THE FIRST THREE DECADES OF TWENTIETH CENTURY

AMERICAN SOCIETY

*Manhattan Transfer* marks an important stage not only but also in Dos Passos’s progress toward his fatherland but in his development as an artist. In the preceding two novels he had examined a rather special contemporary institution and a rather special area; but in terms of form and of content, he had remained within the contemporary tradition of the art of the novel and of the story of the Sensitive Young Man . . . (Wrenn 122) living in Manhattan from 1923 to 1925, in the very centre of our urban financial society, he was ready for a broader view and a broader challenge. The novel that emerged from these years was something new, a city novel studying American social patterns from within and in a vertical cross-section in a single characteristic area.

*Manhattan Transfer* represents a sufficient degree of success. It is one of the essences of Dos Passos’s method here, and of his vision of modern life. *The 42nd Parallel* established, Dos Passos as an unusually serious artist, serious with the seriousness that expresses itself in the propagandist spirit . . . (Leavis 102). He cannot be interested in individuals without consciously relating them to the society and the civilization that make the individual life possible. The artistic shortcomings of his work might be, not merely excused as inevitable, but praised as propagandist virtues: they are necessary to a work that exhibits the decay of capitalistic society.

In recent decades the artist has come to be the only critical spectator of society. He demands and confers the heightened significance in ordinary existence which is hostile to any self extinction in the collective consciousness. So that when the balance is lost between individual responsibility and mass solidarity, the artist
automatically moves to the side of the individual. With equal inevitability, the less resourceful man, faced with perplexities of planned social disorder, walks deeper into the collective sleep that makes that chaos bearable to him. The novel of Dos Passos is almost wholly concerned with presenting this situation. His people are, typically, victims of a collective trance from which they do not struggle to escape.

*Manhattan Transfer*, which corresponds roughly to James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, cuts a cross-section through a set of adult lives in New York. But the city is not envisioned as providing anything more than a phantasmagoric back-drop for their frustrations and defeats. “The city is felt as alien, meaningless” (Hook 54). James Joyce, on the other hand, accepts the city as an extension of human functions, as having a human shape and eliciting the full range of human response which man cannot achieve in any other situation. Within this analogy his individuals explore their experience in the modes of action and passion, male and female. The stories are grouped according to the expanding awareness of childhood, adolescence, maturity and middle age. Man, the wanderer within the complex ways at once of this psyche and of the world, provides an inexhaustible matter for contemplation.

In novels like *Journeys between Wars, The Ground We Stand On*, Dos Passos has exhibited his personal outlook upon the world, furnishing us the context in which to consider his “dramatic” (Beach, *Theory* 50) representations of life. The volumes of commentary on the state of the world are relatively inconsiderable from the point of view of literary art. But they are of great importance for the understanding of his social philosophy, and they have many sturdy merits. In *Manhattan Transfer* the system is to present a prodigious number of persons of the most representative groups in short shots, without transition, each going his own way; some of them
appearing once, just for the record, some several times over a course of years, some frequently enough to give the impression of leading characters, especially when their orbits cross in marriage, business or other social contact.

Through the early thirties the work of Dos Passos and the work of the proletarian writers ran along the same track. They shared certain attitudes: distrust of big business, hostility to the capitalist system, sympathy for the oppressed worker and the “little man,” (Gurko 55) contempt for money values, and a conviction that the individual, by himself, was helpless in the grip of society. Their novels displayed characters as class types and centered on the conflict between those selfishly devoted to their own interests and those dedicated to advancing the interests of others. The principal dilemma of their novels was whether a particular figure would “sell out” to the interests or continue, at great sacrifice, to struggle for the better world.

The American City Novel

Originally conceived as a single novel, a “series of reportages in which characters appeared and reappeared,” (Rosen 191) it grew over a decade into the trilogy, whose subject was nothing less than the history of American life in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Though the consummation of his experiments with literary form, it represents neither a conclusion to the evolution of his political thought, nor a totally coherent analysis of American society. As in Manhattan Transfer, the fragmentary form prevents our easy identification with individual characters. The focus is shifted instead, to the larger social patterns, and the reader is driven to an active participation in the political analysis. It dramatizes the essential
aloneness of its characters at the expense of any real sense of the social nexus that relates their individual alienation to the nature of the city’s institutions.

*Manhattan Transfer* describes a panoramic view of life in New York city between 1890 and 1925. It contained fragments of popular songs, news headlines, and stream of consciousness monologues from a horde of unrelated characters. Dos Passos felt that his novels should paint a picture of society as it was, to expose human difficulties by showing them realistically. Following the directions of an author he admired, Walt Whitman, Dos Passos who sought to use a “moral microscope” (Cowley, “After thoughts on Dos Passos” 134) upon humanity. He became a leading modernist with his novel, an astonishingly original novel. Influenced by modernism more than by any literary precedent it is a montage of many fictional lives linked to the central stories of an idealistic reporter and a calculating actress. It foreshadows trilogy by telling these stories against the historical background of New York from the beginning of the borough system to the rampant materialism of his immediate observations.

In the novel *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos shifts his attention from war to the city. New York looms over the characters with a dynamic and terrifying materialism. The novel is divided into sections titled “Ferry Slip,” “Tracks,” “Rollercoaster,” “Steam roller,” “Revolving Doors,” and “Skyscrapers” (Nanney 15) which emphasize how human lives are enveloped in energy and power that threatens to overwhelm them. He employs a cubist technique, fusing bits of dialogue, action, newspaper clippings, signs and fragmented glimpses of the scenes of city life. Human experience is speeded up, and characters clash, representing the forces of modern labour and business, the press and the world of entertainment. He adapted
such art forms as cubism, futurism and unanimism to his own aesthetic vision. He saw Paris as the center of modernism and turned to the French Poets, Blasie Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire for techniques to reproduce the sights, sounds, and movements of modern city life.

*Manhattan Transfer* represents Dos Passos’s innovative application to literature of the artistic theories and techniques that emerged during the decades before and after the turn of the century, when a veritable revolution in the arts occurred in Europe and then in the United States. This chronicle of the city incorporates impressionism, expressionism, montage, simultaneity, reportage and other techniques of “the new” (Sartre, *Literary 55*) in the arts and is important also for its themes of alienation and loss, as well as for its satiric treatment of the urban scene.

