INTRODUCTION

PROLOGUE

Dos Passos's stylistic innovations and his role as a social historian have been exhaustively studied, widely recognized and justly lauded. To say something more on these aspects of Dos Passos shall be to show one's mastery over the obvious. On the other hand, he has been unjustly disparaged for his art of characterisation. This study is an attempt to consider and evaluate Dos Passos's creation of characters. For the purposes of economy and compactness, the attention has been chiefly focused on the heroes of Dos Passos because here his art of characterisation appears to be at its best. In this investigation the female fictional characters and the interspersed historical biographies will not be taken up for detailed analysis and will figure in the study only where they are necessary for understanding and building up the case for the male fictional characters.

An examination of the novels of Dos Passos reveals that his protagonists move and develop in a systematic and logical manner which I term the "heroic pattern." It constitutes three phases of the hero's consistent
development: Initiation — Involvement — Alienation, and bears a resemblance to the mythic hero's movement pattern of Separation — Initiation — Return, as discussed by Joseph Campbell.¹ In this study, the concept of the "heroic pattern" will help in mapping out the process of the formation of the hero's personality and his problems. During his life time, the hero undergoes three distinct stages or phases, which are defined or differentiated not by his growth in physical terms but by the experience that he gains in the process. The "heroic pattern" as outlined above shall be the main concern of the present dissertation.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. After an introductory survey of the social background and the literary tradition, the subsequent chapters deal with the application of the concept of the "heroic pattern" to Dos Passos's novels as a whole. The emphasis is not on the analysis of individual works but on the relationship of the concept to Dos Passos's vision as seen in all his novels. Chapter I on Initiation traces the adolescent's coming of age through various painful experiences. Chapters II, III and IV are focused on the secondary stage of the hero's involvement in the system as it manifests itself in the forces of war, capitalism and party politics. These forces lead to the characteristic predicament the hero finds himself faced with. In order to study Dos Passos's presentation of this predicament in depth, to each aspect of the system,
three different kinds of response from three different characters are taken into consideration. This pluralistic involvement of the characters enables the reader to see the system from three different angles. Chapter V on alienation deals with the hero's separation from his spiritual self or his estrangement from the society he lives in. The concluding chapter is an attempt to assess Dos Passos's contribution to the art of characterisation on the basis of the analysis made earlier. I suggest that his art of characterisation is in no way less marked than his other literary merits.

II

POLEMICS

Dos Passos's art of characterisation has spawned diverse and divergent views. One is likely to be baffled by the lashing censure from the partisan critics on the one hand, and lavish praise from ardent admirers on the other. Aware as we are, of the diversity of verdicts on his characterisation, our effort here shall be to rise above the purely personal and subjective considerations and study his novels objectively in the perspective from which they actually were written.
It has been alleged by most of the critics that the stylistic and technical inventiveness of Dos Passos and the accuracy of his social observation have impaired his art of characterisation. But critics like Jean-Paul Sartre, Melvin Landsberg and Arthur Mizener give a dissenting note. As early as 1929, Edmund Wilson, Dos Passos's life-long friend, appreciated his acutely sensitive social awareness reflected in Manhattan Transfer, and the deftness with which he anatomized the life in the city of New York. Wilson ranked Dos Passos with Hemingway, Wilder, and Fitzgerald, and among all the writers of his generation, Wilson reckoned him as one "who has made a systematic effort to study all the aspects of America and to take account of all its elements...."² This is high praise indeed, yet Wilson also pointed out that Dos Passos's sociological awareness and "disapproval of capitalist society"³ intrude into his characterisation. "In Manhattan Transfer", Wilson wrote, "it was not merely New York, but humanity that came off badly. Dos Passos, in exposing the diseased organism, had the effect, though not...the intention, of condemning the sufferers along with the disease; and even when he seemed to desire to make certain of his characters sympathetic, he had a way of putting them down."⁴ In 1930 again, Wilson hailed Dos Passos's new publication, The 42nd Parallel as "the most remarkable, the most encouraging American novel...."⁵
But this time, Wilson felt that Dos Passos had "been able to immerse himself in the minds and the lives of his middle-class characters, to identify himself with them...."  

Andrew Pearse criticises the sociological historian in Dos Passos and counts it a potent reason for his weak characterisation. He points out that Dos Passos's characters being the product of a rapidly changing society remain "two dimensional", whereas the static society of Jane Austen, Trollope, Turgenev and Proust produced characters with "three dimensional plastic quality." He adds, "Dos Passos' men and women are insignificant. Lacking identity and context, they do not provide material for a great novel, except in that as a group they represent the destructive world-changing march of American history, of which their vagabondage is an aspect and a condition."  

Mary McCarthy also fails to find memorable characters in the twentieth-century fiction because of the polarity and tension between, what she categorizes as the writers of sensibility and the writers of violence. However, she visualizes a possibility of strong characterization in the individual devoted to social goals, the social workers, as she calls them. She writes, "Social workers themselves have become one of the major forces in American life, the real and absolute administrators of the lives of
the poor, yet no one since Sinclair Lewis and Dos Passos has dared write of them." Notwithstanding his exploration of the new domain of social workers, Dos Passos is not included by McCarthy in her list of the masters of the art of characterisation.

