



**A Narratological Study and  
Analysis of the Concept of  
Time in John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.***

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## Abstract:

This research paper is primarily concerned with applying Gerard Genette's narratological theory, mainly the concept of tense or time with its subdivisions of (order, duration, and frequency) to John Dos Passos's trilogy U.S.A. It aims to approach the text using Genette's framework as explained in his book, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method and prove that it is the suitable tool for this attempt. The three novels that make the trilogy are: The 42nd Parallel, 1919, and The Big Money. Moreover, since time is a component of narratology, this study will be concerned with discussions about 'narratology' and 'narrative', too. This paper is divided into three main sections; the first section is devoted to a background of narratology and narrative theory. The second section introduces Genette's theory of narrative. The third section is concerned with the analysis of the trilogy in the light of Genette's theory. The ultimate goal of this research paper is to spotlight the efficiency of Genette's theory as an analytical tool and to illustrate how this analysis enriches the understanding of U.S.A.

**Keywords:** Genette, Order, Duration, Frequency, U.S.A.

## ملخص :

تهتم هذه الورقة البحثية بتطبيق نظرية "جيرارد جينيت" السردية، - وبشكل أساسي عنصر الزمن بنقسيماته الفرعية (الترتيب، والمدة، والتواتر) - على ثلاثية جون دوس باسوس (الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية). وتحاول الورقة فهم النص باستخدام الأسس التي وضعها "جينيت" في كتابه (خطاب الحكاية؛ بحث في المنهج)، وإثبات أن هذه الأسس هي الأداة المناسبة للقيام بذلك. الروايات الثلاث التي تصنع الثلاثية هي: (خط عرض ٤٢، ١٩١٩، الثروة)، ونظراً لأن الزمن هو أحد مكونات علم السرد؛ فإن هذه الدراسة ستهتم بتعريف "نظرية السرد" و"السرد" أيضاً. تنقسم الورقة إلى ثلاثة أقسام رئيسية؛ يقدم القسم الأول تعريفاً بالسرد ونظرية السرد، ويقدم القسم الثاني نظرية "جينيت" في السرد، وأما القسم الثالث فيعنى بتحليل الثلاثية في ضوء نظرية "جينيت". وأخيراً.. فإن الهدف النهائي من هذه الورقة البحثية هو تسليط الضوء على كفاءة نظرية "جينيت" كأداة تحليلية، وتوضيح كيفية إثراء هذا التحليل لفهم ثلاثية (الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية).

Gordon Pradl states that the origin of the words ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ are derived from the verb “to know” (3) There are many definitions for the term ‘narrative’. One definition is provided by Monika Fludernik who demonstrates that the word ‘narrative’ is derived from the verb ‘to narrate,’ and it is not only confined to the novel. Narrative exists where there is a story, and someone who tells this story (1). Similarly, Roland Barthes traces that narrative is transmitted via different means and in different forms such as spoken or written language, and fixed, or motional, images, or gestures. Present in different genres as in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, cinema, comics, news item, and conversation. Every age, every place, every society has its own narrative. Narrative exists with the existence of mankind and it is impossible to find any people on earth who do not have their own heritage of narrative. Barthes concludes, “narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.” (65)

Narrative is part of history, politics, race, religion, identity, and time, all of these can turn into stories. These stories can elucidate and set up our experience (Wake 14). Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle explain that history is written in the form of narrative, science consists of stories, Astronomy tells the story about the creation of the world, and Geology depicts the story of the construction of mountains, rivers, and lakes (52-53). Misa Landau highlights the power of narrative in the following quotation:

The growth of a plant, the progress of a disease, the formation of a beach, the evolution of an organism – any set of events that can be arranged in a sequence and related can also be narrated. This is true even of a scientific experiment. Indeed, many laboratory reports, with their sections labelled ‘methods,’ ‘results,’ and ‘conclusions,’ bear at least a superficial resemblance to a typical narrative, that is, an organized sequence of events with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Whether or not scientists follow such a narrative structure in their work, they do not often recognize the extent to which they use narrative in their thinking and in communicating their ideas. Consequently, they may be unaware of the narrative presuppositions, which inform their science. (104)

The previous definitions of narrative spotlight some features of narrative and the most important one of them has to do with its wide scope and the ‘everywhere’ nature of it. Conversely, the definitions given by the famous narratologists who followed the previous theorists such as Genette, 1980; Prince, 1987; Chatman, 1978 were totally different. Those narratologists narrowed down the scope of narrative in their definitions. Gerald Prince defines narrative as “the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other” (1982). H. P. Abbot explains that the narratologists define it in a limited sense as “an act of storytelling addressed by a narrator to a narratee, or as the

recounting of a sequence of past events. (2002)

