

# John Dos Passos

## NEWSLETTER

No. 7

Winter 2001

### THE MISSING MODERNISTS? AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE CASE OF JOHN DOS PASSOS

by

Richard Schur

While working toward my doctorate in American Studies in the late 1990s, I scarcely remember hearing the name of Dos Passos. My familiarity with his work hearkens back to my undergraduate days, 1987-1991, when I read a selection from *The Big Money* in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* in a survey course in American literature. With that limited knowledge of Dos Passos' work, I set out to read his *U.S.A.* as background for a course in "American Culture, 1877-Present" which I have been assigned to teach.

In reading *U.S.A.*, I noticed that, like cultural theorists including Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Stuart Hall, Dos Passos develops a multilayered critique of power relations by examining the everyday habits, rituals, and practices of a wide variety of Americans.<sup>1</sup> Despite (or because of?) Dos Passos' reliance on a variety of modernist techniques, especially collage, he seeks to develop a thorough critique of the burgeoning mass culture industry and the transformation it was effecting. While it would be erroneous to suggest that Dos Passos relied on the same literary forms or genres as the aforementioned forerunners of contemporary cultural studies or relied on the Marxist tradition as a primary theoretical orientation, he did share with them a deep skepticism about the liberatory potential of an overly commodified cultural life.

In addition to reading the trilogy, I examined a number of cultural histories that explored the major shifts in American artistic production during the modernist period. Rather than mapping how everyday practices shaped relations of power in the past, these works develop a historical narrative from the lives and works of artists, writers, musicians, and architects. From this reading, I found myself asking the questions which are the subject of this short article. Given Dos Passos' blending of literary, biographical, autobiographical, and journalistic writing, why is he studied primarily as a figure in literary history rather than as a pioneering force in cultural studies and cultural criticism? Why is the modernism of Dos Passos, with its

sociological bent that sought to describe and thus criticize popular culture and everyday habits of rich and poor Americans, virtually ignored among current students of American cultural studies? For example, a recently published reader in cultural theory and popular culture includes articles by F.R. Leavis and Dwight MacDonald (contemporaries of Dos Passos) and makes frequent reference to modernism. In this cultural studies reader, there is however little attempt to examine how modernist cultural criticism, let alone the groundbreaking work of Dos Passos, has shaped contemporary scholarship in cultural studies.<sup>2</sup> Even the forerunners of modernist cultural criticism, such as Thorstein Veblen, Van Wyck Brooks, and Constance O'Rourke have been all too infrequently cited in contemporary work in American cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> This short article seeks to identify the relative absence of Dos Passos and modernism within cultural studies by examining the place of Dos Passos within two texts that are likely to be read by undergraduates in history and general readers who are interested in cultural history.

In the recently published *Body and Soul: The Making of American Modernism*, Robert Crunden attempts to map the full terrain of modernism by examining its manifestations in music, literature, photography, art and cultural criticism.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest to Dos Passos scholars is his methodology. Crunden, perhaps unconsciously, uses a series of biographies to engage in this mapping process. Not unlike Dos Passos, Crunden relies on the juxtaposition of these

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biographies to bring together what has been made invisible by the current canons in American literature, art, and music. He reads the modernism of Dos Passos against those of other literary figures including William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Jean Toomer, and Wallace Stevens; of composers including Edgard Varese, Jelly Roll Morton, and Igor Stravinsky; and of artists including Charles Sheeler, Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, and Georgia O'Keeffe. While few of these names will be unfamiliar to most students of Dos Passos, what makes Crunden's book interesting is his attempt to portray this wide range of figures as part of generalized movement of intellectuals who felt dehumanized in the modern world.

In many ways, Dos Passos plays a central role in Crunden's narrative because it is precisely Dos Passos' bookish, intellectual ways—Crunden asserts that “Dos Passos may well have been the best-read American modernist” (86)—that serve as a model for modernist disaffection from the burgeoning consumer culture. Moreover, because Dos Passos had considerable knowledge of art, literature, architecture and music, Dos Passos, in Crunden's analysis, writes “the American city novel” in *Manhattan Transfer* (98) and captures urban modernism in *U.S.A.* (106). If Crunden is correct that Dos Passos captured so much of the American experience between the two World Wars and criticizes the burgeoning of mass culture, why is Dos Passos not examined more regularly within American cultural studies?

