INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

Xerox University Microfilms
300 North Zeab Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108
VANDERWERKEN, David Leon, 1945-
DOS PASSOS AND THE "OLD WORDS".

Rice University, Ph.D., 1973
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

©
Copyright
David Leon Vanderwerken
1973
RICE UNIVERSITY

DOS PASSOS AND THE "OLD WORDS"

by

David L. Vanderwerken

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Director's Signature:

[Signature]

Houston, Texas

May, 1973
Abstract
DOS PASSOS AND THE "OLD WORDS"
David L. Vanderwerken

The Camera Eye sections concerning the trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, the climactic event of Dos Passos' USA trilogy, suggest that something has happened to our language. In Camera Eye (49), the speaker ponders how to "rebuild the ruined words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers district attorneys college presidents judges without the old words the immigrants haters of oppression brought to Plymouth how can you know who are your betrayers America." A few pages later, Camera Eye (50) asserts: "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." This study, essentially, is an extended analysis and interpretation of the statements quoted above; two statements which, in miniature, reveal a major theme of Dos Passos' fiction--the misuse of the American language. In examining Dos Passos' language theme, this study focuses upon three general areas of concern: definition of the theme; tentative explorations of the theme in the apprentice novels; full statement of the theme in Manhattan Transfer and USA.

Chapter I takes up several questions posed by the Camera Eye passages quoted above, which are crucial for defining Dos Passos' theme. What are the "old words"? How have they become "slimy and foul"? Who are the "strangers"? How, and by whom, can the "ruined words" be rebuilt? Dos Passos provides clear answers to these questions and indicates his assumptions about language in his nonfiction. His comments are analyzed
in detail. After the "old words" theme is defined, Chapter II surveys Dos Passos first attempts to express his theme in One Man's Initiation: 1917, Three Soldiers and Streets of Night. Close readings of the apprentice novels reveal how these early explorations of the "old words" theme prove confusing and unsatisfactory. What is missing in the apprentice novels, and later supplied in Manhattan Transfer and USA, is an explanatory framework, an apparatus, for defining and clarifying the "old words" theme.

Finally, in Chapters III and IV, this study grapples with the full flowering of the "old words" theme in Manhattan Transfer and USA. In both Manhattan Transfer and USA, nearly everything--structural devices, scenes, characters--supports the theme. Each of the four technical structures of USA expresses the "old words" theme in its own special way, yet, taken together, the four parts achieve unity. Chapter IV discusses the strategies of each technical device in presenting the theme. There is particular emphasis on the Camera Eye sections, which form a novel within the trilogy, and which establish a full framework for understanding the "old words" theme. Chapter V assesses Dos Passos' achievement and deals with a question implicit throughout the study--the efficacy of language. May a novelist really be, as Dos Passos claims, "an architect of history"? A special feature of this study is an appendix that surveys fifty years of Dos Passos criticism, including much excellent, and heretofore uncollected, French criticism.
CONTENTS

Chapter I  Dos Passos and the "Old Words"  . . . . . . . . 1

Chapter II  The Apprentice Novels . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 26

Chapter III  MANHATTAN TRANSFER . . . . . . . . . . . 66

Chapter IV  USA . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 88

Chapter V  Achievement . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 149

Appendix  Fifty Years of Dos Passos Criticism . . . 159

Bibliography . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 202
I. INTRODUCTION: DOS PASSOS AND THE "OLD WORDS"

"Language from its very beginnings has served two purposes: one purpose is to deceive and the other is to convey truth."--John Dos Passos

The Camera Eye sections concerning the trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, the climactic event of Dos Passos' USA trilogy, suggest that something has happened to our language. In Camera Eye (49), the speaker ponders how to:

rebuild the ruined words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers districtattorneys collegepresidents judges without the old words the immigrants haters of appression brought to Plymouth how can you know who are your betrayers America

A few pages later, Camera Eye (50) asserts: "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." This study, essentially, is an extended examination of the statements quoted above; two statements which, in miniature, reveal a major theme of Dos Passos' fiction--the misuse of the American language.

In analyzing Dos Passos' language theme, this study will focus upon three general areas of concern: definition of the theme; tentative explorations of the theme in the apprentice novels; full statement of the theme in Manhattan Transfer and USA. First, the passages above pose several immediate questions, the answers to which are necessary for defining the language theme. What are the "old words"? How have they become "slimy and foul"? Who are the "strangers"? How, and by whom, can the "ruined words" be rebuilt? Dos Passos provides clear answers to these questions, as well
as indicates his assumptions about language, in his non-fiction. His comments will be examined in detail. Secondly, the clear statement of the theme of misused language in the trilogy leads one to ask if Dos Passos' pre-USA novels show early traces of the theme; and, if they do, how is it expressed? Close readings in Chapter II of Dos Passos' first three novels, *One Man's Initiation: 1917*, *Three Soldiers*, *Streets of Night*, will show that the language theme does appear. But a close reading also reveals how these early explorations of the theme prove confusing and unsatisfactory. Finally, this study will grapple with the full flowering of the language theme in *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA* in Chapters III and IV. In *USA*, especially, the theme is fully supported, not only by direct authorial statement (such as those above), but by the narrative itself: by the characters in the trilogy, what they say, what they do, what happens to them. Yet the first task is to define some of the key, but cryptic, utterances in the lines from the Camera Eyes.

The hortatory tone of such phrases as the "old words" and the "clean words our fathers spoke" indicates their charged meaning for Dos Passos. By "old words," as he tells us in a number of essays, Dos Passos means the great verbal propositions stated at the birth of the nation. The "clean words our fathers spoke" are the words, phrases and sentences of our heritage as written in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," "all men are created equal," "freedom of speech,
worship and assembly"—in short, the language which embodies the idea and the promise of America—comprise Dos Passos' "old words." Furthermore, "old words" is Dos Passos' shorthand term for the world view, the informing vision, held by the founding fathers. In "The Use of the Past," Dos Passos writes:

Our history is full of answers to the question: How shall we make selfgovernment work? People like ourselves have been making it work with more or less success for centuries. And history is only dead when people think of the present in terms of the past instead of the other way round. The minute we get the idea that the records can be of use to us now, they become alive. They become the basis of a world view into which we can fit our present lives and our hopes for the future. We have never been told enough about the world view which the founders of the American republic held up to the men who followed them.

Dos Passos continually stresses the "aliveness," the timelessness, of the "old words." Again, from "The Use of the Past":

In our past we have the hope that kept Washington's army together the winter at Valley Forge. That was the world view of 1776. It still has meaning today.

Fascists and communists alike tell us that we have only the Almighty Dollar and the degradation and sluggishness that comes from too much property on top and too much poverty below. To answer them we don't need to fill ourselves up with the hope of another historical illusion like theirs, but we do need to know which realities of our life yesterday and our life today we can believe in and work for. We must never forget that we are heirs to one of the grandest and most nearly realized world views in all history.

Although the foregoing statements suggest a general concept behind the "old words," Dos Passos provides more specific definitions elsewhere. For example, in "The Changing Shape of Institutions," Dos Passos describes what, for him, is the raison d'être for the United States:
If we are to save the republic we must continually be aware of the aims of the republic. Lincoln said that the United States differed from other nations in that it was "dedicated to a proposition." That proposition has remained basically unchanged through our history, though the means of putting it into effect change as the shape of society changes. That proposition implies that the cohesive force which holds our nation together is not a religious creed or a common ancestry but the daily effort to give to every man as much opportunity as is possible to fulfill himself in his own way, protected by law from the arbitrary measures of those in authority. The men who founded this nation tried the unheard-of experiment of founding a state which would be the servant instead of the master of its citizens.\(^5\)

In this passage, the "old words" mean individual liberty, the freedom to define oneself according to oneself, free from external restraints. Dos Passos caps his essay by saying, "We have to remember, before it is too late, that this nation was founded not to furnish glamorous offices for politicians, or to produce goods and services, or handouts of easy money, but to produce free men."\(^6\) This term "old words" then, is, for Dos Passos, broad in its implications. It is akin to another shorthand phrase, which, umbrella-like, covers much of the same ground—the "American Dream."

Before turning to Dos Passos' diagnosis of how the "old words," as defined above, have been "ruined" and how they may be rebuilt, it is important to examine the assumption in the Camera Eyes under review that, once upon a time, the "old words" were "clean."

For Dos Passos, the early national period of our history, the Age of Jefferson, is a veritable Golden Age, populated by heroes and characterized by clear thought and direct speech. Dos Passos' obsession with this era is reflected
in a number of works: *The Ground We Stand On* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941), *The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1954), *The Men Who Made the Nation* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1957). In all these books, Dos Passos views the founding of the nation as an epic achievement. And the founding fathers are treated as mythic heroes who realized a grand vision. Jefferson, in particular, "had this worldpicture so clearly in his mind that the imprint of it was sharp on everything he did. It was as if his clear musing mind had reduced the main conformations of the thought of his time to a design as plain as a seal on a ring." In yet another historical survey of the generation of 1776, suggestively titled *Prospects of a Golden Age* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.; Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), Dos Passos labels everyone a hero. Chapters such as "A People of the Pen and Press" and "A People of Builders" imply that, indeed, any man lucky enough to be alive at the time was much like Jefferson or Franklin.

One benefit enjoyed by the "People of the Pen and Press" in the Golden Age is, according to Dos Passos, a "clean" language. The "old words" produced in this era are pristine, undistorted, and mean exactly what they say. As Dos Passos says in "A Question of Elbow Room," for the generation of 1776, there was no controversy over definitions. Concerning the "old word," "happiness," Dos Passos writes: "When [Governer] Morris wrote George Washington his definition of statesmanship, 'I mean politics in the great Sense, or that sublime Science which embraces for its Object the Happiness of Mankind,' he meant the same thing by the word
'happiness' as Jefferson did when he wrote it into the Declaration of Independence. To both men it meant something like elbow room. Elbow room is positive freedom." In the Golden Age there was no "lag in definition" which, Dos Passos argues, is definitely the case today: "We have failed to notice that the words don't apply any more to the facts they are supposed to describe." At any rate, Dos Passos' assumes that the "old words" were once "clean." It may shed further light on what "clean" means to turn now to Dos Passos' understanding of how the "old words" became "slimy and foul." A full discussion of these Camera Eye quotes in context can be found in Chapter IV. Here, however, the focus will be on Dos Passos' framework of thought, synthesized from four essays collected in Occasions and Protests.

One of the recurrent concerns of "The Workman and His Tools," "A Question of Elbow Room," "The Changing Shape of Institutions," and "Cogitations in a Roman Theatre" is the gap between the original meanings of the "old words," as Dos Passos comprehends them, and their meanings when applied to present realities. Dos Passos argues that modern Americans are at the mercy of great self-serving and restrictive institutions - great corporations, mass education and communication (which reduce thought and expression to the lowest common denominator), centralized, paternal and bureaucratic government. Essentially, historical change for the worse has happened; Jefferson's farmer has become today's corporate commuter. Yet, the "old words" are continually invoked to describe this new reality:
The whole subject has been confused, of course, by the doubletalk of the zealots for total bureaucratic rule, a doubletalk where the old vocabulary of democratic liberties is made to mean something quite different from what was originally intended; but the fact remains that Americans are finding it harder and harder to apply the words and phrases that fitted so well the society that Jefferson and Madison lived in, to the pyramidshaped social structures of today.\footnote{11}

For "zealots," substitute "strangers"; for "doubletalk," substitute "our language turned inside out"; for "old vocabulary of democratic liberties," substitute "clean words our fathers spoke"; for "different from what was originally intended," substitute "made them slimy and foul." Clearly, the preceding paragraph and Camera Eye (50) differ only in tone. Moreover, the "old words" have been so imprecisely used, so "mutilated in the mouths of politicians that one can hardly pronounce grand old words like 'liberty' and 'democracy' without an apologetic blush."\footnote{12} Still, if Jefferson's farmer could spot a "slimy and foul" lie ten miles away, why cannot modern Americans do so?

As Dos Passos diagnoses the problem, we have, through no fault of our own, lost the ability to see our world clearly. Dos Passos' favorite method of supporting this contention, which he uses in at least two essays, is to set up an historical comparison between the average man's situation in Jeffersonian times and today. The major difference is: "In Jefferson's day the average citizen had a fair understanding of the workings of the society he lived in."\footnote{13} This "understanding," Dos Passos tells us, was not abstract but practical, rooted in personal experience:
The world outside was not too different from its microcosm in the farming community where he lived. Most of the events which occurred in it were comprehensible to a man of average intelligence. When the farmer went to town to listen to a politician tell him how to vote he could test the reliability of the orator's words against his own experience of practical life, against his fairly wide acquaintance with various types of men, farmers, mechanics, millers, merchants, the local judge and the doctor and the lawyer.\textsuperscript{14}

In short, Jefferson's farmer had a solid frame of reference, a substantial empirical context, by which to "test" words. Thus, it was most difficult to slip empty verbiage by this shrewd, questioning, practical man; he could "see" any gap between words and things. According to Dos Passos' analysis, modern man does not "understand" his world the way his ancestors understood theirs; he has no firm frame of reference; therefore, he cannot "test" words reliably. While Jefferson's farmer could "comprehend" his whole world, modern man "comprehends" only tiny slices of his: "Life in our changing industrial world has become so cut up into specialized departments and vocabularies, and has become so hard to understand and to see as a whole that most people won't even try. Even people of first rate intelligence at work in various segregated segments of our economy tend to get so walled up in the particular work they are doing that they never look outside of it."\textsuperscript{15} What modern man "knows" about areas of experience outside his discipline is second-hand knowledge, "what he reads in the papers, hears over the radio or sees on T.V."\textsuperscript{16} While the knowledge possessed by Jefferson's farmer was "real," Dos Passos stresses that, for us, knowledge is "parroted."\textsuperscript{17} "These agencies [mass media] of selfserving propaganda from one group or another
tease and inflame [modern man's] mind with a succession of unrelated stimuli. These stimuli are rarely sustained enough to evoke the response of careful study and understanding, and the resulting satisfaction which is implicit in the word 'understanding'; so in the end they leave the man frustrated. 18 Simply, it is easy to lie to modern man. He has no experiential frame of reference by which to make judgments about words--especially the "old words." If Jefferson's farmer were told that, to preserve his "liberty," he should support an expenditure for rifles to ward off Indian raids, he could "test the reliability of the orator's words against his own experience of practical life." Can we make a similar "test" when told that, to preserve our "liberty," we should support an ABM system? Hardly. We might read a few newspaper and magazine articles by scientists and military experts (if we can understand them), listen to what Eric Sevareid and David Brinkley advise--and then make an "intelligent" decision. Or, we might simply say, "Anything for 'liberty.'" Yes to the ABM," responding like trained dogs to the sound of the "old word." For Dos Passos, either response is invalid, a shot in the dark. But what does Dos Passos offer as a solution for our inability to see clearly and test words experientially? Is it possible to recover the clear eyes of Jefferson's farmer so that we may know when the "old words" are being used "slimily"? Can the "old words" be rebuilt and restored to their original meanings?

At this point in Dos Passos' thought, his logic ends and his assertion of beliefs begins. The artist in him is
showing when he simply asserts that the "old words" are eternally valid, and that another Golden Age can be achieved. Just how these good things will happen is vague indeed.

Time and again, Dos Passos calls for a fresh political vocabulary, for relevant terms. In "The Changing Shape of Institutions," for example, Dos Passos tells us that we must invent "methods of communication by which the operations of the great macrocosms that rule our lives can be reduced to terms which each averagely intelligent man can understand, truly understand the way a good mechanic understands the working of an internal combustion engine." 19 Yet, Dos Passos refuses to specify what these new "terms" will be. His argument, such as it is, runs that the "terms" will arise naturally once we "manage to see the shape of our society as clearly as Harvey saw the heart of the shrimp." 20 The method is supposedly inductive: "The first prerequisite is a fresh understanding, untrammeled by prejudice or partisan preconceptions, of the institutions we live in." 21 But once everyone is seeing and thinking clearly, the resulting new vocabulary will strikingly resemble - lo and behold - the "old words," de-slimed and rebuilt. Thus, new ways of seeing and understanding will lead us back to the given.

That Dos Passos assumes the "old words" are the given is demonstrated in a number of places. One of the most interesting expressions of this occurs in "A Question of Elbow Room":

Newton's basic principle of gravitation has not been superseded. It has been amended and amplified by Einstein's formulae. Newton's still remains one of the explanations through which mathematicians cope with the observable facts of physics. In a somewhat similar way, if men could be found to apply to political problems the
sort of first rate rigorous thinking which we have seen applied to physics in our lifetime, new statebuilders would discover that the great formulations of the generation of 1776 were as valid as ever.22

Here, we see that the "old words" are analogous to physical law in Dos Passos' mind. Gravity and the "great formulations" are equally verities. Only a short extension of thought would be needed to raise the "old words" to the realm of a religious creed. In a revealing statement, which appears in "Lincoln and His Almost Chosen People," Dos Passos asserts that the "old words" are, indeed, transcendent:

At Trenton Lincoln had proclaimed his anxiety "that this union: the Constitution and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated according to the original idea for which the struggle was made." This idea was based on individual liberty and individual responsibility. It depended upon the belief that there was a divine spirit in man which ever strove for the good. The truth of this conviction can't be tested by logic or proved by scientific experiment, but the contrary can't be proved either. Inevitably the moment comes when we have to take the leap of faith.23

This "conviction," plainly, can only be labeled religious; all rational argument now ceases. The "old words," the truths Jefferson called "self-evident," are for Dos Passos, flatly, revelation. With such a credo, it is no wonder that Dos Passos is optimistic that, once the "old words" shine forth in their compelling splendor, another Golden Age will be at hand.

Again, the possibility of recovering the Golden Age is not a matter for logical argument, rather a matter of stating "our hope and our faith."24 And this Dos Passos continually does, although "the age of Jefferson and Adams and Washington and Hamilton and the rest seems as far away as the age of Confucius."25 However, Dos Passos asserts that past fact implies future fact: "The men of those times lived through
and brought through with them the bundle of notions that is the culture of the western world; what has been done once can be done again." And once more: "If the first builders succeeded against great odds, why should we who have their foundations to build on, necessarily fail?" It is a grand vision.

But what is the role of the writer of fiction in all this? The route to this question has been long and tortuous, albeit prerequisite. The preceding discussion of certain of Dos Passos' beliefs and assumptions provides a context for understanding his conception of the writer's task—to "rebuild the ruined words."

Admittedly, searching for anything resembling a formal aesthetic in Dos Passos' essays proves frustrating and confusing; contradictions, and seeming contradictions, abound. The reason for this is that Dos Passos has no "art of fiction," strictly speaking, on the order of, say, Henry James. However, that is not to say that Dos Passos has no artistic credo. He certainly does. But the problem comes in attempting to separate Dos Passos' artistic concerns from his socio-political and ethical concerns. This, finally, cannot be done. As his essays reveal, Dos Passos makes no distinctions between the socio-political, the ethical, the aesthetic. The following discussion will not only delineate Dos Passos' shaping artistic principles, but will acknowledge and account for the ambiguities and confusions inherent in some of them.

In many essays, both early and late, Dos Passos says
that writers must never impose external rhetorical frameworks or preconceived opinions upon their material. Yet, at the same time, Dos Passos counsels writers to bear allegiance to the "old words." The following passage from "The Workman and His Tools" (1936) illustrates this dual command:

No matter how narrow a set of convictions you start from, you will find yourself, in your effort to probe into men and events, less and less able to work within the prescriptions of doctrine; and you will find more and more that you are on the side of the men, women and children alive right now against all the political organizations, however magnificent their aims may be, that regiment and bedevil them; and that you are on the side, not with phrases or opinions, but really and truly, of liberty, fraternity and humanity.

The words are old and dusty and hung with the faded bunting of a thousand political orations, but underneath they are still sound. What men once meant by these words needs defenders today. 28

"Cogitations in a Roman Theatre" (1964) shows that Dos Passos' position has not wavered in the least. This latter essay echoes the earlier by claiming that writers must "avoid preconceptions" while holding "standards":

The human mind can no more function without the conviction of right and wrong than a mammal can exist without a skeleton. Without firm belief that good is good and evil is evil where can we find the inner fortitude needed to explain to the masses of men, whose minds have been befogged by endless selfserving propaganda, what we mean by civilization?

The terms we have to use have been so mutilated in the mouths of politicians that one can hardly pronounce grand old words like "liberty" and "democracy" without an apologetic blush. 29

Both these representative statements are wide open to charges that they are contradictory. What are "liberty, fraternity and humanity" if not "prescriptions of doctrine"? What are "liberty" and "democracy" if not "preconceptions"? But for Dos Passos, there simply is no contradiction here.

As shown earlier, Dos Passos views the "old words" as
beyond question or challenge; they are the good and the
given. The words of Marx, for example, are "prescriptions
of doctrine," merely human statements. The words of Jefferson,
on the other hand, are somehow divine. Certainly, for all
his exordiums to writers to reject biases, Dos Passos himself
holds a definite political and ethical bias. He just assumes
that no right thinking person could possibly object to such
an admirable bias. However, this bias exists in his work,
which may help explain why Dos Passos conceives of the writer's
task as being necessarily political.

For Dos Passos, the very nature of modern society forces
the writer to adopt a political stance:

The writer's liberty is indissolubly linked with
the liberty of his fellowcitizens. There may have
existed societies in the past where thinkers and
painters could win their way into some privileged
sanctuary where they would be comparatively free to
express themselves as they pleased, but in the
closeknit society imposed on us by the structure of
mass production industry no such sanctuary exists.
The writer is free to write and to publish what he
believes to be true only insofar as the farmer is
free to work his farm as he pleases, as the factory
worker is free to move in search of better oppor-
tunities, as the bookkeepers or the merchants are
able to make their livings as best they can without
the supervision of some government's police. 30

In this passage, Dos Passos argues that technocratic inter-
dependence coerces the writer into making a commitment.
The luxury of withdrawing into an ivory tower is an option
closed to the modern writer. Dos Passos' judgment of
uncommitted artists finds expression in his novels in
harsh portrayals of aesthetes such as the early John
Andrews in Three Soldiers, Fanshaw Macdougan in Streets
of Night and Richard Ellsworth Savage in USA. Of course,
Dos Passos has a firm opinion of the kind of moral and political commitment a writer must make: "His real political aim, for himself and his fellows, is liberty."\textsuperscript{31} Because, "without liberty," Dos Passos warns, "first rate writing" is "impossible."\textsuperscript{32} Here one might counterargue that some "first rate writing" has come out of prisons or that Alexander Solzhenitsyn's work testifies that good writing can happen "without liberty." But Dos Passos admits of no other possibility; only "liberty" allows the "objective attitude which is the necessary preliminary to the discovery of truth."\textsuperscript{33} The chief of the "old words," then, must somehow inform every piece of writing.

Concerning "preconceptions," it might be said that Dos Passos is blind to the mote in his own eye while pointing up the beam in others'. But this objection must be suspended in order to examine Dos Passos' conception of the "objective attitude" a writer must have. The "objective attitude" is, finally, a process of seeing and of describing accurately what has been seen. For Dos Passos, "Taste and hearing have their importance but sight is the basic sense."\textsuperscript{34} The writer must educate his eye by cultivating, paradoxically enough, an "ignorant frame of mind,"\textsuperscript{35} by becoming as "ignorant" as Adam: "The state of mind that makes for objective description, like every state of mind in which you forget who you are, has a sort of primeval happiness about it. You look out at the world with a fresh eye as if it were the morning of the first day of creation."\textsuperscript{36} The happy result of seeing "each new phenomenon with a clean slate as if you had never heard of it before,"\textsuperscript{37} according to Dos Passos, is that words and objects will coincide:
"Observing objectively demands a sort of virginity of the perceptions. A man has to clear all preconceived notions out of his head in a happy self-forgetfulness where there is no gap between observation and description." Immediately following this statement, Dos Passos provides examples from science—Darwin's description of a cuttlefish and Harvey's description of a shrimp—as support. The "objective attitude," therefore, entails a scientific precision in using language: "In the painful search for the words needed truthfully to describe an event, every word has to represent some real thing." All these statements about seeing through accepted orientations—"labels and classifications and verbalisms"—reflect the thinking behind Dos Passos' device of the Camera Eye. The writer must be as objective and accurate as a camera in recording, not only objects and events, but human behavior as well. And the writer's objectivity and accuracy will lead him to the "discovery of truth."

To recapitulate briefly, an atmosphere of "liberty" is conducive to "objective observation," which in turn, leads to "truth." As one might guess, "truth" for Dos Passos is of a special kind—the "truth" of "man's behavior." Dos Passos believes in certain fundamental realities of human behavior, what he calls "deep currents," upon which a writer must focus. Moreover, these "deep currents," when discovered, demand expression in "sharply whittled exactitudes about men's instincts and compulsions and hungers and thirsts." Dos Passos' clearest definition of what he means by "truth" appears in "Cogitations in a Roman Theatre":
What is the truth? It is a question to which humanity has found many answers. It has been involved in all the casuistries and sophistications and the proliferations of verbiage the human mind is capable of. I believe it can be best answered in the form of a creed. I believe that there are certain simple realities which are universal to all men, no matter how diverse their backgrounds or their environments or their social customs. The man who humbly seeks out these realities is on the firm path which will lead him to the truthful observation of the world about him.\[44\]

Surely, there would seem to be a strong element of the behavioral scientist in Dos Passos. The techniques for studying men seem not unlike those Darwin brought to the study of cuttlefish. Indeed, Dos Passos often makes statements such as: "There has been too little exploration of industrial society in the terms of human behavior."\[45\] But Dos Passos' behaviorism is of a special kind; the "truth" of "man's behavior" encompasses "a divine something"\[46\] as well as "instincts and compulsions and hungers and thirsts."

Men are just more than cuttlefish. In his admiring comments on the characters found in William Faulkner's novels, Dos Passos provides some further insight into what he means by the "truth" of "man's behavior": "Faulkner's characters impose their nightmare reality upon you because they are built out of truths, the truths of the stirrings of the flesh and blood and passion of real men observed tenderly and amusedly and frightenedly, just as Homer made his goddesses and heroes real because he built them out of traits he knew in men and women."\[47\] However, the writer's discovered truths must be expressed in what Dos Passos believes the most protean of artistic mediums - language.

For Dos Passos, the writer's main problem lies in the inherent flexibility of language itself. A writer must be
aware of how words shift and change in meanings and connotations, and he must beware of the seductions of current jargon and fashionable argot: "The very words we need to describe what we see change their meanings,"48 and "The man who lives behind a desk or on the lecture platform has to seek daily confrontations with reality to keep his mind clear of the delusions and obsessions of the current verbiage."49 Dos Passos stresses that writers must be conscious of the vicissitudes of language, of how words can boomerang, of how language can conceal or distort discovered truths. In "Cogitations in a Roman Theatre," Dos Passos summarizes the dangers and difficulties of using language: "Language from its very beginnings has served two purposes: one purpose is to deceive and the other is to convey truth. One has to reach a fairly ripe age before one comes to a full understanding of how hard this is to do. Lies come easier."50 For Dos Passos, words, like vials of nitroglycerin, must be handled gingerly; if used carelessly, they may explode in the writer's face.

Another challenge faced by the modern writer is the effect of communications technology upon language, which, Dos Passos argues, compounds the problem of language's natural instability. The sheer quantity of words churned out by mass media has cheapened and devalued language. In the "Introduction" (1932) to the Modern Library edition of Three Soldiers, Dos Passos laments that the machinery of print has stolen some of the magic from words:
In the middleages the mere setting down of the written word was a marvel, something of that marvel got into the words set down; in the renaissance the printing press suddenly opened up a continent more tremendous than America, sixteenth and seventeenth century writers are all on fire with it; now we have linotype, automatic typesetting machines, phototype processes that plaster the world from end to end with print. Certainly eighty percent of the inhabitants of the United States must read a column of print a day, if it's only in the tabloids and the Sears Roebuck catalogue. Somehow, just as machinemade shoes aren't as good as handmade shoes, the enormous quantity produced has resulted in diminished power in books.51

Media, with its power to debase language through lies and distortions, is the writer's mortal enemy. Confusion reigns: "Your uneducated and illiterate man in the old days would hardly have been likely, if you showed him a pig, to have called it a goat. Today, with our minds continually indoctrinated with whatever fallacies the authorities in charge of radio and television feel it to their interest to promulgate, you can't be too sure."52

For Dos Passos, the responsibility for upholding and affirming the sanctity and power of words against the machines rests with the writer. In his own novels, Dos Passos carries on a relentless war with mass media. The treatment of propaganda, YMCA pamphlets and atrocity films in Three Soldiers, the indictment of newspapers in Manhattan Transfer, the attacks upon public relations and advertising agencies, radio and Hollywood in USA--all testify to Dos Passos' vehement prosecution of this war. And this war against the enemies of words testifies to Dos Passos' faith in the persuasive powers of language.

Dos Passos believes, as much as any ad man or public relations exec, that language can influence men. Certainly,
there is a strongly didactic, or even propagandistic, element in Dos Passos' work; indeed, he is the first to admit that he "preaches": "not to admit that is to play with a gun and say you didn't know it was loaded."\textsuperscript{53} His faith is that writing "molds and influences ways of thinking to the point of changing and rebuilding the language, which canalizes the mind of the group."\textsuperscript{54} As shown earlier at great length, Dos Passos desires to "mold," "influence" and "rebuild" in one direction—toward the recovery of the "old words," in their original meanings, in American life. To "rebuild the ruined words" is the motivating intention behind Dos Passos' fiction.

When, in Camera Eye (50) of \textit{USA}, Dos Passos says that "our language" has been turned "inside out," he means by "our language" a special American language—"the clean words our fathers spoke," the "phraseology of democracy."\textsuperscript{55} These special words have been made "slimy and foul," distorted from their original meanings. As noted earlier, Dos Passos posits a Golden Age in America's past when the "old words" were not only "clean," but indeed, were borne out in everyday life. "Liberty," for example, was manifest in the lives of men and women; human behavior illustrated, and thus defined, "liberty." This is the true test of "liberty" for Dos Passos, since "Liberty in the abstract is meaningless outside of philosophical chess games."\textsuperscript{56} By observing individuals and rendering them as objectively as possible in his fiction, Dos Passos tries to show us that the "old words" are not manifest in contemporary American life, that
a tremendous gulf exists between the original meanings of the "old words" and the way they are being defined by modern human behavior. He tries to make us see, for example, in Three Soldiers that the everyday lives of the men make a mockery of the phrase, which invokes the "old words" and justifies World War I--"to make the world safe for democracy."

In trying to make us see, Dos Passos assumes that Americans know the original meanings of the "old words," just as "we know that a nickel is a nickel even if the Indian and the buffalo have been rubbed off." His novels are, then, correctives; they appeal to that "something more than common" in the American character.

The fullest, clearest and most direct portrayals of the discrepancy between the original meanings of the "old words" and their current perversions occur in Manhattan Transfer and USA. In USA, especially, it is as if Dos Passos tries to place the whole nation under the uncompromising scrutiny of a microscope to magnify and measure the extent of the discrepancy. In both Manhattan Transfer and USA, nearly everything--structural devices, scenes, characters--supports the theme. However, Manhattan Transfer and USA did not spring full blown; early traces of Dos Passos' concern can be found in his first three novels. Although One Man's Initiation: 1917, Three Soldiers and Streets of Night seem hardly to bear any affinities with Manhattan Transfer and USA, these apprentice novels, nevertheless, contain materials which anticipate the thematic direction of the later triumphs.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


2. *USA*, p. 462.


4. *The Theme is Freedom*, p. 159.


19 "Occasions and Protests," p. 207.
21 "Occasions and Protests," p. 72.
22 "Occasions and Protests," p. 64.
26 "Occasions and Protests," p. 50.
27 "Occasions and Protests," p. 44.
31 "Occasions and Protests," p. 11.
32 "Occasions and Protests," p. 15.
33 "Occasions and Protests," p. 15.
36 "Occasions and Protests," p. 75.
37 "Occasions and Protests," p. 75.
38 "Occasions and Protests," p. 73.
"Cogitations in a Roman Theatre," in Occasions and Protests, p. 283.

40 "A Question of Elbow Room," in Occasions and Protests, p. 75.