Analysing U.S.A. in the naturalistic perspective, John William Ward contends that the industrialized - urban society reduces the individual to a non-entity. The all powerful social forces condition the human personality and therefore the character is made subservient to these forces. Elaborating his viewpoint on the characters in U.S.A. he adds, "There are no people in the book, only automatata walking stiffly to the beat of Dos Passos's despair...there are no individuals in American society. Dos Passos's 'hero' is USA, that monstrous abstraction, Society itself. Society is the hero -- or the villain -- of the piece." Ward suggests that the characters in U.S.A. are controlled by the gyrating or swirling forces of the metropolitan. It may pull them together, or swirl them apart or reunite them again, still they remain "shadows of environmental force." The same puppet-like movement of characters in the early novels of Dos Passos is observed by Bernard DeVoto. He recognizes Dos Passos as a great "Anatomist of our Time," and suggests that the U.S.A. trilogy is the
expression of a maturer mind which has deftly interpreted
the American life. As a clairvoyant experimenter, Dos Passos
remains consistent in the development of his stylistic
powers. DeVoto asserts that in scope and multiplicity of
Dos Passos's technical achievement, "no comparable
achievement exists in our fiction." Yet, in Three
Soldiers he finds his characters to be "mere atoms of
personality buffeted by the tremendous forces in which
they were caught," and in Manhattan Transfer "the
characters as mere filings in the great fields of force..."
not "sufficiently alive to engage our sympathies."
Examining U.S.A., DeVoto contends that because of his
"rigorous behaviourism," Dos Passos characters seem to
have undergone an intellectual and emotional atrophy. They
act like frigid, insensate human beings, "They feel no
lust and no love, nor any other of the common experiences
of mankind." In the same vein, Lydenberg finds U.S.A.
"starkly deterministic" and feels that "None of its
characters has free will, none determines his fate, all
move like automatons." Without dilating much on the
subject, Herbert J. Muller also ambiguously comments on
Dos Passos's deficient characterisation. "The chief
limitation of Dos Passos," he writes, "lies in his
characterisation. His many characters are with few
exceptions shrewdly observed, carefully individualized,
sharply projected — thoroughly life-like; but they are
never compelling." Delmore Schwartz appreciates in U.S.A. Dos Passos's avant-garde techniques, the use of Newsreel headlines, Camera Eye, and Biography. But he feels that the excessive use of these devices seems to have broken the novel into fragments and thus not only is the narrative movement hindered but the reader's interest is thwarted, too. The stylistic devices, of course, are conducive to the presentation of "truth," but Dos Passos's love for verisimilitude impairs rather than promotes his characterisation. "In Dos Passos," he comments, "there is a beautiful imaginative sympathy which permits him to get under the skin of his characters, but there is no imagination, and no Don Quixote." Schwartz probably suggests that Cervantes in the character of Don Quixote fictionalizes truth and the character grows larger than life. But Dos Passos's undue insistence on "truth" deprives his characters of the universality that the characters of Cervantes achieve. Mark Schorer praises the briskness and rapidity created in U.S.A. by the Newsreels, Camera Eyes, and the Biographies but he finds Dos Passos unable "to draw highly individualized characters. Types, yes, and great types sometimes, but fully realized and rounded characters, no."

Critics like Jean-Paul Sartre, Melvin Landsberg, Arthur Mizener have noted how Dos Passos registers with a
fine imaginative and creative verve, the marvellous relationship of the character with the values and problems of society. Sartre extolls Dos Passos as "the greatest writer of our time." He perceives in him a semblance of objectivity, a dispassionate personality presiding over his heroes. In an early essay on 1919, Sartre observes, "In the novel the dice are not loaded, for fictional man is free. He develops before our eyes; our impatience, our ignorance, our expectancy are the same as the hero's." He notices the way Dos Passos immerses his heroes in the indeterminate flux, and leaves them "free." Dos Passos treats "passions" and "gestures" of his characters as "things," and Sartre writes, "Proust analysed them, related them to former states and thereby made them inevitable. Dos Passos wants to retain only their factual nature." Sartre adds the keen remark:

"Dos Passos imposes upon us instead the unpleasant impression of an indeterminacy of detail. Acts, emotions and ideas suddenly settle within a character, make themselves at home and then disappear without his having much to say in the matter. You cannot say he submits to them. He experiences them. There seems to be no law governing their appearance."

Somewhat similar to Sartre's is the observation of Melvin Landsberg. "Dos Passos," he tells, "creates fictional people who are not only socio-political but also biological beings, their impulses interacting constantly
and dramatically. He presents numerous tragic and comic aspects of life, thus helping to give the narrative power and interest beyond that of the political theme."

Further, in the same vein he observes:

If the careers and personalites of Dos Passos' people are demonstrably influenced by social, political, and economic forces, they are not determined by these forces. On the one hand is the world, yes; but on the other hand is character. Some individuals merely drift. Others set sails to speed with the wind or to struggle against them.

Both Sartre and Landsberg appreciate in Dos Passos the art of interlacing the milieu with the character. Presenting a slice or segment of real life experience -- socio-economic or socio-political -- Dos Passos exposes his hero to the powerful forces which operate around him. In doing so, he does not wallow in mere stylistic innovations, or simply record social history; he goes beyond to examine how the milieu impinges on the individual.

Arthur Mizener ranks Dos Passos with Ben Jonson and Swift. He agrees that Dos Passos's characters are "two dimensional", "Types" or "Humors" like those of Ben Jonson or Swift. But they have been created "calculatedly and necessarily," and they reflect the author's "realized and communicated passion." With the help of the representative characters the writer is able to unveil the "permanent defects of humanity." Dos Passos's creation
of the "type" hero, Mizener believes, is an artistic necessity and Dos Passos does it wilfully. Mizener elaborates:

Around each of these heroes Dos Passos constructs his wonderfully varied, satiric representation of a segment of American society, of the business world, of the labor movement, of professional politics, of New Deal Washington. Each subordinate character fits his part in the whole by being what Jonson would have called a 'humor.' You cannot easily forget Marice Gulick or Comrade Irving Silverstone or Chuck Crawford or Herbert Spotswood; you remember them not because they seem 'real' to you but because, like Sir Epicure Mammon, they are classic representations of their types....