Miles Orvell, who wrote a somewhat earlier cultural history of the shift from realism to modernism, anticipates much of Crunden's analysis of Dos Passos. Orvell, in his *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture 1880-1940*, argues that the United States shifts from a culture of imitation to one of authenticity in the time period that the book examines.<sup>5</sup> A culture of authenticity, in which the rhetoric of being, reading, observing

or experiencing the “real” replaces the general sentiment toward copying the “pre-existing” norms of a sentimental Victorianism. According to Orvell, *U.S.A.* represents Dos Passos' effort to produce a realistic set of stories that transcended the civility and gentility of realist writers, while offering a panoramic vision that exceeded the limited modernist lenses of Dos Passos' contemporaries.

Orvell, then, connects Dos Passos to the concerns of cultural studies by considering him as a critic of capitalism. Orvell writes that *U.S.A.* “implicitly confirmed the rational economy and the aesthetic of the machine at the same time that it explicitly attacked the American corporate capitalism that was built on the base of the industrial machine” (262). He describes the trilogy as a chronicle that combined fact and fiction, autobiography and biography, and narrative and fragments of historical texts. The work of Dos Passos, in Orvell's estimation, did more than tell a story: it described and criticized modern American culture. The modernism of Dos Passos, in Orvell's analysis, transformed the act of writing and the act of representation into an act of cultural critique and cultural renewal (272). While Orvell's work antedates that of Crunden by nearly 10 years, Orvell goes further in connecting Dos Passos to the contemporary trends in cultural studies. Moreover, Orvell's reading of Dos Passos suggests that Dos Passos' work must be considered as a missing forerunner of American cultural studies. Unfortunately, Orvell focuses primarily on developing a historical narrative out of the past, rather than fully realizing this point. If he had wished, Orvell could have made a more forceful argument regarding the continuing importance of Dos Passos.

The work of Orvell and Crunden has been clearly shaped by the explosion of scholarship in cultural studies, even though they work within the field of cultural history. Both their books place Dos Passos within a cultural framework to explain the factors that shaped his work and the reasons why literary-minded readers recognized something powerful and new in Dos Passos work. The writing of Dos Passos, like the photography of Strand and Stieglitz and the poetry of William Carlos Williams, sought to merge the burgeoning of mass culture with high art. Rather than rely on purely classical models or the refined subject matter of upper class existence, Dos Passos sought to describe and evaluate the tremendous changes experienced in U.S. culture during the first half of the twentieth century. Dos Passos', Strand's, Steiglitz's, and Williams' art grapples with the dehumanizing impact of technological innovation, industrialization, and the creation of mass markets. By demonstrating how these themes appear throughout American life during the modernist period, Orvell and Crunden demonstrate that a tradition of cultural criticism, born and bred in the United States, existed prior to the contemporary growth of the cultural studies movement. Their arguments demonstrate that cultural criticism is not a new enterprise as some advocates of cultural studies seem to imply and can remind students of Dos Passos that

#### THE JOHN DOS PASSOS NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter seeks to promote scholarship on and interest in Dos Passos' writings and biography, and will publish short articles on these subjects. It will also publish news items, notes, letters, and queries on these and other relevant matters. Among these matters are work in progress, manuscript locations and accessions, bibliographies, and textual scholarship.

For return of manuscripts, contributors should send, along with their submissions, stamped envelopes addressed to themselves. They should address all queries and manuscripts to the editor, Melvin Landsberg, Department of English, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-2115.

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his work, especially *U.S.A.*, is connected to an ongoing political project of cultural criticism.

