

= 25 Images of a Man 's Passion =

25 Images of a Man 's Passion , or The Passion of a Man is the first wordless novel by Flemish artist Frans Masereel (1889 ? 1972) , first published in 1918 under the French title 25 images de la passion d 'un homme . The silent story is about a young working @-@ class man who leads a revolt against his employer . The first of dozens of such works by Masereel , the book is considered to be the first wordless novel , a genre that saw its greatest popularity in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s . Masereel followed the book in 1919 with his best @-@ known work , Passionate Journey .

Masereel had grown up reading revolutionary socialist literature , and expressed his politics in A Man 's Passion ; the work is also filled with religious imagery , as with the Common Man taking the role of the martyred Christ . It owed its visual style to Expressionism and mediaeval woodcuts . The book was popular , particularly in German editions , which had introductions by writers Max Brod , Hermann Hesse , and Thomas Mann .

= = Background = =

Frans Masereel (1889 ? 1972) was born into a French @-@ speaking family in Blankenberge , Belgium . When he was five his father died , and his mother remarried to a doctor in Ghent , whose political beliefs left an impression on the young Masereel . Masereel grew up reading Marxist , socialist , and anarchist works by such writers as Karl Marx and Peter Kropotkin , and often accompanied his stepfather in socialist demonstrations . After a year at the Ghent Academy of Fine Arts in 1907 , Masereel left to study art on his own in Paris . During World War I he volunteered as a translator for the Red Cross in Geneva , drew newspaper political cartoons , and copublished a magazine called Les Tablettes , in which he published his first woodcut prints .

In the early 20th century there was a revival in interest in mediaeval woodcuts , particularly in religious books such as the Biblia pauperum . The woodcut is a less refined medium than the wood engraving that replaced it ? artists of the time took to the rougher woodcut to express angst and frustration . From 1917 Masereel began publishing books of woodcut prints , using similar imagery to make political statements on the strife of the common people rather than to illustrate the lives of Christ and the saints . In 1918 he created the first such book to feature a narrative , 25 Images of a Man 's Passion , which is thus the earliest example of the wordless novel genre .

= = Synopsis = =

25 Images of a Man 's Passion tells of a young man who protests injustice against the working class in an industrialized society . The man is born to an unwed mother , struggles to make a living , and drinks and whores with his coworkers . He educates himself by reading and talking with his coworkers , and is executed by the authorities for leading a revolt against his employer .

Scenes from ' 25 Images of a Man 's Passion ' '

= = Style and analysis = =

The title and content of the book have biblical resonances with the mediaeval woodcuts from which they draw inspiration . In line with Masereel 's politics , the Common Man is martyred instead of Christ ; during his trial , Christ on the crucifix shines light upon the man . The cover of the German edition depicts the main character burdened Christ @-@ like with a crucifix .

Visually , the book owes much to Expressionism , though experts disagree on whether to label Masereel 's work Expressionist ; critic Lothar Lang finds Masereel 's revolutionary politics to set Masereel apart from the Expressionists . Perry Willet finds parallels between the story arc of Masereel 's book and that of Expressionist playwright Ernst Toller 's The Transformation (1919) , though Masereel 's work was the more political ? Toller lacked Masereel 's commitment to socialism . Socialist themes of the martyrdom of the working class were common in wordless novels ; with the city as a backdrop to a worker 's struggle against oppression , the book set the tone and themes for

future wordless novels by Masereel and other artists , such as the American Lynd Ward .

= = Publication and reception = =

Printed from twenty @-@ five woodcut blocks , the book was first released in 1918 by Édition de Sablier , a Swiss publishing house of which Masereel was a co @-@ sponsor . It was first offered as a numbered collectors ' edition , and followed by trade editions . Kurt Wolff produced an inexpensive German edition (Die Passion eines Menschen) in 1921 . The German edition was particularly popular , and its several editions had introductions by writers Max Brod , Hermann Hesse , and Thomas Mann . In the same Expressionistic style , Masereel followed Man 's Passion with Passionate Journey (1919) , The Sun (1919) , Story Without Words (1920) , and The Idea (1920) .