Being a "type," Mizener suggests, a Dos Passos character ceases to be an individual and becomes a symbol of all the men who have found themselves in similar predicaments. Yet, the hero is raised above the level of mediocre humanity by the intensity of the awareness of his predicament. The Dos Passos protagonist suffers from the "shock of recognition" of the problems and perplexities enveloping him.

It is amply clear from the whole gamut of views we have studied that most judgements have been based on the analysis of Passos's earlier novels. Strangely enough, seven of his novels written after U.S.A. have received little or no attention at all. Consequently, critics have missed much in their assessment of Dos Passos's characterisation, which therefore, can be called neither final nor comprehensive. In order to make an adequate
assessment of the Dos Passos hero, we have to take into
purview the entire range of Dos Passos's novels from
One Man's Initiation—1917 (1920) to Midcentury (1961).

Furthermore, what Dos Passos himself says about
the import and art of characterisation shall be pertinent
to my purpose here. In a review of William Rollins's
The Shadow Before, while Dos Passos was at work on
The Big Money, he proclaims the vocation of a novelist
and thereby makes his objective amply explicit. Therein
he avers:

The business of a novelist is ... to create
characters first and foremost, and then to
set them in the snarl of the human currents
of his time, so that there results an
accurate permanent record of a phase of
history. Everything in a novel that doesn't
work towards these aims is superfluous or,
at best, innocent day-dreaming. If the
novelist really creates characters that are
alive, the rest follows by implication. A
record of his time is fairly easy to establish
for any writer with the knack of honest
observation and a certain amount of narrative
skill. It's the invention of characters, which
is work of an entirely different order from the
jotting down of true-to-life silhouettes and
sketches of people, that sets the novelist
apart from the story-teller or commentator....
We hardly ever create in our fiction living and
rounded characters.

Evidently, Dos Passos rejects the traditional
notion that a novelist should begin with an arresting
plot and intently wait for the turn of characters. Rather,
a character stands before him definite and vivid, wrapped
in contemporary milieu. He vivifies and unfolds a character
by infusing into him a breath of social reality. Out of a web of seemingly disconnected incidents a story evolves and from it the characters in various situations take shape and emerge as life-like personalities. Each character appears to move in an independent orbit, yet gyrated by the same social forces. Dos Passos firmly believes that the life of a man is nothing but an environment lived. It may be an imaginatively created environment as in the Romances of Hawthorne or Melville or an environment determined by history and society as in the novels of Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Farrell, and Dos Passos himself. This primary but eternal ecological relationship becomes the basis of his characterisation. The matter does not end here. Sinclair Lewis reckons the inevitable relationship of environment and character in "The American Scene in Fiction." He contends:

The scene of a story is the environment affecting the character, and that scene, the fact that it is chill or tropic, rustic or boilingly urban, voluptuous or ironed with poverty, brisk with State Street efficiency or creeping like a Wiltshire village, is much a part of the protagonist's character and development as his heart.31

He adds:

Somewhere between the extremists who desire characters to float in chaos and those who try to adorn their conventional tales with a new setting, as a cigarette manufacturer adorns his undistinguishable wares with a new slogan, is the wise realm that recognizes the value of the scene without trading on it.32
In his Stockholm address on December 12, 1930, while receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature, Sinclair Lewis expressed his hope that the American novel will come out of the "stiffness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism," and pointed out Dos Passos as one of the budding, promising writers in that direction.

### III

**BACKGROUND: SOCIAL — HISTORICAL — LITERARY**

In the foregoing pages it has been noticed that a Dos Passos character registers the flow and flux of society and seems to drift on the "snarl of human currents of his time." That Dos Passos's genius is essentially sociological and historical makes it all the more imperative to study the social, historical and literary milieu vis-a-vis his heroes.

Appreciating Dos Passos's art of encompassing the rapidly changing social forces, Granville Hicks writes, "No American novelist has written more directly about change, the great social changes, the characteristic and revolutionary changes of the twentieth century, than Dos Passos." The social milieu in Dos Passos work, especially early fiction, is fluid, swiftly changing, giving rise to a swirl of events, a kaleidoscopic movement
of various vignettes. The narrative part, therefore, does not necessarily develop chronologically. More often than not, the hero remains a cynosure amidst the social conglomerations. Alfred Kazin substantiates Granville Hicks's view by saying, "What Dos Passos wants to capture more than anything else is the echo of what people were actually saying, exactly in the style in which anyone might have said it. The artistic aim of his book \textit{U.S.A.}, one may say, is to represent the litany, the tone, the issue of the time in the voice of the time, the banality, the cliché that finally brings home to us the voice in the crowd -- the voice of mass opinion." \footnote{35}

The period before the First World War showed a marked development in industrialization, technology, transportation and formation of unions. The expansion and development of new industries was indicative of a new civilization and prophetic of the developing social complexities. Monopolists amassed huge wealth and created a schism between the "haves" and "have-nots." On the one hand were the masters of America's economic expansion, railroad barons, steel emperors, oil controllers, and on the other, the knights of Labour, architects of A.F.L and other unions. The monopolists who collectively controlled approximately half of the total revenue gave rise to an offensive movement. The labour leaders zealously made an
effort to overthrow capitalism. The wave of industrialization in the pre-war America is portrayed in *The 42nd Parallel* (1930) and *Midcentury* (1961) and the dehumanizing effects of an industrialized - urban society in *Manhattan Transfer* (1925). In *The 42nd Parallel* Dos Passos covers the history of the nation from 1900-1917, the rise of big business and economic imperialism. American fin-de-siècle is reflected in *Midcentury* through the rambling reminiscences of Blackie Bowman, a protagonist.