In 1925, Dos Passos published *Manhattan Transfer*, is a groundbreaking work that conferred a distinctly American flavour upon the modern novel. The narrative bounces along in a jolting, almost cartoonish pace, which powerfully echoes pedestrian life in New York City between the wars. This technique allowing syntax and structure to reflect material realities makes his contribution to American letters not estimated. Not only did he introduce this narrative device more effectively than any American author has done before or since, but he additionally introduced a distinctly journalistic, near objective narrator, which endows his stories with a strange sense of veracity. Dos Passos has been through with the spectrum of American political thought over the course of his life. He started early in the radical Left, then adopted a more pragmatic liberal perspective, and finally moved swiftly from conservative to reactionary to radical libertarian. But the critical view of Dos
Passos as a traitor to the literary career has had tragic consequences on his legacy. “Thus the destiny,” James T. Farrell wrote, “of any man who is guilty of the sin of disillusionment” (119). A testimony to this author’s genius is that he anticipated a number of major literary preoccupations that would follow his tenure as American “chronicler,” the stylistic inclusion of mass media, the blending together of disparate genres, the mordant portrayal of American materialism, the sense that monolithic ideologies are as blinding as they can be progressive. Further he presented these concerns with more clarity, vision and stylistic innovation than many of his more politically consistent contemporaries whose reputations have remained intact.

The shadowy image of a brilliant purpose shows through in *Manhattan Transfer*. It can be seen in the complex panorama of many-sided life which gives the novel look of having been photographed rather than written. It can be sensed in the quick, nerved violence of the prose which, although it is not yet a “style,” (Alridge 75) seems to have been compounded out of the same dirty concrete as that of the city it describes. It is present, particularly, in the truly remarkable energy and daring of Dos Passos’s conception. But it is, as yet, uncleared and undirected. The energy and the violence lead to nothing because they have no object. There is no frame in which they can be concentrated and no purpose which they can be used to serve.

At the time Dos Passos wrote this novel, there seems to have been no cause great enough to impel him toward a supreme integration of his powers. He had all the vitality and insight he needed to produce a major work of art and he certainly had all the idiosyncrasy and passion he needed. But he had to believe once more in the
necessity of taking a stand, of affirming a principle, before he could display his powers in a way that would be more meaningful than a mere cataloguing of disgust.

Dos Passos was able to return to the material he had begun to explore in that novel and see in it implications which had previously escaped him. He sensed now that the real victims of the system were the working classes and that the real evils of the system stemmed from wealth and power. He was thus able to focus his sympathies upon a specific social group and set them against his hatred of another social group, just as in his earlier novel he had focused his sympathies upon the individual aesthete and set them against his hatred of war. He was able to write now within the frame of two distinct and separate worlds, two nations, and to bring to his writing the full power of his protest as well as the full power of his futility.

In *Manhattan Transfer*, he brought it to a perfection not matched by any of his predecessors. At the same time he created the paramount novel of the big city. This accomplishment represented the full implementation of nineteenth century realism in the American novel,

This type of novel does not have fixed rules but can be described as a kind of mosaic, or better, a revolving stage that presents a multitude of scenes and characters which, taken together, convey a sense of the life of given milieu and by extension give the tone of contemporary life generally. The strategy is to move the reader through a varied series of actions involving a broad and representative cast of characters. (Becker, “Visions” 38)

This type of novel almost automatically exhibits unity of place. It handles the dimension of time in a variety of ways. Dos Passos opts here for the predominant time pattern, that of a period of years approximating a generation, a sufficient span
of growth and change to demonstrate the effects of a given milieu. While *Manhattan Transfer* is not a chronicle of public events to the same extent as *U.S.A.* is, it does have a sufficient time scheme to assist the reader’s orientation. This lack of detailed chronological reference is important in that it directs attention not to people’s subjection to major external forces such as wars, ideologies and economic crises, but to something more subtle, a changing psychosocial ambiance, a revolution in life styles and values.

Dos Passos writes here very much in the vein of what in the thirties was described as a “committed” author. For the committed writer it is not the cracking-up of an individual life that is his proper subject. Then it is the cracking-up of a whole world that really matters, the imminent disintegration and dissolution of existing societies and cultures in the face of political power exercised ruthlessly and brutally. In the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Dos Passos clearly recognized the beginnings of “the general conflagration” (Hook 8), which would end by embracing Europe, America and Asia in the Second World War. Living in what he goes on to describe to Fitzgerald as “one of the damnedest tragic moments in history” (11). He could not agree that the artist was adequately fulfilling his role by proceeding in Fitzgerald’s manner that is, by looking inward, by exploring his own inner consciousness. On the contrary, the artist should look outward, recognize the dominant forces at work in society and the world, and struggle to incorporate them within his own imaginative vision. For Dos Passos the final confrontation was not between the artist and his own deepest and truest thinking and feeling self, but between the artist and what he calls “the murderous forces of history” (11).
The life of middle class Americans, even under capitalism and even in a city like New York, it is not as unattractive as Dos Passos makes it, no human life under any conditions can ever have been so unattractive. Under however an unequal distribution of wealth, human beings are still capable of enjoyment, affection and enthusiasm, even of integrity and courage. Nor are these qualities and emotions entirely confined to classconscious workers and their leaders. There are moments in reading a novel or seeing a play by him when one finds oneself ready to rush to the defense of even the American house and even the ford car, which one begins to reflect, have perhaps done as much to rescue us from helplessness, ignorance and squalor as the prophets of revolution. We may begin to reflect upon the relation, in Dos Passos of political opinions to artistic effects.

The Novelist as “Architect of History”

_Manhattan Transfer_, first hailed by Sinclair Lewis as a germinal work and called by Joseph Warren Beach “one of the most brilliant and original American novels of the century” (Gelfant 76) it holds a unique place in American city fiction. The finest example of the synoptic form of the city novel, it is one of the most ambitious experiments in the use of urban materials. Perhaps no other city novel reveals such sheer virtuosity in the handling of urban imagery and symbolism, such skill in creating the city as an entity in itself, and such ingenuity in making a complex form the vehicle of implicatory social commentary. It is search for techniques to project the city immediately, in all its dazzling and stupefacient variety, in its sensuous shapes, aesthetic moments, its pace, rhythms and atmosphere.
Manhattan Transfer becomes a kind of text on the art of the city novel. Yet the achievement of this novel is not only its brilliant and imaginative creation of modern New York as an immediate place: its achievement is also its serious social and moral interpretation of a twentieth century way of life. Underlying the aesthetics of the novel is a concept of the novelist as an “architect of history,” (Beach, “The Twentieth Century Novel” 437) a shaper of moral opinion who influences the group mind of his times by compelling and revealing works of art. The total achievement of this novel as city fiction must be evaluated in terms of his peculiar concept of the novelist’s function, a concept that determined the historical sweep of the novel, the direct focusing upon the city rather than upon its people, and the underlying interpretation of Manhattan as a huge symbol of twentieth century historical tendencies.

