

**Failed Idealism and Father-Son Relationship**  
**in John Dos Passos's *The Adventures of a Young Man***

MISUGI Keiko

ジョン・ドス・パソスの『ある若者の冒険』における  
理想主義の失敗と父－息子の関係性

三 杉 圭 子

## Abstract

*The Adventures of a Young Man* is John Dos Passos's eighth novel, published in 1938 just after the completion of his major work, the *U.S.A.* trilogy (1938). The narrative recounts the life of labor movement organizer, Glenn Spotswood. The protagonist's life evolves into a series of failures, driven by impractical idealism embedded in an inherited morality from his father. Rooted in his ambivalent relationship with his father, Glenn's social ambition is thwarted because of his awkward allegiance to his moral conscience. He grows more uncompromising to follow his inherited tendencies, as if to disapprove of his father's concession to social mores, while harboring the contradictory wishes to remain a mother's boy and become a patriarch of his family. Moreover, misgivings for his family's social class complicates an identity Glenn cultivates as a member of the working class. Finally, even as Glenn is largely dependent on speeches to disseminate his beliefs, an inability to articulate an authentic experience exacerbates his incompetence. Glenn's accumulation of missteps and disappointments results in his dying alone as a nobody. In a final analysis, the protagonist's weakness is analogue to that of the novel itself. A sense of predestination looms over Glenn's fate that circumscribes the development of the novel as well. In his major works, Dos Passos was capable of identifying what is lacking in modern war, the metropolis, or the nation, which *The Adventures of a Young Man* fails to do.

**Keywords:** John Dos Passos, *The Adventures of a Young Man*, father-son relationship, idealism

## 要 旨

『ある若者の冒険』においてジョン・ドス・パソスは主人公グレン・スポッツウッドの短い生涯を綴っている。グレンは労働者に組合加盟を働きかけ、彼らの生活改善に情熱を傾けているがその人生は失敗の連続である。彼には父から譲り受けた強固な倫理観がある。しかし父から受け継いだ資質は最終的にグレンを不毛な死に導いてしまう。父自身、自らの理想主義のために実社会では成功しなかった。父－息子の関係性は複雑で、父からの継承はグレンにとって両義的である。グレンは父から強い倫理観とともに男らしさの規範を受け継ぎつつも、父に対する競争心や復讐心さえ抱いていると考えられる。また父が持つ知識階級としての自負心はグレンの労働者階級への共感や献身と対立し、彼の自己同一性を曖昧なものにする。グレンの秀でた話術もまた父親譲りであるが、常套句や自発性を失った彼の言葉は真実を伝えることができない。倫理的憤怒や非力な言葉への依存という主人公の弱点は本作の文学上の欠陥と呼応する結果となっている。

**キーワード:** ジョン・ドス・パソス、『ある若者の冒険』、父－息子の関係性、理想主義

*The Adventures of a Young Man* is John Dos Passos's eighth novel, published in 1938 after the completion of his major work, the *U.S.A.* trilogy (1938)—consisting of *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* (1930), *Nineteen Nineteen* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936). Released as the first of the author's second trilogy, *District of Columbia*, and followed by *Number One* (1943) and *The Grand Design* (1949), this novel is his first to employ a straightforward narrative technique concentrating on a single protagonist since his debut novel *One Man's Initiation: 1917* published in 1920. Through *The Adventures of a Young Man*, we follow the life story of a labor movement organizer, Glenn Spotswood, who is driven by his uneasy relationship with his father, to die a sudden though not unexpected death at about thirty years old. In this paper, I will discuss how Glenn fails to live up to his idealism, inherited from his father Herbert Spotswood, while his relationship to his father remains nothing but ambivalent to Glenn himself.