42 Occasions and Protests, p. 13.

43 Occasions and Protests, p. 13.


46 "Cogitations in a Roman Theatre," in Occasions and Protests, p. 279.

47 Occasions and Protests, p. 276.


50 Occasions and Protests, pp. 281-282.


52 "Cogitations in a Roman Theatre," in Occasions and Protests, p. 283.


54 Occasions and Protests, pp. 8-9.


57 Occasions and Protests, pp. 10-11.

58 "Lincoln and His Almost Chosen People," in Occasions and Protests, p. 322.
II. THE APPRENTICE NOVELS

The War Experience

Dos Passos' initial discovery of the misuse of the "old words" grows out of his war experiences. In everything Dos Passos writes about America's participation in the Great War, there is a sense of shock, disillusionment and betrayal: "It's hard to overestimate the revulsion wrought by the first world war in the minds of a generation that had grown up in the years of comparative freedom and comparative peace that opened the century."\(^1\) What Woodrow Wilson called a war "to make the world safe for democracy," Dos Passos calls a "reversal of American tradition."\(^2\) For Dos Passos, the institution of military conscription and America's foray into international power politics betray the "old words." As Tom Randolph states in *One Man's Initiation: 1917*, "'It's sort of goin' back on our only excuse for existin':"\(^3\) Although profoundly disturbed by the fact of the war, Dos Passos describes himself as "crazy to see what war was like."\(^4\) In "The Harvard Afterglow," Dos Passos says that a mixture of indignation and curiosity motivated him to join the ambulance corps:

I'd been fretting and fuming because I was trapped in a backwater cut off from the main currents of life. Well, in the three years that had passed
since I'd turned in my last theme in English, I'd seen some life and a good deal of death. War had turned out to be a great teacher. I'd lost all pretense of collegiate sophistication but I'd come out with a prime case of horrors. I had seen too many men in agony. I had the horrors too about the kind of world the gentlemen at Versailles were arranging for us poor buck privates to live in. All through those years in college I'd been honing for "the real world." The "horrors" of Dos Passos' wartime education find expression in One Man's Initiation: 1917 and Three Soldiers. The greatest horror of all is the mockery made of the "old words" by the Army experience and by the justifiers of the war. The central irony upon which both novels dwell is that Americans must become slaves in order "to make the world safe for democracy."

While One Man's Initiation: 1917, unlike Three Soldiers, is not a fully conceived novel but a series of narrative vignettes unified by the presence of Martin Howe in each, both works possess three elements in common. First, in both novels Dos Passos subjects the justificatory slogan for America's participation in World War I, "to make the world safe for democracy," to a special kind of scrutiny; by observing human behavior in the U.S. Army, Dos Passos shows what that echo of the "old words" means in terms of the daily lives of the soldiers. Dos Passos' examination reveals that the experiences of Martin Howe, Tom Randolph, Dan Fuselli, Bill Chrisfield and John Andrews give the lie to the phrase for which they ostensibly fight. Second, besides pointing up that the phrase which everyone associates with World War I is brutally deceptive, both novels examine the propaganda harnessed in the service of
Woodrow Wilson's statement. The version of the war presented by newspapers, pamphlets and films is shown as being unrelated to the reality of the war as experienced by individual combat soldiers. The words of the YMCA morale boosters, those unctuous justifiers of the war, receive especially pejorative treatment. And finally, both novels contain central characters who slowly become aware of the discrepancy between the rhetoric and the reality of the war. Martin Howe in *One Man's Initiation: 1917* and John Andrews in *Three Soldiers* are innocent, sensitive, rather aesthetic characters who reflect certain qualities of the author himself. What Dos Passos says about the youthful author of *One Man's Initiation: 1917* could apply to Howe and Andrews as well:

"This narrative was written more than a quarter of a century ago by a bookish young man of twenty-two who had emerged half-baked from Harvard College and was continuing his education driving an ambulance behind the front in France."

Dos Passos' increasing recognition of the misuse of the "old words" parallels that of Howe and Andrews. In these two war novels, Dos Passos discovers the misuse of the "old words" as he goes along, so to speak, which may explain why the theme is not rendered with the satisfactory clarity found in *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA*. In the war sections of *USA*, for example, Dos Passos treats the war as, in great measure, a product of misused language--specifically, the misuse of the "old words" promulgated by J. Ward Moorehouse's public relations agency. By the time of *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA*, Dos Passos has fully understood,
digested and developed his theme; he is able to show how the misuse of the "old words" has not only been responsible for America's involvement in the war, but has permeated all aspects of American society. Although Dos Passos is not aware of the complete significance of his theme in One Man's Initiation: 1917 and Three Soldiers, both works reflect his becoming conscious of the misuse of the "old words" and exhibit his first attempts to express this concern.

One Man's Initiation: 1917

For the 1969 edition of One Man's Initiation: 1917, Dos Passos wrote a long introduction commenting upon the original journal notes and personal letters which he ultimately reworked into narrative form. One point Dos Passos stresses in this introduction is that he recognized and was disturbed by certain changes which had occurred in America, although he understood neither the direction nor the nature of those changes: "Wartime France is very much pleasanter than peacetime America. I am torn between a desire to 'eave 'arf a brick into the middle of things over there, and to penetrate a little deeper into the tragic farce that has projected them."7 As we know, he chooses to penetrate deeper rather than to heave bricks: "I had inwardly decided to let others storm the barricades. My business was to tell the tale" (5). Even as a "half-baked" young man with literary ambitions, Dos Passos realized that he needed to be detached, that he needed time to understand the war, its causes and its implications for America, to interpret his own responses, and above all, to see and experience the reality of war. Dos Passos' decision
"to let others storm the barricades" suggests a desire to avoid preconceptions or partisan viewpoints, to stand aside and observe, to "tell the tale" objectively. This potentially creative state of open-mindedness cultivated by Dos Passos is reflected in the character of Martin Howe: "'I am going to do something some day, but first I must see!'" (108). For Dos Passos, only by approaching the phenomena of the war with a "clean slate" will it be possible to validly understand those phenomena.

Martin Howe, the autobiographical central character of One Man's Initiation: 1917, illustrates the quality of mind, a state of "happy self-forgetfulness," requisite for Dos Passos' objective observer: "He has never been so happy in his life. The future is nothing to him, the past is nothing to him" (44). Howe's mind, clear of preconceptions, becomes a tabula rasa: "Now a leaf seems to have been turned and a new white page, spread before him, clean and unwritten on" (45). For Dos Passos, a "clean" mind creates clear sight, and things seen will then be recorded on the blank mind accurately. The final result will be a rebuilt consciousness. In One Man's Initiation: 1917, Dos Passos uses sight images to describe Howe's increasing awareness - from seeing with "half-closed eyes" (54) to seeing clearly. In Chapter II, for example, Howe is dreamily enjoying the sensuous atmosphere of a French café when a wounded soldier and his mother sit down at a nearby table:

As he stared in front of him two figures crossed his field of vision. A woman swathed in black crêpe veils was helping a soldier to a seat at the next table. He found himself staring in a face, a face that still had some of the chubbiness of boyhood. Between the pale-brown
frightened eyes, where the nose should have been, was a triangular black patch that ended in some mechanical contrivance with shiny little black metal rods that took the place of the jaw. He could not take his eyes from the soldier's eyes that were like those of a hurt animal, full of meek dismay. (54)

This passage, in its clarity and sharpness, has the quality of a snapshot; there is no gap between "observation and description." The scene impresses itself directly on Howe's mind, much like an image impresses itself on a piece of film. Indeed, Howe's mind seems like a roll of unexposed film, and the many short scenes in the novel are like a series of snapshots. Inherent themes, meanings, concerns are discovered in the materials rather than imposed from the outside; Dos Passos waits to see what literally develops from his role of film. It is Dos Passos' belief that such objectivity will validate anything which may arise from his materials.

As discussed in Chapter I, Dos Passos' ideas of forgetting the self's preconceptions, of somehow rebuilding consciousness out of real things, of not imposing mind upon external reality but only recording what external reality imposes on the mind, are subject to question. Dos Passos' desire for total objectivity, to be a kind of human camera, may be an impossibility. Even in the Camera Eye device of USA, we are continually aware of the subjective consciousness behind the camera. Dos Passos does indeed hold preconceptions, and they are apparent as early as One Man's Initiation: 1917.

However, when Martin Howe mentions his "old watchwords" in Chapter I, it is not apparent just what these "watchwords"
are. One explanation for Dos Passos' failure to be specific here may be that, at this time, he has not formulated these "watchwords" in his own mind. When, in Chapter IX, Howe speaks of liberty--"All my life I've struggled for my own liberty in my small way. Now I hardly know if the thing exists." (158)--only a tenuous connection, at best, can be made between "liberty" and "old watchwords." In USA, on the other hand, a very clear connection is made between "liberty" and "old words." Even though in the introduction to One Man's Initiation: 1917 Dos Passos speaks of comprehending the process through which the "vestiges of old truths" have become "putrid and false," there is no indication that Dos Passos sees this as a language problem per se of the magnitude suggested by USA. Although Dos Passos in 1917 recognizes that there is some sort of gap between an ideal America and the real America, he has yet to define that gap as a problem of the misuse of the "old words." Yet the similarities between the phrases "vestiges of old truths," "putrid and false" and "old words," "slimy and foul" are unmistakeable. Dos Passos is clearly beginning to think in a certain direction. However, only later, after Dos Passos has understood and clarified his theme, do Howe's vague "old watchwords" become the Camera Eye's clearly defined "old words." The vagueness of the theme of the misuse of the "old words" in these early years may be attributable to the very process of discovering what it is.

Yet, in One Man's Initiation: 1917 Dos Passos is discovering that there is some relationship between American
propaganda and a change in America's state of mind: "It [American propaganda] is as far different from the flabby benevolence Americans have pretended to as German megalomania is from their old sentimental 'idealistic' placidity" (30). At least an inkling of Dos Passos' theme is contained in this statement about the importance of words in shaping the behavior of Americans. Biased words, or propaganda, have released what Dos Passos calls a "piratic energy" (30) in the American people. One indication of the influence of propaganda and Dos Passos' attempt to understand the nature of its effects can be found in the dialogue between Howe and an American girl aboard the troop ship.

The unnamed girl is introduced in terms of a physical quality: "--she bared all her teeth, white and regular, as those in a dentist's showcase, in a smile as she spoke--"(47). The simile dehumanizes her. And that she bares her teeth, like a canine, is significant in light of the ironic dog imagery and viciousness of her rhetoric: "'Oh, I don't see why they ever take any prisoners; I'd kill them all like mad dogs!'" (48), and "'I hate them so it makes me quite ill. The curs! The Huns!'" (48). Here is a typical American girl of the day. What has created the horrible violence in her consciousness? Have German soldiers personally assaulted her? No. She is a victim of the current propaganda about German atrocities, or what USA will call "wartalk."11 Howe, on the other hand, is skeptical of atrocity propaganda--"'I wonder if it's all true!'" (48)--which brands him as unpatriotic in her mind. Of course the stories are true,
according to her, because they have appeared in print, 
"'and lots more that it hasn't been possible to print, 
that people have been ashamed to tell'" (47-48). Dos 
Passos undercuts this remark by having the girl relate an 
"'absolutely authentic'" (48) story she has heard fourth-
hand about the rape of a convent. Her obvious enjoyment in 
repeating the "true" (48) story reflects just how much she 
has been brutalized by emotional rhetoric. During the 
course of her story, the dinnerbell interrupts and she 
runs off to dress.

This girl, as an "average" American, represents the 
predominant condition of the American mind during the war 
hysteria. She has confused her emotional response to 
propaganda with experiential understanding of the war. There 
is no ground in her experience for the words of hearsay and 
of print, which she parrots so blithely. She uncritically 
accepts that the words describing a situation, German 
atrocities for example, are the situations. For Dos Passos, 
authentic understanding of an event or situation must be 
grounded in personal experience of that event or situation. 
The girl's information, according to a distinction Dos 
Passos draws in "The Changing Shape of Institutions," is 
"parroted" rather than "real."12 Concerning the issue of 
atrocities, Dos Passos has said: "Anybody who has seen war 
knows the astonishing difference between the attitude of 
the men at the front, whose work is killing and dying, and 
that of the atrocity-haunted citizenry in the rear."13 
(A difference made even more starkly clear in the confrontations 
between non-combat "Y" men and veterans in Three Soldiers.)
For Dos Passos, things must be actually seen before true understanding occurs; Dos Passos is an unyielding empiricist. The girl, however, has made up her mind about the war, prior to going overseas, from second-hand, while Howe must "see" (108) it before making any judgments. He must test propaganda against reality. The girl, by contrast, responds to words in the same way that she responds to the dinnerbell—immediately and thinkingly. In stressing her canine teeth, her Currish language and her conditioned response to propaganda bells, Dos Passos may be suggesting that she is nearer to one of Pavlov's dogs than to a thinking human being.

The crucial difference between the speciousness of the "parroted" information of the "atrocities-haunted" girl and the truth of personal experience is illustrated in the narrative of the English soldier.

In Chapter Five, Howe and his drunken friends happen across an Englishman who had a first-hand experience with an atrocity: "'Before I left the front I saw a man tuck a hand grenade under the pillow of a poor devil of a German prisoner. The prisoner said "thank you." The grenade blew him to hell!'" (92). As the evening wears on, the Englishman's story provides a counterpoint to the soldiers' revelry. While the girl in the earlier scene was distracted by a dinnerbell, the Englishman cannot escape the experience even though he gets progressively drunker. The English soldier's compassion for the enemy soldier, whose death he actually witnessed, contrasts with the girl's perfunctory hatred for men she has never even seen. The soldier's
understanding of atrocity is grounded in experience, which, for Dos Passos, makes the soldier's understanding authentic. Unlike the girl, he knows whereof he speaks; his is an earned statement. Dos Passos add the perfect touch of irony to this scene by juxtaposing the "real" and the "parroted":

"Mind you, I'm not what you'd call susceptible. I'm not soft. I got over all that long ago." The Englishman was addressing the company in general. "But the poor beggar said 'thank you.'"
"What's he saying?" asked a woman, plucking at Martin's arm.
"He's telling about a German atrocity."
"Oh the dirty Germans! What things they've done!" the woman answered mechanically. (95)

The irony of the above exchange is, of course, that the topic of conversation concerns an allied atrocity. Howe deliberately puts the woman on by saying, "'He's telling about a German atrocity,'" which evokes her "mechanical" remark. By pushing the right button, Howe receives the stock verbal response. Pavlov's dog again.

The national implications of the problem of authentic and inauthentic understanding, defined and illustrated in the two scenes discussed above, find expression in Chapter IX. In this chapter, Howe and Randolph engage in a philosophical debate with four French soldiers: Chenier, an advocate of Catholicism, Merrier of socialism, Lully of anarchism, and Dubois of violent social action. During the discussion, Howe and, occasionally, Randolph make several judgments about America's participation in and attitude toward World War I. As veteran ambulance drivers, Howe and Randolph have seen the war, the torn and mutilated bodies,
the atrocities committed by both sides; in short, the two
men have been through "all the circles of hell" (108).
Their empirical understanding of the war bestows credence
upon their judgments.

When Merrier asks, "'And in America--they like the
war?'" (157), Howe answers: "'They don't know what it is.
They are like children. They believe what they are told,
you see;'" (157). Unlike these Frenchmen, the English
soldier, and Howe and Andrews, stateside Americans simply
do not "know" the war empirically, which, for Dos Passos,
is the only valid mode of knowing. Americans lack "experience"
(157) of the war; like the girl on the troop ship, most
Americans possess the credulousness and innocence of
"children" in allowing "what they are told," not what they
have seen, to shape their attitude toward the war. At one
point in Chapter Nine, Howe assesses the effect of pro-
paganda upon Americans: "'I shall never forget the flags,
the menacing exultant flags along all the streets before we
went to war, the gradual unbaring of teeth, gradual lulling
to sleep of people's humanity and sense by the phrases-
the phrases!'"(159). Howe's statement recalls one specific
example of a brutalized American, the girl with the
"unbared teeth" (47), whose humanity has certainly been
"lulled to sleep," when she suggests that it would be
"humane" (47) to chloroform every German alive after the
war. The horrifying result of the national brainwashing
is the brutalization of the American people, which Dos
Passos sees as discrediting everything America stands for.

By succumbing to propaganda, by refusing to think, by
becoming a war machine, by losing its humanity, Dos Passos
suggests that America has betrayed itself. America is no longer special among the nations of the world. America's entrance into the war is a "tragedy" (158) because, in so doing, America has gone back, in Tom Randolph's words, "'on our only excuse for existin'" (158). The promise of America, which Howe articulates, as a new start for mankind, where men of the Old World could find "'freedom from the past'" (158), has been blasted: "'America has turned traitor to all that, you see; that's the way we look at it. Now we're a military nation, an organized pirate like France and England and Germany'" (158). The war "to make the world safe for democracy" has had a most unforeseen and ironic consequent--the Europeanizing of America. And the national rhetoric, "the speeches," "the notes" (158), is mere "camouflage" (158), which masks the reality of American behavior.

What is missing in Dos Passos' indictment of America's self-betrayal in One Man's Initiation: 1917, and later supplied in USA, is a context for understanding precisely what has been betrayed--the "old words." The meaning of the statement, "our only excuse for existin'," which is very generally and vaguely defined in One Man's Initiation: 1917, is spelled out with full clarity by the Camera Eye device in USA. Moreover, USA undertakes a detailed examination of exactly how propaganda distorts the "old words." However, in One Man's Initiation: 1917, we see Dos Passos discovering certain materials and problems which will undergo refinement
and development, and which will inform his entire oeuvre.

Three Soldiers

Three Soldiers continues the assault upon inauthentic understanding of the war begun in One Man's Initiation: 1917, while, at the same time, undertaking to comprehend the nature and the significance of life in the American Expeditionary Force. A central tension in both war novels is between the stated purpose of the war, "to make the world safe for democracy," and the means for achieving that purpose—the army. This tension is more immediately rendered in Three Soldiers possibly because the army is examined from inside through the experiences of three draftees, while, in One Man's Initiation: 1917, the army is viewed from the outside by a Red Cross Auxiliary volunteer. For Dos Passos, the military institution contradicts not only Wilson's justificatory phrase, but, it is implied, the "old words" echoed by the phrase. The Camera Eye in USA will directly connect the slogan justifying the war to the "old words," a connection suggested, but not explicitly made, in Three Soldiers. However, in Three Soldiers, Dos Passos uses the slogan for purposes of irony and paradox in applying it to the experiences of individual soldiers in the U.S. Army; the most undemocratic of institutions is sent off to be democracy's savior. The army dehumanizes its members, denies individual liberty, practices censorship, and establishes hierarchical and stratified class lines. Men use Wilson's slogan over twenty times in the novel in bitter, mocking and
sarcastic ways; the slogan becomes a cruel joke. On the other hand, the reality of army life is continually described as "slavery," a word used at least forty-five times in the novel. The slavery of the army does not end with the Armistice, which occurs less than half-way through Three Soldiers. That the army continues to tyrannize men after the war is over could be Dos Passos' grim prediction of an undemocratic, maybe even fascistic, post-war America.

While continuing to attack printed words which have no basis in reality, Three Soldiers expands in scope to indict inauthentic spoken words--those of the Y.M.C.A. people--as well. In exposing the rhetoric of the "y" men, Dos Passos emphasizes that these men are not hypocrites; they are well-meaning and sincere yet simply blind to the realities around them. As Martin Howe says in One Man's Initiation: 1917, "The best camouflage is always sincere"(158). The "y" men's fierce Christianity, their ignorance of the realities of war, and their innocence of the contempt in which the battle-hardened soldiers hold them are subjects for Dos Passos' ridicule throughout the novel.

As if the "camouflage" of written and spoken words were not enough, Three Soldiers also analyzes a very new form of "camouflage"--film. The danger of this visual medium, which Dos Passos suggests may be even more serious than the danger of propagandistic words, is that people too easily confuse what they see on the screen with real life; there is a tendency to forget that film is an art form--and as artificial as any art form. A documentary of German atrocities, shown to the troops in Chapter I of
Three Soldiers, evokes, significantly, "blind hatred":
"There were hisses and catcalls when a German flag was seen, and as the troops were pictured advancing, bayonetting the civilians in wide Dutch pants, the old women with starched caps, the soldiers packed into the stuffy Y.M.C.A. hut shouted oaths at them." Even the sensitive and intelligent John Andrews, who is impervious to written or spoken propaganda, is "carried away" (27) by the collective hate generated by the film, which illustrates film's enormous propaganda potential. As the men leave the hut, one soldier remarks: "'I never raped a woman in my life, but by God, I'm going to. I'd give a lot to rape some of these goddam German women!'" (27). The film has done its job. The men's response to film is reminiscent of the unthinking response to print by the girl in One Man's Initiation: 1917. For Dos Passos, seeing via film is seeing at second-hand, unempirically, and is an invalid ground for understanding. When film works hand in hand with print, the problem of authentic understanding is compounded. This double-barrelled victimization of the mind by both words and film is illustrated in Three Soldiers by the plight of Dan Fuselli.

The first two parts of Three Soldiers are devoted to Fuselli, a former optical-goods clerk, ironically enough, whose chief characteristic is his stubborn unwillingness to see, and therefore, to understand the war. Fuselli unquestioningly believes what printed words and frames of film tell him to believe about the war; his responses to the war are externally induced, conditioned by rhetoric and movies. Fuselli allows nothing to shake his faith in
his own preconceptions. One scene which underscores Fuselli's inauthentic understanding of the war occurs in the second chapter of Part II. In this scene, Dan Cohen, a veteran, relates some of his personal experiences to Fuselli. When Cohen tells Fuselli that the Germans humanely notify Allied hospitals days in advance before shelling the vicinity, Fuselli responds with disbelief: "'Germans done that! Quit yer kiddin'" (88). Cohen's story contradicts a Y.M.C.A. pamphlet called "German Atrocities," which Fuselli had dutifully read: "[Fuselli's] mind became suddenly filled with pictures of children with their arms cut off, of babies spitted on bayonets, of women strapped on tables and violated by soldier after soldier" (69-70). Moreover, when Cohen recounts how American hospital orderlies strangled an hysterical American G.I. who got on their nerves, Fuselli closes his mind completely and leaves Cohen. Fuselli makes no attempt to reconcile his beliefs with Cohen's narratives; Fuselli just refuses to allow Cohen's lived experiences to supersede, or even modify, his own "parroted" preconceptions.

Even more than rhetoric, the most profound influence upon Fuselli's conception of the war is the motion picture. There are at least twelve instances in the chapters on Fuselli in which film is mentioned. The movies have defined war for Fuselli as an heroic enterprise: "'Oh, when we're ordered overseas, I'll show them,' he thought ardently, and picturing to himself long movie reels of heroism he went off to sleep" (17). Fuselli never questions the truth of the film version of war even when faced with the actual tedium and ugliness of trench warfare; nothing experiential displaces the second-hand images unrolling in his mind.
In the episode of the German helmets in the first Chapter of "The Metal Cools," experiential reality challenges Fuselli's movie reality. This episode is similar in kind to the scene in *One Man's Initiation: 1917* in which Dos Passos contrasted the girl's inauthentic understanding of atrocity with the English soldier's experiential, and thus authentic, understanding of atrocity. The only difference between the two scenes is that the present scene concerns the authenticity of images instead of words. When Fuselli fantasizes about the war, the German helmet serves as a synecdochic image of the enemy. The image is central in two of Fuselli's reveries in "Making the Mould." In the first, Fuselli visualizes the war in a montage drawn from Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and from atrocity films:

He was in a place like the Exposition ground, full of old men and women in peasant costume, like in the song, 'When It's Apple Blossom Time in Normandy.' Men in spiked helmets who looked like firemen kept charging through, like the Ku Klux Klan in the movies, jumping from their horses and setting fire to buildings with strange outlandish gestures, spitting babies on their long swords. Those were the Huns. Then there were flags blowing very hard in the wind, and the sound of a band. The Yanks were coming. Everything was lost in a scene from a movie in which khaki-clad regiments marched fast, fast across the scene. (37)

In the second, Fuselli dreams of his future heroism: "Overseas, under fire, he'd have a chance to show what he was worth; and he pictured himself heroically carrying a wounded captain back to a dressing station, pursued by fierce-whiskered men with spiked helmets like firemen's helmets" (40). Fuselli's unempirically grounded conception of the spiked helmet is met with scorn by a veteran soldier, who has witnessed a scene which has burned the image of German helmets into his consciousness:
"I can't sleep at night thinkin' of the shape of the Fritzes' helmets. Have you ever thought that there was somethin' about the shape of them goddam helmets...?"

"Ain't they just or'nary shapes?" asked Fuselli, half turning round. "I seen 'em in the movies." He laughed apologetically.

"Listen to the rookie, Tub, he's seen 'em in the movies!" said the man with the nervous twitch in his voice, laughing a croaking little laugh. (56)

In this scene, Dos Passos is juxtaposing movie reality and experiential reality – Fuselli's derivative image and the nervous soldier's empirical image. A few pages later, the nervous soldier, "staring straight into Fuselli's eyes" (59), explains the significance of the helmets. He had grenaded a group of card-playing Germans in a dugout: "'I lay there lookin' at 'em for a hell of a time, an' then I clicked a grenade an' tossed it gently down the steps. An' all those funny helmets like toadstools popped up in the air an' somebody gave a yell an' the light went out an' the damn grenade went off!" (60). The soldier creates his own simile of the toadstools to describe the helmets, a grotesque, surrealistic association, but truly his own. For Dos Passos, Fuselli's image is preconceived, second-hand, and therefore, inauthentic.

Because Fuselli refuses to see, he never does comprehend the war. The movies failed to inform him of the existence of labor battalions, permanent K.P. and doses of clap. He ends up bewildered and confused, a lesson in futility, a victim of what he has been told to believe. As well as showing in Three Soldiers the victimization of men's minds by print and film, Dos Passos satirizes another source of misleading information – the Y.M.C.A. people. Dos Passos never has a good word for these rear-echelon cheerleaders, who simply do not know experientially what they are talking about and who have not
seen the slaughter they so joyously champion. John Andrews, as the most perceptive and intelligent of the three soldiers, is Dos Passos' satiric mouthpiece. Of the many scenes between Andrews and these pulpit warriors, three are especially significant.

Early in "Machines," John Andrews and others shed their uniforms and take an impromptu swim in a French lake. While the men are dressing, a "r" man creeps up and overhears Andrews' lament that the short respite is over: "'God, I can't make up my mind to put the damn thing on again,' said Andrews in a low voice, almost as if he were talking to himself; 'I feel so clean and free. It's like voluntarily taking up filth and slavery again!'" (156). After the "r" man perfunctorily rebukes such rank heresy, "'D'you call serving your country slavery, my friend?'" (156), the following ironic exchange occurs:

"'You'll get into trouble, my boy, if you talk that way," said the "r" man in a cautious voice.
"Well, what is your definition of slavery?"
"You must remember that you are a voluntary worker in the cause of democracy. You're doing this so that your children will be able to live peaceful."
"Ever shot a man?"
"No. . . . No, of course not, but I'd have enlisted, really I would. Only my eyes are weak."
"I guess so," said Andrews under his breath. (157)

Andrews' two pointed questions are the keys to this dialogue. For Dos Passos, an abstract word such as "slavery" must be defined concretely out of lived experiences. Andrews has earned the right to use "slavery" as a descriptive term for army life because of his personal experience of army life - the indignities suffered, the inhumanities endured, the freedoms denied. Andrews has arrived at his definition inductively,
which, for Dos Passos, is the correct way. If every part of army life manifests slavery, then "slavery" is the only fit term for describing the condition of the whole. The "Y" man, on the other hand, has no personal definition because he has no experience in which to ground one. He merely falls back on his platitudinous preconceptions and justifications, which, within the context of the army and the war established by the novel, are exposed as ridiculous lies. No scene in _Three Soldiers_ indicates that anyone is a "voluntary worker in the cause of democracy." The "Y" man has never killed; he has never seen war's realities; his eyes are "weak." Andrews devasting understatement, "'I guess so,'" needs little comment. The "Y" man's eyes must be less than "weak" for he says a few lines later, in all seriousness, that World War I is a "'great Christian undertaking'" (157).

Another scene illustrating the gulf between innocent pieties and reality takes place in the hospital where Andrews lies wounded. A "Y" man stops by to cheer Andrews up with news that Frankfort is under Allied bombardment. However, Andrews unexpectedly suggests that, if the "Y" man hates the Germans so much, he could borrow a pistol and shoot the German prisoners who work in the garbage detail. Disconcerted by Andrews' irony, the "Y" man immediately retreats behind his verbal barricade:

"Say, where were you raised, boy?" The "Y" man sat up suddenly with a look of alarm on his face. "Don't you know that prisoners are sacred?"

"D'you know what our colonel told us before going into the Argonne offensive? [see pp. 169-170] The more prisoners we took, the less grub there'd be; and do you know what happened to the prisoners
that were taken? Why do you hate the Huns?"
"Because they are barbarians, enemies of civilization. You must have enough education to
know that," said the "y" man, raising his voice angrily. (210)

Here again, the words of experience explode the words of inexperience. The "y" man just assumes that Americans do
not shoot prisoners, that only Germans are "barbaric," that only Germans are "enemies of civilization." Andrews, however,
has seen prisoners shot, has seen barbarisms committed by Americans, has seen that civilization's main enemy is the
kind of armchair crusader represented by the "y" man: "Men were more humane when they were killing each other than when
they were talking about it" (210). Such "talkers," who have no empirically based idea of what they are talking
about, receive Dos Passos' fullest censure.

The Reverend Dr. Skinner, who addresses Andrews' convalescent ward at Christmas, is the worst of the "talkers." The Armistice had been declared less than two months ago, but what is the tone of the good Reverend's message?
"'Indeed, my friends, I very much fear that we stopped too soon in our victorious advance; that Germany should have been utterly crushed'" (218). This from a man who calls Germany a "ruthless foe" (218). Throughout the sermon, Dos Passos offers no authorial comment; he simply lets Skinner condemn himself. Only at the end, when the men sing "Stand up, stand up for Jesus," does Dos Passos' restrained fury break through: "The men got to their feet, except for a few who had lost their legs, and sang the first verse of the hymn unsteadily. The second verse
petered out altogether, leaving only the "Y" man and the Reverend Dr. Skinner singing away at the top of their lungs" (219). The men know that what they have seen and done is hardly Christian in nature. However, Skinner is no hypocrite; he believes what he says. The problem with Skinner is his failure to see—to see that the war opposes everything for which Christianity stands. Blind men such as Skinner who urge people to kill a Hun for Christ are, as one soldier suggests, ",as much to blame as anybody is'" (220) for the war.

Essentially, the Christian justifiers of the war have turned Christianity inside out and have made the clean words Jesus spoke slimy and foul. In the same way, the political justification for the war, "to make the world safe for democracy," has become a lie. As Andrews asks a disillusioned, bitter and legless soldier: "'You don't think we've made the world quite as safe for Democracy as it might be?'" (220). In Three Soldiers, Dos Passos shows that the fine-sounding slogan and the experiences of individual soldiers are widely divergent.

One soldier whose army experience exemplifies the discrepancy between the phrase and the reality is Chrisfield, the Indiana farm boy. After leading an independent life as a farmer, Chrisfield cannot adjust to being "'ordered around'" (23) by officers: "'This ain't no sort o' life for a man to be treated lahk he was a nigger'" (139). Despite his inadvertently racist expression (Andrews in the very next line amends Chrisfield's remark by saying, "'No, it's no
sort of life for a man"), Chrisfield has accurately described the army condition--slavery. Indeed, Chrisfield comes to hate his masters, the officers, more than the enemy. As the most primitive, uneducated and inarticulate of the three soldiers spotlighted in the novel, Chrisfield's resentment toward the slavery he encounters expresses itself in acts of violence. And ultimately, Chrisfield murders an American officer, Anderson, who becomes Chrisfield's personal symbol for gratuitous oppression. Murdering officers may not be quite what Wilson had in mind in urging men "to make the world safe for democracy." Just what does that fine phrase mean to an average dogface like Chrisfield? In "Machines," when Chrisfield is searching for Anderson in order to kill him, the slogan runs through Chrisfield's mind: "Without thinking what they meant, the words Make the world safe for Democracy formed themselves in his head. They were very comforting. They occupied his thoughts. He said them to himself again and again" (165). Yet it is just a set of words which mean nothing to him. Nothing in Chrisfield's experience of the war relates to making the world safe for democracy. By placing the slogan in such an ironic context--inside the head of a doughboy preparing to murder his own officer--Dos Passos underscores the meaninglessness of the phrase. Chrisfield's relationship to the slogan which justifies his being in Europe is not atypical, but, the novel implies, representative of the front line soldier. While Chrisfield does not have the intelligence to consciously apprehend that there is a gap between the slogan and the slavery of the army, John Andrews does. While in the hospital, Andrews has the
leisure to meditate on the implications of the dichotomy between the fine words and the grim reality.

