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Paul van Ostaijen, the poet

Hidde Van Ameyden van Duym

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PAUL VAN OSTAIJEN, THE POET

by

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The introduction of a new acquaintance can be made in two ways: either by providing extensive proof that for years one has missed intellectual pearls which apply to this and that particular problem which one likes to hear discussed, or by providing enough material to enable the acquaintance's merits to stand by themselves ... if he has them; the latter consideration is superfluous since we assume that the hostess would not bother without that prerequisite.

In this essay on Paul van Ostaijen, the second approach has been used. The first chapter tries to show briefly what kind of period, what kind of man, and what kind of thoughts we are dealing with. The period of 1915-1928, the period during which van Ostaijen wrote, is characterized by great cultural and political activity. On the one hand we find the development of fauvism, futurism, dadaism, expressionism, suprematism, neoplasticism and vorticism, all of which are
movements which applied to every field of artistic creation, from painting to poetry and architecture, and on the other hand we find World War I, the Russian Revolution, Nazism and Flamingantism. The man van Oostaijen was a man of great intelligence and high sensitiveness. Not only did he have the premises of every one of these activities at his fingertips, but he kept exhorting himself and his contemporaries on the basis of international standards which these movements had provided. He expressed his thoughts in poetry, essays, manifestoes, short stories and satires, each equally worthy of attention.

The four following chapters discuss the four main periods into which van Oostaijen's poetry can be divided. Each chapter gives a survey successively of content, form and outlook on life, followed by excerpts from van Oostaijen's literary theory and selected translations of the poetry of the period concerned.

The reader may feel that he is spending too much attention to a local scene which is not of immediate interest to him, but he will find that van Oostaijen's art goes beyond the local.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain more material on Paul van Oostaijen than the list of cited works indicates; it must be observed that de Roover's Paul van Oostaijen is a source of dubious quality which was only consulted for
biographical information. A look at the bibliographies on van Ostaijen reveals that the only translation of his work has been made into French by E. Schoonhoven in a work called *Paul van Ostaijen. Introduction à sa poétique* (Antwerp, 1951).
BIOGRAPHY

Leopold Andreas van Ostaijen was born February 22, 1896, in Antwerp. He was the last child of a family of seven. The sixth child was Constant who was nine years old when Paul was born. Despite his early death in 1938, Paul survived all his other brothers and sisters except Constant who died a few months after him. Constant cared much for Paul and helped him several times; he helped him financially when Paul was ill with tuberculosis. Paul's father was a rich plumber who had retired. He had not much faith in Paul, of whom he said that he was "not even fit to be office boy because of his bad handwriting."  

1 A. de Roover, Paul van Ostaijen (Bussum, 1960), p. 22.
After having attended three high schools, he ended up in the Koninklijk Athenaeum at Antwerp. The only subject in which he was good was religion, but his extra-curricular interests included German and French literature, painting and the Flemish movement.  