While both writers discuss how Dos Passos relied on a wide range of sources, neither Crunden nor Orvell examines the impact of *U.S.A.* on American culture since its publication. How did Dos Passos transform American culture? What is his cultural legacy? While Dos Passos had an interest in and regularly depicted (and criticized) American popular culture, what can his rather “highbrow” critique tell us as historians, students of literature, and cultural critics? I find it troublesome that Dos Passos and modernism, in general, have been increasingly marginalized in the study of American culture. In part, this may be a response to previous generations of scholars’ extreme devotion to the study of high modernist texts at the expense of work by non-white writers and popular forms of writing, including detective and romance fiction. Such a response is understandable and necessary; however, the work of Dos Passos from the 1920s and 1930s underscores the interrelationship between popular, mass, and avant garde culture. A close examination of his work might help students of American culture chart how popular culture shaped and was shaped by high modernism and how contemporary American culture still struggles with the legacy of modernism.

Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* argues that strong poets clear imaginative space for themselves by misreading the work of their predecessors.<sup>6</sup> The omission of Dos Passos and his modernist contemporaries from current work in cultural studies may constitute a disciplinary analogue to Bloom’s strong poet. Could it be that American cultural studies has omitted modernism, because of a willed misreading of it, in order to create imaginative space for itself in the academy?

American cultural studies and students of Dos Passos and modernism need one another. Any binary that pits literary studies against cultural studies is a false one.<sup>7</sup> More than anything else, Dos Passos demonstrates that literature and cultural studies may be connected in ways that both may prefer to ignore. The example of Dos Passos may also demonstrate that the concern of “good” literature is always the status of social and cultural relations. While literature and cultural studies have developed different procedures to examine how a given text interacts with those relations, the focus of both is on cultural struggles and their manifold expressions. Dos Passos, and modernism more generally, offered a profound expression and critique of the cultural conflict caused by the burgeoning of mass culture. It seems to me that Dos Passos scholars and cultural studies proponents should be engaging in a dialogue that helps the Dos Passos scholars better theorize the forces which shaped *U.S.A.* and its reception and that helps cultural studies theorize how power relations work in the United States.

## Notes

1. Some of the major texts in the discourse of cultural studies include: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Smith (New York: International, 1971); Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); and David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
2. See John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (Second Edition. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
3. See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Viking, 1953); Van Wyck Brooks, *The Early Years—A Selection from His Works 1980-1921*, ed. Claire Sprague (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Constance Rourke, *The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942); and Barry Shank, “The Continuing Embarrassment of Culture: From the Culture Concept to Cultural Studies,” *American Studies* 38.2 (Summer 1997):95-116. See also George Lipsitz, “Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies,” *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, ed. Lucy Maddox (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999) 310-331. Lipsitz’s article is particularly telling in its evasion of modernism and its critique of popular and mass culture in his attempt to develop a history of American cultural studies.
4. Robert Crunden, *Body and Soul: The Making of American Modernism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
5. Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
6. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 5.
7. See John Brenkman, “Extreme Criticism,” *What’s Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, eds. Judith Butler, John Guillory, and Kendall Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2000) 114-136.

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## HOMOSEXUALITY AND BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS IN *U.S.A.*

by

Melvin Landsberg

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century America according to a new book, passing the black-white color line was sometimes identified, by the person or literary character involved, with passing the heterosexual-homosexual line.<sup>1</sup> In developing this argument, in *Queering the Color Line*, Siobhan B. Somerville discusses the works, and sometimes the lives, of James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, and Carl Van Vechten, among others.

Citing a number of historians, Ms. Somerville writes that “during the 1920s, two neighborhoods in Manhattan—Greenwich Village and Harlem—developed flourishing enclaves of gay culture.” She also calls attention to Henry Lewis Gates Jr.’s assertion that the Harlem Renaissance “was surely as gay as it was black, not that it was exclusively either of these.”

When I received an advertisement of this book, I thought immediately of the final Richard Ellsworth Savage narrative episode in John Dos Passos’ *The Big Money*. There Savage is in a Harlem dive dancing cheek to cheek “with a soft-handed brown boy in a tight-fitting suit the color of his skin” (*BM*, 516).<sup>2</sup> I sent for a review copy of Ms. Somerville’s book, advising Duke University Press that I would discuss it only in connection with an episode in Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.*

On the surface, Savage and his date, a young socialite girlfriend named Pat Doolittle, are only slumming in Harlem. While he dances with the brown boy, she dances with “a pale pretty mulatto girl.” Dick suddenly breaks away from the boy and pulls Pat away from the girl. He forcibly brings Pat back to her home, on Park Avenue, telling her that they left because it was “time to draw the line” (*BM*, 516). But then he returns alone to the very same place in Harlem, and dances with the boy. Now thoroughly drunk and where no one knows him, Savage finds release from his inhibitions.

Why in Harlem, besides for anonymity? Conceivably Dos Passos was basing the event on an incident about which he knew. But *U.S.A.* purposefully depicts much of the country, and the author may well have intended to present a small aspect of Harlem, though certainly not its literary Renaissance.

Homosexuality and black-white relations are two unsettling themes in *U.S.A.*—unsettling to Dos Passos himself in “The Camera Eye” and to characters in his narrative. These themes also find a place in the biographies and the Newsreel. In the concluding Savage episode, towards the end of the trilogy, the two themes seem to reach a finale together.

In “The Camera Eye” (2) of *The 42nd Parallel*, Dos Passos’ father (a Northerner) teases the boy’s mother (a Southerner): “What would you do Lucy if I were to invite one of them to my table? They’re very lovely people Lucy the colored people” (*FSP*, 13). The boy’s sexual desires do not respect a color line. Later, in “The Camera Eye” (19) “he wished [he] had the nerve to hug and kiss Martha the colored girl they said was half Indian old Emma’s daughter” (*FSP*, 239).

Dos Passos does not depict his desires as extending to homoeroticism. This theme appears in “The Camera Eye” (24) of *The 42nd Parallel*. On a steamboat excursion, a “baritone” from Athens, Kentucky, “is too attentive to the small boy,” warning him against bad girls, and talking of “beautiful statues of Greek boys.” But the child finally gets away from him (*FSP*, 284-85).

The themes of homoeroticism and color appear briefly, but separately, in the biographies. Rudolph Valentino is heartbroken when the *Chicago Tribune* calls him a pink powderpuff (*BM*, 191). And the people choosing a corpse to be the American Unknown Soldier of World War I are told: “Make sure he aint a dinge, boys” (*NN*, 468). The dinge remark is doubly ironic in the light of a Newsreel item which appeared previously: when towards the end of *The 42nd Parallel*, the United States entered World War I, Newsreel XIX proclaimed: “PLAN LEGISLATION TO KEEP COLORED PEOPLE FROM WHITE AREAS” (*FSP*, 362).

In the narratives, Dos Passos presents the two themes extensively. The first Janey Williams section in *The 42nd Parallel* finds the Williamses living in Georgetown, D.C., a deteriorated area. Young Janey walks from school with a “little yaller girl” who lives across the street from her. Once after she invites the girl into her house, Janey receives a lecture from her mother: “You must never associate with colored people on an equal basis. Living in this neighborhood it’s all the more important to be careful about those things.” Joe, her brother, who has already learned this lesson, yells: “Niggerlover niggerlover” in her ear (*FSP*, 135). Ironically, this prejudice, inculcated early, leads to Joe’s death in the fourth narrative section on him in *Nineteen-Nineteen*. Armistice Day finds him a merchant seaman in Saint-Nazaire, in France. When he enters a cabaret and sees a prostitute or loose woman he likes dancing with a black Senegalese officer, he attacks the black, and a fracas ensues. Somebody brings a bottle down on Joe’s head and crushes his skull.

Earlier, in the second narrative section on Joe Williams in the same volume, a wealthy white American lured Joe into a Trinidad hotel and propositioned him for homosexual favors. Joe pushed the man away and escaped, but his reaction was not the kind of visceral fury he would feel at finding a black dancing with a white woman he wants. Dos Passos ascribes such violent behavior on race to white southern males. Doc, the Floridian who sails from New Orleans to New York with Charley Anderson in the Anderson narrative section of *The 42nd Parallel* exhibits

the same visceral fury towards blacks as does Joe. Twice after imbibing liquor he raves about wanting to kill them.

