

John Dos Passos

John Dos Passos:
Biography and Critical Essays

Edited by

Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu
and Bernardo Guido de Vasconcelos

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P U B L I S H I N G

John Dos Passos: Biography and Critical Essays,
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*A special tribute to
Maria do Carmo Cunha Santos*

The preservation of John Dos Passos's Madeiran heritage for the generations to come was one of Maria do Carmo's most cherished aspirations, a life-project completed with the foundation of the John Dos Passos Cultural Centre, a cultural and research institution inaugurated on September 20, 2004, as a lasting tribute to the writer's life and literary career. She donated her remarkable private collection of Dos Passos's complete works and related critical studies to the Centre Library, along with other 'relics' and pieces associated with the author's life and career. Her painstaking research to trace Dos Passos's Madeiran roots and responses to his visits to the homeland of his ancestor Manoel Joaquim dos Passos are unequivocal testimonies of her commitment to this venture, to which she engaged body and soul, a worthy enterprise we hereby wish to acknowledge.

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PREFACE

“Why, I could spend a century in Madeira”
—John Dos Passos

The foundation of the John Dos Passos Cultural Centre¹ in Ponta do Sol, Madeira, fulfils my personal dream to commemorate the relationship of that significant twentieth-century American writer and his family to Portugal, and most especially, to Madeira. His early awareness of his Portuguese roots, his sense of being an outsider wherever he went in his childhood, youth, and early manhood, and his consequent rebellion against the excesses of capitalism have parts of their bases in his Portuguese heritage. To set the stage for the essays collected here, I should like to review briefly his engagement with Madeira.

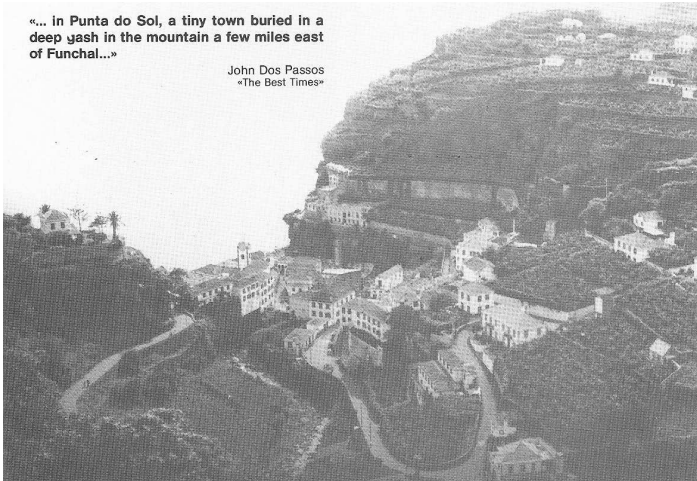
Dos Passos (1896-1970) visited the island three times during his life. In his book *The Best Times. An Informal Memoir* (1968),² he expressed his love for the homeland of his grandfather, Manoel Joaquim dos Passos, a native of Ponta do Sol, which Dos Passos later described as “*a tiny town buried in a deep gash in the mountains a few miles east of Funchal*”. (15)

He first visited Madeira when he was nine, at the time called Jack Madison because his mother, Lucy Addison Sprigg Madison, and John Randolph, his father, were not married. Only later did he take the name John Roderigo Dos Passos. In his recollections, he set the context of this visit:

¹ Officially opened in September 20, 2004. The main building, known as Villa Passos, with the Seven Star of the Great Bear on its facade, stands at the heart of Ponta do Sol, and is an ex-libris of the village’s historical heritage. It was built on the first half of the 19th century and was owned by relatives of Dos Passos’s grandfather, Manoel Joaquim Dos Passos, born in 1812, who left to America in 1830. Although renovated, it still preserves its original late 1930s features, the time when the final changes were made by Fortunato Pitta, the last of Dos Passos’s relatives to live there. The property was bought by the Government of Madeira in 1996 from Maria Amália Pitta Teles, the last Dos Passos heiress, and is now a state-owned cultural and research institution.

² Dos Passos, John. *The Best Times. An Informal Memoir*. New York: Signet Books, 1968. Except where indicated otherwise, all page reference in the text are to this volume.