Irene J. F. Jong writes that the first use of the term ‘narratology’ was in 1969 by the Bulgarian-French literary theorist, Tzvetan Todorov in his *Grammaire du Decameron* (1). David Rudrum defines narratology as “A theoretical school evolved initially in France, its origins lie much earlier, in Russian formalism. The term narratology, Mathew Dubord and Gregory Castle maintain, has been used by the recent theoreticians, Tzvetan Todorov 1977 and Gerald Prince 2005 to refer to the science of narrative (346). Paul Wake adds that narratology is a theory that studies the nature of narrative (2006). When Todorov coined the term, he added the (-ogy) like in biology, sociology to indicate that narratology is “the science of narrative” (Herman 19). Narratology is ‘la science du recit’ or ‘the science of narrative’ (Todorov 1969: 10). In addition to the Russian formalism, the term narratology originated in the structuralism of Roland Bathes and the structuralist semiotics of A.J. Greimas. The primary goal of these diverse theories was “to devise a system or “grammar” by which narrative can be described and interpreted according to formal rather than thematic or ideological criteria.” (Dubord and Castle 346).

Peter Barry considers narratology as a branch of structuralism that stemmed into a new and independent school (144). Although it originated as a branch of structuralism, Raphael C. Meamy adds that narratology managed to get rid of the structuralist control, which causes difficulty in defining it (1). Wolfreys et al. exemplify some of the topics that

narratology addresses:

Narratology will address the functions of duration, repetition, the chronological or anachronic reordering of events out of a progressive temporal linear sequence, the role of the narrator and the various levels of discourse, along with their hierarchical or architectonic relationships, which constitute narrative structure. (70- 71)

Dr. Vali Gholami demonstrates that Genette introduced for the first time a toolbox for the student of fiction and researchers. Jonathan Culler in his foreword to Genette's *Narrative Discourse* compares Genette's book to a guiding manual for the students and researchers when analyzing literature. By introducing and coining several terms in this book such as 'homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, analepsis, and prolepsis', Genette created what classical narratologists were trying to create: a poetics of fiction. (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 33-34)

Genette introduces three divisions and categories to examine and control the relations between the three elements of narrative story, narrative, and narrating. Genette elucidates that tense and mood control the relations between story and narrative, whereas voice controls the relations between narrating and narrative and narrating and story (*Narrative Discourse* 32). Fludernik concludes that "these distinctions enable us, for example, to account for the fact that the same story can be presented in various guises." (2)

Among the three levels, Genette concentrates mainly on the level of narrative or “the words on the page” (Tyson 228). Tyson remarks that Genette observed through his analysis of narrative that all the three levels work side by side. Furthermore, to analyse any narrative, he reduces it into its basic forms and examines how these forms are interrelated or connected. Genette notices that the qualities of tense, mood, and voice connect the three levels together (228). Ogata et al. affirm that “tense” has to do with the relationship between the time of the story and the time of discourse or narrative, “mood” is equal to the modality for regulating narrative information, while “voice” has to do with evaluating the relationship among narrating, story and discourse. (2)

### *Tense*

In the category of tense, Genette discusses the relation between story time and narrative or ‘pseudo-’ discourse time (*Narrative Discourse* 35). Seymour Chatman states that Genette’s distinction between ‘story-time’ and ‘text or narrative time’ is the basis of any recent discussion of narrative (“Genette’s Analysis” 353). Moussa Ahmadian and Laila Jorfi say that ‘story time’ is the time of events as they are supposed to have taken place in other words the real and definite duration of events in the story. However, ‘discourse-time’ refers to the way in which those events are organized in the text; simply it covers the time it takes for the reader to read the pages of the novel. The first step to examine the tense or the time of any narrative is to compare the order of the events of the text with their order in the

story which is the actual arrangement of the events (Henderson 5). To analyze story time and discourse time, Genette classifies this relation between the time of the story and the time of the narrative or discourse into three categories: order, duration, and frequency. (*Narrative Discourse* 35)

