

Across genres: John dos Passos's *Brazil on the move*

A pluralidade de género em *Brazil on the move*, de John dos Passos

Fernanda Luísa Feneja¹

ABSTRACT: This article analyses how John Dos Passos's *Brazil on the Move* (1963) exemplifies the conventions of travel writing, on the one hand, and how it departs from them, on the other, in its representation of a foreign country and of its culture. I intend to discuss the relevance of this combination of literary genres in this book, considering the writer's background, his writing techniques and the ideology/ies underlying his work.

Key-words: travel writing – literary genre – cultural representation – the self and the other

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa de que forma o livro de John Dos Passos *Brazil on the Move* (1963) é paradigma das convenções da literatura de viagens, por um lado, e como se distancia delas, por outro, ao representar um país estrangeiro e a sua cultura. Pretendemos refletir acerca da importância de tal ecletismo genérico nesta obra, tendo em conta o percurso do escritor, as suas técnicas de escrita e a/s ideologia/s subjacentes à sua obra.

Palavras-chave: narrativa de viagens – género literário – representação cultural – o eu e o outro

INTRODUCTION

John Roderigo Dos Passos became conspicuous in the American literary scene in the twenties, following the publication of *Manhattan Transfer*, in 1926. Although before that he had already published a few works, namely *One Man's Initiation* (1920) and *Three Soldiers* (1921), which focus mainly on the war experience and on its devastating impact on the individual, in *Manhattan Transfer* he attempted most successfully at the innovative writing style that he later improved in *U.S.A.* (1930, 1932 and 1936). Not only did these novels deal with the thematic concerns of the decade, but they also converged with the modernist impulse in the arts, by means of their technical originality.

Because both academic and literary criticism have long acclaimed *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.* as Dos Passos's best works, he is mostly referred to as a modernist novelist.

¹ Doutorada em Literatura Americana (2007), mestre em Estudos Americanos (2000) e licenciada em Línguas e Literaturas Modernas, Estudos Ingleses e Alemães (1986). E-mail: luisasf@sapo.pt

However, throughout his life-long career, he tried to keep his creative independence from any literary labeling, both through his reflections on that issue and, most importantly, through the literary production itself. In fact, on the one hand his works also display aesthetic features shared by naturalistic and realistic trends. And, on the other, his bibliography covers a wide scope of literary genres and modes, ranging from the novel to poetry, plays, historical narrative, biography², and autobiography³.

Brazil on the Move (1963) adds to such an eclectic production apparently as a book of travelling or a journey narrative. Dos Passos's biographers, Townsend Ludington (1980) and Virginia Carr (2004), explain how the writer became so interested in this country so as to write a book about it. He travelled to Brazil on three different occasions, in 1948, 1958 and 1962, respectively. The first trip was part of a working expedition to a few countries in South America to study the impact of communism and of dictatorship in that part of the globe. He spent a month in Brazil, which he extensively travelled through and became fascinated by, as he stated in a letter to Claude Bowers: "Brazil is enormous and poor and interesting" (CARR, 2004, p. 469). The material he collected there was used in an article in the December 1948 issue of *Life* magazine, "Pioneers in Brazil" (468-9). Dos Passos would return to Brazil in 1958 on an invitation by the "Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos". Although this trip included a number of lectures at Brazilian universities and a few articles, as a way to pay for the longer stay – he called it a "working holiday"⁴ (516) –, he already had in mind the idea of writing a book based on the journey (514). *Brazil on the Move* was published in 1963, after one last trip the year before, and the narrative covers episodes from all the three stays. Paragon House republished it a few decades later as the first paperback edition, in its "The Armchair Traveller Series", in 1991.

² The Ground We Stand On (1941), The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson (1954), The Shackles of Power: Three Jeffersonian Decades (1966) are some of his historical writings. The Garbage Man, Airways, Inc., and Fortune Heights are three plays, published in 1934.

³ Jay Pignatelli, the main character in Chosen Country (1951) is considered the fictional representation of John Dos Passos himself.

⁴ Meshew quotes Fussell on how travel and work are intertwined: "Travel is work. Etymologically, a traveler is one who suffers travail, a word deriving in its turn from Latin tripalium, a torture instrument consisting of three stakes designed to rack the body. Before the development of tourism, travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of judgment" (MEWSHAW, 2005: 4).

Interestingly, the book seems to have regained recent acclaim, partly following its reedition in Brazil in 2013. As in the United States, this is also the second edition since the Portuguese translation *O Brasil Desperta*, in 1964. Also, the Portuguese literary critic Vamberto Freitas has recently written an article on *Brazil on the Move*, a reflection he considers deserving given not only the ancestral ties between Portugal and Brazil, but also the need to explore Dos Passos's hypenated status and his later relation to his Portuguese ancestry (FREITAS, 2012).