The novel starts with a recounting of Glenn's childhood, introduces the theme of parental influence, and moves onto his college days and involvement in a labor movement. Glenn then becomes a member of the Communist Party, while working as a labor organizer under the name Sandy Crockett. As he comes to voice his distrust of Party strategies, however, he is expelled from the Party and dies a solitary, anonymous death contrived by the Communist International in the Spanish Civil War. When ostracized by the Communist Party, Glenn thinks of how he forsook his youthful wish to become a zoologist to make him who he has become, and wonders if it is on account of "moral indignation" and "the gift of gab" that he has inherited from his father (220). That is, the son's strong sense of morality and talent for public speaking are hereditary, and thereby inescapable. To explore this notion, I will examine Glenn's moral conscience as a secularized version of his father Herbert's concept of the "Christian Gentleman," as well as analyze Glenn's desire to become a patriarch to fulfill his manliness as his father expects.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I will explore Glenn's ambiguous identity which fluctuates between his father's claim to the "professional" class and his own compassion for the working class. Glenn's dependence upon ineffectual language becomes enmeshed in words as stilted as those of Herbert. Ultimately, *The Adventures of a Young Man* renders the disintegration of Glenn's idealism, formulated in the complex relationship between father and son.

The novel received scathing attacks from leftist critics for its ideological defection, as Glenn's political turn synchronizes with Dos Passos's own. At the same time, the novel suffers from literary flaws, making it difficult to deny the decline of the author's creativity. Even as Dos Passos kept

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1 Glenn's anxiety about his masculinity may be echoing Dos Passos's own uncertainty about his manliness as a writer before his father. I have discussed elsewhere that Dos Passos seems compelled to prove his masculinity before his father, who was a prominent lawyer. Born as an illegitimate son, Dos Passos could not live with his father, who was loving but physically absent, until his parents officially married. See Misugi, "John Dos Passos's Early War Novels and the Question of Manliness."

publishing to the end of his life, his genius is typically recognized as peaking with his first trilogy. Lacking in aesthetic distance from the subject in *The Adventures of a Young Man*, the supposed narrative of youthful adventurer suggested by the title backfires, and instead, renders “bitter judgement of middle age,” as Malcom Cowley puts it (Maine 207). John Aldridge, in a similar vein, argues that the novel is “little more than a case history of one man’s experiences in the labor movement” (80), and “all that remains is a listless and heartsick negation” (66). Moreover, George Becker assesses that “[t]he whole novel is obviously controlled by polemic purpose,” and the protagonist is “a wooden and unconvincing figure” (86). *The Adventures of a Young Man* fails to enhance the literary reputation the author earned through his earlier works. And yet, it is worth discussing the inefficacy of Glenn’s idealism in the context of the novel’s father-son relationship in order to understand his characteristic behaviors and his frame of mind.

Throughout the novel, Glenn struggles, and loses, in his efforts to help the working class. His sympathy for workers first emerges during his Midwestern college days, when he spends a summer among migrant workers in Milwaukee. After transferring to Columbia University, he begins to attend socialist meetings, associating himself with radical activists. Partly spurred by lovelessness, Glenn then decides to “offer himself, his brain and his muscle, everything he had in him, to the revolutionary working class” (105). The course of his life, however, continues to be full of frustrations. When starting a banking job in Texas to meet financial needs, he becomes involved in a Mexican pecan shellers’ strike, only to leave the town at a critical moment. Back in New York, he joins the Communist Party, which sends him to help miners organize for strikes in the South. He joins a striker’s rally which is followed by a physical clash between the strikers and the mining company that causes some casualties. He is arrested along with the local miners including Pearl Napier, whom he has befriended. But bailed out by the Party, he tours as a speaker who represents a living witness of the violent conflict. Several miners, falsely arrested for murder during the commotion, however, are imprisoned, and eventually Napier is killed in an attempt to escape from the prison. Linda W. Wagner, thus, bluntly points to the ill effects that “[Glenn] Spotswood’s ‘hope’ is genuine; but his actions are, ultimately, ineffectual. Worse, they harm others” and that “the result of Spotswood’s ‘help’ is death” with Napier (118). Finally dismissed from the Party, Glenn becomes a minor activist for a splinter group in the Midwest, and when nothing comes of his endeavors to help the workers in his country, he volunteers to help fight the Fascists in Spain.