World War I caused an upheaval in the mores and manners of the American people. It was a novel and significant experience for the American people, for it was America's first major involvement in a foreign war since American independence. The war aroused ambivalent attitudes to participation and pacifism. The first reaction to the declaration of war in Europe in 1914 was almost a unanimous desire for neutrality. People voted for Woodrow Wilson because "he kept us out of war." Later, the American people changed their stand, and so did Woodrow Wilson. War, for him, became a holy crusade. With his "bunting phrases" to make the world safe for democracy, he led America to war. The policy of isolationism was abandoned in the hysteria for War. Dos Passos's first two novels *One Man's Initiation-1917* (1920) and *Three Soldiers* (1923) are the first American novels about the First World War. War experiences are also spread over in *1919* (1932) and *The Great Days* (1958).

In the Twenties when the future appeared to be bright for a prosperous America, the Big Prosperity Bubble blew up on "Black Thursday," the 24th of October, 1929. The clouds of sudden economic collapse overcast the whole nation. Millions of investors lost their savings, thousand were forced into bankruptcy, debts mounted, purchases declined, factories cut down production, workers were retrenched and dismissed, wages and salaries slashed. The Wall Street Crash further confirmed Dos Passos's indictment of man's mad pursuit for wealth and luxury at the expense of the abiding values of life as shown in Manhattan Transfer (1925). Dos Passos has dealt with the aftermath of the Depression in The Big Money (1936). It covers the time between the years from 1920 to 1929. America's economic failure deeply strained the relation between the "haves" and "have-nots." The Adventures of a Young Man (1939) picks up the thread after The Big Money. It covers the early days of the Labour movement in U.S.A. and concludes with the Spanish Civil War. Most Likely to Succeed (1954) covers the Twenties and the Thirties. In these novels Dos Passos discerns dangers in the Communist leadership. The bickering between the
capitalists and the working class resulted in strengthening of the unions which got the government support under the Wagner Act and section 7A of the N.I.R.A. code. The concentration of power in the unions gave rise to malpractices and corruption in the unions themselves. Midcentury (1961) deals with the corruption prevalent in the local union leadership during the period, 1945-1960.

After electing Franklin D. Roosevelt, people anxiously waited for the President's fireside chat on the radio. Dos Passos describes the scene in "THE SHIP OF STATE VII" of The Grand Design (1949):

> We sit round the radio after supper to hear them, we even leave home and crowd into the ballparks and convention halls and granges and theatres to hear them promise high wages and low prices and high prices and low wages and economy in the administration and plenty of public money to spend in everybody's home state and to keep us out of war.¹³

With the President's emphatic assurances and prompt implementation of the New Deal, people hoped that the murky clouds of the Depression will disappear. But unfortunately the advent of the New Deal failed to remove the torpor of fear and hopelessness caused by the Depression. Number One (1943) covers the period between the Wall Street Crash and the advent of F.D. Roosevelt to power. It portrays the career of a demagogue who aspires to be a dictator thereby nullifying the possibility of a government
of the common man. The Grand Design (1949) is chiefly concerned with the Depression and the New Deal and ends with the outbreak of World War II. Here Dos Passos exposes the corruption, favouritism and bureaucratic inertia in the government machinery. Collectively, the District of Columbia trilogy presents a large section of the political history of the United States approximately from the early Thirties to the early Forties.

In the "watershed" of the Nineties are born the literary giants of American fiction, namely, Elliot Paul (b.1891), Pearl S. Buck (b.1892), John P. Marquand (b.1893), John Dos Passos (b.1896), F. Scott Fitzgerald (b.1896), William Faulkner (b.1897), Ernest Hemingway (b.1898), Thomas Wolfe (b.1900), John Steinbeck (b.1902), James T. Farrell (b.1904). The writers born in the last decade of the nineteenth century were coming of age in the exciting days of World War I and the post-war era. As Dos Passos is a prominent member of this group, a brief survey of the literary background from the turn of the century onward should be useful.

The great American writers in the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, were brought up on the genteel sentimentalism of the gilded age. These writers viewed the problem of the American individual as one of defining selfhood, and in the process they sought ways and means of suggesting fresh areas of perception and
insight into the human condition. The work of diverse writers, such as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Henry Adams and Henry James was bound together by the common theme of the ethical centrality of the individual within a set-up over which he had but a pitifully limited control of action. The four characteristic books of the last decade of transition of the nineteenth century and of the first decade of the twentieth century, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907) all dramatise the theme of the education of the American individual through experience. Though these works differ from one another in the values they project and in the perception of the social reality they depict, they are unanimous in their emphasis on experience as the dynamic of a higher awareness and understanding of life.

During and after World War I, there came into being a new cycle of literary growth and maturity. Hemingway and Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe, Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, James T. Farrell, Dos Passos and John Steinbeck, had all established themselves as major talents in American fiction. One group of writers among them was more concerned with the facts of experience, which found articulation in forms organic to their substance.
Others strained experience into the predetermined patterns of aesthetic form; for them mere experience had no meaning or significance. A naturalist such as Dreiser entered a phase of mysticism which had already been implicit in his humanistic compassion. Sinclair Lewis discovered that his satirical, and somewhat sentimental, small-town-characters were being quickly absorbed into the textures of the popular imagination. Faulkner was stripping life to its forms and deflecting the forces of naturalism into the complex elaborations of a neo-Gothic form. Hemingway, on the other hand, was reducing the experience of society in its dramatic moments of individual intensity in which the absurd and the sublime were held in austere balance. In the works of Faulkner and Hemingway, the propelling energy was that of a total sense of form operating on a total sense of life.

Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Dos Passos, Farrell and Steinbeck, are all the chroniclers of contemporary life, documenting in detail, or forging and discovering its inherent patterns, or isolating the patterns of life, in order to vivify the experience of existence. To them, experience is essentially social. These writers present the ambiguities and dilemmas, the pains of involvement and the pangs of estrangement within the individual's social
consciousness. Their novels dramatise the development, the change, the adjustment, the transformation of their heroes as American types. They deal with the metamorphic elements in human character in terms of forceful images and symbols drawn particularly from the American urban environment. Farrell and Dos Passos demonstrate a more positive sense of commitment to ideas and ideals, since they are solidly entrenched in the world of fact. Their trilogies are epic frescoes of American society, rich in documentation and vibrant with radical idealism. Farrell applies the naturalistic technique to the harsh conditions that marked the sprawling American slums. Dos Passos dramatises the dislocation and fragmentation of the individual as well as of society. In his novels, the human sensibility is presented in its disintegrating aspect as a dissolving congeries of ephemeral historical sensations. The hero wages his battles in the very heart of society.

The novels of Dos Passos are neither the annals of the life of a hero nor the factual records of the historian but the dovetailing of the hero and the flux, the frenzy, the confusion of American society. Dos Passos aptly points out the urgency of interweaving the times with the fictional men, in the words, "first rate writing must always add something to man’s knowledge of himself, of
man's behavior when he runs in packs, of the world around him." His palpable design aspires beyond history to encompass the complexities of a real life. Silhouetting against the turgid socio-political environment, Dos Passos makes his hero welter in the issues that flow past him and over him. In his article "The Workman and his Tools," Dos Passos points to the moral and practical responsibilities of the writer in relation to the fast-changing thoughts and mores of society. He tells the largely communist-minded audience that, "In times of rapid change when terms are continually turning inside out and the names of things hardly keep their meaning from day to day, it's not possible to write two honest paragraphs without stopping to take crossbearings on every one of the abstractions that were so well arranged in ornate marble niches in the minds of our fathers." Thus, with great acumen Dos Passos presents the picture of the societal flow, with an equal focus on the heroes who drift along with the current. Being a sociological historian, he deliberately avoids delineating the predilections and idiosyncrasies of an individual. Herbert McLuhan in his famous essay "Technique vs. Sensibility" puts the cart before the horse when he says, "The author [Dos Passos] is sensitive to the ugliness and misery as things he can see. But he is never prepared to explore the interior landscape which is the wasteland of the human heart." Not to give psychological probings
to his characters is an artistic strategy with Dos Passos. It is more of a denial than a lack of genius or talent on his part. As a committed author, Dos Passos believes that a novelist cannot play his role adequately by looking inward and exploring his own consciousness. Rather, he takes cognizance of the predominant forces at work in society and endeavours to realise them within his imaginative vision. "For Dos Passos," observes Andrew Hook, "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.'"*41 Dos Passos indicts Fitzgerald for his crack-up articles published in Esquire where the latter endeavours to probe into the individual's consciousness. He wonders how Fitzgerald could afford "time in the middle of the general conflagration to worry about all that stuff? to probe into the individual's consciousness."42 In the same letter, he points out that "We're living in one of the damnest tragic moments in history,"43 and advises Fitzgerald to write "a first rate" novel about the contemporary catastrophic times. Dos Passos suggests that if a novelist dilates on the individual's consciousness, he runs the risk of obfuscating the objective reality around.
IV

THE DESCENT OF THE HERO

The interest in the hero has survived the ravages of time. Generation gaps widen, life styles change, fads and folk fancies develop or decline, the hero too varies in character, but the interest in the hero is perennial. Victor Brombert gives a convincing reason for this:

"...so long as man projects an image of himself in myth and art, so long as he somehow tries to justify this image or to deplore it, the notion of the hero is certain to stay alive.... The very concept of man is bound up with that of the hero." Although the mythic hero has petered out into the unheroic modern hero, with his stature shrunk from the titanic to the puny, yet the essential characteristics remained the same throughout the ages. Furthermore, despite this diminutive transformation, character in a novel is still considered as the pivot upon which the entire superstructure revolves. For Charles Child Walcott, character is the sumnum bonum of a novel. Rejecting Aristotle's concept that in a tragedy character is less important than plot, he categorically considers character to be the "axis" or "hub" of a novel. Agreeing with modern critics, he acutely observes, "With character the hub, they [modern critics] would suggest that various wheels of action could turn about that hub, their several
planes revealing different dimensions of the character or realizing different potentials. The assumption is that character is source and motive and cause of what happens.45

Critics, such as, Victor Brombert, Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell have lucidly traced the descent of the warrior hero into the modern unheroic hero. To the descent problem of the hero, Victor Brombert suggests three stances: with the supernatural; with the society or the "group;" and with the self.46 The supernatural stance is generally applied to the mythical or medieval hero. It involves hero's confrontation with the supernatural or atemporal powers of gods, fairies or monsters. The mythical hero is a master of prodigious physical prowess, endowed with superior gifts of head, heart and hand. Differing from other men in the degree of his power or divine talent, the hero sets on his quest, and gets involved in the supernatural powers. Cedric H. Whitman finds that "a surprising majority of Greek heroes stride grimly into ruin,"47 and thus conform to the typically Greek notion of the tragic hero. Aptly epitomizing the Greek hero's relationship to the supernatural powers, Victor Brombert writes, "At his best the ancient hero had something of the divine in him. God, demigod, godlike, or intimate with the gods, he provides a transzendental link between the contingencies of the finite and the imagined realm of the supernatural. Time and the timeless, man's mortal state and the realm of eternal laws,
were brought through him into conflict with each other.\textsuperscript{48}

