

# The Idea

Frans Masereel

1920

2020 Preface

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UprisingEngineer, Masereel Group,  
August 30, 2020

The Idea  
83 Woodcuts  
From  
Frans Masereel

Introduction by Hermann Hesse  
Kurt Wolff Verlag / Munich  
5. – 9. Thousand

Printed in 1928 by Offizin Haag-Drugulin, A.-G. in Leipzig / Cover drawing by Emil Preetorius  
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INTRODUCTION

”La passion d’un homme”, ”The Path of Sorrows”, was the title of the first series of woodcuts by Frans Masereel, which I saw years ago in brotherhood counts, although I have never met him personally, and although he is actually not close to me in terms of type and origin, but rather is my antipode.

”Man’s Path of Sorrows” could be the title of the whole work of this wonderful, fanatical, childlike, refined artist, and this already means that Masereel has been at the center of all art from the very beginning. Because man’s path of suffering, the passion of the Incarnation, the painful being on this difficult path, the thousand upsurges, a thousand bitter relapses - this passion story is the only and eternal content of all art.

This very modern artist Masereel, this real big city dweller, this curious, slightly enthusiastic, always hungry, always receptive child person, who so often has to do with factories and cars, with flywheels and pipes, skyscrapers and urban street traffic, who has the distorted face of the usurer Having portrayed the raw of the policeman, the stupid of the whore, the evil of the exploiter a hundred and a thousand times as timely, he is basically always occupied with something thoroughly timeless and eternal: with the eternally identical, eternally compassionate, eternally inspiring human history. How this two-legged, talented, evil, dangerous, cowardly cattle can become that other person whom the religions and great cultures mean, the person of the idea, the person in the service of God, the person of love, self-conquest and goodness - these ancient, serious, happy, holy story, about which the Bibles of all peoples and ages deal, this Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Golgotha of the developing, the aspiring human is the content of Masereel's art, over and over again. He does not speak of Moses and the kings, not of the prophets and not of the Savior, he speaks of himself and of us, his brothers, he speaks of the people of our time, as he is in the midst of his cities, his machines, his armies and Barracks, his factories and penitentiaries are looking for their way, the longing for God in their hearts, sometimes attracted and bound by the world with all the loveliest charms of love, sometimes deeply offended and disappointed, involved in a hundred battles, hero and fool of an eternal ideal. Masereel has portrayed this person many times, always it is himself. Several times he has let him die, he has placed him against a wall in front of the soldiers' shotguns and had him shot, often he has visibly perished in a hopeless fight with them much stronger world, with these barracks, these judges, these newspaper and factory people, these wooers, these ruffians and connoisseurs. But again and again he gets up, again and again he begins his beautiful and difficult path, again and again he falls from the sky with broken wings, only to swing himself out of the gloomy chamber window of everyday life in enthusiastic hours. And all these fights - that's the wonderful thing! - Not a preacher, not an angry prophet, not an accusing judge, not a malicious satirist, but a lover experiences all these battles, these sufferings, these wanderings and agony of death. Something of that which makes him so drunk and enthusiastic and that inspires his flight so ravishingly, something of this distant, divine, blissfully anticipated, fervently sought, what he finds in sun and sea, in flowers and animals, in beautiful bodies and in beautiful pious ones Worshiping gestures and seeking out again and again, something of the ray of this divine is also in his factories, his night clubs, his prostitutes, his courtrooms, his distorted egoist faces. On many of his papers, where the hero falls into the hands of the Philistines and is stoned by the mob or rolled to death by the ice-cold justice machine of the state, the bearers of the brute force may have really angry, really wild, raw, beastly faces, but their grins reveals infinite agony - they too go a difficult path, a path of suffering, the wicked, the violent criminals, the lost brothers who want to kill the living and eternal in themselves as they kill it in the persecuted hero. They too suffer, these brutal violent people, they too are on their way on a difficult, arduous path, lost people, plagued by fearful dreams, convulsively doing stupid and wrong things. They too suffer, they too are people, are brothers. As much as he seems to simplify with his rapid wood-cutting technique, the artist loves to pursue the characteristic expression, the characteristic gesture of his villains and evildoers too, he studies the elegant top hat, the grimace of the policeman snarling, the crease of the industrialist's trousers with the the same love, the same devotion, curiosity and burning artist obsession as he studies the shimmer of a naked body, the smile of a child.

In the woodcut series "The Idea" Masereel found one of his most delightful symbols. There he sits at the table, the dear fellow, coaxed, pensive, concentrated, waiting for the spark. And the

spark comes and ignites, from the artist's head the idea jumps brightly and easily, a small, lovely girl figure, a shimmering, naked little Undine, whom he greets with delight and gratefulness, presses to his heart, adores, kisses full of love. But then the holy hour is already over, the idea must go, it must go out into the world, to the others. Sadly, he says goodbye to her, sadly he sees her making her way. She no longer belongs to him, the dear little one, she has flown away and is now going towards the world, towards her mission. It is received with curiosity, with joy, in the midst of a swarm of people who are ready to grab it, exploit it, and sell it on. She, the naked, beautiful fairy tale child, is quickly put into everyday clothes, she wears her clothes sadly through the streets, rushes from them furiously, races and dances naked and radiant through the world, is gazed at by the people, suspected by the Philistines, denounced by morality, taken away by the police, locked up, dressed in new clothes. She finds her father and hero again, who receives her blissfully, who is persecuted because of her, is captured, is led to death - but she is always with him, makes suffering a joy, and when he is shot and dies for his idea should, she places herself between him and death, but has to see him die and help bury. She walks on through the world, the dear little fairy, she enchants and frightens people, is coveted and persecuted by them, she takes refuge in a print shop, is reproduced, flies a hundredfold, comes into a thousand hands, in front of a thousand eyes, excited love and contempt, admiration and scandal - how happy and easy it swings up on the paper where it leaves the press! It is pursued again, is burned, but while the burners glee into the ashes, it is already floating away high in the air, conquering the wire, the telephone, the train, the Morse set, the photographer and film superior and mermaid with the whole complicated apparatus of our mechanics, gets everything excited, confuses everything, spreads seeds of unrest, of life, of love, of indignation, and in the end, after eighty adventures, finds his way back to him, to hers Father and lover. He's sitting and has just given birth to a new, beautiful idea - but wasn't he shot dead? to bury? No, he's been living again a long time ago, maybe since then he has died many deaths, gone through many Gethsemans. She floats in to him and sees him sadly obsessed with the new idea, in love with his new sister, but she too is not allowed to stay with him, she too has to go out and begin her passionate journey. Thus the ring closes, the Creator remains lonely.