The Margo Dowling narrative sections, all in *The Big Money*, bring the color and homoerotic themes together. Margo at age sixteen, wishing to escape her wretched circumstances in New York City, entices Tony Garrido, a twenty-one year old Cuban guitar player, to marry her and take her to his country. She is of Irish descent and blond, and observes that Tony's face is "a very light coffeecolor." In Cuba Margo finds his family "yellow or coffeecolored" (she notes a "niggerwoman" among them) and Tony turns out to be a homosexual, weak both in body and character (*BM*, 243). Margo escapes from Cuba, but Tony remains an unwanted part of her life, continually demanding money, living with male lovers, and interfering with her fortunes. Finally a German homosexual lover murders him.

Several other homosexuals appear in the narrative sections of *U.S.A.* Thus Eric Egstrom, whom Eleanor Stoddard knows from the Chicago Art Institute, and Maurice Millet, her French teacher at the Berlitz School, are always together and sleep in the same bed. Dos Passos treats as droll the relationship among Eveline Hutchins, who loves Maurice; Eleanor, who is sexually frigid but has a "beautiful" mutual friendship with Eveline; and the two homosexual men:

Eleanor used to wonder about them sometimes but it was so nice to know boys who weren't horrid about women (*FSP*, 221).

In what sense do the homoerotic and color themes in *U.S.A.* reach a finale in the last Richard Ellsworth section of *The Big Money*? We see even more clearly than before that Savage is dangerously deceptive towards women: first, Daughter, for whose death he was responsible in *Nineteen-Nineteen*; now Pat Doolittle, to whom he proposes during the Harlem escapade; in the future, perhaps, one of Doc Bingham's daughters.

As for the racial theme in the trilogy—for once in *U.S.A.*, blacks have ceased to be servants or victims. After the Harlem place closes, Savage gets into a taxicab with the brown boy and "a strapping black buck he [the boy] said was his girlfriend Florence" (*BM*, 517). He is taking them to his home for breakfast. As he enters his apartment, he is struck on the head and robbed of his watch and money. Morally, Savage's fright on recovering consciousness in the morning seems thoroughly deserved as we read the apprehensions and language that run through his mind:

Now they knew his name his address his phonenumber. Blackmail, oh Christ. How would it be when Mother came home from Florida to find her son earning twentyfive thousand a year, junior partner of J. Ward Moorehouse being blackmailed by two nigger whores,

male prostitutes receiving males? Christ. And Pat Doolittle and the Bingham girls. It would ruin his life (*BM*, 518).

Dos Passos' presentations of black-white relations and homoeroticism in *U.S.A.* cannot be schematized, though certain conclusions are obvious. Among southern white males, violence towards blacks is at or just beneath the surface; and the country in general is race conscious and discriminatory. In the trilogy Dos Passos finds both black-white relations and homosexuality disturbing to society, and he is antipathetic or unsympathetic towards homosexuality.

Incidents in *U.S.A.* do not reflect the thesis in *Queering the Color Line*, except for one telling detail: the brown boy in the Harlem dive says he is Gloria Swanson. Though Savage under the influence of liquor is democratic towards the black homosexuals, he never thinks of himself as black. Tony Garrido, in the Margo Dowling story, is a secondary character from a society with its own racial situation, and Dos Passos' narrative tells us little about his thought processes. But despite the very limited applicability of Ms. Somerville's book to *U.S.A.*, it will probably have uses in sociology and literature; and it has served serendipitously to occasion the musings in this essay.

## Notes

1. Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000. The quotations from it are on p. 129.

2. All citations to Dos Passos' work are to the trilogy *U.S.A.* New York: The Modern Library, 1937. *FSP* refers to *The 42nd Parallel*, *NN* to *Nineteen-Nineteen*, and *BM* to *The Big Money*. Ms. Somerville's book makes no mention of Dos Passos or any of his works.