In order to examine the nature of Glenn’s actions, we may first notice that it is not so much political conviction as it is moral sentiment that propels the character’s deeds. When trying to help the imprisoned coal miners, Glenn professes to a colleague, “‘After all, this wasn’t a political issue’” (201). Though he finishes this line by adding, “‘it was a matter of civil rights’” (201), his real apprehensions have more to do with his feelings. He is especially concerned with Napier’s fate because he had grown attached to this honest, hard-working character. The Party strategy, however, does not allow his feelings to intervene with their maneuvers; instead, they try to use the

incident to advertise and advance their power. As one hard-boiled Party official puts it, “Our function is to educate the American workingclass in revolutionary Marxism. We are not interested in the fates of individuals” (199). Another official, Irving Silverstone, in his appraisal of the miner activists accuses Glenn of mawkishness: “Real proletarians...lovely people...but they lack Marxist preparation. There’s too much of the artist in you, Sandy. You are sentimental” (185). Glenn finally admits to it, as he tries to ease his guilt over his ineptitude to get them out of the jail, “Irv’s right. I’m too damn sentimental” (185). Nevertheless, after expulsion from the Party, Glenn does not relinquish his commitment to the betterment of the working class. What is at stake is not political creed but his moral disposition.

If Glenn’s idealism is rooted in his individual perceptions rather than systematic belief,<sup>2</sup> the influence of his father Herbert offers a vital clue to the formulations in his son’s mind. Herbert, once a lecturer at Columbia University, had lost his position due to pacifism he exhibited during World War I, at once eroding his self-esteem and family finances. Glenn struggles for a different kind of life from his father, and at the same time, is destined to follow that very path. Oscillating between paternal influence and independence, he loses control of his life. John Chamberlain, one of the few kindly reviewers of the novel, writes that “in reporting the private war of Glenn Spotswood, Dos Passos investigates all phases of the old dilemma: how to keep the political struggle for power from conquering or corrupting the humanity to which all reformers and revolutionists should aspire” (Maine 201). In contrast, this paper argues that Dos Passos’s narrative represents neither historical nor political battle but an intensely personal one—a filial battle—against paternal influence that Glenn fights within himself.

Revisiting the way Glenn was distracted from his childhood interest in zoology, he locates a sense of his morality in his genetics. He speculates: “what it was [that] had put him off the track, maybe it was moral indignation; his father had studied for the ministry and ended up as a pacifist lecturer, he was in Geneva now helping anaesthetize the workers of the world with the League of Nations. Must be in the blood” (220). Glenn’s moral consciousness, in a way, is a secular version of Herbert’s concept of the “Christian Gentleman,”<sup>3</sup> which is passed down to Glenn as mixed patrimony. When the novel begins with the chapter entitled “Parental Bent,” the boy protagonist is soon introduced to the idea of the Christian Gentleman as a family moral standard. Glenn’s grandfather tells him of Andrew Jackson as the epitome of “‘a great heart and a Christian

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2 The tendency may reflect Dos Passos’s own, as Robert Gorham Davis opines: “Here Dos Passos draws...on his experience in Harlan County, Kentucky, but the political arguments which were the breath of life to American intellectuals in the late thirties are treated in a very perfunctory fashion. Never much interested in leftist theory, Dos Passos is now too completely alienated to be able to re-create the highly involved quasitheological debates that went on endlessly among and within the various factions of the left” (32).

3 According to E. Anthony Rotundo, the concept of “the Christian Gentleman” was a widely accepted idea as one of “three ideals of manhood held up to middle-class men in the nineteenth century North,” along with “the Masculine Achiever” and “the Masculine Primitive” (36).

Gentleman’” (4). His mother Ada praises his grandfather as the boy’s role model: “Straight as a ramrod at eightytwo and a Christian Gentleman [...] and that was what little Glenn must always be” (4). Accordingly, his father Herbert believes that he himself has lived up to this standard. Herbert quarrels with his brother Matthew at a Thanksgiving meal to defend his pacifism and thus conscientious objectors. Herbert expounds that “he could find no justification for a Christian to take part in war and that he thought the application of Christianity to war was not only spiritual but practical” (15), and adds further, “‘A man’s first duty is to his belief in what’s right and what’s wrong. I believed that our entering the war was an act of criminal folly and I still believe it’” (21). He and Ada thus reinforce this ideal and moralize that their son should grow up to be a responsible Christian Gentleman. That is indeed how Glenn is raised, as Malcom Cowley writes:

When Glenn Spotswood is five years old, his mother asks him always to be a Christian gentleman, and essentially that is what he remains throughout his life, for all his adventures in free love and atheism. It is for reasons of conscience that he joins the Communist Party and helps to organize the Harlan County miners. It is for the same reasons that he leaves the party, after finding that its leaders are neglecting the real interests of the miners in order to make propaganda for a future revolution. (Maine 206)

Glenn’s sympathy with the working class is in accord with his father’s mandate. This paternal influence predestines Glenn’s life to a large extent. Long before he became a labor organizer, Glenn had always stood up for the weaker and remained committed to his sense of justice. An experience in primary school illustrates exertion of Glenn’s moral conscience. On witnessing a small boy, Piggy Green, harassed by older ones, he tells the victimizers that such bullying is “a shame” and is in turn punched by one of them (5). The incident “sets the pattern for the remaining major incidents in Glenn’s life,” as John Brantley identifies (59). Later working as a summer camp counselor, Glenn expresses his disagreement with the camp owner, who unfairly discharges senior counselor Paul Graves for holding him responsible for the self-inflicted misfortune of a boy camper. Glenn quits the job in solidarity with his friend Paul in order to hold on to what he thinks is right.

Such idealism, however, would not be honored, just as Herbert’s belief aggravated the economic situation of his family, as well as his already precarious position as an undesirable son-in-law to the eyes of Ada’s parents. As Iain Colley observes, the paternal influence is not an absolute blessing for the son:

Herbert Spotswood’s ethical rigour limits his practicality and his ability to understand those who compromise or adapt. Though Glen [sic] resents his father’s preaching, it is he who is destined to follow the path of idealism. But it is not a route he at first chooses for himself. “The paternal bent” is a source of irritation to him. (121)

Throughout his life, Glenn would have to face undesirable consequences for the moral conscience he inherited. Herbert’s message, furthermore, is loaded with ambiguity, further complicating the

father-son relationship. The father requires the son to act as a Christian Gentleman and at the same time to abide by social mores. Learning of the Piggy Green incident, Herbert rebukes, “it was a Christian Gentleman’s duty to protect the weak, but it was just as well not to do it in school hours when it was against the rules” (5). As for his pacifist idealism, despite his declaration, “I don’t think I owe any apologies to anybody” (21), he deplores the outcome. When Ada passes away, he laments: “‘If I had been able to keep my situation at Columbia everything would have been all right’” (21). On Glenn’s graduating from Columbia, Herbert confesses his regret with a twinge of pain: “‘I still believe I was right,’ he said haltingly, ‘but perhaps I might have tried to insinuate my ideas more tactfully; there’s a certain selfindulgence in extremism, which I am coming more and more to distrust’” (108). Evidently there is a certain anguish in Herbert for the sacrifices he made for his idealism, which he later comes to regard as too radical. Herbert thus gives Glenn filial advice to be realistic and take a banking job that his Uncle Matthew arranged for him in Texas after college.

Glenn, however, cannot fully concede to Herbert’s equivocal moralizing. He would rather embrace idealism, if not extremism than compromise, even if it means certain setbacks. He must have learned his lesson early. With Piggy, Glenn not only received a black eye from the bully but also is penalized by a teacher to whom the bullied boy falsely informed that it was Glenn who abused him. Yet, when small, Glenn grows furious at a cousin who has derided Herbert for being “a big sissy” after a Thanksgiving quarrel over his pacifism, so that Glenn would not talk to his cousin through a whole movie they went to see together (16). It is not hard to imagine Glenn’s irritation, then, when Herbert grieves over his son’s ineffectual idealism. Herbert entrusts his son to the camp owner Dr. Talcott, an old friend of his, and later to brother Matthew to help Glenn become a mature adult, only to his disappointment. Glenn leaves the camp offending the Talcotts, and is discharged from the East Coast National Bank. Glenn makes similar choices time and again throughout his life, and does so consciously and conscientiously, if not vindictively, to rectify what his father failed to embrace at the expense of socio-economic situation of the family. If we remember Glenn’s childhood aversion to playing the role of Benedict Arnold, a traitor to the American Republic in the Revolutionary War, Glenn’s loyalty to righteousness has always been fierce. Therein, we may discern a touch of retributive passion added to the stubbornness, as Glenn would have received a different kind of education altogether had Herbert remained at Columbia.