3 Since van Ostaeyen was very active in the Flemish movement it will be useful to give a short survey. In the second half of the nineteenth century the Flemish started objecting to the domination of the Walloons but the electoral system prevented the breaking of the political power of this French-speaking bourgeoisie. This movement called "Flamingantism" did achieve in 1873 that some laws were established concerning the use of the Flemish language in courtrooms and public laws, but it reached a deadlock because clerical and anti-clerical elements could not come to an agreement. The movement did have a social ideal in that it considered education of the people necessary for the development of Flanders but there is no immediate relationship between Flamingantism and socialism. Through the cooperation with Holland in the area of literature and philology, the literary element was predominant. In 1910 some of the differences were overcome and a united party was formed under a Catholic, a Liberal and a Socialist. When the Germans invaded Belgium, the Flamingants who had emphasized their Germanic character were immediately accused of collaboration by the Walloons. The Flamingants were divided; some wanted an alliance with Holland, some wanted an independent state of Flanders, some a federal Belgium and some an alliance with Germany. We find these views expressed in such magazines as Jong Vlaanderen, which had pan-Germanic aspirations, De Vlaamse Post, which was not anti-Belgian but wanted an independent Flanders, and De Vlaamse Stem, which was run by Flemish refugees in Holland. The latter coined the word "activism" after analogy with the Swedish movement which sympathized with the Germans, but it also published anti-German poetry. When it turned out that the Walloons were rather contemptuous of the Flemish language in the army, and especially after the King had declared that "the Flamingants had no other care than the liberation of the territory," many of the sceptic Flamingants became activistic, i.e. tried for help from Germany. The Germans, who wanted fleet bases on the Belgian coast, were willing to negotiate. They separated the Flemish and the Walloons in concentration camps and later split the Belgian Ministry of Arts and Sciences in a Flemish and a Walloon department; also the occupied part of Flanders was enabled to
In 1912 the family van Ostaijen was living in the country. In the neighboring village lived the composer Jef van Hoof who formed the center of a group of artists, journalists and Flamingants. Paul was introduced to this circle and met among others Prits Francken, contributor to the magazine Carolus, and Rene Victor, who later helped him with the typography of Occupied City. In 1913 Paul quit school. The next year he became clerk at the Antwerp townhall. He used his spare time to improve his French and German and kept in touch with both cultures through the Mercure de France and the Weisse Blätter. He saw the first silent films brought out by Nordisk Film Co., in which Asta Nielsen starred. Van Ostaijen called a section of Occupied City after her. He also visited the "Wintergarten," a music hall which formed the theme of his first collection of poems. There also he met the painter Floris Jespers who played cello in the orchestra. Paul was very interested in painting, with which he became acquaint-
ed more through books than through exhibitions. He always felt that painting was far ahead of literature, saying "the painters are to be envied," a reason why he always kept strong ties with painters. Only later in his life did he make two literary friends. The alliance of painting and literature is not unusual if we consider that Cézanne discovered Chagall, that Max Jacob and Apollinaire were defenders of cubism and that Kirchner was enraptured with Walt Whitman.

The van Ostaijen of this period was a dandy. Paul Gilliams describes his appearance: "In the evening, on the Keyserlei, I met Orpheus in Biedermeier costume. He was gaped at on account of his unfashionable red tie, his red velvet vest, and his peculiar black dress. Sometimes he had a pearl-grey MacFarland, and when there was a breeze it looked as though he had the wings of an imperial eagle. In the winter he wore a fur cap; he also wore a high stand-up collar. He was the dandy, the lord in mighty and grey Antwerp."

Frits Francken introduced van Ostaijen to the editor of Carolus, which meeting resulted in an article by van Ostaijen in the beginning of 1914 about Vincent van Gogh, Jacob Smits (both painters) and Rik Wouters (a sculptor). At the end of the same year he met the brothers Alfons and Peter Baeyens who

6 Ibid., p. 20.
7 Quoted by Borgers, p. 8.
were running the Vlaamse Gazet. To it he contributed four articles, of which one was devoted to Alain Fournier and one to Hugo von Hoffmannsthal. Peter Baeyens, a rich man's son, became his friend (he is the Mr. So-and-So of Occupied City). He is also the man who took him to nightclubs and acquainted him with the use of dope, a habit which it took van Ostaijen several years to be rid of. During the following years, van Ostaijen was clerk at the townhall and worked at the same time for several publications. For the Antwerps Courant he worked as a reporter of boxing and wrestling matches. After the matches he went to the theater in order to write a criticism of the plays; these he contributed to One Land. For the latter magazine he also wrote articles on the brothers Floris and Oskar Jespers, a painter and a sculptor, and on Paul Joostens, a painter.

As Flamingant he made a name for himself through a multitude of articles which he contributed to magazines of different views; he wrote for One Land, which believed in a federal government, and for the Goedendag, which wanted Belgium to join Holland. In the latter he proclaimed the slogan, "Every youth is an activist," adding that the new generation had only one principle: "To look through the prism of Flamingantism."9

8 de Hoover, p. 8.
9 Ibid., p. 10.
For these activities he was taken to court in 1917 when he participated in a demonstration against Cardinal Mercier, who was visiting Antwerp. He was sentenced to three months in prison; the execution of this sentence was prevented by the Germans, but when the war was over van Ostaijen thought it wiser to go abroad.  

