JOHN DOS PASSOS:

THE INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS MILIEU

JOHN DOS PASSOS: THE INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS MILIEU IN THREE NOVELS BY JOHN DOS PASSOS

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ABSTRACT

The following study deals with the individual's relationship with his social, historical and institutional milieu in three novels by John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer (1925), U.S.A. (1930-36), and Midcentury (1960). In chapter I, the introduction to this study, I have presented a brief biographical sketch on the author as well as an examination of Dos Passos' choice of an artistic form. Dos Passos' conception of art and the function of the artist as well as Dos Passos' place in the evolution of naturalistic literature have been discussed.

The second chapter of this study focuses on the individual in conflict with an urban environment. The effects of this setting upon the individual's psyche forms the crux of my investigation. In chapter III, I have examined Dos Passos' U.S.A. trilogy. The individual's relationship with his historical milieu and Dos Passos' essentially Marxist interpretation of history are used as the basis of my analysis. Chapter IV deals with Midcentury. The discussion in this chapter is founded upon the individual's conflict with social institutions, especially American labor organizations. In chapters two, three and four, Dos Passos' anti-deterministic philosophy and his concern with the

individual is accentuated. Dos Passos' belief that personal integrity and social responsibility and conscientiousness are the mainstays of the survival of both individual and national liberty is established as the focal point of discussion. The "vag", who embodies this idea, is used as the linking motif between the three studies.

Chapter V, the conclusion, discusses Dos Passos' role as both a writer and citizen. Here the instructive and artistic qualities of the three novels examined in this study have been evaluated.

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The danger to the survival [of] any kind of personal liberty anywhere in the world has become so patent, that those of us who care for liberty more than anything find ourselves continually seeking new ground.

John Dos Passos, in
a letter to J.H. Wrenn
March, 1954.

I

A. INTRODUCTION: THE MAN AND HIS MILIEU

To fully appreciate Dos Passos' art it is, I believe, necessary to have some knowledge and understanding of Dos Passos the man and especially, his relationship to his own social, political, and cultural milieu. An examination of the social and historical events and conditions which shaped Dos Passos' political consciousness as well as an investigation of Dos Passos' own efforts to shape and alter these conditions are helpful in gaining an understanding of Dos Passos' novels.

John Roderigo Dos Passos was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1896. A study of this period of American history and culture is very valuable, for the characteristics of his early environment in many ways determined the type of artist Dos Passos was later to be. With the dawn of the twentieth century, the hitherto submerged class struggles in America emerged into full view. In an age of capitalism, robberbarons, and economic oppression, a mood of reform and revolution swept over the nation. Figures such as Eugene Debs, Thorstein Veblen, Edward Bellamy, and Samuel Gompers proclaimed the grievances of America's poor. Muckraker[1] journalism, liberal politics

and a spirit of progressivism echoed this mood of reform and protest. American society, during this period, was also becoming progressively urban and industrial. New frontiers were being opened up by industrial technology and scientific knowledge. This, America believed, was the age of "progress"; scientific knowledge and humanitarianism would realize "utopia". In the spirit of the new century's optimism and idealism, nationalism and imperialism captured the popular mind. Democracy, Americans believed, was working and it should consequently make its presence felt throughout the world.

Dos Passos, to some extent, shared this spirit of idealism in America. As a young man studying literature at Harvard in 1912, he became one of a group of artists such as E.E. Cummings, Edmund Wilson, and Scott Fitzgerald who supported the popular surge of reform and liberalism. The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 virtually destroyed America's political and social idealism. In 1917 America, to safeguard the existence of democracy in the world, joined Europe's war. Although a proclaimed pacifist, Dos Passos was curious to see the war; he joined America's Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps and embarked for Europe. Dos Passos' war experience formed the fabric of his first two novels, One Man's Initiation - 1917 (1920), and Three Soldiers (1921). As displayed in these war novels, Dos Passos' participation in the war opened his eyes to social

and governmental abuses. The war, says Townsend Ludington, "destroyed what vestiges of romantic aestheticism remained from Dos Passos' Harvard days; it heightened his belief in the importance of individual liberties and his respect for the common man, and it deepened his hatred of the cant, even the inhumanity, of officialdom".[2]

After the war, Dos Passos returned to America where he wrote numerous articles protesting governmental abuses and imperialism. Through these articles Dos Passos struggled to find a solution with which governmental abuses could be combated. The final answer he found, lay in the popular voice:

> Not until a large and aggressive body of our citizens has formed the habit of loudly and immediately repudiating every abuse internal or external of the government's authority and every instance of bullying mob intolerance will we as a nation show that "decent respect for the opinions of mankind" necessary to reconquer the confidence of the... [essential, freedom-loving] body of foreign opinion...for the sake of peace... our nearest neighbours...must be made to feel that there is...in the United States... a body of opinion that puts humanity before national interests and class interests.[3]

Dos Passos' interest in humanitarianism, the individual's liberty and reform came to a peak in 1925 with the publication of Manhattan Transfer and his involvement in the Sacco and Vanzetti case, the trial of two American anarchists who were executed in 1927. Dos Passos viewed the death of these two men as the death of American

democracy and justice. It was during this period that he achieved his nearest identification with the average American's struggle for freedom from economic, social, and political oppression. With the death of Sacco and Vanzetti, says Townsend Ludington, Dos Passos "moved as far to the left as he ever would; he took a more active interest in politics than before.. his stance was that of a fellow-traveler...."[4]

Dos Passos at this time also became very intrigued with Communism and the Russian revolution. In 1929 he journeyed to Russia to examine Russia's socialist society which he thought might offer an appealing alternative to the capitalistic system which had murdered Sacco and Vanzetti. Dos Passos was, however, disappointed with what he saw and decided that "he could more easily tolerate the tyrannies of American monopoly capitalism...than he could the tyrannies of the Communist ideologues".[5] A disillusioned man, he returned to America where subsequently, over the course of the next six years, U.S.A. was written. During this period of his life Dos Passos was active in protesting miners' conditions in Harlan County, Kentucky as well as the Scottsborough trial. He also became involved in the defence of Luis Quintanilla, a Spanish artist jailed and executed for his political activities in Spain. Quintanilla sparked Dos Passos' interest in both Spanish art and politics.

In 1937 Dos Passos journeyed to Spain with Ernest Hemingway to film a documentary on the Spanish civil war. It was during this visit to Spain that the rift in Dos Passos' long friendship with Hemingway occurred. Differences in political opinions caused the rupture; Hemingway left for Paris while Dos Passos remained in Spain to investigate the death of a friend, José Robles, whom he believed had been murdered by Spanish Communists.

The conditions in Spain and the political trends at work in the remainder of Europe left Dos Passos disillusioned with communist and socialist systems of government; in Spain, France, England and Russia he had seen that their promise to guarantee individual liberty had not been met. Dos Passos again turned to America for a solution. He believed that

> ...in that country and its governmental systems [lay] the answer...the one hope for the future of the type of western civilization which furnishes the frame of our lives is that the system of popular government based on individual liberty be not allowed to break down.[6]

Dos Passos' dedication to American democracy fired an interest in the history of American politics. During a period from approximately 1937 to 1959 Dos Passos turned to writing essentially historical novels in which he traced the growth and development of America's democratic political and economic system. This interest provided the inspiration for Midcentury (1960), one of Dos Passos' last novels and

one which, along with Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A., has been examined in the following study.

B. INTRODUCTION: THE ARTIST

> ...art must not only mirror life; it must also be true to life. The most significant art will somehow perceive and express the permanent conditions of life and those of the profoundest or fullest living. [7]

Throughout his literary career, John Dos Passos was very conscious of the connections between art and society. The novelist, he believed, was "a sort of second-class historian of the age he lived in".[8] It was his function to present a given condition of life and then to judge whether that condition limited or enhanced the individual's living of life. In short, his responsibility as an artist was one of evaluating the social and historical conditions he depicted. This qualification on the artist arose out of Dos Passos' conviction that art has the power to influence the patterns of historical and social change, that the artist was in fact, an "architect of history".[9]

Dos Passos' conception of both art and the artist played an important role in his choice of an artistic form. The form selected was to be one appropriate for the expression of both his critical commentary and his desire to recreate or "mirror" life. The integration of both pursuits was achieved by using the chronicle or documentary form. Defined as "recording or depicting in

artistic form a factual and authoritative presentation, as of an event or a social or cultural phenomenon",[10] the documentary allowed Dos Passos to criticize, with factual evidence, the social and historical conditions he depicted; it also left room for the imaginative flights of the artistic mind. Through documentary, Dos Passos' social criticisms could be given artistic form.

Dos Passos' belief that art must mirror and judge life ultimately determined the nature of his artistic methods and style. He looked to naturalistic literature, especially the works of both Emile Zola and Theodore Drieser, for devices which would realize these ends. From the naturalists Dos Passos learnt the use of social, biological and historical determinism, objectivity, the use of the typical and representative, and expressionistic and impressionistic devices.

Dos Passos, according to C.C. Walcutt, "is a tremendously significant figure in the development of naturalism, particularly as an end-point in the evolution of naturalistic forms".[11] Dos Passos' significance lies in the fact that while he relies heavily upon traditional naturalistic devices in the creation of his novels, the novels themselves preach an essentially non-naturalistic philosophy. While his novels are determinist in method, they display an anti-deterministic faith in reform and the power of the individual's will. Jean-Paul Sartre

believes that Dos Passos employs determinism in an effort to "arouse the reader's indignation and to impel him towards a revolt against his own self-deception and moral complacency".[12] The deterministic nature of Dos Passos' novels, he claims, "forces the reader to compare his own freedom and the existing moral choices still available to him with the petrified destinies of the fictional characters on the other side of the mirror".[13]

Jean-Paul Sartre's insight into Dos Passos' purpose sheds light on Dos Passos' role as a satirist and his use of naturalistic methods in the creation of satire. Especially significant is Dos Passos' use of the typical in the creation of characters and events. Realism and objectivity are sacrificed to create a world whose social and moral evils are made obvious through magnification and irony. The motivation for this distortion of reality is Dos Passos' own outrage against the nature of contemporary social and historical conditions.

Like the naturalistic novelists before him, Dos Passos is concerned with the collective and typical. However, as Alfred Kazin points out in "Dos Passos and the 'Lost Generation'", Dos Passos is primarily interested in the individual not the social group. Throughout the works examined in the following study, the primacy of the individual is clear. This preoccupation finds its roots in anarchic ideology, which accentuates the full development and individualization of men.

In Manhattan Transfer (1925), U.S.A. (1930 - 1936) and Midcentury (1960), the novels examined in the following study, the individual's relationship with his social, historical and political milieu is investigated. This relationship, as displayed in these three novels, is one of conflict, where social and historical circumstances threaten both the individual's identity and social, political and economic freedom. The effects of social and historical conditions upon the individual as well as the individual's role as "architect" of history and society have been examined. In studying these works, I have also attempted to show how Dos Passos utilizes the structure of his novels in expressing the nature of the individual's relationship with his environment.

The three novels used in this study were selected primarily because in each Dos Passos presents a group of characters in conflict with their social and historical setting. The novels chosen for this study are also written in a very similar style and hence, almost naturally fall into a single group. Taken together, they also present a neat chronological study of America's social and political history. In addition, these three novels display Dos Passos' development as an artist in portraying one theme, the individual's relationship with his social and historical milieu. They also illustrate that Dos Passos' concern with the individual remains constant throughout both his literary career and the development of his political and social consciousness.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A term applied derisively to a group of American writers between 1902 and 1911 who worked actively to expose the dishonest methods and unscrupulous motives operative in big business and in city, state and national government. A group of magazines - *the Arena, Everybody's, McClure's,* the *Independent, Collier's* and the *Cosmopolitan* - led the movement, publishing the writings of the leading "muckrakers" - Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, T.W. Lawson, Mark Sullivan and Samuel H. Adams. Upton Sinclair's novel, The Jungle and some of the novels of Winston Churchill and of D.G. Phillips are "muckraking books".
C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, (3rd ed.; Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1972). p. 330.

