

= Wordless novel =

The wordless novel is a narrative genre that uses sequences of captionless pictures to tell a story . As artists have often made such books using woodcut and other relief printing techniques , the terms woodcut novel or novel in woodcuts are also used . The genre flourished primarily in the 1920s and 1930s and was most popular in Germany .

The wordless novel has its origin in the German Expressionist movement of the early 20th century . The typically socialist work drew inspiration from mediaeval woodcuts and used the awkward look of that medium to express angst and frustration at social injustice . The first such book was the Belgian Frans Masereel 's 25 Images of a Man 's Passion , published in 1918 . The German Otto Nückel and other artists followed Masereel 's example . Lynd Ward brought the genre to the United States in 1929 when he produced Gods ' Man , which inspired other American wordless novels and a parody in 1930 by cartoonist Milt Gross with He Done Her Wrong . Following an early @-@ 1930s peak in production and popularity , the genre waned in the face of competition from sound films and anti @-@ socialist censorship in Nazi Germany and the US .

Following World War II , new examples of wordless novels became increasingly rare , and early works went out of print . Interest began to revive in the 1960s when the American comics fandom subculture came to see wordless novels as prototypical book @-@ length comics . In the 1970s , the example of the wordless novel inspired cartoonists such as Will Eisner and Art Spiegelman to create book @-@ length non @-@ genre comics ? " graphic novels " . Cartoonists such as Eric Drooker and Peter Kuper took direct inspiration from wordless novels to create wordless graphic novels .

= = Characteristics = =

Wordless novels use sequences of expressive images to tell a story . Socialist themes of struggle against capitalism are common ; scholar Perry Willett calls these themes " a unifying element of the genre 's aesthetic " . In both formal and moral aspects , they draw from Expressionist graphics , theatre , and film . Wordless novelists such as Frans Masereel appropriated the awkward aesthetic of mediaeval woodcuts to express their anguish and revolutionary political ideas and used simple , traditional iconography . Text is restricted to title and chapter pages , except where text is a part of the scene , such as in signs .

The storytelling tends to be melodramatic , and the stories tend to focus on struggles against social oppression in which characters are silenced by economic , political , and other social forces . The characters are clearly delineated as good or evil ? the good drawn sympathetically and the evil with the contempt of the artist 's moral indignation .

Most wordless novelists were not prolific ; few besides Masereel and Lynd Ward produced more than a single book . The books were designed to be mass @-@ produced for a popular audience , in contrast to similar but shorter portfolios by artists such as Otto Dix , George Grosz , and Käthe Kollwitz , which were produced in limited editions for collectors . These portfolios of typically from eight to ten prints also were meant to be viewed in sequence . Wordless novels were longer , had more complex narratives , and were printed in sizes and dimensions comparable to those of novels . A large influence was the most popular silent visual medium of the time : silent films . Panning , zooming , slapstick , and other filmic techniques are found in the books ; Ward said that in creating a wordless novel , he first had to visualize it in his head as a silent film .

Typically , wordless novels used relief printing techniques such as woodcuts , wood engraving , metalcuts , or linocuts . One of the oldest printing techniques , relief printing has its origins in 8th @-@ century China and was introduced to Europe in the 15th century . It requires an artist to draw or transfer an image to a printing block ; the areas not to be printed (the white areas) are cut away , leaving raised areas to which ink is applied to make prints . The monochrome prints were usually in black ink , and occasionally in a different colour such as sienna or orange . Relief printing is an inexpensive but labour @-@ intensive printing technique ; it was accessible to socially conscious artists who wanted to tell wordless stories of the working classes .

= = History = =

In 15th @-@ century mediaeval Europe , woodcut block books were printed as religious guides ; particularly popular was the *Ars moriendi* . The early 16th century saw block books disappear in favour of books printed with the movable type of Gutenberg 's presses . Woodcut printing persisted into the 16th century under artists such as Dürer , Holbein , and Amman , after which engraving techniques superseded woodcuts . Pioneered by Thomas Bewick , wood engraving enjoyed popularity beginning in the 18th century , until the method gave way by the 19th century to more advanced printing methods such as lithography .