While Glenn’s moral conscience is shaped to some extent by his father’s expectations, this sense of patriarchy stands out as another patrimonial inheritance. In adulthood, Glenn repeatedly vocalizes his wish to become head of a family. On his flight from the turmoil in Texas, Glenn says, “‘I want to get married . . . And have kids and lead a normal life. I’m sick of helling around’” (139); he proposes to Gladys Funaroff, a flirtatious young radical married to his friend, to no avail. When he visits the house of Pearl Napier, Glenn is impressed with the coal miner’s simple and steady life, blessed with a wife and two children and expecting one more at the age of twenty-one, lamenting,

“I’m twentyeight and I’m not even married yet” (174). In the same vein, he grows envious of Paul Graves with whom he is reunited while on a speaking tour for the Party, as the old friend now has “a nice wife and four nice children,” besides a respectable job (187). Those men whom he admires, be they rich or poor, are decently functioning family men—patriarchs. He tells Gladys how a man should not be alone but have a family: “I’ve just led half a life...without anybody...you know what I mean.... Jesus, we need whole men at a time like this” (147). It is not clear whether he means strictly males or overall humankind, but if we remember how Herbert used to tell his son to be manly with emphasis on masculinity, we may surmise that Glenn’s own desire to be a husband and father is manifestation of another paternal influence he unconsciously carries with him. When Glenn works as a camp counselor with Paul, Herbert writes approvingly, “*you boys are a couple of fine manly fellows and already standing on your own feet in the world*” (36). In contrast, his subsequent disappointment with Glenn’s breach with Dr. Talcott reads, “*Your first failure to make good in the world of men has been, I must frankly confess, a severe blow to me*” (46). Glenn’s wish to get married and start a family can be interpreted as a means to prove his manliness, to satisfy his desire which Herbert has nurtured in the boy.<sup>4</sup>

Glenn’s craving to be a patriarch may be understood, furthermore, in the context of Oedipal rivalry against Herbert. One childhood episode reveals Glenn’s attachment to his mother, whom he calls by a pet name “Muddy,” in his clinging to her hand “that was warm inside its white glove” (4) on his way home. In opposition, Glenn cannot help distancing himself from his rather aloof father. With the Piggy Green incident, for example, Glenn cannot explain details or defend himself to Herbert: “all he could say was, ‘Yes, Dad,’ ‘No, Dad,’ while Dad went on lecturing him” (6). Moreover, there is a moment when Herbert tacitly blames Glenn for Ada’s death. When left alone with his two young sons, Herbert talks to the boys about his own marriage: “how happy their two lives had been when she was perfectly well, before the Caesarean she had in Cleveland when Glenn was born. Of course that probably hadn’t been the cause of the cancer, but she’d never been so well after it, that was a certainty” (18). As young Glenn has to bear the sorrowful loss of his beloved mother as well as the blame by his self-absorbed father, he seems to have good reason to long for patriarchal status himself as a means to negate his presumed guilt and to finalize his independence.

Glenn’s relationship to women is curiously ambivalent. Sometimes he appears possessive and patronizing, while at other times almost filial and vulnerable. For example, with a tinge of class consciousness, he feels a secret desire to control how Gladys, a Russian Jewish girl from Brooklyn, looks and sounds before his friends, though his awareness gives him instant bad conscience:

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4 Glenn’s idea of righteousness is often expressed through gendered language, as was common usage in the early twentieth century. For instance, he reacts to his cousin’s derogation of his father, calling him “a big sissy,” as discussed earlier, and bemoans his incapacity as a labor organizer: “It’s the workers [who] are going to do it anyway...not a lot of soapbox *sob*sisters” [emphasis added] (221).



