

Mea Culpa, Dos: A Reconsideration of John Dos Passos

by Samuel Hux (June 2015)

Almost forty years ago I reviewed John Dos Passos's last (and posthumously published) novel, *Century's Ebb*, which was subtitled *The Thirteenth Chronicle*. In the 1950s Dos Passos began arranging retrospectively his novels as "Contemporary Chronicles"—with *Chosen Country* (1951) as the first, the trilogy *U.S.A.* falling fourth, fifth, and sixth, *Midcentury* (1961) as number 12. *Century's Ebb* rounds out the story of Jay Pignatelli, who was the hero of the first chronicle and a thinly disguised John Dos Passos. I doubted that it could alter the reputation of Dos Passos, writing that "the critical credit of his novels of the Twenties and Thirties rises and falls, but it is still those novels one thinks of. In literary conversation 'Dos Passos' still means *Three Soldiers*, *U.S.A.*, perhaps *Adventures of a Young Man*, not *The Grand Design* or *Most Likely to Succeed* or even *Midcentury*—the latter clearly intended in method and substance to rival *U.S.A.*"—which remains pretty much the case now forty years later. [more>>>](#)