictable, piercing part of the subject, this infinite potential to rise up, that the "concept" of "character" excludes in advance. Under the reign of this "concept," the mass of Egos would be reduced to the absolute monarch that "character" wants to be . . . that is, if the unconscious could be cancelled out. (384)

Since the unconscious cannot be "cancelled out," "character," for Cixous, can have sense only as a "Figure" that can be used in semiotics: it can function as a social sign in relation to other signs within a text. However, if the text supports the existence of "character," then it is done in accordance with representationalism, which is mainly aimed at communicability. "The marketable form of literature," says Cixous "is closely related to that familiar, decipherable human sign which "character" claims to be . . ." (385). Here, "character" has referents to which he alludes, and has essential traits, which can assure the readers that he is true, and identifiable. In other words, traditional readers look at text and character as iconic representations of reality, a simulacrum where signifiers yield definite signifieds. In Cixous's view, the ideology which underlies such a "fetishization of "character" is that of an "I" who is believed to be "a whole subject" (that of the "character" as well as that of the author), conscious, knowable. . . . (385).
The ideology to which Cixous points, is accomplished in the name of reality principle, and she traces the reason for such a view in the semantic history of the word character—kharattein:

It is first the mark, the drawn, written, preserved sign; then, the title, natural or legal, which confers a rank, a right. . . . A mark, then, by which the “character” is assured to be that which has been characterized and refers back to the stamp, to the origin. (386)

In its lexical evolution, the word “character” also includes the meaning, the art of the portrait which confers the distinguishing mark and thus differentiates one person from another. It is designed more to function as a decisive element in the social coding, because it characterizes people. In this sense, the personage becomes, “in the final analysis, the role of roles” (386). Readers, when they confront a “character,” engage themselves in a speculative operation where Ego’s “(re)appropriation” of itself takes place. “Character” occupies a privileged position in literature, and without him/her, no text exists. Hence, Cixous observes, the disappearance of the “character” in the postmodern novel is disturbing to many readers who consider it a murder, a vacuum, and draw back from such a text where they cannot identify with anybody.

Cixous, however, clarifies that the “hero” or “character,” “the captor of the imaginary” is not dead, but merely brought out of his illusion, what she terms as “unmasked.” Unmasking of the character, as Cixous explains:

does not mean revealed! But rather denounced, reduced to his reality as simulacrum, brought back to the mask as mask. He is given up then to the complexity of his subjectivity, to his multiplicity, to his off-center
position, to his permanent escapade: like the author, he disappears only to be multiplied, attains the self only to be, in the same instant, differentiated into a trans-subjective effervescence. (387)

The reference to “trans-subjective effervescence” recalls Benveniste’s views on the relationship among language, discourse and subjectivity, discussed in the first chapter. Benveniste dismantles the ubiquitous, transcendental “I” of Decartes, by proving that the personal pronouns “I” and “You” emanate meaning periodically in a discourse, and that these signifiers are reversible. Cixous, too, draws attention to the constructed nature of subjectivity when she warns against being trapped, if we do not pay attention to the issues related to subject, and its “subjectification.” What we take as the true subject is merely its mask, because “subject” is an effect of the unconscious, the production of which never stops. Thus Cixous describes the unconscious as “unanalyzable” and “uncharacterizable” (387). For her, “I” is multiple, diverse and “insubordinable,” and therefore, resisting subjugation in the name of “character.” In the texts which exemplify these notions, “character” or “personage” is Nobody; even when he is presented as a “character,” a part of his subjectivity remains unassigned. In addition to defying codification, Cixous says:

> These texts baffle every attempt at summarization of meaning and limiting, repressive interpretation. The subject flounders here in the exploded multiplicity of its states, shattering the homogeneity of the ego of unawareness, spreading out in every possible direction, into every possible contradiction, transegoistically. (388)
Thus subjectivity can neither be covered by, nor contained in, nor designated by “character.” Cixous finds such examples of inadequacy of “character” in novels by writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Henry James and even in Shakespeare.

Like Cixous, Erving Goffman sees social interaction in daily life from a “dramaturgical perspective” and expresses similar views regarding character. According to Goffman, we are all performers and audience on the universal stage of society, where the audience recognize the acting codes enacted by performers. In other words, people are masked and when on some occasions the mask is removed, “the individual who performs the character will be seen for what he largely is, a solitary player involved in a harried concern for his production. Behind many masks and many characters, each performer tends to wear a single look, a naked unsocialized look” (207). Fisch, who extrapolates Goffman’s views in his essay, “Character as Linguistic Sign” reaches similar conclusion on character as that of Cixous:

The “characters” of other people that we draw in our minds or that they adopt for our benefit are mere phantoms. . . . We construct characters for other people, we categorize them, attribute properties to them such as anger, greed, amiability, placing them as objects in the world. We also reflect upon our own selves, turning ourselves into objects. But such reflection carries with it the shadow of negation, of nothingness, it has no relation to Being-in-itself, to the plenitude of a subjective existence which cannot be known or described and certainly cannot be rendered on the stage. (602-603)
Both Fisch and Cixous emphasize the impossibility of finding a true connection between persons and their representations, thus paving a new way to look at character, that is, to come to terms with the relationship between the signifier and the signified which is always changing and multiple.