“Glenn caught himself wishing she hadn’t worn that tamoshanter and didn’t have that stilted way of talking. It wasn’t a Jewish accent exactly, but it would sound funny against the middlewestern drawl of Mike and his friends, and Marice’s Westchester patter” (94). Or, he feels self-important, as his then lover Marice Gullick, a shallow liberalist heiress from Uptown Manhattan, shines beyond others at a party where the audience to a speech he delivers expresses ardent interest: “He couldn’t help feeling good too, because, though some of them were younger, Marice was the bestlooking woman there and much the best dressed” (216). Toward Glenn, women often treat him like a child. Gladys would sit “beside him nodding her head and smiling as if she were talking to a child” (104). Marice even shows maternal care once too often. When Glenn catches the flu, he stays in bed for three days, which makes him “feel like a kid” (80), as she brings meals to his bedside. Later, she becomes lover and literal patroness to Sandy Crockett, Glenn’s alter-ego, whom she regards as a prominent revolutionary activist, providing him with room, board, clothing, taxi fare, and motherly care. Like a stage mother, she would coax Glenn after a public speech, “‘How about a little teeny drink? Poor boy, you need it, Mamma’s got a flask in her handbag’” (210). Glenn eventually grows weary of Marice’s superficial zeal for radicalism and leaves her when she takes up with Irving Silverstone. But his weakness for a motherly figure seems to echo his Oedipal relationship with his parents.

While Glenn’s tenuous relationship with his father plays a major role in making him an enthusiastic though ineffectual idealist, Herbert’s class consciousness presents a constant dilemma for his son. Glenn’s identity as a consequence remains ambiguous. He proclaims to Herbert that “his ambition [is] to rise with the working classes and not from the working classes”; but the father admonishes the son to the contrary, “‘You don’t belong to the working classes. If there’s such a thing as the professional class, that’s where we fit’” (109). Herbert emphasizes their intellectual assets, distinguishing his household from the working class. At the same time, their financial situation remained tight since Ada’s death, as they depended upon her annuity and means to keep from falling short of a comfortable middle class living. Nevertheless, Herbert takes pride in his academicism and expects his son to share his perspective. Glenn, on the other hand, tells Herbert that he cannot consider taking a teaching job, saying, “‘I couldn’t teach what I didn’t believe and what I do believe would get me in a jam right away, like the jam you got into at Columbia’” (107-08). Instead, after quitting the banking job, Glenn’s moral conscience leads him to proclaim that “[w]hat he was going to do was get a job in a mine or mill or something, he wanted to get plain hard laborer’s work, live, eat, sleep like a worker. He was sick of this whitecollar business. He hadn’t any interest in the owning class, he was through with being a parlor pink. He was sick of it. It disgusted him” (143). Yet, he finds some satisfaction in Marice Gullick’s elegant sartorial taste and appreciates her gracious lifestyle in her Uptown brownstone home which she turns briefly into their love nest. He wishes to help the working class as a labor organizer, but is never sure if he can eventually become one of them. Oscillating between his idealism and bourgeois background,

Glenn is unable to find a place in society where he can properly belong.

Glenn's uncertain identity is reflected in his adoption of the pseudonym Sandy Crockett, which he assumes as a Party member. Migrant worker Ben Noe first bestows the name "Sandy" on Glenn. The two are roommates and carry on bone-aching labor in the fields, where a college boy like Glenn is a sheer curiosity. Ben suggests that Glenn cannot be a part of the genuine working class unless he discards what his family has given him, noting, "His folks named him Glenn but I call him Sandy. I can't have a guy around me named Glenn" (80). If the surname Crockett echoes Davey Crockett, the legendary frontier man and later politician, it may reflect Glenn's ambition, as well as his aspiration for masculine achievement—pioneering his way through a new realm of his life, breaking away from his origins.

Paul Graves exposes Glenn's identity crisis, however, by raising straightforward questions. After Glenn's Party-line speech, Paul remarks that one cannot simply discard one's origins by assuming a pseudonym:

"I think what you're doing's great, but why can't you do it under your own name?"

"Plenty of reasons, Paul, lots of the time we're underground, particularly in the South."

[...] "Don't you kind of forget who you are, who your folks were, all that sort of stuff?"

Glenn felt his face getting red. "I believe in it, the lack of a name... our folks are the workingclass... can't you see?"