In other words, a good novel objectified and interpreted contemporary life from a detached or non-personal, that is, a historical point of view, and at the same time it passed moral judgement upon the social life it depicted. Underlying this concept of the novel was a conviction in the power of art to influence the pattern of social change.

Technique as Social Commentary in Manhattan Transfer

It is as an architect of history that Dos Passos wrote Manhattan Transfer and U.S.A. Both novels dramatize a process of social change. Their implicit intention is to press upon the public mind an awareness of a historical drift away from the American ideals of democracy, individuality, and liberty. This intention explains the
scope and substance of these novels, the necessity of showing the passage of years, and of recreating the essential, if not the total, features of society.

While these so called “collectivist” (Schwartz 351) novels have been criticized by such discerning readers as Malcolm Cowley and Edmund Wilson for not giving full representation to all aspects of American life, to the moral and beautiful as well as the demoralized and sordid, the relevant question is not whether they “tell the whole truth” (Cowley, Return 41): it is whether they discern essential and underlying historical movements. In focusing upon the historical direction of American life, Dos Passos necessarily abstracted elements from the American scene. He wanted to show the drift towards monopoly capitalism, and his intention committed him to exclusion as much as to inclusion.

In Three Soldiers, John Andrews deserts the army in “a gesture” (Cowley, “After thoughts on Dos Passos” 168) for individual freedom, just as in Streets of Night; Wenny chooses suicide as an act of social condemnation. But it is in Manhattan Transfer that Dos Passos is the “hard-headed realist… radical historian of the class struggle”(168) most clearly expresses himself, not because he has arrived at a new realistic stand as a novelist, but because he has achieved, through his apprenticeship, a firmer grasp of his art. It establishes his control over the techniques of implicatory statement. Here he finally avoids the structural division between dramatic action and expository statement, which in his earlier novels had left his theme unincorporated in form. Here theme and form become an aesthetic integer. The techniques that create the dramatic world of the novel establish toward it a firm social and moral attitude. Thus technique becomes the vehicle of social commentary. The stream of modern history is captured in the novel’s dramatic action, structure,
pace, mood, symbols and characters. And as these formal elements create a dramatic world in the dynamic process of social change, they implicitly judge and condemn the historical tendencies of the times.

Since technique is clearly Dos Passos’s means of statement, analysis of his technique reveals his social and moral interpretations of city life. He is a technique of abstraction which proceeds through an impressionistic method. His realism consists in striking essential details abstracted from their total context.

Dos Passos’s method is to give an impression of reality, rather than to give, like Dreiser, a total cataloguing of actual details. The method of abstraction is fundamental to his creation of the city as a place, an atmosphere, a way of life, and a historical expression of the times. It is fundamental too to his creation of character and of social relationships. The selective process is severely imposed upon all the material of urban life, not only because he was giving a synoptic view of the city, but even more important, because he was giving an interpretation of an underlying historical trend. Thus his cityscapes are only fleeting sensuous impressions of scene. His people are only representatives of a human state of mind intrinsic to the city. They are not fully realized flesh and blood people, but abstract states of being. His total city is not a faithful reproduction of complementary and balancing details: it is an expression of a historical trend.

Twentieth-century Manhattan, as Dos Passos portrays it in an abstract literary picture, embodies the trend away from formulated American ideals of a social system that would allow the individual fullest opportunity for equality and personal self fulfillment as a human being. It symbolizes rather the trend towards a mechanized kind of life that is expressed, in economic terms, in monopoly
capitalism, in human terms, in the loss of man’s human capacities for love and self-realization. The abstract qualities that are presented as urban scenes, characters, atmosphere, social patterns and historical tendencies are implicit commentaries upon the moral significance of modern American city life. His judgement is inherent in his selective process and in the results of this selective process as a unique and personally envisioned city emerges in the novel as twentieth-century Manhattan.

The beauty of the city lies in its colour formations, sometimes brilliant and gaudy, sometimes muted and subdued. All other sensory details, those of sound, weather and odor, are oppressively ugly. The cacophony of the city streets swells from a jumbling of incessant noises, the “growing rumble of traffic,” “frenzied bell of fire engine,” “the long moan of a steamboat whistle” and the “childrenvoices screeching.” The people “grop e continually through a tangle of gritty sawed brittle noise” (MT 136). Grit is palpable on their lips. The weather oppresses them: in winter a “razor wind” cuts the ear and makes the forehead ache, in summer a hot afternoon sun lies on the back like a heavy hand, and “sunlight squirms in bright worms of heat on face and hands” (177).

Most offensive of all, and perhaps most brilliantly used for the matic implications, are the odors of New York. A stench seems to raise from the massing humanity herded in tenements or crowded in “pigeonhole” rooms, “Jiggling Subways,” and jammed busses. Beneath the “goldplated exterior” of the city lies the brutal fact of man’s indignity in a crowded, sweaty world where there is no room. Ellen’s momentary awareness of the “unwashed smell” of a man’s body evokes an image of closeness and fetor: “Under all the nickel plated, goldplated streets enameled with May, uneasily she could feel the huddling smell, spreading in dark
slow crouching masses like corruption discharging from broken sewers” (Doctorow, “Foreword” 395). To Jimmy the smell suggests the mass frustration in the city, the “huddling stuffiness of pigeonhole rooms where men and women’s bodies writhed alone tortured by the night and the young summer.”

The fact that one’s perception of people is on the same level as the perception of things suggests not only the impersonality in the city’s crowds but also the loneliness within the crowd. In the last scene of Manhattan Transfer, as Jimmy Herf wanders through the city streets, he too catches disconnected glimpses of faces and disjointed sounds of human footsteps and conversation. But he knows himself to be essentially alone. In a mood of alienation and loneliness, he realizes the barriers of indifference and impersonality that keep people apart and this forlorn realization contributes to his decision to leave the city.