### **Order**

In examining order, Genette responds to the question of “when?”. In fact, Genette identifies order through comparing the sequence of the events as they happened in the story with their sequence as written in the text (*Narrative Discourse* 35). Usually, we find this inconsistency obvious between the order of the events in story and narrative in the “detailed and complex” narratives (Gholami 35). The order of story time and narrative time may not correspond (Hacizade 11). The narrator is free enough to choose to present the events in chronological order in the text as they took place in the story or he can deviate from this chronological order, that is, to tell them out of order (Amerian, et al. 1035). For this reason, Genette creates the term ‘anachrony’ to refer to these discordances, deviations, and inversions of the time in the text as opposed to the sequential arrangement in the story (*Narrative Discourse* 35). Simply, anachrony is any reversal, shift, or inversion in “the chronological line of events” (Amerian et al. 1035). Genette explicates that this anachrony can be divided into two categories ‘analepsis’ and ‘prolepsis’ (*Narrative Discourse* 40). In fact, Genette originates these terms to become the equivalents of the Anglo-American terms ‘flashback’ and ‘flashforward’ (Gholami 35-36).

According to Genette, the chronological order dominates the three novels. All the narrative sections in the three novels are presented without anachronies or any deviations in time (*Narrative Discourse* 35) except for few examples. In *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel*, the narrative section tells the story of about five main characters in twenty narrative sections. Three of them are working people, exploited by the system Mac McCreary, Joe Williams, and even Janey Williams (Smith 21). The fictional narrative part which tells the story of Mac, or Fainy McCreary, follows chronological order; there is no deviation in the time of the events. The story of Fainy McCreary or Mac was narrated in the first seven sections of the novel and in the seventeenth section as well (Walker 7). The novel's actions begin with the story of Mac who had rebellious ideas. Walker describes Mac as politically "leftist" (7). He was born in Connecticut. After the loss of his mother, he moved with his family and Uncle Tim to Chicago where he lived for ten years. Then he started to work in his uncle's print shop, after finishing school. When his Uncle was forced out of business, Mac looked for a job and found one with Doc Bingham, selling books and left for Michigan. Bingham turns Mac out of him without paying him, so Mac travels around U.S.A and Canada. He joins the Wobblies and later goes to Mexico to participate in the revolution there but chose running a bookstore instead. Passos was unique throughout his presentation; the order of narration was consistent and not interrupted. However, the order of the narrative in the novel is interrupted with the other three modes of narration that Passos

used. These are the Newsreel, the Camera Eye, and the Biography.

Passos repeated the same pattern of following a chronological order throughout the fictional narrative sections that recounted the story of the seven main characters in *1919*. The novel involves the story of Joe Williams, Janey Williams' brother, began as a baseball player, and then he joined the Navy, which he left after a fight, and eventually became a merchant seaman. Richard Ellsworth Savage or Dick went to Harvard and wrote poetry. In *The Big Money*, the telling of the characters' stories throughout the narrative was regulated chronologically. However, Passos used analepsis or flashbacks to shed light on Margo Dowling and her father's background and life. For example, in the following passage, the narrator used analepsis in order to show how the life of Fred, Margo's father, was like in the past and the relation between Agnes and her mother:

Then it was Agnes who would tell her stories about the old days and what fun it had been, and Agnes would sometimes stop in the middle of a story to cry, about how Agnes and Margie's mother had been such friends and both of them had been salesladies at Siegel Cooper's at the artificialflower counter and used to go to Manhattan Beach ... and how Fred was lifeguard there. "You should have seen him in those days, with his strong tanned limbs he was the handsomest man ..." "But he's handsome now, isn't he, Agnes?" Margie would put in anxiously. "Of course, dearie, but you ought to have seen him in those days." (Passos, *The Big Money* 165)

Agnes told Margo about her mother. They used to be best friends and worked in the same place. They used to go to Manhattan Beach where they met Fred there. Agnes described Fred as handsome and good looking. And she relates how they got to know each other. Thus, this particular narrative movement created through the use of analepsis helps to give a background about Margo and her family and to provide the reader with a complete profile of Agnes as well.