The wounded undertaker in the adjacent cot provides the impetus for Andrews' thoughts in the hospital scene. This undertaker is a bitter man. A combination of idealism and pragmatism had motivated him to go to war. He had believed '"We was goin' to put things to rights by comin' over here'" (205), and he had thought it personally politic to enlist: '"But, hell, everybody was saying that we was going to fight to make the world safe for democracy, and that, if a feller didn't go, no one'ld trade with him any more"'(205). But when he saw the reality of war, the '"dirty butchery"' (203), he became profoundly disillusioned--'"I didn't think it was going to be like this"'(205). The undertaker now feels misled by '"the fellers who got us over here"' (214), the '"bastards"' (214) who betrayed him with rhetoric; he knows empirically that Wilson's slogan is a lie. The undertaker's bitter revelations are of the utmost significance for Andrews. The undertaker, a man whose daily bread back home depended on pretenses and euphemisms, has achieved authentic understanding of the war. Andrews broods upon this man: "That man and his father before him lived by pretending things they didn't feel, by swathing reality with all manner of crêpe and trumpery. For those people, no one ever died, they passed away, they deceased. And it was so as not to spoil his trade that the undertaker had enlisted, and to make the world safe for democracy, too. The phrase came to Andrews' mind amid an avalanche of popular tunes, of visions of patriotic numbers on the vaudeville stage" (207). In this passage, an implied analogy
is drawn between the appearance and the reality of undertaking and the appearance and the reality of the war. Just as the "crêpe and trumpery" and euphemisms of the undertaking profession mask the reality of death, the "crêpe and trumpery" of Wilson's slogan hide the reality of the war.

That the justificatory slogan for the war is unrelated to the war's actualities raises a crucial question for Andrews - the validity of any fine phrase throughout history:

Were they all shams, too, these gigantic phrases that floated like gaudy kites high above mankind? Kites, that was it, contraptions of tissue paper held at the end of a string, ornaments not to be taken seriously. He thought of all the long procession of men who had been touched by the unutterable futility of the lives of men, who had tried by phrases to make things otherwise, who had taught unworldliness. Dim enigmatic figures they were--Democritus, Socrates, Epicurus, Christ; so many of them, and so vague in the silvery mist of history that he hardly knew that they were not his own imagining; Lucretius, St. Francis, Voltaire, Rousseau, and how many others, known and unknown, through the tragic centuries; they had wept, some of them, and some of them had laughed, and their phrases had risen glittering, soap bubbles to dazzle men for a moment, and had shattered. (211)

Although Andrews' disillusionment may cause his overstating the case, he voices his doubt that the phrases expressing the explanatory systems, worldviews and philosophies of the past are more than evanescent "soap bubbles." However, in the search for meaning undertaken in the passage, none of the luminaries Andrews mentions are Americans. Dos Passos may be implying here that, while Old World thought is moribund, there exist some "gigantic phrases" which are not just "gaudy kites," "ornaments" and "shams," but are valid--which are not "unworldly" but are capable of realization in this world. It could well be that Dos Passos is in the process of discovering a viable set of phrases within the American tradition. By USA, certainly a fully
developed and articulated group of phrases growing out of American tradition are distilled into the shorthand term "old words." When the complete framework is revealed in USA, the slogan justifying the Great War becomes not only a lie in its unrelatedness to realities, but in its distortion of the ancestral "old words" which the slogan echoes.

In the "Introduction" to the 1932 edition of Three Soldiers, Dos Passos expresses dissatisfaction with his second novel: "It is thirteen years since I finished writing this book. Reading it over to correct misprints in the original edition has not been exactly a comfortable task. The memory of the novel I wanted to write has not faded enough yet to make it easy to read the novel I did write." Of course, by 1932 the first two novels of the USA trilogy have been published. Possibly, Dos Passos is unhappy with Three Soldiers in retrospect because the theme which he fully understands by 1932 is not developed with adequate clarity in the earlier work. The framework of the "old words," which makes USA cohere, is just not present in Three Soldiers. However, certain strategies appear in Three Soldiers which illustrate Dos Passos' working toward the theme of the misuse of the "old words." In trying to make us see that the war is somehow un-American, Dos Passos contrasts Wilson's slogan with the realities of the war experienced by three infantrymen. And we see that instead of making the world safe for democracy, the war has actually released forces which dehumanize, stifle and oppress men. Later, in USA, Dos Passos juxtaposes the "old words" with the
behavior of men and women to show us that the entire nation is currently un-American. Moreover, Three Soldiers shows us the lies and the liars used to support Wilson's slogan. World War I had taught Dos Passos that words can kill:
"We had seen the physical power of lies to kill and destroy." 17 In USA, we will see how lies turn the "old words" inside out. And we will see how lies may erode the humanity, or even kill the spirit, of liars.

"The Harvard Afterglow": Streets of Night

Dos Passos' third novel stands as an anomaly in the author's canon. Critics generally agree that Streets of Night is a piece of juvenilia begun at Harvard and, easily, his worst novel. 18 Surely, it is the most pretentious, most self-consciously literary and least interesting of all Dos Passos' novels. In short, it is a tedious book. Set in pre-war Boston and focusing upon the lives of three young intellectuals, Streets of Night portrays a debilitated culture populated by enervated men and women. While the men in Three Soldiers are slaves, the characters in Streets of Night, Fanshaw Macdougan, Nancibel Taylor, David Wendell, are no freer. However, no officers or MP's restrain Macdougan, Taylor and Wendell; their shackles are invisible and their bondage self-imposed. Their policemen reside inside their heads in the form of social rules and sexual conventions--what David Wendell calls the "must nots." 19 The three characters in this novel are, to use a contemporary idiom, "uptight." Dos Passos' lack of sympathy for all but
David Wendell is painfully obvious. And the tone of the novel in treating such characters is preachy; Dos Passos tries so hard to do us good by showing us what happens to these repressed zombies. The major question which arises from reading this novel in the context of Dos Passos' other fiction is simply how to account for *Streets of Night*. Dos Passos himself never mentions the novel, which may indicate that he would just as soon forget it. Yet what imperative lies behind this novel, which appears only two years before *Manhattan Transfer*?

It seems to me that *Streets of Night* is Dos Passos' attempt to purge himself of his college experience. In recalling his Harvard years, Dos Passos always contrasts the world of Harvard with the real world. Harvard, as Dos Passos sees it, created an illusory world of art, order and stability, while "out there" somewhere existed a chaotic real world, a world of social and political action, a world preparing a war. Ostrich-like, Harvard kept its head in the sand. In "The Harvard Afterglow," Dos Passos remembers his discontent: "Looking back on it years later I found myself remembering the time I spent at Harvard as a period of afterglow. No more ungrateful brat ever ran for a nine o'clock across the old duckboards in the Yard."²⁰ Dos Passos' restlessness at Harvard and his impatience to enter the real world is reflected in *Streets of Night* by David Wendell. Yet, neither Dos Passos nor Wendell know just what they seek in the real world; their aspirations are vague. However, Dos Passos suggests in "The Harvard Afterglow" that experience alone is what he hungered for—a desire constantly frustrated by the "backwater" called
Harvard: "There had been a young poet named Tom Eliot, an explosive journalist named Jack Reed. They had moved out into the great world of hellroaring and confusion. I felt I'd come too late. Some of my undergraduate friends were trying to replace the ardors of the past with Oscar Wilde and Beardsley's illustrations and The Hound of Heaven; the mauve gloaming. I wasn't satisfied with any of it."

The priggish Fanshaw Macdougan in Streets of Night is precisely the type of Nineties-drenched aesthete mentioned in this passage. Possibly in portraying Macdougan's ludicrous and exaggerated aestheticism, Dos Passos is trying to cancel out once and for all any sympathy he once might have held for aestheticism as a response to life. For Dos Passos, the war dispelled the "mauve gloaming" for good.

In another assessment of his Harvard experience, found in Camera Eye (25) of USA, Dos Passos castigates himself for not having had the nerve to break out of the artificial environment of Harvard:

havent got the nerve to break out of the bellglass four years under the ethercone breathe deep gently now that's they way be a good boy one two three four five six get A's in some courses but don't be a grind

A pervasive indolence, which stifles the spirit, exists at Harvard. The "bellglass" and "ethercone" images precisely describe the passive and anesthetized atmosphere suffusing Streets of Night. Moreover, in the Camera Eye, Dos Passos judges the prevailing elitist aestheticism at Harvard as sterile, dull, insular, irrelevant:

grow cold with culture like a cup of tea forgotten between an incenseburner and a volume of Oscar Wilde cold and not strong like a claret lemonade drunk at a Pop Concert in Symphony Hall"
In *Streets of Night*, David Wendell damn cultural aestheticism for being a mere "'scented preservative'" (185). Yet outside the ambience of Harvard Yard, there is an active world, a real world where, for example, "millworkers march with a red brass band through the streets." Dos Passos laments that he lacked the courage to escape from the inertia of Harvard and to join the "great world of hellroaring and confusion":

> it was like the Magdeburg spheres the pressure outside sustained the vacuum within and I hadn't the nerve to jump up and walk out of doors and tell them all to go take a flying Rimbaud at the moon

This crucial question of nerve, of having the courage to live, resonates throughout *Streets of Night*, especially with respect to David Wendell.

Wendell is the only character in the novel who attempts to break out of the "bellglass," to flee the suffocating "vacuum" of Harvard - in short, to live. That Wendell's effort is abortive and fatal seems to me to be Dos Passos' way of suggesting that, "There, but for the grace of the war, go I." In retrospect, Dos Passos judges the spiritual slavery of the whole Harvard-Cambridge-Boston scene as equal to, if not worse than, the physical slavery of the army. How else explain the bitter and disillusioned tone of *Streets of Night*, which for sheer spleen, exceeds *Three Soldiers*? At any rate, *Streets of Night* is Dos Passos' bill of divorcement from the "Harvard afterglow"; Dos Passos is clearing away all "romantic garbage" from his mind before tackling the "raw structure of history" in *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA*. 
The core of *Streets of Night* is a graduate student's attempt to "bust loose" (89) from his family, from society, and from the "romantic garbage" of Harvard. David Wendell, the son of a minister, suffers from a profound case of the blues. He is convinced that his past life has been a pseudo-life: "'Before I came to college I spent my time dreaming, and now I spend it gabbling about my dreams that have died and begun to stink. Why the only genuine thing I ever did in my life was get drunk, and I haven't done that often'" (192). His four years at Harvard, especially, were "'wasted!'" (80). What Wendell means by these remarks is that his life has been lived at second-hand; he has had no first-hand experience of things, no empirical knowledge of life. After breaking off relations with his clergyman father, the Rev. Jonas Wendell, David vows that he will "'try to be, for the first time in my life!'" (106). In rebelling from all the "dead customs and restricting ghosts" (117) of his past, Wenny desires to "'tear off this fearful cotton wadding I've been swaddled in all my life!'" (103), to "'see what the world is like!'" (103), to become an individual: "'You have to put yourself out to live at all; every damn moment of your life you have to put yourself out not to fossilize. Most people are mere wax figures in a show window. Have you seen a dredger ever, a lot of buckets in a row on a chain going up an inclined plane? That's what people are, tied in a row on the great dredger of society. I want to be a bucket standing on my own bottom, alone!'" (88). Wendell is another Dos Passos character, like Martin Howe and John Andrews, who hungers for an empirical understanding of life. When Wendell says, "'It's hard actuality I want, will have'" (189), he reminds
us of Howe, who desired to "be initiated into all the circles of hell," and Andrews, who joined the army to "rebuild his life out of real things." As seen in the war novels, living, for Dos Passos, means seeing, experiencing, risking, testing and questioning. In Streets of Night, one character who seems to be "living" in Dos Passos' sense, and who becomes a symbol of freedom, independence and experience for Wendell, is Whitey, the hobo from Perkinville, South Dakota.

Wenny first encounters the hobo just after the scene in which the priggish Nan Taylor rejects Wenny's love. Like Wenny, Whitey has had "'a fallin' out with the old man'" (130). Whitey has bummed from town to town over most of America, living by his wits. To Wenny's question about girls, Whitey says that "'they don't bother me. I get it now and then. But I don't miss it'" (132). Whitey is a compellingly attractive figure for Wenny with his freedom, his experience and his perspective on sexuality. Wenny draws strength from this shrewd, tough, resourceful and confident young man and feels that he may overcome his fear of sexuality if he adopts Whitey's nonchalant stance. Not only in Streets of Night, but in Manhattan Transfer and USA as well, Dos Passos uses the hobo life to symbolize independence and self-reliance. Jimmy Herf takes up life on the road at the end of Manhattan Transfer after "busting loose" from New York. And by the time of USA, going on the bum is de rigueur; most of the male characters in USA have a fling with the experiential life--on the roads, on the rails, on the steamships. Wenny, emboldened by his new friend, decides to go hobo psychologically, "reborn without a cent" (133), which leads to his disastrous attempt to conquer fear.
The episode in which Wenny tries to sleep with a prostitute named Ellen becomes a private test of courage for him, an empirical experiment to measure the extent of his self-liberation. Wenny believes that if he can conquer one of society's strongest taboos, he will be free to live authentically. The crucial question is one of courage: "To live you can be afraid of nothing. The Greeks were not afraid. The leanfaced men were not afraid. By god they were. Men flagellated themselves round the altar of Apollo on Delos. They recanted on their deathbeds and stuck their tongues out eagerly—for the wafer. And can David Wendell, silly little Wenny, son of a minister with his collar on backwards, can I conquer fear? I must" (138). He goes with Ellen to her room to defeat all the "must nots" (139): "To be free of this sickness of desire. I must break down my fear. Of what, of what? The social evil, prostitutions of the Caananites, venereal disease, what every young man should know, convention, duty, God. What rot" (140). But as his abysmal failure illustrates, his courage is inadequate to break the restraining forces of his mind; he runs from Ellen with her taunt of "coward" screaming in his head (141).

A further significance in the encounter between Wenny and Ellen resides in the two explicit references Dos Passos makes to George Washington. In the dance hall where Wenny picks up Ellen, a portrait of the father of America broods upon the scene. For Dos Passos, of course, Washington is a primary figure in the pantheon of the founding fathers. As shown earlier in this study, the myth of Washington and
and other founding fathers is what interests Dos Passos. In such a seemingly private novel, one might well wonder why Dos Passos interjects a tiny political note at this point in the story of David Wendell's try for freedom. The picture of Washington at first evokes in Wenny's mind the names of town which Whitey the hobo had visited: "Beyond, through blue arabesques of tobacco smoke, tops of instruments from the orchestra playing 'Goodby, Girls I'm Through,' a chromo of George Washington in a gold frame hung with a festoon of red frilled paper. In his mind muddled the towns Whitey had told him about, Akron and Cleveland and Chicago and Atlanta and Tallahassee and Key West" (134). An identification is implied here between Washington and Whitey as symbols of freedom. It is as if Washington and Whitey are giving their sanction to Wenny's determination to live free and experientially. A few moments later, a flat identification is made between Washington and Wendell when Wenny momentarily adopts Washington's viewpoint: "Wenny seemed to stand apart from this body of his touching the girl's body, to look at it critically through the tobacco smoke as if from the bleary eyes of the chromo of Washington. And when he is sated, his voice seemed to say, when his flesh has grown very cold he'll be like Whitey, going round to new towns, walking down roads, hopping freights" (137). Dos Passos suggests that by "busting loose," by revolting against the forbidden, Wendell is spiritually in accord with that American symbol of revolution--George Washington. And, when we remember that Wenny is from Washington, D.C.,
the identification between the two rebels is knitted even more tightly.

What Dos Passos is doing in this scene, it seems to me, is placing his character inside an historical context, a technique which foreshadows that of USA. In USA, what happens in the narrative sections is judged by the context of the "old words" established in the Camera Eye. For example, does J. Ward Moorehouse's behavior, his actions and words, affirm or deny the "old words"? In Wendell's case, we look at him from the perspective of Washington and draw comparisons between the mythical father of his country and his latter-day son. The man who commanded a few thousand farmers to victory over one of the world's crack armies is juxtaposed with a man who lacks the courage to sleep with a woman, and who ends a suicide. Wendell's behavior, for Dos Passos, denies the Washington symbol of courage and rebellion. By juxtaposing these two, Dos Passos gains resonance; he is able to suggest that there are public and national implications contained within the private behavior of Wendell. Dos Passos' method in the preceding Streets of Night scene is a forerunner of the method of USA. Yet, in Streets of Night it is not made clear precisely what kind of statement Wendell's behavior makes about America. But in USA, we know exactly what individual behavior says about America because of the "old words" framework provided by the Camera Eye.

The intimation in Streets of Night that some political significance resides in what appears to be an apolitical
situation points up one of Dos Passos' firmest beliefs: life is political. This conviction, I believe, grows out of Dos Passos war experience. In judging his college years from a post-war perspective in _The Theme Is Freedom_, Dos Passos bemoans his undergraduate ignorance of American history and politics: "My father had put in a good deal of thought and a good deal of money trying to get me an education, but I managed like some others of my generation to go through school and college without getting the faintest notion of what American history was about. At Harvard, we were much too superior to be interested in politics."27 Much of the sour attitude expressed in this passage goes into _Streets of Night_ as well. The war might have proved David Wendell's salvation by giving him both perspective and experience. For Dos Passos himself, the war served as a kind of great awakening; the war shattered the "bellglass"; the war confronted him with real life; the war politicized him: "Now I found myself consumed with curiosity to know what the phraseology of democracy which I'd been bandying about with the noisiest of them, really meant in terms of people's lives."28 This is the central Dos Passos issue which the apprentice novels begin to explore. However, these exploratory early novels suffer from a certain vagueness; it is not clear what the "phraseology of democracy" is for Dos Passos, nor what the author assumes those "great words"29 once meant, nor what precisely the relationship is between that "phraseology" and behavior. In order to
make his theme clear and effective, Dos Passos needs some explanatory framework so that "even the bankers and the clergymen"\textsuperscript{30} may understand. \textit{Manhattan Transfer}, in part, and \textit{USA}, in full, supply such an apparatus.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II


2 The Theme Is Freedom, p. 1.


4 The Theme Is Freedom, p. 1.


7 From a letter to Arthur McComb in "Introduction," One Man's Initiation: 1917, p. 28. Future references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

8 See "A Question of Elbow Room," in Occasions and Protests, p. 75.

9 Occasions and Protests, p. 73.

10 Occasions and Protests, p. 73.


12 Occasions and Protests, p. 207.

13 "The Workman and His Tools," in Occasions and Protests, p. 11.

14 John Dos Passos, Three Soldiers (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921), p. 27. Future references will be cited parenthetically.

15 Cf. David Sanders, "'Lies' and the System: Enduring Themes from Dos Passos' Early Novels," South Atlantic Quarterly, 65 (1966), 215-228. "Dan Fuselli is always gauging angles he can't quite turn. He never learns the terms demanded by the system for his survival: not merely compromise, but complete surrender."


20. Occasions and Protests, p. 16.


22. The 42nd Parallel, in USA, pp. 301-302.

23. The 42nd Parallel, in USA, p. 302.

24. The 42nd Parallel, in USA, p. 302.

25. The 42nd Parallel, in USA, p. 303.


27. The Theme Is Freedom, p. 152.


30. Nineteen-Nineteen, in USA, p. 103.
III. MANHATTAN TRANSFER

One striking feature of Manhattan Transfer is its pervasive use of biblical allusion. Chapter titles such as "One More River to Jordan," "Rejoicing City That Dwelt Carelessly," and "The Burthen of Nineveh" carry clearly biblical suggestions. Furthermore, many chapter headnotes and narrative segments place New York City within a context of wicked Old Testament cities such as Sodom, Babylon and Nineveh - cities marked for destruction. Indeed, the novel abounds with references to the Deluge and to the "fire next time"; fire engines race through the streets of New York twenty-seven times in Manhattan Transfer. Moreover, an apocalyptic and prophetic tone informs the novel. A modern day Jonah, an old tramp, sits "under his gourd"¹ in the headnote to Chapter One in the Second Section, and he later prophesies in "The Burthen of Nineveh" that it will only take "seven seconds" (381) for God's wrath to consume New York. Yet beyond these more obvious biblical materials stands a controlling myth - the Tower of Babel - which adds another perspective to Dos Passos' treatment of New York. Through implied comparisons with the Tower of Babel story, which, of course, concerns language, Dos Passos finds a congenial apparatus for clarifying the theme of the misuse of the "old words."

In Manhattan Transfer, Dos Passos establishes a relationship between the chaos of the city and the confusion of language. Looming behind this comparison is the Tower of Babel myth:
Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered upon the face of the whole earth." And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Therefore its name was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.  

Surely, the New York of Manhattan Transfer manifests a confusion of tongues. The New Yorker hears many of the world's languages, many different accents speaking pidgin English, many kinds of American dialects. Another form of language confusion in the novel results from the dominance of the printed word. Print assaults the consciousness of the city dweller from a variety of sources: advertisements, signs, billboards, periodicals and newspapers. And words, through overuse and specious usage, have been devalued; everything is the "greatest" or the "best." Finally, in the chapter entitled "Skyscraper," newsman Jimmy Herf, the central character of Manhattan Transfer, has a vision of a modern Tower of Babel where "typewriters rain continual nickelplated confetti" (365) - explicit evidence of Dos Passos' appropriation of the myth.

But the technique of Manhattan Transfer, of fragmentation, of dislocation, of discontinuous narrative, itself reflects not only a modern confusion of language, but a confusion in society at large. Characters are held in view for an instant and suddenly dropped. It is an atomistic society with people rushing pell-mell, sometimes colliding momentarily, and then
charging on. Scenes are short and continually shifting, which creates a sense of feverish, undirected movement. The inhabitants of Dos Passos' New York are scattered about the city much as the ancient Babelites are scattered about the world. However, in borrowing the Babel myth for *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos recasts the ancient materials in an American mold.

One can see the attractiveness of the myth for Dos Passos' imagination in the way the myth lends itself to Dos Passos' special understanding of American experience. The myth provides him with a convenient framework for drawing historical parallels. The time when America had "one language and few words" was, for Dos Passos, during the founding of the Republic. As discussed in Chapter I, Dos Passos believes a special American language, which he calls the "old words," and which, for him, embodies the meaning of America existed in a pure state during America's "Golden Age." But with the rise of industrialism in America, and the passing of the "Golden Age," men began to build cities and towers to make names for themselves and their business enterprises, and the "old words" began to be sullied as the dollar displaced them in importance. In the headnote to the chapter "Dollars," an old man and his son watch from a rowboat as a shipload of emigrants disembarks:

"I'd give a million dollars," said the old man resting on his oars, "to know what they come for."
"Just for that pop," said the young man who sat in the stern. "Ain't it the land of opportonity?" (49)

The promise of America is now defined solely in economic terms - a false definition for America upon which Dos Passos elaborates in *USA*. In building its own Tower of Babel, America has
created its own confusion of language by turning its "old words" inside out. "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" have been corrupted into success, fame and the pursuit of the big money. Dos Passos suggests the extent to which the "old words" have been confused when Jimmy Herf mentions the "old words" during his vision of the skyscraper: "Pursuit of happiness, unalienable right . . . right to life liberty and . . ." (364, Dos Passos' ellipses). The "old words" here are fragmented and disconnected; and the bewildered and confused Herf has no idea what they mean or whether they mean anything at all. Although full treatment of America as Babel is, finally, the concern of USA, Manhattan Transfer marks the point where Dos Passos begins to explicitly explore Babel's confusion, corruption and misuse of the "old words."

The materials discussed above are most clearly and fully realized in Manhattan Transfer through the narratives devoted to the central character, Jimmy Herf. My concentration on Herf and his immediate world in this chapter is justifiable in light of Dos Passos' concentration on him in the novel. Herf's twenty-three sections, which I have abstracted for continuity's sake, although they are distributed throughout the novel in short chunks, are the focal points at which the meanings of the novel converge. The major action of Herf's narrative is his movement toward flight. And, like a contemporary Lot, Herf is the only man allowed to flee the City of Destruction. Moreover, Herf's episodes illustrate the effect of Babel upon moral and humane qualities; to remain in the city is to risk the loss of one's humanity, to risk metamorphosing, like Ellen Thatcher Herf, into a porcelain doll - hollow, rigid, artificial and cold.
Herf enters the novel in the third chapter as a child returning to New York with his mother. The day of their arrival is the Fourth of July. In the details of Jimmy's introductory episode, it is clear that Jimmy will be associated with the larger issues of the novel. Jimmy's child's consciousness tries to grasp the phenomena around him in concrete terms. The Statue of Liberty, "A tall green woman in a dressing gown standing on an island," arrests his vision. His mother replies to his query about the torch: "That's a light, dear. . . Liberty enlightening the world" (69).

Mrs. Herf also explains why an orator is reading the Declaration of Independence and that her grandfather Harland was killed in the Revolutionary War. Finally, at the Merivales, Jimmy participates in the traditional fireworks display. No one tells Jimmy what the Fourth of July or the Declaration of Independence really signify. The holiday has become a ritual following a prescribed pattern of oratory, liquor and fireworks. Dos Passos suggests that the annual celebration has become, not a day for meditation and renewal of fidelity to the "old words," but simply a cultural habit. An empty lip service is given to the "old words," but the actual values of this society are diametrically different. A dramatic manifestation of this hypocrisy is presented in the words of Uncle Jeff Merivale, the master of the fireworks display in this section.

After Mrs. Herf's stroke early in the novel, Jimmy goes to the Merivales for dinner. Jimmy observes the diners carefully, especially Uncle Jeff with his "booming voice," and another man named Wilkinson: "No I tell you, Wilkinson,
New York is no longer what it used to be when Emily and I first moved up here about the time the Ark landed. . . . City's overrun with kikes and low Irish, that's what's the matter with it. . . . In ten years a Christian won't be able to make a living. . . . I tell you the Catholics and the Jews are going to run us out of our own country, that's what they are going to do" (101, Dos Passos' ellipses). Wilkinson opines that the nation is in such a state because Americans are "too tolerant" (102). The vindictiveness and bigotry expressed in this passage undercut the Fourth of July symbols of the earlier episode. The Declaration of Independence is mocked by Uncle Jeff's words. Jimmy applies the conversation to his own experience in which a group of his pals taunted a child who was suspected of being Jewish. Jimmy begins to see that there is something paradoxical in America's consciousness.

The first stage in Jimmy's movement toward flight from the nexus of values incarnated in the Merivales is his rejection of his Uncle's offer to place him in his company after Lily Herf's death. At lunch in Merivale's posh club, Merivale attempts to persuade Jimmy of the virtues of the American success ethic:

"Look around you. . . . Thrift and enthusiasm has made these men what they are. It's made me, put me in the position to offer you the comfortable home, the cultured surroundings that I do offer you. . . . I realize that your education has been a little peculiar, that poor Lily did not have quite the same ideas that we have on many subjects, but the really formative period of your life is beginning. Now's the time to take a brace and lay the foundations of your future career. . . . What I advise is that you follow James's example and work your way up through the firm. And don't forget this, if a man's a success in New York, he's a success!" (119, Dos Passos' ellipses)

In this passage Merivale restates the simplistic American
formula: "thrift and enthusiasm" will ultimately, and inevitably, lead to "success." And "success," of course, means material and economic reward; Merivale countenances no other definition. Merivale tries to instill in Jimmy the creed which kept Poor Richard's farmers humping behind the plow, which kept Horatio Alger's bootblacks hustling the streets, which keeps the modern inhabitants of New York chasing the brass ring. Even more important than what Merivale says in his speech is what Merivale fails to mention - the human costs of the rat race he sanctions. Jimmy Herf comes to understand that, behind the simple categories of winners and losers, successes and failures, there exists a cruel reality of psychic waste, of emotional agony, of physical abuse, of moral laxity. Through his speech, Merivale also makes an ethical appeal; he establishes himself as a model worthy of Jimmy's emulation. Yet Jimmy and the reader know that this is the same man who, a few pages earlier, railed against those "kikes and low Irish" who have succeeded. The inconsistency is obvious, although Merivale would never recognize it.

At age sixteen, Jimmy is being told to go forth and "make a name" for himself in business, the only legitimate avenue of endeavor, in Merivale's opinion, for a "man in a man's world" (119). Although Uncle Jeff neglects to inform Jimmy of the price of this kind of "success," Jimmy begins to find out immediately. After the manner of other main characters in other Dos Passos novels, Herf learns things by opening his eyes and taking a long objective look around him. As he leaves the club, Jimmy observes the people going in and out of the revolving doors:
For a moment not knowing which way to go, he stands back against the wall with his hands in his pockets, watching people elbow their way through the perpetually revolving doors; softcheeked girls chewing gum, hatchetfaced girls with bangs, creamfaced boys his own age, young toughs with their hats on one side, sweatyfaced messengers, crisscross glances, sauntering hips, red jowls masticating cigars, sallow concave faces, flat bodies of young men and women, paunched bodies of elderly men, all elbowing, shoving, shuffling, fed in two endless tapes through the revolving doors out into Broadway, in off Broadway. Jimmy 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. All of a sudden his muscles stiffen. Uncle Jeff and his office can go plumb to hell. (120)

In this passage, Jimmy empirically tests the words of his Uncle and sees a discrepancy between the fine words and the reality of the human meat grinder before him. The dehumanized creatures in this scene, hotly pursuing something called "success," are the victims of their acceptance of Merivale's words.

There seems to me a further implication in the above passage. I think Dos Passos would have us remember that these people, "elbowing, shoving, shuffling" through the revolving doors, are Americans. Their behavior hardly manifests "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." For Dos Passos, as he tells us in "The Use of the Past," post-war America "was just another piece of stage scenery, so crudely painted as to deceive only the rankest suckers, that masked a slaughterhouse of industrial exploitation." The scene Herf witnesses is, for Dos Passos, un-American, a violation of what this nation is supposed to be - America become hell. Herf knows instinctively that something is terribly wrong, and he senses that the use of words is, in some way, an integral cause of this wrongness. What Herf's "muscles" seem to know here is slowly brought to consciousness throughout the rest of the novel.
Although Herf ostensibly rejects the world of Uncle Jeff early in his life, he still participates in that world through his job as a newspaper reporter. He does not realize that the newspaper world, and, by implication, the total urban environment, is corrupting him. So long as he remains in the city, he cannot escape this fate. One scene in "Nine Days' Wonder" shows how Herf participates in corruption while deluding himself that he is detached from the sordid. Herf has allowed Stan and Ellen to carry on their affair in his apartment. Oglethorpe, Ellen's husband, catches them and, although his speech is serio-comic, it is full of painful truth for Herf: "'I know you think you're one of the dynamiters and aloof from all that. . . . How do you like being a paid prostitute of the public press? How d'you like your yellow ticket? I read and keep silent. I am one of the silent watchers. I know that every sentence, every word, every picayune punctuation that appears in the public press is perused and revised and deleted in the interests of advertisers and bondholders. The fountain of national life is poisoned at the source'" (195). Although Oglethorpe's speech here is pompous and self-dramatizing, a drunken actor's set piece, his words are more perceptive than he realizes. Just as Herf has played the pander for Stan and Ellen, through his job he panders to the public taste. Herf's involvement in the lying world of the newspaper involves him in the corruption of the world at large. Oglethorpe rightly sees that Herf's aloofness from the sordidness around his is merely an attempt to avoid his share of guilt.