My father considered English education much better than American. Since his tenderly affectionate relations with my mother remained technically irregular so long as his first wife lived, it was only in Europe that they could travel open. As a result I was sent to school (...) in the northern suburbs of London. For a while I was the only American there. Then, in the fall of 1904³ (...). It must have been around this time that I was taken to Madeira to recuperate from a hernia operation. (19)



Ponta do Sol (1960)

Secretaria Regional do Turismo, Cultura e Emigração
Eco do Funchal

His arrival in Funchal, the capital city of Madeira, was in the company of both his parents, on board of the American vessel *S.S. Ambrose*. Their names were included in the lists of visitors published on the local newspapers *Diário Popular* and *Diário de Notícias* of May 2, 1905. Once onshore, they headed to the luxurious Reid's Palace Hotel, where they stayed, having checked in as Mr. John R., Mrs. J. Madison, and Master J. Madison, a hotel "on a magnificent headland overlooking Funchal". (19) Jack never forgot the lush hotel gardens, where he could catch lizards among the flowers.

Dos Passos's father wished to contact relatives on the island, namely his cousins João Augusto Teixeira, João Pitta Ferreira, and Fortunato Pitta,

³ The correct date is 1905, as is recorded in the local newspapers. Dos Passos was not sure of the exact date.

who belonged to a distinguished family from Ponta do Sol, where a stately house still stands, “a solid-looking residence with the seven stars of the Great Bear engraved over the door (...), still known as Villa Passos”, located on the central square. (15, 20) Of one cousin who gave him Latin classes he wrote:

I’ve always remembered Dr.Vergil as coming to see us at Reid’s Hotel (...). Anyway I was already studying Latin in school, and my father, determined I should not lose anything by the enforced vacation, induced this cousin of ours to tutor me everyday. I remembered a sallow, bearded little gentleman in a dusty frock coat who appeared every morning with a bunch of tightly packed roses for my mother. We called him Dr. Vergil because he knew the entire *Aeneid* by heart. (12, 19)

The ‘smells’ of Funchal “clung in his memory”.

He recalled: “[my father’s] image is associated in my mind with the smell of melons. There lingers somewhere in the back of my head an infantile memory of a table and the sun flashing on his bald head as he leaned over to slice a huge yellow melon”. “I must have been very small, in a high chair probably, because in the picture everything is very large”. (12)

The ‘smells’ of Funchal surely included those of flowers, fruits, cakes, and the ‘*carros de cesto*’ (wicker and wood toboggans) — one of Madeira’s legendary touristic activities — that slid downhill from Monte to Funchal, on a ten-minute drive down a steep track about two kilometers long. Or perhaps he remembered the smell of the train on its way down from Monte to the city. The numerous objects such as embroideries and books preserved in his home in Virginia testify to his fascination with Madeira.

In 1830, when still a young man, Manoel Joaquim dos Passos left Ponta do Sol to emigrate to America after being involved in a stabbing. (16) He first boarded the American vessel *Alcyon* that sailed from Funchal to Gibraltar, from where he booked passage on another boat heading to Baltimore. Later he moved to Philadelphia, where he worked as a cobbler. (15) For a young man born and brought up in a small village who did not speak English, arriving in a foreign country must have been hard. One can only imagine how he felt at the end of the day, when alone in his room with no money, no friends, nor anyone to talk to in his own language.

Dos Passos remembered his father telling him about Manoel’s rough manners, that when he “didn’t like the way a dish was cooked he would raise the window and pitch it out into the street. The hungry children would sit in their chairs wide-eyed with horror at seeing their dinner disappear”. (16) Manoel Joaquim married an American girl, Lucy Catell,

and had a big family: Ant3nio, Francisca, Manoel, Joaquina J3lia, Francisco, Benjamin, and John, who was born in Philadelphia in 1844. (15)

A Mr. Price, John's first employer, helped him take night classes at the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied law. He later became an important lawyer in New York. Dos Passos recalled that his father "always said he owed his start in life to Mr. Price's teaching and kindness". He also remembered having met Mr Price when he was a small boy. His father "asked him to lunch on his boat (...) he came up the gangway of the *Gaivota*. Mr Price and his daughter (...) both called my father Jack. That made an impression on me because up to then I'd been the only Jack in the family". (17)

John R. "made himself an expert in the law as it pertained to brokerage practices". (20) With his brother Benjamin, he set up a business, Dos Passos Brothers. Our author remembered his father's "acutely analytical mind" which enabled him to synthesize his law practice into a *Treatise on the Law of Stock-Brokers and Stock-Exchange* that "soon became the principal textbook on the subject in the country's law-schools". (20) Another of his works is *Commercial Trusts*. (24)