In 1916 van Ostaijen published *Music Hall*, a collection of poems of the years 1914-1915. It was printed in an edition of 206 copies at Gust Janssens in Antwerp and consists of three parts: "Music Hall," "Songs for the Princess of Ji-Ji," and "Diverse Songs." The collection represents both the influence of and the reaction against some of the old schools such as impressionism and a Dutch group of poets, who at the end of the Nineteenth century started a literary revival and who are known as the "poets of 1880." As he always did when he had developed new views, van Ostaijen later condemned *Music Hall* and wanted to buy back as many copies as possible in order to burn them. His friend Du Perron had to beseech him to lend a copy in 1925.  

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10 Borgers, p. 10.  
11 Dutch title is also *Music Hall*; parts are called "Music Hall," "Verzen voor de Prinses van Ji-Ji" and "Diverse Verzen."  
12 Borgers, p. 9.
A month before the truce of 1918 The Signal was published at "Het Sienjaal" in Antwerp. The frontispiece had a linoleum cut by Floris Jespers. It was printed in an edition of 226 copies and consisted of three parts: "Songs of Real Life," "Me and the City" and "The Signal." The poems were the fruits of the years 1916-1918. They show a strong influence from what is called unanimism or humanitarian expressionism; i.e., a belief in the basic goodness of humanity (Whitman) and in the performance of the group rather than the individual (Jules Romains, Ame des Hommes).

A couple of months before, van Ostaijen had published an article called "Expressionism in Flanders" in a recently founded magazine De Stroom. In the article he denounces impressionism, the l'art pour l'art doctrine and the work of Crane and Morris in England as "compromise art." Tracing the development of expressionism in Flanders in the work of Ensor, Wouters, Floris and Oskar Jespers, and Joostens, he compares their work with that of their contemporaries such as Chagall, Archipenko, Boccioni, Russolo, Severini, Kandinsky, Marc, Leger, Matisse, Gleizes, Metzinger, Mondrian and Klee.14

13 Dutch title is Het Sienjaal; parts are called: "Lieder van het Werelijken Leven," "Ik en de Stad" and "Het Sienjaal."

14 For orientation it may be useful to mention the following events. 1905: Kirchner, Heckel, Bleil and Schmidt-Rottluff founded "Die Brücke"; their interest was in Munch who was in Germany from 1892 to 1906, in African sculpture and in Walt Whitman of whom Kirchner says that he possesses "the true
Just before the truce Paul van Ostaijen left for Berlin because of his activistic leanings and the prison sentence for three months. Berlin was a hotbed of numerous activities when he arrived. There was the strife between the socialists under Fritz Ebert and the communist Spartacus Leagues under Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, with whom van Ostaijen sympathized. Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were calculatedly murdered in the beginning of 1919. Then there were the artistic activities of "Der Sturm," "Bauhaus," and "Dada." The expressionist movement "Der Sturm" had several aspects. Its magazine acquainted van Ostaijen with the poetry of Steem and Else Lasker-Schüler. Its exhibitions acquainted him with the works of Marc, Chagall, Klee, Baumeister, Schwitters and Schlemmer, and he made friends with Campendonk, Stückenberg, Feininger and Kandinsky. Its art evenings made him appreciate the poetry
of Stramm through the declamations of Rudolph Blümner.  

when in 1919 Gropius founded the "Bauhaus" in Weimar, van Ostaijen knew students (Feininger) and faculty (Klee, Schlemmer and Theo van Doesburg who lectured in 1921). In 1918 Hülsenbeck had founded the "Dada Club" in Berlin after having been two years before one of the founders of the "Cabaret Voltaire" in Zurich together with Arp, Tzara and Ball. Hausmann founded the magazine Der Dada. Together they tried to be "subversive." It was their task "den Deutschen ihre Kultur-ideologie zusammenschlagen ... und mit allen Mitteln der Satire, des Bluffs, der Ironie, am Ende aber auch mit Gewalt gegen diese Kultur vorschieben." One of the movement's great events was "die Erste Internationale Dada Messe" held in 1920 in Berlin and Cologne where it created a riot. Its slogans were "Dada ist Politisch" and "Die Kunst ist tot. Es lebe die neue Maschinenkunst Tatlina!" The principles of every one of these movements were used and commented on by van Ostaijen.

