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Jimmy Herf's Yearning for Corporeality in *Manhattan Transfer*

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『マンハッタン乗換駅』におけるジミー・ハーフの身体性の希求

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Abstract

John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) is his first major modernist work expressing his creative response to the modern condition. Above all, what is at stake for Dos Passos is the notion of corporeality as opposed to what he perceives as a misguided use of language——an idea that has the potential to revive American democracy. This paper will examine Dos Passos's attempt to incorporate corporeality in his literature through the response of the fictive characters Jimmy Herf and Congo Jake. Jimmy, as a budding writer, craves to free himself from captivity by corrupted words in the Metropolis. With his ambition to become an original artist, he seems to reflect Dos Passos's own attempt to expand the definition of his writing beyond words via the integration of visual elements in his literature. Through lived experiences and bodily perceptions, Jimmy wishes to invigorate his writing through such corporeality. Similarly, the hybrid body of Congo Jake, a French immigrant with an artificial leg, illustrates Dos Passos's endeavor to integrate corporeality in literature as a means to revive the myth of the American dream.

To examine how the novel reveals the writer's attempt to make his literature more effective, this paper first discusses how Jimmy yearns for corporeality by exposing his captivity to stylized words dominant in the Metropolis. Most notably, Jimmy reveals his position through the newspaper trade and in his faint but likely aspiration toward the integration of corporeality in his writing to counteract his literary predicament. Next, the case of Congo Jake is investigated as an example of extended corporeality that flourishes in the Metropolis, particularly in relation to the idea of the American dream, being both secular and mythical. Focus on the founding myth of American democracy moreover invites discussion of Jimmy's longing for corporeality through what Dos Passos terms the "old words," language that sustained Dos Passos's faith. This investigation should lead us to consider the greater manifestations of *Manhattan Transfer* as illustrated by the possibility of integrating corporeality into literature as well as into American democracy, and further explore hopes and problems behind the American dream.

Keywords: John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, corporeality, words

要　旨

ジョン・ドス・パソスの『マンハッタン乗換駅』(1925) は、彼の最初の重要なモダニズム作品であり、従来の言語芸術の枠組みを超えようとする試みである。本論では、この小説における身体性が、本来の力を奪われた言葉の誤用に対抗し、文学的創造とアメリカの民主主義を再生させる活力として作用することを考察する。そのために、二人の登場人物ジミー・ハーフとコンゴ・ジェイクに注目し、作品における身体性と文学の統合の可能性を検証する。作家志望の新聞記者ジミーは、創造における身体性を希求しつつも、大都市ニューヨークにおいて、膠着し腐敗した言葉の捕囚として苦境に立っている。しかし作品中にはわずかながらも、彼が身体性の獲得をとおして新たな創造に向かおうとする兆しが見られることを論じる。次に、義足を付けたフランス系移民コンゴの身体性を分析する。貧しい出自から成功を得た彼は、民主主義という理念的「アメリカの夢」の具現者であり、その身体は多様かつ包括的なアメリカ社会を体現している。そして本作品における身体性は、コンゴに見られるように、ドス・パソスが「古の言葉」と呼ぶ建国の理念を再現し、その力こそがジミーの文学的創造の鍵となり得るのだ。この考察は、『マンハッタン乗換駅』における身体性と言葉、そして文学との統合の可能性を、アメリカの民主主義の理念との関連において明らかにするものである。

キーワード：ジョン・ドス・パソス、『マンハッタン乗換駅』、身体性、言葉

John Dos Passos's affinity for various forms of modernist art beyond literature, such as painting, film, music, and the performing arts, has often been noted since the publication of the novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925).[1] His was a revolutionary age of cubism, futurism, fauvism, montage, and ballet Russ. Avant-garde artists were striving to express their response to the new age of science, technology, and cities, while World War I demolished the presumed value of human life. Dos Passos was entirely familiar with such contemporary trans-Atlantic developments, and in his own attempt to respond to the question of modernity, incorporated techniques of other modernist art to expand his expression beyond words. Critics have discussed elements of the visual arts, as in modernist paintings and film, that resonate in his oeuvre. Lisa Nanney's *John Dos Passos Revisited* (1998), for example, included significant analyses of visual elements in Dos Passos's major modernist works. She argues that "in *Manhattan Transfer* he finds in other arts, particularly painting and film, elements of a new language" (162), which become "an alternative to the language that has been debased by American culture" (155) of the machine age.

