



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 9 Sayı: 42 Volume: 9 Issue: 42

Şubat 2016 February 2016

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

THE USE OF CAMERA-EYE TECHNIQUE IN *THE THREE SOLDIERS* AND *MANHATTAN TRANSFER* Bülent Cercis TANRITANIR*

Abstract

John Dos Passos as a modernist writer entertains the reader during telling his stories. In an excellent way he uses camera-eye technique to tell what he grasps in reality. Passos more than a realist novelist shows characters and urban life. In *The Three Soldiers*, Passos was an ambulance driver in the First World War and mirrors the reality. He is picturing characters feeling, attitudes, flee, wound and ambitions. In *Manhattan Transfer*, Passos lives the city and reveals his experiences about urban life. He considers city as protagonist and takes its pictures and changes during thirty years. He tells every details of the city like statue of liberty, flag, streets and mechanical inventions. As a result, real expressions react with the soul of the receiver and drive him/her to continue reading his works. This paper argues the use of camera-eye technique in Passos's two novels *The Three Soldiers* and *Manhattan Transfer*.

Keywords: Camera-eye, Picture, Soldiers, Desert, City and Reality.

INTRODUCTION

All people, even little boys and girls, want to stand in front of the mirror because of the real reflection it gives. Mirror's reflection satisfies human nature because it shows everything as it is without any additions. In the early 20th century John Dos Passos more than any American writer of his generation (Foster,1986) assumed the new ways of telling stories. At that times, film makers were slowly improving these ways. He gradually deserted the old-style of story-telling method which reveals events and characters chronologically, lead to a climax and then falling off. As an alternative, he just used picturing like a camera. Passos used camera-eye technique to reveal his stories. This technique makes him a star in the sky of the famous American novelists. He just transited reality with no exaggerations and imagination, which entertains the reader during reading his works. He was a modernist writer that is why he always tried to put a sharp line with the past. He was interested in telling history because it shows people's felling. In both novels, Passos set out to turn characterization, plot and setting with a montage document. It is not clear whether you read or watch the novels. Maybe his biggest aim is to form a new image inside readers' minds and achieve a new breath while reading. Passos was interested in some movements related to painting such as Cubism or Futurism and thus his interest in film montage got theoretical knowledge. Thanks to his interest, he was among the brave writers who attempted and tried new things.

Passos was highly affected and fascinated by the age of machine, so he wished to show himself as a kind of movie machine that images and records his times. He wished it because nobody before him had been such a man. With these qualifications, he wrote completely new kinds of novels. In this paper I want to show how Passos uses camera-eye technique in *The Three Soldiers* and *Manhattan Transfer*. In *The Three Soldiers* he pictured the three characters with their atmosphere and in *Manhattan Transfer* he pictured the city as a protagonist. Besides these, effects of the war is so clear in *Three Soldiers*. While examining bad results of the war, Dido Sotiriou's *Farewell Anatolia* became bestseller in 1980s in some countries affected by the World War I. In her essay about *Farewell Anatolia*, ŞİMŞEK pays attention that being soldier in the first World War is more difficult than being in any other wars (ŞİMŞEK,2015:220).

I. MODERNISM (1915-1945)

Modernism is the name of all movements which were dominant from the opening of the 20th century. This period Writers wanted to convince more empirical and sometimes more extremely individualistic forms of writing. John Dos Passos is considered as a modernist writer. Throughout his literary life, he was captured by history of modern art (Diggins, 1974). This movement can be known not only in literature but also in arts. Modernism is widely known as the most creative time in the history of humanity. It can be defined as a sharp line which separates the past and find new forms of expressions. Writers like Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, James Joyce, T.S Eliot, and William Faulkner are called

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Yüzüncü Yıl Univrsity, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature.

Fathers of modernism. In order to understand literary modernism correctly, it's necessary to give a view at the American history. This country witnessed a change as a product of industrialization. Cities start to rise and technology abruptly had the authority to shift everything. That was when realism in literature started. Literary movement produced text that mirrored the very real lives of the working class. During this period literature started to change.

Modernism is formalist, confusion, obscurity and deep in sense and for modernist writers, the plot is non-plot; in which it doesn't contain cause and effect. The target of the writers is to pay attention to the readers, so they concentrate on one subject during the story. Stream of consciousness is the most important technique because of showing unclear emotions. Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* brought experimental stream-of-consciousness techniques into his writing method. In modernism, there are no rules and social concerns and the time of the tales is not important. Their characters are from middle class who attempt to gain high class. The importance of Personal experiences and individuality. They use an easy language but complicated in meaning and its time is too short. Passos's thoughts about modernism seem to be like an art. He describes modernism as a trend over the whole world, a "creative tidal wave" (Lowry, 1969), affecting all arts directly or indirectly. His early novel *Manhattan Transfer*.

II. CUBISM AND FUTURISM

Cubism, as defined by E. H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion*, is "the most radical attempt to stamp out ambiguity and to enforce one reading of the picture – that of a man-made construction, a colored canvas" (Princeton, 1960:281). Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Gertrude Stein, and Pierre Reverdy were the first ones to use cubism in literature. These poets presented a lot of techniques related to Cubism such as destruction of grammar, free verse, etc. (Cauman, 2001). Passos was always under the influences of some artistic movements such as Cubism. As is seen former sentences, Cubism enforces reading of the Picture and Passos makes readers see the events in his sentences with the effects of Cubism. Cubism helped him create his own unique style. Moreover, he had some illustrations and his ability of camera-eye technique comes from his talents of painting. In Cubism, first of all you need a visible content and Passos worked as a driver during the war times so he had a lot of visible contents to create something in minds of the reader. What he saw are the subjects of his novels.

Futurism, another movement in which Passos was really interested, refuses all traditional aesthetic values and claims that the future of the world is modernism. It focuses on age of machines, civilization and urbanization. It aims a clear break with the past and a new meeting with the future. Subjects of futurism are war on the past, war on immobility, speed, modern life. In *Manhattan Transfer*, Passos uses futurism technique at a less degree. He focuses on the newly things in New York City. The novel attacks social indifference of modern urbanization and it presents Manhattan as a merciless place full of restlessness.

Cubism and Futurism contained new ways of examining daily things and representing them like the human figure and common objects, as well as ephemeral subjects like movement (Song, 2006:6). The Futurist movement had concepts of simultaneity, dynamism, and speed in life and art and in addition these, it focused on political and glorified war as a way of obtaining national supremacy for Italy. With this aim of Futurism, Passos examined political ways of wars through three characters in the army.

III. LOST GENERATION

Lost Generation contains specially a group of American writers who came forward during post-World War I. The reason why the group's name was "lost" was that some important and inherited values were lost after the world. Lost doesn't mean vanished but it mostly includes meaning of disoriented, wandering, directionless and these terms presented "a recognition that there was great confusion and aimlessness among the war's survivors in the early post-war years" (Hynes, 1990). The writers and artists joining in Lost Generation were F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, John Dos Passos, Waldo Peirce, Alan Seeger, and Erich Maria Remarque. John Dos Passos presented effects of war in *Three Soldiers*. This novel is regarded as a group of socially conscious novels containing disillusionment that appeared after the war. Almost all people had big disillusionments because of a number of deaths. *Three Soldiers* is regarded as a mirror of thoughts during Lost Generation. In *Three Soldiers*, he tries to be an antiwar novelist standing against all styles of wars and all boredom of the army. Being an active member of Lost Generation, Passos wants all readers to see bad effects of wars on people and also on the daily life of people. Still, he has been widely read with his identity of Lost Generation and antiwar. He was, at that term, appreciated by his contemporaries, as well.

IV. THE USE OF CAMERA-EYE TECHNIQUE IN *THE THREE SOLDIERS* AND *MANHATTAN TRANSFER*

Passos is a creative artist. He is not conventional as other American writers. Many readers of Passos have been troubled by Camera Eye. The subject matter of this technique is the brief stream of consciousness and of course it brings out some obscurity. Camera-eye is very difficult to identify until reading Passos's

autobiography *The Best Times* in 1966 (Pizer, 1980). Camera Eyeworks as a personal subjective commentary on the objective elements of the narration elsewhere in U.S.A for Passos and its emphasize is often upon the everyday stuff of New York's streets (Beddow, 2010).

In *The Three Soldiers* he used a camera eye technique to tell the story of common American soldiers in the First World War. During reading this novel you feel as if you were looking at these soldiers because being an ambulance driver during World War the First enabled him to take pictures of what he saw. He pictured everything around without any addition.

Dos Passos in *Three Soldiers* clearly presents three soldiers; Chris Chrisfield, Dan Fuselli and John Andrews in order to illustrate how the World War I had an impact on ordinary soldiers and also people around them. Andrews, the musician and chief character, points out that we are here for nothing and we cannot change anything. He has just come from Harvard for war about which his expectation is that he will have peace for his troubled mind. However, he faces slavery and boredom. In fact, Andrews is a typical Dos Passos hero who has the qualification of aesthetic revolutionary and is also a beauty-devoted young man having a deep social consciousness. Two companions of Andrews, an Italian-American, Dan Fusseli, and a gentle farm boy, Chris Chrisfield, are disillusioned like Andrews. The farmer, so-called gentle, loses his endurance and kills an officer within the army.

Manhattan Transfer is also an important work by Passos. The novel is seen as far older than the movie technology since it brings out a major entertainment industry during the time this book was written. Focusing on this novel, Passos uses a lot of unconventional choices such as undermining the heroic, downplaying the dramatic, and tempering the tragic with absurd or fatalistic elements. *Manhattan Transfer* includes characters whose destinies seem random or perverse; whereas other novels present brave protagonists who choose their own fates. In the novel Passos iconoclastically approaches to the moments of some intense actions during the story. He shows the chaos and an urban battle with violence and intense temptations. So, it can be really difficult to catch the actions of the novel if you haven't lived in a big city before. The novel is considered kaleidoscopic portrait of the city. The novel has a number of characters as well, yet the protagonist is the city itself.

In his both novels, Passos claims that everyone has equally importance. So his novels are symbols of democratic structures of that century. In *Manhattan Transfer*, the city is presented as a deconstructed totality, fragmented into different ways and various point of views like a Cubist painting. With the steps of the avant-garde urban portrait films of his period, Passos follows some glimpses forming a collective gaze around. Besides, he anticipates to use many techniques presented by the great "city symphony" movies during the 1920s; for example, *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) by Vertov and *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) by Walter Ruttmann have great effects on Passos. Passos relies on visual imagery and skips some transitions and thus jumps cinema sector through his *Manhattan Transfer*. Passos prefers filmmaking with camera-eye technique to focusing careful process and intense labored psychology of literature.

Passos has some stylistic choices offering some insights into the stories during the novels. He gives not only what can be seen and heard, but also what the stories are. He doesn't intervene the moments of characters. Thanks to Passos, we know the purely physical angles of each detail about the stories through his deep observations.

In *Three Soldiers*, The 'Y' man refuses Andrews's idea and says we are here in Europe for democracy. 'Y' man continuously reveals that we are the protector of democracy. Then Passos shows Andrews intention for deserting. He is waiting for a moment to take a chance and flee the army. He decides after healing from his wound, he will desert the army. Then Passos pictures Andrews during a dangerous journey in a unique way. He is going to hide and endure anything even to face death in order to have freedom for a couple of months:

.... And I was going to be married to a dandy girl [...] But, hell, everybody was saying that we was going to fight to make the world safe for democracy [...] "Democracy.... That's democracy, ain't it: we eat stinkin' goolash an' that there fat 'Y' woman goes out with Colonels eatin' chawklate soufflay.... Poifect democracy!... But I tell you what: it don't do to be the goat." "But there's so damn many more goats than anything else," said Andrews. (Passos, 2004: 140- 141)

As soon as he got out of the hospital he would desert; the determination formed suddenly in his mind, [...] he would desert. He pictured himself hobbling away in the dark on his lame legs[...] He was ready to endure anything, to face any sort of death, for the sake of a few months of liberty in which to forget the degradation of this last year. (Passos, 2004:145)

In *Manhattan Transfer*, He puts his camera-eye on the city. Passos uses "fly on the wall" technique while describing a metropolis. John Dos Passos creates a literary work that looks like his own personal picture of the city. As mentioned before, he deals with this city as a protagonist character. During reading this novel it gives you the impression of looking at the real picture of the city because he shows everything and tells every detail in order to give you a complete image. The novel also includes "jump cuts" in some

parts bringing breaks during important events. Here with the jump cuts, he gives responsibility to the reader to find a central meaning of the novel:

What exactly does happen when one experiences a city in real life? ...The inhabitant or visitor basically experiences the city as a labyrinth. Although one with which he may be familiar, He cannot see the whole of a labyrinth at once, except from above, when it becomes a map. Therefore his impressions of it at street level at any given moment will be fragmentary and limited: rooms, buildings, streets. These impressions are primarily visual, but involve the other senses as well, together with a crowd of memories and associations. The impressions of a real city makes on an observer are thus both complex and composite.... (Pike 245)

Passos as an artist among American novelists was interested in society more than individuals and interested in history more than in psychology. His compassions were always with the men and women who were the victims of social and historical forces, while he was also interested in art. Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* shows New York City and its change during thirty years. At the beginning he shows urban as a suitable place for man to live in and makes his own fortune on it. He reveals its importance. He focuses on color and smell of the city, the posters, the advertisements, the latest trends, etc. A man tells Mr. Perry not to miss the chance and reminds him that the opportunity knocks the door once a time during a whole life. New project is building in New York like new bridges. Many mechanical inventions enter the city like telephones, electricity and steel bridges:

In six months I can virtually guarantee that these lots will have doubled in value. Now that we are a part of New York, the second city in the world [...] I firmly believe that you and I will see it, when bridge after bridge spanning the East River have made Long Island and Manhattan one, when the Borough of Queens will be as [...] All these mechanical inventions - telephones, electricity, steel bridges, horseless vehicles - they are all leading somewhere. (Passos, 2000:13-14)

The *Three Soldiers* has also interesting qualifications in the way of its technical innovations; that's to say, form of the novel is regarded totally as 'decentralized,' not having a central character and a single plot to consider it together artistically. Although Dos Passos never fully exploits the possibilities of the technique, the germ of the style is clearly seen and it is improved in *Manhattan Transfer* which brings to perfection in USA (Heiney, 1958).

At the very begging of the novel Passos pictures another character who is Dan Fuselli. Passos shows emotion and attitude of Fuselli. The way of picturing this character is very interesting for readers. Passos takes Fuselli's picture as he imagines himself in three different positions. Firstly he feels as a little kid at home putting blanket on himself and sleep peacefully, secondly as an officer, dresses as him and even in nineteen years old as an officer and be with a girl like Mabe who waits him somewhere outside the camp. Thirdly pictures his scare outside the camp, numerous guards looking for him and he is running breathless down a long street pursued by mans who holding guns. After all these interpretations, imaginations and pictures, he starts to sleep and reveals that he should respect his commanders when they go across him. He claims that he must be respectful in order to get promotion. He wants to send a letter to his girlfriend back home and write down Corporal Dan Fuselli:

Fuselli wrapped the blanket round his head and prepared to sleep. [...] He felt cosy and happy like he had felt in bed at home, when he had been a little kid. For a moment he pictured himself the other man, the man who had punched an officer's jaw, dressed like he was, maybe only nineteen, the same age like he was, with a girl like Mabe waiting for him somewhere. How cold and frightful it must felt to be out of the camp with the guard looking for you! He pictured himself running breathless down a long street pursued by a company with guns, by officers whose eyes glinted cruelly like the pointed tips of bullets. He pulled the blanket closer round his head, [...] He must remember to smile at the sergeant when he passed him off duty. Somebody had said there'd be promotions soon. Oh, he wanted so hard to be promoted. It'd be so swell if he could write back to Mabe and tell her to address her letters Corporal Dan Fuselli. (Passos, 2004:6-7)

If we look main spirit behind *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos can be seen one of the few writers of twenty century to make extensive use of machine-based futurist themes (Lowry., 1969). Passos is going deeply and takes the picture of New York City. It appears in this novel as the actual protagonist. Now he is showing its roads especially Eleventh Avenue and Fifth Avenue which is crowded and full of cars. Then he pictures the statue of Liberty which is a very important figure in this city and tells every detail about it. He points out that by sea way many people enter this city and make it bigger. He describes statue of Liberty as a tall green woman covers in a frock, standing on an island and holding up her hand. His description for these things was as taking picture of these things with nothing extra that was the reason we are entertained and we react with the story:

The morning has grown bleak. Leaden clouds have settled down over the city. [...] Eleventh Avenue is full of icy dust, of grinding rattle of wheels and scrape of hoofs on the cobblestones. Down the railroad tracks comes the clang of a locomotive bell and the clatter of shunting freight cars. [...] Fifth Avenue at about Eighth Street.' (Passos, 2000:40)

...‘Look deary you’re missing things... There’s the statue of Liberty.’ A tall green woman in a dressing gown standing on an island holding up her hand. ‘What’s that in her hand?’ ‘That’s a light, dear... Liberty enlightening the world... And there’s Governors Island the other side. ... (Passo, 2000:57)

Passos turns his camera to another character who is Chrisfield. He Pictures Chrisfield’s dreaming as he is at home in India and the Frenchwoman prepares food for him instead of his own mother. At this moment a Frenchwoman is standing in the door and he is eating, Sergeant Anderson shouts at him and calls him "You goddam..." and calls him these words repeatedly. Then Passos Pictures Chrisfield reaction who pulls a knife and attacks the Sergeant to kill him but his friends stopped him. Passos in *The Three Soldiers* shows all these points as you are looking at:

He dreamed he was home in Indiana, but instead of his mother cooking at the stove in the kitchen, there was the Frenchwoman [...] shouting at the top of his lungs: "You goddam..." he started, but he couldn't seem to think of anything more to say."You goddam..." he started again [...] He was Sergeant Anderson. Chris drew his knife and ran at him.... (Passos 2004:92,93)

Passos uses aesthetic terms and innovations of that term that offered new ways of understanding and presenting world of urbanization (Lowry, 1969). Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* stabled his camera on the Flag and pictured it. Flag is the most important figure because it is the definition of a state. He tells every detail about it. He wants us to know this flag is not consisting of normal fabric. It is made of silk. Passos do all these details to put readers in the picture: "What flag?' 'The silk American flag.' 'No dear it's all put away. "Please I'd so like to have that flag cause it's the Fourth of July an everything.'" (Passos, 2000:57)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion human nature is built on reality, our mind reacts and is affected with the real events. Throughout my research on these two novels, it becomes clear that Passos’s writing is immortal in the mind of readers because his role in the novel is just taking pictures. Through the influences of Joyce, Cendrars, Flaubert, Zola, Eliot, Passos attempts a novel, *Manhattan Transfer*, to show that doing the impossible in an entire city and an entire era. The depth of the novel’s concerns distinguish it from its contemporary books with Passos’s jazz-inspired style of writing. Whereas humanstry to live their histories, New York City starts to become a metropolis through the novel. In the novel, individual lives ebb and flow like particles in the lifebloodstream of city, and the city accepts or rejects them without emotion.