Time in another sense, as crucial moments and as spanning years, it is distinct for the characters and for the city. In Jimmy Herf’s personal history, the moment when he marries Ellen may be crucial but in the history of twentieth century Manhattan this moment is inconsequential. What is important in time for the city is historical sweep that reveals social tendencies. The novel shows Manhattan changing through the decades from an ideal of a modern metropolis to a disordered world of vice and destruction that sets the mad tramp raving at the end of the novel.

Action is ceaseless: the people engage in energetic affairs of love, business, marriage and careers, the seasons change and the years pass, but in the end, actions have cancelled each other, decisions have remained abortive and plans, and time has defeated one’s hopes in the city.
Manhattan Transfer: Dos Passos’s Waste Land

Perhaps the most obvious similarity between The Waste Land and Manhattan Transfer is their use of the structural principle of dissociation and recombination. Dos Passos disintegrates the usual discursive ordering of experience so as to bring together apparently unrelated fragments of actuality which, seen in juxtaposition, coalesce into a new unity expressing a “total” (Lowry 47) view of his subject. The two writers, coming to grips with the clashing contradictions and chaotic quality of modern life, capitalize to the utmost on the possibilities of shock effect, discord, discontinuity. Just as one vignette in The Waste Land melts without warning or transition into the next, so too in Manhattan Transfer scene follows scene abruptly, each dissolving unexpectedly into another, the chief unifying factor being the thematic device of “the city” and the spiritual atmosphere associated with it.

Turning his back on bourgeois society, giving up his job and drifting about the city, Jimmy exemplifies in his own aimless quest for “something new” the purposelessness of the metropolis he hates. Seeking “refuge in the past,” sinking into “dreamier and dreamier reverie,” his failure is ultimately a failure of true male assertiveness and vitality; unable to awaken in Ellen a positive response to life, he is incapable in a larger sense of redeeming the prevailing urban desolation. Although he achieves what looks like a solitary salvation by leaving New York, even this gesture, with its hint of “symbolic suicide,” (Cowley, “After thoughts on Dos Passos” 173) suggests merely another dead end.

U.S.A stands as the important American novel of the decade on the whole more satisfying than anything else one can have. It lacks any touch of eccentricity, it is startlingly normal, at the risk of seeming paradoxical one might say
that it is exciting because of its quality of cliché: here are comprised the judgements
about modern American life that many of us have been living on for years.

When he published *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos had come to a critical
turn in his career. He had been uprooted by the war, he had fled from the peace, but
he could not resolve himself in flight. More than any other American novelist of the
contemporary generation, he was fascinated by the phenomenon of a mass society in
itself, but his mind had not yet begun to study seriously the configuration of social
forces, the naturalism and social history, which were to become his great subject in
*U.S.A.* Like that he wrote so much up to 1930,*Manhattan Transfer* is only a
preparation for *U.S.A.* as in the case of his early works, it is a mediocre, weakly
written book. He had as yet no real style of his own; he has not even in *Manhattan
Transfer*. But he was reaching in that book for a style and method distinctively his
own, and just as the Sacco Vanzetti case was two years later to crystallize the
antagonism to American capitalist society that is the base of *U.S.A.*, so the
experimental form of *Manhattan Transfer*, its attempt to play on the shuttle of the
great city’s life dozens of human stories representative of the mass scene was to lead
straight into the brilliantly original technique of *U.S.A.*

Yet the achievement in style and technique of *Manhattan Transfer* is
curiously inconclusive and muddy. The novel seems to flicker, in the gaslight of Dos
Passos own confusion. Out of the endlessly changing patterns of metropolitan life he
drew an image that was collective. He was all through this period working in
expressionist drama, as plays like *The Garbage Man, Airways* and *FortuneHeights*
testify, and as in the expressionist plays Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, he sketched
out in his novel a tragic ballet to the accompaniment of the city’s music and its mass
chorus. Most significantly, he was working out a kind of doggerel prose style completely removed from his early lushness, full of the slangy rhythms he had picked up in *Three Soldiers* by reproducing soldier speech, and yet suggestive of a wry and dim poetry. This new style his evidently owed in part to contemporary poetry, and like his trick of liquefying scenes together as if in a dream sequence and fusing words to bring out their exact tonal reverberation in the mind to James Joyce (Kazin, *Native* 341).

*Manhattan Transfer* was that the romantic poet, the creator and double of Martin Howe and John Andrews and the novel’s Jimmy Herf, had become fascinated with a kind of mass and pictorial ugliness. The book was like perverse aesthetic geometry in which all the colors of the city’s scenes were daubed together madly, and all its frames jumbled. What one saw in *Manhattan Transfer* was not the broad city pattern at all, but a wistful absorption in monstrousness. The poet-aesthete still stood against the world, and rejected it completely. Characteristically even the novel’s hero, Jimmy Herf moons through it only to walk out into the dawn after a last party in Greenwich Village, bareheaded and alone, to proclaim his complete disgust with the megalopolis of which he was, as the Dos Passos poet-heroes always are the victim.

The stories are grouped according to the expanding awareness of childhood, adolescence, maturity and middle age. Man, the wanderer within the labyrinthine ways at once of his psyche and of the world, provides an inexhaustible matter for contemplation. Dos Passos seems to have missed this aspect of Dubliners. But in *U.S.A.* while extending his back-drop from the city to the nation, he did make the attempt to relate the expanding scene to the development of one, the mind from
childhood to maturity. That is the function of Camera Eye. Newsreel projects the changing environment which acts upon various characters and corresponds to riffling the back issues of Life magazine.

Like many other reviewers, though Lewis Sinclair believed Dos Passos had the potential to become the greatest of American novelist. He had captured ‘the minds and lives of his middle-class characters’ with astonishing realism, he made us see America through their eyes. He noted that he was the first American writer “to have succeeded in using colloquial American for a novel of the highest artistic seriousness” (Maine, Critical 11). He was particularly impressed by his ability to tell so much about a character so quickly and entirely without authorial intrusion or commentary; though he noted that occasionally the characters became “two-dimensional caricatures of qualities or forces which hates.” Yet Dos Passos seemed to be ‘the only novelist of his generation, who is concerned with the large questions of politics and society,’ and for that reason the completed work ‘may well turn out to be the most important novel which any American of his generation has written.’