This language, unjustifiably abused and depraved, is the "old words" (*Big Money* 1135) in Dos Passos's own terminology that convey mythical America's essential values: "the unalienable rights" of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." as well as the concept that "all men are created equal." It is the "old American speech of the haters of oppression" (*Big Money* 1157) that communicates such principal ideas of American democracy; as critic David L. Vanderwerken terms it, this "special American language" is comparable to the concept of the "American Dream" ("*U. S. A.*" 195). It carries with it the fundamental values of the illusory American dream, such as individual freedom and equality in the American ethos as articualted in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the "old words" of the Founding Fathers.[2]

While Vanderwerken focuses on the theme of misused language in his studies of Dos Passos's major works, Nanney calls attention to the tangibility and perception that serve as keys to the writer's response to the problem of the modern condition. Earlier in her aforementioned study, Nanney identifies that the protagonists in the narrative sections of Dos Passos's *Rosinante to the*

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1 For example, the early reviewer Lloyd Morris sees the novel as "an attempt to achieve an expressionistic picture of New York" (2). Allen Tate compares the novel to "a breathless movie scenario" (160). D. H. Lawrence associates Dos Passos's narrative techniques with that of a film (363). Later, such critics as E. D. Lowry (1969), Michael Spindler (1981), Gretchen Foster (1986), Lisa Nanney (1998), David Seed (2009), as well as his biographers Donald Pizer, Townsend Ludington, and Virginia Carr, have discussed Dos Passos's close relationship to other modernist art.

2 Dos Passos also refers to the concept of "old words" in his 1936 essay "The Workman and His Tools": "The words are old and dusty and hung with the faded bunting of a thousand political orations, but underneath they are still sound. What men once meant by these words needs defenders today" (13-14).

Road Again (1922) search for "a 'gesture'—an immediate tangible sign—that will go beyond the 'rubbish' of words", and she defines "the ideal gesture" as "one that 'makes the road' or the way of approaching knowledge 'so significant that one needs no destination': that is, the perception itself becomes the art" (78). If physicality and the process of action, then, are foundations to Dos Passos's creative response to the modern condition, what is at stake seems to be the question of corporeality rather than misused language as a means to revive the idea of American democracy.

Therefore, examining how corporeality functions in the fictive characters in *Manhattan Transfer* represents a critical inquiry into Dos Passos's attempt to incorporate corporeality into his literature. For example, Jimmy Herf, one of the protagonists and a budding writer, yearns to free himself of captivity by corrupted words in the Metropolis. With his ambition to be an original, imaginative artist, he seems to reflect Dos Passos's own attempt to expand the definition of his writing beyond words by integrating visual elements into his literature. Through lived experiences and bodily perceptions, Jimmy wishes to invigorate his writing via corporeality. Similarly, the hybrid body of Congo Jake, a French immigrant with an artificial leg, illustrates Dos Passos's endeavor to incorporate corporeality into literature and revive the founding myth of the American dream.

To examine how the novel reveals the writer's attempt to make his literature more effective, this article focuses on the fictive character who seeks to adopt elements of corporeal experience and bodily perceptions and decides to leave the city. It also considers another character who embodies the American dream through his survival in New York. First, I discuss how Jimmy yearns for corporeality by examining his captivity to stylized words dominant in the Metropolis, most notably in accordance with the newspaper trade, as well as in his struggles with action, failure, and his faint but budding aspiration for the integration of corporeality into his writing to counteract his literary predicament. I will also explore the case of Congo Jake in comparison to Jimmy as an embodiment of extended corporeality that flourishes in the Metropolis, particularly in relation to the idea of the American dream as both secular and mythical. Focusing on the latter fabled elements will invite the discussion of Jimmy's yearning for corporeality in relation to the "old words" in which Dos Passos sustained some faith. This investigation should lead us to examine how the novel *Manhattan Transfer* illustrates the possibility of integrating corporeality into literature, as well as into the idea of American democracy.

Jimmy Herf is a troubled young man, a cub reporter at the *New York Times*, who longs for corporeal experience and aspires to become an imaginative writer. His fascination with words is already apparent in his childhood. When living in a luxurious hotel on Broadway with his sickly mother, he was already a bookish child with a volume of the *American Cyclopædia* by his bedside as a comfort after his prayers (555). The book young Jimmy reads is, in fact, the first volume of an encyclopedia series. Besides his reading of juvenile literature, such as *The Coral Island* (566), which is more age appropriate, Jimmy's attraction to comprehensive alphabetical lists of words indicates

his keen interest in, or addictive inclination toward the printed word. As his concern for his mother's illness terrifies him, Jimmy tries to divert himself from the fear of her death by reading the encyclopedia. However, as he distances himself from physical reality, he misses an opportunity to understand the true meaning of life, which should have been an effective resource for his future creativity.

As an adult, his entanglement with words becomes more conspicuous and crucial upon making it his profession to attend to commercial language of the newspaper in the Metropolis. Having turned down a job offer by his prosperous uncle at age sixteen, he later accepts the offer after graduating from Columbia University. Words become his resource and his trade through which he makes his daily living in the city. He grows gravely despondent, however, over his situation. He tells his cousin that his job at the Times is "a hellish rotten job," and he's "sick of it" (698). To a friend, he reveals his destructive desire for "setting off a bomb under the Times Building" and speaks contemptuously of taking another job: "anything so long as it's not newspaper work" (634).

