

Morley Callghans's *Strange Fugitive*: A Portrayal of the Journey of Self Identity and Self Awareness

Dr. Smita Mayekar

H N College of Commerce, Solapur, Maharashtra, India

Abstract: *The identity issue in Morley Callghans's Strange Fugitive is related to the search for a new identity by bringing about a total transformation in the existing one and emerging as a new self. The paper presents how Harry, the protagonist of the story, is caught between physical, mental and social conflicts; to attain a new identity The main objective of the paper is to analyse the theme of self-awareness and to explain the portrayal of the conflict between personal and social constraints within the narrative.*

Keywords: identity, self-awareness, transformation, personal conflict, social constraints

1. Introduction

In *Strange Fugitive*, Callaghan takes us into the Toronto bootleg world of the 1920s, as he sees it. It is, in fact, the first gangster novel rooted in actual events which are narrated out of Callaghan's experiences as a crime reporter of *Star*. It is the story, of "Harry Trotter, an Ontario white Anglo - Saxon Protestant who establishes himself as a major bootlegger in the "foreign" dominated multicultural underworld of 1920's Toronto." (*Strange Fugitive* xi). It is a novel of Harry Trotter's loss of identity, a story of Trotter's descent from a respectable Toronto lumberyard foreman to the underworld of Toronto.

The novel is divided into four parts which depict the life of Harry Trotter. The first part of the novel introduces the reader to the life of Trotter, the protagonist, a lumberyard foreman, who was a dominating person at home as well as in his workplace. Trotter's wife Vera, who is at the heart of the novel, is the central character in this part. His middle-class lifestyle deprived him of the luxuries and material comforts offered by life. An aggressive and angry young man, Trotter aimed high to become big and successful. Right since his childhood he strived hard to earn money and his family background influenced his behavior. He was denied comforts of life due to the financial condition of his family. His father was a factory worker and spent all his spare time painting.

In part second of the novel Harry, Trotter embarks on his journey into a new world, the world which he thought would give him a new identity which he longed for. In Toronto, Harry tries his hand at different activities of the underworld like drinking, dancing and going to speakeasies in a multicultural world. He turns to the crime world to earn his fortune. Influenced by the words of Isaac Pimblett, he leaves home and also leaves behind Vera, his wife whom he loved and cared

He indulges in the first crime when along with Jimmie he loots a truck load of a bootlegger's shipment and sells it to an Italian owned speakeasy named Angelina. They unload the truck and then park it back in some safe place. After successfully getting the custody of the booze, they sell it to Angelina. It was his first crime and success in his first 'venture' gave him confidence and satisfaction.

He had never been in trouble with the law. He didn't even like knowing cops. Trouble could come from cops and law only if you were poor and a failure. The satisfaction he was nursing made him feel he was going in the right direction

Harry experiences mental satisfaction and is convinced that he was going into the right direction. A new confidence and self - awareness surges in and is assured of future success. He is eager for more strength and influence and money. He feels more confident and surer of himself.

In Part third of the novel, Trotter establishes himself as part of the underworld. It deals with his prospering bootlegging business. He emerges from small - time bootlegger to a big - time gangster and a wealthy booze exporter:

The new identity of being a rich and prosperous man, gave Harry all the satisfaction which he urged for in the days of the past. He owned a lavish flat fully furnished in splendid style. Throughout the novel, he sees his identity only through the materialistic world around him. However, he did not forget to send money to Vera every month. He still loved her and thought vaguely of living with her later in life, when he had more money. Vera is the link which pulls him back to his original self, but it is too late for him to retain his original identity and return back home. While she is out of sight in nearly three fourth part of the novel, she is always in Harry's thoughts and mind.

Harry seemed happy with this materialist success. However, deep within his conscience he knew about the illegitimacy of his business in society. For the sake of respectability along with Jimmy he started a book - store and hired Eva Lawson to look after the store. In the office at the back of the store, they kept their accounts and records of sales and prospects. As their business steadily improved, they decided to hire a reliable driver to avoid the risk of arrest driving a truck. They appointed Joe Atkins with a salary of fifty dollars a week.