[2]Townsend Ludington, ed., The Fourteenth Chronicle, (Boston: Gambit, Inc., 1973), p. 80.

[3]J.H. Wrenn, John Dos Passos, (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 45.

[4]Townsend, Ludington, ed., The Fourteenth Chronicle, (Boston, Gambit, Inc., 1973), p. 343.

[5]Ibid., p. 421.

[6]Ibid., pp. 496-8.

[7]J.H. Wrenn, John Dos Passos, (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 104.

[8]J.P. Diggins, "Visions of Chaos and Visions of Order: Dos Passos as Historian", American Literature, XLVI (1950), 330.

[9]J.H. Wrenn, John Dos Passos, (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 148.

[10]Ibid., p. 145.

[11]C.C. Walcutt, "Dos Passos and Naturalism", in Allen Belkind, ed., Dos Passos, the Critics and the Writer's Intention, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 81.

[12]Allen Belkind, ed., Dos Passos, the Critics and the Writer's Intention, (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. xxxvi.

[13]Ibid., p. xxxvi.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass....

from "The Hollow Men"
T.S. Eliot, (1925)

II

MAN IN SOCIETY: MANHATTAN TRANSFER

Manhattan Transfer (1925), John Dos Passos' first documentary, is like U.S.A. and Midcentury, a collective novel dealing with group experience. An offshoot of French unanimism,[1] Manhattan Transfer uses the city as its setting and source of inspiration. Dos Passos, however, goes beyond the unanimistic study of group activity and behaviour; he establishes the city as the antagonist of his novel and accentuates the dissociation and isolation of the individual within the collective social unit. The fate of the individual in the city becomes the platform for Dos Passos' criticism of America's social and economic structure.

Manhattan Transfer is a chronicle of New York City in the early nineteen-twenties. The novel is constructed out of intermingling fragments of narrative on approximately fifty lives. The characters of the novel may be separated into four categories. There are the two main characters, Jimmy Herf and Ellen Thatcher, a group of secondary characters such as George Baldwin, Stan Emery, Ed Thatcher, and Congo Jake, who in one way or another are associated with the two main characters, a group of characters such as Bud Korpenning, Joe O'Keefe, Anna Cohen and Dutch

Robertson who make only occasional appearances, and a small group of anonymous characters such as the foreigners on the dock, firebugs, messenger boys, the "young man" of chapter II, Book I, and the unknown soldier of the novel's concluding chapter. The effect of the novel's oscillation between characters from each group is, to quote E.D. Lowry, "comparable to that produced by a procession of faces glimpsed on a crowded street. Some may be singled out for close scrutiny, others may be observed for a fleeting moment".[2] In this way, Dos Passos establishes his characters as components of the limitless slice of life which in Manhattan Transfer, forms his setting and his subject.

Dos Passos uses the novel's chapter titles and the prose poems heading the narrative of each chapter to form the setting or conditions of the group and individual experience he is about to examine. His choice of chapter titles reflects the imagery and mentality of an industrial, machine-conscious civilization and establishes him as a futuristic and technological novelist. The chapter titles create an elaborate impression of New York; they characterize the city as materialistic (Dollars), technological (Skyscraper), evoke the city's predominant sense of movement and glitter (Ferryslip, Tracks, Nickelodeon), and indicate the city's essentially corrupt and chaotic nature (Went to the Animal's Fair, Revolving Doors, Rejoicing City That Dwelt Carelessly, Burthen of Nineveh). These titles are

generally taken from the snatches of songs which appear in the narrative and provide the basis of the network of symbols and images which supports the novel.

The prose poems which introduce the narrative portions of the novel also create a general impression of New York; like the titles, they provide a social and environmental background for the fictional lives of the narrative. Their significance,however, goes beyond this relatively superficial function; it lies instead in their presentation of the central issue of the novel, the conflict between the individual and the collective social group. The prose poems establish the city as an antagonist and oppressor of its inhabitants. This effect is achieved by imbuing the city with a sense of power, density, and limitless chaos, and by establishing it as the center of the nation's scramble for economic success. By placing anonymous individual figures within this setting, Dos Passos emphasizes the victimizimg effect the city has on the individual and in this way, he firmly establishes the central conflict upon which the entire novel is based. The prose poem heading "Skyscraper" provides the best example of this technique:

> The young man without legs has stopped still in the middle of the south sidewalk of Fourteenth Street. He wears a blue knitted sweater and a blue stocking cap. His eyes staring up widen until they fill the paperwhite face. Drifts across the sky a dirigible, bright tinfoil cigar misted with height, gently prodding the rainwashed sky and the soft clouds. The young man without

> legs stops still propped on his arms in the middle of the south sidewalk of Fourteenth Street. Among striding legs, lean legs, waddling legs, legs in skirts and pants and knickerbockers, he stops perfectly still, propped on his arms, looking up at the dirigible. [3]

Enveloped within the impressionistic outer structure of titles and prose poems are the narrative sections of the novel. Here Dos Passos narrows his hitherto general perspective; the "camera eye" is drawn away from the general to observe particular individual lives within the city. As Dos Passos narrows his focus, the conflict between the individual and his social milieu becomes more apparent. It is in the narrative portions of Manhattan Transfer that Dos Passos describes the effects of the city, as they were depicted in the prose poems, upon the individual.

An examination of the structural arrangement of Manhattan Transfer's narrative provides some insight into the psychological effects collectivism has upon the individual mind. The lack of chronology and the continual shift of character and scene in the narrative reflects the psychological discontinuity of individuals in a collective setting. The very form and structure of the narrative presupposes a lack of order and purpose in the characters' lives and in addition, reflects the individual's inability to impose his own will upon the flow of events which surround him. This structural formula, says C.C. Walcutt, is the "perfect naturalistic form".[4] Through this form, he explains, Dos Passos

> ...writes a kaleidoscope, a pattern that always changes and never repeats because the possible combinations and permutations are endless; and this structure perfectly states its meaning because it is its meaning. It is a picture of chaos, a blind, formless, struggling, frantic world moving in so many directions at once that it would be impossible for anyone to imagine an intelligent control of its energies...the envelope of chaos contains, physically and metaphorically, the busy volitions of the individuals who move back and forth to weave its web.[5]

The psychological effect the city has upon its individuals is also conveyed in the very language Dos Passos uses to describe the city; words and images used to render an impression of the city's noise, bustle, and glitter become metaphors for its individuals' states of mind. For instance, the sentence, "Jagged oblongs of harsh sound broke one after the other over his head..."[6] evokes the mental condition of the frustrated, humiliated, and homeless Joe Harland. The clanging fire alarm which keeps Jimmy Herf awake at night conveys his tense and chaotic feelings. The image of the screaming, speeding fire truck which runs throughout the novel, maintains this sense of chaos as well as the too-fast pace of city life and the subsequent nervous tension it produces in its inhabitants.

The emotional effects of a technological, machine-oriented rather than human-oriented environment upon the individual are illustrated in Dos Passos' use of mechanical images in the creation of character. Mechanical toy, doll, and marionette images are used throughout the novel

to convey the dehumanizing and desensitizing influence a technological setting has upon the individual. Jimmy Herf for example, describes Ellen Thatcher as "an intricate machine of sawtooth steel whitebright bluebright copperbright in his arms"[7] and both Ellen Thatcher and George Baldwin feel like tin mechanical toys, "all hollow inside".[8] Circular images such as rollercoasters and revolving doors are used as metaphors of the individual's sense of confusion, meaningless and helplessness in his environment. "The trouble with me", says Jimmy Herf, "is I can't decide what I want most so my motion is circular, helpless and confoundedly discouraging".[9] He watches men and women "fed in two endless tapes through the revolving doors out onto Broadway, in off Broadway"[10] and thinks of himself "fed in a tape in and out the revolving doors, noon and night and morning; the revolving doors grinding out his years like sausage meat".[11] The notion of transience embodied in the novel's title and the novel's focus on the ferryslip at both its beginning and end also express the futility of individual lives and the search for significance in the city. This futile and continuous movement embodies the hopelessly purposeless nature of life in an environment which defies the individual's search for stability and meaning.

The inhabitants of the city are strongly influenced by the sensual and material nature of their setting. As

products of their environment, they become over-preoccupied with these aspects of their social milieu; the individual is gradually reduced to reacting in terms of stimulus and response. Dos Passos' rendition of the city finds its source in his characters' preoccupation with the sensual and material:

> Dusk gently smooths crispangled streets. Dark presses tight the steaming asphalt city, crushes the fretwork of windows and lettered signs and chimneys and watertanks and ventilators and fire-escapes and moldings and patterns and corrugations and eyes and hands and neckties into blue chunks, into black enormous blocks. Under the rolling heavier heavier pressure windows blurt light. Night crushes bright milk out of arclights, squeezes the sullen blocks until they drip red, yellow, green into streets resounding with feet. All the asphalt oozes light. Light spurts from lettering on roofs, mills dizzily among wheels, stains rolling tons of sky.[12]

Dos Passos' emphasis upon the beauty of colour, line, light and sound of the city ironically highlights, through contrast, its morally dull and sterile lives.

The characters of the novel live in and are ultimately betrayed by an environment which equates money, physical beauty and sex with happiness and personal fulfillment. The failure of this shallow formula is made apparent in the characters' inability to form satisfying and successful personal relationships. In addition, whether they succeed or fail in their attempts to obtain material success, the characters of the novel are generally dehumanized by their efforts. Dos Passos' treatment of what may be called

the "climatic" events of life, birth, marriage and death, reflects this dehumanization process. Ellen's quick resort to abortions for both herself and her friend Cassandra as well as the description of birth in the first narrative section of the novel display the lack of value attached to life in a collective, materialistic and technological society. Death is most often viewed as a spectacle, as is apparent in the characters' eagerness to watch a fire or visit the scene of an accident or murder.

Manhattan Transfer's characters are depicted as helplessly moved along, as on a treadmill, by the chaotic pace and variety of events in the city. This impression is established by describing the movement and noise of mechanical objects such as cars, subways and whirring machines and then recording the individual's perception of these phenomena. The individual usually registers the city's waves of objects and people as a dissociated, fragmented blur of impressions:

> In the heavy heat streets, stores, people in Sunday clothes, strawhats, sunshades, surfacecars, taxis broke and crinkled brightly about her grating her with sharp cutting glints as if she were walking through piles of metalshavings. She was groping continually through a tangle of gritty saw-edged brittle noise.[13]

The rapid waves of stimuli the characters encounter in the city stand as the chaotic force which aimlessly directs the individual lives of the novel. The individual's inability to impose a sense of order upon the stream of

objects, people and events in the city and his inability to comprehend them as a meaningful sequence and whole also reveals the psychological fragmentation the city imposes upon the individual mind.

The individual's feeling of helplessness in the face of the overpowering sprawl and variety of his environment is made obvious in the characters' perception of the city as a Kafkian maze or web. The city is perceived as a tangle of buildings, light, noise and colour. By overlapping his characters' lives, a technique often interpreted as a flaw in the realism of Dos Passos' narrative, Dos Passos also expresses the web-like atmosphere surrounding both the individual's personal relationships and his day to day life in New York. Dos Passos' characters are trapped by both their relationships and their environment; to quote George Baldwin, "the terrible thing about having New York go stale on you is that there's nowhere else. It's the top of the world. All we can do is go round and round in a squirrel cage".[14] Ed Thatcher's search for his wife in a New York hospital is a powerful example of an individual lost in the complex and impersonal maze of the city.

To emphasize the individual's helplessness in the city's web of movement, light and noise, Dos Passos uses a thread of fly imagery throughout the novel. In "Tracks" the reader is given a detailed description of Jimmy Herf's observation and killing of a fly, which is

significantly described in very human terms:

> In the sunlight on the window ledge a fly sat scrubbing his wings with his hinder legs. He cleaned himself all over, twisting and untwisting his forelegs like a person soaping his hands, stroking the top of his lobed head carefully; brushing his hair. Jimmy's hand hovered over the fly and slapped it down. The fly buzzed tinglingly in his palm. He groped for it with two fingers, held it slowly squeezing into mashed grey jelly between finger and thumb. He wiped it off under the window-ledge. A hot sick feeling went through him. Poor old fly, after washing himself so carefully too.[15]

This paragraph is not only indicative of the individual's victimization and sense of helpless determinism in the city but it also indicates the insignificance of individual lives within the collective social unit. Ellen Thatcher's feeling that her bed "was a raft which she was marooned alone, always alone, afloat on a growling ocean"[16] has a similar dual effect of determinism and insignificance. Dos Passos maintains that the individual in the city is, to use Bud Korpenning's words, "no more'n a needle in a haystack".[17] Throughout the novel images of multiplicity and uniformity such as earthworms, apples, pigeonholes and as portrayed earlier, the fly, emphasize this idea.