Dos Passos's memory of John R. was of "a warmhearted man (...). He supported needy relatives and was always ready to bail out an unfortunate friend. Passionately fond of the sea, he liked to talk of being descended from a Portuguese pirate", (30) and admired "the personal uprightness of (...) the Portuguese he knew". 20)

In 1903, John R., who got along very well with the British, published a book entitled *The Anglo-Saxon Century*, which, according to Dos Passos, "was possibly better received in England than in the United States". In that connection, says our author, "an odd little memory remains in my mind (...). My mother and I [went] to see him in his court uniform before he [left] to be presented to King Edward". This was the time when "Dedi [was] on the edge of becoming an Englishman", a moment when young Dos Passos had "been making a desperate plea to be allowed to go home to America to school" (21). John R. was a caring parent, making sure his son had a proper education and access to books, as well as good living conditions. Dos Passos remembered the first book his father gave him, *Captain Marryat's Mr. Midshipman*. "Easy when I was eight. I read it through again and again; then Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (...)." These early readings, plus a few yachting trips and sailing a canoe off the Sandy Point shore, "whetted" young Dos Passos's "taste for the sea. Until it was obvious that I was too nearsighted to pass the physical I planned to work for an appointment to Annapolis to follow the sea as a career", he confessed. (24) Although he had travelled in Portugal in the fall of 1919,

he did not visit Madeira again until late March, 1921, on his way to Europe. He travelled on board the *S. S. Mormugão*, a Portuguese vessel owned by Companhia Portuguesa de Transportes: “It turned into a lovely crossing (...). The ship officers treated us with a benevolent politeness we found charming”, he recalled. E .E. Cummings was travelling with him, and so Dos Passos had the opportunity of showing the city to his friend. Despite staying only for a couple of hours in Funchal, Dos Passos still managed to see his relatives. “This time I was delighted with my Portuguese cousins”, he confessed (102).

His endeavour to decipher the great epic poem *Os Lusíadas*⁴ in the Portuguese version and without a dictionary seems to confirm his eagerness to have a more profound understanding of his ancestral roots (102).

Dos Passos visited Madeira a last time in 1960, travelling with his wife, Elizabeth Holdridge Dos Passos, and their daughter Lucy. They arrived on the 16th of July and again stayed at Reid’s Hotel. Dos Passos was interviewed by the local newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, when he asserted that he was proud of his Portuguese ancestry, noting that he was sorry for not speaking Portuguese because he “never had the opportunity to practice”.⁵ Yet he admitted he could read and that he greatly admired the renowned Portuguese Modernist poet Fernando Pessoa.⁶ His enthusiasm towards Portugal was further confirmed when he announced that he had “a project to write a book of essays on Portuguese Culture”.⁷ The writer and his family were invited to Ponta do Sol, where Joaquim Sequeira Cabrita, the mayor, paid homage to the writer. João Sebastião Ferreira, and other Dos Passos’s cousins and their wives were present. The celebration took place in the Town Hall, where the chief dignitaries of Ponta do Sol gathered. The mayor opened the session, applauding Dos Passos for having given them the honour of visiting his ancestors’s village, and highlighting his achievements as a writer. The town further honoured him by hanging a plaque on the house owned by his cousin Fortunato Pitta’s heirs, with the following inscription: “In this house the eminent American writer John Dos Passos’s ancestors were born. He visited this council on the 20th July 1960. Homage of the Town Hall of Ponta do

⁴ Portuguese title of the epic poem by Luís Vaz de Camões (written ca. 1556, published 1572) where he sings the great Portuguese feats, namely the discovery of New World lands.

⁵ *Diário de Notícias*, Funchal, July 16, 1960.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Sol”.⁸ John Dos Passos thanked the townspeople for their tribute and said: “I am sorry not to be able to speak my ancestors’ language. As you know my grandfather left Ponta do Sol more than one hundred years ago (...). I cannot forget my friends’ and Madeiran relatives’ hospitality”.⁹ He received as a gift a copy of the book entitled *Ilhas de Zarco* (Zargo’s Islands), edited by the Madeiran author Pe. Eduardo Pereira. After the session, the visitors were taken to ‘Villa Passos’ located at 3 Rua Príncipe D. Luís I, where Dos Passos met many relatives eager to greet him.