Post @-@ impressionist artist Paul Gauguin revived woodcut printing in the late @-@ 19th century , favouring it for its primitivist effect . Early in the 20th century , woodcut artists such as Käthe Kollwitz (1867 ? 1945) and Max Klinger (1857 ? 1920) published portfolios of woodcuts , thematically linked by themes of social injustice . Expressionist graphic artists such as Max Beckmann (1884 ? 1950) , Otto Dix (1891 ? 1969) , Kollwitz , and Karl Schmidt @-@ Rottluff (1884 ? 1976) were inspired by an early @-@ 20th @-@ century revival of interest in mediaeval graphic arts ? in particular Biblical woodcut prints such as the *Biblia pauperum* . These artists used the awkward look of woodcut images to express feelings of anguish .

= = = In Europe = = =

The wordless novel grew out of the Expressionist movement . The Belgian Frans Masereel (1889 ? 1972) created the earliest example , *25 Images of a Man 's Passion* , in 1918 . It was a commercial success and was followed by *Passionate Journey* , which at 167 images was Masereel 's longest book . It was also the most commercially successful , particularly in Germany , where copies of his books sold in the hundreds of thousands throughout the 1920s and had introductions by writers such as Max Brod , Hermann Hesse , and Thomas Mann . Masereel 's books drew strongly on Expressionist theatre and film in their exaggerated but representational artwork with strong contrasts of black and white .

Masereel 's commercial success led other artists to try their hands at the genre ; themes of oppression under capitalism were prominent , a pattern set early by Masereel . At age thirteen , Polish @-@ French artist Balthus drew a wordless story about his cat ; it was published in 1921 with an introduction by poet Rainer Maria Rilke . In *Destiny* (1926) , Otto Nückel (1888 ? 1955) produced a work with greater nuance and atmosphere than Masereel 's bombastic works ; where Masereel told tales of Man 's struggle against Society , Nückel told of the life of an individual woman . *Destiny* appeared in a US edition in 1930 and sold well there .

Clément Moreau (1903 ? 1988) first tried his hand at the genre with the six @-@ plate *Youth Without Means* in 1928 . István Szegedi @-@ Szüts (1892 ? 1959) , a Hungarian immigrant to England , made a wordless book in brush and ink called *My War* (1931) . In simple artwork reminiscent of Japanese brush painting , Szegedi @-@ Szüts told of a Hungarian cavalryman disillusioned by his World War I experiences . Helena Bochořáková @-@ Dittrichová (1894 ? 1980) was the first woman to produce a wordless novel , *Childhood* (1931) , which presented middle @-@ class life , rather than the working @-@ class struggle found in the works of Masereel or Nückel . Bochořáková described her books as " cycles " rather than novels . Surrealist artist Max Ernst made the silent collage novel *Une semaine de bonté* in 1934 . Following World War II , Werner Gothein (1890 ? 1968) , a member of the German Expressionist group *Die Brücke* , produced *The Tightrope Walker and the Clown* (1949) .

= = = In North America = = =

In 1926 , the American Lynd Ward (1905 ? 1985) moved to Leipzig to study graphic arts ; while there , he discovered the works of Masereel and Otto Nückel . He produced six such works of his own ; he preferred to call them " pictorial narratives " . The first , *Gods ' Man* (1929) , was his most

popular . Ward used wood engraving rather than woodcutting and varied image sizes from page to page . Gods ' Man sold 20 @, @ 000 copies , and other American artists followed up on this success with their own wordless novels in the 1930s .

Cartoonist Milt Gross 's He Done Her Wrong (1930) was a parody of the genre ; the book uses varying panel designs akin to those of comics : the action sometimes takes place outside the panel borders and " dialogue balloons " show in images what the characters are saying . Cartoonist and illustrator William Gropper 's Alay @-@ oop (1930) tells of three entertainers ' disappointed dreams . In Abraham Lincoln : Biography in Woodcuts (1933) Charles Turzak documented the American president . Animator Myron Waldman (1908 ? 2006) wrote a wordless tale of a plump young woman looking for a glamorous husband . The book , Eve (1943) , also uses " picture balloons " as He Done Her Wrong does .

Inspired by mediaeval religious block books and working in an Art Deco style , American illustrator James Reid (1907 ? 1989) produced one wordless novel , The Life of Christ (1930) ; due to the book 's religious content , the Soviet Union barred its importation under its policies on religion .