*Dos Passos' U.S.A. can powerfully stimulate the creative imaginations of college students encountering it in their literature and composition classes. We are happy to publish the two pieces which follow.*

## THE CLAIRE EYE

by

Claire Hagen

### *The Claire Eye (1)*

it's bright and blue out and I'm boosted up up to the cab of the combine and my legs burn on the back seat so I slide over to mom's white legs where I sit and watch the wheat and sky my two favorite colors kent drives through albert's fields the family fields and the old ones watch from the house and mom tells me not to ask why edith has no hair as she waves from the upstairs window and I think of her field of iris and wonder who will care for them when she's gone I look through the back glass at erica who is drowning in the wheat she's drowning and she loves it and she smiles as it covers her I'm afraid the grain will swallow her but she stays on top with arms and legs stretched and she's fine she's wonderful she calls but I don't join too afraid I won't know how to stay afloat I stay safely stationed on mom's white legs the field is empty because we took it with us and the proud kansas locusts are serenading as we enter the old ones' house with the smell I know is theirs and I find albert in his soft rocker to collect my stick of spearmint

### *The Claire Eye (2)*

I'm riding through the park wall park my park  
I'm riding for the first time on my blue trail blazer bike with no extra wheels and no one by my side the evening is perfect by the lake and by the block party with the neighbors I never really knew and the pot luck dishes I never really wanted to taste except for the "thank you" bites my mom made me take if neighbor brian did one good thing it was to teach me how to ride the blue bike and he taught me that on that night he taught me in time to go just once around the lake before the closing of the day and in time for me to tell myself over and over again that "I will never forget this night"

### *The Claire Eye (3)*

driving to the mountains just beginning to gain altitude in our big brown volkswagen van smelling of fried chicken and pringles our favorite road traveling snacks just mom dad sis and me and I'm perched high upon my big orange pillow in the middle seat with the black belt stretched as far as it will go while mom crochets and dad drives and sister emilie reads on the way back and we all listen to john denver because we're in colorado headed to the deep mountain woods for some quality camping and all is so beautiful until emilie sits straight up and I watch in horror as she leans over from the back seat to the middle one and vomits right beside me I scream and emilie doesn't stop and neither does the van because there is no place on the curvy mountain roads I stay high upon my orange pillow paralyzed by the substance the van finally stops and mom jumps out with only paper towels asking loudly why poor pale em didn't just vomit on the floor

*The Claire Eye (4)*

we wait in anticipation of the gun stretching jumping building our pulse the worst part is now when the seven members cram into our team "slot" awaiting the bang that will send us flying random shouts are heard from the crowd and my dad's voice registers but I don't even turn my focused head from the course all is at stake and I'm racing against the team for my spot and for our team spot and for myself and for time plus the wind I glance to my reeboks checking once more the securely double tied laces with my rings looped in exactly how I like them for every race the gun sounds and sends me automatically sprinting elbowing spitting to get ahead of the pack and I know that to the crowd we look like cattle being forced through a chute too small for the herd but we're just 100 kansas cross-country runners fighting to the finish line I've started and I'm breathing with my rhythm hearing others wheeze and stumble and coach beam yelling at me to "work past my comfort zone" so I press on with the pain and with songs and plath poems echoing in my head "there burns a fierce, brief fusion that dreamers call real and realists illusion and insight like the flight of birds"

*The Claire Eye (5)*

that september marked the time of all our worst fears put together and for a moment we were one and we had to be to survive the suicide it suspended us and still does even though his mound has long since flattened and sprouted plenty of grass for his visitors to sit upon and who visits now now that we have all moved away who brings the flowers and the candles and the letters and who hangs the bracelets on the branch above him making jokes of mullets and freestyle tree jumping a block away from him I'm sitting at our hill and watching the same setting sky as before remembering the frustrations we used to spout and wondering what it was that was monumental enough to die for I reminisce in the moment and I hear him saying to the old mop dog "rugby you are a dog you are a dog with three legs"

*The Claire Eye (6)*

a little golden leaf just hit me on the nose as it fell from its tree branch to the ground the university of kansas is well dressed today in its fall coating and morning air reminding me of the precious handful of seasonal days biding their time in my memory I march to class in my jeans and sweater with the wind cutting right through the synthetic fibers sending me a pleasant little shiver soon it will be winter and I will stop the marching and begin folding my dollars to fit just right in the bus money slot I miss home with my gray cat and breakfast and the bathroom floor warm on my feet most of all I miss the one that is growing tadpoles in the northwest and sending homemade envelopes just for me but this this is my place now and for today at least with the leaves dancing around me I am satisfied

*Claire Hagen is a freshman taking honors English at the University of Kansas.*

## *Der Grosse Schweiger*

by

Michael Lindseth

Lo! Here is the man—Albert Einstein, Physicist.