John Dos Passos and Relatives, Ponta do Sol (1960)

Colecção Perestellos, Museu Vicentes, Funchal

The Madeiran newspapers did not fail to notice John Dos Passos’s presence. On its front page, the *Jornal da Madeira* (July 18) announced the writer’s arrival the day before. Another local newspaper, the *Eco do Funchal* (July 24) also announced on its front page that homage would be paid to the American writer by the Ponta do Sol Town Hall.

Ten years after his last visit to Madeira, the news from all over the world announced Dos Passos’s death, on September 28, 1970. Thirty four years later, Villa Passos was converted into a state run research and cultural institution — the John Dos Passos Cultural Centre — as a lasting

⁸ Villa Paços, Rua do Príncipe D. Luís, 3, Ponta do Sol, Madeira.

⁹ *Diário de Notícias*, Funchal, July 21, 1960.

tribute to the writer. It was inaugurated by Dr. Alberto João Jardim, President of the Regional Government of Madeira. John Dos Passos's daughter, Lucy Dos Passos Coggin, her husband Rodney, and their daughter, Lara, were present at the opening session. Lara made a speech in Portuguese. I, like many others, was profoundly moved by the occasion, which was the realization of a major project I had imagined for decades.



John Dos Passos Cultural Centre

Villa Passos, the stately house with the seven stars of the Great Bear on the façade is now a museum and library.

—**Maria do Carmo Cunha Santos**
John Dos Passos Cultural Centre

INTRODUCTION

Though an American citizen, our Dos Passos was much
interested in Madeira and the mainland of Portugal;
to honor him in this context is to honor Portugal.

—Townsend Ludington

The essays in the present volume are a selection of contributions read at an international conference organized by the John Dos Passos Cultural Centre (Madeira, Portugal), in October 2006. One of the conference's foremost goals was to bring together scholars from different parts of the world, with varied cultural and academic backgrounds, to discuss John Dos Passos's life and literary work in a venue formerly the home of the author's Portuguese ancestors, which Dos Passos visited a number of times.

The conference was also an effort to make the recently founded John Dos Passos Cultural Centre known beyond national borders, namely to the international scholarly communities, and appraise the role it may play in encouraging further scholarship on the author, which includes the study of his Portuguese roots and the influence they may have had in his literary career.

The venue seems in fact to have stimulated the biographical approach to our writer and his works. Yet, most of the essays in the present collection are valuable contributions to the ongoing critique studies on the author's writings, considered in terms of literary techniques and representations, as well as core thematic issues, namely ideology, politics, and social practices that have helped define Dos Passos as both a towering figure of the American Modernism and as an outspoken political and social critic. Furthermore, by focusing on the specificities of the historical and cultural contexts, the present volume provides a significant insight into not only the biographical and aesthetic aspects but also the local impact and the international scope of Dos Passos's works.

The modernist aesthetics, with its indistinct notion of 'text' and 'blurring borders' between fact and fiction that enable a variety of readings of literary representations, makes Dos Passos's works a remarkable critical laboratory. Furthermore, John Dos Passos's lifetime was an age of unprecedented political instability characterized by the so-called 'Red Scare' that shattered the 'American Dream' of liberty and egalitarianism,

and by international warfare, hence an age of break with the past, and of social and political tensions that signaled the quest to consolidate the growing more neo-liberal hold on power, all of which have been scrutinized by Dos Passos's scholars.

The ever-increasing number of contemporary and posthumous criticism on Dos Passos's writings dissects his literary innovations and offers invaluable insights into the historiographical, ideological and social dimensions of the American and, to some extent, the European societies of his age. Dos Passos's writings have been read and re-read with increasing fascination by scholars of different academic affiliations, beginning with the efforts of his contemporaries from both sides of the political divide to the present day.

Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "John Dos Passos and '1919'",¹ where the French writer discusses the individual and historical time, is followed by other studies where this and other aspects of Dos Passos's literary work are addressed with specific emphasis on the literary management of some of the key techniques of the Modernist aesthetics and the myriad of literary representations, whose scope and purpose are those of imaginative creation, as well as on the more enduring historical and cultural (ideological, political and social) facts the author witnessed or experienced in his lifetime. The wealth of critical studies on John Dos Passos's writings and his age definitely testify these general concerns and express the remarkable range of the author's life experiences and prolific literary imagery, all of which indisputably endorse the *status* of his literary name.