His hostility toward the newspaper business is rooted in his deep frustration and self-conscious guilt of catering to commercialism, which has undermined his idealistic ambition to be a writer with an original mind. He thus endures harsh accusations of journalistic whoredom. John Oglethorpe, an audacious theatrical man, questions Jimmy's conscience:

> "How do you like being a paid prostitute of the public press? [...] I know that every sentence, every word, every picayune punctuation that appears in the public press is perused and revised and deleted in the interests of advertisers and bondholders. The fountain of national life is poisoned at the source." (651)

This rebuke is aimed at the market's impingement on the freedom of the press by the market. Indeed, it is the era of yellow journalism,[3] when cheap stories of sensationalism and sentimentalism circulated as popular commodities. The above narrative, for instance, introduces an account in which a tabloid newspaper publishes the life story of a robber and murderer, as well as a poem he dedicated to his poor mother (791). Accused of being "the yellow journalist" (698), Jimmy does not have the means to fight back and can only acknowledge his own servility: "I'm sick of playing up to a lot of desk men I don't respect" (698). Accordingly, when a friend accuses him of growing "callous," Jimmy excuses himself by placing blame on his job, "I guess it's the *Times*.... I'll get fired soon, don't worry" (685), and disparages himself as "nothing but a goddam traveling dictograph" (784). He feels enslaved by his mercenary, servile job of writing to order, while his desire to be a more creative, original writer remains unfulfilled.

Unable to free himself from being captivity by words, Jimmy surrenders himself to hallucinatory linguitstic visions of words. He imagines himself featured in a newspaper headline as

3 One of the founders of the sensational yellow journalism, William Randolph Hearst, is most harshly criticized by Dos Passos in his biographical sketch in *The Big Money* (1160-1169). See Vanderwerken, "*U. S. A.*" (198).

"DEPORTED" (792). He further equates the printed word with skin irritation: "print itches like a rash inside me. I sit here pockmarked with print" (793). Newspaper language has infected his body and physically afflicts him. Furthermore, even after quitting his job at the *Times*, he feels assaulted by the language on signs, billboards, and advertisements that surround him in the city environment: "Spring rich in gluten.... Chockful of golden richness, delight in every bite, THE DADDY OF THEM ALL" (790). Walking uptown, he "breathed in rumble and grind and painted phrases until he began to swell, felt himself stumbling big and vague" (791). These passages illustrate that it is "the city of scrambled alphabets" (790), and there is no escape from these words, which are meant to mesmerize, enthrall, and brainwash people's minds toward thoughtless consumption.

Linguistically entrapped as a cub reporter in a city of degenerated language, Jimmy has always been conscious of his lack of physical experiences. He was educated at Columbia University but regrets his education and wishes that "it'd been real Columbia, Bogota and the Orinoco and all that sort of thing" (632). He would go on to say, "I've a great mind to join the navy and see the world" (633), and says a few pages later, "go to Mexico and make my fortune.... I'm losing all the best part of my life rotting in New York" (635). He once laments to his friend: "why in this country nobody ever does anything. Nobody ever writes any music or starts any revolutions or falls in love. All anybody ever does is to get drunk and tell smutty stories. I think it's disgusting" (649). His remark reveals his desire for action, be it political, romantic, or creative. His instinct tells him that he needs to absorb the reality of life through his body and senses. Therefore, he plunges himself into action when World War I breaks out in Europe. Like many other youths of the lost generation, including Dos Passos himself, Jimmy crosses the Atlantic to participate in the historical event.

In his memoir *The Best Times* (1966), Dos Passos recalls his war experience as an ambulance driver: "War was the theme of the time. I was in a passion to put down everything, immediately [as] it happened, exactly as I saw it" (56). He then goes on to describe how it made his sensory organs more perceptive: "The chance of death sharpened the senses. The sweetness of the white roses, the shape and striping of a snail shell the taste of an omelet, the most casual sight or sound appeared desperately intense against the background of the great massacre" (56-57). Here, we witness an apparent connection between enhanced perceptions and literary creativity in the novelist.

Accordingly, an emphasis on corporeality is what Jimmy needs to produce the spirited words he craves. He speaks of an overwhelming sensation that the war in Europe incites in him: "What gives me gooseflesh is the armies mobilizing, Belgrade bombarded, Belgium invaded... all that stuff. I just can't imagine it....." (676). He thus claims, "I want to go to the war" (699), and "I'd like to get an assignment as warcorrespondent" (676). Compared to the experience of Dos Passos as an ambulance driver, we may doubt whether a correspondent necessarily amounts to immediate

observations of the battlefield. Indeed, as Congo Jake once says, "Correspondent very good ting... Always drunk in American bar very far from battlefield" (676). Nevertheless, Jimmy's anxiety seems genuine, not only to get away from the *Times* and New York but also to plunge himself into the war so that he can write about his raw experience of historic events.