In addition to this, the recent creation (in 2013) of a website⁵ dedicated to John Dos Passos by his family, is expected to renew public attention to the writer's work and trigger the reedition of some of his works, as his grandson, John Coggin, states in a an interview with Douglas Trevor:

Certainly, we are excited to promote classics like *U.S.A.* and *Manhattan Transfer*. In addition, we want to use the site to spread word of John Dos Passos's obscure but strong works like *Brazil on the Move*. Many out-of-print works are deserving of fanfare. Our hope is to return some titles to print. We believe that the official John Dos Passos website can act as a catalyst for a revival of interest in his work. It's an exciting time for the John Dos Passos legacy" (TREVOR, 2013).

CLASSIFYING *BRAZIL ON THE MOVE*

Townsend Ludington, who gives more attention to *Brazil on the Move* than Virginia Carr, refers to it as a "book of reportage about Brazil", largely based on the notes made by the writer during his trips and on the materials he collected (1980, p. 488). Linda Wagner considers that, together with *The Portugal Story* (1966) and *Easter Island* (1971), it is a book "about places" (1979, p. 147). Both terms seem to unmistakably converge with the overarching definition of travel writing, which literary dictionaries define broadly as the description of any author's journey to a distant place, traced back to Great Antiquity with Herodotus' trip to Egypt and other parts of Africa (c. 485-425) (WHEELER). Cuddon, in turn, calls "travel books" all sorts of writing that, for a variety of reasons and purposes, deal with accounts or records of "sojourns in foreign lands" (1991, p. 995), which partly explains the richness and variety that he ascribes to the genre (1002).

⁵ www.johndospassos.com.

Research on travel literature, however, has raised important questions concerning its delimitation as a literary genre. Some major studies are those of Casey Blanton (2002) and Tim Youngs (2013). While both concur in the idea that travel writing is quite a hybrid and complex genre, comprising diverse influences such as those of fiction or journalism, each of them puts forward relevant arguments in terms of the conceptualization of this type of literature.

In her seminal work *Travel Writing. The Self and the World* (2002), Blanton maps out the history of travel writing, from its early origins to the present, and analyses a number of selected works that span the whole timeline of human history. She thus classifies travel literature into two different, though overlapped, types: (1) the impersonal journey narrative, with a linear structure that clings to the chronological order of the itinerary itself; and (2) a second type, which relies more noticeably on elements borrowed from fiction, such as a rising and falling action, conflict, or character. She concludes that what can be considered nowadays “travel literature” results largely from a balance between the impersonal and the personal types, which testifies to the afore-mentioned genre complexity and impurity (4-5). Nonetheless, travel writings are always writings of place, in other words, representations of place and the fixing of “the contours and colours of a particular region of the globe” in our minds (2002: 106).

Youngs, in turn, sets out to define the term by linking it, on the one hand, to the narrative categories of time and space, and, on the other hand, to the idea of identity: self-identity and the other’s. As Blanton, he considers its eclectic character, namely the integration of features from fiction, but draws primarily on Peter Hulme’s⁶ criterion that the writer must have travelled to the places he describes (pp. 5-8). This aspect is of paramount importance because it places travel narrative outside the scope of fiction.

While an overview of the chapters of *Brazil on the Move* most obviously sets the book in the category of non-fiction, it still hints at some genre imprecision. In addition, as we shall see later in this essay, its complete reading raises a number of questions that, in my view, go beyond that of genre and correlate with Dos Passos’s path both as a writer and as an American citizen.

⁶ Youngs co-published *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002) with Peter Hulme.

BEYOND TRAVEL RECORDS

Brazil on the Move opens with a brief Brazilian legend about the country and the people, which serves as introduction to the characterization that follows. Throughout this first chapter, Dos Passos describes the country's atypical geography, its natural wonders and flaws, and mentions the Portuguese settlement and colonization. Although knowledge of this issue proved crucial and even prompted his later interest for his ancestry, eventually leading him to the writing of *The Portugal Story*, it is only superficially exposed. Besides the simple style and language, it seems to lack a deeper and critical insight, namely as regards the process of colonization. Jandyra Cunha, who studies Dos Passos's vision on Brazil from the standpoint of linguistics, considers that he sticks to the official versions taught to school children in the fifties, which befitted his conservative political perspective at the time. Therefore, he pictures the Portuguese settlement as a peaceful process, accepted almost as a natural phenomenon by the colonized people (2000).