From various theoretical formulations, conceptions, and perspectives discussed above, it is evident that character is not a simple aspect of fiction. Although in most theoretical discussions of literary character, the mimetic or representational dimension is predominant, recent interest in the constructional or semiotic dimension of character provides a different perspective. There is a shift in focus of interest: from an attempt to test the correlation of real life individuals with those in fiction to an attempt to examine the semiotic conventions (textual elements, codes, norms and ideologies) that are operative in the construction or dissolution of a character. Such a shift is not only due to the radical changes in the philosophical conception of language and the reality it produces (discussed above) but also due to the changes in the conception of subject or self. An amalgamation of thoughts from recent investigations in linguistics, psychoanalysis and semiotics has heralded a new critical era where many of our traditional ways of studying literature have undergone great transformation. In this context, characters in Callaghan’s fiction require a reassessment with a view to understanding the means through which they are constructed. The discussion of novels in the following pages illustrates characters in his fiction as signs and subjects, rather than as whole, individualized selves. His characters have been largely discussed from a referential point of view, the important versions of which need to be discussed briefly.
Critics, who consider Callaghan a religious writer, treat his characters as symbols or as enacting empirical and spiritual conflicts. In “Introduction” to Such Is My Beloved, Malcolm Ross undertakes a detailed analysis of the traditional symbolism of Catholic art in Such Is My Beloved, and interprets Father Dowling’s madness at the end of the novel as a symbol of love’s restoration in the extremity of sacrifice. He prefers a symbolic reading of the novel to that of allegorical. In contrast to Ross, Woodcock places Callaghan in the company of “moralist writers” such as John Bunyan, Jonathan Swift, George Orwell and Andre Gide and concludes that his works fail or succeed “according to the success with which he [Callaghan] manipulates the element of parable within it” (93). In this perspective, character is treated as a mere exemplification of themes, which are the dominant textual elements in a parable. For Woodcock, the characters and structures of action in the three novels of the thirties Such Is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth (1935) and More Joy in Heaven (1937) are not realistic, but allegorical. As Woodcock says:

Considered as probable human beings, Father Dowling and Kip Caley are absurd; considered as the God’s Fools of moral allegory they at once assume authenticity. Similarly the two Aikenheads, Michael and his father Andrew in They Shall Inherit the Earth, are radically simplified individuals who live fully only in terms of their essential moral predicament. (97)

In the classic opposition between innocence and diabolic, moral man and immoral society (depicted in some minor characters) the central characters struggle, not only in their hearts but also in a conscienceless society. Woodcock finds it difficult to interpret
characters in the later novels such as *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), *The Many Colored Coat* (1960), and *A Passion in Rome* (1961), because he does not find them as embodying specific themes like those novels of the thirties. Thus he concludes that the characterization in these later novels “hovers uneasily between the sharpness of caricature and the flabbiness of sentimental pseudo-realism” (101). Such an evaluation of characters in these novels is due to Woodcock’s focus on allegorical reading of Callaghan’s novels.

As against Woodcock’s allegorical approach, Hugo McPherson moves in another extreme direction in believing that the success of Callaghan’s novels depends on readers’ willingness to accept his “characters as living men,” because Callaghan, like T.S. Eliot, is concerned with portraying “the modern vision of human condition” (61). For McPherson, Callaghan is a religious novelist, who, by situating the events to function “simultaneously as realistic action and symbolic action,” in fact, reveals “the empirical and spiritual conflicts of his protagonists” (62). Rejecting strict religious interpretations of Callaghan’s fiction, Judith Kendle suggests that Callaghan’s moral philosophy owes as much to aesthetic considerations as it does to Roman Catholic doctrine. In Callaghan’s fiction, Kendle notes, Bible fades more and more into literature, traditional symbols are put to literary use and the artist is identified with a merciful god. In short, Callaghan makes a religion of art. Thus Harry Lane of *The Many Colored Coat* and Sam Raymond of *A Passion in Rome* are seen as Callaghan’s surrogates, seekers after truth.

Critics who identify Christian humanism or personalism in Callaghan’s novels (under the influence of Jacques Maritain) interpret characters as carrying out the themes of individual moral freedom, sainthood and the supremacy of the soul. Thus Desmond
Pacey views characters in novels such as *Such Is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth, More Joy in Heaven, The Loved and the Lost, The Many Colored Coat*, and *A Passion in Rome* as the objective correlates for Callaghan's theme of self-sacrificial love or sinner-saint motif. In the 1980 article, "Callaghan’s Vision: Wholeness and the Individual," Patricia Morley, too, recognizes the predominance of individual human being in Callaghan’s fiction, but notices a shift in the portrayal of character according to the change in Callaghan’s vision. The characters in the works of the 1930s are idealized in their spiritual quest; those in the works of some fifteen post-war years enact the necessity of prudence and self-knowledge; and those in the novels of the 1970s are “fallible human beings” whose portrayal is more psychological and humanistic (9). Without referring to Maritain’s humanism, Ina Ferris discerns the primary impulse of Callaghan’s narrative as “an asocial, secular obsession with the assertion of the self,” and sees characters as exemplifying this theme. She explores how all of Callaghan’s characters are endowed with “an explosive ego,” the assertion of which turns the characters into isolated figures. As Ferris points out: “Callaghan’s central characters are essentially loners, characters whose solitariness emerges as the centre of their reality. . . . Callaghan’s people are most memorable and most authentic when most alone” (13). Ferris’s insights on the workings of “an unbridled egotism” in Callaghan’s characters are important in the discussion of character as subject in the later part of this chapter.