Dos Passos’s Portrait of Life in New York City

Nobody causes injustice to Dos Passos dismissing the thread of his main story, for there is no evidence that he considers it important to himself. The real ‘meat’ of his strange novel comes in the host of human moths, more or less singed or wilted, who flutter and swarm round the lights of Broadway and Fifth Avenue, tramps, drunkards, wastrels, homonsexualists, prostitutes more or less accredited, villagers, waiters, bootleggers and ruffians, with the shadow of Jefferson Market Night Court somehow never far from their shoulders. These people are stunned by
city noises and sickened by its smells: they crave its pleasures, yet hate the work that pays for them; they smother down their heartaches with food and drink; they cheat themselves the oftenest; they can conceive of life nowhere else than in the prison-city that is turning their faces gray before their hair. “The terrible thing of having New York go flat on you is that there’s nowhere else. It is the top of the world. All one can do is go round and round in a squirrel cage” (Stuart 5).

Jimmy Herf, the newspaperman who leaves New York to go on the turn at the close of Manhattan Transfer, is a symbolic representation of Dos Passos himself, entranced by the complexity and color of American life but disgusted with the emphasis that is placed on money-getting, especially as practised on Manhattan Island. When young critics of United States were feeling their first flush of social-consciousness back in 1930, it was the fashion to criticize Dos Passos, Herf as “escapist” (Chamberlain 12) for not expressing his discontent by joining a party or signing a manifesto in favor of the Russian Experiment. But it is a little hard to see what alternative to “escape” existed for an average newspaperman back in the middle twenties. Novels are supposed to approximate the movements of life, and in 1925 disillusioned reporters did not become conscious social rebels, they became skeptics and ironists, or they took to drink. There was not even a newspaper guild in those days to join.

Though Dos Passos was never a Marxist he shared the belief current among intellectuals that history was heading toward some sort of final conflict. No writer could stand aloof. Whatever he said would add its thrust to one of the forces, progressive or destructive, that were coming into collision. The sense of social
change, of released energy, which had given power to *Manhattan Transfer*, was expressed on a far vaster scale in *U.S.A.*

Like *Manhattan Transfer*, *U.S.A.* begins around 1900, at the time of the fighting in Cuba and the Philippines. The oratorical prophecies in the first Newsreel recall his father’s expectations in The Anglo-Saxon century. The trilogy is intended to be a total history of public moods and social changes through some twenty five-years, as experienced by twelve very different Americans. Public events are far more important than in *Manhattan Transfer*, the political analysis is more explicit and revolutionary. To cope with such tremendous matters, Dos Passos makes daring experiments in form.

When he was traveling, and before he became an activist, he wrote *Manhattan Transfer*, a fine piece of reporting, a big step beyond *Streets of Night*, showing off for the first time his powers of social observation. A Washington square bus “smelled of gasoline, and asphalt, of spearmint and talcum powder and perfume from the couples that jiggled and closer together.” A restaurant kitchen was filled with “the smell of swill and hot soapsuds,” as one of the characters went “twice around with the little mop, dip, rinse and pile in the rack.” On gray winter mornings Eleventh Avenue was “full of lay dust, of grinding rattle of wheels and scrape of hoofs on the cobblestones,” and the people themselves were gray too, struggling for a dollar or a meal, and reading with heavy irony the slogans of the city of the time, the Gay White Way and “the land of opportunity” (Sinclair 167). Dos Passos did most of his scenes with a broad brush, and he surrounded his hero, Jimmy Herf, who was a hard-up wanderer in the city like himself, with a cross section of city strugglers all in trouble somehow with the “back-drag of death and stagnation.”
Dos Passos’s Ideas on American Culture

One view had it that the meaning of America was the advance of civilization into a rude and savage continent and that the history of the United States, it is a record of progress from simple, primitive beginnings to an advanced, complex, civilized society, Turner asserted:

American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic Coast; it is the Great West. (Ward 50)

The promise of American life implied the constant opportunity to escape from history, society, to go backward in time to a new beginning. But it is important to remember the moment in which Turner spoke. The frontier was closed. History had, so to speak, caught up with the frontier. The American landscape now displayed factories and machines and great cities and people no longer shaped by the experience of pioneer life. There was a pessimistic fatalism in his interpretation of our history. If the democratic values and the meaning of America had risen from experience with a succession of frontiers, then the end of the frontier implied the weakening of democracy and degeneration in American values.
Dos Passos’s Theme

*Manhattan Transfer* has no narrative in the ordinary sense of the word and the theme, while it is well established, has no great movement of its own. The theme is conceived in its entirety from the first page: it is the emptiness of society and culture as revealed through individual lives in the wasteland of the twentieth century. Unlike most novels, the “proof” is not developed in a narrative but it is established through a series of some two hundred episodes, many of which have no direct relation to other episodes except as they all are related to the theme. These episodes are carefully spaced for continuity of narrative and contrast and suggest four major flaws in people who are the products of twentieth century urban society: (i) a primary interest in self and a lack of concern for others, (ii) materialism, (iii) shallowness and hypocrisy, (iv) cynicism.

The isolation of the individual in the machine-like metropolitan life is treated with more emphasis than any political idea and is revealed as the source of the complementary social ailments, self-interest and loss of social conscience. Ed Thatcher’s behaviour as he passes the vicinity of a tenement fire is typical of this theme as it is portrayed in *Manhattan Transfer*.

The materialism of the age, is another major area of Dos Passos’s theme, is revealed through the obsession of the characters with “getting ahead.” There is real estate speculation as well as speculation on Wall Street, the latter being reduced to absurdity by Joe Harland’s insistence that neither skill nor brains, but an old tie was responsible for his success. The shallowness and hypocrisy of the age is attested time.
The theme of cynicism is further exploited in such thoughtless remarks as Baldwin’s about a man named Specker who is the “only honest man in the city of New York.” Baldwin says, “He is never made anything much by it” (Brantley, *Fiction* 49). Ellen says “JoJo” is her husband, “till divorce do us part,” and Jimmy Herf and Ellen are told that “the difficulty under prohibition is keeping sober.” Perhaps the thing that makes the cynicism of the characters such an acid social commentary is that their cynical attitudes are usually well founded.