Despite the fact that Dos Passos had previously written a few books on American history, and that his major fiction works successfully intertwined fiction and historical representation, in this first chapter of *Brazil on the Move* history provides no more than the framework for the cultural portrait of the Brazilian people. In particular, Dos Passos contends that the racial mixture of the Portuguese settlers can be traced back to the nation's formative years, including Celts, Visigoths, Burgundian French, Moors, Phoenician, or Carthaginian. Along with interracial marriage and progeny, Portuguese culture and language testify to that interaction, which also accommodates religious exchange, for example between Moors and Catholics. These traits, according to Dos Passos, distinguish Portugal from other European colonizing nations, and were taken by fifteenth century settlers to Brazil, where they expanded this matrix of racial interaction, this time with the native people (1991, pp. 2, 3). Because of this, Dos Passos calls Brazil the "Melting Pot of the Americas", which is also the title of this first chapter. Yet, such a choice goes beyond the ethnographic portrait of the people. Imported from the American context, the expression "melting pot" is a metaphor for the composition of America, based on diversity, and expresses the idea of fusion of all cultures, thereby giving birth to a new one, the American (PIRES, 1996, p. 277). Regardless of the controversy that the term also entails⁷, it remains linked to the idea of cultural

⁷ Criticism of the concept relied heavily on the idea that the fusion of all cultures, expressed by the metaphor of melting metal, did not respect the particular characteristics of each culture, implicitly running counter to the

pluralism, closely linked with cultural tolerance. This conceptual connection also underlies Dos Passos's reflections on the Brazilian people: "Along with racial toleration, religious toleration has been the rule (1991, p. 11). And again, he believes this feature to have been inherited from the Portuguese: "Perhaps the thread of racial and religious and political tolerance that keeps reappearing in their history has something to do with the success of the Portuguese as colonizers" (...) "Seafaring peoples tend to get their prejudices rubbed off" (2-3). It is interesting to note that another European traveler to Brasil, in the late thirties, the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig⁸, celebrates the mixture of races and the incredible identity pattern that was born out of such an interaction, openly opposing the belief in the correlation of culture and race (1955, p. 20); his perspective thus converged with the anthropological theories of Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, who put forward the concept of cultural relativism, where culture correlates with learned behavior, human creativity and spiritual liberty, and the need for tolerance (PIRES, 1996, p. 68).

Dos Passos's appreciation of this feature of the Brazilian people not only conforms to this pattern, but it is also consistent with his previous approaches to issues such as race, nationality, religious beliefs or gender in his early fiction, in which he consistently represents the diversity in American society and crudely exposes how they illustrate the betrayal of the American Dream.

Only after having traced this profile of the country does Dos Passos start the description of his journey. This second chapter resembles a travel diary, consisting of Dos Passos's chronological telling of his wanderings from the moment he first landed in Rio de Janeiro in 1948 to the trip to Belém with Bernardo Sayão in the second chapter. A comprehensive look at the lexical field provides immediate evidence of this. Apart from verbs of movement, almost all of them in the past simple tense, such as "landed", "turned off the road", "returned over", "got settled", a handful of diverse expressions belong in the same semantic field: "roads", "hotel", "lodging", "on the way back", "my next expedition", "trip", "airport", "by that time we had arrived", we "walked back to the station" (13-27), to cite but a few. However, such a linguistic framework, as simple as it may be, provides the unavoidable

concept of cultural pluralism. Other expressions came out as a result of this discussion, aiming to preserve each culture's own identity: stew, salad, salad bowl, for example (Pires, 1996: 280-1).

⁸ Stefan Zweig eventually moved to Brazil, Petropolis, in the early forties. Deeply depressed with the evolution of World War II and the rise of anti-Semitism and of intolerance, he would commit suicide, soon followed by his wife.

resource for the travel-writer to gain insight into the visited place. Again, the categories overlap, as this record is, after all, a writing of place. And place, incidentally, is a prime narrative category: as Reis and Lopes state, while in fiction it consists of the physical elements that make up the scenario where the plot develops and the characters give life to it, in travel writing all the narrative is defined either by the novelty of space or by its rediscovery, widening the traveller's horizons and triggering his own change (2002, pp. 135, 138).

Nevertheless, the chapter is far from being a pure narration of the journey or the sole description of places, as both of them are consistently intertwined with examples of diverse contents, ranging from information about public services to scattered cultural and historical references. For example, the physical description of public facilities, such as the Health Center in Rio Doce, belongs in a broader account of the Brazilian public Health Service (19-25); the overnight at Governador Valadares allows for a political discussion at the restaurant, on the issues of American imperialism and the American cooperation with Brazil (36-7). Every now and then the narrative offers a touch of the Brazilian way of life, either from the narrator's point of view or from his interlocutors' and guides'. This mosaic pattern, which persists throughout the whole book, informs the reader about the Brazilian bureaucracy, the people's hospitality, the economic activities, the "sociology of the *favelas*" (32), the transportation system, Oscar Niemeyer's architecture, writers, to cite a few. In Chapter VIII, for example, Dos Passos makes acquaintance with Gilberto Freyre, who becomes his host for an entire day, providing him with the opportunity of a cultural immersion in the background of Freyre's writings, namely the colonial Brazilian setting of sugar plantations (180). Other chapters (III and VI, in particular), depict the development of Brasilia as a symbol of the nation's progress and modernity:

Dr. Israël points through the window. 'Brasília.' He smiles and shrugs and frowns all at once. The shanty town unfolding below is known as Cidade Livre, the free city, a straggle of frame buildings painted in a dozen colors on either side of a broad dusty road. He insists on calling it 'provisional city'. In two or three years it will have done its work. They will tear it down. 'The real city will take its place'⁹ (DOS PASSOS, 1991, p. 75).