For these and other obvious reasons, the inscription of Dos Passos's name on the pages of cultural and literary history deserves to be duly acknowledged. Moreover, the course of history itself has enveloped Dos Passos's allure against the seemingly relentless growth of neo-liberalism and globalization, a situation which further increases the importance of his writings.

¹ In *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Annette Michelson (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

The Collection

The above inception highlights the close, though sometimes ambiguous, relationship between biography, aesthetics, ideology, social critique and gender in Dos Passos's writings that runs through the present volume of essays.

1. *Biographical Insights*

The first contributions included in this collection address aspects of Dos Passos's biography. **Carmo Santos**, the founder of the John Dos Passos Cultural Centre on the island of Madeira, in her Preface to this volume summarizes some well known information about Dos Passos's relationship to Madeira, and also adds to our knowledge by recounting facts most scholars have not been aware of which are relevant to understanding him. His attachment to his Portuguese roots is epitomized by his statement "Why, I could spend a century in Madeira".² Santos remembers the author's several visits to the island and the experiences and opinions he expressed about it and its people, noting that Dos Passos's autobiographical writings testify to his fondness for the homeland of Manoel Joaquim Dos Passos, his grandfather, who emigrated to America in 1830.

Dos Passos's biographer, **Townsend Ludington**, to some extent endorses Santos's claims about Dos Passos's fondness and interest regarding Portugal and his Portuguese roots, allowing that when older his attitude toward all things Portuguese was distinctly benevolent. Yet, this scholar's emphasis is more on Dos Passos's less sympathetic views in this respect, especially during his youth, when his memories unveil a 'somewhat prissy' young man, who saw Portugal and its people in many regards as despicable.

Yet, such conflicting feelings and attitudes of fondness and prejudice towards one's ancestral roots and cultural backgrounds are commonplace traits shared by most immigrants and their descendants. Dos Passos's sentiments towards his heritage largely conform to this pattern, in what concerns the emotional and psychological effects of immigration, even though in overt antagonism to his social, ideological and political stance as a writer. They are therefore understandable, chiefly if one bears in mind that he was the child of well-to-do parents brought up in different European countries.

² Dos Passos's words to his friend Rumsey Marvin.

Conversely, Dos Passos's recollections of Portugal and Madeira, above all those of his early visits, can also be seen as 'Camera-Eye' portrayals of the Portuguese and Madeiran societies and ways of life. Notwithstanding the prejudice that some of his recollections explicitly or implicitly convey, his eye-witnessing of the huge gap between the wealthy and the poor in the country of his ancestors might have been powerful early influences on the moulding of his mind as an outspoken social critic and political activist, in short, a rebel and critical observer who, as Carlos Azevedo points out, strove to look America searchingly in the face.

This seems in fact to be **Carlos Azevedo's** reading of the role that both Dos Passos's Portuguese heritage and his youth experiences in other European countries played in the author's life and writings. This contributor argues that due to both these backgrounds Dos Passos experienced a feeling of non-belonging, perceiving himself to be 'a man without a country', a 'double foreigner', an outsider with uncertain national identity and substance. Furthermore such feelings, along with other biographical aspects, characterize the intersection of fiction and autobiographical elements found in his writings, albeit in a subliminal way.

A somewhat different biographical insight is the interesting parallel **Hans-Peter Rodenberg** draws between Dos Passos and Hemingway, focalizing our attention on the fact that despite their radically different approach as writers, the lives of these two literary giants of modernism show remarkable similarities. Both volunteered for service as ambulance drivers during the First World War, both shaped their war-time experiences into best-selling novels and both men decided to leave the United States for Paris after the war—where their first extended encounter took place and where they formed two central figures of what Gertrude Stein termed the 'lost generation'. A decade later, Hemingway and Dos Passos were to meet again on the side of the Spanish Republic when fascism exercised its preliminary confrontation with communism on the Iberian Peninsula in preparation of the greater drama of the Second World War. According to Rodenberg, during these years 'Hem' and 'Dos' shared a turbulent friendship, in the course of which both competed for literary fame, shared private disasters, battled with each other over political issues to the point of open hatred, although they also grudgingly and joyously enjoyed each other's company.

Dos Passos's war-time experiences are also emphasized by **Maria do Céu Marques**, who claims that they shaped the author's vision of history and war. Marques gives us some glimpses on the important role war played in Dos Passos's life and literary career, drawing our attention to his

war-time experiences during the two great World Wars and the Spanish Civil War depicted in some of his writings, where fact and fiction intertwine.