One consequence of the corruption inherent in the newspaper world is its dehumanizing effect. Herf makes a valiant
attempt to keep his professional life from influencing his personal life. For several years he successfully remains humane and compassionate in personal relationships and cold and impersonal in his job. A fine illustration of this tension in Herf occurs in the party scene of the chapter "Went to the Animals' Fair." Herf tries to console Tony Hunter, whose homosexuality has led to self-hatred. Society's sexual conventions are horrible if they result in one's psychic disorder: "'All the hushdope about sex. I'd never realized it before tonight, the full extent of the agony. God you must have a rotten time. . . . We all of us have a rotten time. In your case it's just luck, hellish bad luck. Martin [Herf's politically radical friend] used to say: Everything would be so much better if suddenly a bell rang and everybody told everybody else honestly what they did about it, how they lived, how they loved. It's hiding things makes them putrify. By God it's horrible. As if life wasn't difficult enough without that!'" (235). Instead of merely calling for honesty and sincerity in human affairs, why does not Herf do something to achieve such worthy aims through his newspaper work? The press could potentially be a humanizing force in society. Yet if, for example, Herf wrote a series dealing seriously, intelligently and sympathetically with homosexuality, he knows the articles would never see print. Herf knows that newspapers are concerned, not with serving human needs, but with selling advertising and with selling papers. And the newspapers' dual interests are best served by confirming prejudices already existing in public attitudes. The press's governing motto in Manhattan Transfer and in USA is "don't rock the boat." Herf's desire for honesty and sincerity in
human affairs is opposed to his job as recorder of all the news that's fit to print.

As he walks on after parting with Hunter, Herf's mind orders itself on the random pattern of the newspaper in which only the facts, especially the most sensational and brutal facts, are wanted. Yet Herf realizes that the facts must be written according to newspaper formulas, which lack any kind of personal meaning. The public maw must have its meat:

Declaration of war . . . rumble of drums . . . beefeaters march in red after the flashing baton of a drummajor in a hat like a longhaired muff, silver knob spins flashing grump, grump, grump . . . in the face of revolution mondiale. Commencement of hostilities in a long parade through the empty rainlashed streets. Extra, extra, extra. Santa Claus shoots daughter he has tried to attack. SLAYS SELF WITH SHOTGUN . . . put the gun under his chin and pulled the trigger with his big toe. The stars look down on Fredericktown. Workers of the world, unite. Vive le sang, vive le sang. (236, Dos Passos' ellipses)

This parody expresses the absurdity of facts without understanding. The reporter is just not allowed to see facts in new ways or in new relationships which might create understanding and reveal truth. As Dos Passos says in "The Workman and His Tools," a false objectivity, opposed to the objectivity of the "solitary individual," is the aim of newspapers: "As in industrialized science, we have in writing all the steps between the complete conveyor factory system of production and one man handicraft. Newspapers . . . produce the collective type of writing where individual work is indistinguishable in the industrial synthesis. It is a commonplace that business aims, which are to buy cheap and sell dear, are often opposed to the aims of the technician, which are, insofar as he is a technician and not a timeserver, the development of his material and of the technical possibilities of his work."
(my ellipsis). Instead of clear thought, honest emotion or truthful writing, the newspaper affirms only the safe, the acceptable, the clichéd, the conventional, the sentimental and the sensational. Formulas absorb facts. The danger for the reporter in constantly abiding by formulas in describing life is that the formulas tend to become substitutes for life.

The scene in which Herf observes an attempted hijacking of Congo Jake's bootleg liquor points up how clichés and life are beginning to fuse in Herf's mind: "He was making up the story in his mind. . . . In a lonely abandoned dancehall on Sheepshead Bay . . . lovely blooming Italian girl . . . shrill whistle in the dark" (319, Dos Passos' ellipses). The lived experience is transformed by Herf into a melodramatic formula with all the sensational elements - bootleggers, beautiful girl, lonely dance hall, imminent violence - congenial to the Sunday Supplement audience. The salability of the incident, not the truth of it, becomes the primary consideration. The clichés Herf uses, which would apply to many similar events, deny the complexity and the uniqueness of this particular incident; the simplistic formula itself becomes the incident. As Jim W. Corder argues in Uses of Rhetoric: "The word is not the thing. Any dramatic widening or narrowing of the distance between the word and the thing is accompanied by disorder and early sorrow. Madness, private or social, lies at the two extremes, either when we assume the word to be the thing or when we assume that the word no longer has any connection at all with the thing."7 Herf is at the "extreme" of "narrowing the distance between the word and the thing." Certainly, "disorder and early sorrow" characterize one possible fate for Herf. And "madness" itself may be the
upshot of his attempt to package life in clichés and formulas, as his later mental disintegration suggests.

That life resists being enclosed in this manner is suggested in Herf's thoughts as he returns to the city after the hijacking scene. His ideas for the Sunday Supplement story merge into his memories of the happy days Ellen and he had spent in France. Ellen was pregnant at the time. He wishes that the complexities and unfinished endings of lived experience could be ordered like one of his articles: "Funny these fits of refuge in the past. Suppose she had died; I thought she would. The past would have been complete all round, framed, worn round your neck like a cameo, set up in type, molded on plates for the Magazine Section, like the first of James Herf's articles on The Bootlegging Ring. Burning slugs of thought kept dropping into place spelled out by a clanking linotype" (322). The machine images suggest that Herf is becoming like a writing machine. And the ultimate danger is that the machine will dominate the human.

Herf's thoughts of Ellen, from whom he is separated, trigger his dream vision of the linotype and illustrate that the machine is, indeed, becoming dominant. Moreover, when the linotype machine metamorphoses into Ellen, she becomes identified with the inhuman machine world, with sterile language, with all those qualities of contemporary life from which Herf finally flees. The linotype symbolizes the false god which Herf will cast down:

He turned out the light, opened a crack of the window and dropped wooden with sleep into bed. Immediately he was writing a letter on linotype. Now I lay me down to sleep ... mother of the great white twilight. The arm of the linotype was a woman's hand in a long white glove. Through the clanking from behind amber foots
Ellie's voice Don't, don't you're hurting me so... Mr. Herf, says a man in overalls, you're hurting the machine and we won't be able to get out the bullgod edition thank dog. The linotype was a gulping mouth with nickel-bright rows of teeth, gulped, crunched. He woke up sitting up in bed. (329, Dos Passos' ellipses)

Both of Herf's worlds, public and private, have merged in the confused language of the dream. This dream is a crucial warning for Herf that he is in danger of being devoured by the false god. The powerful warning in this dream sequence, reminiscent of dream-warnings in the Bible, motivates Herf's flight from the City of Destruction.

Herf's first task is to break irrevocably with his wife, who is so clearly identified with the non-human. As his "private life" (344), Ellen is merely a constant reflector of his professional life. Herf burns to be other than "a goddam traveling dictograph" or an "automatic writing machine" (344). That his resolve to end his relationship with Ellen is a positive act is indicated in the following image: "Inside him all sorts of unnamed agonies were breaking loose. He felt like the man in the fairy story with an iron band around his heart. The iron band was breaking" (345). The reporter's detachment will wither as Herf undergoes his renewal. The two pages in which Herf ends it with Ellie are notably shallow. Her bored tone underscores that she is unworthy of his love. She is of the city. Herf, like Lot, finally flees the corrupt city, but Ellen, paralleling Lot's wife, looks back, figuratively speaking, and turns into modern glass instead of Biblical salt: "Ellen felt herself sitting with her ankles crossed, rigid as a porcelain figure under her clothes, everything about her seemed to be growing hard and enameled, the air bluestreaked with cigarettesmoke, was turning to glass" (375).
Herf's next move is to quit his job. As he wanders aimlessly through the streets of New York, on an early spring day, his mind is very sensitive to the printed words he sees. It is as if through the exercise of his consciousness he may empty himself of print, exorcise the lying language he has lived with for so long. That the season is spring suggests renewal and growth. The language of advertising, which Herf encounters, is emphasized as being one of the grossest perversions of the medium:

He walked north through the city of shiny windows, through the city of scrambled alphabets, through the city of gilt letter signs. Spring rich in gluten... Chockful of golden richness, delight in every bite, THE DADDY OF THEM ALL, spring rich in gluten. Nobody can buy better bread than PRINCE ALBERT. Wrought steel, monel, copper, nickel, wrought iron. All the world loves natural beauty. LOVE'S BARGAIN that suit at Gumpel's best value in town. Keep lighting, ignition and generators. (351, Dos Passos' ellipsis)

The loose usage of words like "better," "best," "all," "nobody," renders them meaningless. Herf feels himself to be full of meaningless words, a million of them: "One taste tells more than a million words. The yellow pencil with the red band. Than a million words, than a million words. 'All right hand over that million... Keep him covered Ben.' The Yonkers gang left him for dead on a bench in the park. They stuck him up, but all they got was a million words" (352, Dos Passos' ellipsis). Herf's imaginary bandits would have stolen counterfeit coin, a devalued language. His reverie continues, inspired by spring, and he thinks of the loss of his twenties in terms of a newspaper account. His twenties are criminals and fugitives since they have been employed in an immoral society:

DEPORTED: James Herf young newspaperman of 190 West 12th Street recently lost his twenties. Appearing before Judge Merivale they were remanded to Ellis Island for
deportation as undesirable aliens. The younger four Sasha Michael Nicholas and Vladimar had been held for some time on a charge of criminal anarchy. The fifth and sixth were held on a technical charge of vagrancy. The later ones Bill Tony and Joe were held under various indictments including wifebeating, arson, assault and prostitution. All were convicted on counts of misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance. (353)

Herf's surrealist vision of his trial, with himself as "your correspondent," parodies the factual style of reportage.

This entire section is Herf's attempt to cleanse himself from the taint of corrupt and unclean words by using them ironically. He meets the "demands of spring" (352), of purification and renewal, by emptying himself of false language: "And as I sit here, thought Jimmy Herf, print itches like a rash inside me. I sit here pockmarked with print" (354). But he is healing himself of the pox of print.

While Herf has not yet formulated alternative values to replace those in which the corrupt society believes, he feels it is enough, at this point, to reject the dishonesty and insincerity of existing conditions. As he explains to a group of his Bohemian friends: "I'm beginning to learn a few of the things I don't want," said Herf quietly. 'At least I'm beginning to have the nerve to admit to myself how much I dislike all the things I don't want!' (360). Herf, it seems to me, speaks for Dos Passos here as well. In rendering New York City in Manhattan Transfer and in rendering the nation in USA, Dos Passos shows us an America he most definitely does not want. And he assumes that modern America is neither what the founding fathers wanted, nor what we should want.

In calling into question the false values of this society, there is an implied examination of the original values of the nation itself. The fundamental question for Herf, for Dos
Passos, and for us, is what did the great phrases of the founding fathers mean originally and what is their interpretation today? From the day of Herf's arrival in New York on Independence Day until his flight from New York, this central question has hovered in the background of Herf's story. But the "old words" are confused; Herf realizes that America has built its own Tower of Babel when he has his vision of the skyscraper. The importance of this passage as the crux of the novel compels full quotation:

Pursuit of happiness, unalienable pursuit . . . right to life liberty and. . . . A black moonless night; Jimmy Herf is walking alone up South Street. Behind the wharves ships raise shadowy skeletons against the night. "By Jesus I admit that I'm stumped," he says aloud. All these April nights combing the streets alone a skyscraper has obsessed him, a grooved building jutting up with uncountable bright windows falling onto him out of a scudding sky. Typewriters rain continual nickelplated confetti in his ears. Faces of Follies girls, glorified by Ziegfield, smile and beckon to him from the windows. Ellie in a gold dress, made of thin gold foil absolutely lifelike beckoning from every window. And he walks round blocks and blocks looking for the door of the humming tinselwindowed skyscraper, round blocks and blocks and still no door. Every time he closes his eyes the dream has hold of him, every time he stops arguing audibly with himself in pompous reasonable phrases the dream has hold of him. Young man to save your sanity you've got to do one of two things. . . . Please mister where's the door to this building? Round the block? Just round the block . . . one of two unalienable alternatives: go away in a dirty soft shirt or stay in a clean Arrow collar. But what's the use of spending your whole life fleeing the City of Destruction? What about your unalienable right, Thirteen Provinces? His mind reeling phrases, he walks on doggedly. There's nowhere in particular he wants to go. If only I still had faith in words. (365-366, Dos Passos' ellipses)

In this scene, Herf finds it impossible to reconcile the "old words" with the skyscraper. The original idea and the original promise of America have been diverted into an empty and superficial materialism; the "Thirteen Provinces" have become the "City of Destruction." The skyscraper is a symbolic objectification of the "old words" turned inside out. 8 It is a new
Tower of Babel, a temple to the false words, complete with temple prostitutes. And Ellen, the golden girl, is the chief prostitute. Neither the vision nor the "phrases" which reel in Herf's mind make sense to him. He is bewildered, disordered and confused; no relationship exists between the "old words" and this towering symbol of modern America. No wonder Herf is "stumped." And if the skyscraper is indeed the legitimate extension of the intentions of the founding fathers, then no wonder Herf loses his faith in words.

A further confirmation of the perversion of the "old words" can be seen in the speech of the judge at the trial of Dutch Robertson and Francie, the "Flapper Bandits." The judge is, in effect, a priest of the skyscraper-temple as he interprets the "old words" as sanctioning the status quo:

"The unalienable rights of human life and property the great men who founded this republic laid down in the constitution have got to be reinstated. It is the duty of every man in office and out of office to combat this wave of lawlessness by every means in his power. Therefore in spite of what those sentimental newspaper writers who corrupt the public mind and put into the head of weaklings and misfits of your sort the idea that you can buck the law of God and man, and private property, that you can wrench by force from peaceful citizens what they have earned by hard work and brains . . . and get away with it . . . ." (391, Dos Passos' ellipses)

In this judge's interpretation of the "constitution," the rights of property supersede the "rights of human life," which, for Dos Passos, distorts the meaning of the Constitution. "Misfits and weaklings," according to the judge, must be weeded out. Not only the criminal who breaks the "law of God and man, and private property," but the "misfits," like Herf, who reject the accepted values are in danger of being sacrificed to the Moloch-like skyscraper. What is ironic about the judge's remarks here is that Robertson, who had not been able to find
work since his demobilization, turned to crime in desperation. Dos Passos suggests that "weakness" exists, not in Robertson, but in society. The judge's interpretation of the "old words" exemplifies that they have been perverted to such an extent that they are used to justify any social reality.

Finally, Herf flees Babel-Sodom-Babylon-Nineveh-New York and its false gods, and he starts a one-man Reformation movement, complete with a martyr. The newspaper account of a man who was killed for violating a fashion convention is both comic and serious in significance. The sheer absurdity of the facts is balanced against the seriousness of the issue underlying them. Herf sees both aspects of the incident: "'By God if I was starting a new religion he'd be made a saint. . . . Talk about the Unknown Soldier. . . . That's a real hero for you; the golden legend of the man who would wear a straw hat out of season!'" (401). Herf drinks a toast to his saint: "'It's the funeral of St. Aloysius of Philadelphia, virgin and martyr, the man who would wear a straw hat out of season!'" (401). Herf's levity is ironic in tone since the martyr is a true hero, in Herf's eyes, in his disregard for meaningless conventions. Herf also sees the man's act as patriotic in affirming the true intention of the "old words" - the man had exercised his freedom: "'The golden legend of the man who would wear a straw hat out of season.' Jimmy Herf is walking west along Twenty-Third Street, laughing to himself. Give me liberty, said Patrick Henry, putting on his straw hat on the first of May, or give me death. And he got it!" (403).

Clearly, a parallel is being drawn between the founding fathers and their creation of the ideals of America and the
Philadelphia Saint and his hat. In Philadelphia, in 1776, the founding fathers drafted a document, which was as unconventional as could be, and pledged their lives to support it. Our new Philadelphia patriot carries on the spirit of those men in Herf's opinion. But unconventional acts are so rare that the man from Philadelphia deserves canonization. Herf wishes he could paint a medieval portrait of his saint with the appropriate iconographical details: "By gum if I were a painter, maybe they'll let me paint in the nuthouse, I'd do a Saint Aloysius of Philadelphia with a straw hat on his head instead of a halo and in his hand the lead pipe, instrument of his martyrdom, and a little me praying at his feet" (403). The little man with the straw hat becomes Herf's symbol of freedom.

Herf leaves New York with his guiding vision of the new incarnation of the "old words." The flower wagon he passes suggests that Herf is returning to the pastoral world where he may create new values to replace those rejected. His flight is a morally affirmative act. The false interpretation of the "old words," symbolized in the skyscraper, has been denied. Herf carries the legitimate word with him, not externally or materially, but within his heart. He is reborn and redeemed by the spirit of the great words of the patriarchs. And therein lies Dos Passos' hope for the nation.

In Manhattan Transfer, Dos Passos grasps his materials with a sure hand; he avoids the problem of vagueness in theme and implication found in his earlier work. For one thing, Dos Passos' use of a biblical myth, which becomes an historical analogue for America and which becomes a frame of reference for viewing America's special language, greatly clarifies the
"old words" theme. For another, through Herf's experiences of the newspaper world, Dos Passos illustrates at length the current debasement of language. In _USA_, Dos Passos will incorporate into one of the four techniques of the trilogy illimitable examples of the press's misuses, corruptions, distortions and devaluations of words. Finally, ambiguities in implication, which mar the apprentice novels, rarely appear in _Manhattan Transfer_. _Manhattan Transfer_ is more pointedly focused. Herf's segments, surely, carry significant implications, the intentions of which are clear. We see that the behavior of modern Americans, for Dos Passos, would sadden and disappoint our founding fathers. We see a nation gone astray from its purpose - worshipping a golden calf - yet still mouthing the "old words" which define its purpose.

For Dos Passos, Oglethorpe's drunken comment is more insightful than he can know: "The fountain of national life is poisoned at the source" (195). In _USA_, Dos Passos examines the "poison" in the "national life" in exhausting detail.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


6 *Occasions and Protests*, p. 9.


8 A good discussion of the skyscraper vision is provided in E.D. Lowry, "The Lively Art of *Manhattan Transfer*," *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 1628-1638.
IV. USA

From the Preface, where Dos Passos asserts that the United States is "the speech of the people,"¹ to the final Camera Eye of The Big Money, where Dos Passos affirms the "old American speech of the haters of oppression" (BM, 463), the USA trilogy focuses unceasingly upon the theme of the misuse of the "old words." And, in the four techniques of the trilogy, Dos Passos at last finds a fully effective strategy for clearly and explicitly presenting his theme. In defining America as "the speech of the people," Dos Passos means, not "speech" in general, but the special American language which he calls the "old words"--the "old American speech of the haters of oppression." Understood this way, "American speech" is the language of our common heritage, which, for Dos Passos, unites us and identifies our uniqueness as a people: "the tendrils of phrased words" (vi), "the link that tingled in the blood; U.S.A." (vii). The isolated, itinerant young man of the Preface--"No job, no woman, no house, no city" (vi)--searches for America, which means the "speech" of America, with his ears attuned to the "speech that clung to the ears" (vii). But through his journey, the young man discovers that "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" (BM, 462). Dos Passos' thesis
in USA is that our special language, and thus America, has been betrayed; by examining the rhetoric and behavior of modern Americans, Dos Passos desperately tries to show us the fraudulent uses of our "old words." And he hopes to "rebuild the ruined words" (BM, 437), to reaffirm the real America, to "bring back (I too Walt Whitman) our storybook democracy" (BM, 150). USA, then, is Dos Passos' "search for stinging words to make you feel who are your oppressors America" (BM, 462), and USA is Dos Passos' affirmation of faith in the recovery of our "storybook" nation: "If you hit the words Democracy will understand" (1919, 102-103).

Each of the four techniques of USA expresses the "old words" theme in its own special way, yet, taken together, the four parts achieve unity. Dos Passos uses the Newsreels, which Joseph Warren Beach has called an "index to the American mind," to illustrate a number of corruptions in language. In the Biographies, Dos Passos judges many of his subjects according to their fidelity, in their words and actions, to the "old words." Through the Camera Eye sections, Dos Passos constructs an explicit thematic framework for the trilogy by creating, defining and meditating upon his central term—the "old words." Finally, Dos Passos examines the lives of nearly a score of contemporary Americans to see if the "old words" manifest themselves in daily behavior. Most of the narratives are concerned with the relationship of the characters to the language they use, or to the swirl of language around them. And any gaps between Dos Passos' understanding of the original meanings
of the "old words" and their current definitions "in the terms of peoples' lives" \(^3\) become readily visible.\(^4\) Dos Passos' orchestration of his four techniques produces a harmonious composition which reveals the maximum of meaning in the "old words" theme.

Newsreel

The main technique of the Newsreel device is simple but effective--juxtaposition. Headlines, snatches of feature articles, bits of editorials, items from columns, advertisements and popular songs are scrambled and listed in seemingly random fashion. Dos Passos lets the contradictions, incongruities and absurdities arising from the Newsreels speak for themselves. And what they speak is Babel:

"spectators become dizzy while dancer eats orange breaking record that made man insane" \((42P, 54)\). Yet a careful disorderliness amidst the Newsreels' apparent jumble reveals itself:

Come on and hear
Come on and hear
Come on and hear

In his address to the Michigan state Legislature the retiring governor, Hazen S. Pingree, said in part: I make the prediction that unless those in charge and in whose hands legislation is reposed do not change the present system of inequality, there will be a bloody revolution in less than a quarter of a century in this great country of ours.

CARNegie TALKS OF HIS EPItAPh

Alexander's Ragtime Band
It is the best
It is the best

the luncheon which was served in the physical laboratory was replete with novel features. A miniature blastfurnace four feet high was on the banquet table and a narrow gauge railroad forty feet long ran round the edge of the table. Instead of molten metal the blastfurnace poured hot punch into
small cars on the railroad. Icecream was served in the shape of railroad ties and bread took the shape of locomotives.

Mr. Carnegie, while extolling the advantages of higher education in every branch of learning, came at last to this conclusion: Manual labor has been found to be the best foundation for the greatest work of the brain. (42p, 23)

In this selection from Newsreel II, the first paragraph concerns "inequality" in America, while the headline and the two paragraphs devoted to Carnegie's conspicuous consumption at this lavish luncheon present a clear example of just such "inequality." And the interweaved strains of "Alexander's Ragtime Band" color the news items with a touch of absurdity. Moreover, in light of the context of USA, this illustration of "inequality" in the land where "all men are created equal" bespeaks the present state of the "old words." The items thus juxtaposed contain more meaning than if they were isolated; the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. Newsreel II, taken as a model for all the Newsreels, demonstrates the two main thematic effects Dos Passos gains by carefully arranging disparate and incongruous material: the items tend to modify and qualify one another by their positions in the Newsreel; the sum of the items comments on the present state of the "old words."

Since Dos Passos castigates newspapers in his previous novels, it comes as no real surprise that in USA he allows the press to hoist itself on its own petard by simply quoting actual news items. One only has to recall Jimmy Herf's newspaper experiences to know Dos Passos' stance toward the press. Besides the Newsreels' obvious satire, further insight into Dos Passos' attitude toward newspapers in
USA arises from Mary French's brief stint as a reporter and from the Biography of William Randolph Hearst.

While Mary French is working for a Pittsburgh paper, her editor assigns her to get "both sides" of a story on "red agitators" (EM, 133) in the steel mills. However, the editor is already convinced of the "truth" (EM, 133) of the situation; he has all the "dope" on those "enemy aliens" (EM, 133). Mary does her job too well. She discovers that "the nearest to Russia any of them came from was Canarsie, Long Island" (EM, 136), that the living conditions of the workers are atrocious, and that steel company detectives murdered a girl labor organizer. But her article never goes to press; rather, it gets her fired. The editor chooses to continue printing lies and even accuses Mary of writing "a first rate propaganda sheet" (EM, 137). The treatment of newspapers and editors here is consistent with earlier novels. The newspaper is portrayed as the worst possible source for accurate information and perceptive interpretation of events. The newspaper is governed by sales, not truth. When the truth conflicts with the public consensus, as Mary learns, the truth must be suppressed.

Yet, the most telling indictment of the press occurs in Dos Passos' Biography of William Randolph Hearst. Hearst, whose life is almost archetypal in illustrating the misuse of words, is one of the most hated figures in the Biographies: "he had a knack for using his own prurient hanker after the lusts and envies of plain unmonied lowlife men and women (the slumber sees only the streetwalkers, the
dope parlors, the strip acts and goes back uptown saying he knows the workingclass districts); the lowest common denominator; manure to grow a career in, the rot of democracy. Out of it grew rankly an empire of print" (BM, 470). Hearst dwells on the superficial, distorts and corrupts language, appeals to the worst in men. No wonder Dos Passos, who appeals to the best, to that something "more than common" in the American character, should hate this exploiter of "the geewhiz emotion" (BM, 471). It would seem as if many of the sensational items in the Newsreels have been culled from Hearst papers: "SIX UNCLAD BATHING BEAUTIES BLACK EYES OF HORRIS MAN" (42P, 240), "COLLEGE HEAD DENIES KISSES" (42P, 110), "ARMY WIFE SLASHED BY ADMIRER" (1919, 214), "TOOK ROACH SALTS BY MISTAKE" (1919, 341), "PIGWOMAN SAW SLAYING" (BM, 188), "HUNT HATCHET WOMAN WHO ATTACKED SOCIETY MATRON" (BM, 434). Unrelieved sordidness, preoccupation with the cheap, the titillating, the brutal, the degrading—the fruits of a "free press" gone rotten. For Dos Passos, Hearst's empire of print "grows and poisons like a cancer" (BM, 476). And, finally, Dos Passos dramatically underscores Hearst's monstrousness by alluding to his admiration for Hitler, "the lowest common denominator come to power" (BM, 477).

Although they do serve the very functional purpose of marking the progression of time in the trilogy through topical references to major historical events such as wars, revolutions, political and economic movements, the Newsreels' main significance lies in the meanings arising from the juxtaposition of items. In Newsreel VI, for example, a paragraph describing an explosion in a steel
mill, "The hot metal ran over the poor men in a moment" (42P, 80), is immediately followed by this headline: "PRAISE MONOPOLY AS BOON TO ALL." By contrasting these two seemingly unrelated items, Dos Passos suggests that monopoly is not exactly a "boon to all" and that the human costs and sufferings of monopoly have been overlooked. Furthermore, for Dos Passos, monopoly capitalism is hardly the economic system envisioned for America by the founding fathers. Another fine example of Dos Passos' method of juxtaposition appears in Newsreel XVIII, where Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war speech, which argues that America is "privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth" (42P, 351), contrasts with headlines about the jailing of "traitors" who oppose the war and the draft. Dos Passos' point is clear; Wilson, by denying freedom of speech and by forcing military conscription, contradicts the "principles that gave America birth." And the final item in Newsreel XVIII, "ALLIES TWINE FLAGS ON TOMB OF WASHINGTON," recalls Washington's farewell address warning, which Wilson has ignored, to beware of foreign entanglements. One final example, found in Newsreel XX, shows just how devastating Dos Passos' method of juxtaposition can be. Some armchair warrior's jingoistic and sentimental paragraph on the flag, "I see alternate strips of parchment upon which are written the rights, and then,—in the corner a prediction of the blue serene into which every nation may swim which stands for these things" (1919, 4), is demolished by two lines of a ribald doughboy
song: "Oh we'll nail Old Glory to the top of the pole/
And we'll all reenlist in the pig's asshole." As we know, for Dos Passos, America's participation in World War I betrays, rather than upholds, the "old words" which the flag symbolizes.

One further effect of the Newsreels should be mentioned. As one reads deeper into the trilogy, certain Newsreel items accrue more bitterly ironic meanings or become understood in wider contexts. The headline in Newsreel XXXV, "FIND BLOOD ON $1 BILL" (1919, 341), carries greater significance in relation to the narratives, Camera Eyes and Biographies which deal with bloodmoney: "Wars and panics on the stock exchange, machinegun fire and arson, bankruptcies and warloans, starvation, lice, cholera and typhus: good growing weather for the House of Morgan" (1919, 340). Blood on the dollar, indeed. Another item, which means more than it says, is the headline in Newsreel XLVI: "PROSPERITY FOR ALL SEEN ASSURED" (FM, 26). Variations on this statement roll through the trilogy like a drumbeat, creating the most obvious kind of irony when read against the poverty, misery and horror detailed in the narrative sections.

Dos Passos' strategic placing of the items in the Newsreels serves as its own commentary; through careful juxtaposition, the Newsreels dramatize Dos Passos' theme at every turn.

Biography

While it is difficult to generalize about the twenty-seven capitalists, labor leaders, politicians, scientists,
intellectuals, and artists whom Dos Passos spotlights in the Biographies, many seem to divide roughly into two camps—heroes and villains—in accord with Dos Passos' famous statement in Camera Eye (50): "all right we are two nations" (BM, 462). Simply, Dos Passos' heroes are those men whose lives and writings affirm and uphold the "old words." Debs, Haywood, Reed, Bourne, Hibben, LaFollette, Hill, Everest and Veblen are true Americans, faithful to the original idea of America, and, finally, members of the "beaten nation" (BM, 463). And, just as simply, the villains are those whose words and actions betray and deny the "old words." Keith, Carnegie, Wilson, Morgan, Ford, Hearst, Taylor and Insull are un-American, "strangers who have turned our language inside out" (BM, 462), and "who have bought the laws and fenced off the meadows and cut down the woods for pulp and turned our pleasant cities into slums and sweated the wealth out of our people and when they want to they hire the executioner to throw the switch" (BM, 463). In the Biographies, Dos Passos uses one criterion for judgment: fidelity to the "old words" admits the subject into the hallowed circle of "us"; infidelity banishes the subject to the realm of "them."

Eugene V. Debs and Bill Haywood, the two labor leaders, are heroes because they worked to realize the promise of America, not for themselves, but for others. Debs "set on fire the railroad workers" (42P, 26) with his vision of the "world he wanted, a world where brothers might own, where everybody would split even" (42P, 26), a world of
"free men" (42P, 27). And for Haywood, "the wants of all the workers were his wants, he was the spokesman of the West, of the cowboys and the lumber-jacks and the harvest-hands and the miners" (42P, 95). Ultimately, both Debs and Haywood are defeated by the "strangers," "who dreamed empire" and "lynched the pacifists and the proGermans and the wobblies and the reds and the bolsheviks" (42P, 95). But Dos Passos admires these two men who envision America as paradise, and who, therefore, align themselves, in Dos Passos' view, with the vision of the founding fathers.

While Debs and Haywood demonstrate their heroism in their actions, John Reed, Randolph Bourne and Paxton Hibben prove heroic through their journalism. For Dos Passos, Reed, Bourne and Hibben use language with uncompromising honesty, write empirically grounded truths, refuse to cater to conventional wisdom and remain faithful to the "old words." The motif of Reed's Biography is "Reed was a westerner and words meant what they said" (1919, 14). Reed understands the "old words" in their original meanings--"in school hadnt he learned the Declaration of Independence by heart?" (1919, 14)--and he is appalled at their betrayal by contemporary Americans: "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; not much of that round the silkmills when in 1913 he went over to Paterson to write up the strike, textile workers parading beaten up by the cops, the strikers in jail" (1919, 14). Reed reports accurately what he sees--the gap between the "old words" and present reality. When Dos Passos praises Reed as the "best American writer of his
time" (1919, 15), it is clear that Dos Passos means that Reed is the most faithful to the "old words." Bourne, as well as Reed, is a demanding empiricist. Although Bourne wants to believe in the "reformed democracy" of "Wilson's New Freedom," Bourne questions the rhetoric of his day to see if the words mean what they say: "he was too good a mathematician; he had to work the equations out" (1919, 104). Bourne's inquiry reveals that Wilson's slogans, which seem to echo the "old words," are lies:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{for New Freedom read Conscription, for Democracy,} \\
\text{the War, for Reform, Safeguard the Morgan Loans} \\
\text{for Progress Civilization Education Service,} \\
\text{Buy a Liberty Bond} \\
\text{Straff the Hun} \\
\text{Jail the Objectors. (1919, 105)}
\end{align*}
\]

The greatness of Bourne, for Dos Passos, is that Bourne "saw clear and sharp" (1919, 104); by seeing through Wilson's smoke-screen, his deceptive and misleading uses of the "old words," Bourne illustrates his own loyalty to America's special language. Like Reed and Bourne, Paxton Hibben also leaves a legacy of fidelity to the "old words." Sensing that "something was wrong with the American Republic" (1919, 178), and that "The rich were getting richer, the poor were getting poorer; profits were for the rich, the law was for the rich, the cops were for the rich" (1919, 178), Hibben, in his life and work, asks a crucial question:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{was it for that the pilgrims had bent their heads} \\
\text{into the storm, filled the fleeing Indians with slugs} \\
\text{out of their blunderbusses} \\
\text{and worked the stony farms of New England;} \\
\text{was it for that the pioneers had crossed the} \\
\text{Appalachians,} \\
\text{long squirrelguns slung across lean backs,} \\
\text{a fistful of corn in the pocket of the buckskin vest,} \\
\text{was it for that the Indiana farmboys had turned} \\
\text{out to shoot down Johnny Reb and make the black man free? (1919, 179)}
\end{align*}
\]
In other words, is this exploitative industrial horror, modern America, the logical and inevitable development of the vision of the patriarchs? Hibben and, of course, Dos Passos thunder "no!" The passage above from Hibben's Biography reveals some insight into Dos Passos' laudation, not only of Hibben, but of Reed and Bourne as well. Along with Dos Passos, they truly believe in the American myth. Reed, Bourne and Hibben possess that "stubborn streak in the old American blood" (1919, 180), which motivates their journalistic attempts to make real America and ideal America coalesce.

