

PRINTMAKING

The Power of the unwritten word

With the new collection *Graphic Witness*, Toronto artist and printmaker George Walker reintroduces the wordless novel to the post-RAW generations. Reproducing four “wordless novels” from the early and mid-20th century, the book provides contemporary readers of graphic novels and comics some historical precedence and context for the art form.

Edited by Walker, *Graphic Witness* (Firefly Books, \$29.95, 423 pp., Smythe sewn in wraps, www.fireflybooks.com) presents works by four artistic and literary masters of the wordless novel. The first presented in the book, Frans Masereel, had a profound effect on the college-aged Walker, fuelling his interest in traditional relief printmaking techniques, and using these techniques to create extended visual narratives - wordless novels. “At the time words didn’t seem able to communicate my feelings. Pictures seemed more poignant and accessible to illustrate this world,” Walker writes in his preface.

Crediting Masereel as the inventor of the

form, Walker starts *Graphic Witness* with his *The Passion of Man*. The story, in 25 full-page images, follows the hero through a series of encounters, temptations and moral challenges, with an ending as dark as the woodcuts.

Lynn Ward, one of America’s most renowned wood engravers, was inspired to put his talent to work telling wordless stories after seeing Masereel’s work while studying in Germany during the 1920s. In *Wild Pilgrimage*, Ward touches on “racism, love and rejection, and power and class structure in the labor movement” over the course of 98 wood engravings.

Like Ward’s story, Giacomo Patri’s *White Collar* varies from Masereel’s by varying the size and colour of the images. Born in Italy, Giacomo Patri moved to the United States and worked as an illustrator and teacher. *White Collar* is an autobiographical account of his early struggles as a commercial artist told in 120 linoleum cuts.

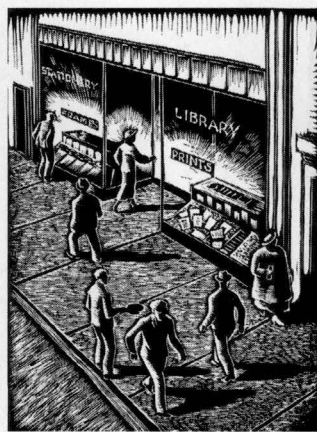
Laurence Hyde immigrated to Canada from England at the age of 12. *Southern Cross* is his critical account, told with wood engravings, of the American tests of hydrogen bombs at the Bikini Atoll in 1946.



Lynn Ward's
Wild Pilgrimage (1932).



Frans Masereel's
The Passion of Man (1918).



Giacomo Patri's
White Collar (1938).



Laurence Hyde's
Southern Cross (1951).