The insignificance of individual lives within the city is also conveyed by illustrating the dual nature of the individual's identity within a collective environment. Dos Passos shows that while each character of the novel is conscious of himself as an individual, he is nevertheless,

a small and insignificant segment of the larger collective unit. Each character is simultaneously an individual and a social type.

To establish the individual as a social type, Dos Passos deliberately limits characterization. The characters are given almost no psychological depth; instead, they are presented as caricatures and as such are characterized by impressions of action and movement in much the same way an impression of the city is evoked in the prose poems introducing the narrative. The characters' stance as social types as opposed to individuals performs an important function within the novel. The reader is first of all unable to become emotionally involved with the novel's characters; he is not allowed to perceive or consider them as individuals and as a consequence, throughout the novel, remains aware of the characters as representatives of various social and moral attitudes. As firmly established representative types, Manhattan Transfer's characters become useful and effective as vehicles for Dos Passos' social criticism.

As social types, the characters of the novel are moulded around the rich-poor and success-failure constructs established in the prose poem to "One More River to Jordan" and the narrative of the novel. These divisions provide the basis of the two-choices framework of the novel, a construct which Dos Passos, in U.S.A. develops

into his two-nations motif. To emphasize these economic divisions in the American social consciousness, Dos Passos usually places characters from the wealthy-successful and poor-failure categories side by side. For instance, Jimmy Herf and Joe Harland are the poor relatives of the rich Merivale family and similarly, Emile, a French immigrant, finds employment waiting on the rich. The success-failure division among Manhattan Transfer's characters provides the platform for Dos Passos' criticism of the distortion of the American ideals of liberty, equality, opportunity, and the right to life and happiness. America's claim to these ideals, as they are embodied in the Statue of Liberty, is satirized by placing these ideals in close juxtaposition with America's slums, poverty, prejudice, social darwinism, and the fate of the individual within a materialistic and technological social unit.

The characters of the novel formulate various perspectives towards the social and political ideals and conditions presented in Manhattan Transfer. They choose from the various alternatives illustrated in the novel; in effect, they take sides in the conflict between the individual and society. Dos Passos presents three choices available to the individual. The individual can on the one hand consent to be a victim of social forces by making no effort to change the conditions which victimize him. He can also become an "arrow collar",[18] that is,

take the side of the system of oppression by becoming part of it. In contrast to this choice, he can establish himself as a "soft shirt"[19]; he can choose to fight for his own liberation and escape the forces of social oppression.

The first alternative presented by Dos Passos is embodied in the fates of Joe Harland, Stan Emery and Ellen Thatcher. Joe Harland merely sits back and accepts his fate as it is dictated by society; he supports his choice with the belief that "things aren't always a man's fault".[20] He denies even the opportunity to fight social oppression by refusing to join his company's labor union. Stan Emery is both personally and socially irresponsible. Like Joe Harland, he allows himself to be victimized by society but unlike Joe, his response does not stem from fear or shame but from carelessness. He does not value his own life and liberty enough to care what happens to either. Ellen Thatcher becomes a slave to the social system. While powerless and not yet part of it, Ellen sacrifices her own integrity, sensitivity and her one chance for happiness in hopes of joining the social and economic system which dazzles her personal and social vision.

Dos Passos presents his second alternative in characters such as Congo Jake and Emile. These two characters become part of the capitalistic economic and social system. Ironically, in a sense they are also victims of this system even while they are a part of it.

Congo sacrifices his integrity and dignity as a man by going so far as to risk his life for money and Emile virtually gives up "living" in his efforts to attain a place in the American economic structure.

Dos Passos' third choice is illustrated through Jimmy Herf and his hero, the unknown soldier, "St. Aloysius of Philadelphia, virgin and martyr, the man who would wear a straw hat out of season"[21] the man who when forced to give up his liberty or his life, chose to die for liberty's sake. Jimmy Herf makes a similar moral choice; he decides to depart from New York in a "dirty soft shirt"[22] rather than "stay in a clean arrow collar"[23]. He refuses to become part of the system which denies the individual his freedom, his individuality, and his identity. Like the vag of Dos Passos' later novels, Jimmy Herf has an active social and moral conscience; as both a reporter and individual citizen, he observes and judges society according to its respect for the individual's significance and liberty. He develops a social and moral perspective and when he acts upon the convictions of this vision, he ultimately gains a personal sense of identity and fulfillment. By defining himself politically and morally, Jimmy Herf finds a place and role in his society. Both Jimmy Herf and his hero, the unknown soldier, show that while Dos Passos uses deterministic methods in the portrayal of man in society, he is nevertheless anti-deterministic

in philosophy. Through these two characters, Dos Passos reveals his faith in the individual's power to order his own destiny and combat the forces which oppress him.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Unanimism, the term [Jules] Romains coined in order to express the activity and behaviour of groups, began in 1905 and paralled the evolution of cubism, orphism, and futurism. It was, in great measure, literary application of sociological theory and was to express, as Romains conceived it, the evolving consciousness of the collective life of groups and the city. Ben Stoltzfus, "Dos Passos and the French", in Allen Belkind, ed., Dos Passos, the Critics and the Writer's Intention, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 205.

[2]E.D. Lowry, "The Lively Art of Manhattan Transfer", PMLA 84:6 (1969), 1631.

[3]John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer ,(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), p. 351.

[4]C.C. Walcutt, "Dos Passos and Naturalism" in Allen Belkind, ed., Dos Passos, the Critics and the Writer's Intention, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 82.

[5]Ibid., pp. 81-2.

[6]John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), p. 158.

[7]Ibid., p. 228.

[8]Ibid., p. 375.

[9]Ibid., p. 176.

[10]Ibid., p. 120.

[11]Ibid., p. 120.

[12]Ibid., p. 112.

[13]Ibid., p. 136.

[14]Ibid., p. 220.

[15]Ibid., p. 96.

[16]Ibid., p. 168.

[17] Ibid., p. 17.

[18] Ibid., p. 366.

[19] Ibid., p. 366.

[20] Ibid., p. 105.

[21] Ibid., p. 401.

[22] Ibid., p. 366.

[23] Ibid., p. 366.

"We stand defeated America"

John Dos Passos
The Big Money, (1936)

III

MAN IN HISTORY: U.S.A.

In U.S.A. (1930-36), Dos Passos broadens both the scope and nature of his subject and setting. The entire American nation is used as the milieu of Dos Passos' examinations and the American historical experience furnishes his topic. American history from roughly 1900 to 1930 forms the fabric of the three novels which make up the trilogy. The 42nd Parallel deals with pre-war America, the American depression and the germinating stages of the American labor movement. Nineteen-Nineteen is concerned primarily with Wilson's war in Europe (W.W.I) and the international and personal implications of this war. In The Big Money the post-war economic boom and the beginnings of an age of science, technology, film and labor are depicted.

The body of the trilogy is devoted to the careers of a dozen people. There is no central character in U.S.A. Each novel deals with about four of the dozen and there is a slight carry-over from one novel to the next. In The 42nd Parallel the main characters are Mac McCreary and J.W. Moorehouse. Mac, the son of a laborer, struggles through the labor movement, joins and leaves the I.W.W. and ends by living with a Mexican girl and comfortably

selling radical books from their shop. J.W. Moorehouse, a youth from Delaware, rises through business and public relations into politics where he mediates between capital and labor with the purpose of keeping the latter in line. J.W. Moorehouse has a long platonic relationship with Eleanor Stoddard, a frigid, frustrated artist from Chicago who goes to New York where she prospers as an interior decorator. Eleanor later gains an important position with the Red Cross in Paris and finally marries a Russian prince. The 42nd Parallel also records the story of Janey Williams, mousey and fearful, who becomes the devoted secretary of J.W. Moorehouse.

Nineteen Nineteen adds the careers of Janey's brother Joe Williams and Richard Ellsworth Savage, an opportunist who drifts into J.W. Moorehouse's employment. A central figure of this novel's narrative is Eveline Hutchins, a girl from Chicago who joins Eleanor Stoddard as an interior decorator, goes to Paris with the Red Cross, has a brief affair with Moorehouse and later dies from a lethal dose of sleeping pills. The story of Daughter, a wild Texas tomboy who dies pregnant and rejected by Dick Savage in an airplane crash, is also depicted in this novel.

The Big Money has a central character, Charley Anderson, aviator and war ace, who goes into business manufacturing airplanes and is on the way to riches when

he is caught up in a fever of market speculation that takes his money as fast as he can make it. There are also the stories of Mary French, a student who devotes herself to the working class and reform and Margo Dowling, who works her busy heartless way through a number of men, one of them Charley Anderson, to a fat contract in Hollywood.

As in Manhattan Transfer, Dos Passos, in U.S.A., examines the individual in relation to his environment. He illustrates the divisions in the American social and political consciousness and in addition, shows how individuals deal with the conflict of interests this division embodies. As in Manhattan Transfer, Dos Passos uses this conflict as the basis of character presentation and as the platform for his social and political criticisms.

In U.S.A. Dos Passos utilizes four interrelated devices, the "Newsreel", "Camera Eye", biography and narrative, to depict the American historical experience. The newsreels, like the prose poems of Manhattan Transfer, are written in an impressionistic style and function as a general historical and social backdrop to the fictionalized lives of the narrative. They stand as the common historical and social events which the novel's various characters have created and to which in turn, they respond. The fleeting disjointed impressions of the newsreels convey the discontinuity of both historical change and the individual's understanding of the making of history.

In U.S.A., says J.P. Diggins,

> History unfolds as a kind of indeterminate determinism, a series of happenings that can be told without explicit interpretation, told only through the disjointed flashes of newspaper headlines. There is no casual order of understanding behind the disorder of events. What happens, happens.[1]

The newsreels also provide the "leitmotifs" of the trilogy's novels; they focus their attention upon such issues as war, labor, imperialism, big business, opportunity, and anti-foreigner sentiments, issues which form the subject of the biographies, "Camera Eye" passages and narrative sections of the trilogy. They also display the relationship between the public and the private, the collective and the individual consciousness. This is done in two ways, first of all by showing this relationship within the single newsreel itself as for example is done in newsreel (I). Here Dos Passos juxtaposes headlines on the war in the Philippines with the personal lines of song, "There's been many a good man murdered in the Philippines/Lies sleeping in some lonesome grave."[2] The very positioning of the newsreels amidst the biographies, "Camera Eye" passages and narrative sections of the trilogy attains a similar effect. The constant oscillation from the collective to the individual maintains the reader's awareness of the effect historical circumstances have upon individual lives.

The biographies, like the newsreels, function as a social and historical backdrop to the fictionalized

lives of U.S.A.'s narrative. They maintain the reader's awareness of the larger historical processes Dos Passos is describing throughout the trilogy. Their subjects are the men and women who influenced early twentieth century American history and culture. It is in the biographies of the novel that Dos Passos presents the central social and political conflict in America. Dos Passos moulds this conflict around the Marxian theory of history[3] as the struggle between oppressors and oppressed which, in American terms, becomes a struggle between those who betray and abuse America's democratic ideology and those who uphold it or who are being oppressed as a result of its betrayal. Dos Passos firmly establishes the individual's political, economic, and social liberty as the central issue at stake in this struggle. This notion is in effect an expansion of the conflict described in Manhattan Transfer. Whereas in Manhattan Transfer the issue of liberty was constructed around social and psychological terms, in U.S.A., it becomes a purely economic and political concept. Although this idea was hinted at in Manhattan Transfer's unknown soldier, it is not fully developed until U.S.A.