Jimmy's war experience, however, fails to match his ambitions, as he joins the Publicity Department of the Red Cross. However lofty its cause may be, it is yet another job to order for the organization. He is in Jerusalem on Armistice night, and it is doubtful how close he can get to the reality of the war itself. For comparison, we recall the figure of John Moorehouse, a shrewd but empty publicity agent, appearing in *1919* (1932) and *The Big Money* (1936), the second and third installments of the *U. S. A.* Trilogy. Jimmy's publicity job with the Red Cross may not be overtly commercial as with the *Times*, and yet, it is aimed at steering the public mind. While little is accounted of his war experience, there is no evidence that the job offered him any opportunity to express what he had seen or felt. Jimmy remains captive to superficial words and returns home more confused. When urged by his aunt, Mrs. Merivale, to write a book about his experiences in Europe, he vaguely answers that he has tried a few articles, but no one seemed to want to print them because of his radical political outlook (729). We may surmise, however, that he gained no substantial experience from the war to invigorate his creativity, but weariness with life seems to aggravate him. Additionally, although he had once considered "[starting] any revolutions" was a realistic action to invigorate life, his then wife Ellen Thatcher testifies to her friend that despite a rumor, he is not really a "Bolshevik pacifist" or an "I. W. W. agitator" (781), which proves that he has not been able to commit himself to any action for which he has had yearnings.

Jimmy's love affair with Ellen Thatcher, an actress and incarnation of the dazzling Metropolis, stands as another attempt to break away from his imprisonment by ineffective words. His attraction to her starts as a purely physical reaction. He first notices her voice that sets him "tingling" (596) and is smitten by the "lovely girl with copper hair" (597). His nonverbal reaction to Ellen eloquently reveals his impulsive enchantment. As he becomes acquainted with her, "Jimmy couldn't keep his eyes off her; her small squarely shaped hands, her neck molded with a gold sheen between the great coil of coppery hair and the bright blue dress" (637). The very physicality of the attraction seems to entice him toward Ellen, who might be his Muse and rescue him from a futile entrapment with words.

Although they marry and have a child, Jimmy and Ellen's relationship ultimately cannot provide the writer productive ground for his writing. His desire to transcend words and reach out to Ellen goes unrequited, as she remains a clone-like being. As many critics have pointed out, she is depicted as a doll-like, mechanical figure, cold and unfeeling toward Jimmy. The narrator calls her an "Elliedoll" (743) and depicts her as "a porcelain figure under a bellglass" (744), thereby refusing any empathy with another human being, a possible exception being her late lover, Stan Emmery.

Unable to establish an empathic bond with her, Jimmy finds himself linguistically incompetent with Ellen. When they are alone together for the first time, he finds himself "stammering" (637). Even after a few years of married life, Jimmy still stumbles upon words when trying to have any significant conversation with her: "Ellie I don't know why it's always so difficult for me to speak out about anything.... I always have to get drunk to speak out.... Look here do you like me any more?" (785). His pathetic incompetency betrays his yearning to be a writer with vital words.

Toward the end of the novel, however, Jimmy struggles to produce vital words from his experience. Guided by his friend Congo, a bootlegger, he witnesses a clash between gangsters over contraband in Brooklyn. The dramatic incident allows him a spicey encounter with the New York underworld. Jimmy is aware of the rare opportunity, which spurs his creative mind. When the commotion ensued, "He felt excited and puzzled and a little drunk. Already he began to construct the story in his mind" (761). He even begins narrating it tentatively: "In a lonely abandoned dancehall on Sheepshead Bay... lovely blooming Italian girl... shrill whistle in the dark...." (762). However, as Nanney analyzes, "instead of honest reporting, what comes to his mind are clichés and formulas" (160), his story sounding predictable and banal. Moreover, just as he should be experiencing what is going on, he realizes that he is locked in and can only roam around inside the hall: "Always the way... a parasite on the drama of life, reporter looks at everything through a peephole. Never mixes in" (762). Missing the immediate physicality of experience, he is literally confined in a sphere of ineffective words and finds himself stymied. On his way home, he tries to think of "the bootleg story he'd write for the Sunday Magazine Section" (764), but nothing comes of it. Furthermore, his choice of the Magazine as a desirable platform for his career seems to betray his drive for worldly success rather than genuine literary aspiration.[4] Given his knowledge of and aversion to the *Times*, we may suspect whether Jimmy's ambition comes with a readiness to accept possible editorial interference, which should mean a compromise for the sake of worldly success.