In the medieval times, which witnessed a shift from the pagan to the Christian vision of the world, the rise of feudalism, courtly life and a complex class structure, the mythical hero was replaced by a chivalrous knight hero. The romantic knight displays a feat of arms, loyalty to the ruler and fidelity to his lady love. Like the mythical hero, he too undertakes an arduous quest which brings him into the atemporal realms of the supernatural forces. The mythical hero's movement is motivated by destiny and he is constantly under the vigilant supervision of a god or goddess. The knight errant, on the other hand, is not guided by a supernatural power or at least he is not conscious of it. The knight's quest is a series of aimless wanderings "in search of an object which usually seems increasingly vague even to him."\textsuperscript{49}

G.W.F. Hegel in \textit{The Philosophy of Fine Art} elucidates how the social heroic stance has become indispensable in modern times. He asserts that the changing socio-ethical values leave little scope for the ancient or traditional hero to grow up. The cataclysmic changes demand the hero to be the representative of society. Summing up his viewpoint Hegel writes, "it is true that under the present condition of the civilized world a man may act independently for himself in many directions, the fact remains that in
whatever direction he may turn he is still only a member of a fixed order of society and appears as such limited in his range rather than the vital representative and individual embodiment of society itself." An individual's freedom or ideology in the rapidly changing times is likely to come into clash with the social, political, economic and legal forces of society. An individual struggles against the legalized fabric to establish his uniqueness. His victory or defeat helps define the acceptance or rejection of the social conventions. He "thus fights paradoxically against a social order and for society."  

The third heroic stance, the hero's relation with the self, involves psychological and philosophical implications. The modern age characterized by machine, technology and rational and secular attitudes, has jeopardized the very existence of man. The ideas of Darwin, Freud, Jung, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have awakened the modern individual to the meaninglessness of his life. Under such disparate influences the hero's relation with the self has become of paramount importance. The heroic stance to the self is manifested in a disintegrated personality -- a split between thought and action -- resulting in unheroism. The "existential" protagonists of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Kafka amply exemplify the hero's
relation to the self. Convincingly tracing the decline of the mythical hero into the modern unheroic hero, Joseph Campbell writes:

...the democratic ideal of the self-determining individual, the invention of the power-driven machine, and the development of the scientific method of research, have so transformed human life that the long-inherited, timeless universe of the symbols has collapsed. In the fateful, epoch-announcing words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra: 'Dead are all the gods!'. One knows the tale; it has been told a thousand ways. It is the hero-cycle of the modern age, the wonder-story of mankind's coming to maturity. The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes. The dream-web of myth fell away; the mind opened to full waking consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night.

It is not only that there is no hiding place for the gods from the searching telescope and microscope; there is no such society any more as the gods once supported. The social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization. Its ideals are not those of the hieratic pantomime, making visible on earth the forms of heaven, but of the secular state, in hard and unremitting competition for material supremacy and resources.

Supporting Joseph Campbell's contention regarding the descent of the modern unheroic hero from the mythical hero, is Sean O'Faolin's observation on "the virtual disappearance from fiction of that focal character of the classical novel, the conceptual hero."

The potential argument of Arthur Miller, Northrop Frye, Marshall W. Fishwick, G.W.F. Hegel and their school is that the hero should be society-oriented. Arthur Miller,
in the introduction to his collection of plays gives a sociological interpretation for the transformation of the Greek tragic hero into the common man tragic hero, which he believes, is equally valid and profound. The ancient tragic hero could belong only to the higher "ranks" as the only other rank was of the slaves. The slaves were "divested of alternatives" and could not be portrayed as heroes. But in modern times, he argues, "There is a legitimate question of stature...but none of rank, which is so often confused with it. So long as the hero may be said to have had alternatives of a magnitude to have materially changed the course of his life, it seems to me that in this respect at least, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role." Pointing out the disappearance of the difference in ranks, he writes:

It matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president if the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course is less than the maximum possible. It matters not at all whether the hero falls from a great height or a small one, whether he is highly conscious or only dimly aware of what is happening, whether his pride brings the fall or an unseen pattern written behind clouds; if the intensity, the human passion to surpass his given bounds, the fanatic insistence upon his self-conceived role....

Dos Passos, too, is well aware of the transformation of the ancient mythic hero into the grimacing, disillusioned, insecure, common man as the hero, who adequately and supremely answers to Marshall W. Fishwick's primary requisite
of a hero, "Heroes must act their ages." Victor Brombert calls the relationship of the individual and society as the "social heroic stance." Frye categorises this as the "low mimetic mode." This categorisation is most valid and congenial for the study of the Dos Passos hero. Dos Passos the zeitgeist makes his hero the vehicle by which to vivisect the milieu. Therefore, in this study care has been taken to keep to the sociological perspective.

V

THE HEROIC PATTERN

Granting that the Dos Passos hero is the projection or register of the flux and flow of society, it will be neither ambitious nor fatuous to suggest for the Dos Passos hero a movement pattern of Initiation — Involvement — Alienation on the analogy of the mythical hero's movement pattern of Separation — Initiation — Return.  