⁹ Architecture plays an important role in Dos Passos's work: In *Manhattan Transfer*, for example, the issue of modern architecture is discussed in terms of the destructive power of the city over the individual, while one of the biographies in *Dos Passos's The Big Money* is Frank Lloyd Wright's.

Such a comprehensive insight into the portrait of a nation places *Brazil on the Move* far beyond the characteristics of a travelogue, which, broadly speaking, consists of a piece of writing about travel, or of a travel diary. The traveler's impressions and experience, albeit present, most often play the role of a watermark in the sociocultural representation of the country, complying with the idea that culture encompasses products of human thought such as customs, belief, art, music, made by a particular group of people at a specific time, a shared, common patrimony¹⁰ that the reader feels as the core of the book.

Because examples of thematic diversity abound throughout the book, it is important to mention that, in a way, its structure seems to retain features from Dos Passos's synoptic style, which he thoroughly applied, especially in *U.S.A.* and in *Manhattan Transfer*. The reader is offered a collage of different episodes that may consist of simple journey narratives, of ideological discussions, of historical accounts, of historical facts, of more poetic description of places, of description of people or of social events. Cunha considers that this panoply often makes the book resemble a series of field notes devoid of any organization criterion (2000). But, for Wagner, the use of these writing techniques, such as the juxtaposition of different elements or of contrasting language, pervade all his writings, including the last ones. She contends that in his books of place, as she labels *Brazil on the Move*, he resorts to the same devices and style: focus on character rather than event, attention to physical detail, juxtaposition of segments, use of vernacular (1979, p. 147).

«THE PEOPLE THE LORD PUT THERE»

The Brazilian people are given special attention in the cultural synopsis of the country, used, as Wagner contends, as “repeatedly, the vehicle for Dos Passos's comments about the country” (1979: 148). In this respect, such a representation is also informed by an anthropological perspective, focused on the study of all forms of behavior of groups of people. This concern may explain why the chapter title, «The People the Lord Put There»,

¹⁰ These are general, comprehensive dictionary definitions that define the concept but do not explore correlated questions: Longman Dictionary of Language and Culture. 4th impression. Harlow: Longman, 2000, 314, and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. 6th Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 306.

resumes the opening legend, drawn from the following excerpt: “Is it fair, Lord,” asks the archangel, “to give so many benefits to just one country?” “You wait”, said the Lord Jehovah, “till you see the people I’m going to put there” (1).

Back in the second chapter, Dos Passos’s description of the working class gives not only a portrait of their social and working conditions, but also of the cultural, ethnographic background:

That was my first sight of the Brazilian working man in the mass, of the longsuffering happygolucky nomadic tribes who spread over the vast extent of the country moving from plantation to mine to lumbermill or construction camp, illnourished, ridden with illness, enduring cold and heat and hunger, tightening their belts, and singing their sambas and breeding their children and somehow getting the work done (DOS PASSOS, 1991, p. 41).

This combination of poverty and innate joy that seems a characteristic of Brazilians is resumed in other parts of the narrative, including its ending, where Dos Passos describes the atmosphere of a political campaign in Mossoró, in which tension soon gives way to singing and dancing:

A dangerous tension seems to be building up. Suddenly a samba band begins to play. (...) In three minutes half the people are dancing. The oratory fades away. No more traffic jam. The floats are moving. The meeting turns into a sort of carnival parade with samba schools dancing ahead of the floats, each behind its own banner. TOO YOUNG TO VOTE, reads one. Songs take the place of speeches. Children, teenagers, old men and women, everybody is dancing.

No more tension. (204-5)

In his article on *Brasil on the Move*, Vamberto Freitas highlights this concluding episode, also pointing out the dancing and the joy, among such poor people, as a feature of the Brazilian people. From his point of view, this last description reflects the atmosphere of fight and ambiguity faced by Brazil at that time (2012).

Other scattered, short references of socio-cultural or ethnographic contour appear throughout the narrative, such as the use and explanation of the unique Portuguese word *Saudade* (180), itself a symbol of Portuguese identity, or the embedded habit of addressing everyone who looked educated as “Doutor” (110). In Cunha’s opinion, the inclusion of other Portuguese words, namely in greetings or of farewell, conveys more vividly the idea of Brazilian hospitality and joy (2000).

Dos Passos's concern with people in the narrative takes different forms. Besides the sociocultural, ethnographic portrait of Brazilians as a people, focusing on their cultural identity by showing their common beliefs, arts, or customs, he also resorts to individuals, both common people and personalities of the cultural, political or cultural realms. Examples of both cases rely on the interaction between local people and the narrator, but in the second case Dos Passos also uses pieces of biography, some of them intertwined with the historical narrative of certain episodes. For instance, the second chapter gives extensive attention to Bernardo Sayão, to his life and work, as well to his qualities.