Apart from these approaches, a few critics have tried to locate Canadian archetypes in Callaghan’s fictional characters. In an interesting article, “The American Adam and the Canadian Christ,” Dick Harrison draws parallel between two types of characters repeatedly sketched in American and Canadian novels owing to the “lack of
established gesture or manner” to present the social scene (161). Whereas the American novelists repeatedly turn to the image of Adam, as “a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentiality,” placed at the beginning of a new history, the Canadian archetype is “a central redemptive figure” who stands in the midst of history, “carrying the burden of an imperfectly understood past history and uncomfortably aware of his own implication in its sins” (161-162). This redemptive figure, Harrison describes, is the Christ, the new Adam. He traces such figures in a number of Canadian novelists, and Callaghan is one among them. Thus Peggy Sanderson of The Loved and the Lost and Father Dowling of Such Is My Beloved are not just “socially victimized characters, the outcasts and ‘fugitives’” but are Christ figures who try to expiate the evils of the society and end in a pathetic situation. Like Harrison, Isobel McKenna discerns cultural archetypes in Callaghan’s portrayal of women characters, as they are old fashioned, either “Eve in modern dress” or “martyrs.” Further, in a comparison with male characters, she assesses that women characters are seen as embodying the “Christian virtue of self-negation” (77).

Unlike the religious, symbolic, allegorical and archetypal approaches to characters in Callaghan’s fiction, critics such as Joseph Warren Beach, Pelham Edgar Desmond Pacey, and E.L. Bobak offer a realist approach. They defy the subjective, religious and psychological reading, and instead, argue that Callaghan is a realist along with other Canadian writers such as Frederick Philip Grove, Hugh MacLennan and Philip Child and with American writers such as Hemingway and Theodore Dreiser. Characters within this critical approach are viewed as authentic individuals often found in real life, especially, characters in the novels of the mid thirties are interpreted as exact portraits of people of that period. Much debated relationship between Callaghan and Hemingway has
given rise to finding characters in both the novelists as “smashed men,” “the young man starting out,” “boon comrades,” and “victimized women” (as Fraser Sutherland describes them). Callaghan’s early novels have often been interpreted as dominated by Naturalism or Determinism, and his characters are seen as victims of fate or the hostile forces present in the world they inhabit.

Attention paid exclusively on characters and characterization can be seen only in theses and dissertations presented at various periods, but here too, the study is influenced by thematic concerns. For instance, Iain H. McKellar’s thesis entitled “The Innocents of Morley Callaghan: A Study of the Themes in the Novels,” focuses on the psychology of the innocent, not from the theoretical perspective, but from Callaghan’s own moral sense. Joseph Pathyil’s “Morley Callaghan’s Christians: A Study of Some Characters in the Novels of Callaghan,” as the very title suggests, studies characters from five novels as “true Christians” or “transcendentalists.” Helen Elizabeth Hoy concentrates on female characterization in Callaghan’s novels in the second chapter of her dissertation. The chapter, entitled “The Portrayal of Women in the Novels of Morley Callaghan” identifies contrasting figures of the “sophisticated and the innocent” and the idealization of the “positive innocent figure.” She notes that Callaghan’s heroines often function as “moral touchstones” and symbolize contrasting worlds (spirituality/materiality and freewill/conformity), thus, prompting the male protagonists to choose between them.

In the above array of critical studies, except some of the theses and dissertations, discussion on character has been peripheral because of the dominance of thematic concerns in such studies. In 1981, Donald R. Bartlet identifies an important feature of female characters in Callaghan’s fiction. He disagrees with critics such as Edmund
Wilson, Isabel McKenna and George Woodcock who treat Callaghan’s women characters as martyrs, types, saints or loose women; instead, he argues that Callaghan’s heroines are quite complex. Characters such as Marion Gibbons, Peggy Sanderson, Carla Caneli, Lisa Tolen, and Gina Bixby arouse respect, curiosity and wonder in readers even though they seem dishonourable and vulnerable in the novel. Bartlet, however, sees their significance in elevating the novels to the tradition of tragic literature, and in their personalities and roles being central to “theme, plot, and the protagonists’ epiphanies” (69). The complexity and the elusive quality of characters, however, require a more detailed explanation. Recently, Gary Boire has drawn attention to an important aspect of Callaghan’s fiction that indicates the direction in which Callaghan criticism should move. In his view, Callaghan creates “subversive characters,” which is in accordance with the enactment of “subversive style”:

A form of writing which both jettisoned the baroque embroidery of a colonial heritage, and laid the necessary groundwork for later modernist experimentalists. This meant. . . . the meticulous rhetorical construction of an elusive ambiguity that resists readerly certainty or final narrative closure, an ambiguity of plot, language, and structure which forces individual readers to ‘see the world through their own eyes’. (209)

The quotation at the end of the paragraph is in connection with Callaghan’s remark made in a personal interview with Boire in 1984. The extension of this remark includes Callaghan’s admission that his writing tried deliberately for a “haiku effect,” because “it’s always completed by the reader inside their own mind” (qtd. in Boire 209).
emphasis on the unexplored areas in the study of character and style, and on the role of reader indicates the scope for a reassessment of Callaghan's characters.

The present study is a departure from thematic concerns and is an attempt to see character as a construct, a sign, in Callaghan's fiction with the help of recent theoretical formulations on character discussed early in this chapter. Such a study shows a unique technique operating in the construction of character: there is not only a deliberate attempt for unconventionality in the character sketch, but also a continual deferral of fixed meanings in characters. The study also reveals that characters become intelligible or meaningful through their differential as well as contigual relationship with other signs within the novel, rather than through their inherent qualities or essential properties. Hence, characters in Callaghan's fiction are discussed from two perspectives: as a linguistic sign, and as a subject.