Dos Passos uses the economic, social and political conflict in America as the structural basis of the biography on Thorstein Veblen and the social and economic alternatives presented in Veblen's The Vested Interests and The Common Man. Veblen envisions two social and economic alternatives

in America:

> ...a warlike society strangled by the bureaucracies of the monopolies forced by the law of diminishing returns to grind down more and more the common man for profits.
> or a new matter-of-fact commonsense society dominated by the needs of the men and women who did the work and the incredibly vast possibilities for peace and plenty offered by the progress of technology.[4]

The historical figures portrayed in U.S.A.'s biographies are moulded around the alternatives presented in Veblen's words. The characters are established either as pro-war profiteers and betrayers of individual liberty or as anti-war supporters of the democratic creed and the common man. Dos Passos uses Andrew Carnegie, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Fred Taylor, Samuel Insull, the Morgans, and the Hearsts as representatives of the economic, political and social organizations which oppress the common man and violate American democratic principles. Thorstein Veblen, Eugene Debs, Bill Haywood, Wesley Everest, Joe Hill, Jack Reed, Isadora Duncan, Paxton Hibbon and Frank Lloyd Wright are established as the protectorates of the individual and the democratic system; all these characters are "for the people".[5] A number of biographical characters, such as Thomas A. Edison are socially irresponsible. Dos Passos finds their lack of commitment and inaction an asset to big money and war interests and hence, defines these particular characters as oppressors. Thomas Edison, writes Dos Passos,

> ...never worried about mathematics or the social system or generalized philosophical concepts;
> in collaboration with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone, who never worried about mathematics or the social system or generalized philosophical concepts;
> he worked sixteen hours a day trying to find a substitute for rubber... [6]

The distinction between oppressors and oppressed also forms the structural basis of the fictional narrative of U.S.A. Mac, Mary French, Ben Compton, Joe Williams, and Charley Anderson stand as the economically, socially and politically oppressed; J.W. Moorehouse, Eleanor Stoddard, Eveline Hutchins, G.H. Barrow, Dick Savage and the group of lawyers and politicians involved in Moorehouse's schemes, become the fictional oppressors of the American citizen's democratic rights and freedom. This distinction within Dos Passos' narrative on fictional lives comes to a forceful head in "Vag", the concluding portrait of the novel:

> Eyes black with want seek out the eyes of the drivers, a hitch, a hundred miles down the road.
> Overhead in the blue a plane drones. Eyes follow the silver Douglas that flashes once in the sun and bores its smooth way out of sight into the blue.
> (The transcontinental passengers sit pretty, big men with bankaccounts, highly paid jobs, who are saluted by doormen; telephonegirls say goodmorning to them. Last night after a fine dinner, drinks with friends, they left Newark. Roar of climbing motors slanting up into the inky haze. Lights drop away. An hour staring along a silvery wing at a big lonesome moon hurrying west through curdling scum. Beacons flash in a line across Ohio...
> The transcontinental passenger thinks contracts, profits, vacationtrips, mighty continent between Atlantic and Pacific, power, wires humming dollars, city jammed, hills empty, the indiantrail leading

> into wagonroad, the macadamed pike, the concrete skyway; trains, planes; history the billiondollar speedup,
>
> and in the bumpy air over the desert ranges towards Las Vegas
>
> sickens and vomits into the carton container the steak and mushrooms he ate in New York. No matter, silver in the pocket, greenbacks in the wallet, drafts, certified cheques, plenty restaurants in L.A.
>
> The young man waits on the side of the road; the plane has gone; thumb moves in a small arc when a car tears hissing past. Eyes seek the driver's eyes.[7]

The oppressed-oppressor motif which underlies the biographical sketches provides the reader with a general value system for the entire trilogy. When he encounters the fictional characters of the narrative, the reader will judge them by the criterion Dos Passos has presented in the biographical portraits. The symbols of war, money, and labor through which the biographical figures are depicted, become the tools the reader employs in judging and evaluating the moral and political attitudes of the trilogy's fictional characters. To ensure that the reader will evaluate correctly, that he will distinguish the oppressors from the oppressed, Dos Passos abandons total objectivity in the biographies. In the portraits of historical figures who violate democracy and victimize the common man, Dos Passos utilizes irony, satire and contradiction. Bryan, for example, is ominously depicted as the "silver tongue of the plain people";[8] a "silver tongue in a big mouth",[9] he orders an electric exercising horse as soon as he discovers that the president uses one. The portrait of Minor C. Keith, "Emperor of the Caribbean", ends with very

pointed and incriminating words: "Why that uneasy look under the eyes, in the pictures of Minor C. Keith the pioneer of the fruit trade, the railroad-builder, in all the pictures the newspapers carried of him when he died?"[10] Andrew Carnegie "The Prince of Peace", writes Dos Passos, "gave millions for peace...always except in time of war".[11] In the portrait of President Wilson, Dos Passos again places blatant contradictions side by side: "I wish to take this occasion to say that the U.S. will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest, and he landed the marines at Vera Cruz."[12] Henry Ford, says Dos Passos, hired only "good clean American workmen who didn't drink or smoke cigarettes or read or think".[13] To evoke the reader's support for those figures who uphold the individual and the democratic system Dos Passos resorts to hardline honest phrases or what he calls "straight writing".[14] In portraying these figures, Dos Passos emphasizes the purity and honesty of their words; Jack Reed, he says, "was a westerner and words meant what they said."[15] In these portraits Dos Passos directs his reader's attention to the democratic ideals these figures represent by referring to both Walt Whitman and Greek democracy. Isadora Duncan, he says, "was an American like Walt Whitman; the murdering rulers of the world were not her people; the marchers were her people; artists were not on the side of the machine-guns; she was an American in a Greek

tunic; she was for the people".[16]

In the portrait of Paxton Hibbon, Dos Passos contrasts America's democratic ideals and past with what America has become in the present:

> The rich were getting richer, the poor were getting poorer, small farmers were being squeezed out, working men were working twelve hours a day for a bare living; profits were for the rich, the law was for the rich, the cops were for the rich;
> was it for that the Pilgrims had bent their heads into the storm, filled the fleeing Indians with slugs out of their blunderbusses
> and worked the stony farms of New England;
> was it for that the pioneers crossed the Appalachians....[17]

The retrospective angle from which this biography is told, emphasizes Dos Passos' belief that Whitman's America had achieved the pure democratic formula, one formulated around freedom of speech and self-government and one which Bob Lafollette, "one of the little group of willful men expressing no opinion but their own",[18] had tried to recreate in Wisconsin,

> the model state where the voters, orderloving Germans and Finns, Scandinavians fond of their own opinion, learned to use the new leverage, direct primaries, referendum and recall.[19]

The figures of the biographies stand as representatives of the historical events and social and political attitudes which influence the fictional characters of U.S.A. Mac, Mary French, and Ben Compton, for instance, are affected by not only such historical persona as Debs, Joe Hill, Everest, Haywood, and Veblen, but by the same social and

historical conditions which have formed these mens' moral and political attitudes. Mac as a boy reads Debs and at one point in his life actually meets Big Bill Haywood at a miner's strike in Goldfield, Nevada. Mary French's father votes for Debs in 1912. The fictional characters are also affected by the actions and decisions of their country's political leaders, especially as is illustrated through Joe Williams, J.W. Moorehouse, and Dick Savage, Woodrow Wilson's decision to enter World War I and make the world safe for American democracy. Issues which concern and involve the politicians mentioned in the biographies, become the fabric of conversations in the trilogy's narrative.

Eleanor Stoddard and Eveline Hutchins, U.S.A.'s artists, are influenced by a wave of "art nouveau" and bohemian life style which to some extent was formed by Isadora Duncan and Frank Lloyd Wright. An ironic contrast is set up between the artists of the narrative and those of the biographies; it becomes apparent that while Isadora Duncan and Frank Lloyd Wright were sincere artists, for the people, Eleanor and Eveline are shams, participating in snobbish artistic circles and denying the very sensitivity which moves the true artist. Dos Passos himself borrows modern art techniques in the construction of U.S.A. The entire trilogy, especially the newsreels, "Camera Eye" sections and biographies are built out of the cubist and impressionistic devices utilized by early twentieth century

American futuristic artists, who in The 42nd Parallel, are admired by Eleanor's friend, the unconventional Maurice Millet.

The inventors portrayed in the biographies have a very strong and direct influence upon the fictional characters of U.S.A. Their inventions, "tin lizzies", airplanes, electricity, mass production and consumption affect the characters' life style, needs and ambitions.

To accentuate the relationship between history and the fictional lives of the narrative and to render the transitions between the biographies and narrative more fluid, Dos Passos in the biographies, blends history with fiction. U.S.A.'s biographical sketches are not presented as cold, streamlined historical fact. Dos Passos enters into the psyches of his historical figures; he endows them with the emotions, opinions and desires his fictional characters possess. In "The Body of an American", Dos Passos' portrait of an unknown soldier, the merging of historical and fictional matter is perfected. What was once an individual American, a conglomeration of nerves, eyes, ears, palate, tongue, fingers, toes, armpits, skin and brain searching for his "outfit",[20] is transformed into an American myth and historical phenomenon. "John Doe" becomes emblematic of the "typical soldier of this representative democracy who fought and died believing in the indisputible justice of his country's cause".[21] For

Dos Passos, the unknown soldier functions as an example of how history affects individual lives. In addition, the unknown soldier becomes the vehicle for Dos Passos' exposure of the duplicity and tragedy of American social and political ideals.

In U.S.A.'s "Camera Eye", Dos Passos simultaneously presents historical facts and the individual's reaction to them; in effect, he dramatizes the American historical experience. This technique provides U.S.A. with fluid transitions into the fictionalized correlation between history and the individual, presented in the trilogy's narrative sections.

Written in a lyrical and Joycean stream-of-consciousness style, the "Camera Eye" sections record Dos Passos' own historical experience. Not only do they portray his reactions to historical events such as the Boer War, World War I, labor conditions and movements and the famous Sacco and Vanzetti trial, but more important, they also show how history shapes Dos Passos' moral attitudes as he grows out of childhood naivete and lack of historical understanding towards the formation of the pronounced moral, political and social attitudes of his adulthood. U.S.A.'s fictionalized lives are presented in a similar manner; Dos Passos describes each character's social and historical background and perspective as a child before he portrays their opinions and morals as adults.

The "Camera Eye" sections illustrate how Dos Passos chooses a moral and political attitude towards history. Like the characters of Manhattan Transfer, the Dos Passos of the "Camera Eye" takes sides in the economic and political conflict which divides the nation. Dos Passos, as in Manhattan Transfer, renders the individual's deliberation in choosing and forming an historical and political perspective in terms of a search for an identity or "face".[22] As in the case of the vag and Jimmy Herf, this search for a moral and political position is expressed in wandering:

> You find yourself (if self is that bellyaching
> malinger so often the companion of aimless walks)...
> an unidentified stranger
> destination unknown
> hat pulled down over the has he any? face[23]

As in Manhattan Transfer and the narrative sections of U.S.A., the search for an identity, role and place in history is also expressed in the structural composition of the novel. The fragmented style of the "Camera Eye" reflects Dos Passos' psychic disorganization as he, like Veblen, continues to "[peel]the onion of doubt"?[24] Not until "Camera Eye" (46), "walk the streets and walk the streets", where Dos Passos begins to fit historical and social realities into his own political and essentially Marxist perspective, do the "Camera Eye" sections lose their surrealistic quality and become clear and straightforward prose.

