

Untimely Passages: Jerry Zaslove as Colporteur

Charles Simard

As I write this (June 10, 2022), all five hundred and seventy-six pages of the final proof of Jerry Zaslove's *Untimely Passages: Dossiers from the Other Shore* are being sent electronically to the printer. The publication of this highly atypical book has been a massive undertaking in all regards. While I started working on editing its parts with Jerry at some point in late 2017, Jerry himself started working on his *Passages* much earlier, of course—in the late 1960s, when, as a young teacher and critic, Jerry started expressing in print his fascination with the textual medium and its socio-cultural ramifications.

Indeed, the book anthologizes pieces from all periods within Jerry's rich intellectual life—from the first chapter that opens this collection, titled "*Doctor Zhivago* and the Obliterated Man: The Novel and Our Time and Literary Criticism" and originally published in an autumn 1967 issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, to pieces from the 1970s and 1980s that all bear evocative, complex, productive titles like "*Einbahnstrasse* or the 'One Way Street': The Legacies of Formalism and the Dilemmas of Bureaucratic Literacy" or "Ten Fables for the Heroic Future: Picture Fables," then the 1990s (consider: "We Shall Act, We Shall Build: The Nomadism of Herbert Read and the 1930s Legacy of a Vanished Envoy of Modernism" or "Voices of Silence – Peoples of Invisibility: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and the Loss of World History"), the 2000s, dominant in this collection (see: "Siegfried Kracauer's Cosmopolitan Homelessness: The Lost Cause of an Idea" or "Geological Poetics: A Triptych for Kladno and the Similkameen Valley"), and finally the 2010s and 2020s (read: "The Insurance Man: Kafka in the Penal Colony" and "A Small Manual of Piety and a Curriculum for the Plague: After Bertolt Brecht's *Die Hauspostille*, or Breviaries"). Excitingly, the collection also includes a number of previously unpublished essays,

appearing in print for the first time, such as “Why Are We Afraid of the Panzaic Principle? One Road through the Wilderness of Institutions,” “Postscript: A Breviary for the Plague Years,” and, perhaps pre-eminently, the book’s introductory essay, “Prologue: River Crossings,” whose composition and positions Jerry explicitly cherished during the last year of his life.

In rethinking and reorganizing these written reflections into a coherent whole, Jerry saw his essays anew, as “imaginary bridges over literary river crossings,” and reimagined himself as a sort of travelling reader and teacher—a *colporteur* (to use Jerry’s favourite conceptual character), who “walks along the streets and waysides of cities with books ... intervening, accompanying, rereading, becoming strange again.” Consequently, *Passages* became as much a critical anthology about literature, politics, cultural studies, social philosophy, interdisciplinary art forms, and the humanities, as a piece of literary art in itself. Editing, revising, and organizing the book’s parts were always done under the auspices of this dual approach (critical + artistic, theoretic + aesthetic ...), consistent with Jerry’s well-known interest in *constructively* anarchical, anti-authoritarian, and playful methodologies.

After a rapid illness, Jerry passed away on June 23, 2021, as we were adding the finishing touches to the book’s prologue (which, as the name implies, was composed last). He continued working on the text and replying to my editorial queries until the last week of his life. While I was very much saddened by the realization that Jerry wouldn’t be around for his *Passages*’ publication, and very much continue to be, I find solace in the fact that the existence of the vital part of his legacy that is the book is now assured. All chapters of *Untimely Passages*—twenty-one in all—were thoroughly revised by Jerry and all substantial editorial changes were authorized by him. Samir Gandesha, the current director of SFU’s Institute for the Humanities (founded by Jerry in 1983), generously writes a foreword, “Journeying towards Other Shores,” which provides ideal prolegomena to the reflections contained in *Passages*.

My warmest thanks to those among Jerry's family, friends, and colleagues I have met, as well as to my colleagues at Talonbooks—especially Catriona Strang, Leslie Smith, Kevin Williams, Vicki Williams, Spencer Williams, Chloë Filson, and Donato Mancini—who have participated in this achievement and actively supported me during the editorial process. In memoriam Jerry Zaslove.

Charles Simard is a Québécois literary editor and translator from Montréal / Osheaga. He is a senior editor at Talonbooks (Vancouver, BC) and has published a dozen translations for Orca Book Publishers and others. He holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature from Université de Montréal and was a postdoctoral fellow at CUNY's Graduate Center. As a lexicographer, he participated in the making of the bilingual linguistic suite Antidote.