**Duration:**

Duration has to do with the speed of the text in opposition to the speed of the story. Genette delineates that it is not that easy to measure the speed of a text as there is no specific criterion for calculating the duration of the text except the time it takes to read it which varies from one reader to another (*Narrative Discourse* 86). Genette denotes that the story time is measured in minutes, hours, days, months, or years, and narrative time is measured in the number of words, lines, or pages of a text (*Narrative Discourse* 87-88). Thus, the duration or speed is measured by examining the length of time or the minutes, hours, days, and years during which an event took place in the story and the number of words, lines and pages of the text or narrative assigned to describing it. (Gholami 37- 38)

Tyson observes that “duration is what produces the sense of narrative speed” (229). Genette calls these variations in speed ‘anisochronies’ and indicates that these changes in speed exist in every narrative (*Narrative Discourse* 88). He presents these variations to describe the comparison between the speed of the

events in the text and the speed of them in the story. These are ellipsis, pause, summary, and scene (*Narrative Discourse* 95). In addition, Genette announces that when a period in the story is deleted in the narrative or the text this is called ellipsis (*Narrative Discourse* 106). There are two main kinds of ellipsis following this idea of time: the definite ellipsis and the indefinite ellipsis (*Narrative Discourse* 106). The definite ellipsis is when the period of time is pointed out with these phrases 'one week' or 'long years', but when this period of time is not indicated as in these phrases 'many years' or 'long years', this is called indefinite ellipsis (*Narrative Discourse* 106). Also, when the narrator describes a character's childhood in only two or three lines. Ellipsis is when "the text time is zero and the story time consist of hours, days, months or years" (Gholami 39). The technique of ellipsis is used most of the time to keep away from telling "inconsequential events." (Malpas and Wake 18)

In the 42<sup>nd</sup> parallel, the use of ellipsis was not common. An example for ellipsis is when Passos starts to narrate Mac's journey in finding a job the speed changes and ellipsis, which omit details about Mac, occur. The narrator mentioned, "When Fainy was seventeen" (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 19). The narrator here jumped in time without telling in detail what took place in the previous years. Thus, ellipsis has to do with the idea of skipping some events in the narrative time. The time before Mac had reached seventeen was deleted as there was nothing important in Mac's life to shed light on. This kind of ellipsis is called a definite ellipsis as the period of time is pointed out.

In the second novel, *1919*, Passos included some examples of ellipsis to accelerate the narrative time. As an example, “When he got paid off in New York a month later it made him feel pretty good to go to Mrs. Olsen and pay her back what he owed her” (Passos, *1919* 57). The narrator skipped time, approximately a month, as he wanted to focus on an important event that took place later. The important event is that when Joe Williams got money, he went to pay Mrs. Olsen back. This is a definite ellipsis. Another example of skipping the events in narrative time is this sentence, “Joe was two months ashore that time” (Passos, *1919* 67). The narrator is declaring that Joe did not sail for two months and this is a definite ellipsis as well.

The opposite of ellipsis is pause, as Gholami described pause that took place when the text time is infinite, and the story time is zero (39). Genette displays that pause in narrative does not coincide with any time in the story (*Narrative Discourse* 95). He delineates that descriptions are examples for pause. Genette stressed the significance of these descriptions as they show the “labor of perception” of the characters in the novel thus they participate in their analysis and subsequently their understanding (*Narrative Discourse* 100-102). An example of pause is when the narrator describes a short discussion between the characters which lasted for five minutes in five pages. (Gholami 39)

One of the striking examples of the descriptive pauses is introduced at the very beginning of the trilogy in the prologue. This detailed description made by the narrator illustrates the degree of alienation the Americans feel before the war:

The streets are empty. People have packed into subways, climbed into streetcars and buses; in the stations they've scampered for suburban trains; they've filtered into lodgings and tenements, gone up in elevators into apartmenthouses ... The young man walks by himself, fast but not fast enough, far but not far enough ... he must catch the last subway, the streetcar, the bus, run up the gangplanks of all the steamboats, register at all the hotels, work in the cities, answer the wantads, learn the trades, take up the jobs, live in all the boardinghouses, sleep in all the beds. One bed is not enough, one job is not enough, one life is not enough. (Passos, *U.S.A.* v - vi)

As is seen, there was a young man wandering in the streets looking for a job. While he was walking, he was met by “non-human” crowd of the streets. His eyes were “full of desire and hunger”. The young man walks aimlessly in the streets. He feels alien to all the people moving around him. Although, everything moves dynamically using different types of modern transportations of subways, buses, and steamboats, the young man stands still as he was the only person on earth who could not figure out what is going on around him. Everything in the capitalist society around him does not fit him. He was “deprived of one of the essential needs of a capitalist society: mobility”. The man has nothing, owns nothing, and feels empty inside as he has “no job, no woman, no house ... no city”. Passos used this descriptive pause to delineate the life during the modern world of

capitalism (Khouidi 82). The young man is a symbol of all the Americans, he “walks fast by himself through the crowd that thins into the night streets ... mind is a beehive of hopes buzzing and stringing” (Passos, *U.S.A.* v). The above descriptive pause of the young man and his journey to find a job holds a mirror for the reader to observe the real ugly face of the modern world of capitalism.