Two other Biographical subjects, Senator LaFollette and Thorstein Veblen, also have an admirable "stubborn streak." Senator LaFollette, politically incorruptible, receives Dos Passos' praise for attempting to prevent America's betrayal of itself by entering the Great War: "He was one of 'the little group of wilful men expressing no opinion but their own' who stood out against Woodrow Wilson's armed ship bill that made war with Germany certain; they called it a filibuster but it was six men with nerve straining to hold back a crazy steamroller with their bare hands" (42P, 368). Like the three journalists previously discussed, LaFollette believed in mythical America. As a Senator, "he worked all his life making long speeches full of statistics, struggling to save democratic government, to make a farmers' and small businessmen's commonwealth, lonely with his back to the wall, fighting corruption and big business and high finance and trusts of combinations and the miasmic lethargy of Washington"
(42P, 367-368). From this passage, it is clear that, for Dos Passos, LaFollette is a true American, a spiritual descendent of Jefferson, a keeper of the "old words." Along with LaFollette, the other "stubborn" representative of true America is Thorstein Veblen, whose work is testimony to the tradition of freedom and truth. Dos Passos' homage to Veblen, as one of his spiritual fathers is well known.  

Of course, Veblen as doubter, questioner, and provocateur appeals to Dos Passos: "Veblen asked too many questions, suffered from a constitutional inability to say yes" (BM, 93). But what is most significant about him, for Dos Passos, is Veblen's belief in a humanly oriented capitalism. Veblen challenges America to view its great wealth and technology, not as an end in itself, but as a means of achieving a just society, of realizing the "vast possibilities for peace and plenty offered by the progress of technology" (BM, 102). To do so would be an extension and realization of the vision of the patriarchs. The great question for Veblen, and Dos Passos, is: "Was there no group of men bold enough to take charge of the magnificent machine before the pig-eyed speculators and the yesmen at office desks irrevocably ruined it and with it the hopes of four hundred years?" (BM, 104). This belief in technology and progress shows that Dos Passos is no Luddite and gives justification for placing him among those of the Futurist movement.  

Veblen's work remains a model of honest thought and language: "his memorial remains riveted into the language: The sharp clear prism of his mind" (BM, 105).
The Biography of Hearst, already examined in connection with the Newsreels, is representative of Dos Passos' attitude toward those whom he considers infidels to the "old words"--the "strangers." Dos Passos views the great capitalists such as Hearst, Keith, Carnegie and Morgan as false Americans who have "sweated the wealth out of our people" (BM, 463), and whose shaping value is not the "old words," but the dollar bill. Keith, according to Dos Passos, dies with an "uneasy" (42P, 242) look in his eyes, for which Dos Passos suggests a cause. As the banana king of Central America, Minor C. Keith contributes to the making of an imperialistic and exploitative America: "and that is the history of the American empire in the Caribbean, and the Panama canal and the future Nicaragua canal and the marines and the battleships and the bayonets" (42P, 244). An America which economically rapes smaller countries and enforces its actions with military might is not Dos Passos' America; such deeds are more usually associated with the "organized pirates"8 of Europe. Another robber baron, whom Dos Passos implies would also have just cause for an "uneasy" look, is Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie's Biography is notable for its shortness, less than two pages, possibly indicating Dos Passos' estimate of Carnegie's true worth. Instead of the generally unsubtle invective that Dos Passos employs in many of the Biographies of villains, Carnegie is done in with a rapier thrust:

Bessemer Duquesne Rankin Pittsburgh Bethlehem Gary
Andrew Carnegie gave millions for peace
and libraries and scientific institutes and
endowments and thrift
whenever he made a billion dollars he endowed an
institution to promote universal peace
always
except in time of war. (42P, 265)
The final line here does its job and casts doubt on the alleged "Prince of Peace" (42P, 264). For Dos Passos, Carnegie is simply a hypocrite, whose benevolence is the product of war profits; human blood has provided the cornerstones for his "libraries and scientific institutes." The Morgan family, as well, prove hypocrites in Dos Passos' Biography of them. While the Morgans talk about the "best interests of the country" (1919, 340) and "American principles" (1919, 340), their financial empire thrives, according to Dos Passos, on "Wars and panics on the stock exchange, machinegun fire and arson, bankruptcies, warloans, starvation, lice, cholera and typhus" (1919, 340). The Morgan plutocrats become more powerful than even the President. During the gold panic of 1893, "Morgan sat in his suite at the Arlington smoking cigars and quietly playing solitaire until at last the president sent for him; he had a plan all ready for stopping the gold hemorrhage" (1919, 338). That the Morgans supersede in importance the highest elected official in the nation and influence self-serving policies are clear indications for Dos Passos that the Republic is in sad shape. In reality, the Morgan aristocrats betray "American principles." Dos Passos judges the subjects of these Biographies - Keith, Carnegie, the Morgans - as subversives, aliens and "strangers," who owe allegiance to an aberrant America where money and power triumph over the "old words."

Dos Passos rebukes two other important members of false America, Frederick Winslow Taylor and Henry Ford, for their dedication to a dehumanizing system of industrial efficiency and production at the expense of the human values of the "old words." Taylor's scientific plan of increased production through
efficiency, which he calls, ironically, the "American Plan," turns men into little more than unthinking automatons. The ideal workman, for Taylor, is a machine: "The skilled mechanics were too stubborn for him, what he wanted was a plain handyman who'd do what he was told" (FM, 23). Certainly, for Dos Passos, a plan that denies the individuality, freedom and creativity of the worker is actually an "un-American Plan."

As Dos Passos argues in his Biography of Ford, who appropriates the "American Plan" for his factories: "The American Plan; automotive prosperity seeping down from above; it turned out there were strings to it" (FM, 51). And these "strings" for the assembly-line worker are loss of autonomy, mind, manhood and vitality:

At Ford's production was improving all the time; less waste, more spotters, strawbosses, steeplejacks (fifteen minutes for lunch, three minutes to go to the toilet, the Taylorized speedup everywhere, reach under, adjust washer, screw down bolt, shove in cotterpin, reach under, adjustwasher, screwdownbolt, reachunderadjustscrewdownreachunderadjust until every ounce of life was sucked off into production and at night the workmen went home grey shaking husks). (FM, 55)

Taylor and Ford have created a race of American zombies who neither "read nor think" (FM, 51), but who roll out a new Ford every eighty-one hours. Finally, during the depression, the whole inhuman system cracks and Ford witnesses "the new America of starved children and hollow bellies and cracked shoes stamping on souplines" (FM, 56). That Ford becomes an antiquarian in old age, trying pathetically to return to the "way it used to be, in the days of horses and buggies" (FM, 57), suggests to Dos Passos that Ford had misgivings about this false America in which he so deeply participates.

No figure in USA, not even the capitalists, receives more scornful treatment than Woodrow Wilson. Dos Passos'
Wilson cloaks himself in the "old words" while his actions betray them. Dos Passos' Biography describes Wilson as a man living in a "universe of words" (1919, 241), and, indeed, Wilson's Biography is filled with speeches. An early speech of Wilson's concerning his "belief in the common man" (1919, 243) is juxtaposed with his wartime utterances, "force without stint or limit" (1919, 243) to show how he betrays the sacred words he invokes. Several times Dos Passos contrasts Wilson's rhetoric with the reality:

"I wish to take this occasion to say that the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest";
and he landed the marines at Vera Cruz. (1919, 245)

And,

With the help of "Almighty God, Right, Truth, Justice Freedom, Democracy, the Selfdetermination of Nations, No indemnities or annexations,"
and Cuban sugar and Caucasian manganese and Northwestern wheat and Dixie cotton, the British blockade, General Pershing, the taxicabs of Paris and the seventy-five gun
we won the war. (1919, 246)

For Dos Passos, Wilson is a liar who holds out the hope of the "regeneration" (1919, 243) of the "old words," but whose actions result in their degeneration. While uttering "freedom," "truth," "justice," "democracy" and all the rest, Wilson turns America into a repressive and militaristic "State" (1919, 245):
"If you objected to making the world safe for cost plus democracy you went to jail with Debs" (1919, 246). Wilson is no Washington or Jefferson or Adams but a "stranger," who takes their "clean words" and makes them "slimy and foul."

Furthermore, Dos Passos is extremely vitriolic in his condemnation of Wilson's performance at the Versailles conference. Dos Passos charges that Wilson does not realize the significance of his words for the people of Europe: "(Did Meester
Veelson know that in the peasants' wargrimed houses along the Brenta and the Piave they were burning candles in front of his picture cut out of the illustrated papers?) (Did Meester Veelson know that the people of Europe spelled a challenge to oppression out of the Fourteen Points as centuries before they had spelled a challenge to oppression out of the ninetyfive articles Martin Luther nailed to the churchdoor in Wittenberg?" (1919, 247). Wilson allows himself to be "trimmed" (1919, 249) by Lloyd George and Clemenceau at the conference. The world is safe for democracy, but Europe gets the oilfields. Wilson's efforts to explain himself to the nation, "to save his faith in words" (1919, 249), finally kill him. For Dos Passos, Wilson offered the possibility of reaffirming the "old words," but the man's character was not adequate to the hope he inpired. 9

The oft anthologized Biography, "In Body of An American," which completes Nineteen-Nineteen, is a crushing indictment of the false America. Dos Passos juxtaposes the solemn rhetoric of the ceremony of the dedication with a fantasized account of Everyman's experience in the war. The official rhetoric of the government is undercut by the hard realities of racism, oppression, exploitation and death. Dos Passos renders the dedication ceremony of the unknown soldier as a mockery of the very words it is intended to affirm. It is blasphemy in Dos Passos' view, and the chief blasphemer of all is the subject of the final sentence of the novel: "Woodrow Wilson brought a bouquet of poppies" (1919, 473).
Camera Eye

The fifty-one Camera Eye sections, which record the growth and development of the informing consciousness of USA from the Boer War to the Harlan County miners' strike of 1932, compose a kind of autobiographical novel within the trilogy.\textsuperscript{10} And the story that the Camera Eyes tell is the story of Dos Passos' becoming aware of the misuse of the "old words." Following the pattern of a \textit{bildungsroman}, the Camera Eye consciousness progresses from innocence in \textit{The 42nd Parallel} through initiation in \textit{Nineteen-Nineteen} to experience in \textit{The Big Money}. The Camera Eyes of \textit{The 42nd Parallel}, which portray the perceptions, impressions and memories of a comfortable and sheltered upper middle class child, seem generally oblivious to the world beyond the self, although, upon examination, they do reveal an active and inquisitive mind curious about the tumultuous social and political world from which he is insulated, sensitive to contrasts, distinctions and injustices, aware of much yet understanding little. However, in \textit{Nineteen-Nineteen}, the Camera Eye speaker's cozy world is shattered by World War I. As we discussed at some length in Chapter II, Dos Passos' war experience proved a crucial turning point in his life, since it marked his political awakening. Through the Camera Eye speaker's experiences in France, he begins to question his own assumptions about America; he begins to see a difference between the real nature of this war, supposedly fought "to make the world safe for democracy," and what "they taught us" (1919, 101) America stands for; he begins to realize that his idea of America, which he had considered as stable and enduring as the firmament, diverges
from the actuality of contemporary America. Finally, in The Big Money, the disillusioned Camera Eye speaker's understanding of this discrepancy, which the war had initially revealed to him, increases and matures, climaxed by his final judgments in the Camera Eyes concerning Sacco and Vanzetti and the Harlan strike.

The Camera Eye sections, in tracing the speaker's path from ignorance to radicalization, provide USA with a clear and complete framework for understanding the "old words" theme. Essentially, the Camera Eyes recapitulate the stages in the development of Dos Passos' understanding of his own central theme; establish, through explicit authorial statement, an unambiguous attitude toward his materials; and furnish a context in which to judge the behavior portrayed in the narratives. And the Camera Eye speaker becomes, finally, a metaphor for three decades of modern American experience; he assumes the role of righteous spokesman for the original and sacred, and therefore, the legitimate and true, idea of America.

While the first eighteen Camera Eyes of The 42nd Parallel, written from the viewpoint of a child, simply record experiences without interpreting them, certain experiences similar in kind, when read against all of USA's Camera Eyes, become resonant and significant. One such group of experiences can be found in Camera Eyes (3), (7) and (9), where the speaker becomes aware of class distinctions, although he does not understand them. In Camera Eye (3), the speaker sees a factory, made spooky by darkness, from a train window:

but you're peeking out of the window into the black rumbling dark suddenly ranked with squat
chimneys and you're scared of the black smoke and the puffs of flame that flare and fade out of the squat chimneys. Potteries dearie they work there all night. Who works there all night? Workingmen and people like that laborers travailleurs greasers (42P, 25)

His mother's response implies that he and she are superior to "people like that," who are a subhuman mass—"greasers"—to be avoided at all costs. And the epithet "greaser," used so casually by his genteel mother, introduces the speaker to the cruel language of bigotry. Yet the working class, these "greasers," fascinates the speaker, as can be seen in Camera Eye (7), which concerns the "muckers" of the silver factory: "look out for the muckers everybody said bohunk and polak kids put stones in their snowballs write dirty words up on the walls do dirty things up alleys their folks work in the mills" (42P, 81). Here, while the working class is an unknown and threatening, yet excitingly attractive, entity, the speaker in Camera Eye (7) is more cognizant of the division between the "muckers" and "we clean young American Rover Boys" (42P, 81). And finally, in Camera Eye (9), the speaker meets "a young guy couldn't have been much older'n me" (42P, 92) who has "bummed all the way from Minnesota" (42P, 93) to work in a fertilizer factory. This meeting between the sheltered speaker and the free and independent "mucker" is reminiscent of David Wendell's encounter with Whitey in Streets of Night. Again, while admiring the young hobo, the speaker is aware of a social gulf between them: "I guess he wasn't much account" (42P, 93). These three Camera Eyes, which concern the speaker's perception of class lines, contain the seed for the cry of Camera Eye (50):
"all right we are two nations" (BM, 463). By then, of course, Dos Passos has cast his lot with the "muckers," the common people who compose the "beaten nation"--"a husky boilermaker from Frisco . . . an Italian printer . . . a hobo from Arkansas" (BM, 464, my ellipses)--who are the real Americans because of their fidelity to the "old words." The "two nations" statement, traced back to its sources, develops from the speaker's memories of a glimpse of a pottery, of the smell of a silver mill, of a meeting with a Minnesota hobo.

Two further early Camera Eyes, which, in light of later sections, pulse with meaning are (10) and (14). Camera Eye (10) concerns the speaker's visit to Washington with an old confederate major while Congress is in session. Two words that reverberate through this Camera Eye are "flat" and "dead," which appear eleven times in two pages. For example, the speaker and the old man "walk up the [capitol] steps and through the flat air of the rotunda with the dead statues of different sizes" (42P, 97). "Dead," in this passage, has two possible meanings: the obviously literal meaning and a symbolic one. Not only are the statues of Washington, Jefferson and other founding fathers lifeless marble, but the ideas those men represent, the "old words," could be "dead" as well. Certainly, by Camera Eye (50), the "old words" have become "slimy and foul" (BM, 462). And the current Senators and Representatives, with their "big slit unkind mouths" (42P, 97), would seem to be the "strangers," who have taken over America. Quite possibly, since these "strangers" have betrayed America,
they are "dead" too; certainly, they inhabit "dead air" (42P, 97). Finally, the speaker concludes Camera Eye (10) by mentioning "that big picture at the Corcoran Art Gallery full of columns and steps and conspirators and Caesar in purple fallen flat called Caesar dead" (42P, 97). Later Camera Eyes reveal the implied analogy contained in this statement. Indeed, "conspirators" have overthrown America--"the conquering army" (BM, 524) of Camera Eye (51)--just as Caesar was betrayed and slain. Another Camera Eye that expands in meaning within the context of all the Camera Eyes is (14), where the speaker hears a reading of The Man Without a Country. The speaker fantasizes that he is the banished Philip Nolan: "and the judge sentenced me and they took me far away to foreign lands on a frigate and the officers were kind and good and spoke in kind grave very sorry reading voices like Mr. Garfield" (42P, 148). On one level, this passage reflects mere boyish imagination. But, indeed, as later Camera Eyes show, the speaker becomes increasingly alienated from an America he considers false, and finally, he views himself and others like him--the true Americans--as native exiles. (Although, unlike Nolan, Dos Passos never "damns" the United States, he once "privately seceded," as he tells us in The Theme Is Freedom.11) In Camera Eye (51), the speaker acknowledges that the "strangers" have "made us foreigners in the land where we were born" (BM, 524). Neither Camera Eye (10) nor Camera Eye (14) by themselves reveal the kinds of meanings I have indicated; only within the context of all fifty-one sections do these
implications become clear. The Camera Eye sections do indeed function like the parts of a novel, with later sections illuminating the meanings of earlier sections.

In the last three Camera Eyes of The 42nd Parallel, the speaker's tone takes on a note of peevishness and ill-concealed impatience with the safe world he has always known. He wants to emerge from his cocoon; he finds his innocence burdensome; in short, he is restless. When he goes to college in Camera Eye (25), he discovers no great awakening, but, indeed, the very opposite: "four years under the ethercone breathe deep gently" (42P, 301). Intellectually, the speaker desires strong beer, but Harvard supplies only tepid and weak tea: "grow cold with culture like a cup of tea forgotten between an incenseburner and a volume of Oscar Wilde" (42P, 302). Painfully aware of the active and raunchy outside world from which he has been shielded, the speaker takes up a kind of fashionable Marxism in Camera Eye (26), attending a rally at Madison Square Garden and seeing someone beaten by police for mentioning "Washington and Jefferson and Patrick Henry" (42P, 350). But this episode only reflects a college boy's dabbling--all for the revolution, so long as it causes no inconvenience to one's self: "and we had several drinks and welsh rabbits and paid our bill and went home, and opened the door with a latchkey and put on pajamas and went to bed and it was comfortable in bed" (42P, 350). But it will be the war, which looms on the horizon in Camera Eye (27), that will satisfy the speaker's hunger for initiation into the real world.
In *Nineteen-Nineteen*, the war introduces the speaker to a new range of experiences—the sight of mangled and dead Americans, the oppression and dehumanization of the army—which initiate him into "all the circles of hell." The fifteen Camera Eyes of *Nineteen-Nineteen* reflect a maturer and more judgmental speaker, emancipated by his parents' deaths, who recognizes that the behavior of America manifested in the war is a truer expression of contemporary America than the high minded rhetoric justifying America's involvement in Europe. The death of the speaker's parents, related in Camera Eye (28), marks a point of transition. The "bellglass," the vacuum which the speaker inhabited, has "shattered": "it was the end of that book" (1919, 10-12). Certainly, the war-tempered speaker of *Nineteen-Nineteen*, "washing those windows, K.P., cleaning the sparkplugs with a pocketknife, A.W.O.L., grinding the American Beauty roses to dust in that whore's bed" (1919, 13), is no longer the mothered and smothered innocent of The 42nd Parallel.

When, in Camera Eye (32), the speaker laments, "What can you tell them at home about the war?" (1919, 150), he means how does one make America see the contradictions he sees. Or, as Dos Passos phrases it elsewhere, how does one show America that the war is a "reversal of American tradition" disguised by the fine phrase "to make the world safe for democracy." How make America aware, first of all, that State paranoia and repression are loose in the land of the free. In Camera Eye (31), a private party is raided by "Department of Justice Espionage hunting radicals proGermans"
(1919, 128). While America is supposedly safeguarding democracy abroad, America is harassing private citizens at home. Second, how tell America about the army—that democracy's agent in the war is the most anti-libertarian of institutions, and that it dehumanizes, brutalizes and destroys the dignity of individuals. Camera Eye (37) describes the depersonalizing nature of the army:

sol viol sk not LD viol Go 41/14 rd sent SCM alphabetically according to rank tapped out with two cold index fingers on the company Corona Allots Class A and B Ins prem C and D

Atten--SHUN snap to the hooks and eyes at my throat constricting the adamsapple bringing together the US and the Caduceus

At ease (1919, 252)

A man is reduced to a card and filed away; a man is a mere cog in an inhuman system, "spare parts" and "scrap" (1919, 454) for the war machine. And finally, how make America see, while wrapped in its illusion of its glorious heroes in pretty uniforms saving the world for democracy, what Dos Passos calls elsewhere the "waste of time, waste of money, waste of lives, waste of youth"—"the grey crooked fingers the thick drip of blood off the canvas the bubbling when the lungcases try to breathe the muddy scraps of flesh you put in the ambulance and haul out dead" (1919, 101). The Camera Eye speaker, obsessed by such questions, seeks to understand the terrible incongruity of death in the context of the beautiful French countryside, tries to come to terms with bewildering contradictions, attempts to reconcile his assumptions about America with this hideous reality.

The horrors, incongruities and contradictions that the speaker has witnessed, along with his feelings of shock and bitterness, are drawn together in the crucial Camera Eye (30),
where the speaker and two like-minded friends grope for understanding. The difference between Camera Eye (30) and similar scenes in earlier novels is the clarity of the issue and the precision in the terms used to describe that issue. When Martin Howe and John Andrews express their sense of betrayal, it is not entirely clear just what has been made a lie by the war, beyond vague statements such as "our only excuse for existin'"\textsuperscript{15} and "the phrases like balloons."\textsuperscript{16} But here in Camera Eye (30), there is no uncertainty or confusion over precisely what has been betrayed by America's involvement in the Great War:

three of us sit in the dry cement fountain of the little garden with the pink walls in Récicourt
No there must be some way they taught us Land of the Free conscience Give me liberty or give me death Well they give us death (1919, 101-102)

Specifically, it is the "old words"--that special American language of the founding fathers embodying the idea of America--which have been betrayed by America's behavior in the war. America has allowed itself to be lured into the evil of a European war: "welltido country people . . . carefully planted the garden and savored the fruits and the flowers and carefully planned this war" (1919, 102, my ellipsis). The beauties of Europe with their seeming order and tranquility are cruel deceptions; the odor of the flowers in this garden blends with the "faint aftersick of mustardgas" (1919, 102). The speaker, given his realizations in Camera Eye (30), ponders the alternative responses open to him. He can succumb to cynicism and despair:

to hell with 'em Patrick Henry in khaki submits to short arm inspection and puts all his pennies in a Liberty Loan or give me (1919, 102)
Or he can try, through words, to awaken the nation to its betrayal of itself, placing his faith for the renewal of the "old words" in that "something more than common"\textsuperscript{17} in the American tradition:

\begin{quote}
La Libre Belgique The Junius papers
Areopagitica Milton went blind for freedom of speech
If you hit the words Democracy will understand even the bankers and the clergymen
I you we must (1919, 102-103)
\end{quote}

The speaker decides to align himself in a tradition of writers who affirm freedom, individualism and human dignity. In the Camera Eyes of The Big Money, the speaker tries desperately to "hit the words," through both mild and rabid exhortation, which will hopefully make the American democracy "understand" what it has done to itself.

With a disillusioned perspective on America, the Camera Eye speaker returns home in Nineteen-Nineteen to discover that he is an exile in his native land. The first six Camera Eyes of The Big Money reflect attempts to comprehend this new money-mad America. In Camera Eye (43), he contrasts his memories of rural America with the urban America he now finds and questions whether this hard, cynical Uncle Sam was worth the terrible price of a war: "what good burying those hated years in the latrinestench at Brocourt under the starshells if today the crookedfaced customs-inspector with the soft tough talk the burring speech the funnypaper antics of thick hands jerking thumb (So you brought home French books didjer?) is my uncle" (BM, 28). The speaker seeks to understand, in Camera Eye (45), this new America in which
"the personality must be kept carefully adjusted over the face" (BM, 125), and whose inhabitants "slip through the fingers" (BM, 126). But the speaker finds phonies everywhere, in the radical movement as well as among the Greenwich Village hedonists he encounters. As he wanders, pondering the essential question, "what leverage might pry the owners loose from power and bring back (I too Walt Whitman) our storybook democracy" (BM, 150), the speaker finds no answers. The "topdog" (BM, 150) Americans of the big money offer only a soulless materialism and not a means for recovering our "storybook democracy." Yet the "underdog" (BM, 150) radicals, so righteous, mislead men by oversimplifying issues and by "telling them what they want to hear" (BM, 149): "Why not tell these men that we stand on a quicksand? that doubt is the whetstone of understanding" (BM, 150). When the speaker finally becomes radicalized and throws in with the underdogs as a result of Sacco and Vanzetti, the form his protest takes is not communistic, but finally, American. As Dos Passos has said about the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, "I seceded into my private conscience like Thoreau in Concord jail."18

The galvanizing and climactic event, not only of the Camera Eyes, but of the entire trilogy, is the Sacco-Vanzetti case. The speaker's judgments and interpretations of the Sacco-Vanzetti incident color every aspect of USA and tell us how to read the trilogy. Camera Eye (49), the finest in the trilogy in my opinion, expresses the significances and implications of Sacco-Vanzetti for the nation. The speaker's method is to establish an historical context in which to place the Sacco-Vanzetti affair. First,
it is fitting that Bartolomeo Vanzetti lives in Plymouth where, three hundred years before, "the immigrants landed the roundheads theackers of castles the kingkillers haters of oppression this is where they stood in a cluster after landing from the crowded ship that stank of bilge" (BM, 435). Second, Vanzetti is a spiritual descendent of this original tradition of freedom lovers who founded America: "this is where another immigrant worked hater of oppression who wanted a world unfenced" (BM, 436). The speaker, convinced that he has arrived at Vanzetti's essential significance, agonizes to find the words to make America understand the truth of Vanzetti also: "pencil scrawls in my notebook the scraps of recollection the broken halfphrases the effort to intersect word with word to dovetail clause with clause to rebuild out of mangled memories unshakeably (Oh Pontius Pilate) the truth" (BM, 436). And the "truth," once understood by America, shall make America free:

accustomed the smokingcar accustomed the jumble of faces rumble cozily homeward toward Boston through the gathering dark how can I make them feel how our fathers our uncles haters of oppression came to this coast how say Don't let them scare you how make them feel who are your oppressors America rebuild the ruined words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers districtattorneys collegepresidents judges without the old words the immigrants haters of oppression brought to Plymouth how can you know who are your betrayers America or that this fishpeddler you have in Charlestown Jail is one of your founders Massachusetts? (BM, 437)

From this passage it is clear that the key phrase "old words" means everything that we traditionally associate with the promise and the idea of America--the words, phrases and sentences which separate America from other nations, which define our national purpose, which establish our claim as the most noble experimental nation ever conceived, which
embody our moral worth. Everything that motivated a Swedish farmer and his family to risk the hazards and pains of a five thousand mile journey in Jan Troell's The Emigrants is contained in the "old words." The "old words" are America, more so than the mere geographic location, and the Camera Eye speaker warns that to murder Sacco and Vanzetti is to murder America and to hand America over to the "strangers." Furthermore, Camera Eye (49), through its method of drawing historical analogy, is a paradigm which shows us how to read USA. Just as the Camera Eye speaker measures the incident against the "old words," so should the reader measure the events and incidents and behavior of the narratives against the "old words" framework of the Camera Eye. For example, are the words and actions of Moorehouse, Savage and French faithful or unfaithful to the "old words"? What do examples of behavior say about the state of the "old words" as a living force in American life? USA, then, becomes a mode for measuring real America by ideal America, and the wideness or narrowness of the gap between the two is always clear.

The significance of Sacco-Vanzetti for Dos Passos cannot be overestimated. He even compiled a history of the case.19 In his essays, Dos Passos offers a plausible subrational reason for the antipathy of the people of Massachusetts to Sacco and Vanzetti. He argues that the two anarchists remind the people of their own failure to achieve the just society, and of their betrayal of the "old words":


Yet, under the conflict between employer and workman and the racial misunderstanding, in themselves material enough for the creation of a frameup, might there not be a deeper bitterness? The people of Massachusetts centuries ago suffered and hoped terribly for the City of God.

This little white courthouse town of Dedham, neat and exquisite under its elms, is the symbol of a withered hope, mortgaged at six per cent to the kingdoms of the world. It is natural that New Englanders, who feel in themselves a lingering of the passionate barbed desire of perfection of their ancestors, should hate with particular bitterness, anarchists, votaries of the Perfect Commune on earth. The irrational features of this case of attempted communal murder can only be explained by a bitterness so deep that it has been forgotten by the very people it moves most fervidly.²⁰

These two paragraphs are an early source for the Camera Eyes dealing with Sacco-Vanzetti. Camera Eye (⁴⁹) attempts to understand the "deeper bitterness" and appeals to that lingering "desire of perfection."

Camera Eye (⁵⁰), which records the speaker's response to the execution, contains the famous declaration: "all right we are two nations" (⁴⁶, ⁴⁶). Despite the obvious Marxist interpretation of the phrase, the most significant implication is that there are two attitudes toward the "old words." One nation is composed of apostates: "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" (⁴⁶, ⁴⁶). Anyone, "lawyers districtattorneys college-presidents judges," even United States Presidents, who mouths the "old words" while betraying them in his actions is a "stranger." In Camera Eye (⁵¹), the speaker further defines the "strangers":
"(they have made us foreigners in the land where we were born they are the conquering army that has filtered into the country unnoticed they have taken the hilltops by stealth they levy toll they stand at the minehead they stand by when the bailiffs carry the furniture of the family evicted from the city tenement out on the sidewalk they are there when the banks foreclose on a farm they are ambushed and ready to shoot down the strikers marching behind the flag up the switchback road to the mine those that the guns spare they jail)" (BM, 524)

Much like the Snopes' invasion of Faulkner's county, the "strangers" have taken over the land by infiltration. The strangers have killed Sacco and Vanzetti, but they have also made them martyrs. Their deaths have "made the old words new" (BM, 463). Given the speaker's tone in these Camera Eyes, it would not be extreme to see in his words a call for a new American Revolution in response to a new Boston Massacre. And the other nation, faithful to the "old words," is the true heir of the patriarchs. Like the children of Israel who only had the Word of God to combat their Egyptian oppressors, the true America has the words of the fathers:

but do they know that the old words of the immigrants are being renewed in blood and agony tonight do they know that the old American speech of the haters of oppression is new tonight in the mouth of an old woman from Pittsburgh of a husky boilermaker from Frisco who hopped freights clear from the Coast to come here in the mouth of a Back Bay social worker in the mouth of an Italian printer of a hobo from Arkansas

the language of the beaten nation is not forgotten in our ears tonight (BM, 463)

The "language of the beaten nation" and the language of the "strangers" are easy to spot in the narrative sections of USA. The terms and definitions set forth with such lucidness by the speaker in Camera Eyes (49)-(51) influence our judgments of the characters.21 And ultimately, in his interpretations of the Sacco-Vanzetti incident, the Camera Eye
speaker erects a central thematic framework integral for understanding all parts of USA.