Such strategies of depicting people illustrate simultaneously the two types of travel writing defined by Mary Pratt in terms of the type of traveler-narrator: the impersonal one, the "manners and customs" figure, relying mostly on information and description of sights and sites, and the sentimental one, concerned with people as individuals and involving interaction between narrator and indigenous people (MILLS, 1993, p. 75).

As Pratt also contends, the first type produces information while "land-scanning" and by self-effacing, while the second one "must be associated with the critical sector of the bourgeois world, the private sphere, home of the solitary, introspecting Individual" (Mills, 1993: 76).

Although Pratt's conceptualization belongs in the context of imperialism and colonization, it remains applicable to contemporary travel writings, as is the case with Dos Passos's. But, also in terms of this particular aspect, he reconciles both types, adding to the hybrid character of the narrative.

POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

In another excerpt, a reference to a particular characteristic of the Brazilians as a people accommodates political discourse:

'We Brazilians,' the younger man burst out, 'are a people of noble impulses. We hate war and militarism. We believe in progress. We are a people of grandiose illusions. That is why the Communist movement here is like your Mr. Wallace's party in the States' (DOS PASSOS, 1991, p. 45).

Political references and commentary are embedded in historical narrative. Significant episodes of Brazilian recent history are told in the very same concise, story-telling style. Although Dos Passos keeps an apparently objective perspective in most situations, restricted to the local people's perspectives and sometimes supported by the nature of events themselves, as well by particular politicians' actions, criticism of Dos Passos has placed his views on Brazilian politics and ideology in the context of his later conservative stand. Freitas mentions that when Dos Passos travelled to Brazil in the sixties, his political mindset as regards internal affairs was already unmistakably Republican, which determined his support to the social-democrat cause in Brazil (FREITAS, 2012).

Actually, the seventh chapter in *Brazil on the Move* is notably political. Although the chapter opens with a typical sentence of travel narrative ("The first thing I saw when I stepped out of the hotel our first morning in Manaus was a curlyheaded young man" – Dos Passos, 1991: 137), it soon departed from such a genre, setting out to cover the 1962 campaign, in which two major trends opposed: the one supporting Fidel Castro and Communist Powers, and the other one supporting the United States and its Alliance for Progress (139-140); further to this, it describes with most detail the public and political path of anti-Communist journalist Carlos Lacerda, whom Dos Passos met personally. So far, however, political bias on Dos Passos's behalf is not evident in the open expression of his views, but rather on the selection of information reported and on the writing style. Even devoid of openly expressed support, Carlos Lacerda's portrait is given a positive, sympathetic representation:

At forty eight he is just reaching political maturity. His is the most compelling presence on Brazilian television. He somehow finds words every voter can understand to explain the difference between the reorganization of society under freedom and the Communist or Castro way. The direct approach, the straight talk, the burning dedication of the dark eyes behind the shellrimmed glasses still hold his audiences spellbound" (177-8).

As Freitas notes, Dos Passos assessment of Brazil was highly shaped by the United States political, social and economic reality, which makes him draw consistent comparisons between the two countries. Incidentally, this was one of the aspects that led to criticism from Leftists in Brazil, as regards Dos Passos's perspective expressed in *Brazil on the Move* (2013). Explicit comparisons actually appear throughout the narrative, in different situations and in relation to very diverse topics: from the analogy between the presidential palace in Brasília, another icon of modern architecture, and the Capital Hill in Washington (77), to the reflection on the

socioeconomic status of black people both in the US and in Brazil (182) or the Brazilian high students' knowledge of American writers, which Dos Passos infers as superior to that of their American counterparts as regards Brazilian literature (182-3), to the comparison of both working classes (183), or the comparison between Carlos Lacerda and Patrick Henry (149), a major figure of the American Revolution famed by his speeches.

In addition, the characterization of Brazil is also informed by a few references to the external affairs involving the two countries: American financial support to Brazilian manufacturing during the war (151), the successful cooperation between Americans and Brazilians as regards the Public Health Service, despite and Brazilian disappointment at the US (37), Getúlio Vargas's prohibition of Franklin Roosevelt's speeches to be printed in Brazilian newspapers (148), American support to Carlos Lacerda's anti-Communist campaign (175).

Although in previous chapters Dos Passos seems never to openly take a political stance, as I mentioned above, towards the end of the book, whose last chapters already correspond to his third visit, his approach becomes more personal and committed:

“Among the Americans I find a great deal of gloom. The Alliance for Progress seems stalled. Among the Department of Agriculture people to be sure there's a talk of a real breakthrough in rainforest agriculture. If it's true it's the most exciting news since chloroquin. So much to be done... If it weren't for the Communists.

For the first time, in all my batting around Brazil, walking with a group of Americans at lunchtime into a restaurant, I see real hostility in the faces of people at other tables.” (182).