In *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel*, Passos does a masterful job of “depicting the environment and the conditions that Mac and others are struggling against just to make a living” (Yetter 76). Such descriptions reflect the characters’ lives and their struggles in the capitalist world. The narrator mentioned, “When the wind set from the silver factories across the river the air of the gray four family frame house where Fainy McCreary was born was choking all day with the smell of whaleoil soap” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 6). The narrator wrote down, “the four-family house” and “the smell of whale oil soap”, to trace the “direct results of the industrial life of the community” in the early life of Mac (Nelson 115). Passos encapsulates the tough neighbourhood that Mac had to live in. A neighbourhood of bullies where the safest place to play was in the backyard of a frame house that is home to four other families:

The backyard was the only place you could really feel safe to play in. There were broken down fences, dented garbage cans, old pots and pans too nearly sieves to mend, a vacant chicken coop that still had feathers and droppings on the floor, hogweed in

summer, mud in winter; but the glory of the McCrearys' backyard was Tony Harriman's rabbit hutch, where he kept Belgian hares. (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 8)

The above description gives voice to Mac's fear and insecurity in the place where he should have found all sorts of security and peace.

Passos used pauses to elaborate more about the characters. As in the second novel, *1919*, the character of Janey, "She was nicely dressed and had her chin up with a new little cute independent tilt ... Her voice was different. She had a quick chilly way of talking and a kidding manner she'd never had before" (Passos, *1919* 58). Apparently, this portrayal of the character of Janey suggests that she is a successful self-confident young lady who was able to achieve her goals and become independent. She was full of energy and life.

In the third novel, *The Big Money*, the pauses that Passos used in the novel were sometimes descriptive other times they were in the form of comments uttered by the narrator on what was taking place in the novel. An example of the descriptive pause is when the narrator depicted how was Margo's Christmas. The narrator used these words "long slow", "awful", "gloomy", "pale", "dead tired", and "crying" to describe how Margo and Agnes supposed to spend Christmas in comparison to other girls of her age. The narrator recounted:

The winter was a long slow climb to Christmas, and after all the girls had talked about what they'd do at Christmas so much Margie's Christmas was awful, a late gloomy dinner with Agnes and the old people and only one or two presents. Agnes looked pale, she was deadtired from getting the Christmas dinner for the people she worked for ... but Margie felt like crying. Not even a tree. (Passos, *The Big Money* 172)

This pause marked how the life of little Margo was like even in the occasions when she was supposed to celebrate and enjoy herself, but the misery went on as pain and hardship were her lifestyle in capitalist America.

Comments were employed also as an example of pause in the novel. Passos provides the first impression of Margo when she arrived at New York. It was “sunny” unlike “the dark” city where she used to live with her father or with Agnes’ family, “The streets of the uptown West Side looked amazingly big and wide and sunny to Margie” (Passos, *The Big Money* 173). This passage expresses Margo’s hope that New York will be the city where her dreams will come true. Speedily, Margo discovered that her life with Agnes in New York was just like being imprisoned in “a cage”. The narrator remarked, “They had a small room for the two of them, but it had a canarybird in a cage.” (Passos, *The Big Money* 174)

Gholami throws light on the last two types, namely summary and scene. Summary takes place when the time

specified to the narration or the text is less than the time of the story itself, so we have an increase in speed in the text more than in the story (Gholami 39). Genette depicts summary as the narration of events that may take time in the story in a very few sentences or paragraph in the narrative. In other words, “the narration of a long time in a concise form” (*Narrative Discourse* 95- 96). He proceeds that summary can provide the “background information”. In *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel*, the narrator summarized what happened to Fainy in Chicago before he went to work, “At first he went to school and played baseball on back lots on Saturday afternoons, but then came his last commencement, and all the children sang *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, and school was over and he had to go to work” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 17-18). Passos used the phrase “Saturday afternoons” to summarize the details to make the narrative fast. Another example is when Passos summarized in just one sentence what took place over ten years: “Fainy lived ten years in Chicago” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 17). The purpose of this technique is to accelerate the pace of the narrative by just providing a background for the main information on which the narrator does not want to concentrate, but which is nevertheless necessary.