While the cross section was by no means Dos Passos’s invention with *Manhattan Transfer* he brought it to perfection not matched by any of his predecessors. At the same time he created the paramount novel of the big city. This accomplishment represented the full implementation of nineteenth century realism in the American novel, though with a difference.

**Dos Passos: A Slice of Life**

The novel begins about 1904; there are references to the Roosevelt-Parker contest for the presidency in that year, and continues to a less determine point in the mid twenties. We are reminded as the novel comes to an end that Congo Jake had come to America twenty years before, that “Lady Be Good” is a current song hit, but there is no reference to events of such public importance as the Sacco-Vanzetti.

Before we can analyze the nature of that experience, it is necessary to look at the cross section of characters that undergo it. In this sociological novel one cannot know when a personage first appears whether he will have an important role or not. It is only by his persistence in the narrative and the emphasis he receives that one can judge his weight. In *Manhattan Transfer* there are four clear categories of character.
At the bottom of the scale are incidental, often anonymous, individuals whose situation may best be described as a thematic supplement to the main narrative: for example, at the very beginning a group of bewildered immigrants or at the end an old derelict weeping in the street.

Next priority in importance are those characters who appear in several scenes but who are not present throughout and are not closely connected with other characters. Such a case is Bud Korpenning, who comes to New York as the novel opens, appears in eight scenes, and commits suicide at the end. Toward the end of the work one has two similar cases, Anna Cohen and Dutch Robertson, little people, the disaster of whose lives adds painful to the general statement.

Ideally a cross-section novel should have no protagonist, should make its case by following a considerable number of personages of fairly equal importance and representativeness. Before coming to this, the second-level, however, one must acknowledge that in this instance Dos Passos does concentrate on two major figures, Ellen Thatcher and Jimmy Herf. It is around them that the second-level characters gravitate. Some have a direct attachment, like that of Oglethorpe to Ellen, or of James Merivale to Jimmy. Some are disconnected parallels, as is the case with the architect Philip Sandbourne. One can see as following similar courses in their search for success in an environment that is hostile or indifferent.

The reader cannot escape asking whether in fact these figures are sufficiently representative. The answer is ambiguous: banker, lawyer, broker, bootlegger, labour leader, architect, and musical productions, these are by no means a complete scope but they do serve as an adequate sampling, though a bit out of balance by reason of the number of hangers-on in the arts who surround Ellen.
The two major characters do stand out from the mass and dominate the novel. Ellen-Elaine, Helena, depending on her mood and aspiration is inhibited by no particular scruples in her effort to get ahead. She is not a monster, merely a self-centered woman determined to get what she wants without regard for standards of morality or convention. She first marries Jojo Oglethorpe, a much older man, an actor and a homosexual; because she thinks he can help her become an actress. She impulsively marries Jimmy Herf in Europe during World War I and drops him when he can no longer support her. There seem to be many other men in her life. Stan Emery, whom she really loves, kills himself in a drunken madness. She aborts the child he has fathered. She is pursued throughout the novel by George Baldwin, an attorney with political aspirations, whom she resignedly marries at the end.

The significant things in Ellen’s makeup are her ambition and her egotism. Like Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, she makes her way in the theater more by beauty and sex appeal than by talent. She uses people around her and discards them when they are no longer useful. The last we see of her is in a display of hardened indifference to the death of Anna Cohen in Madame Soubrine’s shop. She is one who succeeds, at the cost of changed emotions.

The personality of Jimmy Herf is more difficult to pin down. He is obviously, one of those partial projections of his own being that Dos Passos frequently makes. He returns to the United States as a small boy after long residence in Europe; he has no father, his mother dies when he is sixteen; he serves in the Red Cross during the war. He is by far the most sensitive and articulate of the people in the novel. However, it is a mistake to see him as directly echoing the author’s experience. His function in the novel is to be odd man out, to be the uneasy seeker of a value system
counter to that subscribed to by the rest, to refuse to make the compromises that
worldly success demands. At the end he opts out. One can last see him hitching a
ride in the Wasteland of the Jersey Flats.

The lives of these people are presented discontinuously. The novel consists of
some one thirty scenes, the longest of which runs thirteen pages. There are no
transitions, although in a few cases succeeding scenes are linked by simultaneity of
action. Most of the sections carry forward the experiences of the more important
characters, but at the very beginning there are seven scenes that are incidental or
thematic, and at the end this device is used again.

The importance of the main characters can be gauged by the frequency of
their appearance. It is found that Ellen is in thirty six, Jimmy Herf in twenty-six,
George Baldwin in sixteen and Gus McNiel in fourteen scenes. This broad and
varied scenic presentation indicates the basically inductive nature of the cross-
section technique. The author provides what he thinks is an adequate sampling; the
reader contemplates it, as he would the people whom he encounters in real life. He is
left to draw his own conclusions without overt authorial intervention or moralizing,
though we cannot deny that there is an intelligence, however unobtrusive, which has
chosen and arranged the elements on which the reader is to pass judgement.

What generally occurs in realistic novels is that lives go downhill; there is a
high incidence of disappointment and failure. Dos Passos conforms to this pattern.
He sets his representative group in a given milieu, records their activities over a
period of years, and permits little deviation from a pessimistic downward curve. He
shows, as did his master Flaubert, that most people fail and that the ostensible
success of a few must, by any reasonable standard, be considered failure. For
example, Gus McNiel, a milk man, by the fortunate incapacitation he suffers in an accident is diverted into labour-union activities. His role as a big shot is hedged with ambiguity.

Congo Jake arrives at wealth and a Park Avenue apartment and assumes his proper impressive name of Armand Duval. Yet his situation is precarious. He has arrived by being a bootlegger. Any day he may be arrested, convicted, and sentenced to Atlanta. George Baldwin, who takes advantage of McNiel’s accident to get his start as a lawyer, eventually goes into politics, cynically assuming the label of reform candidate but destined to be the puppet of the big corporations.

James Merivale, Jimmy’s cousin and foil, follows the straight and narrow path of a banker, watching his every gesture, denying himself any spontaneity of action, accepting even a legally dubious marriage for his sister, because of the advantage to be gained from her husband’s connections. They are the apparent winners.