When characters are seen as linguistic signs, the play is on the relationship between the signifier and the signified. There are some characters in Callaghan's novels, which have been built on this relationship, particularly when Callaghan's intention is to satirize or contrast. In such cases, Callaghan draws these characters by their names, as marks stamped forever. Erringtons in *It's Never Over* (1930) are passionately concerned with their reputation and evacuate John Hughes when they come to know of his affair with Isabelle Thompson, the sister of the hanged Fred Thompson. It is as though they cannot stand the human condition, "erring," but they also derive vicarious pleasure out of other people's affairs. Outwardly, these characters become signs for socially respected values and are opposite to what their names denote, but inwardly they are very much what their names signify. In *No Man's Meat*, the pun on the name of the couple Beddoes
(Bert Beddoes and Teresa Beddoes) is illuminating to grasp what these characters are. The story covers twenty-four hours at the Beddoes' cottage beside a lake in the Algoma district of Northern Ontario, around three characters, the Beddoes and their friend Jean who visits the cottage. Along with the sexual connotations explicit in the title, a great number of erotic symbols are linked with characters to signify lesbian sexuality. Bert Beddoes is introduced sitting up in bed, he gossips like women, is concerned about order and dignity, is emotionally sterile, insensitive, lustful, views women as sexual objects and is proud. His only aim in life is "not to be disturbed" (15). Teresa, on the other hand, has a "thin nervous alert boy's body," spends her mornings in woodcarving, and possesses a "bright metallic hardness," which attracts Jean. The differences between Beddoes are highlighted with the arrival of Jean, who is a curious mixture: has a beautiful feminine figure, swears like a man, has masculine tastes in entertainment, and evokes fantastic adventures. The sterility of Beddoes' conjugal love which is not consummated in bed is finally broken when Jean and Teresa elope together. These three characters' response to a dominant symbol in the novel frames the situation. The tall rock in the lake emerges as a phallic symbol in the characters' responses to it: For Bert, it is "like an old woman leaning," for Teresa, "It's not like a woman at all. It's too hard and steady and urgent. I'm not sure it's like a man even. The time we paddled by the base in the shadow on the dark water and it hanging over us, it drove all the feelings out of me." Jean responds in a similar manner to Teresa: "the great rock looming overhead makes me feel nervous" (30). Thus the name "Beddoes" becomes an ironical sign for the characters of Bert and Teresa. Whereas in the case of "Erringtons" the sign suggests an inward condition with "Beddoes," it suggests the opposite and gives ironical implications. These two signs
an animal: he is fat, with “heavy, lifeless black hair with a rigid unnaturally white part in
the middle and a very yellow dead-looking skin . . . his almost bridgeless nose” (8). The
second reference to him also begins with a description of his physical features: “But Mr.
Baer’s glasses were thrust up on the bridge of his nose, the head with heavy woodenly
arranged hair shot forward, and grinning with his thick underlip tight against his teeth”
(20). Henceforth, we recognize this character by these signs, which find their full
expression in his name; he is marked forever.

In his sketch of these minor characters, Callaghan is closer to Sterne and Dickens
who use names not as “an adventitious appendage to such substantial humanity. . . . What
comes first is names; it is they that determine character” (Fisch 599). They create signs
that not only designate and define the world, but signify and mark it. It is significant that
Callaghan’s characters that resemble caricatures are minor characters, and they are more
in the novels written during his first phase of writing, that is, until 1937. The reason
being, Callaghan is more concerned with characters as signs to create an alternative world
in his fiction to comment upon the society caught in Economic Depression of the thirties.
He sets these caricatures against the major characters that are signs in a more complicated
sense, which will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs. The minor characters
discussed above take us back to the original nature of the term “character” which is
something belonging to “écriture, to a linguistic ordering of reality” (Fisch 593).

The major characters in Callaghan’s novels demand a more detailed analysis in
order to understand the way they are delineated. Upon a careful examination we notice
that Callaghan is working with a different kind of strategy in sketching these characters
than what we understand in the minor characters. He goes a step beyond the art of
caricatures where the signs yield definite meanings in the form of signifieds. Now, the signs do not possess stable meanings anymore, instead, their meanings are ambiguous, and the connection between the signifier and the signified is ruptured. The two novels chosen for discussion of this aspect of characters are *Such Is My Beloved* and *A Time for Judas*. By destabilizing the traditionally established meanings of some characters Callaghan interrogates the very notion of fixity in any society as an ideology. In turn, the analysis of this subtle process in the novels shows that:

there is no concept which is not embroiled in an open-ended play of signification, shot through with the traces and fragments of other ideas. It is just that, out of this play of signifiers, certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to a privileged position, or made the centres around which other meanings are forced to turn. (Eagleton 114)

