

Classic Poetry Series

Paul van Ostaijen
- poems -

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Paul van Ostaïjen()

Paul van Ostaïjen (22 February 1896 – 18 March 1928) was a Belgian poet and writer.

Van Ostaïjen was born in Antwerp. His nickname was Mister 1830, derived from his habit of walking along the streets of Antwerp clothed as a dandy from that year.

His poetry shows influences from Modernism, Expressionism, Dadaism and early Surrealism, but Van Ostaïjen's style is very much his own.

Van Ostaïjen was an active flamingant, a supporter of Flemish independence. Because of his involvement with Flemish activism during World War I, he had to flee to Berlin after the war. In Berlin—one of the centers of Dadaism and Expressionism—he met many other artists. He also struggled through a severe mental crisis.

Upon returning to Belgium, Van Ostaïjen opened an art gallery in Brussels. He died of tuberculosis in 1928 in a sanatorium in Miavoye-Anthée, in the Wallonian Ardennes.

The Czech poet Ivan Wernisch was so impressed by "the genius of van Ostaïjen" that he learned Flemish to be able to translate him. His translation was published as *Tanec gnómu*, *Dance of the gnomes*, in 1990.

Baroque Account

Sometimes
when the boats of their senses' beat
against the ever-swelling cliff
of a fragrance that's still open
to fantastic beasts
 and plants that
 shot through with fear
 between the sea's blue and the blue of the sky
 are a sheer metaphor
sometimes desire flames up in people so high
that they tackle the flimsy boat
and take to sea
the wind plays a delusion in the sails
 an old delusion that lies
 in a slump beyond the horizon
 till the wind has blown the hull to bits
 and from the pieces wafts the wine of the delusion
 this old delusion
None knows the SOS beyond the senses' horizon
and that at the bottoms of our souls there are antennae
that pick up only the vibrations
from beyond
Sometimes the urge will force the dream into a shape
and the body turns to dream

Paul van Ostaijen

Bersaglieri Song

A gentleman going up the street
a gentleman going down the street
two gentlemen going up and down
that is the one gentleman goes up
and the other gentleman goes down
right in front of the shop of Henryson and Wenryson
right in front of the shop of Henryson and Wenryson
the famous hatmakers
they meet each other
one gentleman takes his high hat in his right hand
the other gentleman takes his high hat in his left hand
the one gentleman and the other
the right and the left the one going up and the one going down
the left going up
the right going down
each with his high hat his own high hat his bloody own high hat
pass each other
right in front of the door
of the shop
of Henryson and Wenryson
the famous hatmakers
then the two gentleman
the right and the left the one going up and the one going down
once past each other
put their hats on their heads again
don't misunderstand me
each puts his own hat on his own head
that is their right
that is the right of these two gentlemen

Paul van Ostaijen

Country Charleston

Paul van Ostaijen

Homage To Singer

Swinger
Singer
sewingmachine
Hear
Hear
Floris Jespers bought a Singersewingmachine
What
What
yessir
Jespers Singer sewingmachine
what's that
yessir
I'm telling you
Floris Jespers bought a Singersewingmachine
How come
what for
what does he want to do
Yessir
he will
how's that
Circulez
for
SINGER'S SEWINGMACHINES ARE THE BEST

the best
how come
how can you tell
who knows
all is vanity
Singer and Saint Augustine
Genevieve of Brabant
has a Singer too
die Jungfrau von Orleans
A Singer?
yessir
yessir yessir yessir I'm telling you a Singer
don't you understand English Mister
Circulez
Bitte auf Garderobe selbst zu achten

I want a sewingmachine
everyone has a right to a sewingmachine
I want a Singer
everyone a Singer
Singer
singer
meistersinger
Hans Sachs
doesn't Hans Sachs have a Singermachine
why doesn't Hans Sachs have a Singer
Hans Sachs is entitled to a Singer
Hans Sachs must have a Singer
Yessir
that is his right
Right makes might
Long live Hans Sachs
Hans Sachs is right
he has a right to

SINGER'S SEWINGMACHINE ARE THE BEST

all men are equal before Singer
Circulez
a Singer
Panem et Singerem

Panem et Singerem Panem et Singerem Panem et Singerem

et Singerem et Singerem

I want a Singer
we want a Singer
we demand a Singer
what we want is our right
ein fester Burg ist unser Gott

Panem et Singerem Panem et Singerem Panem et Singerem

et Singerem et Singerem

what's that
what for

what does he want
what will he do
Salvation Army
Bananas atque Panama
the man's right
he's right
right he is yessir
yessir
yessir
what for
who says so
where's the proof
yessir he is right

Panem et Singerem Panem et Singerem Panem et Singerem

Singerem et Singerem

Paul van Ostaijen

Marc Greets Things In The Morning

Hi boy with the bike on the vase on the bloom
ploom ploom

hi chair by the table
hi bread on the table
hi fisher-of-fish with the pipe
and
hi fisher-of -fish with cap
cap and pipe
of the fisher-of-fish

H i i i —i fish
hi little fish
hi tiny fishy-fine of mine

Paul van Ostaijen

Mythos

Paul van Ostaijen

Night Sounds

There must be white farms beyond the edge
of the blue fields by the moon
at night you hear along distant roads
horse hooves
you hear everything then silent delusion
water is suddenly oozing from distant moon fountains
— you suddenly hear water
oozing in the night —
the horses drink hurriedly
and whinny
then they are heard trotting towards the stable again

Paul van Ostaijen

Poem

Rest thus your head on my arm
that from your forehead to your lips my eye
may glide along the bridge of your nose
Rest thus your head
I rest my hand on your lips be still

Paul van Ostaijen

Recitative

Under the moon the long river slides by
Above the long river the moon mournfully slides
Under the moon on the long river the canoe slides to the sea

By tall reedbeds
by low meadows
the canoe slides to the sea
with the sliding moon the canoe slides to the sea
Companions then to the sea the canoe the moon and the man
Why do the moon and the man two together slide submissively to the sea

Paul van Ostaijen

The Old Man

An old man in the street
his simple tale to the old woman
it's nothing it sounds like a tenuous tragedy
his voice is white
it resembles a knife that's been whetted for so long
the steel has worn thin
This voice hangs outside him like an object
above his long black coat
The lean old man in his black coat
is like a black plant
At the sight fear rasps through your mouth
the first taste of a narcosis

Paul van Ostaijen

The Sailor's Suicide

The sailor
hears the voice of the Lorelei
he looks at his watch
and jumps in the water

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Young Landscape

So the two stand almost motionless in the meadow
the girl who hangs straight down on a rope from heaven
puts her long hand on the long straight line of the goat
that bears the earth on its tiny feet inversely
Against her white-and-black checked smock
the girl — in the whimsy of
my solitude I call het Ursula
holds a poppy high

There are no words as graceful
as the rings in the zebu horns
as tanned by time as a zebu hide
shock inside of you their value bare
Such words I'd like to garner to a sheaf
for the girl with the goat

Across the edges of my hands
my hands
feel for my hands
incessantly

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