The following passage is a summary extracted from *1919*. The narrator here is summarizing how Joe's life was like during winter:

It was nasty sleety winter weather. Mornings Joe sat in the steamy kitchen studying a course in navigation ... Afternoons he fidgeted in the dingy doctor's office ... waiting for his turn for

treatment ... It was a glum looking bunch waited in there. Nobody ever said anything much to anybody else. A couple of times he met guys on the street he'd talked with a little waiting in there, but they always walked right past him as if they didn't see him. Evenings he sometimes went over to Manhattan ... It was a bum time except that Mrs. Olsen was darn good to him and he got fonder of her than he'd ever been of his own mother. (Passos, 1919 54)

The narrator summarized how Joe Williams had to live throughout the “mornings”, “afternoon”s, and in the “evenings” of winter. This summary illustrated how Joe’s life was that boring and tedious. He was wandering from place to place and drifting from job to job. In the quotation the narrator describes a lonely person who is aimless and jobless even when he was met by any person, they do not take any notice of him at all. This description emphasized the fractured life of the ordinary American citizens who were living in the capitalist society.

Finally, the last element is scene. Genette explicates that scene is considered the opposite of summary as it gives “the ‘dramatic’ content” (*Narrative Discourse* 109). Scene is the presentation of the detailed and long passages, mostly in dialogues (*Narrative Discourse* 94). Simply, it is when the text time and the story time are equal (Gholami 39). Throughout *U.S.A.* Passos used limited number of dialogues and dramatic scenes as he relied mainly on the narrative summaries to cover the flow of decades. In *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel*, Passos used the detailed scenes between Mac’s father, Pop, and Uncle Tim to

give the reader an opportunity to understand the nature of Mac's life and hence the Americans in general during that time. This scene was after Pop had lost his job because of the strike in the Chadwick Mills. Pop says:

Ablebodied man by Jesus, if I couldn't lick any one of those damn Polaks with my crutch tied behind my back ... I say so to Mr. Barry; I ain't goin' to join no strike. Mr. Barry, a sensible quiet man, a bit of an invalid, with a wife an' kiddies to think for. Eight years I've been watchman, an' now you give me the sack to take on a bunch of thugs from a detective agency. (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 9)

However, Pop is still a strong and able man, he felt invalid and disabled after losing his job because of some gangsters. He felt tyrannized and oppressed as he will not be able to financially support his family anymore after eight years of working as a watchman. In another situation, when Pop was complaining to Uncle Tim and blaming himself for leaving Middletown and moving to Chicago. Pop felt like "a whipped cur" as he had to run away from the place he used to live and work in. Tim told him not to feel guilty, there was no alternatives for him to turn to, he had no money and no job to raise the two children with. Pop sighs his state:

Well, Tim, I feel like a whipped cur ... So long as I've lived, Tim, I've tried to do the right thing," Tim says, "... there was nothin\* else you could do, was

there? What the devil can you do if you haven't any money and haven't any job and a lot o' doctors and undertakers and landlords come round with their bills and you with two children to support? (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 14)

Pop is an embodiment of the American community; he reflects their agonies and plights. Uncle Tim's reply to Pop's inquires and questions baited the reader's involvement and awareness of the miserable conditions of the American citizens, who were moneyless, and had no jobs to support their families. The poor people could not turn away from the endless demands of payment bills put on them by "undertakers and landlords" who get everything. Therefore, the previous two scenes provide the reader with a closer and more realistic observation of Mac's father and Mac himself as well.

The dramatic scenes were also Passos's technique to give his characters the space to present themselves to the readers through their own words and thoughts so as to enrich the reader's understanding of the characters. The scene between Dr. Bingham and Mac was an example. Dr. Bingham was the second experience for Mac at work after he left his Uncle. Dr. Bingham said to Mac, "Do you realize, young man, that it is not a job I am offering you; it is a great opportunity ... a splendid opportunity for service and self-improvement. I'm offering you an education gratis" (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 31-32). Dr. Bingham told Mac that having a job during their time was kind of a miracle because of the fact that not all the people have this opportunity nowadays.

Nelson indicates that Dr. Bingham's words to Mac about the lifetime opportunity he was offering to Mac was "mere shams which Mac quickly sees through once they begin their tour" (25). Thus, this scene reveals the contradiction between Bingham's words and actions.