The above passage points out that ideology and fixation of meaning are inescapable and are not eradicable in any culture. A deconstructive reading, however, shows that oppositions (such as man/woman, rich/poor, saint/criminal), established within a system, can be “partly undermined or can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning” (115). Derrida’s deconstructive method aims at showing that the classic oppositions or any set of binary oppositions, when examined closely, demonstrate that one term of an antithesis secretly inheres within the other. The analysis of Callaghan’s characters in the following pages, too, shows how binaries are undermined through characters which stand for opposite meanings: sacred and profane in *Such Is My Beloved* and love and betrayal in *A Time for Judas*. 
Set in the 1930s depression period, *Such Is My Beloved* centres on the attempt of a priest to rehabilitate the lives of two prostitutes. Father Dowling, the young priest of a Catholic Church, accidentally meets two prostitutes in his parish, Ronnie and Midge; his meeting with them first embarrasses, then troubles, and then challenges the priest. His concern for them develops gradually in the novel and brings him into conflict with respectable parishioners and church authorities. Eventually, Father Dowling loses in the face of social opposition (Mr. and Mrs. Robison) and hierarchical disapproval (Father Anglin and Bishop Foley). His profound disappointment in his mission results in Father Dowling’s madness, and at the end of the novel he is admitted to an asylum. At the asylum, when his thoughts are clear, he engages himself in writing a commentary on “Song of Songs,” the love song from the Song of Solomon, which is interpreted as Christ’s love for Church. The religious symbols present in the novel have led critics towards allegorical and symbolic readings, which tend to find parallels between the larger symbolic world of Christianity and the contemporary society. Brandon Conron compares Father Dowling with Christ and the two prostitutes with the Biblical woman taken in adultery (80-81). Ross sees Father Dowling as a symbol of the continuing presence of Christ in the Mystical Body within the three fold set of symbols he finds in the novel: the mystical body; the bridal body; the sacramental, sacrificial body (viii). The realist group of critics find an accurate portrayal of the people and their conditions during the depression in the 1930s. These readings, although illuminating, are rooted in representational theory that reinforces the cultural and symbolic oppositions present in the text; there is a need to move beyond the symbolic or cultural world to the world created by signs to show that the oppositions are set to be undermined.
In *Such Is My Beloved*, the conventional signs are chosen only to make their meaning ambiguous. Conventionally, the sign “priest” stands for God’s servant and thus obedient to the Church. In the first page of the novel itself, Callaghan introduces a contradiction in this sign; Father Stephen Dowling delivers a sermon passionately on the “inevitable separation between Christianity and the bourgeois world” (3). The deviation from the Church rule in delivering provocative sermons is highlighted by Father Anglin’s disapproval in the same paragraph: he “shrugged his shoulders as a kind of warning.” Whereas traditionally the Church is identified with Christianity, yielding a unified meaning, they are shown to be as contradictory here. Father Dowling and Father Anglin become the two varieties of the same sign: one who identifies himself with the basic tenets of Christianity and the other who agrees with the rules of Church as an institution. As a single sign is divided into two to show the way meaning has changed in a particular bourgeois world, so are the two opposite signs—priest and prostitute—brought together to show that they are not antagonistic to each other.

On a February evening, Father Dowling encounters two girls in shabby clothes who beckon to him. Father Dowling’s initial response is to turn away in shame, but he comes back, as his principles prick his conscience. He sets his mind to rehabilitate Ronnie and Midge from their sinful lives. It is important to note that the prostitutes are referred to as “two girls” and neither the narrator nor the priest uses the word “prostitute” in the novel. Cultural institutions such as the Church and the law are defined by things that they exclude for the system. They create binary system of signs, preferring good to evil, noble to ignoble, honour to dishonour. In such a system, prostitutes are on the opposite side of what the Church upholds. Father Dowling’s primary interest, however, is
motivated by a religious intention to bring Ronnie and Midge to this side of the boundary. Gradually, as his relationship with the two girls becomes more familiar, Father Dowling realizes that the fixed meanings of sacred and profane, good and evil are not so much afar as they are believed to be; the two incidents in the novel prove this.

Father Dowling approaches the Robisons, the wealthy parishioners to provide some economic security to Ronnie and Midge so that they will keep away from their sinful activity. Robisons are not only horrified by such an intention but also reject the two girls for the fear of being tainted by them. For Mrs. Robison, “all prostitutes are feeble-minded.” Robisons do not want binaries to disappear; in fact, their affluent position in the society is defined by the very means of such binaries. Father Dowling’s belief in the Robisons as true Christians with a charitable mind is shattered and the duality in their nature is exposed. Ronnie’s rebuke for Mrs. Robisons’ contemptuous treatment of them redefines the meaning of “whore” or “prostitute”: “we’re whores and we know we’re whores, but she’s a different kind of a whore” (107). The meaning for which the sign “whore” stands changes here and acquires a different connotation.

The second incident that offers an entirely different perspective to “whore” takes place when Father Dowling is in the confessional box and a young university student comes and confesses fornication with a prostitute in the neighbourhood. From the details, it becomes evident that the prostitute is either Ronnie or Midge. It makes the priest realize how close his parishioners are, the two girls not so far from others but touching the lives of the whole parish. He thinks that the girls “in a way, had a spiritual value. These girls were taking on themselves all these mean and secret passions. . . . They never suspected the sacrifice of their souls that they offer every day” (127). From Father
Dowling’s reflection, the word “sacred” emerges not as an opposite sign but a part of “profane.” Opposing such a view, his friend and Marxist, Charlie Stewart offers an economic perspective to the condition of Ronnie and Midge:

In the perfectly organized state there would be no streetwalkers. If the state has a proper control of the means of production and the means of livelihood, it’s never necessary for a woman to go on the streets. No healthy woman of her own accord would ever do such work (127).

To Charlie, prostitutes are produced when there is an improper distribution of power and money in a state. His view excludes the question of prostitution from moral or religious concerns, whereas Father Dowling’s reflection on prostitution is centred on those concerns.