Initiation

The word "Initiation" carries a two-fold meaning. In the general sense it conveys the meaning of "the act, process or an instance of beginning, setting on foot, or originating: the condition of being begun." In its
restricted sense, it involves anthropological or sociological connotations. In the anthropological sense, it denotes the rites of passage from adolescence to maturity prevalent in primitive cultures. The initiatory rites consist of an ordeal or ordeals which put to test the initiate's physical endurance and fidelity to the tribe, clan or community. A definition for fictional initiation has been evolved on the basis of the anthropological implications. In order to arrive at a working definition for the Dos Passos hero, it becomes necessary to take into consideration the sociological and literary concepts.

In the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, initiation is explained as: "A systematic ceremonial induction of adolescent youths into the full participation in social life is a practically universal trait of the people of simpler culture. Such practises represent efforts to rivet the youth securely to the regnant social order and are devices for the development of social cohesion." It implies that the initiate is made to pass through certain ordeals and during the process of initiation there is a loss of innocence; and the adolescent enters the adult world. The traumatic experience "rivets" the adolescent "securely to the regnant social order" and the initiate passes out as a regenerated man.
Ihab H. Hassan defines initiation as "the first existential ordeal, crisis, or encounter with experience in the life of a youth. Its ideal aim is knowledge, recognition, and confirmation in the world, to which the actions of the initiate, however painful, must tend. It is, quite simply, the viable mode of confronting adult realities." In substance or spirit Ihab Hassan's definition is close to the one given in the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences. The implication in this line of agreement is that the whole process has three distinct stages; an encounter with experience which is usually a painful one; dawning of knowledge; and the initiate's capacity and ability to confront the adult world. Mordecai Marcus suggests a definition of Initiation which sounds like a synthesis of the various definitions given by Joseph Campbell, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Adrian H. Jaffe and Virgil Scott, Albert J. Guerard, etc. "An initiation story," Marcus points out, "may be said to show its young protagonist a significant change of knowledge about the world or himself, or a change of character, or of both, and this change must point or lead him towards an adult world. It may or may not contain some form of ritual, but it should give some evidence that the change is at least likely to have permanent effects." The operative part of the definition is the attainment of
knowledge which leaves an indelible impression on the
mind of the adolescent, and leads him to the adult world.
Most definitions, as we analyse them, seem to emphasize
the painful experience that the adolescent has to undergo
as a part of his emotional and mental schooling that was
not a part of his pre-initiatory existence. Henceforth,
there is a primary movement into something, in this case,
the adult society.

Initiation which normally takes place during adolescence
receives sufficient treatment in Dos Passos's novels. His
fictional world is essentially youth-oriented and Dos Passos
reveals a prodigious insight into the dynamic processes
of adolescence. His hero makes a painful transition from
adolescence to maturation by undergoing the trauma of
family disorganization, lack of conducive education, sexual
laxity and war. The adolescent goes through one or more
than one of the four painful experiences at a time.
Subsequently he gains knowledge, sheds the childhood notions
or illusions, and finds an ingress into the adult world.
To admit the metamorphosized adolescent into the "regnant
social order," journey remains the invariable mode. Travel,
in a way, is a kind of mobility which also signifies
liberation from old bondages or associations and involvement
into new possibilities. Initiation in Dos Passos means the
encounter of the hero with a painful experience or a series
of experiences, in which he is forced to shed his infantile cathexes or illusions and with the new knowledge he gains in the process, he is admitted into an adult world.

Involvement

Having gone through the process of initiation, the adolescent is transplanted to a new stage of development, a full-fledged adulthood. The childhood docility, dependence and naive notions vanish and he is initiated into the system, the world-order. The system manifests itself in the form of war, capitalism, and party politics, which invariably takes an antagonistic posture. Making his hero the chief vehicle, Dos Passos indicts the institutionalized power and thereby attempts to define his hero's social identity and basic sovereignty. In order to determine the essential nature of the hero, Campbell analyses a great many legends and fairy tales. The broad conclusion that he forms is that the hero whenever he appears, and in whatever age, is invariably faced with the problem of overcoming evil so that good may flourish. In the mythical stories that he narrates the evil often assumes the shape of a dragon or a monster or some formidable obstacle which is overpowered by the hero. In the case of fictive movement, Dos Passos's society with its multifarious problems and complexities takes the form of a legendary monster; it is the villain of the piece. Against this monster is pitted a set of three different characters operating in
the same sphere and providing a pluralistic view of the system: the hero who gropes for material success and happiness, consciously or unconsciously chooses to abide by the dictates of the system, and barters away the abiding values of life for the sake of ulterior considerations; the hero who seeks meaning in the morass of problems and banalities that surround him, is gradually disenchanted with the system, and revolts against it; and the hero who rejects the system but does not enter into a conflict, and observes and acts as chorus or a commentator. All the three kinds of heroes get involved in the system. As the involvement of each of them is on a different level, the reader is provided with a panoramic view of the system.65

Alienation

In American literature alienation has become an archetypal theme. There is hardly an individual to whom the term is not applicable and in the fields of knowledge there is hardly a school which has not interpreted it to its own purposes. Consequently, there is a plethora of interpretations from the fields of theology, philosophy, psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, history, economics, political science, education and literature. Observing "images of disintegration, decay and despair"66 in modern culture, Kenneth Keirston comments that essentially our
age is "not of commitment but of alienation."67 Walter Kaufmann admits that "alienation is an elliptical term"68 and suggests, "What comes to my mind most often when we hear of alienation is estrangement from other men -- usually from one's society. If anything at all could be said to be alienation par excellence, this would be it."69 Donald Oken offers a useful working definition: "Let us consider that alienation represents a sense of estrangement from other human beings, from society and its values, and from the self -- particularly from those parts of the self that link it to others, and to society at large."70 All three kinds of Dos Passos's heroes suffer from alienation depending upon the nature of their involvement in the system. The commentator acts as a spectator of society and his is therefore the direct estrangement. The other two kinds of alienation are spiritual alienation and social alienation. Spiritual alienation is an estrangement from one's psyche or the abiding values of life. In the development of the hero there may be an advancement in the social status but there shall be a corresponding moral or spiritual decadence. Thus, the hero is weaned away from his own psyche and though materially a victor he is vanquished from within. Social alienation means the hero's estrangement or separation from the system because of the incompatibility between the
demands of the system and his personal convictions. It may be a severance from the social periphery into realms undefined or a culmination into death. In the repudiation of the system the hero is destroyed but he is not defeated.