Corbett suggests that Passos followed the same technique used in the first novel of the trilogy in *1919*. Throughout *1919*, Passos applied the use of scenes in painting his characters. As an illustration, the scene between Joe Williams and Warner Jones, "but I might as well tell you right now I can't treat you back ... I'm flat and those goddam Scotchmen won't advance us any pay." "You're a sailor, aren't your" asked the man when they got to the bar. "I work on a boat, if that's what you mean" (Passos, *1919* 19). Joe was replying to Jones after the former had offered Joe a drink. Joe told Jones that he has no money to pay for anything offered by him as he is "flat" or has no money. When Jones asked whether Joe is a sailor, Joe gave a very sarcastic answer which evoked his state of discontentment. Joe's reply reflected how disappointed he was about his job, all what he got from his job was to be on a boat and nothing more.

In *The Big Money*, the detailed dramatic scenes enabled the characters to present themselves to the reader directly. Some scenes have to do with the characters attitudes and choices, others were to display how was the relationship among them. After the war, people in America were classified differently. They were "ex-war aces, movie stars, promoters from Wall Street, social workers, reformers, Communist leaders, United

States Senators” who were affected by the kind of life that requires “the quick reward and by the millions that are made today and lost tomorrow” (Castle 131).

The following scene was between Margo and Agnes. They were talking about Fred. Passos was attracting the reader’s attention to the relationship between Agnes and Fred from one side and between Margo and her Agnes from the other. Agnes was a very kind-hearted and loyal wife to her husband, Fred. Although he was aggressive with her in many situations, she believed that he was a good person if “he’s himself” or if he did not drink alcohol:

“But there's not a finer man in the world than Fred Dowling when he's himself.... Never forget that, Margie.” And they'd both begin to cry and Agnes would ask Margie if she loved her as much as if she'd been her own mother and Margie would cry and say, "Yes, Agnes darling." You must always love me," Agnes would say, "because God doesn't seem to want me to have any little babies of my own.” (Passos, *The Big Money* 166)

The scene when Agnes was speaking with Margo about Tad, a rich college boy, when she was telling her to marry Tad as he was “the sweetest boy” and “a millionaire”. Agnes said, "Margo, you’ve got to marry him. He's the sweetest boy. He was telling us how this place is the first time in his life he's ever had any feeling of home. He's been brought up by servants and tidingmasters and people like that ... I never thought a

millionaire could be such a dear. I just think he's a darling” (Passos, *The Big Money* 260). After Tad had proposed to Margo, she told him that although she liked him, she could not marry him as she was ““a working girl” who ought to protect herself in this cruel society, "Honest, Tad, I like you fine," she said ... "but you know ... Heaven won't protect a workinggirl unless she protects herself”” (Passos, *The Big Money* 268). Margo is giving the reader an example of how the American woman living in this period used to think. In this capitalist society, Margo did not have the choice to live an easy life. In a society which dehumanize its citizens, Margo had no other choice but to work hard day and night to pay the price for her ambitions and dreams.

### **Frequency:**

The last term used by Genette in studying time and narrative is frequency. Frequency is considered Genette's contribution as he is the first one to talk about it (Gholami 39). Genette investigates that Frequency has to do with the idea of repetition and its various forms in the text or narrative. It describes the number of times an event takes place in a story and the number of times it is repeated in the text There are three main forms of frequency in the narrative, these are singulative, repetitive or iterative. Singulative narration is the most common type among the other types of frequency. It is telling once in the text what has happened once in the story. The singulative narration also may include what happened again and again in the story is repeated many times in the text. Genette justified

considering the two cases as singulative because the singulative is “defined not by the number of occurrences on both sides but by the equality of this number” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 114- 115).

The singulative narrative dominates the novel of *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* whereas there are some few examples of repetitive narrative. With this repetitive mode of narration, an event that took place once in story time is narrated several times. This is a way of emphasizing or highlighting the idea that is being described by dwelling on it. It grants some obsessive dimension to the event and singles it out. An example of this repetition is when Uncle Tim speaks to Mac telling him “But it ain’t your fault and it ain’t my fault ... it’s the fault of poverty, and poverty’s the fault of the system” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 14). After a while he repeats it “It’s the fault of the system that don’t give a man the fruit of his labor” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 15). Also, in the same page when Mac’s father said that he feels he is like “a whipped cur”, Uncle Tim replied, “It’s the system, John, it’s the goddam lousy system” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 15). Mac repeated “it’s the system that’s to blame” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 16). And again, Uncle Tim repeated the same word, “I blame the system” (Passos, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* 37). Uncle Tim repeated the word “the system” many times to reflect the characters’ deep feelings of unrest and dissatisfaction towards their government during this time. This type of repetition or frequency is called repetitive telling as the same word or idea is repeated more than one time.

