

# John Dos Passos: The Business of a Writer

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- 1 Scholars became interested in the life and writing of John Dos Passos as early as the 1920s. In 1931, for instance, a German Ph.D. student, Werner Neuse, decided to work on Dos Passos's development as a writer at the *Hessische Ludwigs-Universität*, Giessen. At the time, Dos Passos had not yet completed his masterpiece, the U.S.A. trilogy. Only *The 42nd Parallel* had been published by 1930. *Nineteen Nineteen* appeared two years later, while *The Big Money* was released in 1936. And yet, in the early 1930s, Dos Passos was already a rising star in the literary firmament. He had acquired international fame with novels such as *Three Soldiers* (1921) and *Manhattan Transfer* (1925).
- 2 Deservedly, Dos Passos entered the canon of world literature with the above-mentioned works and became one of the most influential American authors of the twentieth century. Jean-Paul Sartre's statement that is commonly cited refers to Dos Passos as "the greatest writer" of his days (Sartre, qtd. in Oliveira 16). And yet, the interest of researchers started to ebb soon after. In the late 1930s, critics who adhered to a leftist philosophy condemned Dos Passos when the writer departed from the left—an ideology he had subscribed to until then. His work fell somewhat into oblivion. This changed again in the 1960s and the 1980s. Universities started to reintroduce Dos Passos into their curricula. Many dissertations were produced, whose corpus of analysis was dedicated to Dos Passos's fiction. With the advent of the new millennium a new height of Dos Passos scholarship was reached. Researchers in Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the U.S., among others, committed themselves to Dos Passos's life and to his *oeuvre*.

- 3 This does not come as a surprise, since Dos Passos's writing enables us to study a wide range of topics. The scrutiny of modernism, politics (with a special emphasis on the dichotomy between communism and capitalism), migration, censorship, architecture and urban life, American lifestyle, tradition and history, music, realism, gender studies (focusing on both the representation of men and women), as well as comparative studies between Dos Passos and other writers shall serve as a few examples of what has been dealt with academically hitherto.
- 4 This special issue, too, deals with diverse subject matters always placing John Dos Passos at the heart of each article. The title "John Dos Passos: The Business of a Writer" chosen for the compilation of five individual essays published herein is based on an essay authored by Dos Passos, which he entitled: "The Business of a Novelist", printed in April 1934 in the *New Republic*. The general idea behind such a broad caption was to allow the invited scholars to select without restrictions an original research topic, using John Dos Passos's writings (not only his novels) as the anchor point.
- 5 I feel very honored and privileged that these distinguished Dos Passos scholars accepted my invitation to share their knowledge with us. I am deeply grateful to Lisa Nanney, Rosa María Bautista-Cordero, Fredrik Tydal, and to John Dos Passos Coggin.
- 6 Since all articles had to pass a double-blind review process, before they could be approved for publication within *AmLit – American Literatures*, I would also like to thank the reviewers. Themselves devoted Dos Passos's scholars, they gave their time to improve this journal's special edition with their suggestions.
- 7 Last but not least, I feel indebted to *AmLit's* general editors, for their appreciation and their commitment to publishing this volume. Allow me, if I may, to show my special gratitude to Prof. Dr. Irakli Tskhvediani and to Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt for having always been open and patient, when I needed their support regarding various concerns at the several stages of this issue's publishing process.

### **The Contributions in Detail**

- 8 Lisa Nanney has published extensively on John Dos Passos. Her monographs hold a prominent place in Dos Passos scholarship. In her article titled "John Dos Passos and the Modern(ist) Machine" she analyzes how Dos Passos represented and evaluated the machine with both its destructive and advantageous influences on human life. Nanney demonstrates the ways in which the writer embodies his ambivalent attitude towards the machine, recreating the sense of modernity in his plays, modernist novels, and writing for motion pictures.

- 9 Fredrik Tydal, an outstanding contributor and currently the President of the John Dos Passos Society, in his article titled “Bayonets and Bananas: U.S. Imperialism and the Latin American Fruit Trade in Dos Passos’s U.S.A. Trilogy,” studies Dos Passos’s depiction of U.S. dominance and exploitation of Latin America in U.S.A. He explores the complex manner in which U.S.-Latin American relations are outlined in *The 42nd Parallel, Nineteen Nineteen* and *The Big Money*.
- 10 John Dos Passos Coggin, the grandson of John Dos Passos and co-manager of the John Dos Passos Literary Estate, in his article titled “John Dos Passos and George Orwell: Intersecting Lives, Parallel Politics and Writing,” compares his grandfather’s political views with those held by George Orwell. Both writers had met during the Spanish Civil War. The article thus provides deep insight into the Dos Passos-Orwell connection and its impact on their political and literary careers.
- 11 Rosa María Bautista-Cordero is John Dos Passos’s Spanish translator and a major researcher on the Spanish Dos Passos censorship files. In her article titled “The Making of a Spanish Dos Passos,” she examines the image of Spain in Dos Passos’s writings, along with the factors that may have contributed to Dos Passos’s central position within the Spanish cultural system to this day.
- 12 Finally, Miguel Oliveira, who has worked comprehensively on Dos Passos and migration and the writer’s Portuguese heritage, explains in his paper “John Dos Passos in the Crosshairs of Censorship: Investigating the Portuguese Censorship Reports during the *Estado Novo*, the Portuguese Dictatorship under António de Oliveira Salazar” why the Brazilian Portuguese translation of John Dos Passos’s novel *Adventures of a Young Man* was forbidden during Portugal’s authoritarian dictatorship, while a European Portuguese translation was authorized, albeit with cuts.
- 13 I hope the reader enjoys this special issue dedicated entirely to John Dos Passos who, without doubt, deserves his rank among the most prominent American writers.

**Works  
Cited**

Oliveira, Miguel. *John Dos Passos's Influence on Günter Grass: A Study on Two Memory-Writers and Two Distinct Approaches towards Migration as a Literary Theme*. BoD, 2008.

**Biography**

**Miguel Oliveira** holds a Ph.D. in American Studies, which he earned with distinction at the University of Lisbon. He has taught at several universities and colleges. From 2003 onwards, he directed the Language Lyceum in Funchal. Oliveira was appointed head of the Forum for Philosophical Studies of the Forum for Sciences, Arts and Culture on Madeira Island. He then worked for the John Dos Passos Studies Centre and the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs of the Madeiran Government. Furthermore, he founded the John Dos Passos's Portuguese Literary Prize and was invited to chair its first jury. In 2007, Oliveira wrote the Portuguese biography of the Nobel Laureate in Literature Günter Grass as well as various scientific monographs on the North-American writer John Dos Passos. He also translated Ödön von Horváth's novel *Jugend ohne Gott* into Portuguese. Oliveira is considered a major figure of Madeiran present-day literature. A selection of his work was included in several anthologies of contemporary Portuguese poets. In 2021, Miguel Oliveira became an Associate Professor at ISG, Lisbon's first Business and Economics School. Additionally, he teaches at the Language School at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon.