

Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity. By Jonathan Goldman. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011. 204 pp. \$55.00 cloth.

John Dos Passos: Biography and Critical Essays. Edited by Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu and Bernardo Guido de Vasconcelos. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2010. 233 pp. \$59.99 cloth.

Several factors make Jonathan Goldman's book *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* valuable for scholars of modernism. Among those factors is Goldman's examination of the impact of celebrity and popular culture on modernist writing in both the US and Europe. Further, Goldman explores

important ground by addressing oft-studied authors alongside writers whose work has been disregarded and overlooked in recent decades. His decision to relegate John Dos Passos to an epilogue focused on the author's declining fame, however, may prove ironic in coming years. With the recent founding of the John Dos Passos Society, the publication of several biographical and critical collections, and conference proceedings like Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu and Bernardo Guido de Vasconcelos's edited collection *John Dos Passos: Biography and Critical Essays*, an upsurge in Dos Passos scholarship suggests that the author's work is headed for the public eye—perhaps even the arena of celebrity—once again.

Goldman argues that the effects of celebrity are inextricable from the themes of alienation and performance that modernist literature examined—celebrity allows people to transcend the anonymity of everyday life, but a person's identity inescapably comes to depend “on an audience for its continued existence, turning the individual into a stereotype, condemned to perform itself until death” (1). Despite expectations that modernist writers would produce writing that was “free from any impact of the popular marketplace” (2), Goldman contends that “these two supposedly separate aspects of culture are, in truth, mutually constitutive, two sides of the same cultural coin” since modernism portrays the author as a “unique” being, a “choreographer of disparate discourses and repository of encoded meaning, though one that can only be read as such after it has been turned into a kind of object” (2). Goldman explores such qualities in personalities from America and Europe, including Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Charlie Chaplin, Jean Rhys, and John Dos Passos, and argues that the fame of these literary figures “reaffirm[s] the centrality of the individual within mass society” (2).

Though it seems only logical for Goldman to focus his attention on authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and W. B. Yeats for their celebrity status, as well as for representations of celebrity within their work, Goldman is much more interested in examining writers whose “texts suggest the inevitability that modernist aesthetics would incorporate the logic of how celebrity works and what celebrity is” rather than texts that “fictionally represent celebrity” or “celebrity authorship as actual fame” (11). Goldman does not shy away from examining the celebrity of the authors in question, nor does he avoid discussing the ways in which they represent celebrity in their work, but his major focus falls on the impact of modernist culture on individuality and of celebrity on individual worth and definition. For example, Oscar Wilde's inclusion in this study is based in part on *A Picture of Dorian Gray* and the “negotiations between subject, body, and image that characterize Wilde's own celebrity” (33). Through such negotiations, this novel suggests that a person has no inherent value. Instead, the value of an individual is ever-changing and socially contingent. Gray's youthful

and attractive appearance is maintained only through the transfer of his decrepitude to the painting in his attic. As a result, his outward appearance continues to be flawless, concealing his actual repulsive and unattractive characteristics from public gaze.

Goldman's chapters on James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Charlie Chaplin explore the "mutually enabling" characteristics of celebrity and high modernism. Goldman claims that, because so much of an author's status as a high modernist depends on his or her celebrity, Joyce offers the perfect crossroads for exploring the crux of celebrity and high modernism. Joyce's celebrity and his reputation as a high modernist developed posthumously, so attention to book sales or his public persona did not pull his attention from his writing. In other words, he did not write his books in hopes of pandering to the public's perception of him; his high modernistic style produced his celebrity status. Goldman's study of Gertrude Stein certainly does not shy away from examining her real-world celebrity, but primarily attends to her "system of accruing value by association and accumulation"—specifically her relationships with other famous personalities and the impact those interactions had on her public image and her writing (90). Goldman also examines Charlie Chaplin's real-world celebrity "to show how Chaplin uses the logic of celebrity to create the author, enlisting the familiarity of his Tramp image to produce himself as the creator of the film, an idealized subject who authors textual signification" (115).

Turning sharply to explore celebrity's antithesis, obscurity, Goldman focuses next on Jean Rhys, whose celebrity often hinged on her unavailability, pushing her into "a state of being in which one's very existence is called into question" (132). The epilogue centers on John Dos Passos, who Goldman uses as a prime example of how the cultural work done by celebrity and modernism serve to collapse "interior and exterior, subject and object" and how celebrity can help to create the author as a brand or "undermine the modernist, self-fashioned version of authorship" (160). Against the usual critical emphasis on collective perspectives in the *U.S.A.* trilogy, Goldman claims that "celebrity discourse animates [Dos Passos's] writing" (161) and focuses on the Camera Eye sections to demonstrate the importance of individuality in Dos Passos's work, drawing direct relations between this individuality and the public gaze. Goldman never challenges the *importance* of Dos Passos to the modernist period, but states that since that time "Dos Passos's writings and Dos Passos as a figure have failed to grip the public imagination the way Wilde, Joyce, Stein, Chaplin, and even Rhys did—and continue to do so" (161). He asserts that this failure to "grip the public imagination" is directly tied to his relationship with Hemingway. Goldman quotes Stephen Koch: "Hemingway's presence in any room would be remembered for a lifetime. People barely noticed Dos [Passos]" (170), indicating that Hemingway's continued favor with scholars was partially

founded on his ability to project a memorable persona, while Dos Passos's relative lack of current critical attention may be directly tied to his unassertive personality and his less-than-commanding presence in relation to the high modernists with whom he kept company. Goldman also contributes the loss of public interest to "[Dos Passos's] under-choreographed self-promotion and his post-World War II politics that dismayed the academic left" (161).

In light of such claims, Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu and Bernardo Guido de Vasconcelos's collection *John Dos Passos: Biography and Critical Essays* maps out the recently recharged interest in Dos Passos. This collection originated from an international conference put on by the John Dos Passos Cultural Centre in Madeira, Portugal, in October of 2006. Citing the growth of literary studies focusing on neo-liberalism and globalization, Gonçalves de Abreu makes a compelling argument for a resurgence in Dos Passos scholarship and presents the volume as a collection that explores "the close, though sometimes ambiguous, relationship between biography, aesthetics, ideology, social critique and gender in Dos Passos's writings" (xxi).

The chapters in the biographic section examine the importance of the political world surrounding Dos Passos throughout his career by examining this author at various points in his life—a necessary exercise when elucidating the life of an author whose work was so influenced by his political stances, and whose political stances shifted so drastically throughout his life. Though much of this information is already available in biographies, the material in this section offers a useful concision of detail and several interesting interpretations of the author's past. For example, Hans-Peter Rodenberg's essay "'Dear Dos/Dear Hem'—Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos: A Turbulent Relationship in Turbulent Times" interprets Dos Passos as a quiet but assertive man whose strong political beliefs and a serious, scholarly disposition, stood in stark contrast to Hemingway's public persona (and in slight contrast to Goldman's assertion that Dos Passos tended to fade into the background when Hemingway was present). Also important in this section is the explication of Dos Passos's intertwining of fact and fiction seeing as how war-time experience, relationships with other modernist writers, and political unrest colored Dos Passos's novels, plays, and essays drastically.

The portion of this collection that focuses on critical analysis is split into two sections: "John Dos Passos: The American Modernist" and "Ideology, Social Critique and Gender." The four essays in the former section examine questions of influence on Dos Passos's work and the impact Dos Passos had on the modern artistic and political world around him. Of particular strength in this section is Graham Barnfield's chapter entitled "John Dos Passos, the Camera Eye and the Question of Journalistic Objectivity." This chapter specifically addresses the series of Camera Eye sections—a clear

homage to Joycean modernism—by taking on the question of journalistic standards of objectivity in relation to high modernist writing. Barnfield uses what is arguably Dos Passos's most modernistic writing to address "the relationship between literature, objectivity and journalism" which, at the time, was "entering a problematic phase" often ignored in criticism of Dos Passos's writing (96).

Because gender, societal problems, and politics saturate Dos Passos's writing, the second analytical section of this collection examines a broad range of his writing—including his novels, plays, and essays—and their response to the world Dos Passos knew. These address Dos Passos's treatment of modernist alienation in his city novels, issues of ethnicity as they are represented in Dos Passos's novels, military concerns in war-time, constructions of femininity and masculinity among Dos Passos's characters, and his use of satire to critique gender relations, societal norms, and political unrest. Among the most important contributions of this section is the periodic focus on Dos Passos's less popular—and thus less often studied—works. John Trombold addresses the famous *U.S.A.* trilogy alongside the obscure *Chosen Country*, while Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu addresses the importance of female characters in *Streets of Night*. These neglected books deserve more critical attention within both Dos Passos and modernist studies. While the importance of Dos Passos's writing on the development of modern literature is well known, this collection serves an important role in furthering the recent upsurge of Dos Passos scholarship in literary study and makes a strong case for revisiting his novels, plays, essays, and visual art.

In their attempt to recognize and fill critical gaps both recent books serve as important and useful additions to a Dos Passos or modernist scholar's collection. Goldman's study situates the relationships among individuality, culture, and celebrity within the parameters of important and oft-studied elements of modernism, while Gonçalves de Abreu and Guido de Vasconcelos's volume brings readers' attention to an important modernist author whose work deserves, and is beginning to receive, more attention in the critical realm.

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