In 1919, the following phrase, “amount to something” (Passos, 1919 49) was repeated two times in the same page by Del. She was telling Joe Williams that they must work and take any action in their lives till they get married. This repetition reflected how Joe feels helpless to the extent that makes him unable to make his partner feel secured as he himself did not have this feeling inside. How Joe could not do anything for Del as long he could not do anything for himself. In the first chapter about Anne Elizabeth Trent or Daughter. Passos repeats the superlative form of the adjectives in the same passage when he was introducing the character:

The Trents lived in a house on Pleasant avenue that was the finest street in Dallas that was the biggest and fastest growing town in Texas that was the biggest state in the Union and had the blackest soil and the whitest people and America was the greatest country in the world and Daughter was dad's onlyest sweetest little girl. (Passos, 1919 256)

Passos made use of the reoccurrence of these superlative forms of the adjectives: “the finest, the biggest, fastest, the blackest, the whitest, greatest, and onlyest sweetest” to explicate that Anne Elizabeth Trent, who was known as Daughter, belong to a well-to-do family who used to be proud of everything they have even their country.

There were several repeated statements and words throughout *The Big Money*. The statement, which was repeated by Agnes, Margie's stepmother, more than one time in the novel. First, in page 170 when she said to Margo “Margo ... we can't

stand this life anymore, can we, little girl?”. The second time was in page 171 when Agnes repeated the same sentence, “I always told Fred Dowling the day would come when I couldn't stand it anymore.” The repetition of this statement is a providence of the extent of pain that Agnes was facing in her life. Agnes was a copy of how most of the characters were living in capitalist America.

Furthermore, the idea of running away was mentioned more than one time by the narrator whenever he spoke about Margo. The first mention was in the following statement “All Margie's dreams were about running away” (Passos, *The Big Money* 167). Margo had suffered a lot in her life with her father and in school. Her only dream was to leave all this cruel life and stand on her own. Also, in this statement “All she could think of was to run away” (Passos, *The Big Money* 183). The idea of running away is mentioned again. This was after her stepmother's husband, Mr. Frank Mandeville, had raped her and threatens to kill her if she tells. Then after she started to go on her own way, “She'd decided that the thing for her to do was to marry Tony and run away to Cuba with him” (Passos, *The Big Money* 185). Margo decided to marry the Cuban Tony Garrido and to follow him to Cuba. Margo still has the dream of running away even after she married Tony and discovered that she will have a baby from him. Indeed, she was not happy in her life with Tony; she felt she was imprisoned and the chain of her old dream to run away continued, “If she only wasn't going to have the baby Margo would have run away.” (Passos, *The Big Money* 247)

## Conclusion:

This research paper was devoted to applying aspects of Gerard Genette's narrative theory introduced in his book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* to approach the American novelist John Dos Passos's trilogy *U.S.A.* The chapter has focused on one of the dimensions of Genette's model of narratology, namely tense (order, duration, and frequency). As a result of this study, the following can be considered as the main conclusions that the analysis has arrived at.

First, Gerard Genette's theory is a suitable tool which helped to approach the trilogy. Undoubtedly, the understanding of the narrative techniques employed in *U.S.A.* can enhance the reader's appreciation of the trilogy because we will be better aware of the tools that the writer used in writing his trilogy. Second, with regard to the technique of duration with its elements of scene, pause, summary, and ellipsis. The descriptive pauses helped in the portrayal of the setting of the novel in most of the cases, and in the depiction of the characters as well. These pauses enrich the reader's understanding of the suppressive conditions under which they lived in the Capitalist America. The fictional narratives are characterized by "a scanty use of dialogue and dramatic scene" (Walker 8). These scenes and dialogues were really of great help in clarifying some aspects about the characters. The scenes were the characters' voice or in other words their opportunity to speak to the readers. These scenes outlined their disappointments and trials, their relationships and alienation, their struggles and their ambitions. Passos also depended on the narrative summaries to cover "the sweep of decades" (Walker 8). The ellipsis was employed to conceal the unimportant details in the life of the characters.

Third, Genette's theory has been a useful tool for the fact that Genette presented new concepts that can be used in the analysis of the narrative techniques for the first time. One of these concepts is the concept of frequency. By drawing on Genette's new and original concepts, our analytical and interpretive capacities are further enriched and more enlightened.

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