The rest of the characters are obvious losers. Heading the list is Joe Harland, a Herf and Merivale relative, once a big man on wall street, who goes downhill rapidly after his first disgraceful appearance in one of the opening scenes: drunkard, debtor, scrounger, night watchman, inevitably soon to be a Bowery derelict. In their way Blackhead and Densch parallel his situation. After the collapse of their business the former lives the life of an exile in Marienbad on money belonging to his creditors, presumably in danger of legal authority: thelatter evades his obligations by diverting money to his daughter’s safety deposit box. As he dies of a heart attack, his houseboy spits in his face. Each has become a kind of nonperson. Also in parallel is Jake Silverman, a promoter, who is hauled off to jail for his fraudulent stock
promotions, leaving his inamorata Rosie to hock everything portable and beat it. Phil Sandbourne, with a vision of architectural grandeur, is pinned to the drafting board of unimaginative commercial builders. Stan Emery, born to every advantage, lives the life of a psychopathic painfully and dies through drunken misadventure, a playboy to the end.

Beyond these people of some position and substance are the born losers. The whole pathetic groups around Ellen at her boarding house are hangers-on in the theatre, or more precisely in show business, since there is no evidence that they have any talent or genuine vision of art. The most interesting of them is Nevada Jones, who married to Congo Jake after a spotted past, has the determination to make before of her marriage. The marginal economic men and women are represented by Bud Korpenning, unskilled and without resources in the big city; Dutch Robertson, a returned veteran who resorts to crime in desperation, and his girl friend Francie, Anna Cohen, whom we see in a variety of marginal jobs. Joe O’Keefe, first an obsequious follower of McNiel, then trying to make it on his own by means of a bonus racket for veterans. Behind all these, their hands uplifted in supplication, are the nameless, helpless ones, usually immigrants, battered by life in Europe, battered and beaten again in New York.

There is a fair amount of commentary on the nature of success and failure made by the characters themselves. To this extent the novel has an ideological or social focus for the points seems to be that success as conceived within the existing social framework means conformity and a kind of progressive dehumanization. Two images at the beginning of the work assert this. People emerging from the ferry are “crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press,” and the newborn
baby Ellen Thatcher “squirmed in the cotton-wool feebly like a knot of earthworms” (Aaron, “The Adventure of John Dos Passos” 343). Unlike most realists, Dos Passos does not make capital of the reductionist nature of the latter image. He does not in the manner of Zola and Dreiser compare his people to lower forms of life. What he insists on in this novel is the reduction of human beings to something mechanical.

The heading of Chapter V “Steamroller” (350) suggests this process. This is the culminating chapter of part 1, in which the subsidence of hope and joy is quadruply indicated by the death of Jimmy Herf’s mother, Ellen’s marriage, Emile’s crass opportunism and Bud Korpennen’s suicide. These mechanical images are frequent throughout the novel. People are fed into revolving doors, they walk on a treadmill: they are jiggling corpses in a subway car. Jimmy sees himself in his job as reporter as no more than an automation. Ellen, as she capitulates to conformity, plays with phrases like mechanical doll, talking doll, mechanical toy, porcelain figurine, frozen photograph. This is actuality as the two principal figures perceive it, and as the minor figures experience it. It is an actuality to which Ellen submits and from which Jimmy flees.

James Merivale, an unimaginative man, dreams of a testimonial dinner offered by the American Bankers Association to him as president of the Bank and Trust company. Even such a minor character as Anna Cohen dreams of her boy friend Elmer “in a dinner coat, with eartabs, tall as Valentino, strong as Doug. The Revolution is declared. The Red Guard is marching up Fifth Avenue. Anna in golden curls with a little kitten under her arm leans with him out of the tallest window” (Bernardin 13). These dreams are obviously ironic, positioned as they are at points of
disappointment or disaster in the lives of the dreamers. Anna’s for example, comes just seconds before she is horribly burned to death.

The other exception to the practice of allowing dialogue to carry the narrative and reveal the characters’ mental states comes with the development of Jimmy Herf and less frequently of Ellen Thatcher. Here the technique is usually indirect interior monologue that is thoughts conveyed in the third person rather than the first. These passages show the strong influence of Joyce’s Ulysses in their intricate verbal play.

Such a passage is no longer straight interior monologue but involves a verbal play which goes beyond what the character would be thinking. There are many such echoes of Ulysses, recognizable by verbal technique or sometimes by actual content. “From Liverpool, British steamer Raleigh . . .” recalls Joyce’s “Rosevean from Bridgewater with bricks” (Geismar, American 87). There is an unidentified character sorrowing over the death of her husband in the General Slocum disaster in 1904, one of the few non-Irish events referred to in Joyce’s novel.

These experiments do not, on the whole, greatly change the texture of the work. It is seen almost entirely through the eyes of the impersonal narrator. But he is selective, even impressionistic. Characters rarely appear in full outline: a salient characteristic stands for the whole, and nine times out of ten that characteristic is a hat. The sensory experience of his people is dominated by smell. The novel contains an immense catalogue of the smells of the city. Auditory and tactile sensations are comparatively rare. Sight concentrates on sky, light, flashing colour, silhouettes of light and darkness.

Manhattan Transfer goes beyond traditional realism in other important respects. It has often been called expressionistic. That is, it attempts to
externalize essences, meanings, significant realities that lurk beneath the surface of observed reality. In a play, costume, sets, lighting, and discordant apposition of sensory elements generally are the means of bringing this out. In a novel the techniques available are less varied, the prime means are linguistic and imagistic.

Out of these may come a thematic insistence on some element of meaning that inheres in the data presented but it is not readily apparent without such emphasis, or there may be an intrusion of elements that are discordant in the realistic texture and therefore force the reader to seek out their significance. A simple instance in *Manhattan Transfer* is the songs or fragments of songs introduced. Of course, they have a realistic appropriateness in that they are data of the times. They help move us chronologically through the years of the novel, and they are a pointed notation of the vanities and humanities of that era.

Much more important are certain recurring materials bearing on the city itself. It is in these that we find the expressionistic nature of the work. It is immediately apparent that New York City as a physical entity is not going to be treated realistically. The vignette introducing Chapter I is poetic, though full of realistic detail. The second clearly goes beyond realistic statement: There were Babylan and Ninaveh: they were built of brick. Athens was gold marble colmns. (Kallichi 101)

In this passage there is an ambiguity that pervades the novel. On the one hand, New York City takes its place among the great cities of civilization, the highest embodiment of human aspiration in the material world. Their materials are both rare and common, gold and rubble. But implicit in the roll call is the fact that the older cities have fallen, have gone back to rubble, whatever their brilliance
might be. The skyscraper functions as an embodiment of contemporary aspiration. Phil Sandborne dreams of a new artistic form with new materials; Stan Emery, in his habitual euphoric intoxication, just before his death repeats the passage just quoted, joins it to a song recalling the flood, and exclaims, “kerist I wish I was a skyscraper” (Becker, “Visions” 51).