In the beginning, Harry enjoyed this new gained identity but could not sustain it. Somewhere at the back of his mind was a feeling of guilt, guilt of betraying himself, his morals and of course betraying Vera. He constantly lived under the shadow of fear, always conscious of what others said and

Volume 5 Issue 7, July 2016

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

thought about him. Harry's state of mind is explained thus, in the novel:

That was the brunt of success which he did bear and continued to focus on his task. However, as was expected in typical crime stories, events in his life went the same way. Joe Atkins, their confidential aid, is found dead and Harry suspects his rival Cosantino to be the culprit. The police, on finding the hijacked truck missing, also suspect murder and vengeance from the underworld. In quick response, Harry shoots Cosantino point blank, in a cold-blooded murder, which shocks the entire underworld and the media. The news of Cosantino's death flashes in leading newspapers and it spreads like fire. Pretending to be his well-wisher, Harry along with Jim Calmly attend the elaborate funeral of Cosantino. He also consoles Cosantino's wife and is with the entire crowd who grieves the death of Cosantino.

Like a classical drama, part four of the novel deals with the decline and fall of Harry Trotter. It ends with the cold-blooded murder of Trotter on the streets of Toronto. In this part, Callaghan identifies Harry with the materialistic world to which he was so fascinated. He was so impressed by the 'grandeur' of the funeral of Cosantino and his tombstone that he decides to erect a similar tombstone over the graves of his parents in his home-town Maydale. He considered it not to be just a noble task to pay homage to his parents, but a way to show his ability to keep himself at par with the status of Cosantino. He feels satisfied for not just having something to boost his image in the business world, but also please him from within for having done something for his parents. In reality, this act reflects the desolation and emptiness within Harry and it reveals his insecurity. He is aware that his life was at risk, and to hide his insecurities he engages in displaying his material power.

In order to prove himself stronger and more influential than the murdered Cosantino, Harry throws a lavish party as per his plan and dream. The novel ends with the brutal murder of Trotter by his rival gang. Harry is killed on the streets of downtown Toronto. The novel ends with the morbid narration of the incident of Trotter's death, very similar to the way he killed Cosantino.

The tragic and much anticipated end of Harry Trotter reflects the inner conflict faced by him in his attempt to seek self-importance. In the novel, the writer presents the protagonist's attempt to find, in vain, a cord which assimilates the conflict between self-identity and social identity. He is constantly lost in a world of fantasy which he at last brings into reality. However, before he realizes about the transitoriness of that identity, he is no longer alive to experience its fruits.

Unfortunately, Harry Trotter attains the much-desired material wealth but at the cost of his life. He turns to crime to find his fortunes. His ambition to 'make it big' and his temperament leads him to the criminal world of bootlegging. It is a story of a fatal stride towards fulfilment of an unsatisfied desire for legitimization of his individual worth, by his world.

His need for mastery, for a mirror in the world which is subjected to and recognises his value and identity, draws him into an upward spiral of material success, social notoriety and sexual power. It also leads to his downfall through his indulgence in acts of violence, crime, sex, alienation from loved ones and betrayal of others. Harry fulfils the modern dream of becoming a 'somebody' when he was a 'nobody'.

The grounds for that identity continually expand beyond his control. He loses his identity and does not know who he is and what he is in for. He is not comfortable in the gangster world where he loses his identity during his journey through the underworld. In his inner mind, he accepts the bitter truth that he is a misfit in the path which he has chosen. He loses not just his identity but his life in the shootout in downtown Toronto. Trotter is not a fugitive in the actual sense of the word, but is a fugitive in a metaphorical sense. He is projected as an individual who runs away from himself and since it is a strange path chosen to seek an identity for himself, he has been rightly labelled the Strange Fugitive.

2. Conclusion

The portrayal of Harry's journey illustrates the problems of self-awareness and the result of living a life without understanding the self. The novel emphasizes on the challenges of living a life for self-realization.

References

- [1] Collagan Morley. *Strange Fugitive* Exile Editions, 2004. Print
- [2] Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Prism Books, 1993. Print
- [3] Mayekar Smita. *Canadian Identity Motif in the Select Novels of John Hugh MacLennan, Robertson Davies, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Morley Callaghan and Michael Ondaatje*. 2015