The question now is, does the sign “prostitute” or “whore” signify “feeble-minded” women? Does it also signify hypocrisy in the sense Midge used it? Is it a noble sacrificial signifier for absorbing the sins of the people around them? Is it merely a sign of the imperfectly organized state? By bringing together two conventionally opposed signs and by unsettling their fixed signifieds, Callaghan reveals, to use Barthes’s phrase, their “endless commutability.” The typologies and boundaries are no more fixed, or to put it differently, Callaghan does not have reverence for what is fixed and his strategy to unsettle anything that is fixed, leaves the readers to interpret signs for themselves. To recall Fisch’s observation: “the signs formerly imposed on the human scene no longer possess the neatness and permanence they once had” (600). While Callaghan exposes the ideology behind a system, which relies on binary oppositions, he also draws attention to the danger in accepting such oppositions as natural and absolute.
In *A Time for Judas*, there is even more a radical destabilization of fixed meaning of signs. Published in 1983, the novel is an evidence to Callaghan’s unceasing innovativeness in language and character, but it has not received much critical attention. On the cover page of 1983 print, there is a statement from the Globe and Mail which best expresses the significance of this novel: “If Morley Callaghan had written this book a century ago, he would have been excommunicated; if he had written it three centuries ago, he would have been executed.” In his review, Mark Abley aptly points out that the novel “presents a view of Gospel story that St. Paul would have found anathema” (67). The significance of these statements points to the fact that Callaghan does not merely “retell the New Testament story” as Paul Scott Wilson remarked in 1984, but reconstructs it with an added significance. John Moss writes in appreciation that “In this novel, Callaghan takes the best-known story of the Western world and tells it as if it had never been told before. [. . .] He commands our renewed attention to the spiritual, moral, and psychological enigma at the heart of our whole civilization” (53). True to his anarchistic spirit, as evident in many of his interviews and in Gary Boire’s book, *Morley Callaghan: Literary Anarchist*, Callaghan casts a new light on the archetypal character, Judas. The story in brief consists of the last days of Christ on earth, seen through the eyes of Philo, a corrupt and sensual Greek scribe working for Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem, which is under the rule of Romans. The kernel of the novel, however, is Judas’s story, which is situated in the middle of the novel.

It is the character of Judas Iscariot and his confession that are the focal points of this study. Philo first sees Judas in the marketplace in Jerusalem, in violent religious argument with another Jew, who calls him a “renegade” and is hit by a stone. Judas’s
question, if God really wants slaughter of innocent animals, enrages the other jew to brand him a blasphemer. Very early in the novel is introduced the notion of strict adherence to established rules and the counter notion of opposing it. Judas makes a strong impression on Philo as a man with superior air and there develops a friendship between them. He is educated to be a rabbinical scholar, but his question about the existence of God makes him a wanderer and later, a staunch disciple of Jesus. After the Sanhedrin men arrest Jesus (referred to as “the Galilean” by the Jews and the Romans) Judas comes in search of Philo and urges him to write down his version of the story of betrayal and narrates all the incidents from his first meeting with Jesus to the time he betrayed him. Philo takes notes as Judas narrates the story and arranges the incidents into a well-structured plot (narrated in first person), which runs up to seventeen pages in the novel.

Callaghan’s mastery lies in juxtaposing Judas’s version of betrayal with that of Jesus’s disciples and other people. According to Judas, Jesus is the Son of God and he is bemused by Jesus’s stories that are always rich in their implications. Whereas the uneducated followers of Jesus take the literal meanings of his stories, Judas understands the signified meanings that give him an extraordinary understanding of Jesus. For instance, when Jesus tells that he can overthrow and rebuild the temple, the uneducated disciples take the literal meaning of overthrowing the Jewish temples; whereas, Judas, being educated, understands that temples on the earth do not matter, because Jesus has moved the temple into the heart of the man. Judas becomes an ardent disciple, highly moved by the kind of “freedom,” “awareness,” and “compassion” that Jesus’ preaching offers against the strict rules of the Jewish priests. The highlight of the story is that Judas, next to Mary Magdalene, shares a unique, close relationship with Jesus. In one of the
intimate moments with Judas, Jesus expresses the need on his part to "fit into the great myth of death and resurrection," and make people believe in him. The time has come that someone must betray him. In the silence that prevails between them Judas is filled with love for Jesus and understands what Jesus meant:

my love suddenly lifted into a wild abandonment and though still nothing was said, flashes of perception seemed to enlarge my understanding of the word "betrayal." The story as it had been written, yes, his followers needed it. The law, its codes. But he himself had said, "Judge not." For him there was only one law—love. Then may be only one source of all evil—betrayal. The whole inner world swinging between love and betrayal—always first in a man's heart. If it was time now for him to be betrayed, he would cause "betrayal" to be remembered with horror forever as the death of love. (emphasis added 125)

The words in emphasis signify that betrayal and love are two aspects of man's heart; and Judas does not mind adhering to one of them. The deep love and loyalty Judas feels for Jesus motivates him to take the burden of betrayal on him. He thinks he would find the joy of serving Jesus as no one else could have done. His act of betrayal, motivated by love for Jesus will in turn make Jesus a figure of love. This understanding gives Judas a noble air even in his suffering of being a betrayer.

Jesus is arrested after the last supper. What follows the arrest shatters Judas's faith and confidence in his action. In a conversation with him Mary Magdalene she tells him that Jesus must have known only Judas, of all the men, was capable of betraying him; that is why Judas was chosen. She feels compassionate not for the burden Judas has taken on
himself, but for the man he is. Judas's whole sense of himself as the other self of Jesus is shaken. A powerful interior monologue follows after his encounter with Mary Magdalene, epitomizing the anguish in Judas’s heart:

Every man is capable of anything, under the right pressure, I know all that. But to say that the others, all his other companions, could be seen as incapable of betraying him, and they would die first, while I...Why? More! More of everything. Is this my great flaw? In me more of the human chaos, rage, hate, anger, selfishness, pride, meanness, generosity, love. More love for him... Ah, is that it? So I’m picked as the one who, even if he does not do it, is at least capable of doing it. It’s an insult—it’s a knife thrust at my throat... if Jesus picked me in the beginning because he knew I at least was capable – the flaw in my nature was seen. Everything that makes up a man in me was seen -- and from the beginning I was used. Used by the Son of God, picked out to be the victim. 