Summing up, it is clear that while many critics have commented on the characterisation of Dos Passos, no full length study has so far been made of this aspect. Furthermore, both in books and periodicals, no detailed critical discussion has been done of the seven Dos Passos novels which followed U.S.A. So far, only three critical works -- J.W. Wrenn's, John Dos Passos (1961), John D. Brantley's The Fiction of John Dos Passos (1968), and Melvin Landsberg's Dos Passos' Path to U.S.A. (1973) have appeared in English. In order to trace the various stages of the hero's development, the present study aims at examining Dos Passos's novels in toto. All his novels from One Man's Initiation-1917 (1920) to Midcentury (1961), have been taken as one unit. As a consequence, the chronological approach has been abandoned because it generally obstructs the wider and varied range of study which otherwise is possible. Since the characters reflect the social flux and its changing currents, in the main, the relevance of sociological approach has been acknowledged. With "heroic pattern" as the leitmotif, an attempt has been made to revamp the role of Dos Passos's male fictional characters.
Having examined a large number of quest myths, Joseph Campbell sums up the basic movement pattern of the mythic hero:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero’s sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again -- if the powers have remained unfriendly to him -- his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).


40

3 Ibid., p. 431.

4 loc. cit.

5 Wilson, "Dahlberg, Dos Passos and Wilder," The Shores of Light, p. 430.

6 Ibid., p. 447.


10 Ibid., p. 123.


12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 Ibid., p. 3.

14 Ibid., p. 4.

15 Ibid., p. 13.

17 Herbert J. Muller, Modern Fiction: A Study of Values


21 Ibid., p. 89.

22 Ibid., p. 91.

23 loc. cit.


27 Ibid., p. 47.

28 Ibid., p. 47.

29 Ibid., p. 51.


32 Ibid., p. 143.


36 Geographically, the 42nd Parallel is a latitudinal line along which American climate travels from West to East. In the novel also it is an imaginary track along which most of Dos Passos characters travel. Melvin Landsberg points out how the title seems symbolically "to refer to the waves of populist discontent and labor rebellion which brought the spectre of free silver to New York and spread rumors of social revolution in Lawrence, Cambridge, and Boston."

Melvin Landsberg, op.cit., p. 187.


39 Ibid., p. 8.


43 Ibid., p. 488.


Brombert, *op. cit.*, p. 11.


Joseph Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 387


Ibid., p. 33.

That Dos Passos is aware of the common man as an equally viable specimen for a hero is suggested in a conversation between John Andrews, a protagonist in *Three Soldiers* and his friend Henslowe. The two friends are relaxing at a cafe table in Paris and converse:

"And I'm going to every blooming concert . . . Colonnes—Lamoureux on Sunday, I know that . . . The only evil in the world is not to be able to hear music or to make it. . . . These oysters are fit for Lucullus."

"Why not say fit for John Andrews and Bob Henslowe, damn it? . . . Why the ghosts of poor old dead Romans should be dragged in every time a man eats an oyster, I don't see. We're as fine specimens as they were. I swear I shan't let any old turned-to-dlay Lucullus outlive me, even if I've never eaten a lamprey."
Northrop Frye contends that fiction can be classified according to the hero's "power of action" and not by applying ethical codes. He tabulates five types of heroes: the mythic hero, the hero of romance, the hero of high mimetic mode, the hero of low mimetic mode and the hero belonging to the ironic mode. He suggests that the stature of the hero is defined while placed in comparison to other men and environments. In the hero of "low mimetic mode" and the hero belonging to "the ironic mode" notable supreme qualities of the first three types of heroes vanish. But hero's essential response and relationship with other men and environments remain. In the light of this categorization, Frye demarcates the descent of the hero during the last fifteen centuries.


59 Like the mythic hero, the Dos Passos hero undergoes the three stages of movement or development. Needless to say that the Dos Passos hero does not undertake the titanic assignment of the legendary hero. Although in the case of the Dos Passos hero the order of the movement is not strictly adhered to, yet the three terms more or less retain their original meaning. "Separation" is synonymous with "alienation," "Return" tends to imply "involvement" and "Initiation" denotes the initiatory ordeals from adolescence to maturity.


63 Mordecai Marcus, "What is an Initiation Story?" *Critical Approaches to Fiction*, ed. Shiv K. Kumar and Keith McKeen, p. 204.
The antagonistic posture of society is explained by Fanshaw to his friend, Wenny in Streets of Night. "It's just this fearful environment we have to live down, the narrowness of our families, our bringing up, the moral code and all that. The people of the Renaissance were great because they lived in a great period. . . ."


John D. Brantley, in The Fiction of John Dos Passos, has pointed out five patterns of relationship between the individual and the "machine" and contends that "these patterns determine the structure of the novel."


Ibid., p. 4.

Ibid., p. xxii.