"Well, Glenn, I'd rather you'd kept your identity, after all you were quite a friend of mine... and don't forget that the cells that make up your carcass contain the same chromosomes whether you go under one name or another." (186)

Just as Paul impugns, Glenn does not exactly know if he is comfortable in his own shoes. Glenn feigns that he belongs to the anonymous working class and that a name should not matter, yet his blushing betrays his guilty conscience that his claim may be only pretension. Even near the end of his life, Glenn is not sure of what he is. When Communists imprison him in Spain for being a Trotskyist, he attempts to spell out his identity on his cell wall, but gives up: "He started working on a mock heroic testament [...]. *I, Glenn Spotswood, being of sound mind and imprisoned body, do bequeath to the international workingclass my hope of a better world*, but he suddenly felt ashamed and rubbed it all out with the palm of his hand" (266). Glenn cannot even testify for himself and perishes unable to prove who he is.

Glenn's use of language deeply exposes his unstable identity. As a labor organizer, Glenn must explain, encourage, persuade, and often argue, all of which entails a dependence on words and especially on speeches. For a time he publishes a splinter magazine in Detroit, though writing was never his strongest point. Glenn feels most competent and effective when he speaks to an audience. His first major speech for the coal miners in Bull Creek is documented with exaltation:

He was talking slowly. He could feel the people listening; his voice seemed to fill the quiet sunny afternoon, the little graywhite weathered church and the graveyard with the gaunt branches of the dead trees spreading over it, and to surge over the patch of scraggly woods and beat against the black tipple of the Bull Creek mine and the ruddy mountains patched with sprouting green beyond. His words soared easily and hovered in the sunlight and the quiet over the big listening crowd. His body felt easily balanced on the balls of his feet so that he could hardly feel the shaky boards of the speakers' stand. They were listening to every word. When he paused there was a roar or cheering and clapping. (170-71)

He is thrilled that his message is reaching his audience and that he is successfully delivering to them a long-awaited gospel. After his involvement in the coal miners' trial where they are falsely charged for murder, Glenn becomes a star speaker for the Party, turning the trial into a media event that uses Glenn's two-week, twice-daily speaking tour for their public relations. It is no surprise that in being cast out of the Party, Glenn's worst nightmare is losing his voice, unable to utter a single word at a meeting: "He was going through all the motions of speaking but his throat had turned to wood; no words came out. [...] His throat was wooden, no sound came out of it to warn the workers they were being shelled with gas" (231). He has an important message to convey, speech being the only weapon he can brandish. But without this means, Glenn cannot support his cause.

Glenn's speaking ability, clearly, is another quality inherited from Herbert. The way Herbert relates to his young sons is compared to "lecturing" in accordance with his profession (6). Herbert is described as "pronouncing every letter of each word in the careful poised way he had, like he was speaking to an audience in a hall" (5), or addressing his sons "in his natural voice, carefully pronouncing his words as if he were in the classroom" (20). Similarly, Glenn would speak to his friend Gladys as if he were an orator. While at a restaurant with her, he pounds on the table as if delivering a speech: "He was going to join the Party as a worker and not as a whitecollar slave. When he was an honest to God worker he'd join the Party all right" (143-44), which invites her to chide: "'I'm not a meeting'" (144). When cut off from the Party and the audiences, Glenn naturally feels as if he were "at loose ends like a methodist preacher without a call" (220), so reminiscent of his embittered father. When most unsure of himself, Glenn regrets his hereditary talents, wondering "how it was probably from his old man he got the gift of gab, maybe that had been ruination of him. [...] Now if it hadn't been for the gift of gab he'd have led a happy life studying bugs or some goddam thing like his old friend Paul Graves" (220-21). Approaching his thirtieth birthday, Glenn finally comes to realize the spell of paternal influence over him.