(emphasis added 131)

Judas refuses to believe that he is capable of treachery, because he loves Jesus, and what he does to Jesus is out of love, not an exact act of betrayal. But Mary Magdalene’s opinion shows Judas what the world is capable of taking.

The two passages cited above are crucial to understand the basic conception of man as a sign. Jesus wants to prove that he is the Son of God and therefore a sign for love. His disciples and others believe only in what is written in the scriptures—that a messiah must fit into the mythical pattern of death and resurrection. He could be the sign of love only when there is a counter sign of betrayal; he could be the sign of resurrection
only when there is death. After Jesus is arrested, his followers go into hiding, because they want to see whether he was really the Son of God. Often in the novel, there are references to people waiting for the sign, and the pattern to be completed: “I [Judas] felt we were all making rhythmic motions, a pattern, a kind of dance, a ritual dance, and now it was completed, and all the others could run away, deserting him – even as they are doing now and will go on doing till they see the sign” (128). What matters to the world is a sign that is whole and completed. People always needed a negative sign to believe or understand the positive sign. This is the need Judas felt when Jesus shared with him the need for betrayal. But Judas himself cannot bear to be the only negative sign for betrayal, as people take him to be. His confession to Philo shows that he wants to be understood as a sign of betrayal out of love. Despite Judas’s confession, Philo, man of intelligence and artistic sensibility, refuses to be seen with him outside: “How could I let myself be seen with him – a marked man now?” (133). It reinforces the fact that people mark each other with concepts and want a fixed relationship between the signifier and the signified—Judas signifies betrayal whereas Jesus, love. They do not want to know that signified need not be fixed, a signifier can signify more than one meaning.

Callaghan recreates the archetypal symbol of Judas into a sign by exposing the ‘other’ of the sign. More specifically, Judas is not treated as a “natural sign,” in the Barthesian sense, but as “a double sign,” which, in the moment of conveying a meaning, points to its own arbitrariness. Judas is not a fixed symbol for betrayal; he is a changing signifier who signifies love in betrayal. In other words, the absence only intensifies presence and the presence points to the absence; meaning is forever deferred, as Derrida showed by using the term Différence instead of difference. Thus Judas becomes a
deconstructive sign, demonstrating how “one term of an antithesis secretly inheres within the other” (Eagleton 115). Whereas Saussure claims that all the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, Peirce goes a step ahead in showing the variety in the nature of relationship between them (as explained in the first chapter). Hence, the emphasis is more on sign in the modern period, where there is less assured relationship between the signifier and the signified, and more on the ambiguity of meaning. The fictional narrative, which is dependent on these signs, is in turn an activity where meaning is pluralistic.

The analysis of character as subject in Callaghan’s novels further deconstructs the notion of character as a whole subject, conscious, and knowable being. Callaghan’s characters enact the conflict that results because of the pulls of the unconscious and the demands of the conscious Ego. The analysis of characters in A Broken Journey illustrates that characters are not whole individuals, but split subjects. Marion Gibbons exemplifies the crisis of alienation around which her subjectivity is organized. The novel depicts Marion’s futile quest for integrity, unity and self-knowledge.

Marion, a young woman of strong views and sensibility is tormented by her double nature. She is afraid of her mother’s (Teresa Gibbons) sensual nature which has brought her mother a mixed reputation: some people “thought her an unusually devout woman, and some thought her an old hussy beyond redemption” (1). Marion is strongly determined to avoid becoming like her mother by remaining faithful to her lover, Peter Gould. Her attempts to be different from her mother, however, end in frustration and she fails to find true happiness with Peter.
The split in Marion’s nature is highlighted early in the novel. Marion, like a subject in transition from imaginary to symbolic order, refuses to identify herself with her mother and builds her ego. She rejects the sensual advances of many young men when she is at the university, because “she had become aware of her mother’s infidelities and of the men who came openly to see her [Mrs. Gibbons], and her own virginity became very precious to her” (40). Marion chooses to be a novice in a convent when she is twenty-two with an intention to lead a pure life. For Marion, religion seems to signify “a world far beyond her mother’s sensualism” and the eternal Virgin “a symbol of her life” (37). She wants to develop her ego in a “unitary selfhood” (to use Eagleton’s term) by identifying herself with religion. She tries earnestly to live in her fabricated identity as Sister Mary Rose. She reads the ecstasies of St. Teresa of Avila, and like her, she tries “to lift herself into an ecstasy so she might see the image of Christ and feel Him beside her before she went to sleep” (40). Marion begins to see the image of a slender form of a young man, and is filled with excitement that she is becoming closer to Christ. The image, however, turns out to be Christopher, who was her dance partner and “made her tremble in his arms” when he held her during the dances (40). On that night, Marion decides to leave the convent and thinks, “It’s my mother’s nature in me” (41). The desire to be different from her mother, however, does not change and Marion tries to preserve her integrity. Marion’s awareness and her determination correspond to the “imaginary” state that Lacan uses to designate the subject’s experience of identification and duality. Marion’s subjectivity is constructed in the world of signification, where her mother signifies a “demoralized woman,” and she, herself, is trying to be the opposite signifier, a
decient woman (22). It reinforces the idea that the subject’s identifications with signs and images in the world are socially mediated.