Furthermore, his motivation is suspicious. As later solicited by his friends, Jimmy fabricates what he saw, an abject failure of journalistic ethics. He embellishes the account with violence and heroism as if it is a screenplay for a gangster movie. He recounts it was "the worst fight [he] ever saw outside of the movies" (765)—hijackers drowning, champagne spilling, and himself helping out an injured friend. Approximating his story to a movie reveals no innovation beyond words but rather mere sidling up to popular entertainment, which is no better than yellow journalism. A friend's reaction sounds hollow, "Oh, Jimmy [...] you lead the most thrilling life" (766). Jimmy's narrative cannot penetrate the audience and only amuses them at its best. If he wishes to be a true artist, his imagination has failed him. In fact, Jimmy is guilty of his own complaint: "All anybody

4 Launched in 1896, the Sunday Magazine was reworked in 1923 by the legendary editor, Lester Markel, who emphasized interpretive journalism, invited famous writers as contributors and carried longer articles of exceptional literary quality. See obituary, "Lester Markel of The Times Is Dead," *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1977.

ever does is to get drunk and tell smutty stories."

A clue to his predicament surfaces, however, which comes through bodily perceptions instead of stylized words. He recognizes some haunting sense of a girl's corporeality through his struggle when he encounters Anetta, a daughter of Congo's Italian business partner. He experiences a distinct physiological sensation from the "pink cheeks and toobright eyes" (761) of the young girl, who is infatuated with a member of one of the bootlegging gangs. Putting her arms around his waist after a fight, she displays unabashed admiration for the tough masculine figure, looking at him "with parted lips and toobright eyes" (761). Jimmy is struck by the raw exhibition of this physical attraction and finds himself "blushing as he looked at her" (763). His abashment reveals not only his embarrassment but also his attraction to such openness.

The girl's image comes back to him again, interrupting his composition of the imagined Sunday Magazine piece: "The girl's pink cheeks and toobright eyes kept intervening, blurring the orderly arrangement of his thoughts" (764). If the orderliness of his ideas only results in a conventional formula, the seeming disturbance of the image may telegraph the need for inspiration of a more corporeal sort to help him out of the plight with empty words. Accordingly, Jimmy recalls that Ellen once had "toobright eyes like that" (764) when she was pregnant with their child in Europe. He recollects an idyllic scene when a sip of milk from a shepherd restored her health: "the color had come back into her cheeks, and she had looked at him that way" [with too bright eyes] (764). It was a sign of physical affection that Jimmy craved, but Ellen is staunchly of the urban Metropolis, not set in some pastoral scene, and his impulse is not strong enough to resist the lure of a static formula. Unable to face Ellen's rejection, Jimmy imagines she dies in childbirth: "[t]he past would have been complete all round, framed, worn round your neck like a cameo set up in type, molded on plates for the Magazine Section, like the first of James Herf's articles on The Bootlegging Ring" (764). In his wish to confine the past in an orderly composition, we may recognize his penchant for lifeless stasis, which is connected to literary clichés and formulated stories for the *Times* Magazine. It is thus appropriate that, along with his reverie of a happier past with Ellen, the illusion of his worldly success dissolves with the hallucinatory vision of print: "Burning slugs of thought kept dropping into place spelled out by a clanking linotype" (764). The persistent return to a physiological portrayal seems to accentuate his need for such primal contact as a means to invigorate his imagination, but the urge cannot surpass his linguistic entrapment.

Another corporeal element that deserves our attention is Jimmy's compassionate wish to paint a nonconformist martyr as a contemporary saint. Although vague and fleetingly capricious, his notion of becoming a painter reveals an impulse to express his subject through visual representation. Upon learning of a man in Philadelphia who was killed by a mob for defending a straw hat he was wearing out of season, Jimmy dubs him "Saint Aloysius, virgin and martyr" (835). Here he is referencing Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591), born into a noble family, who later renounced his inheritance and died at the age of twenty-three while nursing victims of the plague

(Meager et al. 123). Jimmy then speaks of dedicating a painting to him: "If I were a painter, maybe they'll let me paint in the nuthouse, I'd do a Saint Aloysius of Philadelphia with a straw hat on his head instead of a halo and in his hand the lead pipe, instrument of his martyrdom, and a little me praying at his feet" (836). This utterance is important to my argument as it again indicates Jimmy's interest in the visual representation of his subject. If this wish to paint does not portend his abandonment of a literary career, his yearning at least points to a trust in the physical perception of an object, in this case, by the eye.