This blurring of borders between historical fact and fiction is likewise the object of scrutiny in **Vakhtang Amaglobeli's** essay, where this scholar claims that Dos Passos's publicistic writings: *The Caucasus under the Soviets* (1922); *Rosinante to the Road Again* (1922); *Orient Express* (1927), and *In all Countries* (1936) occupy an important place in his works, as they afford clear insights regarding the author's personal approach and attitude towards the contemporary world. Amaglobeli further argues that Dos Passos's two visits to Georgia in the early 30s aimed chiefly his interest in gaining information about the newly established Soviet lifestyle in that country, annexed by the Russian Red Army in 1921. According to Amaglobeli, the article *The Caucasus under the Soviets* contains the observations of the American writer on post-occupied life of Batumi and Tbilisi. Dos Passos's early support for radical left ideas and some sympathy towards the Soviet System does not prevent him from depicting objectively the Bolshevik activities in Georgia and the way its people lived under the Soviet regime, a portrayal whereby he somehow already predicts the unpromising future of the Soviet Union at this early stage of its existence.

The intertwining of fact and fiction in Dos Passos's literary works is also **Alice Beja's** approach to *Facing the Chair: the Americanization of Two Foreign Born Workmen*, the pamphlet written in 1926 for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, which provides both detailed documentation on the case, by quoting numerous official documents (affidavits, extracts from the trial transcripts ...), and gives the reader a closer perusal into the period when the two Italians were convicted. According to Beja, the pamphlet might permit a deeper look into Dos Passos's political involvement with the left, which was always characterized by a treasured independence. Yet, in her opinion, the text's ultimate importance is that it shows the genesis of Dos Passos's style, namely the use of montage and of multiple focus. *Facing the Chair*, she concludes, is in truth a laboratory for fiction, the cradle where Dos Passos's peculiar style and politics are elaborated. A comparison with the *U.S.A.* trilogy, above all with *Big Money*, where the Sacco-Vanzetti affair is recounted, reveals interesting parallels.

2. *John Dos Passos: The American Modernist*

What Beja labels as Dos Passos's peculiar style is further scrutinized by other contributors, who emphasize the author's position as a modernist writer. This is the case of **Townsend Ludington**, who claims that Dos Passos's involvement with all arts (modernist painting, drama, music, and poetry) during his journeys and residence in Europe, though less acknowledged, was vital to his growth as an avant-garde writer. For Ludington, Dos Passos's early career is central to the understanding of American modernism.

To the European influences on Dos Passos's literary style Ludington claims, **Mario Avelar** adds that of Walt Whitman, whose influence is also echoed in many other prominent modernists. Avelar unfolds the evidence of Whitman's aesthetic innovations in *Manhattan Transfer*. This scholar argues that in this novel Dos Passos develops rhetoric strategies emblematic of modernist epistemological ruptures like the analogy with cinema editing, and of the epic quest anchored on the American bard, which, this author claims, are the core of Whitman's impact on Dos Passos. Avelar's analysis hence focalizes on what he argues to be the paradox of a narrative which welcomes the aesthetic demands of the present while meeting the challenges of a recent recurring past.

Martina Emonts offers some glimpses on the influence of Dos Passos's literary style on German modernist writers, claiming that the echoes of Dos Passos's avant-garde literary innovations on their works are striking. Emonts further argues that such influences were chiefly inspired by the German translation of *Manhattan Transfer*, published by Fischer in 1927. According to this contributor, this is obviously the case with Irmgard Keun, who personalized this new style and creative perspectives in her early literary works, namely in *Gigli — eine von uns* (1931), and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932). She further claims that two important features in modernism, which she describes as 'general displacement' and 'gender discourse', shaped the prose of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* before the rise of fascism interrupted German literary life, lives and careers.

Ângela Varela analyses the pictorial effects that the interface of fiction, historical fact and poetry in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* produce, depicting daily life in the city of New York. Such effects are achieved by collages of short fragmented texts, claims this contributor, whose approach to the novel is an attempt at unfolding Dos Passos's innovative literary ingenuity.