And from then on overt criticism is expressed:

... the anti-communists mostly have to work gratis. The Communists get paid in various ways (...). “The Communists are struggling against imperialism and exploitation: how can an idealist oppose them? The Communist imperialism and Communist exploitation they read about in the newspapers does not impress them. The Berlin Wall; they shrug it off. The development of the demagoguery of Revolution in Mexico should have proved a corrective, but the lesson has been lost (184).

It is important to recall how Dos Passos's political path at home deserved harsh criticism, too; he was even accused of having become a cynical supporter of vested interests (Hicks, 1971: 107) as he progressively departed from his leftist and anarchist beliefs in the early years of his

career, to which he adhered especially when he supported the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti¹¹, towards a Conservative mindset. Granville Hicks, who calls him a writer of change, contends that he was himself a victim of change (1971, p. 106). The execution of his friend José Robles during the Spanish Civil War, supposedly at the hands of the Spanish Communist Party, is often referred to as the drive for this change, making him reassess ideologies vis-à-vis politics and partisanship.

Reacting to Malcolm Cowley's reference to José Robles as a "fascist spy"¹², Dos Passos's article in the *New Republic* discloses what he had found out about the mysterious execution of his friend, and clearly expresses his disappointment with communism:

My impression is that the frame-up in his [Robles's] case was pushed to the point of execution because Russian secret agents felt that Robles knew too much about the relations between the Spanish war ministry and the Kremlin and was not, from their very special point of view, politically reliable. As always in such cases, personal enmities and social feuds probably contributed (DOS PASSOS, 1988, p. 194).

Nevertheless, his disillusionment with American Communism had started in the thirties, as he grew aware of Stalinist terror in Russia and dissatisfied with Marxism and with the organized left in the US (Rosen, 1981, pp. 76-77) as, in open opposition to them, he defended "total freedom of speech and thought" (78).

However, and regardless of his late political commitment – for example, he supported Joseph McCarthy – Dos Passos's political positions seem dominated by his own morals and ideology, as several studies have pointed out: David Sanders argues that his anarchism consists, after all, in his persistent belief in self-government (1971, p. 135), while Eisinger contends that he is able to reconcile traditional liberalism and his late conservatism (1971, p. 145); Hicks also concludes that Dos Passos is critical of any form of totalitarianism, rather defending the people who any way or the other are victims of power, be it political or economic such as big corporations (1971, p. 121): and Nanney argues that even in his radical years, he kept his independence from organized political movements such as the Communist Party. His

¹¹ Dos Passos committed strongly to the cause of the two Italian immigrants Sacco and Vanzetti, accused of robbery and murder and eventually executed. This was a controversial issue that aroused the support of the Left (Nanney 1998: 176).

¹² In his review (*New Republic*, 99, July 1939) of Dos Passos's novel *Adventures of a Young Man* (1939), Cowley echoed the belief that José Robles had been arrested as fascist spy published.

affiliation was to social ideas and his commitment to fighting injustice, namely that suffered by individuals as victims of corporate capitalism (1998, pp. 176-7). Significantly, in his article “The Death of Jose Robles”, Dos Passos puts forward an Emerson-like explanation that reads also as a statement of belief as regards the individual and the humanist approach that pervades his whole writings:

Understanding the personal histories of a few of the men, women and children really involved would, I think, free our minds somewhat from the black-is-black and white-is-white obsessions of partisanship (1988, p. 195).

Dos Passos’s final commentary on the role of communism in Brazilian society, in the last part of *Brazil on the Move*, which I have just mentioned, testifies to the importance of the individual over the system and to the belief in freedom and democracy above all. As early as in chapter one, besides claiming the Brazilian spirit of tolerance, he rounds it up with a simple sentence about a Jewish rabbi who had settled in Brazil: “He spoke with pride and gratitude of his Brazilian citizenship. Only in Brazil had he come to understand the meaning of freedom” (12).

THE SELF AND THE OTHER

In an interview with Douglas Trevor in 2013, Dos Passos’s grandson, John Coggin, says:

I think if my grandfather were alive today, he would be reading widely about Brazil. He always had great hopes for the country. His admiration for the country is vividly expressed in his 1963 work, *Brazil on the Move*. While he would be sad to see the Amazon rainforest deteriorate, he would be glad to see the nation in the world limelight at last (TREVOR, 2013).

Actually, Dos Passos’s second visit to Brasília accounts for his bedazzlement before the grandiloquence, the innovative creativity, the modernity of the city. For all the genial impetus underlying its construction, both the architectural breakthrough and the political support that allowed it, Brasília stands for the country’s commitment to progress, a symbol of the nation: in the first chapter that he dedicates to it, Dos Passos calls precisely it “A Nation in Search of a Capital”.