If we compare Jimmy's struggle with the literary aspiration of his creator Dos Passos, Jimmy's thirst for visual expression seems to echo Dos Passos's own attempt at innovative representation in the novel. We know that unlike Jimmy, Dos Passos was a competent writer fully in command of his usage of words. He made strategic use of newspaper and stylized expressions of popular culture in his writing, as cubist painters attempted in their collage techniques, to recreate a picture of life in New York City. He was also an accomplished painter in association with modernist painters and artists,[5] and we may assume that his use of visual elements is in tune with his trust in physical perception and corporeal experience that can entice the writer out of linguistic confinement. Therefore, it seems fitting that the troubled Jimmy fantasizes about painting as a possible expansion of his expression so that he may escape his captivity by words.

If Jimmy is unable to fulfill his desire for corporeality in any substantial manner, Congo Jake deserves special attention as a genuine survivor in the novel, both in relation to corporeality and the theme of the American dream. Congo was a poor boy from France with a head "thick with kinky black hair" (496) and skin "dark like a nigger" (679), which gave him a first name suggestive of the African nation;[6] and his last name attached itself to his sanguine temperament as he answered "Jake" when asked of his mood (679). He was tending a bar in New York when Jimmy first met him and turned around to become Armand Duval, a bootlegging magnate. Jimmy reflects on their contrary life courses: "The difference between you and me is that you're going up in the social scale, Armand, and I'm going down. When you were a messboy on a steamboat I was a horrid little chalky faced kid living at the Ritz" (819). While Jimmy is without work, money, and family, Congo, almost a millionaire, good-naturedly keeps offering him financial help. What makes Congo a success in a capitalist society is his adaptability and fluid identity. He changes his name, place, occupation, and political convictions. As a bootlegger, he runs his business under the title Marquis Coulommiers and becomes Armand once he slides in a Rolls-Royce. He has much in common with Ellen, who changes her name, occupation, and even her lover, but he surpasses her in his physical and social mobility. Starting out in Bordeaux, he boards a ship to New York and

5 The recent publication of *The Paintings and Drawings of John Dos Passos* by Donald Pizer, Lisa Nanney, and Richard Layman (2016) effectively highlighted this aspect.

6 His race is not clarified in the novel, but it may be assumed that Congo is not of African origin. When he says, "I'm going out to Senegal and get to be a nigger," his friend Emile tells him, "You look like one already," to which Congo answers, "That's why they call me Congo" (512).

travels widely around the globe before settling back in New York. Politically, he remains neutral and passes through an anarchist phase before thriving as a capitalist of the underworld. Moreover, the most relevant feature in our discussion is his artificial leg, made of cork and aluminum. Since his injury during World War I, his corporeality is synthetic, pragmatically serving daily life. The very incorporation of the artificial leg as a part of his body expands the definition of his corporeality. The ease that Congo enjoys attests to the validity of the American dream as he embraces opportunities and freedoms the United States offers. Untrammeled by a fixed identity, Congo is free to follow life where it leads him. His mutability, in short, is what makes him a fit survivor in a dog-eat-dog society. In accordance with the Darwinist creed of "the survival of the fittest," he keeps evolving according to the environment, even incorporating an artificial leg as a part of himself. He therefore becomes a victor in competitive society, a secular version of the American dream come true, with material success achieved through his wit.

And yet, Congo stands as an embodiment of the mythical American dream, the ideal of individual liberty and equality. He does not abandon his heavy French accent—he keeps calling Jimmy "Mr. 'Erf," which proves that America is a country where an immigrant can become a millionaire on his own terms while still retaining his ethnic idiosyncrasy. His mutability, adoptability, and otherness at the same time are quintessential elements behind the dynamism and inclusiveness of American society, which further encompass the fundamental American ethos articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Unlike Ellen, a seeming embodiment of New York City, who remains hollow and exploitative, Congo serves as a robust immigrant-minded, democratic America in his hybrid physicality. In his resilience, we witness the case of a shifting amalgam identity that flourishes in America, in whose words Jimmy, as well as Dos Passos, keeps a tenuous but persistent faith.

Lastly, as the significance of Congo's hybrid corporeality is clearly related to the mythical American dream, I would like to further clarify how the theme of corporeality is integrated into the concept of the "old words." We may do so by examining Dos Passos's reference to the authentic language of the Founding Fathers in his critical account of the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in *The Big Money* as well as in *Manhattan Transfer.* Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian-born anarchists, were arrested for robbery and murder in 1920, sentenced to death, and finally executed by electric chair in 1927.[7] Besides the authorities' failure to provide the defendants with a fair trial, what Dos Passos found most offensive in the case was the betrayal of language. In *The Big Money,* Dos Passos laments how "old words" are no longer valid or effective at vitalizing American democracy, and instead, have become distorted and irretrievable. In Camera Eye (49), the narrator pleads with America:

7 In 1926, Dos Passos interviewed Sacco and Vanzetti in jail, reviewed judicial records, and concluded that the authorities framed them. His research culminated in a pamphlet for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, entitled *Facing the Chair,* that was published earlier in 1927.