Narrative: The 42nd Parallel

Dos Passos' pronouncement on language in "Cogitations in a Roman Theatre," "Language from its very beginnings has served two purposes: one purpose is to deceive and the other is to convey truth," surely applies to the "old words." They, too, have served two purposes. The "strangers" exploit the "old words" to deceive America; they turn the "old words" inside out by using them as a rhetorical smokescreen to hide their real purposes. On the other hand, the "beaten nation" uses the "old words" truthfully and remains faithful to their original meanings. In the narratives, Dos Passos mainly concentrates on the language of the "strangers" to show us the misuses and distortions and deceptions to which the "old words" are being subjected. We see in the narratives a host of hucksters and confidence men who will befoul and beslime any and all words—including the "old words"—for their special interests.

Through the eight narrative sections of The 42nd Parallel devoted to Fenian (Mac) McCreary, Dos Passos presents two deceptive users of words in the persons of Doc Bingham and J. Ward Moorehouse. Doc Bingham is Dickensian in his pomposity, garrulousness and pseudo-intellectuality, much like an unbenevolent Pickwick. He proclaims himself to be a man whose God is truth, and whose mission is to bring knowledge to the benighted world.
As Mac soon discovers, Bingham is merely an avaricious hypocrite who sells pornography, hack romantic novels, and religious tracts, depending upon the tastes of his customers. Bingham is nothing more than a crude confidence man, who exploits the petty lusts of people under the guise of bringing them enlightenment and education.

One incident in particular, which occurs on a train to northern Michigan, illustrates how Bingham fouls the dignity of language. Bingham recites Othello's speech to the Venetian senate, in the absurd context of the smoking car, surrounded by men discussing politics. When he finishes, he offers to sell them pamphlets of Boccaccio's Decameron, "'a byword for spicy wit and ribald humor'" (42P, 41). Bingham exploits a work of art's reputation as a "dirty" book, thereby undercutting his quotation from Shakespeare, and cheapening both works of art. The farcical adventure of Mac and Bingham has a deadly serious importance. Mac collects the money from the men and returns to Bingham, having been scared by the dark look of the conductor. Bingham's response epitomizes his exploitative hypocritical and fraudulent character: "'You leave the conductor to me, and remember that it's never a crime in the face of humanity and enlightenment to distribute the works of the great humanists among the merchants and money-changers of this godforsaken country . . . You better slip me the dough!'" (42P, Dos Passos' ellipsis). This sentence shows how Bingham cloaks his greed in altruistic rhetoric. The fact that a character such as Bingham appears this early in USA indicates that language manipulation and deception will be a central concern of the trilogy.
Later, in Mexico, Mac meets a more sophisticated confidence man in Moorehouse, who can adapt to different rhetorical situations as easily as Bingham.

J. Ward Moorehouse has come to Mexico as an agent for American businessmen who have a special interest in Mexico's current social and political dissension. Moorehouse believes in reconciling Mexican and American interests through public relations. Dos Passos employs his useful method of indirect discourse to illustrate Moorehouse's words: "J. Ward Moorehouse explained that he had come down in a purely unofficial capacity you understand to make contacts, to find out what the situation was and just what there was behind Carranza's stubborn opposition to American investors and that the big businessmen he was in touch with in the states desired only fair play and that he felt that if their point of view could be thoroughly understood through some information bureau or the friendly cooperation of Mexican newspapermen" (318). Further, Moorehouse wants everyone involved "to give each fresh angle of the situation its proper significance in a spirit of fair play and friendly cooperation, but that he felt that the Mexican papers had been misinformed about the aims of American business in Mexico just as the American press was misinformed about the aims of Mexican politics" (319). Mac's only response to Moorehouse's rhetoric is to exclaim in awe: "'Jez . . . that's a smooth bastard!'" (319, Dos Passos' ellipsis).

The "smooth" quality Mac notes precisely describes the unctuous tone of Moorehouse's speech. It is a language of pacification and placation which is dedicated to the preservation of business interests and the status quo.
Moorehouse's terms of "fair play," "point of view," and "friendly cooperation," confuse understanding in their very neutrality and blandness of tone. What Moorehouse really wants is for the Mexicans to tacitly agree to their own economic exploitation by American business. When "cooperation" means exploitation, language, as a tool of human communication and understanding, is destroyed. Furthermore, the conciliatory tone of the above speech is only one of the many tones Moorehouse has at his disposal. For each rhetorical situation, Moorehouse is ready with an appropriate style and tone; he uses whatever rhetorical stance is most expedient at a given moment. The truth, of course, is no factor in his choice of a rhetorical stance.

Further examination of Moorehouse's world of words is provided in the narrative sections devoted to Janey Williams. An additional burden of Janey's story is to point up the dehumanizing effect of the atmosphere of misused language. Janey becomes J. Ward Moorehouse's chief stenographer. Her role is simply that of being the uncreative recorder of the words of Moorehouse. Although she never questions or thinks about the language she so diligently types, she absorbs the values of Moorehouse's public relations world as if by osmosis. Daily she disseminates propaganda and exploitative advertisements: "There was the Onondaga Salt Products account and literature about bathsalts and chemicals and the employees' baseball team and cafeteria and old age pensions, and Marigold Copper and combating subversive tendencies among the miners who were mostly foreigners who had to be
educated in the principles of Americanism . . . " (334, my ellipsis). As we shall see, Moorehouse's concept of "Americanism" means, not fidelity to the "old words," but fidelity to business and industry. For Dos Passos, Moorehouse turns "Americanism" inside out. And anytime Moorehouse says "education," read "propaganda."

Just as Janey blindly accepts Moorehouse's "Americanism," she soaks up his pompous utterances about the war: "He talked about being patriotic and saving civilization and the historic beauties of Rheims cathedral" (336). When she parrots this language to her wandering brother Joe, who has been torpedoed on a merchant ship, he cuts through her rhetoric with his simple "mucker's" language:

Janey went on to talk about the war and how she wished we were in it to save civilization and poor little helpless Belgium. "Can that stuff, Janey" said Joe. "You people don't understand it, see . . . The whole damn war's crooked from start to finish. Why don't they torpedo any French Line boats? Because the Frogs have it all set with the Jerries, see, that if the Jerries leave their boats alone they won't shell the German factories back of the front. . . . I'm tellin' ye, Janey, this war's crooked, like every other goddam thing." (344-345, Dos Passos' ellipses)

Janey's rote and mechanical words here are reminiscent of the girl on the troop ship in One Man's Initiation: 1917. This conversation points up that her understanding of the war is second-hand understanding, while Joe's understanding of the war grows from personal, lived experience. For Dos Passos, as we have seen, the only authentic mode of understanding is empirical.

Janey, meanwhile, has no original thoughts and merely iterates the fashionable rhetoric of her milieu. Under the influence of mindless patriotic rhetoric, she becomes
neurotically suspicious: "Janey wondered if she ought'n't to tell J. Ward about Gladys' pro-Germanism, whether it mightn't be her patriotic duty. The Comptons might be spies; weren't they going under an assumed name? Benny was a socialist or worse, she knew that. She decided she'd keep her eyes right open" (346). Since Gladys Compton has been Janey's best friend, that Janey would think of betraying her upon such flimsy circumstantial evidence shows just how much the world of lying language has eroded her humanity. She is unthinking, unfeeling, and becomes simply a piece of Moorehouse's office furniture. Throughout the rest of USA, Janey is: "Miss Williams, the tiredlooking sharpfaced blonde who was his secretary" (1919, 383).

Janey's employer, J. Ward Moorehouse, creates a vast industry solely devoted to the misuse and distortion of language in general, and of the "old words" in particular. As such, Moorehouse is Dos Passos' villain, the leading "stranger" in the trilogy. Moorehouse's entire lifestyle is given its identity through his manipulations of words. Born on July Fourth, the date which immediately brings to mind the "old words," Moorehouse becomes their chief betrayer.

As a schoolboy, "head of the debating team, class orator and winner of the prize essay contest" (175), Moorehouse establishes himself as an effective user of words. The shaping concerns of his adolescence are to live the "Strenuous Life," outlined by Theodore Roosevelt, the desire to marry a lovely girl, and the desire to be a songwriter. All of these early plans are denied, but
possibly the most important of these is the desire to write songs. He might have been able to use his gift for words for the benefit of the culture. Or at least his songs would have been ethically harmless. But Moorehouse, a diligent reader of "Success Magazine" (180), soon realizes that he can exploit his facility with words in the business world, and he never mentions songwriting again.

His first adventure with the exploitation of language is the real estate pamphlet he writes to promote the bogus Ocean City development. In reality, Ocean City is a collection of "scorched sandlots and pinebarrens laid out into streets (185), but Moorehouse's "lyrical description" (185) ignores such facts: "The lifegiving surges of the broad Atlantic beat on the crystalline beaches of Ocean City (Maryland) . . . the tonic breath of the pines brings relief to the asthmatic and the consumptive . . . nearby the sportsman's paradise of Indian River spreads out its broad estuary teeming with . . . " (185, Dos Passos' ellipses). Moorehouse's advertising puff, loaded with outright lies and dead clichés ("tonic breath," "crystalline beaches," indeed), is a representative sample of his profanation of words. It will be no great step from this passage to his campaign, in The Big Money, against food and drug legislation as a campaign for "Americanism" and for preserving "independence" (BM, 494). Moorehouse has one rule for using words--expediency. If he needs "tonic breath," he uses it; if he needs "independence," he uses it. And to hell with truth or precision.
In Paris, during his honeymoon with his first wife, he shows his real estate pamphlet to Mr. Oppenheimer and Mr. McGill, a steel baron. Oppenheimer is troubled by the ornate rhetoric of the pamphlet: "'Why, Ocean City must be an earthly paradise indeed ... Don't you lay it on ... er ... a bit thick?' 'But you see, sir, we've got to make the man on the street just crazy to go there ... There's got to be a word to catch your eye the minute you pick it up'" (200, Dos Passos' ellipses). The meaning of the words is unimportant and the truth of the description is unimportant; only the emotional appeal of the rhetoric, the "word to catch your eye," matters. Although Oppenheimer may be doubtful, McGill, the steel magnate, admires the blurb: "'By golly, that'll get 'em too,' he said. 'I reckon it was Mark Twain who said there was a sucker born every minute ...' He turned to Ward and said, 'I'm sorry I didn't ketch your name, young feller; do you mind repeating it?'" (201, Dos Passos' ellipsis). And Moorehouse's career is launched. The obvious irony of McGill's confusion of Twain and Barnum, the truth-teller with the huckster, keynotes the world Moorehouse enters.

Through McGill's patronage, Moorehouse takes a position with the steel company as an advertising executive. Moorehouse immerses himself in the business and astonishes everyone with a course of self-education which includes readings in marketing, science, the steel industry, sociology, and psychology. His will is directed to the most effective methods of advertising. When the steel company begins to have labor problems which attract national attention, Moorehouse sees the opportunity to
further his ambition: "Mr. McGill and Ward had dinner together all alone at the Schenley to talk about the situation, and Ward said that what was necessary was an entirely new line in the publicity of the industry. It was the business of the industry to educate the public by carefully planned publicity extending over a term of years" (255). Moorehouse believes that the industry must not only advertise its products, but must advertise itself as well. Of course, the actual conditions of steelworkers in Pittsburgh, which Mary French discovers are wretched (BM, 136), are irrelevant for Moorehouse. He will "educate the public" by lying to it.

Moorehouse proves too large for his position with the steel company, and, seized by his vision, he opens his own public relations agency to mediate between industry and labor. He has the ideas, and his newly acquired wife has the necessary capital. His articulation of his vision is worth noting:

He forgot everything in his own words . . . American industry like a steamengine, like a highpower locomotive on a great express train charging through the night of old individualistic methods . . . . What does a steam-engine require? Cooperation, coordination of the inventor's brain, the promoter's brain that made the development of these highpower products possible . . . Coordination of capital, the storedup energy of the race in the form of credit intelligently directed . . . labor, the prosperous contented American working man to whom the unprecedented possibilities of capital collected in great corporations had given the full dinnerpail, cheap motor transport, insurance, short working hours . . . a measure of comfort and prosperity unequaled before or since in the tragic procession of recorded history or in the known regions of the habitable globe. (268-269, Dos Passos' ellipses)

"He forgot everything in his own words"--including reality. There are a couple of things to be said about this passage. First, Moorehouse's disdain for "old individualistic
methods" in favor of a corporate state, a managed industrial society, is, for Dos Passos, un-American and counter to the affirmation of individualism found in the "old words." Moorehouse's vision is the polar opposite of, for example, Jefferson's. Moorehouse's vision represents the "strangers" of the Camera Eye, the power brokers who have "bought" (FM, 463) America. Second, Moorehouse not only mesmerizes himself with his own words, he even loses himself. Where do the words end and the man begin? (Or vice versa?) His speech is replete with triteness, pomposity and easy generalizations; his "steamengine" metaphor get out of hand when he applies it to human beings. And finally, he loses contact with reality in his reference to the happy American workman, which conveniently overlooks the labor trouble his former steel company employer recently experienced. The assumption of the speech is that the good of industry is the good of America. That is the belief Moorehouse will try to sell to America disguised in fluffy rhetoric, and it is that equation of America and industry which Dos Passos hopes to repudiate in USA.

One of Moorehouse's most useful ploys in his public relations career is the appeal to patriotism. In a Rotary Club speech, for example, Moorehouse discusses the role of the public relations expert in achieving national unity: "'But his main importance is in times of industrial peace . . . when two men are sore and just about ready to hit one another is no time to preach public service to them . . . The time for an educational campaign and an oral crusade that will drive home the mighty colossus of American uptodate industry is right now, today!' (273-274, Dos Passos' ellipses).
This particular "educational campaign" (meaning, of course, "propaganda campaign"), should show workers that to participate in their own exploitation is a patriotic act affirming the very ideals of America. Indeed, Moorehouse turns the "old words" inside out. In another instance, Moorehouse, convinced that World War I is "America's great opportunity" (272) to become the leading industrial power in the world, desires to "educate" America to his view. And, at the same time, Moorehouse is "upholding American ideas against German socialistic ideas and the panaceas of discontented dirt-farmers in the Northwest" (282). For Moorehouse, it is "American" to industrially exploit the miseries of Europeans, and "un-American" to allow "discontented dirtfarmers" a chance to live in the industrial age. Moorehouse perverts words to justify inequity and exploitation ("American ideas"), and he intends to sell the war as if it were a ball bearing or a candy bar. In Nineteen-Nineteen and in The Big Money, Moorehouse continues to make the "old words" "slimy and foul."

Narrative: Nineteen-Nineteen

The second novel of USA covers the years of World War I, the Armistice and the Versailles Conference. For Dos Passos, America's participation in the war becomes America's Fall. America has betrayed its own founders and their vision of a new Eden. With its entrance in 1917, America becomes another "organized pirate like France and England and Germany." From the old ideals of democracy and individual liberty, the
nation is developing a new informing vision of imperialism and exploitation which will deny liberty. However, the new aims of the nation are couched in the language of the old ideals. The justificatory slogan for committing the nation to war, "to make the world safe for democracy," thus becomes the falsest of lies. The novel studies how language is harnessed in the service of America's betrayers, and it suggests that the canker in the national soul can be seen in the malaise of its inhabitants.

In the experiences of Joe Williams, the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust of the pre-war and war years tends to oppose individual liberty. The entire episode of his false incarceration by the British as a suspected spy illustrates how the belligerent nations have been forced to suspend civil liberties. The indignation of his fellow prisoner, a buyer from Chicago, indicates what a traumatic experience unjust political detention is for an American: "'And they talk about the atrocious Chermans and if this ain't an atrocity, vat is it!'" (40). The implication of this is that Americans have an arrogance about their freedom as their birthright. But America little realizes what it is letting itself in for when it joins the world of organized pirates. There is a further indication that the American concept of freedom will be modified by the new external realities. When Joe gets mixed up in a brawl soon after his release, he fears that the British authorities will send him to a concentration camp for the duration of the war.
A fellow seaman arrested in the fight reassures Joe in bluff, arrogant language: "Will Stirp said they were the four of them Americans and wasn't he a Freeborn American Citizen and there wasn't a damn thing they could do to 'em. Freedom of the seas, God damn it" (45). Stirp's words have lost their moral weight since America is in the process of undercutting the whole nexus of values implied in the phrase "Freeborn American Citizen."

When Joe returns to the states, he notices an atmosphere developing which is similar to that of the European nations. War has just been declared and everyone is caught up in the hysteria. Even his sister Janey "talked just like everybody else did" (172). "Wartalk" prevails everywhere, resulting in incongruities like this: "Union Square was all lit up and full of navy recruiting posters. A big wooden model of a battleship filled up one side of it. There was a crowd standing around and a young girl dressed like a sailor was making a speech about patriotism" (170). Joe goes to a bar where two men are voicing their doubts about the war. The bartender "leaned across the bar and said they'd oughtn't to talk thataway, folks 'ud take 'em for German spies" (171). One of America's most venerable ideals, the right of free speech, is being eroded. People are aware of distinctions between what is acceptable to the state and what is not. The girl on the platform is safe, while the men in the bar are in jeopardy. Dos Passos reinforces our awareness of a fearful and repressive America when Joe meets an acquaintance who has become an informer. An actual secret police has been established to seek out "'reds, slackers,
German spies, guys that can't keep their traps shut!" (174). Men's freedom depends upon the whimsy of the silent interpreter of their words: "All I got to do's bum around and listen to guys talk, see? If I hears anything that ain't 100 per cent I slips the word to the boss and he investigates" (174). Joe retreats in disgust from this false America, where police and secrecy and paranoia, not the "old words," prevail: "'Hell, I'm goin' to sea and get out of all this shit'" (174).

Richard Ellsworth Savage, like Joe, sees what is happening in America. But Savage lacks the courage to escape from "all this shit." Dos Passos stresses Savage's self-indulgence and self-pity to underscore his lack of sympathy for his character. The reason for Dos Passos' scorn becomes clear as Savage's narratives unroll: Savage realizes, unlike Moorehouse, that he misuses language and yet persists in it.

As a youth, Savage dabbles in decadent poetry and Wilsonian reform politics. Savage styles himself an aesthete on the pattern of Wilde, Beardsley and Huysmans. Unfortunately, Savage's derivative and imitative verse possesses all the flaws of his models and none of their virtues. His poem, "To a Common Prostitute," dedicated to a minister's wife with whom he has an affair, mawkishly exaggerates the intensity of the emotions arising from that affair: "The scarlet of my sin/ The scarlet of thy sin/ dark birds above the surging seawaves crying/ damned
souls passionately sighing" (83). The weaknesses of Savage's poetry are apparent. The stylized and maudlin images, the gross sentimentality and the preciousness in sensibility reflect the worst qualities of Nineties verse. Simply, no word in the poem is used honestly; no emotion is described accurately. By the way, the subject of the poem, upon seeing it, "laughed hysterically" (83).

His relationship with a politician who happens to like Huysmans leads to Savage's involvement in the world of politics. He works for Wilson in the campaign of 1916: "Dick found himself getting all worked up about the New Freedom, Too Proud to Fight, Neutrality in Mind and Deed, Industrial Harmony" (91). But a few months later, Wilson declares war. As a volunteer ambulance corpsman in Europe, Savage becomes cynical and disillusioned about Wilson and his war. His letter to his former mistress and her husband illustrates his attitude: "I don't believe in Christianity any more and can't argue from that standpoint, but you do, or at least Edwin does, and he ought to realize that in urging young men to go into this cockeyed lunatic asylum of war he's doing everything he can to undermine all the principles and ideals he most believes in" (200). The content of the letter is similar to Joe Williams' opinion of the war noted earlier. And Savage's view is consistent with the attitude toward World War I expressed in One Man's Initiation: 1917 and Three Soldiers. This letter gets Savage into trouble with the intelligence people who caution him not "'to monkey with the buzzsaw!'" (209). From his feeling that he was betrayed by Wilson, who offered reform and gave war instead, Savage repudiates politics for the
rest of his life.

One option Savage considers is to escape from the war, to transform his opinions into action, and to use language to awaken America to its betrayal. He images himself as an exile "sending out flaming poems and manifestos, calling young men to revolt against their butchers" (211). He even buys a compass to help effect a successful escape. But at this point his failure of courage manifests itself. Instead of carrying out his plan, he allows events to carry him as they will. And he returns home from the ambulance corps, having repudiated moral flight: "One night when he was standing alone in the stern beside the small gun, Dick was searching his pocket for a cigarette when his fingers felt something hard in the lining of his coat. It was the little compass he had bought to help him across the Spanish border. Guiltily, he fished it out and dropped it overboard" (213). Just as Savage allowed his poetry to be dominated by other poets instead of asserting his own voice, he is too weak to act on his plan for declaring a separate peace.

Savage returns to France as an officer, his scrape with the censors having been fixed up by the influential Mr. Cooper. He arrives just in time for the Armistice and the convening of the peace conference. Great hopes are associated with the Versailles treaty. In a large sense it is intended, by Wilson, to be a reaffirmation of traditional American ideals. But the real interests of the treaty makers are economic. As Robbins, one of Moorehouse's cynical associates, says: "'But the oil . . . God damn it,
that's what this damned idealist Wilson can't understand, while they're setting him up to big fees at Buckingham Palace the jolly old British army is occupying Mosul, the Karun River, Persia . . . now the latrine news has it that they're in Baku . . . the future oil metropolis of the world!'" (359, Dos Passos' ellipses). Throughout the Versailles sections of the novel Dos Passos is very harsh toward Woodrow Wilson. He criticizes Wilson for both compromising the "old words," and for allowing the European statesmen to exploit him. Dick sees Wilson at a ceremony in Rome and compares him to a Roman. In Dick's view, the Versailles Treaty will sanction a return to a kind of Roman imperialism. He calls for a rejection of this piratical world: "'It's the sack of Corinth . . . they think [Wilson's] going to give them peace, give them back the cosy beforethewar world. It makes you sick to hear all the speeches. . . . Oh, Christ let's stay human as long as we can . . . not get reptile's eyes and stone faces and ink in our veins instead of blood. . . . I'm damned if I'll be a Roman'" (374, Dos Passos' ellipses). But, as before, Savage makes lies of his own words; the conflict in Savage's character between his idealism and his cowardice proves insurmountable. Savage joins J. Ward Moorehouse's public relations staff.

Moorehouse has been a Red Cross publicist in Paris during the war. Now he turns his attention to lobbying for his pre-war clients like Standard Oil. Savage takes a job with Moorehouse because it will allow him "to continue
my real work on the side" (394). Of course, this "real work" is never defined and is, indeed, nonexistent. Savage becomes the Roman he despises, and he participates in Moorehouse's plan to use language to create favorable conditions for American imperialism. This is Moorehouse's interpretation of America's post-war role: "'And then the people are fully behind us everywhere, they are sick of autocracy and secret diplomacy, they are ready to greet American democracy, American democratic business methods with open arms. The only way for us to secure the benefits of the peace to the world is for us to dominate it!'" (312). Thus, we will bless the world by imposing "American democratic business methods" upon it, which is not quite the same thing as "making the world safe for democracy." Moorehouse makes no mention of the "old words"; America is only its "business methods." This is the vision informing the Moorehouse world which Savage enters--a vision which turns the idea of America "inside out" (FM, 463).

Savage is one of two characters (Charley Anderson is the other) who have narrative sections in two novels of the trilogy. The next to last narrative of The Big Money belongs to Savage. We find him working on the Bingham patent medicine account. This is the same Bingham of The 42nd Parallel; only his racket has changed. The world of misused language dominates Savage, and the residue of his defeated poetic power finds its expression in conference room doodling: "On the fritz at the Ritz . . . Bingham's products
cure the fits" (BM, 481, Dos Passos ellipsis). The Bingham account, on which Savage works so assiduously, is "more than a publicity campaign, it's going to be a campaign for Americanism" (BM, 494). This time the appeal to "Americanism" is to be a ploy in the fight against pure food and drug legislation. It is evident that a perverse understanding of American ideals is at work. That Savage works all through the night to achieve an effective publicity plan for "Bingham's Proprietary Medicines" conclusively proves his guilt. Savage, in effect, has become a Moorehouse. When Moorehouse has a heart attack, Savage defends Moorehouse spiritedly to a young scoffer who has said that Moorehouse is not a man but a "name" (BM, 512). On the contrary, Moorehouse is an "institution" (BM, 509):

"Whether you like it or not the molding of the public mind is one of the most important things that goes on in this country. If it wasn't for that American business would be in a pretty pickle. . . . Now we may like the way American business does things or we may not like it, but it's a historical fact like the Himalaya Mountains and no amount of kidding's going to change it. It's only through public relations work that business is protected from wildeyed cranks and demagogues who are always ready to throw a monkeywrench into the industrial machine." (BM, 513, Dos Passos' ellipses)

Savage has come full circle. A comparison of Savage's rhetoric here with that of the intelligence officer, who cautioned Savage not to "monkey with the buzzsaw" of the war effort, will show both to be identical in tone (cf. 42P, 209). Then, Dick was the "crank" with an individual opinion different from the accepted ones. Now, he has become like the intelligence officer, an apologist for a diseased institution, who upholds the status quo with an avalanche of lying words. The grossest misuse of language is the
simile of the Himalaya Mountains. It is both erroneous to call the Himalayas an "historical fact," and it is pathetic to use such a grandiose image to describe a human institution. Savage is incapable of applying word to thing correctly. Savage is a "stranger," dedicated to perpetuating the "industrial machine," who foists upon the "public mind" an idea of America antithetical to the America of the "old words."

Narrative: **The Big Money**

As its title indicates, the final novel of the trilogy examines an idolatrous America which pays homage to the Almighty Dollar instead of to the "old words." The *Big Money* is the most apocalyptic in tone of the three USA novels--"FLOODS AND LIGHTNING DARKEN CITY" (437)--and, like *Manhattan Transfer*, effectively uses biblical imagery. The most striking feature of the money-mad culture of the Twenties--a culture in which the whims of the stock market make and break men daily--is instability. Through the precipitous rise and fall of Charley Anderson, Dos Passos warns that the big money world is quicksand which will finally swallow America. And, Dos Passos also suggests, unless America returns to the firm foundation of the "old words" and repudiates its idolatrous fling with the god of money, the present situation will become our fate.

Charley Anderson returns to America far different from the youth who was introduced in the final narrative of *The 42nd Parallel* (see 42P, 369-415). When he sees the Statue of Liberty from the ship, he remarks "'I remembered her
lookin' bigger'" (8). The remark is significant both in emphasizing Charley's maturation and in suggesting that the "old words" symbolized by the statue have been devalued. As the novel shows, the Statue of Liberty has shrunk indeed. The land of opportunity now means the opportunity to exploit anything for financial gain. When his brother attempts to use Charley's war record as a means of increasing the sales of Fords, Charley vows to become an exploiter himself: "'I got somethin' about airplane motors that'll make any old Ford agency look like thirty cents'" (43). The aviation company which Charley helps form is a smashing success, but he feels uncomfortable in the big money world. He keeps telling himself that he is only a simple, honest mechanic like his friend Bill Cermak. He does not realize that there is no escape from his new role as an owner, although he constantly tries to straddle the fence: "'Hell, I ain't no boss,' said Charley. 'I belong with the mechanics!'" (229). At the center of Charley's unease is the suggestion that the heart of the big money world is a void. There is something anti-human in the business enterprise. Charley's vision of the stock exchange implies this: "The air was full of shuffle and low clicking machinesounds in which voices were lost" (200). Throughout his story, as he rises in the great financial circles, he placates his uncertainty with liquor.

Finally, Anderson's whole career becomes a fraud. The publicity men of his company present his life as evidence of how a typical American boy, with mechanical aptitude and financial shrewdness, can become a success. Of course, they
ignore the Cermaks and Askews lying in his wake. Wheatley, Charley's father-in-law, tells us precisely what Charley's success represents: "'Mr. Anderson, Mother, was one of our most prominent war aces, he won his spurs fightin' for the flag, Mother, an' his whole career seems to me to be an example . . . now I'm goin' to make you blush, ma boy . . . of how American democracy works at its very best pushin' forward to success the most intelligent and bestfitted and weedin' out the weaklin's!'" (300, Dos Passos' ellipses). Wheatley's speech recalls the remarks of the judge in Manhattan Transfer, who argues that the "Constitootion" justifies society's exclusion of "weaklings and misfits." Clearly, Wheatley's interpretation of "American democracy," like the judge's interpretation of the "Constitootion," is a perversion of the "old words." This kind of "democracy" is no more than an economic version of Darwinian natural selection in which power and ruthlessness are the criteria for survival. Wheatley, a "stranger," has turned "American democracy" inside out. It seems to me that Anderson intuitively knows something is wrong with Wheatley's assessment. Was Bill Cermak merely one of the "weaklin's," and thus desinted, indeed deserved, to be killed? Charley's anxiety arises from his awareness that there is something anti-human in the business enterprise (cf. stock-exchange scene noted earlier), and this false justification of Bill's death. His heartsickness is eased by liquor, and finally, by death. Charley recognizes that his success has been earned in the service of a lie, "'somethin' phony'" (377).
The class of people whom Wheatley categorizes as "weaklings" is the concern of the narratives devoted to Mary French, who makes a grand attempt to implement the "old words," but, in the attempt, exhausts herself. Moreover, her narratives examine various radical movements whose ostensible aim is to help the weak and powerless, but whose effectiveness is negated by petty ideological infighting.

Mary's awareness of a divided America germinates from the differences in values she discerns between her parents. Mrs. French is a frustrated aristocrat who values prestige, wealth and social ambition. Her values find expression in bigotry, in nagging her husband, and in reactionary politics: "She had become a great bridgeplayer and was going round the country speaking at women's clubs against votes for women" (114). Doctor French, on the other hand, devotes his life to his practice among the poor miners of Colorado. Her father becomes a symbol of dedication, sacrifice and social responsibility for Mary. On the train to Chicago, where she will work at Jane Addams' Hull House, Mary vows to help make America live up to the "old words" in the same way that her father lives up to the Hippocratic Oath: "thinking of the work there was to be done to make the country what it ought to be, the social conditions, the slums, the shanties with filthy tottering backhouses . . . if the people in the pullmancars could only be made to understand how it was; if she sacrificed her life, like Daddy taking care of his patients night and day, maybe she like Miss Addams . . . " (117, Dos Passos' ellipses). She feels that she must do "something real" (123) to recover the lost words, and she believes she must see the downtrodden as individuals and
not as a mass.

Besides Mary's attempt to serve the "old words" through honest reportage for a Pittsburgh paper, which has already been discussed in Newsreel, her most important experience concerning the "old words" takes place during the Sacco-Vanzetti trial. Her attempt to harness language to move the hearts and minds of the nation in protest contrasts with the cynicism of Jerry Burnham, a reporter. Burnham has lost all faith in the power of language: "'But who cares? Who in hell cares . . . ? Who on the bloody louseinfested globe gives one little small microscopic vestigial hoot?'" (452, Dos Passos' ellipsis). As the time of execution nears, Mary herself develops doubts about the efficacy of language: "She could hardly believe that those words had made her veins tingle only a few weeks before. It shocked her to think how meaningless they seemed to her now like the little cards you get from a onecent fortune-telling machine. For six months now she'd been reading and writing the same words every day" (454). On the day of execution, language has even lost its intelligibility: "The day passed in a monotonous mumble of words, columns in newspapers, telephone calls. Death watch" (459). As we know, the language of the "strangers" triumphs over the "language of the beaten nation." The despair over the efficacy of the "old words" here is very real, yet how can this despair be reconciled with the assertions in Camera Eye (50) that, although the "strangers" claim a physical victory, "the men in the deathhouse made the old words new" (463), and that the "old American speech" is alive, renewed and vital in "our ears tonight" (463)?
For Dos Passos, the answer to such a question is simple:
"There are times when we can only state our hope and our faith." And that is precisely what Dos Passos does in USA—asserts his "hope" that America will repudiate the "strangers," and asserts his "faith" that America will reaffirm the "old words." As we showed in Chapter I, Dos Passos writes to "rebuild the ruined words" in the faith that such a goal can be achieved. For Dos Passos, writing "molds and influences ways of thinking to the point of rebuilding the language." If the Moorehouses of America can "mold the public mind," then so can the artists. USA springs from Dos Passos' firm conviction that, if the "old words" have been made "slimy and foul," then they can be redeemed as well. When Dos Passos says, at the very end of the final Camera Eye, that "we have only words against/POWER SUPERPOWER" (525), this is no admission of defeat. Because, on the contrary, those words "contain the seeds for victories to come."
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 John Dos Passos, USA (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), "Preface," p. vii. Future references will be cited parenthetically, and I will use the following abbreviations before the page number: 42P for The 42nd Parallel, 1919 for Nineteen-Nineteen, and BM for The Big Money. Within the section on each respective novel, page numbers only will be noted.