In Berlin van Ostaijen could find no work; he stayed alive by doing odd jobs and by receiving financial aid from his brother Constant. The atmosphere made him abandon all his humanitarian ideals, and when in Belgium in 1920 Eugene de

\textsuperscript{15} de Roover, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 12.

\textsuperscript{17} Loc. Cit.
Bock founded the magazine *Ruimte*, a publication for humanitarian expressionism, he wrote disappointedly to a friend: "Why didn't they go beyond *The Signal*?" He made the same comment to de Bock, but did send some material to be published in spite of the controversy.

Van Ostaijen's productivity in Berlin was great. In the three years that he was there, he wrote two poetic cycles, grotesques, essays, a film-scenario and two manifestoes for an organ of "emancipated cubism" which organ was discontinued. The first cycle is called *Feasts of Fear and Agony*. It consists of 106 handwritten pages in purple, green, blue and red inks. This collection was not published because van Ostaijen gave it to his friend the sculptor Cskar Jaspers. A few single poems like "Barbaric Dance" were published in literary magazines. About the poem a psychiatrist concluded that it must have been written under the influence of dope. It seems that the relationship with a woman whom van Ostaijen loved very much was able to make him quit the habit, however. Van Ostaijen called *Feasts of Fear and Agony* "a poison used as antidote," thereby explaining his loss of belief in humanity.

19 Dutch title: *Feesten van Angst en Pijn*.
20 Dutch title: "Barbaarse Dans."
21 de Roover, p. 9.
The work is an attempt to sound the depths of the soul and has a very mystical character as suggested by such names as Eckhardt and Dionysos. For the first time van Ostaaijen uses typographical devices, viz. different colors of ink, the arrangement of the letters of a word in several geometrical shapes and different letter sizes.


the publishing. About "Sous les Fonts de Paris" van Ostaijen wrote to his friend Baeyens: "Of this poem I am not sure whether I should kick it out. It is a half-mystical poem, deals about Christ. Yet it contains much occupied city and so I don't know yet what I should do." The book is an acute observation of a group of war scenes around a city, observations which van Ostaijen undoubtedly had made during the time he was in Antwerp when the Germans occupied that city. The typography of Occupied City is of an extravagant variety, some letters are more than an inch tall. Both the manner of observation and the typography show influences from Dadaism.

Among the grotesques which van Ostaijen wrote in Berlin are: The Bordello of Ika Loch (Ika Loch is a play on the word "logic") which was illustrated by Magritte, The Gang of the Trunk, a roman-a-clef about European politics and "The Prison in Heaven," the story of a man who was happiest in prison. In these he satirizes the fashionable psycho-analytical, political, philosophical and art-historical humbug of the period. His prose is more the cerebral development of an argument than a narration, and both theme and style remind us of Kafka. "The Prison in Heaven" reminds us of "Der Hungerkünstler" for instance, but van Ostaijen wrote his story two years before

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23 P. van Ostaijen, Verzameld Werk (Antwerp, 1952-1956), I, 248. Verzameld Werk is van Ostaijen's collected works in four volumes; Poetry I and II contain poetry, Prose I contains short stories and Prose II contains essays. Hereafter these will be cited as I, II, III or IV followed by the page number.
Kafka's piece was published; other stories of both authors also show parallels which can only be explained by a similarity of thinking.\(^{24}\) As regards the similarity it is important to note that van O斯塔jen was the first to translate any of Kafka's stories before this was done in Spain, France or England.\(^{25}\)

His essays of the Berlin period show the same critical spirit as before. They display a peculiar kind of dogmatism which can be illustrated by the following "bulla" which he send to his friend Joostens.

Excommunication of a member of our Holy Apostolic Church in the region Antwerp by the name of Paulus Joostens.