Throughout the novel there is a recurring image of fire engine. It appears to Emery going “lickety-split trailing a droning siren-shriek.” He has an obsessive vision of skyscrapers going up in flames. He turns on the gas jet, pours kerosene, and strikes matches. This linking of skyscraper metropolis and consuming fire has been carefully prepared. Chapter Two which enunciates the gold, brick, rubble, theme, also contains an account of a tenement fire. Ellen Thatcher’s mother remembers “that terrible Chicago theatre fire” (Knox, “Dos Passos and Painting” 51).

When Jimmy Herf returns to New York as a little boy he encounters a fire engine. Chapter Four of Part II is entitled “Fire Engine” and prepares for Stan’s death two chapters later. A fire engine roars by as Ellen decides to have his child aborted. The prologue to the first chapter of Part III likens the war to the pocalypse in terms of “typhus, cholera, shrapnel, insurrection, death in fire, death in water, death in hunger, death in mud” (Sanders 44). Later on a crazed prophet tells two small boys of the fire and brimstone and earthquake and tidal wave that will bring the tall buildings crashing down. It is a doomed city, and by extension so are the people in it.

The images of flashing light and color, which are the chief means of describing the city, are also ambiguous. They are a lure, an aspiration, a promise of an Arabian Nights fairyland, but they are also a delusion. What is so fair and
promising becomes an agent of disappointment and destruction. Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, which frequently figure in this imagery as beacons of hope and freedom, betray their promises. New York is a lodestone, a focus of aspiration which by essential cosmic irony is bound to disappointment.

There is a double movement within the novel, an almost heliographic drawing toward the city, as evidenced in the beginning by the arrival of Bud Korpenning, Jimmy Herf, Michel and Congo Jake, and a body of unnamed immigrants, and a counter movement a frenetic desire to get away. The city attracts by its bigness, it is learnt at the beginning that New York has just become the second most populous urban collection of mass in the world, but that bigness is stultifying because of its indifference, its reduction of people to things. It is a vision of beauty and proud artistry which like all things created by man, is destined to decay over the long perspective of time, but it is also in the short run ugly and ruinous, cheap and evil smelling. Through these imagistic emphases and contrasts, the essence of New York City is got as siren and destroyer, promising and not keeping her promises, as in the case of the immigrants who are destroyed or who are deported because of their belief in freedom.

This novel contains little of what one can call social criticism in terms of institutional malfunction or ideological argument. War as a means of controlling the restless masses, the uneven hand of justice, the non-existent chances of the working stiff, the primacy of money, indifference to genuine artistic vision. All these criticisms are incidentally voiced out of the mouths of various characters, but in no sustained or doctrinaire way. It is changing mores and moral values, without much concern for the forces that produce such change, that are the objects of observation in
"Manhattan Transfer." This novel goes much further than Dreiser’s novels in its assertion of a gap between official and actual morality. It is much more probing than Sinclair Lewis satiric accounts of the pressures of conformity.

The clean-shaven man at the beginning heralds a new era. The new dances, the jazz tunes, the incidental slogans give the flavor of the times. Beneath that surface the reader is constantly confronted with several major currents of change. Interestingly enough, two important aspects of the new society are left out, the automobile and the movies. One can do see the transition from horse-drawn fire engines to those powered by combustion engines, but there is no recognition of the new mobility of the automobile age, it may be assumed, because of the restricted geographical setting. The absence of the movies is harder to account for. This is a serious oversight, since the world of make believe and wish fulfillment provided by the movies would be a natural reinforcement for the vulgar life of illusion with which the novel deals. There are three major shifts in social morality which this novel continually stresses. One is prohibition, another is gangsterism in labour and business, a third is the sexual revolution. Prohibition becomes more than a background element when the Herfs return from Europe after the war, burden with illegal bottles even in the baby’s bassinet, speakeasies and the various evasions of the law against public drinking are shown as part of the new mores and need no comment. Toward the end of the novel there is a detailed high-jacking scene on Long Island which Jimmy witnesses and in which Congo Jake is a principal. It is by such activities outside the law that Jake has risen to affluence and a degree of distinction, evidence of the easy and dubious ways, by which it is possible to rise in the new society, in the impersonal and a moral city. The possibilities of power and coercion
are clearly suggested, but they are neither developed nor judged as they are to be in Dos Passos’s later and more tendentious novels.

Most attention is given to the sexual revolution, again without moralizing. Ellen Thatcher is a liberated woman. She uses men and discards them. Scenes of sexual intimacy among minor characters are numerous, served up as a staple of modern existence. By its matter of fact, acceptance of sexual license, by its de-romanticizing of sex and portraying it as a casual appetite, this novel is a milestone in the depiction of American life. Nothing before it had been so down to earth, so unisexual, straightforward, not even Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (Reihart 175).

Dos Passos came back from one of his long European journeys in the early twenties, saying he had enough of Europe: it was time to discover his own country. *Manhattan Transfer* was part of that voyage of discovery. Except for Jimmy Herf, and possibly Stan Emery, none of the characters he presents are the type of people he knew well. He ignores the big business world of his father almost entirely; he leaves out the genuine artists and intellectuals with whom he associated. Instead he ranges widely among lower middle class and proletarian types. It must be admitted that they are usually two-dimensional, but within those limits they are acceptable and ring true. They bear the stamp of careful observation, though they are not imbued with that extra element of humanity that makes some fictional characters memorable.

The whole novel is an attempt to encompass a segment of American life, its sights and sounds, the feeling and texture of its speech. This is carried out with cool reportorial detachment in an attempt to get it down right, and with an equally detached interest in seeing what could be done with such materials. Intelligence rules here, passion will come later.
Thus this chapter has exhaustively dealt with The First Three Decades of Twentieth Century American Society. The Loss of Individualism in the novels of Dos Passos is elaborately discussed in the next chapter.