In addition, the incursions into Brazil's West (Chapter II), Monte Alegre and Maringá (Chapter IV), and Amazon (Chapter V – “Through Brazil's back door”) reinforce the idea of a country under massive construction and development: diverse economic paths, a national construction site, industry and progress conquering the wild as in the American conquest of the West. From Bernardo Sayão's projected agricultural colony to the coffee plantations in Maringá and the development companies, to the “rainforest economy” along the Amazon, from Peru to Manaus and Belém, it is the idea of newness and of a fresh start that appeals to Dos Passos in his readings in Brazil.

This aspect in a way reflects the American ideal of conquering the wild and permanently starting afresh, the myth of Adam and the ever-present belief in the capacity to restart that is traced back to the foundation of America and that informs American cultural identity. John Coggin refers precisely to the analogy that, in some aspects, Dos Passos saw between the two countries: “Brazil resembled the U.S.A. in some respects. He hoped that Brazil would avoid some the mistakes that America made” (TREVOR, 2013).

Dos Passos's perspective on Brazil, be it in terms of explicit, objective comparisons as the ones mentioned above, or in terms of his beliefs and ideologies, is always framed by the conception of the traveler as someone who approaches the new and the different. Classifying the visited place with words of this sort correlates with the notions of identity and otherness, of sameness and alterity. Luísa Leal, studying the role of literary references by educated travel writers, contends that any cognitive subject needs two fundamental skills to apprehend what is unique in a country completely different from his own: self-relativisation and rationalization. By this she means that what the traveler already knows about the visited places, his “cultural luggage”, establishes the link between the subject and his perception of the new place (Leal, 2000: 238). Pageaux, in turn, explains how the concepts of identity and otherness can only be understood in the framework of the social imaginary. Picturing the foreign thus belong in this definition. The image results from the awareness of the self as regards the other, or the acknowledgement of “here” vis-à-vis “there” (2004, pp.136-7). These poles represent some distance between two distinct cultural realities:

O imaginário social a que nos referimos está marcado – vemo-lo – por uma profunda bipolaridade: identidade versus alteridade, em que a alteridade é encarada como termo oposto e complementar relativamente à identidade. O imaginário que colocamos como termo da nossa investigação é expressão, à escala de uma sociedade, de uma colectividade, de um conjunto social e

cultural, desta bipolaridade que assumimos como fundamental¹³ (PAGEAUX, 2004, p. 137).

Incidentally, the myth of the frontier, which I alluded to above, accommodates, according to Pageaux, the relationship between the self and the other, and illustrate how they correlate in terms of identity and of a heterogeneous culture (162).

Paz and Moniz, when defining travel literature, also mention the dialogue between the Self and the Other, in which both experiences and expectations are shared and which makes possible the process of knowledge, both of one's identity and of the Other's (1997, p. 224).

CONCLUSION

The most evident trait of *Brazil on the Move* is very likely its lack of formal unity. The very fact that it consists of a written record of three different journeys, made under different circumstances and spanning a time period of fourteen years, may in part explain this. As I pointed earlier, its content is varied and includes types or genres as diverse as mere travel records, description of landscapes (both urban and natural), biographical records, authentic dialogues, historical narrative, ethnographic details, cultural references, bits of economic analysis, rapportage, or political commentary.

Language and style, however, do not correlate clearly with such a wide genre, and also thematic, variety. Whatever the topic, the tone is simple and light, even in historical accounts, clearly departing from academic patterns – an option Dos Passos would keep in *The Portugal Story*, which he decided to write following his trips to Brazil and as the expression of his late interest for his Portuguese ancestry. As for dialogues, they record the vernacular language and the colloquial tone, and in a number of examples work as the narrative device to convey the people's perspectives on economy or politics, a feature that summons up “the speech of the people” used by Dos Passos to define *U.S.A.*¹⁴

Considering the theoretical framework on travel writing mentioned above, *Brazil on the Move*, regardless of its structural and thematic diversity, conforms to Blanton's classification

¹³ This social imaginary is defined by a strong bipolarity: identity versus alterity, the latter being the opposing and complementary pole of identity. In our research, the social imaginary, in terms of society, is the expression of the collective, of a social and cultural set, of this bipolarity that we consider fundamental (my translation).

¹⁴ The 42nd Paralell, “U.S.A” (Boston, New York: 2000, xiv).

of personal travel narrative, defined by the borrowing of elements from fiction, namely, in the case of Dos Passos, the use of story-telling, and by the rupture with a linear, chronological structure as the one used in the impersonal travel narrative. But, in accordance with the overlapping of both categories that Blanton believes to apply to most examples, as well as with the hybrid character that superimposes over this genre, *Brazil on the Move* is, most notoriously, a book about places, it is the representation of a place in a wide range of dimensions. Using Blanton's expression about travel writing, Dos Passos too caught "the spirit of the place". Furthermore, his representation of the place results primarily from the encounter with the Other that has also been mentioned as a characteristic of travel writing. The self is the traveler, and his observation of the foreign and the written record of it becomes the expression of a cross-cultural encounter. Dos Passos's readings in Brazil are shaped by his path as a writer and as a citizen, and are informed by his own national and cultural identity with his homeland. More than establishing parallelisms between the two countries, which he also does, his "cultural luggage" is embedded with his particular ideologies and beliefs. Wagner goes further than this as she contends that "Dos Passos's later books of travel share more than technical mannerisms with his late fiction and history" (148). As regards *Brasil on the Move*, she notes, Dos Passos transmits his moral principles, for example through the choice of characters like Bernardo Sayão, whose moral qualities he praises (148).