I would like to wish that this idea will make this little, radiant sorceress, quite a lot in love with herself, enchant quite a lot and fill it with a longing for their homeland, our homeland. It is a spark from beyond, a tender call from the higher world, a tender reminder of our goal and our task, of the path of incarnation that lies ahead of us. We don't want to smile at her or pursue her, this beautiful girl from abroad, we neither want to pursue her, nor burn her, nor drag her down and turn her into a whore. She is our dear little sister, a greeting from our distant home.

The man who wrote this wonderful little picture story, and many others, is a Belgian, and one day during the war he appeared in Switzerland, not to cry out for revenge for his fatherland, but for the war itself to explain. Day after day, joy and consolation for a loyal little group of like-minded people, Masereel's woodcuts against the war, a new sheet every day. The rest of us were all very busy at the time, we had to shoot or guard prisoners, or bandage wounds or invent new substitutes. But when I think back to that fantastic time, it seems to me that Masereel was actually the only one who did something sensible, something good and worthy of gratitude every day. I would like to take this late opportunity to thank him for this.

Hermann Hesse

DOCTOR LOUIS LAVA

APPROPRIATE





























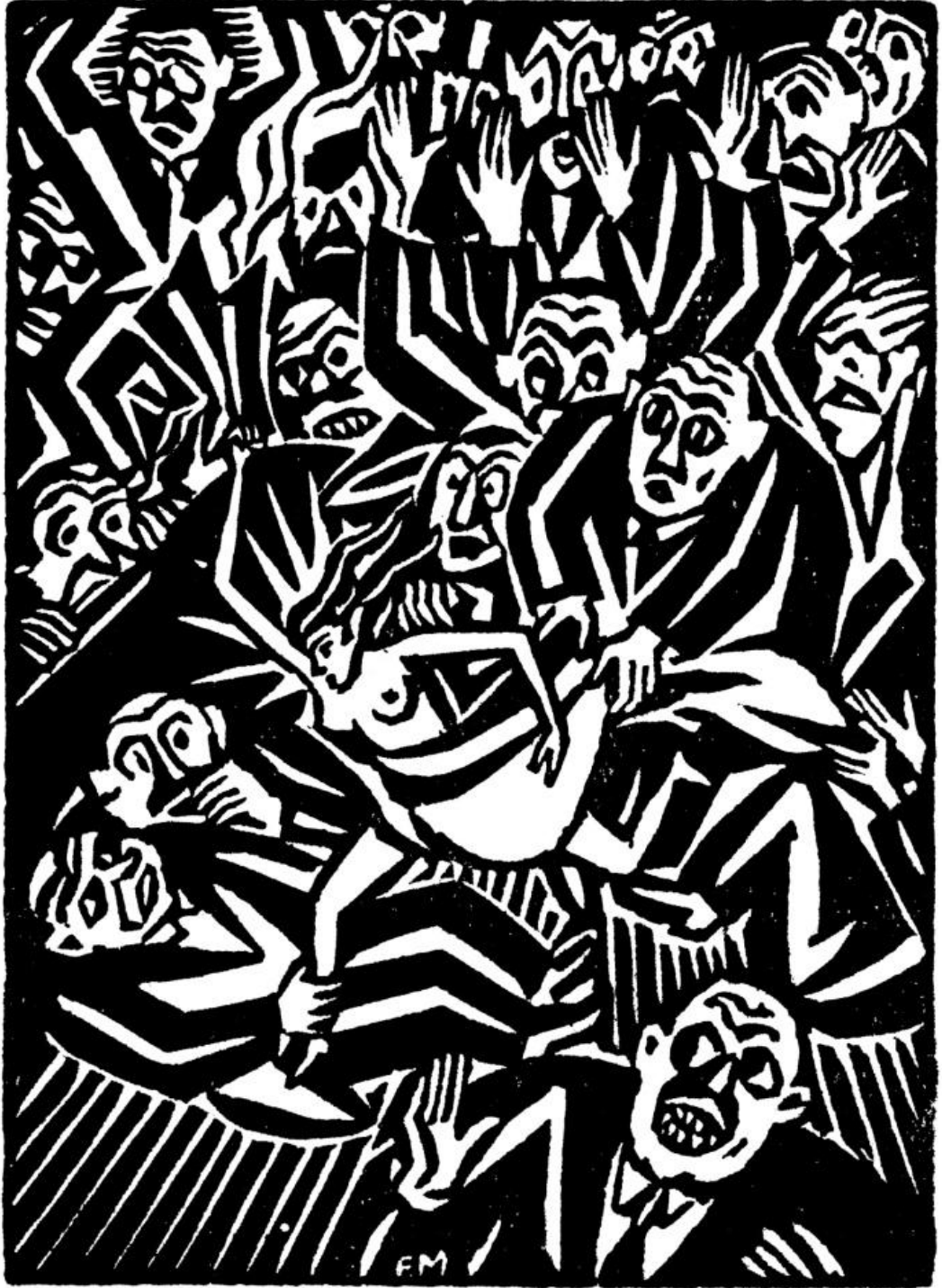






















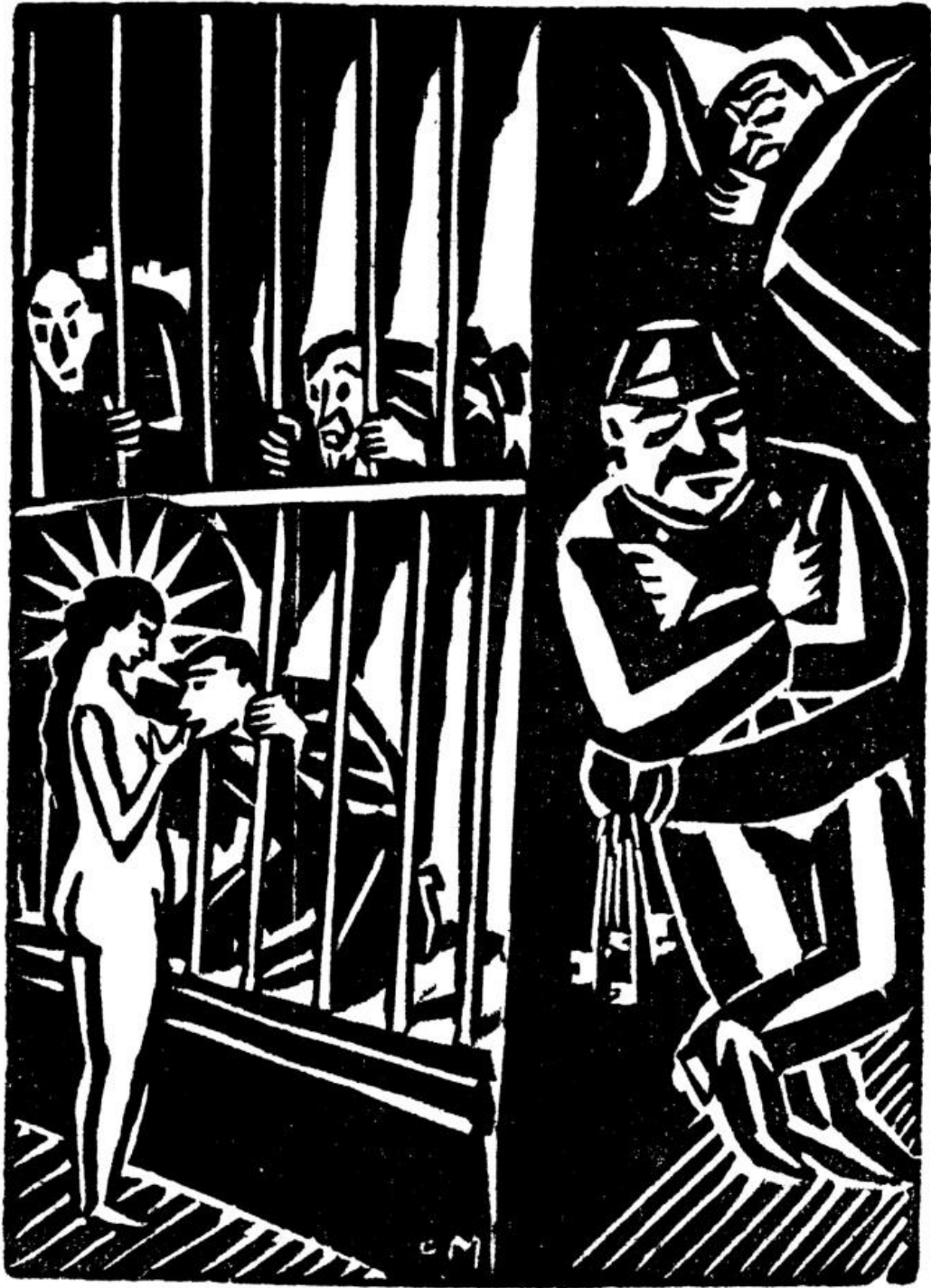


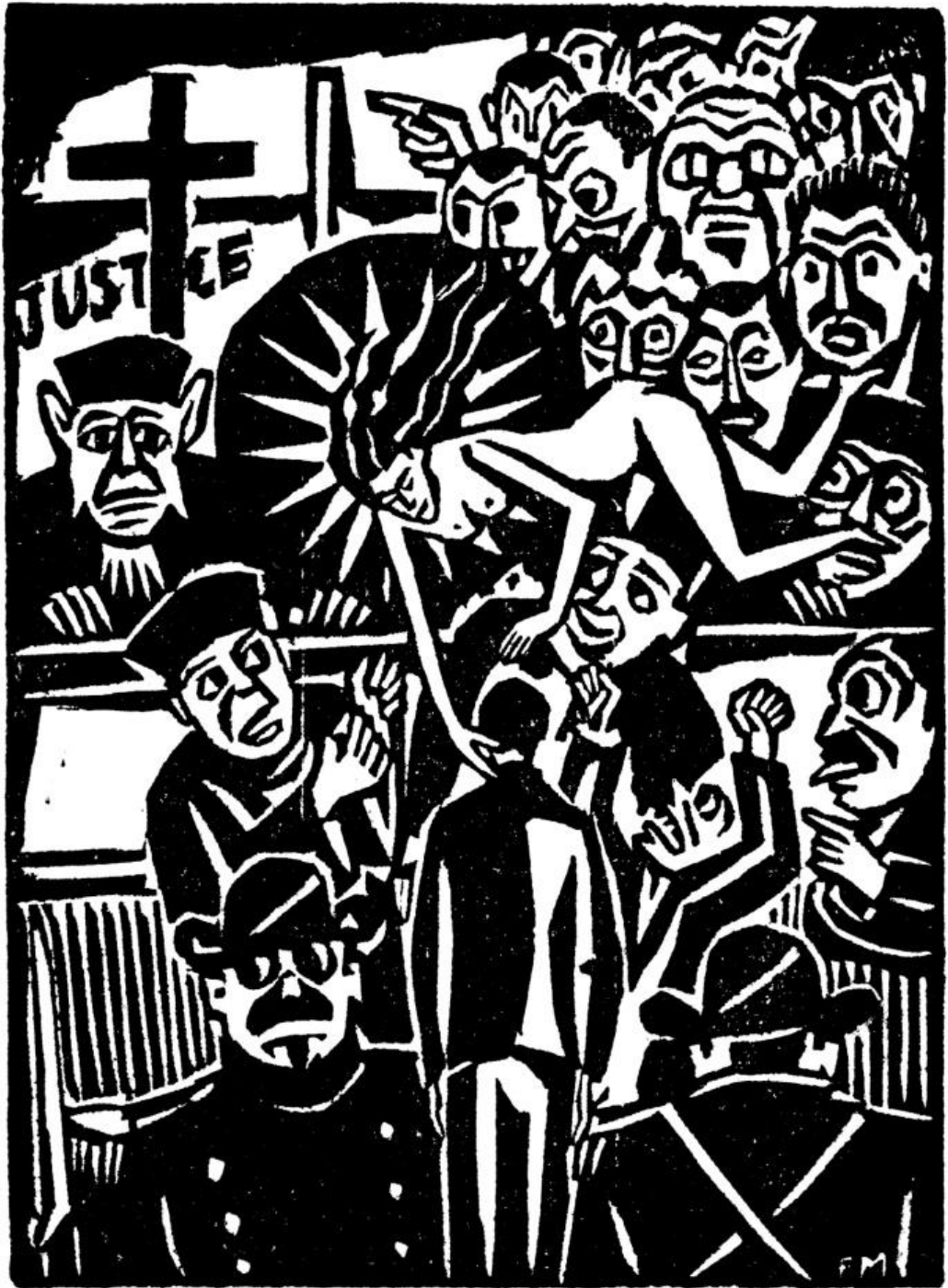




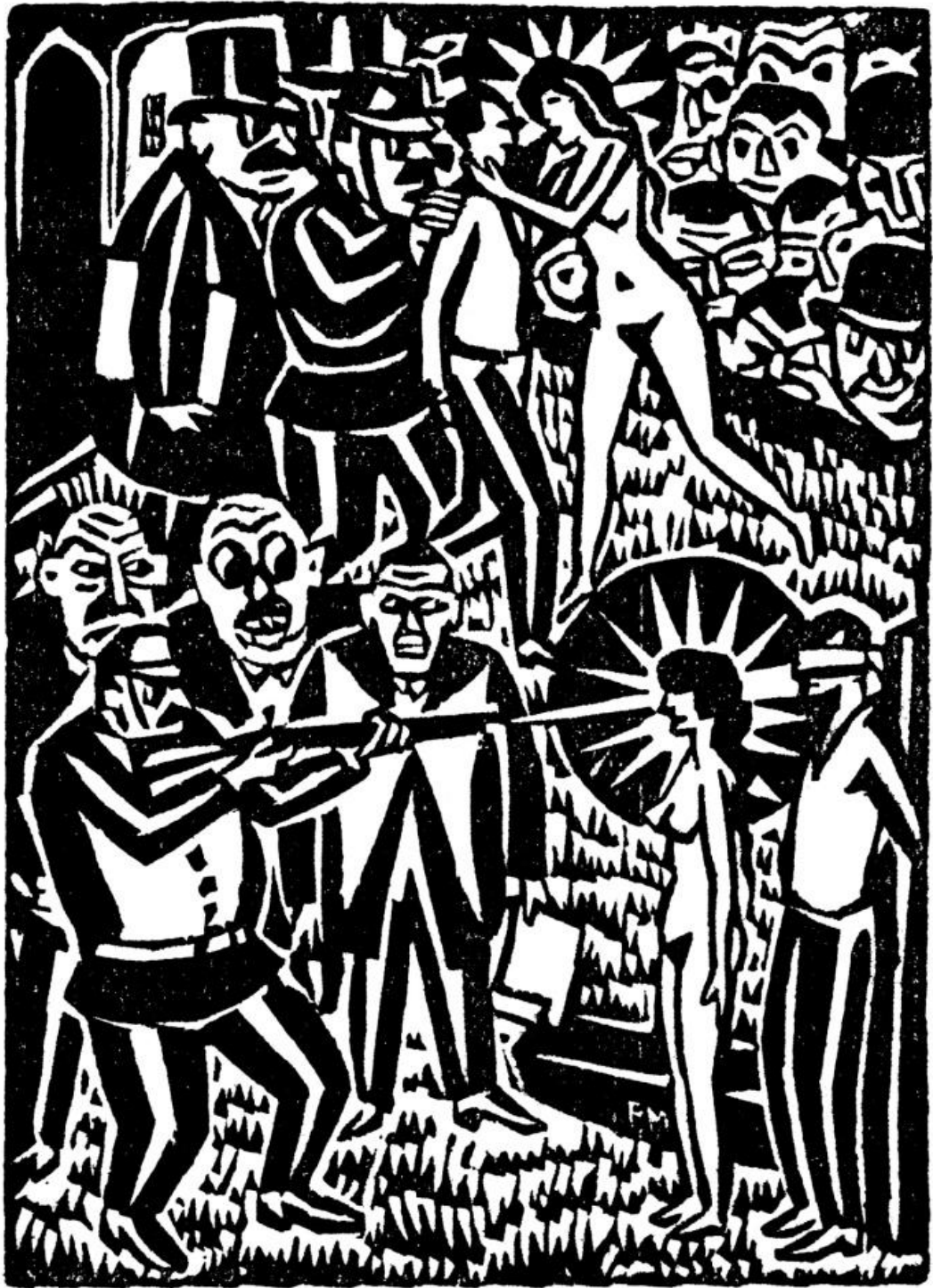




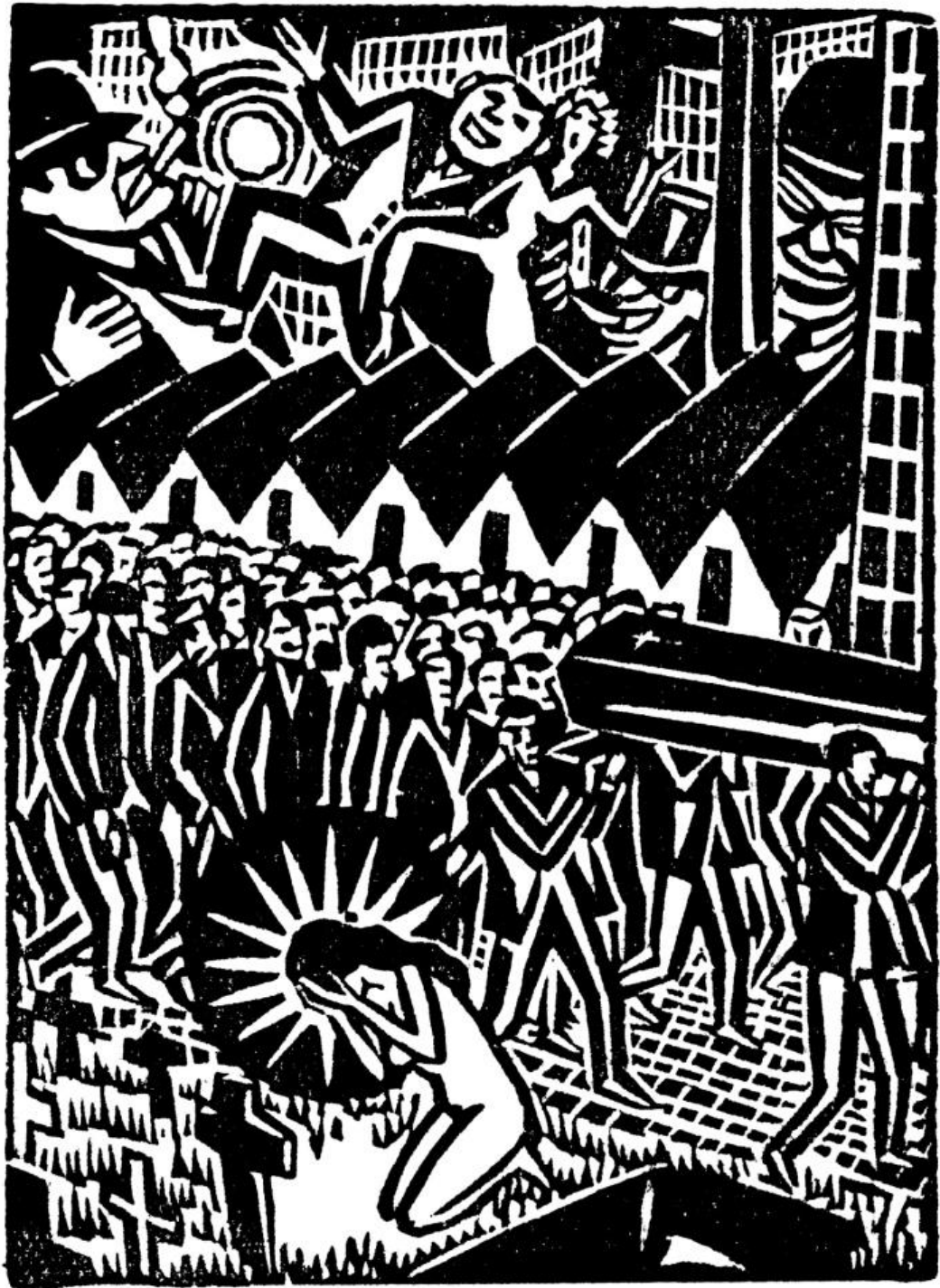


















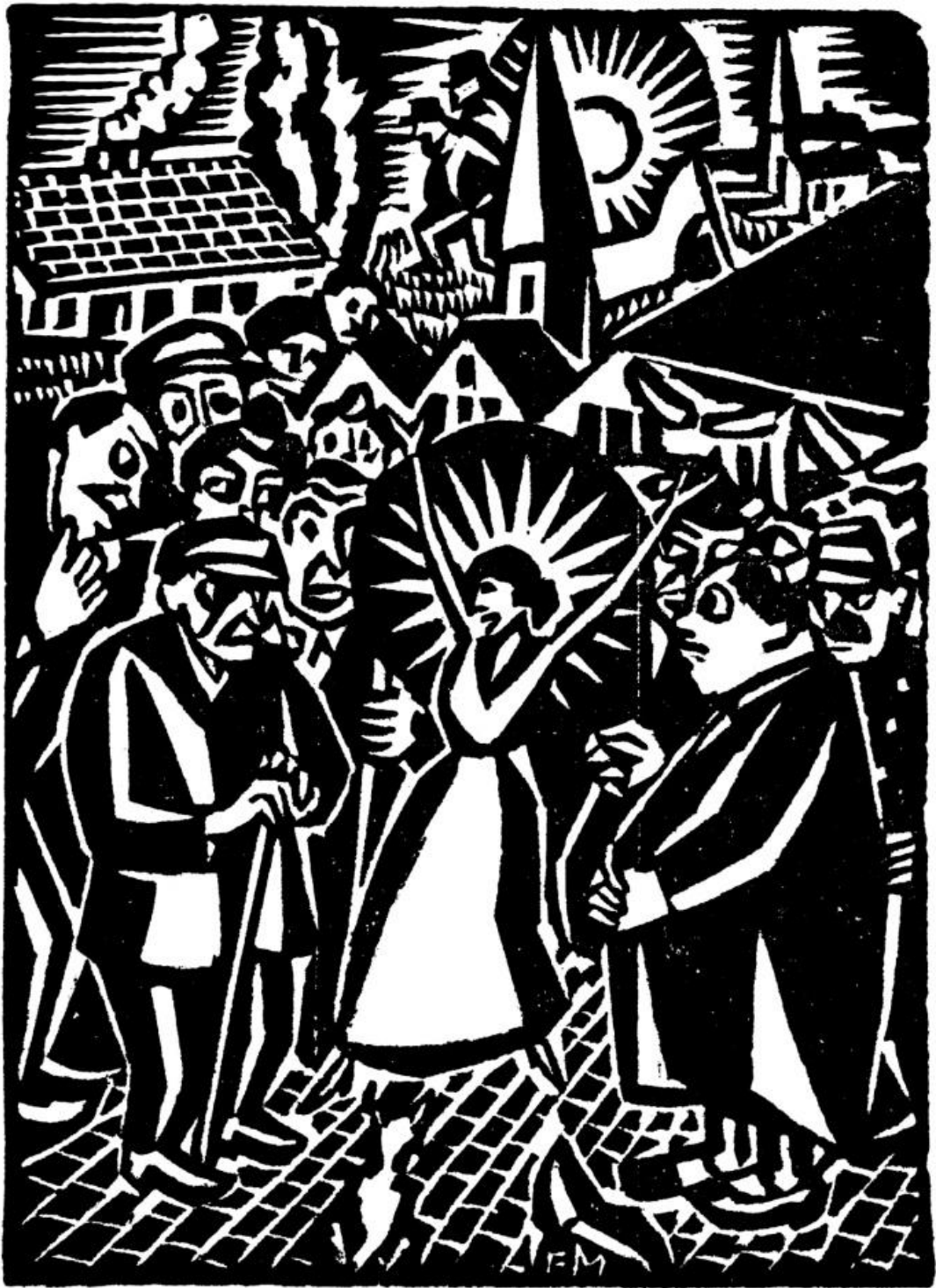