The personal views Dos Passos expresses in the "Camera Eye" sections provide a value system whereby the

reader can judge the historical and political attitudes of Dos Passos' fictional characters. As mentioned earlier, Dos Passos' views are formulated around two interrelated principles, first, the Marxian theory of history as the struggle between oppressors and the oppressed, a concept which Dos Passos develops into the two-nations motif of U.S.A., and secondly, a Whitmanesque or Jeffersonian view of democracy, with an emphasis upon individualism and the speech of the people. These two tenets are presented in "Camera Eye" (50), "They have clubbed us off the streets", in which Dos Passos laments the death of Sacco and Vanzetti and the historical and social tragedy their death represents when it is interpreted in terms of America's democratic principles:

> they have clubbed us off the streets they are stronger they are rich they hire and fire the politicians and newspapereditors the old judges the small men with reputations the collegepresidents the wardheelers (listen businessmen collegepresidents judges America will not forget her betrayers) they hire the men with guns the uniforms the policecars the patrolwagons
>
> all right you have won you will kill the brave men our friends tonight
>
> there is nothing left to do we are beaten we the beaten crowd together in these old dingy schoolrooms on Salem Street shuffle up and down the gritty creaking stairs sit hunched with bowed heads on the benches and hear the old words of the haters of oppression made new in sweat and agony tonight our work is over the scribbled phrases
>
> the nights typing releases the smell of the printshop the sharp reek of newprinted leaflets the rush for Western Union stringing words into wires the search for stinging words to make you feel who are your oppressor America

> America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul.....
> all right we are two nations[25]

Dos Passos' devotion to Whitman's "storybook democracy",[26] individualism, and self-government also finds expression in U.S.A.'s vag, who embodies the notion of self-government and self-reliance. The Dos Passos of the "Camera Eye" shares a number of the vag's characteristics. Like the vag, Dos Passos is an "anonymous civilian"[27] and a victim of the forces of American economic and political oppression. This is made apparent in "Camera Eye" (51), "at the head of the valley in the dark of the hills", where Dos Passos identifies himself with the oppressed miners: "we have only words against...."[28] Dos Passos, like the vag, stands outside of society; he is an observer who records and then judges the social and historical circumstances he sees. As Blanche Gelfant states in The American City Novel, Dos Passos, like the vag, "does not belong within the picture of a society in decay, for he is the instrument through which the picture is projected. Moreover, although he has emerged from this society, he cannot be identified with it or considered part of it for he has rejected it by his disapproval and his refusal to conform to its pattern".[29]

The business of a novelist, says Dos Passos, is "to create characters first and foremost, and then to set

them in the snarl of the human currents of his time, so that there results an accurate permanent record of a phase of history".[30] Dos Passos, in the narrative sections of U.S.A., formulates an illustration of American history by describing the historical process as it is seen through the eyes and reactions of individual ordinary Americans. The characters of the fiction are used as the "human correlatives of the historical moment".[31] It is important to notice that since history provides the central issue of the narrative, no one of the twelve fictionalized lives depicted in the trilogy is established as the novel's center of interest and meaning. Each character has the same importance as the others; they all converge upon a common center, the American historical experience.

Taken together, the trilogy's twelve fictional lives form a collective portrait of American society. In the narrative, Dos Passos illustrates not only how the characters of this society are moulded by historical circumstances but he shows as well, how they react and develop various points of view towards common historical, political, and social events. By overlapping and merging his characters' lives and by using a fragmented technique of narrative presentation, Dos Passos stresses that his fictional lives are in fact simultaneously various attitudes towards common historical and social events.

Although the historical qualifications placed upon the trilogy render Dos Passos' fictional characters as

social and historical phenomena, they are nevertheless established as distinct personalities and individual beings. On a superficial level, this effect is accomplished by merely using longer narrative sections for character development than those found in Manhattan Transfer. In addition, the characters are given a stronger and continuous sense of individual identity by the role they play in narrative sections devoted to the development of an alternate character. Continuous character identity is also established by tracing the development of each character from childhood into adulthood. The most important characterization and individualization device in U.S.A. is, however, the language or idiom in which the various characters speak. Each character is given an idiom of his own and his character arises out of the very speech he uses to express his thoughts. Dos Passos' emphasis upon the speech and individuality of his characters has a very significant purpose within the novel. By accentuating the "speech of the people",[32] Dos Passos illuminates the individual's relationship with his historical and political milieu. By using the "speech of the people", Dos Passos indirectly points towards the ideal democratic system, Whitman's "storybook democracy",[33] with its emphasis on freedom of speech and the expression and exertion of individual points of view.

Each characters' moral and political perspective is expressed in his speech and this speech in turn, forms the

groundwork for the value system Dos Passos' own political views impose upon the entire trilogy. Speech becomes the medium of criticism; it allows the reader to judge and evaluate, in the terms set down in the "Camera Eye" sections and biographies, the various moral and political attitudes which make up the trilogy's narrative. Although the reader is able to sympathize and identify with Dos Passos' characters' points of view, he is nevertheless aware of the larger political and historical framework and value system upon which the novel is based. If any character expresses or illustrates a thought definable by the standards of measurement set down in the biographies and "Camera Eye" sections as destructive to individuality, as oppressive, the reader tends to reject that particular thought or action without rejecting the whole character. The reader shares the character's attitudes from within the character's consciousness but he observes simultaneously from without, judging and rejecting in the historical and political terms of reference established in the biographies and "Camera Eye". For instance, the reader enjoys Mac's attainment of a materially and emotionally comfortable existence in Mexico but nevertheless, remains fully conscious of Mac's betrayal of his social and political principles and ideals. Similarly, while the reader joins Charley Anderson in his efforts to gain the material success and the social status of those who previously

snubbed him and sympathizes with Charley in defeat, he remains aware of Charley's social, political and moral irresponsibility.

The characters of the novel dramatize both the search and choice of the various social and political alternatives observed by the vag who both introduces and concludes the novel as well as the social and political attitudes presented in the biographies and examined by the developing consciousness of the "Camera Eye". As in Manhattan Transfer, this search for an historical place and perspective is expressed in transience and the fragmented structure of the narrative. U.S.A.'s characters, like those of Manhattan Transfer, have three political and social alternatives from which to choose their own moral and historical perspective. They can on the one hand, become part of the oppressing system of economics and politics; they can on the other hand, choose to fight the social and political forces which oppress them, or thirdly, they can, for a various number of reasons, remain "down-trodden" by failing to exercise and demand their rights as individual citizens of a democratic state. Dos Passos formulates the latter two alternatives around deterministic and anti-deterministic principles.

Characters such as Margo Dowling, J.W. Moorehouse, Janey Williams, Daughter, Eleanor Stoddard, Eveline Hutchins and G.H. Barrow choose to become part of the system of oppression. They are harbourers of wealth and

power and tend to lack a social and political conscience, caring and working for no one but themselves. Ironically, as with the characters who made this choice in Manhattan Transfer, they are actually victims of the very system they have joined. While they have gained material success, fame, and power, they are generally dehumanized by their efforts to obtain these things. They are shallow sterile people who despite their social and economic successes, remain unfulfilled. The fate of Eveline Hutchins and Elizabeth Trent (Daughter) drives this point home.

Mac, Joe Williams and Mary French stand as examples of America's oppressed and in the case of Mary French, an example of those who fight oppression and take the side of America's downtrodden citizens. Dos Passos utilizes Mac (Fenian McCreary), the dominant character of The 42nd Parallel, as the embodiment of biological determinism. Like the characters of Manhattan Transfer, Mac is portrayed as being driven by his basic animal drives and impulses, needs which stand in direct opposition to his desire to dedicate himself to the liberation of the "common working stiff".[34] Mac's initial social and political principles and ideals are ultimately defeated by his need to satisfy his own basic drives. Throughout Mac's history, the reader can trace the capitulation of Mac's principles to the satisfaction of his personal appetites. Mac's desire to educate himself in order to help the oppressed of

America is ruined by a drunken sexual escapade in Seattle which renders him penniless and forces him back to the road again. His involvement with Maise and the subsequent sexual and domestic entanglements which arise, block Mac's efforts to join the striking miners in Goldfield, Nevada. In answer to Fred Hoff's belief in self-abegnation for the workingman's revolution, Mac can only reply, "Hell Fred, I'm made of flesh and blood like everybody else".[35] Mac's desire to join Zappata is also defeated by the need to satisfy personal appetites. A life with Concha, the security of owning a bookstore and being his own boss, as well as general material comfort, take preference over Mac's initial dedication to the liberation of Mexican peons and workers. Mac sells out; he is an illustration of Concha's belief that "every poor man socialista... but when you get rich, quick you all very much capitalista."[36] Dos Passos stresses that "the need of any man for ordinary creaturely satisfactions is Mac's final seduction".[37] He shows that more often than not, the common man does not have the courage and will to help create a social and political system which will ultimately safeguard his individual rights and remove him from the grip of social, political and economic forces of oppression.

Joe Williams is depicted as the victim of the lawless flow of social, economic and historical events in America. Even while affected by historical circumstances,

Joe, like the characters in Manhattan Transfer, is unable to comprehend and order them into a logical and meaningful sequence; he suffers his life "with dumb unconsciousness of how outrageous his life is".[38] Joe's destiny is shaped by both a lack of economic opportunity in America and Wilson's war in Europe. He is torpedoed, victimized by an English Alien Controls Board and attacked by anti-Hun and "slacker" factions in both Europe and America. Finally, and not without a touch of irony and pathos, he is killed in a brawl at an Armistice party. Joe is one of those who get nothing at all from America's economic and political interests. He lacks the insight, knowledge, and drive to shape his own destiny and as a consequence, is ground down by the social and political forces in which he becomes entangled. He stands as both a victim and a symbol of the waste and rot of war. The tragedy of Joe William's life becomes representative of the macrocosmic social tragedy brought about by America's departure from the democratic ideals upon which her history was based.

Mary French embodies the anti-deterministic alternative presented in Dos Passos' U.S.A. trilogy. Unlike Joe Williams, she is the victim of social and political oppression by choice; like her father and Jimmy Herf of Manhattan Transfer, and unlike Mac, Mary French rejects a materially comfortable existence in favour of devoting herself to the revolution of the working masses and the

preservation of America's democratic system of government and economics. In contrast to Joe Williams, Mary French has developed an historical perspective, one that is similar to that of the hero of the "Camera Eye". Like this character, Mary French realizes the significance of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial: "If the state of Massachusetts can kill those two innocent men in the face of the protest of the whole world, it'll mean that there never will be any justice in America ever again".[39] Mary French stands as a fictional counterpart to the heroes of the biographies. Like Veblen, Debs, Jack Reed and Haywood, Mary has the courage and will to protest America's social, economic and political ills, the very issues Dos Passos himself protests against by writing U.S.A. Mary French is the central fictional illustration of Dos Passos' adherance to an anti-deterministic philosophy and belief that personal moral integrity and will are the vehicles of social reform in America. It is significant that Mary French, like Jimmy Herf in Manhattan Transfer, is the concluding figure of the narrative. In this way Dos Passos imparts an element of hope and optimism into a hitherto defeatist, pessimistic and deterministic view of the individual's place in history. Through Mary French and the consciousness of the "Camera Eye", Dos Passos shows the reader that the real hero of his trilogy is not an individual character but a "moral attitude toward our society".[40] Mary French

and the Dos Passos of the "Camera Eye" represent the responsible moral conscience which upholds both the state and the individual man. Dos Passos stresses that this alone can rescue the individual and the nation from the imminent process of America's political, moral and social disintegration and decay.

FOOTNOTES

[1]J.P. Diggins, "Visions of Chaos and Visions of Order: Dos Passos as Historian", American Literature, XLVI (1950), 330.

[2]John Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 29.

[3]The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles, freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journey-man, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. Melvin Cherno, Western Society: Institutions and Ideals, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), IV, 26.

[4]John Dos Passos, The Big Money, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 119.

[5]Ibid., p. 173.

[6]John Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 311.

[7]John Dos Passos, The Big Money, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), pp. 554-555.

[8]John Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 187.

[9]Ibid., p. 189.

[10]Ibid., p. 259.

[11]Ibid., p. 278.

[12]John Dos Passos, Nineteen Nineteen, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1932), p. 252.

[13]John Dos Passos, The Big Money,(New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 73.

[14]I think that there is such a thing as straight writing.... The mind of a generation is its speech. A writer makes aspects of that speech enduring by putting them into print. He whittles at the words and phrases of today and makes them forms to set the mind of tomorrow's generation. J.H. Wrenn, John Dos Passos,(New Haven: College and University Associated Press, 1961), p. 148.

[15]John Dos Passos, Nineteen Nineteen,(New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1932), p. 37.