6 See John H. Wrenn, John Dos Passos, Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 9 (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), Chapters I and II.

7 For a perceptive discussion of Dos Passos and Futurism, see E. D. Lowry, "The Lively Art of Manhattan Transfer," PMLA, 84 (1969), 1628-1638.


9 For Dos Passos' opinions of Wilson and the War, see his Mr. Wilson's War (Garden City, N. Y.; Doubleday and Doubleday, Inc., 1962).


12 One Man's Initiation: 1917, p. 108.


14 The Theme Is Freedom, p. 1.

15 One Man's Initiation: 1917, p. 158.


17 "Lincoln and His Almost Chosen People," in Occasions and Protests, p. 322.


20 "The Backwash of Our First Crusade," in The Theme Is Freedom, pp. 24-25. Also see Facing the Chair.


22 Occasions and Protests, pp. 281-282.


24 One Man's Initiation: 1917, p. 158.


V. ACHIEVEMENT

In his Norman Mailer, Richard Poirier claims that American literature is possibly the most patriotic of the world's literatures—a claim which seems to me indisputable: "There is perhaps no other literature quite so patriotic because none is so damning of the failure of a country to live up to its dreams and expectations."¹ Some writers damn the failure more than others. Hear Mailer's Stephen Rojack at the end of An American Dream: "There was a jeweled city on the horizon, spires rising in the night, but the jewels were diadems of electric and the spires were the neon of signs ten stories high. I was not good enough to climb up and pull them down."² Instead of building William Bradford's City on the Hill, Rojack laments, America has built Las Vegas. Yet so many American novelists, while "damning the failure," extol, either explicitly or implicitly, the "dreams and expectations" of the nation. These writers thus qualify their damnation, and their novels end in unresolved tensions, in paradoxes, in stases. They damn and they bless, condemn and affirm, indict and acquit—or as Ralph Ellison puts it, "So I denounce and I defend and I hate and I love."³ Thus, Fitzgerald's Carraway "defends" and "loves" the "last and greatest of all human dreams"⁴ implicit in Gatsby, while decrying the ash heap to which that dream must inevitably be consigned. Thus, Ellison's Invisible Man, despite the nightmare which has been his

149
life, can "affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence." And even Las Vegas yields Cherry--Rojack's salvation. Surely John Dos Passos, as much as any American novelist, "affirms the principle," the "old words," and "denounces" the "men," the "strangers," "who did the violence" to those principles.

Not only is American literature perhaps the most patriotic of literatures, as Poirier suggests, but possibly it is the preachiest of all as well. In their moral fervor, in their hortatory tone, many American writers become like Old Testament troublers of Israel, continually holding the mirror up to what we are as a nation in contrast to what we should be. One could easily choose a thousand sentences at random from American novels which, to someone unfamiliar with American literature, would sound like Isaiah: "O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again." Or, "no wonder the ruined woods I used to know don't cry for retribution! The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge." Amos or Hosea? No, Wolfe and Faulkner. And the themes explored by American novelists are teleological to the point, maybe, of presumption. Updike tells us in Couples that "God is bored with America," and Walker Percy asks in Love in the Ruins if "God has at last removed his blessing from the U.S.A." And Percy's hero ends up "barbecuing in [his] sackcloth." Our writers, convinced that America is a Chosen Country (a Dos Passos history), and assuming that we are working out some metaphysical
destiny, demand so much of us and refuse to let that "something more than common" in America atrophy or surrender to complacency. What other literature holds up such high standards for its people? What a carrot and what a stick! And, indeed, to read John Dos Passos in the proper spirit, one should, like Walker Percy's hero, don sackcloth.

Dos Passos' novels, in a large sense, are jeremiads for our time. USA is the broadest and most strident of all, but the fervor of USA can be found, in varying degrees, earlier. Dos Passos exhorts us to return to the conception of this nation articulated at its birth, and he holds an abiding faith that the "old words" have not lost one whit of relevance for America. It is as if they possess an eternal significance for us akin to scripture, which we should treat with holy reverence. The "old words," as we have shown, are both general and particular at the same time, abstract and concrete together. They contain the grandness of a world vision and sanctify something as mundane as the freedom to wear a straw hat on the first of May. By setting up overt or implied historical comparisons in his novels, by measuring modern America with an America of the Golden Age, Dos Passos wants us to see and understand the difference; and once we do that, we will naturally go forth and make the "old words" live again. There is an unmistakeable didactic imperative in Dos Passos based on his assumptions about the cultural effects of language. He firmly believes his novels can be correctives, and that they have the moral power to heal America.
Of course, Dos Passos' belief in the efficacy of language is hardly unique to him. If one could collect a nickel for every lofty claim about the affective powers of literature made by writers, one could amass a tidy sum. Dos Passos' own pronouncements are very clear and very stunning. In "The Workman and His Tools," Dos Passos asserts that "A writer who writes straight is an architect of history."9 By this Dos Passos means that a writer has the power to shape and form the "mind of a generation,"10 and that a writer may actually create, not just record, history: "If the product is compelling enough, it molds and influences ways of thinking to the point of changing and rebuilding the language, which canalizes the mind of the group. The process is not very different from that of scientific discovery and invention. The importance of a writer, as of a scientist, depends on his ability to influence thought. In his relation to society a professional writer is a technician just as much as an engineer is."11 For Dos Passos, a writer is an engineer of human consciousness, who establishes mind-sets for apprehending experience, who influences not only thought, but human behavior, and whose work can match the cultural effects of a Pasteur, an Edison, an Einstein, an Oppenheimer, a Salk. No modest perspective, indeed. That Dos Passos' statements are representative is proved when one recalls Norman Mailer's not so humble desire to achieve nothing less than "a revolution in the consciousness of our time."12 Such hyperbolic assessments by American writers of the American writer's importance grow out of an unstated belief that since America is a nation of destiny, writers play a central role either in interpreting and understanding
that destiny, or possibly even in shaping and achieving it. And writers have to believe that words can do all these wonderful things. Yet, grave questions arise. Can a novelist indeed be an "architect of history"? Can he revolutionize "consciousness"? Or do such proclamations overstate the cultural importance of literature?

Indeed, many contemporary voices respond to the question of what literature "does" after the fashion of Mark Twain's gibe at reports of his death: the claims made for literature have been greatly exaggerated. Richard Poirier, for one, calls it a writer's "illusion" to believe one's work is of "social and historical consequence," and a writer's "fantasy" to believe one can "change human consciousness in a way that will lead to the redirection of history." In writing about Norman Mailer's war with institutions in his novels, Poirier makes a statement that could apply to Dos Passos (and war with "the raw structure of history") as well, which puts the question of literature's practical effects into perspective: "In any given case, writings that express this sense of embattlement may have little or no direct effect on historical movement or upon consciousness, at least not practically. The effect is always a good deal less than most historically or politically oriented readings of literature like to suggest." However, for Poirier, the practical effects of literature are, finally, beside the point. The importance of "illusions" such as those of Mailer and Dos Passos is their ability to "generate a rare and invigorating power"; because of their beliefs in the
efficacy of language to accomplish change, Mailer and Dos Passos are unafraid to tackle great subjects. Dos Passos' work, as well as Mailer's, "exemplifies the kind of effort that can and needs to be made by anyone who proposes to make more than submissive sense of the world as it now is" (Poirier's italics). Thus, while recognizing that writers such as Mailer and Dos Passos work under an "illusion," Poirier stresses that it is a necessary illusion, even a grand illusion.

The reason Poirier cautions us not to overrate the relationship between literature and life is the simple fact that we do not know precisely how words influence human behavior. It just seems that there ought to be some connection. When, for instance, George Steiner in Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967) darkly argues that literature did not prevent Dachau, Poirier responds in The Performing Self that Steiner's assumption (and his disillusion) is wrongheaded at worst, naive at best:

Are we to believe that literature's relevance to life is finally a matter of its being more relevant than life? Nor does one need George Steiner's operatic pronouncements that the humanistic tradition of literature somehow failed to prevent the gas chambers. While I never knew of any presumptive relationship anyway, Steiner apparently did, so that he can discover that "We now know that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening—and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning." Anyone can propose such connections but they don't happen to be necessary ones. Literature, and by extension, literary studies, may have enormous powers, but we don't know of what they consist or how they could fail or succeed, and neither do the champions, disappointed or expectant, of relevance.

As Poirier points up, to assert, or to assume, or to presume some necessary, or logical, or inevitable relationship between literature and life or between words and behavior is completely
unjustifiable. We simply lack, at this point, any empirical evidence to support such claims; it is all speculation and conjecture. Although writers may need to believe that such connections exist (everyone has to believe that his life's work is significant in some wider context), Poirier would have literature's interpreters clean up their terms and stop simply assuming what needs to be proved.

From another angle, Northrop Frye, as well as Poirier, warns us to keep the distinction between life and literature, indeed, distinct:

So however useful literature may be in improving one's imagination or vocabulary, it would be the wildest kind of pedantry to use it directly as a guide to life. Perhaps here we see one reason why the poet is not only very seldom a person one would turn to for insight into the state of the world, but often seems even more bullible and simple-minded than the rest of us. Life and literature, then, are both conventionalized and of the conventions of literature about all we can say is that they don't much resemble the conditions of life.19

Again, much like Poirier, Frye argues that literature and life are separate, and the former has no discoverable effect on the latter. And moreover, Frye agrees with Poirier that the question of literature's usefulness as a "guide to life" is beside the point. For Frye, a novel records either the world a novelist wants, or the world he does not want, or both; the only valid question concerns the quality of the novelist's rendering of his repudiation or affirmation. And for a writer to proclaim that he is an "architect of history" would be proof positive, for Frye, of his "simple-mindedness."
It could be that American novelists know deep within themselves that their work will not redeem the nation, and their shouts that it will do so increase in direct proportion to their anxiety that it will not. But, on the other hand, they may recognize that, although there could possibly be no connection between literature and life, yet, by the same token, no one has proved this conclusively. Writers may be "simple-minded" without being fools. At any rate, as Frye allows, they can register their protests, take their stands, and render life in America "as we don't want it."20

In the opening chapter of Slaughterhouse-Five, Kurt Vonnegut acknowledges the possibility that his enterprise may be futile. One Harrison Starr plays devil's advocate in the scene:

"You know what I say to people when I hear they're writing anti-war books?"
"No. What do you say, Harrison Starr?"
"I say, 'Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?'"

What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that, too.21

Then, it may be asked, why does Vonnegut publish? Possibly because, in his heart of hearts, Vonnegut is as "simple-minded" as John Dos Passos in hoping that people will read, and above all, heed him. Because Vonnegut shares with Dos Passos a quality Richard Poirier detects in Norman Mailer: "No one now gives more hope that language may still be the potent instrument of human need in its confrontations with the benign as well as the wicked forces of institutionalized life."22 Because to believe in language, along with John Dos Passos, is to believe in the best possibilities of human life. A most simple, yet glorious, belief.
NOTES TO CHAPTER V


5 *Invisible Man*, p. 433.


8 *Love in the Ruins*, p. 378.


10 *Occasions and Protests*, p. 8.

11 *Occasions and Protests*, pp. 8-9.


13 Norman Mailer, p. 22.


15 Norman Mailer, p. 23.

16 Norman Mailer, p. 23.

17 Norman Mailer, p. 23.


22 Norman Mailer, p. 3.
APPENDIX: FIFTY YEARS OF DOS PASSOS CRITICISM

1920-1940

In the period 1920-1940 there are two axe-grinding schools of literary criticism: the Marxists and the New Humanists. The ways in which these two groups respond to Dos Passos indicate the polarity of the times. Granville Hicks is representative of the Marxist response to Dos Passos, and C. John McCole is an advocate of the New Humanist position. Both groups, however, raise questions about class-conscious literature, naturalism, nihilism, and literary values which provide more independent critics, like Beach and Cowley, with a context and a framework for transcending the narrow limits of both camps.

Hicks and McCole

Dos Passos is always an enigma for the Marxists. More than any other writer of his generation, Dos Passos promises to be the proletarian writer who will provide credence, dignity, and established literary merit for the cause. Here is the writer who, if correctly educated, can articulate and embody the revolutionary vision in persuasive art.¹ But despite this potential, as Daniel Aaron says, "this chronic oppositionist and foe of organization could never fully endorse any kind of collective action."² The
vituperation of most Marxist critics of Dos Passos arises from frustration at his unyielding skepticism. Thus, virtually all of the Marxist commentary can be dismissed. The true contribution of Marxist criticism lies in its examination of the way in which Dos Passos uses the methods of dialectic to achieve an intricate cohesion of form and content. In this connection, the pioneer work of Granville Hicks looms large.

Hicks discovers in Dos Passos a positive and constructive response to the complexities of his age: "He is one of a small but growing group of writers who have found an answer to the doubts and denials of their generation in an alliance with the proletariat in its struggle for revolutionary change." Hicks divides his contemporaries into two camps: the escapists who flee into aestheticism or expatriation, and the socially committed who seek to understand and change the modern industrial system. Of course, Hicks's sympathies lie with the latter group.

In *The Great Tradition* and in an important article in the *Bookman*, Hicks traces Dos Passos' development in terms of a growing awareness of the interrelatedness of things and an increasing sophistication of form in which to embody that awareness. He dismisses the first three novels as possessing a "therapeutic" value for Dos Passos, in which the author purges himself of his Harvard and war experiences. The tempting desire to flee is indulged in Dos Passos' volume of verse *A Pushcart at the Curb*, and in the travel narrative *Rosinante to the Road Again*. 
In *Manhattan Transfer*, the *contemptus mundi* of the early novels and the escapism of his poetry and travelogue are fused. But this fusion, in its formal complexity, leads to a feeling of futility. The flaw in *Manhattan Transfer*, for Hicks, is that no redeeming vision underlies its fragments; they are powerful in themselves but unrelated, and finally insignificant.\(^5\)

In *The 42nd Parallel* and *Nineteen-Nineteen* Dos Passos both sees and understands. What he understands, according to Hicks, is the larger drama of the class struggle and the inevitability of revolution. Nothing is isolated and all events find their essential unity within the framework of the dialectic. His new understanding is embodied in a perfectly adapted form: "Dos Passos' superiority arises from his dual achievement: he has perceived relationships that his predecessors could not see, and he has discovered new forms that permitted him to say what he had to say."\(^6\) That his form is in itself an interpretation makes Dos Passos, in Hicks' eyes, the ranking naturalist of his time.\(^7\) Moreover, Dos Passos' capacity for growth, as seen in his attempt to free himself from his bourgeois heritage, makes him a truly symbolic figure in the struggle for revolutionary change.

The shock of *The Big Money* and the *District of Columbia* novels to the Marxists is well known. Dos Passos exposes himself as an indomitable individualist. Hicks is noticeably silent amidst the attacks on Dos Passos by his ideological peers. In his later evaluations of Dos Passos, Hicks demonstrates why he towers over the other Marxists: he is
honest enough to admit the possibility that the error lies in his misunderstanding Dos Passos and not in the novelist. We must now turn our attention to a very different group, the New Humanists, whose intentions for literature would seem to place Dos Passos' work beyond the pale. Concealed in their hostility may be another kind of misunderstanding, which if correctly delineated, would demonstrate that the aims of both this school and Dos Passos were quite similar.

Unlike the Marxist concern with collective man, the New Humanists stress man as individual. In the New Humanists' view, man possesses freedom of choice, and the most distinctive human quality is conscious exercise of that freedom. With these fundamental assumptions, the literary criticism of the New Humanists proves rigorously moral and ethical. The central question they ask, in looking at fiction, is whether the characters impose their distinctively human wills upon their environment. The school of literary naturalism, in which they placed Dos Passos, is totally uncongenial for them in its emphasis upon man as victim of his circumstances. Thus the New Humanists' fundamental objection to naturalism is that it is anti-human.

C. John McCole's chapter on Dos Passos, in his *Lucifer at Large*, is illustrative of the New Humanist approach. McCole lauds the New Humanist school for not compromising with "naturalism, monoptic realism, defeatism, morbid cruelty, or any of the other tendencies which I deal with in my inquiries." In his survey of fiction, McCole finds a pervasive negativism in American novels which he calls a modern "distemper," a sardonic pun on Krutch's *The Modern
Temper. McCole is possibly harsher in his judgment of Dos Passos than others since Dos Passos once promised to transcend negativism: "One is almost inclined to include Mr. John Dos Passos in that small minority who have grappled with present-day problems with understanding and a real temper--with a really vigorous and unyielding spirit. He has made a valiant beginning. But unfortunately, he, too, has succumbed to synicism, determinism, and despair. He, too, has found life nothing more than a 'one-way street'; and to those of us who hope to find from him the way in which it leads, he gives no answer" (178-179). Of his first three novels, McCole finds only Three Soldiers worthy of comment. John Andrews' resistance to the brutalities of the war machine and his attempt to "keep his own individuality and a sense of the inviolability of his worth as a human being" (181) strike a responsive chord in McCole's sensibility. He believes Manhattan Transfer is Dos Passos' best work but, oddly enough, neglects to comment on the quality of life reflected in the novel. Mysteriously glossing over his attack on "defeatism," McCole dwells on Dos Passos' impressionism and the "high evocative power of the images" (183). Most likely McCole is uncertain whether to interpret Herf's flight as a defeat or a victory.

McCole expends all of his invective on the USA trilogy. This comment on Margo Dowling precisely reflects the tone of his argument: "Her 'amours' would make Casanova blush--and then vomit" (187). According to McCole, Dos Passos
makes the "parasite life" (138) attractive, and thus, 
betrays an attitude born of the modern distemper. McCole's 
catalogue of the failings of USA reads like a Humanist 
manifesto. First, most of the characters are defeatists 
which, for McCole, is an invalid response to experience. 
Second, McCole attacks Dos Passos for not respecting his 
characters as people. They are intrinsically unworthy and 
incapable of supporting the tragic significance Dos Passos 
wants to attach to them. Dos Passos lacks "a real, broad, 
comprehensive humanitarianism, because he lacks "some 
measure of humanism" (192). His deterministic treatment of 
his characters is compared to a "fixed" prize fight by 
McCole. Third, there are no ideals in USA that is, 
no ideals agreeable to McCole. Traditional respect for 
"woman" and "chastity" is irrelevant to the world of USA. 
McCole finds this attitude, and most of the sensuality in 
the novel, intolerable: "There are times, surely, when the 
reader may be excused for wondering whether Mr. Dos Passos 
is really trying to understand our age, or merely attempting, 
rather ineffectively, to parody it" (195). Fourth, and this 
needs no comment: "With few exceptions, the Dos Passos 
characters fail to consider morals as one of the natural, 
human concerns which they happen to be" (196). And finally, 
McCole objects to the "anarchistic social creed" he finds 
implied in USA. Anarchism is no answer: "No amount of 
anarchism--either moral or social--can overcome anarchism. 
Defeatism cannot kill defeat. Distemper cannot serve 
where a real temper, a proper mixture of steel-like courage 
and common sense, can alone bring one effectively into
grips with life (199). In short, as the Marxists charge Dos Passos with failing to provide a social vision, the New Humanists chastise him for failing to provide an ethical vision.

The lively controversy between the New Humanists and their detractors resulted in an important document, The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium, published in 1930. Edited by C. Hartley Grattan, the list of contributors includes such impressive names as Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke, R. P. Blackmur, Yvor Winters and Lewis Mumford. Although the book does not pretend to be a unified group statement, "There is a certain general search for the ideals of a true humanism which is not that of More and Babbitt."11 John Chamberlain's contribution, "Drift and Mastery in Our Novelists," contains a short section on Dos Passos in which he refutes the charge that Dos Passos' novels have no ethical center. Dos Passos is not a defeatist or a "futilitarian" but an "artist who would bring ethics--which depend upon the sense of personal responsibility--back into the novel" (273).12 According to Chamberlain, there are two methods open to Dos Passos in which to incorporate a moral vision: "... it may be shaped so as to bring out the author's point of view, his vision of the world in philosophical terms that are more than agnostic, or it may rest content with dramatizing that point of view through the activities of a favored character" (273). Three Soldiers illustrates the latter technique in which John Andrews serves as a surrogate
for Dos Passos, and *The 42nd Parallel* reflects the former in "making a philosophical judgment rise positively out of the record" (274). No one in *The 42nd Parallel* rises above "the animal ideal" (274). The mistake of the Humanists lies in focusing on the case histories and disregarding the tone, the implied judgment, informing the narrative: "But Dos Passos is not content to record the actions of such people; he must let the impact of his own volition, his own will to a different order of affairs, shine through his testimony" (275). In other words, Dos Passos is more compatible with the New Humanists than they suspect.¹³

Cowley and Beach

As one might surmise, the best Dos Passos critics in this period were more eclectic in their approach, appropriating the best from the Marxists and the Humanists, but ultimately judging on strictly literary grounds. Malcolm Cowley is one such critic. Cowley's major contribution lies in delineating the tension in Dos Passos between the aesthete and the realist. Dos Passos' poets, Martin Howe, John Andrews, David Wendell, Jimmy Herf, are defeated by the philistine world of American culture. Cowley notes that the novels in which these four characters appear are examples of "fiction that ought to be known as the Art Novel."¹⁴ Even in *Manhattan Transfer* the ultimate focus is on Herf the Poet despite a consciously collective intention: "It is obvious, however, that a new conflict has been superimposed on the older one: the social ideas of the novelist are, in *Manhattan Transfer*, at war with
his personal emotions. The ideas are now those of a reformer or even a revolutionist; the emotions are still those of the Yellow Book and the Harvard Monthly" (137).

Dos Passos' problem in writing the collective novels of USA, according to Cowley, is that of presenting the broadest possible social context and yet doing it in terms of individuals. He solves this problem brilliantly in the technical devices. The Newsreels illustrate the forces of culture at work on the characters, and the biographies present the famous or representative figures of the age. In the Camera Eye sections, however, the Poet still dominates. But now the formal isolation of the Poet creates an inwardness, a depth and complexity, which, in contrast to the behavioristic treatment of the characters, provides a rhetorical equivalent to the two nations theme. However, the Poet of the Camera Eye is doomed and Cowley argues that the final result of the collective novel is the same as that of the Art Novels: "The sensitive individual should cling to his own standards, and yet he is certain to go under. Thus the final message of Dos Passos' collective novels is similar to that of his earlier novels dealing with maladjusted artists" (146). One notes that Cowley has affinities with the Humanists in his inability to accept defeatism as a valid position for a novelist. He sees Dos Passos as one of the "exiles," to which Cowley devoted a study. Such an approach may not be entirely accurate but at least it allows Cowley to place Dos Passos in an understandable tradition. His insight into the state
of mind behind the formal elements of Dos Passos provides the necessary foundation upon which Joseph Warren Beach builds.

In three surveys of fiction, The Outlook for American Prose (1926), The Twentieth Century Novel (1932), and American Fiction: 1920-1940 (1941), Beach traces Dos Passos' development. Although only two pages of Beach's first study are devoted to Dos Passos, they are important in that Dos Passos' relationship with futurism is first suggested. Beach audaciously ranks Dos Passos higher than Virginia Woolf but lower than Joyce at this stage in his career.

In The Twentieth Century Novel, Beach undertakes to place many modern novelists in a tradition of innovation. In regard to Dos Passos, Beach examines Manhattan Transfer, The 42nd Parallel and Nineteen-Nineteen. He uses Manhattan Transfer as a prime example of the novel of discontinuity, of breadthwise cutting, in which, like cubist paintings, "we pass from one block to another of contrasting color" (438). This method, supremely effective in evoking the frantic tone of urban life, has more important aesthetic and philosophical intentions. One of these is to portray behavioristic man: "Thus his manner of breadthwise cutting serves to reinforce the general impression—that of the dominance of sensation in human experience, the obsession of the senses. The behavior of these men and women reminds one of the tropisms, the 'forced movements,' described by Jacques Loeb in the lower animal and vegetable worlds.
Life appears as will-less, thought as centrifugal, psychology a mere whirl of undirected sensations" (445).

Society becomes an organism for Dos Passos. Obviously, this organism is diseased, but, as Beach perceptively notes, Dos Passos treats the causes of the illness, not merely the symptoms:

But what I admire in him, as an artist, is his unwillingness to distort his art with the bias of social theory. He is, in this respect, the antithesis of Upton Sinclair. Mr. Sinclair is a writer whom one must respect for his earnest devotion to humanity; but one can only deprecate his disposition to swamp fiction with the preoccupations of politics and economics. Dos Passos is as much concerned with social problems as Sinclair; but in his representations of life, he goes to the deeper sources of human motivation--to that subsoil of human nature where spread the roots of all social institutions. In Manhattan Transfer he has shown us our industrial order as it actually affects human happiness. Or we might put it the other way round: he shows us the traits in human nature which have given us our industrial, our social order, such as it is. And that is more philosophical, more realistic. (445)

This is a truth the Marxists were either not willing to admit or incapable of understanding. Moreover, Beach remarks, Dos Passos refuses to give sentimental answers to great problems, to offer the anodyne of traditional religion as a panacea: "But perhaps that is just what makes him the most 'modern' of the writers in this movement" (448).

Besides discontinuity, Beach discerns another modern technique utilized by Dos Passos which Beach calls abstract composition. This is "the apparently freakish insertion into these private chronicles of more general material which takes the place of philosophical comment and suggests the larger bearings of the history so baldly told" (501).
In *Manhattan Transfer* the prose poem headnotes serve the purpose of suggesting references which transcend the scope of the novel. For example the prelude to "Babylon" discusses the physical and moral associations of historical cities such as Ninevah, Rome, and Athens, which embodied the cultural achievement of their period. This places New York in an historical and moral context, but ultimately the prelude suggests the significance of "city" itself as an emblem of human order. In *USA*, Dos Passos finds a way of enlarging the reference of his narrative in the three famous devices. Beach is especially good in analyzing the Camera Eye. These sections are seemingly unordered and uninterpreted. Beach uses the section in *Nineteen-Nineteen*, in which the Camera Eye narrator relates his war experience, to show how brutality and beauty coexist without apparently being related:

> At first all seems disorder and confusion of mind. And then one realizes that what we have, actually, is a cry for order in a world of confusion, and that each one of these pictures is cunningly composed, according to the best principles of balance, contrast, and proportion, of a sensitive spirit faced with the actuality of a war crazed world. Not every writer could be trusted with the liberties of this method. But I am inclined to think that among these sketches will be found many of the firmest and most glowing pages in the whole work of this extraordinary writer. (507)

The biographical sketches reflect Dos Passos' interest in Sandburg and are in themselves interesting examples of abstract composition. Unlike Cowley, Beach feels the Newsreels are quite successful, in their cumulative effect, of ranging themselves in significant patterns emphasizing the ironies of American culture.
For Beach the technical innovations of USA are perfectly commensurate to the study of society as organism. What makes Dos Passos' achievement important lies in the implication that a relationship exists "between our spiritual state and some profound metabolism in the social body. . ." (548). This idea informs Beach's chapters on Dos Passos in American Fiction: 1920-1940. The paradox Beach sees is that men ignore the connections between themselves and society: "And this narrative discontinuity serves again to emphasize the paradox of social beings ignoring the connections, denying the relations, without which they could not exist. So that what appears to be at first a mere eccentricity in technique turns out to be a peculiarly fitting symbol of something primary in the author's philosophy." Thus, technique itself becomes symbol.

The tension in Dos Passos, between the poète maudit and the objective realist, outlined by Cowley, interests Beach also. But Beach, unlike Cowley, suggests that this potentially debilitating tendency is transformed into a strength. Using John Andrews of Three Soldiers as a prototype, Beach argues that Dos Passos, like his character, transforms the sordid into art. The creative act is ultimately redemptive: "Dos Passos went into the War as a man of letters, and in the end his contribution was bound to be in the form of literature. The satisfactions of John Andrews took the line of artistic expression; he was bent on giving voice in music to 'these thwarted lives, the miserable dullness of industrialized slaughter!'" (34).
Thus, extending the argument, other failed artists like Martin Howe, Fanshaw Macdougan, and Jimly Herf find their failures redeemed and transformed through Dos Passos' art.

1940-1950

In general, the criticism of Dos Passos in the Forties lacks the vitality of the previous two decades. Marxist criticism declines in importance because of disillusion with the movement on the part of both Dos Passos and the significant leftist critics. Humanistically oriented criticism has run its course.¹⁸ One can see the influence of the New Criticism as critics begin to concentrate solely upon problems of style and form. And by the Forties, there is a substantial body of significant work, mostly by Cowley and Beach, upon which to build. Geismar, Kazin, Frohock and Beach are Dos Passos' best Forties critics.

Geismar and Kazin

Maxwell Geismar, in Writers in Crisis, calls Dos Passos "the archetype of the rational writer within our tradition, the conscious, moral, progressive writer, the embodiment, not of the destructive rebel, but of all our communal and civilizational aspirations."¹⁹ Dos Passos' rationalism manifests itself in the progressive education of the aesthete-hero, in successive novels, into a revolutionary. Building upon Cowley, a debt Geismar acknowledges, Geismar traces the evolution of the hero. Martin Howe of One Man's Initiation: 1917 is the first portrait of an
aesthete; John Andrews of Three Soldiers is a more elaborate and convincing artist. Andrews understands more than Howe and has overcome Howe's detachment. The artist figure finds expression also in the poetry of A Pushcart at the Curb and in that curious work, Rosinante to the Road Again. Geismar argues that Rosinante is crucial for the development of the Dos Passos hero: "The youth Telemachus may be on a search 'for a father' as he tells us in true classical form. But he is undoubtedly on the road toward a modification of his own literary form. For now the early Dos Passos hero, breaking through his embryonic shell of refinement, is about to emerge as a new and very different figure" (97). The Dos Passos hero is developing a social consciousness and, moreover, developing the nerve with which to implement it. Streets of Night, that embarrassing novel critics ignore, finds an important place in Geismar's structure as a parody of the aesthete. Fanshaw Macdougan is simply too much. The poet figure in Manhattan Transfer, Jimmy Herf, is ready for conversion when he leaves New York. The converted poet becomes the radicalized consciousness of the Camera Eye in USA who finally admits that America is two nations.

After delineating this hopeful pattern, Geismar is troubled by the tone of USA. There seems to be a central paradox in Dos Passos' intention. If all he says about America is true, then why does he still place his faith in a regenerated American democracy? It may be that the failure in democracy reflects the inherent evil in Man's nature,
with the result that any human action is foredoomed.
Geismar's finest insight confronts this viewpoint, one
incompatible with his optimism:

As the U.S.A. trilogy comes to its conclusion, however, we also come to see more fully that these Dos Passos people are not in their entirety accurate historical creations, but very often the symbols of a bleak and despairing view of life. Here again, behind the radical historian, is the American poet of dissolution, comparable in these respects to our Hemingway, though working in such a different medium. If they are molded by the social pressures of American culture, these Dos Passos people are also being pursued by their Fate--by the internal view of the writer now being projected outward into the patterns of our society. In this respect the entire American critique of Dos Passos may be viewed as the sociological embodiment of a point of view: the bitterness of his social analysis, the despair of his conclusions being not so much the historian's verdict as the Poet's lament, and the discontents of American civilization becoming in part the symbols for those of an indignant and disturbed soul. (127-128)

Geismar articulated what Beach and Cowley had intimated.