Glenn's experiences with words present further difficulties of telling the truth. Clichés and lack of authenticity plague him. Firstly, Glenn's speech is rife with borrowed propaganda, even as it may not be so unusual at political rallies. At one rally, once he announces "how nobody was going

to help this poor and exploited foreign language group except their fellowworkers all over the country who must never forget that an injury to one was an injury to all” (141). Already saturated with familiar and commonplace expressions, this last phrase is straight out of the Industrial Workers of the World propaganda, as Irving Silverstone, himself full of Communist clichés, criticizes from a partisan point of view. However well-intended his speech may be, Glenn does not lay claim to original words to communicate his beliefs. In another case, when testifying at court, he meticulously practices his speech with lawyers and makes himself more than ready to state the truth. He finds “himself changed to an actor in the play,” however, and the “story that had seemed so plausible when they’d rehearsed it with the lawyers, began suddenly to sound hollow and false in Glenn’s own ears. He began to wonder if he could be lying” (208). Although what he has to say is founded on facts, every bit being absolutely true, his well-rehearsed speech sounds devoid of spontaneous expression that conveys lived experience. Just as clichés are typically insufficient to persuade an audience, scripted testimony cannot convince a jury. Disconnected from his actual experiences, his words fail to convey his idealism, and without an audience, he loses his *raison d’être*, hastening his way to final destruction. For Glenn, it is as if his hereditary talent for public speaking becomes an impediment in itself, where his very words lack original vision or natural spontaneity. His dependence on ineffectual words turns his inheritance into a curse instead of a blessing.

The life of Glenn Spotswood, as we have witnessed, ends in failure, driven by impractical idealism embedded in an inherited morality from his father. Rooted in this ambivalent relationship, Glenn’s moral conscience, while consistent, is troubled. Ultimately, his social ambitions are thwarted because of his awkward allegiance to his beliefs. Glenn grows more uncompromising, as if to disapprove of his father’s conceding conformity to social mores, with his contradictory wishes to become a mother’s boy and a patriarch of his family. Moreover, despite his compassion for the working class, ambivalence toward his family’s social class complicates his identity. Though largely dependent on speeches to convey his beliefs, his inability to articulate spontaneous words from his lived experiences adds to his inefficacy. His accumulation of errors and disappointments results finally in solitary death as a nobody.

The protagonist’s weakness, interestingly, is analogue to that of the novel itself. A sense of predestination looms over Glenn’s fate, circumscribing the novel’s development. Glenn Spotswood experiences struggle and suffers from internal turmoil, but without a valid platform, fierce moral indignation alone cannot carry him through. His lack of vital words to enable communication of his idealism, furthermore, cripples the novel’s literary merit. In a way, Glenn is comparable to Jimmy Herf in Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), who suffers from a similar problem with words, enmeshed in commercial language of the modern metropolis. Unlike Glenn, Jimmy, however, becomes aware that he needs to invigorate his words with corporeality; and moreover, he has an intimation of vision, the ideal of American democracy, in the language of the Founding

Fathers, as I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Glenn's weakness, if placed next to Jimmy, becomes clear, as he cannot claim any plausible idealism other than his moral conscience, nor effective language, a means to communicate what he believes in. As a result, the novel cannot convey Glenn's struggles in a manner rich with creative vigor. As the rest of the novelist's career shows, *The Adventures of a Young Man* is not a temporary lapse in Dos Passos's creative power but marks the beginning of his descent.

Still, inquiry into the protagonist's problems in this novel aids our understanding of how the writer's earlier works, not only the masterful trilogy and the aesthetically challenging *Manhattan Transfer*, but also such more amateur novels as *One Man's Initiation: 1917* and *Three Soldiers* (1921), can offer more engaging readerly experiences. It is an inordinate challenge for any writer to create a persuasive protagonist who can speak only in stilted language, while crafting a compelling story. Furthermore, even if a novelist shares a protagonist's disillusionment, that does not excuse the author from suggesting some alternative vision. By exposing the futility and machine-like inhumanity of war in earlier novels; the oppressive modern metropolis in *Manhattan Transfer*; and an industrialized, mass-market, deteriorating country in the *U.S.A.* trilogy, Dos Passos paradoxically and eloquently evokes the importance of what is missing in the pictures these works present—values, ideas, and visions that should have fulfilled life—which is something he fails to do in *The Adventures of a Young Man*.

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5 See Misugi, "Jimmy Herf's Yearning for Corporeality in *Manhattan Transfer*."

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