[16]John Dos Passos, The Big Money,(New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 173.

[17]John Dos Passos, Nineteen Nineteen, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1932), p. 190.

[18]John Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 371.

[19]Ibid., p. 371.

[20]John Dos Passos, Nineteen Nineteen, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 465.

[21]Ibid., p. 464.

[22]John Dos Passos, The Big Money, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 212.

[23]Ibid., pp. 211-212.

[24]Ibid., p. 168.

[25]Ibid., pp. 468-469.

[26]Ibid., p. 168.

[27]John Dos Passos, Nineteen Nineteen, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 242.

[28]John Dos Passos, The Big Money, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 523.

[29]Blanche Gelfant, The American City Novel, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), pp. 168-169.

[30]Melvin Landsberg, Dos Passos' Path to U.S.A, (Boulder: The Colorado Associated University Press, 1972), p. 201.

[31] Blanche Gelfant, The American City Novel, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 174.

[32]John Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. xx.

[33]John Dos Passos, The Big Money, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 168.

[34]Ibid., p. 120.

[35]John Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel ,(New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1930), p. 121.

[36]Ibid., p. 320.

[37]Lois Hughson,"In Search of the True America: Dos Passos' Debt to Walt Whitman in U.S.A.", Modern Fiction Studies, XIX (1973), 187.

[38]Alfred Kazin, "Dos Passos and the 'Lost Generation'", Allen Belkind, ed., Dos Passos, The Critics, and The Writer's Intention, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 18.

[39]John Dos Passos, The Big Money, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1936), p. 458.

[40]Kenneth Ledbetter, "The Journey of John Dos Passos", Humanities Association Bulletin, XVIII:2 (1967), 44.

"My heart rebels against my generation,
That talks of freedom and is slave to riches,
And, toiling 'neath each day's ignoble burden,
Boasts of the morrow."

George Santayana
"Ode", (1927)

IV

MAN IN INSTITUTIONS: MIDCENTURY

As a "contemporary chronicle" [1] Midcentury (1960) stands as a coda to Dos Passos' U.S.A. trilogy, chronologically in time and thematically as well as structurally. In Midcentury, Dos Passos deals with America of the 1940's and 50's and attempts to show how America has changed during the course of a century. In U.S.A., Dos Passos depicted the efforts of various individuals such as Veblen, Debs, Everest, Lewis, Haywood, Reed, Lafollette, Mac and Mary French to establish institutions and organizations which would protect the rights of individual citizens in conflict with American business and political systems. In Midcentury, he portrays the product of these efforts. He shows that the institutions initially set up to guarantee and protect the rights of individual workingmen in America, now abuse and betray their very function. The individual, says Dos Passos, has become the victim of those institutions which were to support and ensure his rights. As in Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A., Dos Passos, in Midcentury, offers a solution to the individual in conflict with institutions. He stresses, throughout the novel, the importance of the

individual's personal, social and moral responsibility; this alone he believes, can rescue the individual from the oppressing force exerted by contemporary economic and social institutions. As in Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A., Dos Passos utilizes the structure of his novel in portraying both the struggle between the individual and institutions and the final solution offered.

The change in Dos Passos' political perspective as he moves from U.S.A. to Midcentury is reflected in the tone of the latter novel. While in U.S.A. Dos Passos' mood was one of political idealism, in Midcentury it is that of a bitter and disillusioned observer: "poetic insight has had to give way to the dulling impact of reality".[2]

In contrast to Dos Passos' development as an artist between the writing of Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A., Midcentury displays almost no development in Dos Passos' artistic devices. Structurally and stylistically it is almost identical to U.S.A. Midcentury's documentaries are for example, direct counterparts of U.S.A.'s newsreels and like the newsreels, they establish the historical and social milieu in which the novel is set. Like U.S.A., Midcentury contains narrative sections on fictionalized lives. As in U.S.A., these portions of the novel function as the fictional correlatives of social and historical events. They also show how social and historical

circumstances affect individual lives and again, present various perspectives and attitudes towards common historical and social circumstances. Midcentury's narrative, like that of U.S.A., is organized in a fragmented manner and is interspersed with biographical portraits of contemporary social and political figures. U.S.A.'s "Camera Eye" sections are repeated in the lyrical prose passages which introduce Midcentury's chapters.

Midcentury, like U.S.A., is placed within a broad, national setting. It traces the period since the 1940's through the intermeshing lives of six principle characters, Blackie Bowman, an old time Wobbly and war veteran, Terry Bryant, a laborer and small time union organizer, Frank Worthington, a union president, Jap Milliron, a business executive, Milliron's son-in-law, Will Jenks, who tries to break a taxi monopoly with his own cab company, and in the last chapter of the novel, Milliron's nephew, the self-indulgent Stan Goodspeed. Interlarded with these lives are those of such characters as Michael N. Papadopoulos, H. Hendrikson, and H.J. Pfaff, characters of "The Investigator's Notes". The intermeshing of these lives supplies the fabric of Dos Passos' depiction of the individual in conflict with institutions.

In the lyrical prose passages of the novel, Dos Passos presents the major focus of his theme, the conflict between the individual and institutions. Here he also

firmly establishes the importance of individual responsibility in this struggle. Both notions are presented in the ruminations of the character who dominates these sections of the novel. Through this character, who is usually identified as Dos Passos himself, Dos Passos continues the vag motif presented in his earlier novels, Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A. The vag, a wanderer, once again functions as an observer and judge of his society. In Midcentury, he is characterized as a philospher, a thinker who contemplates the universe and the fate of modern man in a technological and highly organized society.

The "vag" of Midcentury's introductory passages perceives the tragic and ironic paradox of man's need to create the institutions which eventually crush him. He realizes that man, in his efforts to safeguard his individual rights, erects institutions and that in turn, he must erect new institutions to combat the power and abuses of those erected earlier. This paradox is reflected in the cyclical images Dos Passos presents in the lyrical prose passages. The growth and decay of natural phenomena and the rise and fall of social and historical institutions supplies their basis. Through this cyclical framework, Dos Passos predicts the growth and inevitable decay of twentieth century social, economic and political institutions, a process he subsequently outlines in Midcentury's narrative, documentaries and biographies. In these sections of the

novel, Dos Passos repeats the circular images established in the lyrical prose introductions to his chapters. The characters of the documentaries, biographies, and narrative are portrayed as ensnared within the circle of a frustrated search for justice and economic survival.

In "Your Place in the World", Dos Passos exemplifies the conflict between America's institutions, especially labor and business, and the individual American citizen in the skirmish between the dog and the raccoon. The raccoon, laid at the "master's feet",[3] becomes symbolic of the destruction of the individual American's freedom when he is placed within a highly organized environment. The juxtaposition of the freedom and beauty of the natural world with the burdened conscience of the man who contemplates his society, accentuates this tragedy.

In "A Creature That Builds", and "Systems of Enterprise", Dos Passos again presents the central conflict and structural fabric of his novel. Man, in "A Creature That Builds", is portrayed as an institution builder, sacrificing "individual diversity for diversity of caste".[4] The entire piece is constructed around parallels between human society and that of polyps, bees and ants. These parallels provide the source of animal and insect imagery in the novel, a naturalistic structure which becomes especially important when Dos Passos points out that the complex society of the ant, like that of man, contains

its thieves, predators, greedy roaches and scavengers and that social insects, like men, often lose all sense of species-preservation to satisfy their individual instincts.

This theme is continued in "Systems of Enterprise", in which Dos Passos uses individuality as the center of discussion. Again, parallels with the animal world are utilized; the aardvark exemplifies Dos Passos' thesis that "variety instead of uniformity is nature's law".[5] To an institutional-minded society the variousness of life, says Dos Passos, becomes a source of fear for it cracks "the dogmatic mold which man the classifier laboriously constructs to ease the pain of sorting out diversities".[6]

In "Sendoff", Dos Passos laments the tragic victory of man's crusade against diversity; here Dos Passos states that there is no longer a place in society for "the still small private voice that is God's spark in man".[7] The "paragon of animals",[8] "walker on hindlegs, hurler of sticks, foodgiver, builder of shelter, toolmaker, creation's lord, initiator, master of Yes and No",[9] man has succeeded in eliminating freedom, variety and responsibility which for Dos Passos, constitute the very essence of life.

Dos Passos also establishes his belief in the primacy of the individual in the very structural composition of the novel's introductory passages. The oscillation from a universal and general scope to the individual's point of view indicates that Dos Passos' concern is

ultimately with the individual and more specifically, with individual responsibility, "the still small private voice that is God's spark in man".[10] The movement from the general to the specific also provides the pattern for the novel's oscillation from the historical and social backgrounds established in the documentaries to the biographies and the narrative on individual lives.

In Midcentury's documentaries, Dos Passos presents the social, historical, political, and technological background of the novel. As in Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A., he describes the effects of this setting upon the individual. In addition, he once more establishes the conflict between social and economic institutions and the individual. The documentaries evoke the rapid pace and complexity of modern living and record the development of America's political, labor, racial, and youth problems. Most important, however, is their illustration of the effects of technology upon individual lives. The characters of the narrative portions of the novel adopt the qualities of the machines described in the novel's documentaries. As in Manhattan Transfer, the characters are both treated and conscious of themselves as lifeless and empty mechanical objects. Joey, the mechanical boy of documentary one, becomes representational of the emotional and mental condition of individuals living in a machine-oriented society.

The documentaries also show that in a highly organized society, individuality is usually neglected in favour of efficiency, uniformity and profit. They trace the growth and corruption of the American labor movement and the threat corrupt labor organizations pose to the survival of individuality and liberty. As portrayed in the documentaries and subsequently outlined in the remainder of the novel, the common man is faced on the one side with "greedy and ruthless employers"[11] and on the other, with "racketeer-infested union[s] with corrupt leadership".[12] Common men cannot help themselves, says Dos Passos, because "[their] servants have become [their] masters".[13]

Like the documentaries, Midcentury's biographies provide a historical and social backdrop for the novel's narrative. They trace the growth of labor organization, various personal careers and moral attitudes, and the social and historical events which shape the fictional lives of the narrative. Unlike the biographies in U.S.A., those in Midcentury are written in a flat unemotional style. One need only compare U.S.A.'s biographies on Eugene Debs and Thorstein Veblen with Midcentury's biographies on Senator McClellan and W.F. Dean to notice that the irony and idealism of the former have given way to a much calmer and disillusioned tone. By writing in this manner, Dos Passos establishes Midcentury as a realistic confrontation of fact.

Midcentury's biographies are formulated around two general principles, the conflict between the individual and social and political institutions and the juxtaposition of social and moral responsibility with social and moral complacency. Both concepts find their center in "The Uncertainty Principle", the biography on J.R. Oppenheimer, the socially irresponsible communist physicist who participated in the Manhattan Engineer Project. Here Dos Passos ponders

> the difficulty of discovering where the cleavage lies (not outside but inside civilization)
> between the powers that would destroy and the powers that would save
> the spirit of man....[14]

The remaining biographies of the novel are organized around this question and the division it entails.

Dos Passos believes that those who destroy "the spirit of man" are those institutions and men who eliminate the individual's freedom, individuality and right to exercise both social and personal responsibility. Sigmund Freud, for example, is classified as a destroyer because his philosophies, like those of Marx, deny the individual his capacity for self-determination and responsibility. Freud, says Dos Passos,

> by crying up inhibition as the ultimate ill ...disposed of thou shalt not. God
> is a father image to be talked out of the system. The Marxists at least
> made transcendent their anti-God principle;

> For Paraclete read Dialectic; Man worships History,
> Thesis, Antitheses, Synthesis
> form another new Trinity; by scrupulous adherance
> to the Party Line a man may be assured of salvation
> by dialectical materialism;
> these are the brainwashers, the twin myths of
> Marx and Freud, opposed yet interlocking, as victory
> interlocks with defeat, which soared out of the
> scientific ruminations of the late nineteenth century
> to hover like scavenger birds
> over the disintegration of the Western will.[15]

In "The Promised Land (Old Style)", the story of Sam Goldwyn, Dos Passos shows that the dividing line between the oppressors and upholders of the "spirit of man" is often ambiguous. In this portrait, the flaws of a capitalistic, free enterprise system become apparent. The freedom and opportunity afforded by a democratic system encourage and allow individual enterprise and economic success but at the same time, this system of government and economics produces a caste of privileged and underprivileged classes. Dos Passos also shows that within such a social, economic and political system, it remains up to the fortunate to feed the downtrodden of America. Throughout Midcentury it becomes obvious that more often than not, the privileged neglect their duty to the poor. Eleanor Roosevelt exemplifies a similar problem. Although Eleanor remains conscious of her duty to the unfortunate, she is unable to distinguish between a good cause and a shady one. Dos Passos points out that "it never occurred to the rightthinkers that the resentments they fanned up among the underprivileged might become the sinew of new oppressions".[16]

As is illustrated in Midcentury, the labor and welfare systems organized to protect the underprivileged, ultimately deny the individual the responsibility and right to steer his own destiny. The ill effects of these systems are portrayed in the biographical sketches of labor organizers and the narrative on Blackie Bowman, Terry Bryant and Stan Goodspeed.