The man of stone stands with one knee bent  
 A sheaf of papers in one hand, a pen in the other.  
 Slightly rotund with cropped moustache and unkempt hair;  
 hair that never blows with the cold wind.  
 The man of stone stands on a pedestal  
 on which hangs a large bronze plaque:

**“E=mc<sup>2</sup>”**

it proclaims. The man of stone seems  
 to have just gotten up from a desk, having finished his writing.  
 What is the writing? Most would say  
 it is some scientific paper, some proof,  
 something written in a language few could understand  
 —and perhaps it is. The stone man does not say.

I look at the stone man’s face, and it does not say anything.  
 No slight smile, no cock of the eyebrow, no glint in the eye  
 can be found. The years of cold wind and cold rain have blurred  
 the stone face—it shows no emotion.

Certainly this was a great man—only great men  
 are immortalized and summarized in stone.

Einstein grew up in Munich, where his father and uncle had a small electrical workshop.  
 He read books, played the violin, and did poorly in school  
 but still wanted to solve the riddle  
 of his “huge world”

so he went to college, studied, and had sweethearts.

As soon as he had a secure income he married—after all, he was in love with a woman named Mileva. But even she could not compare to his mistress:

Physics.

Physics kept him in Germany during the war  
 while Mileva was in Switzerland, alone;  
 at least Albert had his physics. Their divorce saddened the man  
 who was already a teacher, already a genius, already thinking and rethinking his world  
 where a snow of photons blanketed the Earth with light  
 and time was elastic.

He held opinions  
 criticizing German militarism  
 embracing pacifism and Zionism

touring the world, he tried to explain physics and pacifism  
—often arriving on third-class rail, with a violin under his arm.

When his theories were proven, he was revered  
by people who did and didn't understand him.  
He received a Nobel Prize, but many of his colleagues doubted him:  
he had made brilliant contributions, but his best work was behind him—  
he was now chasing the wind of Heisenberg's uncertainty.

But he believed in a unified field. He believed in a subtle God who revealed himself in the harmony of nature. He believed in a meticulously constructed universe

and a God that didn't "play dice" with it

as men did, deceiving the world with hollow commitments to disarmament and peace.  
The pacifist urged Europe to prepare for war against Nazi Germany; fearing for his life, the European came to America  
and Hitler burned his summer home and took his sailboat.

In America he spoke out as he had all his life  
for a unified mankind  
peaceful and internally justified;  
the public viewed him as a kind old uncle  
world-weary, a fallen genius who didn't take seriously  
the uncertainty of man's whim.

The old pacifist advised Roosevelt to build the bomb before Hitler did  
The bastard child of his physics and war  
that turned thousands to ashes,  
their shadows burned onto the streets.

later theories politely criticized, his politics politely ignored  
he felt like a stranger in his wonderful huge world  
and when the silly old man spoke of peace  
we patted him on the head  
gently put him to bed  
and he died in his sleep, while we were still up making bombs.

I look up at the stone man and I wonder: what would he do  
with an hour of animation? Would he step off the pedestal and walk around in a clumsy gait, or play a violin? Would he speak to us in a high-pitched voice? Perhaps he would write a message on his papers:

"I am Albert Einstein, a physicist;  
I am also a pacifist,  
a Zionist, a scientist,  
and an idealist."

But no, that will not happen.  
Stone lips do not smile, and stone faces do not speak.

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*Newsletter* articles are indexed in the *MLA Bibliography* and in the *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (ABELL)*.