Through these both novels Passos shows reality in a very excellent way. In each one of these two novels he chooses a certain aspect and takes its pictures. In *The Three Soldiers*, he puts his camera on these three common soldiers and shows details about them without any addition or decrease. He is good in using camera-eye technique in *The Three Soldiers* because he himself participated in the First World War as an ambulance driver. In *Manhattan Transfer* he turns his camera on the city of New York and pictures its changes during thirty years. During the reading you feel as if you were living in this city and seeing everything because everything is described by the narrator. By picturing, Passos affects the reader and encourages them to read his writing continuously. As Passos was picturing and transmitting what he viewed as a mirror, the reason of it becomes clear during his writing why he teaches the reader. What he claims is just as real as it is.

It has been clearly seen that Passos ‘s art was shaped with the visual art and spatial quality of his powerful imagination under the effects of Cubism and Futurism. He used much illustration in his works and thanks to them, he was able to use camera-eye technique successfully. He conventionally united art and literature in his both works.

REFERENCES

- AARON, Shaheen (2008). "Spencerian Theory and Modern Rites of Passage in John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*", Web
- BEDDOW, Alastair (2010). "Manhattan Nightmares: John Dos Passos, Charles Sheeler and the Distortion of Urban Space." *Moveable Type*, Vol.6
- BOUNDLESS. "The Lost Generation." *Boundless U.S. History*. Boundless, 21 Jul. 2015. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2016 from <https://www.boundless.com/u-s-history/textbooks/boundless-u-s-history-textbook/from-the-newera-to-the-great-depression-1920-1933-24/the-roaring-twenties-186/the-lost-generation-1027-4785/>
- CAUMAN, John (2001). *Inheriting Cubism: The Impact of Cubism on American Art, 1909-1936*, Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, ISBN 0970572344
- COMLEY, Nancy (2000). "Rooms, Buildings, Streets: The City as Montage in *Manhattan Transfer*", Thesis, Print.
- CORBETT, Bob (1964). "Three Soldiers." Houghton Mifflin Company. Web.
- DIGGINS, John P. (1974). "Visions of Chaos and Visions of Order: Dos Passos as Historian", *Duke University Press* Vol.46, no.3 DOI:10.2307/2924413, p.329-346
- FOSTER, Gretchen. *Literature/Film Quarterly* 14.3 (Jan 1, 1986): 186.
- GIOIA, Ted. "*Manhattan Transfer*: The American novel as Scrapbook", Retrieved 13Feb. 2016 http://www.fractiousfiction.com/manhattan_transfer.html
- HEINEY, Donald (1958). "Recent america Literature 4", Barron’s Educational Series, p.134-135
- HYNES, Samuel (1990). "A War Imagined: *The First World War and English Culture*", London: Bodley Head. p. 386. ISBN 0 370 30451 9.
- LAPSANSKY-WERNER, Emma (2011). *J. United States History: "Modern America"*, Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions, S.238

- LOWRY, E. D. (1969). "The Lively Art of *Manhattan Transfer*", Modern Language Association, Vol.84, no.6 DOI:10.2307/1261510, p.1628-1638
- MAGEE, John (2015). "An Analytical Study of John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*", Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937. Web.
- MICHAEL, Battaglia (2015). "Better than a Textbook", 20 July 1999 Web.
- MORLEY, Catherine (2015). "Modern American Literature", First ed. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh, Print. Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature.
- PASSOS, John Dos (2000). *Manhattan Transfer*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Print.
- PASSOS, John Dos (2004). *Three Soldiers*, Mineola: Dover Publications, Print.
- PIKE, Burton (1996). "The City as Image", "The Image of the City in Modern Literature" edited by Richard Le Gates and Frederic Stout, Hardcover.
- PRINCETON, Princeton University Press, 1960, p 281
- PIZER, Donald (1980). "The Camera Eye in "U.S. A.": The Sexual Center." Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.23, no.3 p.417
- SONG, Jennifer (2006). "Modern Art and Ideas 3, 1907-1914, A Guide for Educators", Department of Education at The Museum of Modern Art
- ŞİŞMANOĞLU ŞİMŞEK, Şehnaz (2015). "Benden Selam Söyleyin Anadolu'ya: Birinci Dünya Savaşında Asker Olmak", *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol. 8, Issue: 39, Issn: 1307-9581 p.208-221