A somewhat different approach is that of **Graham Barnfield** whose focus is on what he perceives as alleged objectivity in Dos Passos's

writings. According to this contributor, although (probably) based on Dos Passos's autobiographical recollections, the 'camera-eye' sections in the *U.S.A.* trilogy suggest an objective technique. The key to this paradox, he argues, is the changing profession of journalism. One promise of Lincoln's Republic idealism — which *U.S.A.* celebrates — was a shift from partisan journalism to a version based on enlightenment and an unadulterated information supply, a promise undermined by the growth of yellow press barons such as Hearst, the scientific claims made by Marxists and newspaper apologetics for the Great Depression. Barnfield further claims that Dos Passos expressed his reaction to these developments, both in the form of journalistic punditry and in the (thwarted) search for an objective function for prose style. Like Christopher Isherwood, he adds, with whose 'I am camera' statement there are certain more sophisticated parallels, Dos Passos's camera-eye writings involved a craft-based evasion of new technologies. Why write and record in the style of a camera, when actual cameras were available to mechanically process the same activity? For Barnfield, Dos Passos's literary activities constituted a response to the decline of certain assumptions about the role of journalism in the public sphere.

3. Ideology, Social Critique and Gender

Yet our author's merit as a major twentieth-century writer is not restricted to his highly individual and innovative style that has been called impressionistic, expressionistic, deterministic, and a host of contradictory other things. Dos Passos is also acknowledged as an outstanding satirist. Political, social and gender issues permeate his novels, essays, and plays, enabling a diversity of approaches, to some extent contemplated in this collection. When not focusing their attention on literary aesthetic innovations, critics analyze the way Dos Passos uses satire to mediate between essence and dialectic in his works of fiction, which is profoundly unsettling, as Jean Paul Sartre pointed out.

The now deceased contributor **Peter Christensen**, whose essay is posthumously included in the present volume, asserts that already in his early works Dos Passos uses limited satire as a way of developing some of the issues that he has raised for his readers. This scholar further draws our attention to aspects in the texts he studied which he believes to be probable authorial intentions.

Robbie Moore analyzes a cluster of 'anarchistic' city novels to highlight Dos Passos's shift from the concept of an alienated 'I' to the concept of an alienated mass. As this contributor notes, New York, like

Conrad's London and Bely's Petersburg, is in bad shape, repressed and firebug ridden and crawling with police. Its individuals are separated by an oceanic void at the 'centre of things', a void manufactured not by Dos Passos's notorious pessimism but by a governing logic of form.

Ethnicity is central to the development of Dos Passos's literary and political identity. In his essay, **John Trombold** argues that the attribution of an ethnic valence to modernism in Dos Passos's early career as a writer derives from his own ethnic background, to his sense of being an 'expatriate', a member of a culturally marginal ethnic minority in Anglo-Saxon America. According to Trombold, the trope of ethnicity is for Dos Passos a means for the negotiation of authority. This scholar further argues that the author's depiction of ethnic intolerance in America, especially in *U.S.A.*, is a force defiant of homogeneity in an Anglo-American world. Yet Trombold also draws our attention to the fact that when Dos Passos later reconciled with his father's Anglo-American ethnocentrism and commitment to the idea of American supremacy his concept of ethnicity served a different purpose—that of facilitating the author's 'repatriation'—the ideological return to his 'chosen country', and of enabling his application of ethnic identity on behalf of a new political vision inimical to his own earlier revolutionary leftism.

Fredrik Tydal draws on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories in his reading of *Manhattan Transfer*, arguing that Bourdieu's emphasis on forms of capital outside the realm of the economic—social, cultural, and symbolic—is important in our understanding of the ties that bind people together in the novel, and can help uncover the mechanisms behind the seemingly random social trajectories of the characters.

Silvia Xavier's essay draws our attention to the trope of 'vag' in Dos Passos's satire which, she argues, is deployed in a trajectory that invokes Walt Whitman's idealized 'poet-vagabond' and ends with the political figure of the 'vagrant'. The 'vag' trope is the central theme of the dialogic play of verbal intentions to address the context of race, which this contributor asserts is closely affiliated to it. Xavier draws a parallel between the tropes of 'vag' found in Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* and Claude McKay's novel *Banjo*, to examine the 'dialogic play' in the multiple meanings of that trope, and suggests that such dialogic readings make us attentive to who it is that produces these meanings, and to the cultural work their texts perform.