In 1938 , Italian @-@ American Giacomo Patri (1898 ? 1978) produced his only wordless novel , the linocut White Collar . It chronicles the aftermath of the 1929 stock market crash and was intended to motivate white @-@ collar workers to unionize . It also deals with controversial topics such as abortion , accessibility of health care for the poor , and loss of Christian faith . From 1948 to 1951 , Canadian Laurence Hyde (1914 ? 1987) produced his single wordless novel , the woodcut Southern Cross , in response to the American atomic tests in the Bikini Atoll . The work tells of an American evacuation of an island for nuclear tests , where one family is left behind . Polish @-@ American Si Lewen 's (1918 ?) first book , The Parade : A Story in 55 Drawings (1957) , won praise from Albert Einstein for its anti @-@ war message . Canadian George Kuthan 's Aphrodite 's Cup (1964) is an erotic book drawn in an ancient Greek style . In the early 21st century , Canadian George Walker made wordless woodcut novels , beginning with Book of Hours (2010) , about the lives of those in the World Trade Center complex just before the September 11 attacks .

= = = Decline = = =

The popularity of wordless novels peaked around 1929 to 1931 , when " talkies " were introduced and began to supersede silent films . In the 1930s the Nazis in Germany suppressed and detained many printmakers and banned Masereel 's works as " degenerate art " . Following World War II , US censors suppressed books with socialist views , including the works of Lynd Ward , on whom the FBI kept files over his socialist sympathies ; this censorship has made early editions of wordless novels scarce collectors ' items in the US .

By the 1940s , most artists had given up on the genre . The most devoted practitioners , Masereel and Ward , moved on to other work for which they became better known ; Masereel 's obituary did not even mention his wordless novels . Many wordless novels remained out of print until the rise of the graphic novel revived interest amongst readers and publishers in the early 21st century .

= = Relation to comics and graphic novels = =

" ... Ward 's roots were not in comics , though his work is part of the same large family tree ... "

There have been sporadic examples of textless comics throughout the medium 's history . In the US , there were comic strips such as Otto Soglow 's The Little King , begun in 1931 , and Carl Anderson 's Henry , begun in 1932 . German cartoonist E. O. Plauen 's wordless domestic comic strip Father and Son (1934 ? 37) was popular in Germany , and was collected in three volumes . Antonio Prohías 's textless Mad magazine feature Spy vs. Spy began in 1961 .

Cartoonist Will Eisner (1917 ? 2005) first came upon the work of Lynd Ward in 1938 . Eisner was an early pioneer in the American comic book industry and saw in Ward 's work a greater potential for comics . Eisner 's ambitions were rebuffed by his peers , who saw comics as no more than low @-@ status entertainment . Eisner withdrew from the commercial comics industry in the early 1950s to do government and educational work . He returned in the 1970s when the atmosphere had changed

and his readers and peers seemed more receptive to his ambitions . In 1978 , he began a career of creating book @-@ length comics , the first of which was A Contract with God ; the book was marketed as a " graphic novel " , a term that became standard towards the end of the 20th century . Eisner called Ward " perhaps the most provocative graphic storyteller " of the 20th century . He wrote that Ward 's Vertigo (1937) required considerable investment from readers in order to fill in the story between images .

Interest in the wordless novel revived with the rise of the graphic novel . Comics fans discussed the works of Masereel and others in fanzines , and the discussions turned to talk of the Great American Novel being made in comics . These discussions inspired cartoonist Art Spiegelman (b . 1942) , who in 1973 made a four @-@ page strip , " Prisoner on the Hell Planet " , in an Expressionist style inspired by Ward 's work . Spiegelman later incorporated the strip into his graphic novel Maus (1992) .

While graphic novels generally use captions and dialogue , cartoonists such as Eric Drooker , Peter Kuper , Thomas Ott , Brian Ralph , Masashi Tanaka , and Lewis Trondheim have made wordless graphic novels . As Gross did in He Done Her Wrong , Hendrik Dorgathen 's wordless oeuvre uses textless word balloons containing symbols , icons , and other images . The influence of the wordless novel is prominent in Drooker 's Flood (1992) and Kuper 's The System (1997) , both metaphorical stories that focus on social themes . Since 2011 , the Pennsylvania State University Libraries and the Pennsylvania Center for the Book have awarded the annual Lynd Ward Prize for Graphic Novel , a cash prize established by Ward 's daughters to highlight their father 's influence on the development of the graphic novel .

===== Books =====

===== Magazines and journals =====

===== Web =====