> rebuild the ruined words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers districtattorneys collegepresidents judges   without the old words the immigrants haters of oppression brought to Plymouth how can you know who are your betrayers America (*Big Money* 1135-36)

Dos Passos sees American democracy in jeopardy as the trial failed to respect Sacco and Vanzetti's rights. He asserts that the assault on "the old words the immigrants haters of oppression brought to Plymouth" was disturbing. As much as Sacco and Vanzetti, the Founding Fathers were immigrants, and their "old words" advocated basic American values: liberty, justice, and truth, the essence of the myth of the American democracy. Due to strong opposition to immigration and radicalism in the 1920s, however, truth and justice were undermined and liberty denied. The state egregiously violated the unalienable rights of these men. Though Dos Passos's literary devotion to the cause comes into print only after 1926, Vanderwerken's assertion that the language theme is at the core of the writer's major works, *Manhattan Transfer* and the *U. S. A.* Trilogy, seems justifiable. The concept of the "old words" in Dos Passos's works are thus an embodiment of the spirit of the mythical American dream, the ideal of American democracy.

The theme of the American dream in *Manhattan Transfer* is duly at work in Jimmy's stories. His homecoming from Europe as a child takes place on the Fourth of July. Just as the ship he is aboard approaches New York harbor, Jimmy expresses his elation, "I could fall down and kiss the ground," as the "fine Patriotic sentiment" is highly commended by a compatriot (539). As he catches a glimpse of "a tall green woman in dressing gown standing on an island holding up her hand," he recalls how his mother would explain that it is the Statue of Liberty, "enlightening the world" (540). Liberty, by no means, is a symbol of American democracy, as French philanthropists sent her to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the American Revolution, which cast off the political yoke of England to win individual freedom and became an emblem of hospitality toward immigrants as popularized by Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus." Jimmy is greeted by the promise of the American dream, so to speak, on his return to his native land.

The dream of material success, however, plagues Jimmy. Although he once denounced worldly success as represented by his uncle Jeff Merivale, saying "Uncle Jeff and his office can go plumb to hell" at the vision of "the revolving doors grinding out his years like sausage meat" (586), Jimmy is nonetheless affected by a thirst for mundane prosperity and fame, as Vanderwerken analyzes:

> In building of its own Tower of Babel, America has created its own confusion of language by turning its 'old words' inside out. 'Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' have been corrupted into success, fame and the pursuit of the big money. ("*Manhattan Transfer*" 255)

His feelings are evident in his daydream about the Sunday Magazine piece and his slightly genderized rivalry with Ellen, who becomes a prominent editor of a fashionable magazine and

financially better-equipped than he. Embittered by Ellen's apparent efforts to appease him, Jimmy grows paranoid and experiences an auditory hallucination: "In the empty chamber of his brain a doublefaced word clinked like a coin: Success Failure, Success Failure" (746). In capitalist corporate America, the American dream cannot be easily dismissed.

The language theme, yet, persists in the novel to question this myth's validity. For example, the judge delivers a verdict to the bandit Dutch Robertson by employing "old words" to evoke the wrongs he and his girlfriend Francie, dubbed the "Flapper Bandit" (806) by newspapers, had committed through a series of robberies. Despite their obvious culpability, Jimmy feels "vaguely sorry" about their arrest, as he has "looked forward to reading their exploits every day in the papers" (807). However guilty they were, Jimmy seems to sympathize with their desperate gesture of rebellion against an oppressive society. The narrator, moreover, scoffs at the words of ostensible justice the judge articulates through irregular spellings to accentuate the hollowness of his language:

> "...And now as a man and a citizen of this great city I want to say a few words to the defendants. Briefly this sort of thing has got to stop. The unalienable rights of human life and property the great men who founded his republic laid down in the *constitootion* have got to be reinstated. It is the *dooty* of every man in office and out of office to combat this wave of lawlessness by every means in his power." (825) [emphasis mine]

With yellow journalism on one hand and the emptied "old words" on the other, there is no vitality of words that can inspire Jimmy in the city. Nevertheless, it seems Jimmy cannot help being attracted to the bandits' brazen physical assertion of individual liberty, however criminal and wrong they are. Captive to words himself, Jimmy seems to affirm their corporeal claim for freedom from poverty and toil. Though the young bandits are arrested and Dutch receives a sentence of twenty years, Jimmy's sentiment is reminiscent of his envious regard of Congo, another criminal, as their lawless actions are demonstrative of their passion for freedom, which he lacks.