A consistent study of Dos Passos's work, taken globally, pins down a number of traits, both in terms of writing techniques and of ideas, that form what can be considered his pattern, the features that define him as a writer despite all the variety that pervades his literary production. Therefore, it is important to note, as a final point and considering the arguments above, that even a non-fiction work with such distinct features, as is the case of *Brasil on the Move*, is in keeping with that defining pattern. Precisely because of its uniqueness, it makes the persistence of those traits all the more relevant, adding to the continuity of Dos Passos's artistry and to the consistency of his beliefs across genres and throughout his whole literary life.

REFERÊNCIAS

BLANTON, Casey, *Travel Writing. The Self and the World*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

BELKIND, Allen, ed., *Dos Passos, the Critics and the Writer's Intention*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press: 1971.

CARR, Virginia Spencer, *Dos Passos. A Life*. 1984. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004.

CUDDON, J. A., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 1977. London : Penguin, 1991.

CUNHA, Jandyra, CUNHA, M. J. C. . Visões de Brasil na Alternância de Código de Updike, Dos Passos e Uys.. In: Cristina Stevens. (Org.). *Quando o Tio Sam pegar no Tamborim - Uma visão transcultural do Brasil*. 1ed., Brasília: Editora Plano, 2000, v. 01, p. 75-108.

DOS PASSOS, John, *Brazil on the Move*, New York: Paragon House, 1991.

-----«The Death of José Robles»,in Donald Pizer, ed. *John Dos Passos. The Major Non-Fictional Prose*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988. 193-201.

EISINGER, Chester E., «Dos Passos and the New Liberalism». Ed. Allen Belkind. *Dos Passos, the Critics and the Writer's Intention*. 136-145.

FREITAS, Vamberto, «A Narrativa Brasileira de John dos Passos». <http://vambertofreitas.wordpress.com/2012/01/14>.

HICKS, Granville, «The Politics of John dos Passos», *Dos Passos, the Critics, and the Writer's Intention*. Ed. Allen Belkind. 106-121.

LEAL, Maria Luísa, Turistas Cultas: Contacto, Testemunho e Mediação. In Isabel Allegro Magalhães et al (coord.) *Literatura e Pluralidade Cultural. Actas do 3º Congresso Nacional da Associação Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada*). Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 2000. 233-240.

LUDINGTON, Townsend, *John Dos Passos - A Twentieth Century Odissey*, New York: Elsevier-Dutton Publishing Co., Inc., 1980.

MEWSHAW, Michael, South Central Review, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), pp. 2- The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of The South Central Modern Language Association Stable. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40039867>. Accessed: 19/03/2014

MILLS, Sarah, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, London: Routledge, 1993.

NANNEY, Lisa, *John Dos Passos Revisited*. Twayne Publishers: New York, Prentice Hall International, 1998.

PAGEAUX, Daniel-Henri, «Da Imagética Cultural ao Imaginário». In Pierre Brunel and Yves Chevrel, eds. *Compêndio de Literatura Comparada*, Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2004. 133-166.

PAZ, Olegário, e António Moniz, *Dicionário Breve de Termos Literários*, Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1997.

PIRES, Maria Laura Bettencourt, *Sociedade e Cultura Norte-Americanas*, Lisboa : Universidade Aberta, 1996.

-----, *Sociedade e Cultura Norte-Americanas. Textos Complementares*, Lisboa : Universidade Aberta, 1996.

PIZER, Donald, ed. *John Dos Passos. The Major Non-Fictional Prose*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

ROSEN, Robert C., *John Dos Passos. Politics and the Writer*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981.

SANDERS, «The ‘Anarchism’ of John Dos Passos», *Dos Passos, the Critics, and the Writer’s Intention*. Ed. Allen Belkind. 122-135.

TREVOR, Douglas, «The New John Dos Passos’s Website». 10 October 2013.
<http://douglastrevor.com/the-new-john-dos-passos-web-site/>.

WAGNER, Linda, *Dos Passos. Artist as American*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979.

WHEELER, L. Kip, «Literary Terms and Definitions».
http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_t.html.

YOUNGS, Tim, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

ZWEIG, Stefan, *Brasil, País do Futuro*, Porto: Livraria Civilização, 1955.

REIS, Carlos, e Ana Cristina M. Lopes, *Dicionário de Narratologia*, Coimbra: Livraria Almedina, 1994.

Data de recebimento: 12/04/2014
Data de aprovação: 05/11/2014