In the biographies, Dos Passos shows that labor unions initially set up to protect the individual's rights and voice the opinions of individual men, eventually strangle the freedoms they were meant to guarantee. Bosses dominate union policy and union members, fearing unemployment, do as they are told. John Lewis, for instance, "ruled his unions with a heavy hand. To mine coal you had to mind John L.... The ...mineworkers thought what John L wanted them to think. He was boss."[17] Walter Reuther, president of the UAW, preaches responsibility, self-government and J.S. Mill. Reuther, however, was ironically "so convinced of the probity of his own intentions that he never could believe in the probity of people who had other ideas".[18] As president of the UAW, he came to feel that "Democracy was when the men voted the way the Reuthers wanted them to vote in a union election".[19] The teamsters, men who chose their vocation for the "freedom of the life"[20] it allowed, find themselves dominated by union bosses such as Dan Tobin, Dave Beck, and Jimmy Hoffa.

In the biographical sketches of labor organizers, Dos Passos develops the paradox inherent within the establishment of social and political institutions. Dos Passos attributes the corruption of these systems to the essentially imperfect nature of man. Unable to "slough off meanness and greed",[21] man inevitably becomes drunk with power and the object of his own interests. Men, like the ants, are usually driven by their own "perversions of appetite".[22]

Dos Passos, despite this deterministic view, does offer an optimistic alternative in Midcentury. In the biographies as well as the fictional narrative, he presents characters who abandon self-interest and dedicate themselves to the protection of the individual citizen's liberty and rights. These characters, like their counterparts in U.S.A., generally advocate self-government and the personal and moral conscientiousness it demands. Their philosophies find their roots in an essentially anarchist ideology, one which Dos Passos himself favoured.[23]

Dos Passos establishes the country lawyer, John McClellan, as an upholder of the individual's liberty and rights. As chairman of the Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Field, John McClellan supports "justice and the right of American citizens to be protected against violence and oppression."[24] He believes that man, rich or poor,

> has God's image in him,
> and the right
> to stand up by himself against bullying institutions;
> to choose how he'll work for his living;
> to choose, so long as he doesn't overjostle his neighbour, whatever opportunities offer to push his way in the world;
> that he has the right to help set the rules and pick the men who handle public affairs:
> selfgovernment. Freedom. The same passions that drove the institutionbuilders to victory entered long ago into the makeup of the word American.[25]

It is in the biography of McClellan that Dos Passos emphasizes the significance of the working man's attempts to fight union corruption. This fight, he says, is in essence one to save the American democratic system: "If this union corruption continues it will spread like a cancer and eventually with the use of rigged elections it can jeopardize our free and democratic system of government."[26]

Bob Lafollette, like McClellan, is also portrayed as a protectorate of the individual. Like his father, Bob Lafollette dedicates his life to "the proposition that the voice of the people, the still small voice of everyman's conscience ...was the voice of God. Politics and the polls were sacred rites,self-government his sacrament".[27]

In the portrait of W.F. Dean, Dos Passos stresses the importance of personal responsibility and moral and social conscientiousness. The lack of this type of responsibility in America of the midcentury, Dos Passos believes, has placed American citizens at the mercy of American social, economic and political institutions. The social responsibility seen in Debs, Everest, Haywood and

Mary French in U.S.A. has given way to social irresponsibility and selfish behaviour on the part of both labor organizers and union members. This in itself contributes to the destruction of the individual American's rights. W.F. Dean's story is told by juxtaposing the moral integrity and judgement Dean maintains as a prisoner of war with the irresponsibility and lack of moral and social conscience that characterizes America of the midcentury. The new generation, says Dos Passos, does not know that responsibility, moral integrity, "the little spark of God in every man, is what keeps man alive in adversity"[28]; they do not know that this is what, in both a personal and social sense, maintains the sanctity of the individual within an institutionalized society. Communist forms of government, Dos Passos adds, deny this spirit in man; their ideology contradicts itself. Like America's labor unions, communist societies ultimately deny the individual the right to voice his rights and exercise personal and social responsibility. The answer for both the survival of American democracy and the individual's right to order his own destiny lies in W.F. Dean's moral formula. Hence Dean is allowed to maintain his stance as a public hero in Dos Passos' eyes and in addition, his moral attitude is firmly established as the "hero" of Midcentury.

By contrasting the biographical portrait of W.F.

Dean with that of the film star, James Dean, Dos Passos accentuates the significance of the individual's social responsibility and moral integrity. The hero of America's youth, James Dean is established as the modern counterpart to the American hero, Huck Finn. Huck, the embodiment of individuality and self-government, is a true vag; he observes and judges his society and gradually develops a personal and social code of ethics, an internal "compass".[29] James Dean and the generation of Americans he represents are portrayed as the antithesis of Huck. They are the modern vags, wandering but psychologically confused, irresponsible and listless. "Lone wolf brat[s]",[30] "poor mixed up kid[s]",[31] they have no use for freedom and the responsibility it entails. Instead, they value "social security and welfare and tailfins on their cars and packaging...."[32] Dos Passos portrays America's youth as victims, of the wants and desires the social and business sectors of society dictate. This new generation, he says has no mind of its own. Dos Passos believes that socially, politically and personally, America's youth have abdicated their individuality and responsibility as citizens of a democratic nation.

Through his portrait of James Dean, Dos Passos depicts the beginnings of an age in which all traces of individuality.

will be lost in the grip of an institutionalized, technological, materialistic, and mass-minded environment. A generation of James Deans, he points out, is the product of social, economic and political systems founded on social welfare and security. Communist and socialist systems, Dos Passos believes, quickly destroy man's spirit, will, strength, drive and dignity, the very qualities which a democratic system, if it works responsibly on both a governmental and grass-roots level, will maintain.

In "The Investigator's Notes", Dos Passos begins to narrow the focus of his novel; the lives of ordinary men now form his subject. Issues which concern the characters of the "Notes" are identical to those upon which the biographies, documentaries, and lyrical prose passages are founded. The conflict between the individual and social institutions, especially organized labor, and the individual's responsibility and role in altering or removing oppressive institutions provide the focal points of both their structure and theme. As a mixture of fact and fiction, "The Investigator's Notes" provide transitional links with both the factual material presented in Midcentury's biographies and the fictional narrative on Blackie Bowman, Terry Bryant, Jap Milliron, and Will Jenks. "The Investigator's Notes" stand as the findings of the McClellan labor investigations committee. Their anonymous observer and recorder and their anonymous general settings give them a tone appropriate

to an investigatory programme and in addition, serve to universalize the individual experiences examined. The characters of the "Notes", through the sheer variety of the vocational alternatives and personality types they exemplify, endow the "Notes" with both an air of realism and representativeness.

To gain his readers' support for the suffering characters of the "Notes", Dos Passos establishes his anonymous investigator as a cool-headed, rational skeptic; thus, when the investigator finds himself "suffering, living, undergoing the little man's story",[33] the reader is also hooked. The reality and urgency of the workingman's grievances against the labor organizations which victimize him are driven home with the death of Michael N. Papadopoulos, the old man who before his death, had confided in the investigator. It is significant that this incident occurs in the first set of investigatory notes; the incident itself supplies the incentive for a continued and prolonged investigation of union corruption and in addition, makes both the reader and the investigator receptive to the fear expressed by the workingmen in Midcentury's remaining "Notes".

"The Investigator's Notes" give a detailed account of labor abuses as they are described in the biographical portraits of the novel. They record the effects of big labor intimidation on the common workingman and like the documentaries, they accentuate the helplessness of individual workers under the domination of big labor

organizations. The characters of the "Notes" are generally pro-union but each in turn emphasizes that they support small independent unions in which the voice of the individual can be heard:

> Our independent union was all right....The main thing about it was it was ours. We had monthly meetings and a man could talk his head off if he wanted to...after all it was our privilege.[34]

As in the lyrical prose sections and biographies of the novel, Dos Passos, in "The Investigator's Notes",expands the concept of a democratic union into a democratic system of government. The destruction of the individual's role in the independent democratic union, he explains, entails the collapse of American democracy. As the smallest democratic unit, the unions should be the core of America's democratic system of government, whose prime purpose is to guarantee the individual American's rights.

As in the biographical sketches of the two Deans, Dos Passos, in "The Investigator's Notes", juxtaposes social and moral responsibility and irresponsibility. Characters such as Hendrikson and Pfaff are placed in direct opposition to the general wave of social irresponsibility gripping the nation. "I don't know what's come over the people of this country", says Pfaff, "They just don't seem to care".[35] In addition, the honesty and sincerity of these men's aspirations and convictions stand in direct contrast to the dishonest, irresponsible and selfish manipulations of the labor bosses who control the small man's destiny.

In "Blackie Bowman Speaking", Dos Passos narrows the focus of his novel even further; a single voice now records, in stream-of-consciousness style, the individual's conflict with America's social and ecomonic institutions. As a victim of these institutions, Blackie quickly gains the reader's sympathy and understanding. In "Blackie Bowman Speaking", Dos Passos repeats the theme of his novel, that social and economic institutions established to protect the individual citizen's freedom and rights ultimately destroy the individual's freedom and right to exercise responsibility for both his own and his country's fate.

The story of Blackie Bowman revolves around Dos Passos' own change in political perspective as it is seen through a comparison of U.S.A. and Midcentury. The two poles of experience presented in these two novels provide the structural basis of Dos Passos' narrative on Blackie Bowman. On the one hand, Blackie, like Dos Passos, shows enthusiasm for socialist principles, which he believes will protect the individual's freedom; on the other hand, as portrayed in Midcentury's lyrical prose passages, "Investigator's Notes", and biographies, Dos Passos and subsequently Blackie, display a disillusionment with what socialist institutions have done to the individual's role in determining his own social, political and economic

destiny. By using a flashback technique of narration, Dos Passos places these two points of view, which arise separately with youth and age, in marked contrast.

Blackie's views as a youth revolve around the socialist notion that "all working people in the world are brothers"[36] and that when "any form of government becomes destructive to the rights of individual men, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it".[37] He also believes that each man should take from society according to his needs and give to society according to his means. Blackie has first hand experience of the flaws in this type of thinking. "All my life", he says,

> I been waiting for the Promised Land. We used to call it the revolution but all that means now is firing squads and jails. That's why I never accomplished anything in my life. Waiting for pie in the sky made nothing ever worth bearing down on.
>
> Then the organizations began to take over. Opened up the Promised Land to dues paying members only, and then only so long as you kept your trap shut.
>
> The great success of the Commies was because they were smart enough to take advantage of the trend. They took all the hopes of mankind and turned them into a concentration camp.[38]

Blackie Bowman's disillusionment with institutionalized society also stems from his experience at the "Haven". Blackie's stay at the "Haven" left him worried because, he says, "I always thought it was economic necessity that made people do wrong."[39] His companions at the "Haven", even while they had "pie in the sky", "lied and stole worse than ever".[40] This experience dramatizes Dos Passos' thesis

that human nature is itself the obstacle to the realization of the ideals envisioned in the establishment of social institutions. Institutions of any kind are ultimately corrupted by the human instinct to satisfy personal needs before social ones. Pure individualism is in the end the corrupter of the institution.