When the novel begins, Marion has returned from a trip. She has plans to consummate her relationship with Peter by going away to Algoma Hills on the north shore of Lake Superior. Unconsciously, she feels that her wishes will not be fulfilled in the city, in the proximity of her mother. Her fears come true when her mother expresses her love for Peter and puts a doubt in Marion’s mind about Peter. The evening Mrs. Gibbons reveals her intentions, Marion is upset with resentment towards her mother and with her frustrated hopes. She goes for an evening walk to calm down; the walk is like a journey into the unconscious where Marion’s suppressed desires are revealed. Callaghan builds up the atmosphere with rain, moonlight, and sensual images: “All the houses on the street were the same color in the bright moonlight, block houses put down neatly in a row, all the same size in the moonlight. It was so much like one of the bright pictures one remembers after a dream” (46). Marion meets a young man who is drunk and on his compulsion, goes to his apartment. In her disturbed state of mind, she waits for his touch and does not mind being kissed by the man. Since the man is drunk, he falls asleep; Marion comes out of his apartment ashamed of herself. She wishes to forget the whole incident: “she hoped for a moment that nothing had happened at all that evening and she had been dreaming. The more she thought of it, the more unreal the night became” (42). Her conscious self tries to suppress once again her unconscious desires that have found an outlet in her distressed state of mind.

Back in her home, Marion reflects on her behaviour: “She had been disappointed, then disgusted, and revolted, had found it necessary to let herself be picked up by a little
drunk and had waited for him to make love to her, which indicated clearly that unless she
hung on to herself, she was apt to become a sensual little bawd” (48). Marion realizes the
similarity between herself and her mother, and is filled with compassion for her mother.
Although she tries to console herself by praying, she feels “within her an uneasy twinge
of resentment” (48). Her resentment is an indication of the unconsummated relationship
with Peter. Marion’s struggle in understanding her relationship with the people around
her is similar to a subject’s attempt to identify with the signifiers on the principles of
differences and similarities.

Marion and Peter are able to resume their relationship and their proposed trip to
Algoma Hills when Mrs. Gibbons realizes that she had misunderstood Peter’s behaviour.
Their journey to Mission is a nightmare, as Peter is suffering with an injured back. Once
on the Mission, Peter is forced to spend his entire time in bed and the lovers’ dream of
finding idyllic happiness in the northern wilderness is spoiled. The Canadian wilderness
is depicted as beautiful and at the same time, sinister. Marion longs for the harmony she
feels in the night at the Mission: “As the northern lights began to sweep vastly across the
sky, she felt a strange harmony and peace all around her, and she felt herself groping
toward it and trying to become a part of it” (209). Her longing is correlated with her wish
to find a complete relationship (unlike her mother’s unfulfilled dream with her lover who
dies in the war) with Peter, something that has shaped her life as against her mother’s
affairs. Yet, Marion’s conscious control over her desire and her sense of assurance seem
to falter in the inexorable landscape. As she says: “They [hills] make me feel small and
unimportant, they’re so rugged, hard and brilliant. My notions of people and things
become unimportant. What is right, what is wrong, what is important, or any ambition, all
seem unimportant here” (214). The unknowable and powerful landscape is identical with the unpredictable nature of the unconscious in human beings. Although Marion tries hard to look after Peter with love and loyalty, she is unable to cope with her disappointment in not being able to fulfill her relationship with Peter. In her disappointment, she gets attracted to a half Indian, Steve, with whom she often goes on boating trips on Lake Superior. During one of her trips with Steve, she is on the verge of allowing Steve to make love to her. On that night, Marion decides to leave the country without Peter and his brother Hubert, for she realizes that she has an uncertain passion, “like the big lake out there. You don’t know what it will be like one hour after another” (264).

More than her desire for Steve, it is the destruction of notions about herself that makes Marion leave Algoma hills. As she confesses to Hubert: “to be thinking a lot about integrity, and then discover that you haven’t got it. . . .” (263). She compares her desires to the thick yellow weeds in the river. The weeds symbolize the deep labyrinth, the unconscious. As Marion reflects on what happened to her in the country, she realizes the force of the desire she had tried to suppress:

The first time she had seen them [weeds] she had been afraid because the water was so dark underneath, dark and deep because you couldn’t see it. . . . she went and sat down again waiting for the picture of the wharf and the weedy water to go out of her head; the picture seemed so much a part of her, so deep within her now, she could hardly put it away from her. . . .

(emphasis added 261)

Just as Marion’s conscious efforts to be something other than her mother fail, so do the notions of character that Peter and Hubert have in relation to Marion. Peter aptly
conveys the constructed nature of character: “In your own head, or inside you, there’s a picture, or notion, or ideal, of some one and then you lie on your back and watch it destroyed. It’s the destruction of the character” (250). In the “primordial hills and the stillness,” Peter realizes the futility of resisting the unconscious forces. Hubert, who is presented as a man with a definite notion of himself and others, too, loses his confidence in knowing people when Marion reveals her relationship with Steve: “Hubert seemed to realize that his own judgment had been faulty, and so he felt helpless, without any confidence in himself. Without that cocky confidence, he thought he couldn’t live at all” (249).

Character in Callaghan’s novels not only emerges as something constructed in one’s mind, but also as something shaped by the expectations, codes and conventions of society. The split nature of the subject destroys the fixed or knowable meaning attached to character. The analysis of character in different novels of Callaghan shows that it is ideology that needs boundaries and demarcations in its concepts and in the roles it assigns to the members of a society. Any literary text is prone to ideology, because language itself is a product of social practice, as Bakhtin pointed out. The text, however, is capable of employing a strategy by which it can undermine the ideology from which it springs. Thus characters in Callaghan’s novels become ‘double signs’ for both “repression” and “dominance.” The strategy, however, is not to put them into binary oppositions, but to show the one as the part of the other, and thus expose the ideology behind them. The destabilization of character as an individual has important effects on Callaghan’s fictional mode, which is discussed in the next chapter.