Seth Moglen argues that in the biographical prose poems of *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos enacted an exceptionally robust process of mourning for the political repression of the Red Scare of the nineteen teens and twenties. In the ten biographies focusing on early twentieth-century American radicals,

Dos Passos documented the processes of incarceration, deportation, censorship, legal and extra-legal violence, and ideological intimidation that destroyed the democratic anti-capitalist political movements that the author admired and supported in the years during and after the First World War. Moglen reveals with precision the modernist representational practices that enabled Dos Passos also to identify the emancipatory yearnings that had animated the early twentieth-century Left and to extend these to his readers as aspirations that might still be embraced and realized in the future.

A somewhat atypical reading of *Three Soldiers* is the one offered by **Miguel Oliveira** who claims that the novel expresses Dos Passos's condemnation of military service abroad. Elaborating on the sensitive tensions between 'old' and 'new immigrants' who were brought together for military missions in a training camp in America, Oliveira draws a parallel between civil migration and military service abroad, and explains why the latter can be considered as military migration. He further claims that what distinguishes *Three Soldiers* from any other war-novel published earlier and until recent times is the combination of the war-theme with the theme of military migration.

Some of the contributors to this volume offered some insights on gender representations in Dos Passos's writings. **M. Z. G. de Abreu's** essay scrutinizes the traditional social constructs of womanhood and sexuality portrayed in *Streets of Night* which she claims are but literary foils to Dos Passos's depiction of assertive female characters that challenge the dominant views of womanhood in the American society of his age. Abreu further argues that this apparently contradictory view of womanhood suggests that Dos Passos was not immune to the long fight of the American women for the improvement of their social, political and civil status, namely to the more militant phase of the women's suffrage movement contemporary to our author's youth.

Miguel Carrasqueira also addresses gender issues in *Three Soldiers* (1921), yet his focus is on representations of masculinity in the novel, where, according to this contributor, it is clear Dos Passos's preoccupation with the struggles between the individual and mechanical society which seeks to strip men from their individuality to successfully make them war-machines. Carrasqueira argues that the novel's main male character, John Andrews, epitomizes the resilient individual who forever struggles against social regulations. Because of his artistic and sensitive background, Dos Passos envisions Andrews as the new model of masculinity, which will appropriately substitute traditional constructs of manhood (related to physical strength and roughness), although the naturalistic structure of the

novel foreshadows the failure of such struggle, when the tentative masculinity gives way to a submissive old masculinity.

Much more could be added about the contributions included in this collection. As it is inappropriate to fully expand on each of them in this introduction, here are but a few observations which provide some glimpses into the texts featured herein. One can only briefly add that the quality of the essays fully justifies the publication of this book, which we believe is an honest and productive contribution to the ongoing studies on John Dos Passos's life and literary career.

—**Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu**
University of Madeira, Portugal

BIOGRAPHICAL INSIGHTS

JOHN DOS PASSOS:
A MAJOR AMERICAN MODERNIST

TOWNSEND LUDINGTON,
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

It is a great honor for me to have been asked to speak about John Dos Passos in this setting, Madeira, the place from which according to him his grandfather emigrated. Manoel Joaquim Dos Passos lived in Ponta do Sol until 1830, when apparently he was involved in a stabbing incident and hurriedly signed on a ship bound for the United States. Though an American citizen, our Dos Passos was much interested in Madeira and the mainland of Portugal, visiting them as a child with his parents and returning repeatedly, the last visit an extended one in 1967 of nearly a month and a half with his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Lucy while he did research for a narrative history entitled *The Portugal Story* that was published in 1969, the year before his death. His first trip to Madeira was memorable; he wrote about it later for a composition class at Harvard when he was an undergraduate there. Please indulge me a bit; I'll read from a biography of Dos Passos I wrote some years back:

Sometimes Dos Passos would travel with his parents when they were together in Europe. A memorable trip was to Madeira, his ancestral home, where the three of them visited after he had undergone a hernia operation. In one of the unpublished essays written at Harvard, Dos Passos described the trip, which left him with vivid images of a miserable voyage from Lisbon to Funchal, during which he lay much of the time stretched out in a steamer chair, 'while a kind hearted gentleman fed me strawberries of miraculous sweetness' to offset the seasickness induced by the constant rolling of their 'wheezy old steamer.'

The bay stretching before Funchal was lovely, "hemmed in by lavender-brown cliffs," while at the far end of town "rose in white and red steps up the mountainside." As soon as the steamer anchored, all sorts of boatmen surrounded her, shouting to the people on board. Dos Passos was fascinated by them and awed by the "small boys, olive skins flashing in the sunlight, [who] dove for the pennies we threw them."