Blackie is ultimately characterized as one of those who follow a path of individualism rather than struggle for social equity by reforming America's economic and social institutions. Like Mac of U.S.A., he becomes a "scissorbill",[41] betraying his social responsibilities and ideals to satisfy his personal appetites, which as in Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A., are embodied in the powerful temptation wielded by women and money.

Blackie Bowman's abandonment of the American labor movement stands in contrast to the faith, sense of personal responsibility and determination displayed in Terry Bryant. Terry Bryant's story absorbs the thematic substance of Midcentury's biographical sketches. His dedication to the common man and justice parallels the efforts of Lafollette and McClellan and his story repeats the pattern of failure established in these two biographical portraits. In addition, Terry experiences the corruption of America's labor movement as it is described in the biographies on such union bosses as Lewis, Reuther, Tobin, Beck and Hoffa.

Terry, like Joe Williams and Mary French of U.S.A., exists as a victim of historical and social events. A

survivor of W.W. II, he is subsequently caught up in the wave of labor organization sweeping over America. Like Jimmy Herf of Manhattan Transfer, Terry Bryant, on returning from Europe, hails America as the land of opportunity and freedom; he sincerely believes that America's social and economic institutions will guarantee the rights of America's workingmen. Like Jimmy Herf of Manhattan Transfer and Dos Passos himself, he is ultimately disillusioned by the real nature of America's social and economic conditions. On first joining the International union, Terry believes that he has found the opportunity to wield his rights and responsibility as an American citizen. Gradually he discovers that unions are corrupt and that the union bosses, not the little man, have the final word. Terry also finds that America's judicial system condones big labor practices. As a consequence, his own crusade for justice, not for himself personally but for the working man in America, is defeated. Like Blackie, Terry decides to fend for himself: "A man's folks come first.... Driving a Hack a man's on his own".[42] Like the unknown soldier of Manhattan Transfer, Terry is victimized by his efforts to fight for liberty. He too emerges a hero: "Terry Bryant had died for freedom.... Here was a man who had chosen death rather than lose his liberty".[43]

Both Blackie and Terry Bryant's lives and principles merge with those in the narrative sections on Frank Worthington,

Jap Milliron, and Will Jenks. Blackie's belief that a man's worth comes from the work he does, supplies the fabric of Jap Milliron and Will Jenks' struggles to establish independent private enterprise. Terry's dedication to the individual American's freedom and democratic rights merges with Jap Milliron and Will Jenks' efforts to guarantee not only the rights of the American workingman, but those of American businessmen as well. Terry, like Frank Worthington, believes in "keeping in touch with the grass roots".[44] However, Frank, like Blackie Bowman, becomes a "scissorbill". He immerses himself in an impersonal bureaucratic labor office and buys a grand home near a community country club. Ironically, as a protectorate of the working class, Frank Worthington leads an essentially bourgeois life.

In "Tomorrow the Moon", Dos Passos circles back to the biographies on Freud, James Dean and W.F. Dean. Like James Dean, Stan Goodspeed stands as the epitome of irresponsibility. Travelling across America with his stolen credit cards, Stan represents the modern vag, irresponsible, resentful, psychologically listless and confused. Like Dean, Goodspeed is the antithesis of a Huck Finn and Dos Passos' earlier vags, Jimmy Herf, Mary French and the Dos Passos of U.S.A.'s "Camera Eye" sections. Stan neither judges nor observes; he just tries to "get more and do less".[45] He lacks the spirit, "the little

spark of God in every man" that forms the essence of Dos Passos' philosophy. He lacks W.F. Dean's internal compass of ethics and the will and ability to distinguish right from wrong. Like James Dean, Stan blames all social and economic ills not upon himself but upon others and that conveniently vague abuser, the system, one which is ironically formed and condoned by Goodspeed's moral complacency and denial of his own personal and social responsibility.

FOOTNOTES

[1] J.H.Wrenn, John Dos Passos, (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 176.

[2] J.G. Becker, John Dos Passos, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974), p. 94.

[3] John Dos Passos, Midcentury, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 120.

[5] Ibid., p. 284

[6] Ibid., p. 283.

[7] Ibid., p. 496.

[8] Ibid., p. 496.

[9] Ibid., p. 496.

[10] Ibid., p. 496.

[11] Ibid., pp. 147-8.

[12] Ibid., p. 148.

[13] Ibid., p. 104.

[14] Ibid., p. 334.

[15] Ibid., p. 30.

[16] Ibid., p. 190.

[17] Ibid., p. 116.

[18] Ibid., p. 141.

[19] Ibid., p. 142.

[20] Ibid., p. 216.

[21] Ibid., p. 137.

[22] Ibid., p. 120.

[23] "While displaying little faith in anarchistic programs, Dos Passos has consistently embraced the anarchic ideal of a society made harmonious not by submission or obedience to the authority of institutions, but by the free association of men - a society in which every man can realize the full development of all his faculties and reach a full individualization not possible under capitalist individualism, or state socialism. In attempting to realize this ideal, Dos Passos rejected in turn both capitalism and communism, believing at one time the two systems were about equal.... The flaw in each system according to Dos Passos, was its tendency to limit and to categorize men... he turned in the 1950's to "the clean words our fathers spoke", to the eighteenth-century ideals of self-government and decentralization associated with Jeffersonian agrarianism. Kenneth Ledbetter, "The Journey of John Dos Passos", Humanities Association Bulletin, XVIII: 2 (1967), 47.

[24] John Dos Passos, Midcentury, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 272.

[25] Ibid., p. 276.

[26] Ibid., p. 275.

[27] Ibid., p. 356.

[28] Ibid., p. 421.

[29] Ibid., p. 421.

[30] Ibid., p. 480.

[31] Ibid., p. 480.

[32] Ibid., p. 481.

[33] Ibid., p. 106.

[34] Ibid., p. 233.

[35] Ibid., p. 296.

[36] Ibid., p. 279.

[37] Ibid., p. 175.

[38]Ibid., p. 61.

[39]Ibid., p. 65.

[40]Ibid., p. 66.

[41]Ibid., p. 264.

[42]Ibid., p. 353.

[43]Ibid., p. 468.

[44]Ibid., p. 226.

[45]Ibid., p. 420.

"To be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education, and a career".

George Santayana
Character and Opinion in The United States, (1920)

CONCLUSION

Manhattan Transfer, U.S.A., and Midcentury show that while Dos Passos, as a naturalistic novelist, uses the typical and collective experience as the groundwork of his novels, his concern is primarily with the individual. Each novel presents individuals in conflict with their milieu and in each, Dos Passos emphasizes the individual's role in defining the problem of social, historical and institutional oppression. As displayed in the three novels examined in this study, Dos Passos' solution to oppression lies in the individual's awareness of his responsibility to both himself and the society to which he belongs. Dos Passos stresses that the exertion of individual responsibility and will is the only way in which the individual's rights can be protected from social, historical and political forms of oppression. Democracy, because it accomodates the individual's voice and opinion, is offered as the ideal form of government. Within this system of government and social organization, the individual is allowed the opportunity of becoming an "architect of history". This role is embodied in the "vag", who in various forms, exists in each of the novels studied. A type of Huck Finn, the vag

observes and judges his environment and then forms a code of ethics through which he interprets and evaluates his social and historical milieu. This process Dos Passos believes, is one which finally sustains democracy and ultimately ensures the individual's rights as a citizen of a democratic state.

Although Dos Passos offers a solution to the problem of oppression, his novels are imbued with a sense of defeat and determinism. This is directly linked to Dos Passos' belief that human nature, man's inability to "slough off meanness and greed", stands as the main obstacle to the individual's struggle for freedom from oppression. As is stated in The Theme Is Freedom, "Faith in self-government, when all is said and done, is faith in the eventual goodness of man".[1]

In "The Duty of The Writer", Dos Passos states that "the type of writer I am interested in...is the writer who is also a good citizen".[2] An examination of Manhattan Transfer, U.S.A., and Midcentury shows how closely Dos Passos as a novelist, tried to fulfil his role as a citizen. The novels studied are themselves indicative of Dos Passos' own awareness of his responsibilities as a citizen. Through these novels, Dos Passos worked at restoring "Whitman's storybook democracy" and "helping Americans discover who they are...before it is too late."[3]

Dos Passos believed that it was the writer's duty to act first as a citizen and only then as an artist. The business of the writer-citizen he believed, was one of instruction. As displayed in the three novels examined in this study, Dos Passos was quite willing to sacrifice his artistic pursuits to the fulfillment of his educative, didactic aims. By Midcentury the instructive ends of Dos Passos' writing take total preference over the creation of works of "art". The style, structure and characters of this novel are geared to an educative purpose. This insistence upon instruction in Midcentury is attributable to the place this novel occupies in Dos Passos' literary career. Manhattan Transfer, an early novel, stands as a presentation or description of social abuses and oppressions as Dos Passos, the young artist, observed them. U.S.A. is in essence, a working out of a solution and perspective towards the problem of oppression. In Midcentury, Dos Passos concentrates on driving home this solution which as mentioned earlier, lies in the individual's awareness of his own personal and social responsibility and the action this responsibility demands. In his effort to educate his readers, Dos Passos, in Midcentury, almost defeats his very purpose. The admonitory finger is so obvious and pronounced in this novel that the novel itself threatens to become tiresome to the reader. The lack of subtlety and artistic softening of the hardline didacticism

in the novel spoils the reader's pleasure in learning what Dos Passos has to offer. In addition, the characters of the novel are so closely intertwined with the basic social and political division in the novel that they tend to become uninteresting. They function as vehicles of didacticism and are consequently not fleshed out as individual's with whom the reader can sympathize and identify.

Midcentury's basic flaw as a novel lies in the fact that the reader is not allowed to participate with its characters and the process of evaluation at work in the novel. Dos Passos himself does all the judging and evaluating in the novel, thus restricting his readers to a passive role. Dos Passos, in Midcentury, denies the reader's function and responsibility as an audience; the reader is not given the opportunity to evaluate and freely form an opinion on the characters and events he has encountered in the novel. Like Walter Reuther, one of Midcentury's biographical characters, Dos Passos is so convinced of the probity of his own opinions and intentions that in his fervor to present them, he risks losing the reader's willingness to learn and listen. Dos Passos, in Midcentury, educates his readers but at the expense of the individual reader's freedom of thought and opinion, the very premise upon which the novel is based.

U.S.A. is much more effective as an educative novel because the reader is allowed to be absorbed in the

individual lives of the novel. While identifying with the novel's characters, the reader, by means of the value system constructed in the biographies and "Camera Eye" sections, is simultaneously allowed to participate in the evaluation of the characters and events presented within the novel. The reader joins the developing consciousness of the "Camera Eye" passages in the discovery of social, historical and political oppression. The intensity of Dos Passos' tone and involvement in U.S.A. also captivates the reader and makes him receptive to the educative experience offered in the novel. In U.S.A. Dos Passos presents a well-balanced blend of art and instruction. The artistic quality of the novel gains significance and meaning from its instructive bent; the didactic ends of the novel, because they are rendered in artistic terms, become more pleasing.

Whether they stand as artistic or educative successes or failures Dos Passos' novels are valuable simply as chronicles of the times in which the author lived and wrote. Most important, however, is their stance as records of an individual's response to those times. Despite Dos Passos' attempts to refine himself, through objectivity and impersonal narration, out of existence in his novels, his works nevertheless retain their stance as personal records. This, ironically, is what makes Dos Passos' novels lasting works of art. To quote J.G. Becker,

> If Dos Passos' novels continue to be read into the twenty-first century, when the data of daily existence that he uses are already as obscure as the details used by Elizabethan playwrights, it will not be primarily because they are interesting period pieces but because they document the experience of an intelligent and sensitive man in those times.[4]

FOOTNOTES

[1] John Dos Passos, The Theme is Freedom, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1956), p. 262.

[2] J.H. Wrenn, John Dos Passos, (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 182.

[3] Ibid., p. 185.

[4] J.G. Becker, John Dos Passos, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 114-115.

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