EPILOGUE

The "heroic pattern" of Initiation -- Involvement -- Alienation, studied in the preceding chapters helps us to map out the development of the Dos Passos hero from adolescence to the final catastrophe. It is observed that the hero's response to the "heroic pattern" as such is not the same in all the cases. Certain characters show full response to all the three phases, some respond only to any two of the three phases and others to only one phase. Accordingly, I shall classify their response as Full, Uncompleted and Tentative. Characters who fully respond to the "heroic pattern" are: Martin Howe, John Andrews, Jimmy Herf, Fenian McCreary, J.W. Moorehouse, Charley Anderson, Ben Compton, Richard Ellsworth, Glenn Spotswood and Blackie Bowman. Instances of uncompleted response are: George Baldwin, Joe Williams, Tyler Spotswood, Jed Morris, Millard Carroll, Paul Graves, Roland Lancaster, Terry Bryant and Jay Pignatelli. The following characters give only the tentative response: Chrisfield, Wenny, Bud Korpennning, Stan Emery, Herbert Spotswood, Chuck Crawford, Roger Thurloe, Frank Worthington, Jasper Milliron and Stan Godspeed. With this broad classification it shall be easier for us to assess Dos Passos's art of characterization and also to formulate
an archetype. Rightly then, depending upon the response to the "heroic pattern," the Dos Passos hero impinges on our mind and eventually becomes, what Anthony Winner calls "provocative of interpretation." 2

Each character reacts to a situation or a problem differently, and individually. Yet, there does emerge an archetype since "the characters," as Anthony Winner points out "are conceived deterministically as products of a crude, self-seeking era while being judged explicitly against a fastidious standard of beauty, vision and purpose, available only to their creator." 3 The archetypal hero before he enters the world-order is a troubled, insecure, questioning young man. While the initiatory process, such as, a death in the family, sordid poverty, inadequate education, pangs of passion, the weirdness of war, provides a significant experience, it also upsets the hero's social equanimity. When he begins his social life, he carries within him certain time-honoured illusions. He appears to be not one man but a symbol of all the apathetically mediocre men who find themselves in a similar predicament. The triple involvement gives a "three dimensional" view, the depth and breadth of the character. Dos Passos endows his characters with a free will. The hero may succumb to the captivating temptations or revolt against the dehumanizing and corrupting world-order, or simply observe the pageant
of the flux and flow of the society. Whatever role he may assume, he no longer remains a single individual but becomes a symbol of the men in mass. In him there is a shift from the self to the collective or mass consciousness. Appropriately then, Jean-Paul Sartre calls a representative Dos Passos character "a hybrid creature, an interior-exterior being." Sartre adds, "We go on living with him and within him with his vacillating, individual consciousness, when suddenly it wavers, weakens, and is diluted in the collective consciousness." How the individual retains his identity in the general societal flow can be adequately expressed in the words of Wenny in Streets of Night:

"But, by God!" Cried Wenny, "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...." (p. 88)

Undeniably, in the general flow of society, the Dos Passos hero does not remain a "wax figure" in a show window. He is on the contrary individualized because of his distinctive qualities and by the profundity of his awareness of the environment around.

Dos Passos belongs to the generation of Hemingway, Faulkner, Farrell, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, who made the Twenties
and Thirties a nostalgic era in American fiction. To revive and resuscitate the past, the social rebels come closest to Dos Passos's outlook on life. The social rebel deliberately softens the contours of his introspective and narrow self, and willingly joins the antagonistic world-order, with a hope to establish a redeemed society. Expressing his hope for a better society and his faith in social rebels, Dos Passos writes:

The mind cannot support moral chaos for long. Men are under as strong a compulsion to invent an ethical setting for their behavior as spiders are to weave themselves webs. New cosmogonies are continually being rebuilt out of the ruins of past systems. Somehow, like the degenerate last Romans, who had forgotten the art of turning Columns and had to use the debris of old temples to build Christian basilicas with, we have to improvise at least enough of an edifice out of the fallen dogmas of the past to furnish a platform from which to rebuild the society we live in.7

The social rebel is a dynamic figure, always on the move, his life being a continuous progression towards an affirmative goal. He hopes that the damaged institutions may yet be repaired and that one may yet root out corruption and selfishness from the human heart and that the individual integrity and sovereignty be restored.

The present study, therefore, may help to remove the allegation that Dos Passos the clairvoyant experimenter has failed in the art of characterization. The critical reception accorded to Dos Passos has always been characterized by mixed
feelings of admiration and censure. The pulls and pressures from the different schools of critics seem to have mutilated the facts and hampered an objective assessment. Granville Hicks, Malcolm Cowley and other critics of the Thirties with a leftist orientation attempt to drag Dos Passos into the Marxist fold; Charles Chid Walcutt, John Lydenberg, John William Ward apply the naturalistic perspective; David Sanders, Chester E. Eisenger point out that Dos Passos's shift from the Left to the Right is the natural outcome of his basic philosophic anarchism; Martin Kallich and Blanche H. Gelfant attempt to make psychological probings. Where this whole gamut of approaches creates confusion and hinders an objective assessment, it also indirectly reflects the versatile and enigmatic genius of Dos Passos. It implies that Dos Passos does "tease us out of thought." Another reason for the critics' inadequate assessment of Dos Passos's characterization is the fact that very few have tried to determine the nature and extent of his characterization while taking the entire range of his novels as their province. The novels which appeared after U.S.A. are cursorily alluded to and hurriedly dropped with the cliché that after U.S.A., Dos Passos was a spent-up force. A slightly sympathetic critic may extend a hesitant praise to Midcentury.
Nonetheless, Dos Passos's prominence among the novelists of the Thirties and Forties has never been questioned. He was the recipient of John Simon Guggenheim Memorial fellowship in 1939 and 1940, Gold Medal for fiction in 1957, Italy's Feltrinelli award for narrative work in 1967. On the occasion when Dos Passos was awarded the Gold Medal for fiction by the National Institute of Arts and Letters, Faulkner, himself a Nobel Laureate, paid a crisp but glowing tribute, "Nobody deserved it more or had to wait for it longer." What Faulkner says about Dos Passos the writer, also holds good for his art of characterization. It goes without saying that the Dos Passos hero does not rise to the tragic stature of a great mythical hero, but he does epitomize the genius and sensibility of an era and envisions the aspirations of an era yet to come. The genius of Dos Passos lies not in how his characters appear when compared with those of Hemingway or Faulkner but how appropriately they serve his needs within the structure of the novel he intended.
To study the phenomenon of initiation, Mordecai Marcus classifies "Initiation" into three types, tentative, uncompleted and decisive initiations. I find the tentative and uncompleted divisions congenial for my purpose.

Mordecai Marcus, "What is an Initiation Story?" Critical Approaches to Fiction, p. 201.


Ibid., p. 8.

Jean-Paul Sartre, Literary and Philosophical Essays, p. 96.

loc. cit.

Streets of Night, p. 88.


Quoted from The Fourteenth Chronicle, p. 572.