Less concerned with the philosophical statement arising from USA, Alfred Kazin concentrates on Dos Passos' achievement in arriving at a perfect rhetorical instrument to reflect industrial America. Kazin dismisses the earlier novels, even Manhattan Transfer, as preparation for USA. Like Hicks, Kazin believes the social conception of USA arises from Marxian dialectic. The concrete event which provides the catalyst is the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. Yet unlike Hicks, Kazin believes the dialectic is worked out in terms of style and not in terms of the fourfold structure. The technical experiments are bold but mechanical. The real vitality of USA lies in its "concrete yet elliptical prose": "The brilliance of the structure lies therefore not so much in its external surface
design as in its internal one, in the manifold rhythms of
the narrative.”20 Each novel of the trilogy exhibits its
particular symbolic rhythm to suggest a total cultural
event. The 42nd Parallel is concerned with youth and
flourishing industrial development which the prose success-
fully approximates. Mac's narrative begins with the smell
of whale soap and the clatter of printing presses, which
immediately establishes the dominant rhythm: "With The
42nd Parallel we have entered into a machine world on
which the rhythm of the machine has become the primal beat
of all the people in it; and Dos Passos' hard, lean, mocking
prose, forever sounding that beat, calling them to their
deaths has become the supreme expression of his conception
of them" (355-356). The same pattern operates in Nineteen-
Nineteen with the story of Joe Williams' meaningless life
reverberating with waste and death, culminating in war.
And finally, Charley Anderson's quest for "the big money"
and his crazy spiral to destruction "becomes the last mad
parable" (357) of that generation. Kazin was the first to
examine seriously the symbolic quality of Dos Passos'
style and broke new ground for later critics.

Frohock and Beach

W. M. Frohock examines the theme of moral frustration
by time in USA as a significant element of its power. This
theme appears in its first form in Three Soldiers where
Dos Passos' largely poetic sensibility is an asset in
underlining it: "The attempt to re-create a fragment of past time, to follow the fortunes of a number of originally unrelated characters at once, to hold the whole thing together by the presence of continuous emotional tension, to make the center of the novel not a person but a Thing which conditions the lives of all the characters, and to probe some of the sources of American frustration--this endeavor will fructify in *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.*". If *Three Soldiers* is the novel of frustration, *Manhattan Transfer* is the novel of time. Frohock sees a double perspective in *Manhattan Transfer* in which the reader develops with the characters but yet also looks back at them from the vantage point of the Twenties (see p. 172). But *Manhattan Transfer* finally lacks an integrated form, making it lesser than *USA*. The trilogy records the failure of America to develop a good society. The passage of time only exacerbates our sense of failure:

In any event, the very fact of our attributing so much importance to the question of morality in Dos Passos is itself a tribute to the power of his work. We do not worry the same question regarding Wolfe, although his work involves the same moral problems, because Wolfe's report on America is so thoroughly personal. We are always conscious of its having been distorted in its passage through Wolfe's gargantuan personality. Dos Passos' report is different in that there is no opportunity to attribute it to the eccentricity of his view. We read Wolfe and are aware mainly of what time did to him, and of his personal feeling of frustration and futility. We read Dos Passos and are convinced of what time has done to us, and recognize the frustration and futility as our own. This position is much less comfortable for the reader, and he is prone therefore to blame the novelist who puts him in it. (178)

Frohock convincingly answers those critics who say that
Dos Passos does not tell the whole truth, that his America is one-sided, that the failure lies with the crankiness of Dos Passos and not with America.

Beach has lost none of his admiration for Dos Passos as his article in a 1947 Sewanee Review testifies. Beach feels that the time has come for at least a tentative evaluation of Dos Passos' achievement. He categorically states that Dos Passos' reputation must rest on Manhattan Transfer and USA. If Dos Passos is read by future generations, they will respond to both method and morality. The author's narrative techniques have indeed advanced the art of fiction. Dos Passos' composition of scenes resembles filmic montage: "It is rather the assembling within the frame of one picture of representative portions of many scenes related to one another not by their simultaneous presence in the same spot but by mental association--of contrast, analogy, irony, symbolic correspondence--and given significance and esthetic effectiveness by their planned arrangement in the new visual pattern." Critics are misled when they condemn the portrait of American morality in USA. Their mistake lies in reading the novel literally when, if read ironically, the satire bursts through:

There is one quasi-religious concept of which Dos Passos is strongly aware. It is what Kenneth Burke calls "piety." This, he says, is the desire, the impulse of the human being to identify himself with the group. And this, one would suppose, is a human development of what in lower animals is called gregariousness. Dos Passos' characters, while reasonably gregarious, are singularly lacking in the type of piety that Jesus calls love. But this again is his theme; he is depicting a society unaware of what it takes to make a society. And the atomistic lovelessness of his people is a reminder of what he considers the great desideratum. If the reader
misses this, it is because he is given objective realism where what might be expected is a tone of obvious satire. (417)

Beach is the first to see a moral fervor in Dos Passos which is more religious in tone than political. This insight resonates through the commentaries in the next two decades.

1950-1960

By the Fifties, Dos Passos' early canon has become institutionalized. His novels are increasingly taught in universities, and he is the subject of numerous articles in academic journals. New Critical and Freudian approaches abound. Charles Walcutt places Dos Passos the naturalist in an historical context. Probably the most important new work is Blanche H. Gelfant's The American City Novel in which she argues that the urban novel is a distinct genre. On the whole, Dos Passos criticism in the Fifties is quite sound and intelligent.

Aldridge and Walcutt

A good general introduction to Dos Passos is John W. Aldridge's chapter in his After the Lost Generation. Aldridge sees in the tonal pattern of One Man's Initiation: 1917, lyricism in the first half, negativism in the second, the essential Dos Passos strength: the power of outrage. The fruitful tension in Dos Passos arises from disillusioned idealism: "The energy that enlivens Dos Passos' best work always has its source in the conflict created by this sensibility as it takes its revenge upon the established
social order for failing to keep the faith."

This tension between protest and negation is most perfectly achieved in the very form of *USA* in which the narratives record negation and the Camera Eye expresses protest. Aldridge's discussion is simplistic and cautious but generally useful.

Dos Passos' status as a naturalist is examined by Charles Walcutt in his study of American naturalism. Dos Passos marks "an end point in the evolution of naturalistic forms." Surprisingly, Walcutt has little to say about *Manhattan Transfer* except that it "weaves a pattern that is no pattern. . ." (283). *USA*, however, reflects in both form and content the division and confusion between idealism and materialism which Walcutt perceives as the seed of naturalism. Since the ideals of the trilogy are unfocused, the protests against the betrayal of those ideals are similarly unfocused: "It is perhaps not extravagant to identify the perfectly expressive form of this work with the final division of the great stream of American idealism. The form expresses a chaos; it is a fractured world pictured in a novel fractured into four parts through four styles from four points of view. This division of the subject combines with the range and variety of the materials treated to give the impression that nothing can be done because the problem is too complex to take hold of" (287). The problems cannot be broken down into their material components because the problems are, finally, moral. Dos Passos' naturalism is the tool of a moralist rather than that of a scientist.
Gelfant

The most important contributions to Dos Passos criticism in this decade are Blanche H. Gelfant's brilliant exegeses of *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA* in *The American City Novel*. Gelfant first confronts the problem of Dos Passos' view of literature and history, a problem troublesome to many critics. By using Dos Passos' non-fiction and essays as documentation, Gelfant arrives at a working definition of the Dos Passos novel: "In other words, a good novel objectified and interpreted contemporary life from a detached or nonpersonal--that is, a historical--point of view, and at the same time it passed moral judgment upon the social life it depicted."25 Given this premise, Dos Passos' problem is to find a formal framework in which to make his judgment. In *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos uses the synoptic technique: the evocation of wholes through selected suggestive details. Gelfant analyzes the dynamics of Dos Passos' synoptic scenes in terms of kinetic color arrangements, tonal patterns, and odors. Gelfant has made shrewd application of Mark Schorer's ideas of technique as discovery in her discussion. In charting the larger structure of the novel, Gelfant discovers a circular pattern consisting of three parts: the first ends with Bud's death, the second with Ellen's abortion, the third with Herf's flight. A complex symbolic structure is also at work, almost entirely suggestive of destruction. In fact, Gelfant believes that the symbols are imposed at the expense of character (as in Stan's skyscraper fantasy at
death), a flaw rectified in USA. But in Manhattan Transfer, characters are "implicit commentaries on the moral structure of the times" (see 165-166).

Gelfant believes that USA should not be limited to the category of city novel. But since, to a great extent, it is revelatory of urbanism as a way of life, she considers it can be so discussed. The Camera Eye, according to Gelfant, is the key to USA. In these sections, Dos Passos achieves a direct subjective expression of reality while yet retaining distance. The technique which accomplishes this is an intensified and extremely concentrated impressionism which deals only in essentials. In Gelfant's scheme, the biographies "symbolize the two opposing factions of a self-divided America" (169). The representative figures illustrate potentialities. Either America will evolve onto a capitalistic nightmare or into a true democracy. Like Beach, Gelfant believes that: "Thorstein Veblen is Dos Passos' key figure not only because he represents specific social ideals that Dos Passos finds admirable but more important, because he describes with rare perspicuity the alternative forms American society can take" (169).

As for the Newsreels, Gelfant thinks that they add little to the whole except in creating plausibility for the fiction. The characters of the trilogy are more successful than those of Manhattan Transfer because Dos Passos has captured their humanity while at the same time achieving a perfect identification between the human spirit and that of the age: "Charley Anderson is the age of The Big Money, as is Ward Moorehouse, or Dick Savage at the end of the trilogy" (174).
Journal Articles

Dos Passos' adoption by the Academy engendered a spate of articles. A fair sampling of these would include papers by Arthur Mizener, Marshall McLuhan, Martin Kallich and Charles Bernardin. Mizener, in two articles in the early Fifties, examines Dos Passos' novels to determine their relationship with the picaresque tradition and with the novel of manners. McLuhan unfairly condemns Dos Passos for not having Joyce's intelligence: "The failure of Dos Passos' insights to keep pace with the complex techniques at his disposal is what leaves the reader with the sense of looseness and excessive bulk in USA." Kallich's article is a notorious Freudian critique in which the Dos Passos artist-hero revolts from the business-man-father. Kallich finds three states of revolt in the first seven novels. One Man's Initiation: 1917, Three Soldiers, and Streets of Night deal with rebellion against family and education. Manhattan Transfer is concerned with the repudiation of society. Finally, in USA, Kallich sees Dos Passos searching for a father image in the complex of ideas surrounding socialism-communism. Bernardin's article is noteworthy for its thesis that Dos Passos was never an aesthete, in the decadent sense, at Harvard. From personal letters, interviews, and articles in the Harvard Monthly, Bernardin deduces that Dos Passos was always rational, abstemious, and temperate. In fact, he made negative judgments of those of his friends who were self-proclaimed aesthetes in stories like "An Aesthete's Nightmare."
1960-1969

The Sixties have been a banner decade for Dos Passos critics. The first book-length critical studies appear in 1961 and 1964. A Minnesota pamphlet on Dos Passos is published in 1962. And there have been more than twenty-five essays in books and journals. Although Dos Passos has not yet become an "industry," a renewed interest in the Thirties, and the author's death in 1970, may provide the impetus for one.

Wrenn, Brantley, Davis

John H. Wrenn's Twayne Series study of 1961 sets the pace for the new critical decade. He announces that his view of Dos Passos is iconoclastic. Wrenn's task is to break the stereotypes of Dos Passos the aesthete, Dos Passos the social critic, Dos Passos the nihilist, and many others, for a fresh reconsideration of his novels. It seems to me that Wrenn's essential contributions lie in his discussions of Dos Passos and tradition. 30

In Chapter six, Wrenn promotes the thesis that Three Soldiers, Streets of Night, and Manhattan Transfer were written in conscious opposition to traditional American states of mind embodied in representative novels by Crane, Hawthorne and Dreiser. In writing Three Soldiers, Dos Passos had The Red Badge of Courage in mind. He had hoped "to damage the complete determinism of Crane--perhaps the one mode of thought most destructive of will and paralyzing to action" (116). One strategy employed is the use of three protagonists to illustrate a belief in individuality. Crane's Fleming is Everyman since all men are the same in
an indifferent universe. Dos Passos' point is that complete
determinism is a death-oriented philosophy. In Streets of
Night, Dos Passos attacks another kind of determinism: the
Puritan doctrine of original sin "as well as Hawthorne's
implied corollary of the virtue of a consciousness of sin"
(117). The common Hawthorne theme that there is something
repressive in the nature of things is rejected by Dos Passos.
This repression, which exists only in the mind, can be
conquered by courageous self-assertion. In Streets of Night,
the characters of Mabel and Whitey act on their impulses and
enjoy a measure of freedom and happiness. Nancibel, Wendell,
and Fanshaw, however, simply lack the nerve to act. Finally,
Wrenn argues that Manhattan Transfer is a critique of
Dreiser's belief in pragmatic individualism and material
success. Wrenn is least convincing in establishing this
relationship. In Wrenn's view, these three Dos Passos
novels constitute a first trilogy which could very well
be titled "American Perspective":

By focusing his criticism at once upon contemporary
institutions and upon their principal interpreters--
Crane, Hawthorne, Dreiser--in our literary tradition,
he developed his own thought and his own techniques
in relation to theirs. He also added to his under-
standing of the whole American tradition and of his
relation to it. In the process, he uncovered some
interesting paradoxes: that fiction may help to
shape the realities of the future; that a central
reality today may be a fiction, a myth; and that
today's fiction may shape the past by interpretation,
by criticism, by new work which, if true enough,
may alter the tradition into which it fits. (131)
[Wrenn notes his debt to T. S. Eliot here.]

The value of Wrenn's thesis is that it successfully answers
the many critics who see no historical viewpoint in Dos
Passos.

Wrenn's book is generally quite useful. He gives full
treatment to *Rosinante to the Road Again*, relating it both to Dos Passos' identity quest and to its avatars in the novels. He discusses the significance of the nonfiction. He does call into serious question the various stereotypical views of Dos Passos, if not destroying them utterly. Some of the writing is unnecessarily dense and vague, and there is an unnerving looseness in the use of terms like tragedy and satire in his chapter on *USA*. Nevertheless, Dos Passos read Wrenn's manuscript and, by his approval, signified that he felt justice had been done (see preface to Wrenn's book).

John D. Brantley's *The Fiction of John Dos Passos* and Robert G. Davis' Minnesota pamphlet are much less distinguished assessments. Brantley's basic thesis is that all of Dos Passos' novels are indictments of the "machine," or social institutions. Any human institution "eventually ceases to function for the fulfillment of the original purpose for the preservation of those ideals and gradually begins to function for the preservation of itself." 31 Novelistic structure arises from the pattern of the relationships between the characters and the various "machines." The characters are judged in terms of the intensity with which they resist, whether they succumb to the machine, make accommodation with it, or act against it. Davis' pamphlet is very traditional in approach. 32 He gives the conventional views of Dos Passos and evaluates him as an important writer of the second rank. Yet Davis' treatment makes no pretension to being other than an introduction for the general reader, and in this respect it remains useful.
Articles

There is more focus in the wealth of articles on Dos Passos in the Sixties than ever before. No longer are there titles like "John Dos Passos." Critics have begun to narrow their range and examine one novel, one aspect of a novel, one theme, or one technical problem. Like his contemporaries Faulkner, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, Dos Passos is being divided into ever smaller pieces. Correspondingly, I will have to deal with more articles in briefer detail in this section than earlier.

There are four valuable articles on Manhattan Transfer in the Sixties. Gene Ruoff studies the patterns of social mobility in the novel and the way in which these patterns condition the artist figure Herf. Herf becomes the spectator and recorder of the various ascending and descending figures. E. D. Lowry compares the similarities between Manhattan Transfer and Eliot's "the Wasteland." He traces the Eliotic imagery of fire and water in the novel and argues that Dos Passos' ultimate concern, like Eliot's, is for man's inner life. In another article, in a 1969 issue of PMLA, Lowry discusses the implications of these Eliotic intentions, and also the technical virtuosity of the novel. His most interesting idea is that each reader, in effect, shapes his own novel by finding his own pattern of relationships among the fragments. Lowry relates the novel to Italian futurism, to cinéma vérité, and to vaudeville. His examination of how Dos Passos exploited familiar character types from stage and screen is original and ingenious. The oft-
mentioned relationship between Dos Passos and painting is explored in very specialized language in George Knox's "Dos Passos and Painting."

Criticism of USA in this decade is characterized by specialization and fresh insights into the well-tilled trilogy. George Knox chooses to study the voices in the biographies, and examines their aural effectiveness. He finds a clever use of incremental repetition and parenthetical statement. Dos Passos puts public statements or public opinion within parentheses to emphasize irony. Repeated phrases provide a contrapuntal trope. Knox notes that the endings of the biographies are always evaluative, either directly or by implication. Michael Millgate perceptively comments on the agrarianism in USA. A specifically Jeffersonian conception underlies the trilogy in which the land is the repository of moral virtue. The characters' stories become morality tales, medieval "exempla" illustrating the corrupting influence of the city. Millgate sees Charley Anderson's narrative as prototypical. Many critics have noted the influence of cinematic techniques on the novels, but Eleanor Widmer suggests that Dos Passos may have influenced Hollywood. Widmer finds that the characters of USA, especially the women, are nineteenth-century types. Anne Elizabeth Trent's pregnancy and death is stock melodrama. Eleanor Stoddard is a George Eliot heroine, immortalized in the movies by the type of women associated with Joan Fontaine. Charley Anderson follows the James Cagney pattern of the second-generation American who rises and falls in the fast world of the big money. Widmer,
following her thesis, sees Margo Dowling as the symbol of USA. She is the golden girl who gets to the top through shrewdness and sex. Widmer believes that the use of nineteenth-century types within a context of twentieth-century naturalism in USA has resulted in our standard cinematic images of the late Thirties. Arthur Mizener, in a recent essay on The Big Money, stresses the innocence of the Dos Passos characters. Charley Anderson is a case in point. He alienates his friend Joe Askew, and is responsible for the death of another, Bill Cermak. At the same time, Anderson has not the slightest awareness that he has acted cruelly or irresponsibly. Mizener does not fully develop his important insight and other critics may explore this avenue of inquiry.34

Mrs. Gelfant and Richard Chase re-examine the identity problems in Dos Passos, a subject which has interested critics since Beach and Cowley. Gelfant argues that the crux of Dos Passos' art is the continuous search for an identity for the faceless man of the Camera Eye: "At the radial point of Dos Passos' art stands a hero obsessed by the elusiveness of his identity, a young man dislocated in his society, self-questioning, uncertain, unnerved and estranged."35 A homeless child of rather tender sensibilities is the root of the generic hero. Mothers provide some stability but frequently die young. Dos Passos' fathers come off poorly in all the novels. But Gelfant
believes it is a mistake to attribute this tendency, as Kallich does, to Oedipal hatred. In most of the novels the hero comes into contact with men of the lower classes, "muckers" who possess a physical vitality in contrast to the introverted hero. The Italian workmen in Streets of Night, Congo Jake in Manhattan Transfer and "Vag" in USA serve as possible identities for the hero. Gelfant sees the "Vag" figure as a romanticized ideal. What ultimately happens is that the hero never finds his identity; he merely changes his external circumstances in the hope that internal realization will occur. The identity crisis is never solved. Richard Chase, in contrast to Gelfant, believes that Dos Passos gave up the search early in his career, and that his art has suffered for it. Dos Passos' major weakness is that he annihilated the Martin Howe figure from his work. While Hemingway develops Nick Adams and Faulkner develops Quentin Compson, Dos Passos abandons Howe. His loss of faith in selfhood, according to Chase, implies a loss of faith in reality:

Reality, which a novelist ought to be able to conceive of as plastic, fecund, emergent, and in motion among balances and tensions, had become for Dos Passos in USA a fixed idea: reality was a great, grim, menacing monolith against which all good things are broken. The quest for selfhood came to interest him no longer because it seemed to be the preoccupation of the self-indulgent, romantic, highbrow decade of the 20's. But the trouble is that in the mind of every great novelist reality remains un fixed and the discovery and fulfillment of the self are a perpetual possibility. 36

A flaw of such magnitude dooms Dos Passos, in his opinion, to that nebulous second rank of modern novelists.
The French Response

French critics have always been deeply interested in Dos Passos. The most obvious reason for this is that so many of his novels are either set wholly or partially in France and have French characters. Beyond this superficial reason, the French are more sympathetic to technical experimentation in the novel form than are the Americans. Dos Passos appears extremely significant because he employs such striking technical strategies in his novels. The tone of most French critics is clinical. They separate the elements of Dos Passos' techniques, scrutinize them closely, and then reassemble them, thoroughly enjoying the intellectual exercise. For some, form is the only criterion for greatness. That Dos Passos' work has been congenial to the French critics' minds has benefitted everyone. They have studied his techniques in more depth and detail than anyone and have contributed greatly to our understanding. This brief summary will encompass the years 1934-1958, the period of greatest French activity in Dos Passos studies. Four major figures, Sartre, Baiwir, Magny, and Astre, will be covered in some detail, with others mentioned at appropriate times.

The earliest document of interest is Philippe Soupault's review of translations of One Man's Initiation: 1917, Manhattan Transfer and The 42nd Parallel. France has been blessed with excellent translators such as Marc Freeman, Maurice Coindreau and N. Guterman. Soupault is receptive to the technique of these novels and urges French readers to be sympathetic and just in their evaluations: "Dans
le cas de Dos Passos il importe avant tout de lui rendre, même maladroitement, justice. soupault stresses the point of view in One Man's Initiation: 1917, the thematic logic of fragmentary juxtaposition in Manhattan Transfer, and the role of courage in The 42nd Parallel. He evaluates Dos Passos as a novelist of force, profundity, valor, and modesty, qualities which are vital in interpreting the crises of our time.

loadault's review illustrates that French critics have an affinity for superlatives. The most famous of these is Sartre's "I regard Dos Passos as the greatest writer of our time." In this 1938 review of Nineteen-Nineteen, Sartre argues that Dos Passos' style and structure are the most perfect metaphors for the ultimate nothingness of human existence yet discovered by a fictionist. The objective style is able to reflect both inner and outer man, the individual and the collective, being and nonbeing. Sartre believes that the death scene of Joe Williams is the most gripping illustration that man exists only as he is social man:

We are inside with him, until the shock of the bottle on his skull. Then immediately, we find ourselves outside with the chorus, part of the collective memory, "...and he was out." Nothing gives you a clearer feeling of annihilation. And from then on, each page we turn, each page that tells of other minds and of a world going on without Joe, is like a spadeful of earth over our bodies. But it is a behind-the-looking-glass death; all we really get is the fine appearance of nothingness. True nothingness can either be felt or thought. Neither you nor I, nor anyone after us will ever have anything to say about our real deaths.

Sartre has made an existentialist out of Dos Passos. That Nineteen-Nineteen had a profound effect upon his own art we know from a 1946 article in the Atlantic Monthly in
which he outlined the importance of Faulkner, Hemingway, Caldwell, Hammett, and Dos Passos for the French: "And as for me, it was after reading a book by Dos Passos that I thought for the first time of weaving a novel out of various, simultaneous lives, with characters who pass each other without ever knowing one another and who all contribute to the atmosphere of a moment or of a historical period."\textsuperscript{39}

Albert Baiwir, in his study of individualism and collectivism in modern American fiction, arrives at many of the conclusions of his American contemporary J. W. Beach. Baiwir traces a circular pattern in Dos Passos' fiction in which the individual gives way to a concern for the social and finally returns again to the individual. \textit{One Man's Initiation: 1917} and \textit{Three Soldiers} speak for themselves in their titles. \textit{Manhattan Transfer} and \textit{USA} broaden to incorporate the mass of men, but in the individuation of the Camera Eye, Baiwir argues that Dos Passos returns to individualism, the true métier of American novelists: "Enfin, et peut-être est-ce là l'obstacle principal qui l'empêche de se donner tout entier à une cause à laquelle il reste malgré tout sincèrement attaché, il ne peut se résigner à l'obéissance passive et aveugle. Et en cela, malgré tout son penchant pour le collectivisme, il reste jusqu'à un certain point l'héritier de la tradition qu'il a toujours combattue, à savoir la tradition individualiste."\textsuperscript{40} Baiwir infers that the American collectivist novel is a contradiction in terms.
Claude Edmonde Magny has been strongly influenced by Sartre in her approach. Her work is a detailed refinement of Sartre's existential reading of Dos Passos. In contrast to Baiwir, she traces the development of the American novel toward collectivity and impersonality. Dos Passos has extended this tradition to its limits. One of Magny's finest discussions concerns the interrelationships of the fourfold technique of USA. The Newsreels constitute an interior monologue of the American collective unconscious. This disembodied monologue passes from time to time into a single consciousness, the Camera Eye. The Newsreels also prepare the consciousness of the reader in a manner similar to Finnegans Wake. Magny demonstrates how narrative consciousness merges into the Newsreel by using Margo Dowling's adventures in Havana as her example. The characters have no selves apart from the public self. This is shown by the way Dos Passos treats the successes of his characters. When Charley Anderson or Margo become successes, they return to the collectivity, they become clichés, and we do not see them in this phase. Only as failures do they disengage from the mass and become individuals. Magny interprets Dos Passos as showing people dispossessed from themselves. Absurdity lies within, yet they are unaware of it. Reality is exterior, and society only provides the illusion of individuality. This technique intrinsically possesses a metaphysic:

Through the social order, he attacks the Order of Things; and behind this order a responsible Creator in whom he does not believe, of whom, in view of his profound materialism, he is even unable to conceive. Hence the closed, almost taciturn aspect of his books, in which the author can never
speak, in which he can only formulate, in the most anonymous, objective and impersonal sort of monologue, an accusation which he knows (or believes) in advance is doomed to pass unheard beneath an empty echoless sky. From Dos Passos' work rises a mute protest not only (as he doubtless believes) against capitalism, but also against the condition of mankind, the world-as-it-is, and finally the structure of being. And if we define metaphysics as an effort to justify—or reject--Being, we shall see that the very technique of USA, like every good technique, is (as Sartre profoundly said) big with a complete metaphysical attitude.  

Dos Passos becomes an American existentialist philosopher under Magny's treatment.

Dos Passos' technique not only possesses a metaphysical attitude, but also a conception of time. The characters of USA have no singular rhythm, no Bergsonian "durée vecue" of their own. They live in what Magny calls a dead time. Moreover, Dos Passos has created a spatialized time, controlled by society. This vision of time, a monstrous divinity in the Dos Passos world, is the true hero of USA. For Magny, this achievement is magnificent: "Here we touch on that central intuition that is the heart of this profoundly original work, the intuition that the writer has spent his life and all the resources of his art in communicating to us" (241).

Nearly every critical document on Dos Passos is dwarfed by Georges-Albert Astre's monumental two-volume study, Thèmes et Structures dans l'Oeuvre de John Dos Passos. The work is an exhaustive examination of the aesthetics of One Man's Initiation: 1917 through USA. I will restrict this brief discussion of Astre's contribution to only his most trenchant insights. One of the most brilliant is
Astre's discussion of the importance of filmic techniques in *Manhattan Transfer*. Dos Passos' problem in this novel is how to show the viewpoints of his characters and yet imply an overall vision. The aesthetic theories of Joyce, Stein and Apollinaire provided a partial answer, but the total answer lay in the techniques of film. Eisenstein, Strand, Von Sterenberg, and Griffith all made films of urban life. Astre carefully examines their film theories, in a very technical manner, and applies them to the novel. He provides examples of montage, shock cuts, cross cuts, and other techniques, and illustrates their verbal equivalents in Dos Passos (I, 164-174).

Another important discussion concerning *Manhattan Transfer* deals with its religious implications. Astre sees two incompatible universes in Dos Passos in which synthesis is impossible. Each man must choose between two opposing forces. Those who try to reconcile them are destroyed. Man is continually under great psychic pressures caused by such antinomial absolutes and imperatives. *Manhattan Transfer* is the record of the results of this aspect of Western thought (see I, 149-150). New York is Babel, a city of discord, which worships the golden calf of capitalism. The novel is a jeremiad, as the chapter headnotes imply, showing us that the promise of the city is vain. Permanence is an illusion. Astre notes an apocalyptic tone: "Ainsi, méditant sur le destin de tous ces Irlandais, Slaves, Saxons, Italiens et Scandinaves se bousculant dans le Bronx, dans Manhattan et dans Broadway, sur ce monde d'acier et de pierre privé de toute certitude, aux seules faims et soifs de l'homme, Dos Passos ne peut..."
éviter que sa prise de conscience ne se fasse aussi en termes bibliques, ne se projette en visions quasi prophétiques et apocalyptiques" (I, 152). Astre sufficiently answers those who say there is no historical sense in Dos Passos: "Manhattan Transfer, curieusement, rejoint le vieux mythe faustien, et, par delà, l'Écriture elle-même... Dos Passos, en 1925, commencer à penser selon 'histoire; il n'a point abandonné totalement la méditation 'selon l'éternité' "(I, 155). Indeed, there is an analogical level of interpretation.

Astre devotes his second volume almost entirely to USA. He chooses to examine The 42nd Parallel in minute detail in order to generalize about the entire trilogy. Astre finds that Dos Passos is working within an established tradition in employing the social trilogy to interpret history. Cooper, Norris, Farrell, and Wolfe in America, Galsworthy in England, and Cholokhov in Russia found the trilogy to be the most congenial form in which to interpret historical trends: "La trilogie développe méthodiquement cette relation du Moi avec le non-Moi à partir des éléments formels qui viennent d'être mentionnés: leur utilisation très habile permet à Dos Passos, aussi bien, de surmonter l'antinomie traditionnelle entre le romanesque et l'historique, entre le réel et l'imaginaire" (II, 308). The trilogy form incorporates an amazing number of dualities which Astre examines. These tensions are never reconciled, indeed, the contradictions inherent in American culture are incomprehensible, except within the context of the art form itself.
NOTES TO APPENDIX


4 Granville Hicks, "John Dos Passos," Bookman, 75 (1932), 32-42.

5 See Hicks, The Great Tradition, p. 288. "Based on a bitterness that finds no adequate expression, culminating in a retreat that is a confession of futility, Manhattan Transfer leaves us with only a recollection of isolated scenes and an impression that the author has seen but has not understood."

6 Hicks, Bookman, p. 36. Also see p. 40 where Hicks especially praises the Camera Eye as the formal element which visualizes "the interrelation of the parts" for the reader.

7 Cf. Alan Calmer, "John Dos Passos," Sewanee Review, 40 (1932), pp. 341-349. Calmer argues that Dos Passos is a sure guide for future novelists because his forms are most adequate in dealing with modern collectivist reality.

8 See Hicks, "Dos Passos and His Critics," American Mercury, 68 (1949), 623-630.


12 For two opposing views, which argue that the inherent limitations of naturalism render it ineffective in suggesting levels other than the actual, see Bernard DeVoto, "John Dos Passos: Anatomist of Our Time," Saturday Review of Literature, 14 (8 Aug. 1936), 3-4, 12-13; and Delmore Schwartz, "John Dos Passos and the Whole Truth," Southern Review, 4 (1938), 351-367. Schwartz's article is especially provocative.

13 An informative survey of the controversy between the New Humanists and their detractors can be found in the first chapter of Richard Ruland, The Rediscovery of American Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 11-56. Ruland concludes that both camps were actually allies against a "common enemy."


16 Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York: The Century Co., 1932), p. 3. Future references will be cited parenthetically. The book is intended to be a "study in the evolution of novelistic technique."


18 However, some commentators owe large debts to the New Humanists. See Percy Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), pp. 185-203; J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come

19 Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), p. 89. Future references will be cited parenthetically.

20 Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p. 353. Future references will be cited parenthetically. For an opposing view, cf. Irving Howe, "John Dos Passos: The Loss of Passion," Tomorrow, 7 (1949), 54-57. "Dos Passos' youthful weakness for prose-poetry that is neither prose nor poetry but rather a decadent pseudo-Whitmanesque rumble still corrupts his style." Despite the severe indictment of the style, Howe maintains that the special quality of USA, passion, transcends style: "The tricky side shows now merely annoy, the characters limp, the prose sometimes grate—but the book lives."


32 Robert G. Davis, John Dos Passos, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 20 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962).


BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS BY DOS PASSOS


SECONDARY MATERIALS: BOOKS


McCle, C. J. Lucifer at Large. New York: Longmans, Green, 1937.


SECONDARY MATERIALS: ARTICLES


_____. "John Dos Passos," Bookman, 75 (1932), 32-42.