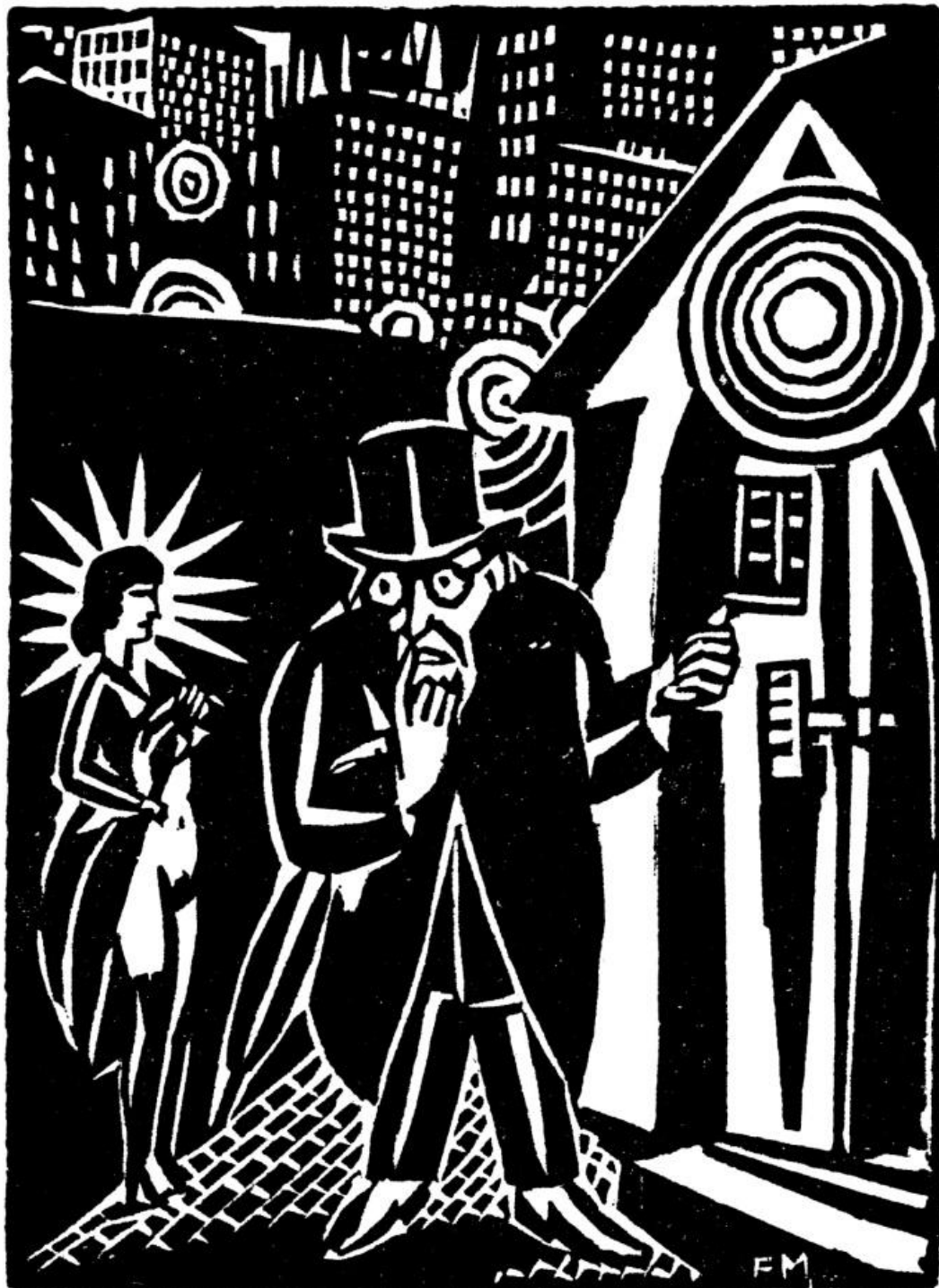


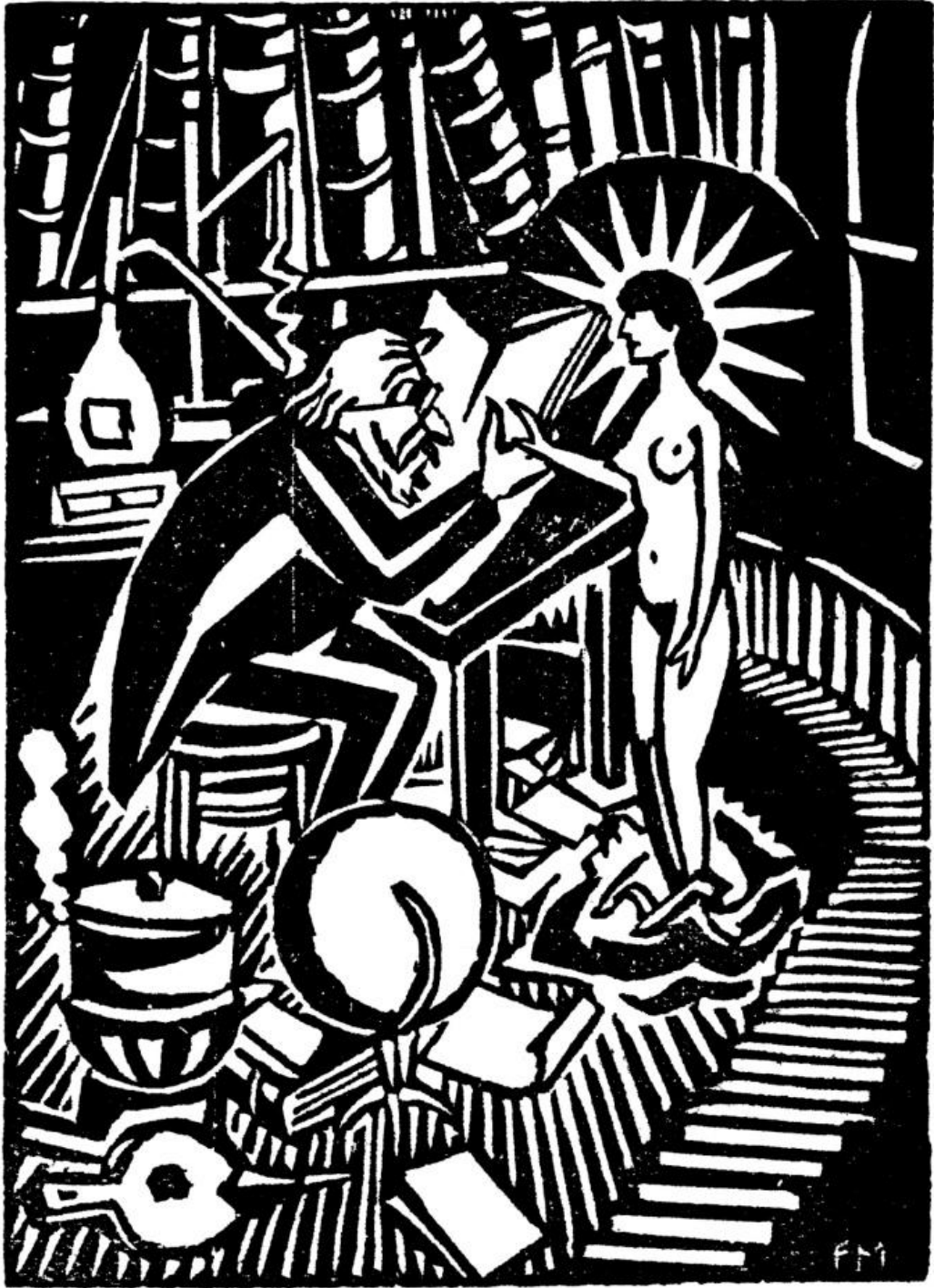














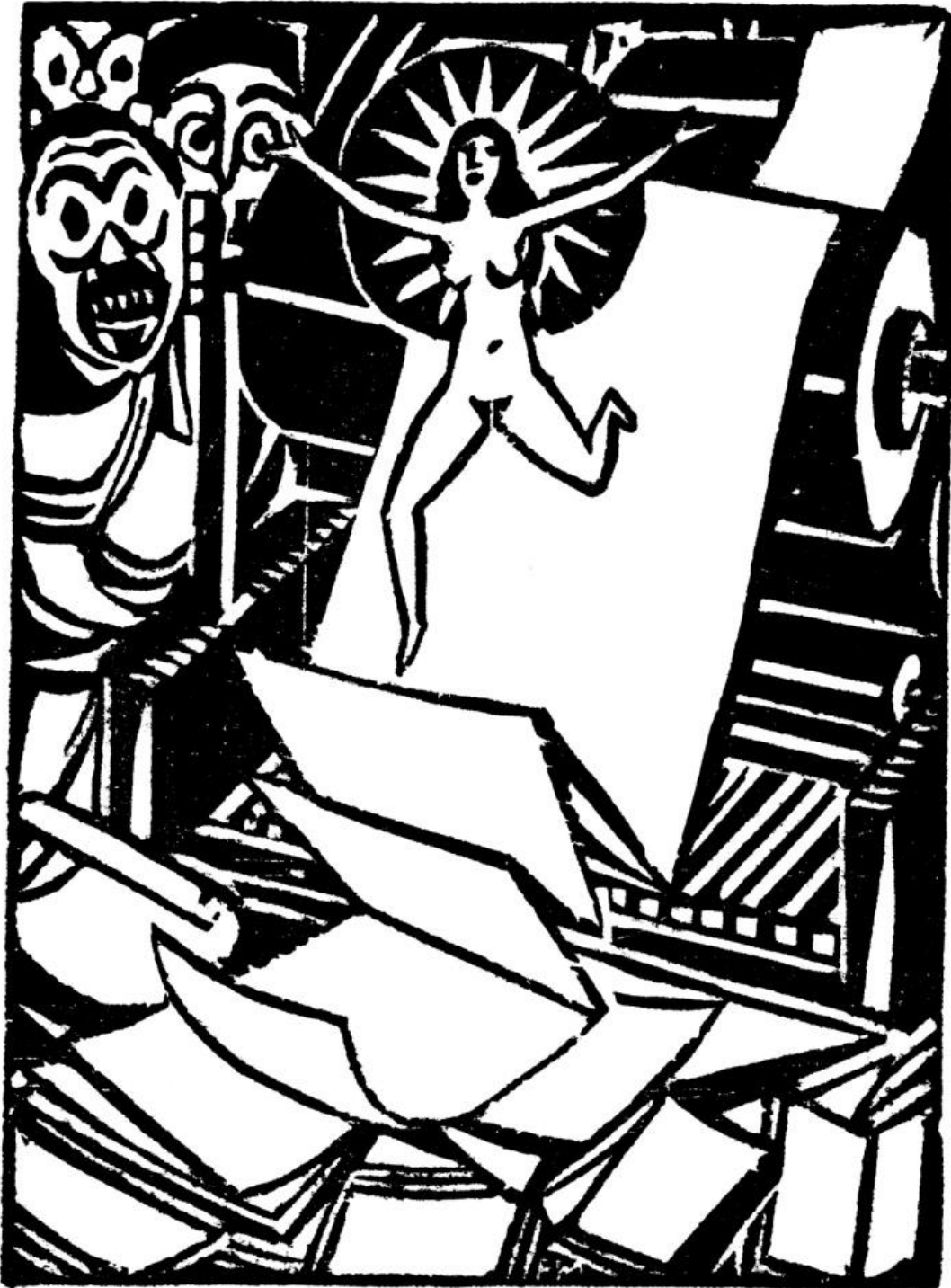
















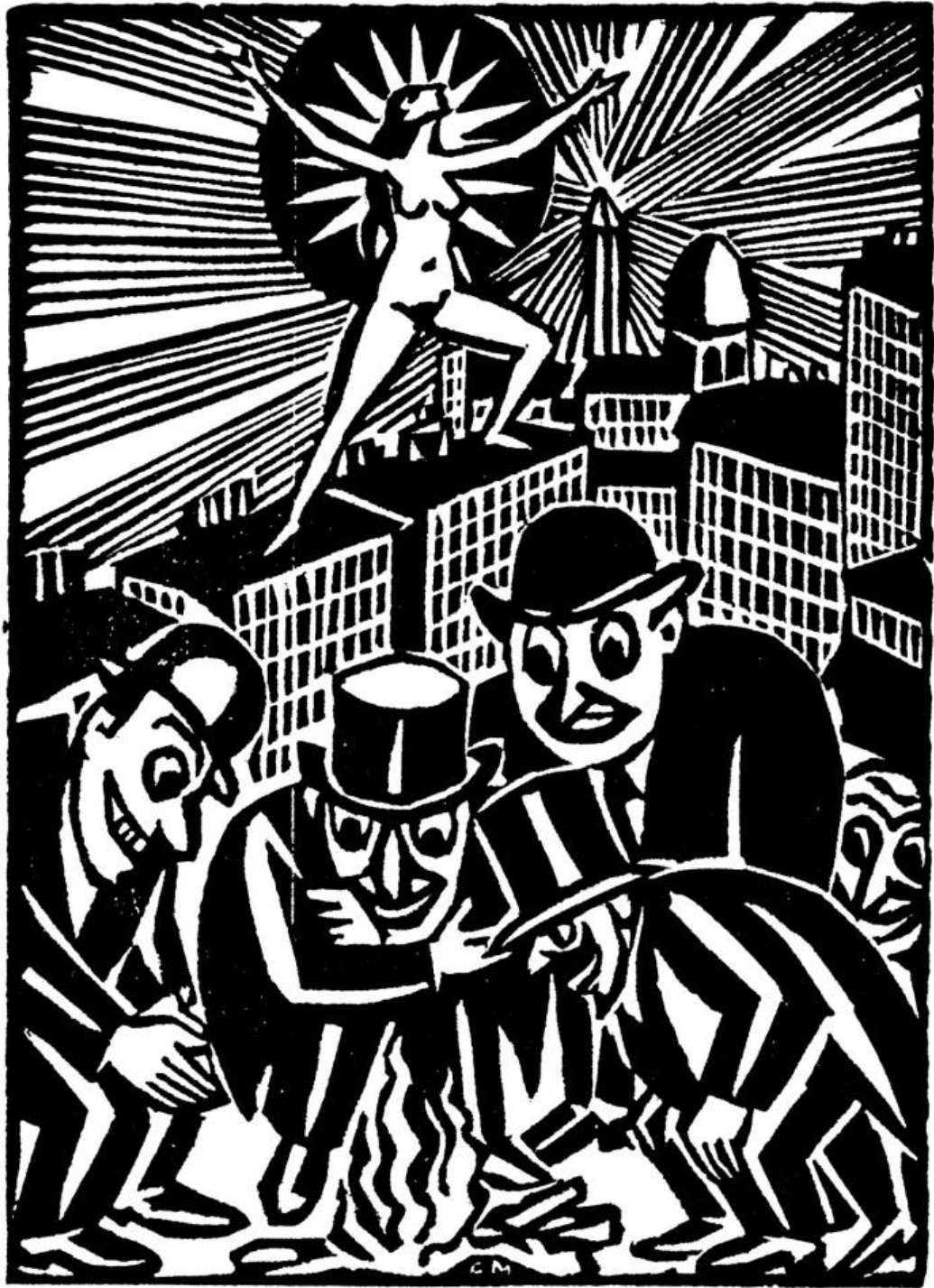


























































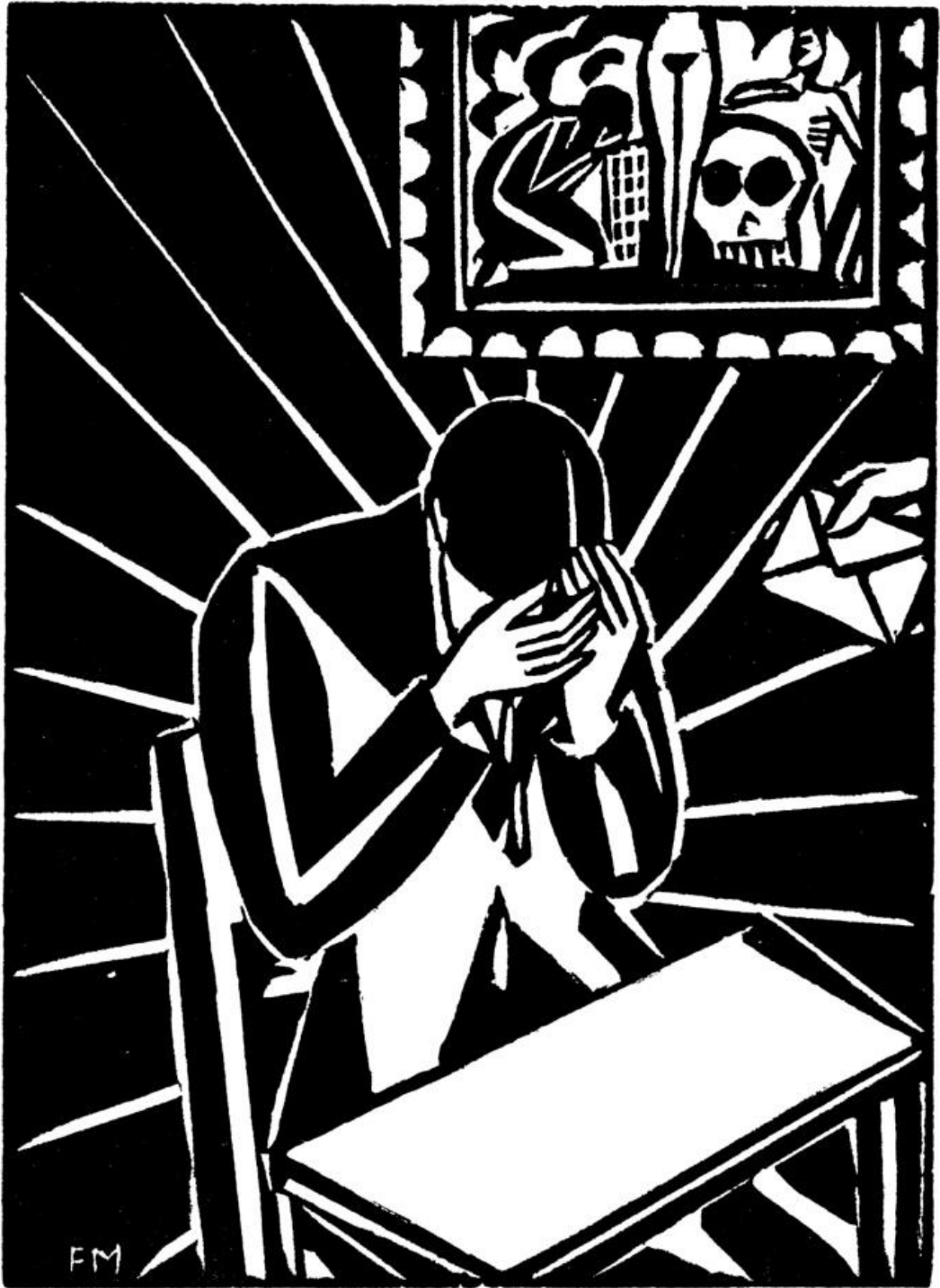












# MASEREELS BILDERROMANE

IN VOLKSAUSGABEN ZU JE RM. 3.50

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## MEIN STUNDENBUCH

165 Holzschnitte

Einleitung von Thomas Mann

★

## DIE SONNE

63 Holzschnitte

Einleitung von Carl Georg Heise

★

## DIE PASSION EINES MENSCHEN

25 Holzschnitte

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# MASEREELS BILDERROMANE

IN VOLKSAUSGABEN ZU JE RM. 3.50

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## GESCHICHTE OHNE WORTE

60 Holzschnitte

Einleitung von Max Brod

★

## DIE IDEE

83 Holzschnitte

Einleitung von Hermann Hesse

★

## DAS WERK

60 Holzschnitte

Einleitung von Hans Reisiger

**Masereel ist vielleicht von allen Lebenden  
der Künstler mit der stärksten zeitgeschicht-  
lichen Sendung. Der Cicerone**

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The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



Frans Masereel  
The Idea  
1920

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