Jimmy is thus haunted by the fragmentation of the "old words." As he wanders through the city, his mind goes astray: "Pursuit of happiness, unalienable pursuit... right to life liberty and...." (802). His confusion continues:

> But what's the use of spending your whole life fleeing the City of Destruction? What about unalienable right, Thirteen Provinces? His mind reeling phrases, he walks on doggedly. There's nowhere in particular he wants to go. If only I still had faith in words. (803)

The "words" in question are his tools for creative expression, as well as the "special American language" that espouses the original American dream of individual liberty that seems unduly impaired. Moreover, Jimmy witnesses an example of bigoted xenophobia, an outright betrayal of the "old words," as he walks out of Child's restaurant. There was commotion inside and a bouncer expells a tall man in a dress suit who seems responsible for the trouble. A policeman arrives on the

scene, arresting instead three innocent Italians. The incident is fairly suggestive of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, where the men were falsely charged for the crime, and of the injustice done to the immigrants, though as much "haters of oppression" as the Founding Fathers.

In this context, the significance of corporeality becomes clear as an effective counter to the pernicious pervasiveness of the misuse of "old words." Jimmy's compassion for the contemporary St. Aloysius reveals another dimension based on the question of individual freedom involved. The martyr moves Jimmy because he was killed for the very corporeal assertion of his individual liberty —to wear an unseasonal straw hat against social pressure. Surrounded by his oppressors, the man faced fatal violence and thus became "the Unknown Soldier," an anonymous yet honorable fighter for a noble cause, "a real hero" (835) for Jimmy in his appreciation for corporeal protestation to defend one's freedom. It is no accident, moreover, that the martyrdom took place in Philadelphia, the site where the "old words" of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were signed. "The special American language" is seemingly mocked, as Jimmy laughs to himself, "[t]he golden legend of the man who would wear a straw hat out of season. [...] Give me liberty, said Patrick Henry, putting on his straw hat on the first of May, or give me death. And he got it" (836). However, the myth of the American dream, the ideal of American democracy, resonates in the reader's mind. As Vanderwerken points out, the contemporary saint becomes a "symbol of freedom," "a true hero, in [Jimmy] Herf's eyes, in his disregard for meaningless conventions" ("*Manhattan Transfer*" 266). In sympathy with the martyr, it is Jimmy's entanglement with stylized writing that he wishes to disregard as he aims to transcend the meaningless reproduction of words.

While the only substantial action he can make at the end of the novel is to leave Ellen and New York, Jimmy ignites his physical senses. He appreciates the natural fragrance from a flower wagon on board: "A rich smell of maytime earth comes from it, of wet flowerpots and greenhouses" (837); he apparently enjoys the physical sensation of being alive and free. Jimmy endeavors to start a new life elsewhere, getting in touch with his own body to search for vital words within himself. As if compared to Congo's hybrid body that makes him a darling of the Metropolis ——which is nothing but metonymy for the United States of America——Jimmy's step forward should adopt a more fluid, spontaneous expression as guided by corporeality in his attempt to activate his literary imagination beyond words.

Along with writing *Manhattan Transfer* between 1923 and 1925, Dos Passos began vigorously participating in the New Playwrights Theater as a writer and designer of stage sets and posters.[8] Over the next ten years, his three plays were put on stage.[9] Though the artistic merit of these plays may not be as persuasive as he had wished, such involvement in the theater illustrates expansion of the sphere of his artistic representation through an actor's actual voice and body, as well as the

8 For biographical information, see "Chronology" in *Novels 1920-1925* as well as Carr and Townsend.

9 *The Moon Is a Gong,* later revised as *The Garbage Man* in 1925, *Airways, Inc.* in 1926, and *Fortune Heights* in 1934.

plastic arts. His aforementioned involvement in the Sacco-Vanzetti trial, which culminated in their execution in 1927, also seems to convey an aspect of his experimentation with corporeality and physical expression. He not only published journalistic articles and pleas for justice but was also arrested for picketing; these experiences seems to have inspired his creation of the *U. S. A.* Trilogy, his most ambitious oeuvre during the years 1932 to 1936. Then, *Manhattan Transfer,* as a precursor to this masterwork, evinces the novelist's desire to integrate corporeality into his writing, where every bit of his endeavors, be they linguistic, visual, or performative, are harnessed.

In *Manhattan Transfer*, we witness the struggles of Jimmy Herf who has fallen captive to words that have lost their original vigor in the modern Metropolis. To counteract the beguilement of demoralized language, Jimmy tries to opt for corporeal experience and reliance on his bodily senses. However ineffectual such yearnings may be, we recognize intimations of his literary redemption, as in the images of the pink-cheeked girl and his hero, St. Aloysius of Philadelphia. While it is Congo's hybridity that best represents the founding myth of America at work, the novel displays the possibility for freedom within a linguistic and imaginative domain for Jimmy——where this fundamental element of democracy may be restored for the novice writer through the corporeal.

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