**BULLA**

As we long with strong desire, as our needs do desire, that the cubicistic faith flourish and grow, especially in countries of disbelief and immorality, as we want to broaden the borders of the Cubistic Church, so we declare in free decision the following through which be fulfilled our pious desire and promise that all remnants of heresy and the early heathen belief of impressionism be rooted out ... and we decide that to our sorrow and grief, but to our happiness in serving the Holy Cubistic Church, Paulus Joostens be expelled from the community of our Church .... Done at Halsense ....

Pope Paulus I.\(^{26}\)

Here he is dogmatically serious in denouncing his friend, but manages at the same time to smile at his own dogmatism;

\(^{24}\) H. Uyttensprot, a Kafka scholar, discusses this relationship in *Paul van O斯塔jen en zijn Proza* (Rotterdam, 1959).

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^{26}\) quoted in Borgers, p. 14.
this paradox is caused by the fact that van Ostaijen's dogmatic arguing always led him to argue about his own tenets so that he ended up a relativist.

In 1921 van Ostaijen decided to return to Antwerp; for eight days he stayed with a friend and then he reported himself. Amnesty was granted but he was immediately drafted and sent back to Germany with the army of occupation. He was stationed near Crefeld where Campendonk lived. Two years later he returned home to Antwerp. The death of his mother during the same year broke his ties with home because he had no contact with his father with whom "he lived under one roof, ate and drank at the same table and spoke -- by way of speaking -- because nothing else was possible, about common everyday things, and even those when they were necessary and inevitable."27

In 1923 Jozef Muls, a man with the ideals of William Morris, who had founded a Catholic monthly called De Vlaamse Arbeid in 1905, asked van Ostaijen to take the place of the poet and writer Karel van den Gever. Since the disappearance of Ruimte, De Vlaamse Arbeid had been drawing the interest of the younger generation. Van Ostaijen accepted the place and in the last five years before his death he contributed some seventy-five pieces to this monthly. Among them is "Modernis-

27 M.E. Tralbaut, quoted in de Roover, p, 16.
tic Poets" which ended a controversy that affected three magazines among which was De Vlaamse Arbeid. In the article van Ostaijen rejected the idea that there existed a collective Flemish movement and accused several critics of emotional instead of technical criticism, and of a lack of knowledge which caused them to fail in making necessary distinctions. Other essays include a review of some works of Cocteau, MacOriel and Jacob, an essay on Campendonk, whom he considered to have developed in the right possible direction and of whom he said that "he observed as Kant thought," and on Floris Jespers whom he criticized for having been too tardy in his development. It seems that the name Floris Jespers in "Homage to Singer" was meant to alleviate the painter's feelings on that score. Although this friendship did not break off, another friendship did, that between the poet Wies Moens and van Ostaijen. In a collection called Self Defense which contains work from the years 1923-1928 there is a piece called "Wies Moens and I" in which he calls Moens a romanticist who was unable to go further than the humanitarian ideals of 1918, and who was unable to understand that van Ostaijen after The Signal had not gone back to sensualism but in Occupied City had done what was logically inevitable: "The

28 Ibid., p. 18.
29 Borgers, p. 18.
30 Dutch title is the same.
nihilism of *Occupied City* cured me of a dishonesty, which I imagined to be honesty and of an extra-lyrical stuck-up air. Afterward I became a normal poet, which is somebody who makes poems because he likes to do so as a pigeon fancier keeps pigeons. I have no claim to the medal of civic virtue.\(^{31}\)

This statement shows van Oostaijen's great personal integrity in doing what he considered the only right thing to do. How strongly he felt about this is shown by a piece called "Humbug and Sense of Reality," again from *Self Defense*.

Charlie, his little brother, mother and an aunt are out walking and pass a balloon salesman. Aunt buys a balloon for the little brother but says to Charlie: "You don't want one, you're too big for that." "The true poet," says van Oostaijen, "is the Charlie who declines the honor of being a big boy but who says in spite of the proverbially correct opinion of the critics, 'I think I would also like a balloon.' The critics are angry. As if they didn't know what is proper for Charlie."\(^{32}\)

This is also the period during which van Oostaijen published his "pure poetry" to which belong poems like "Perceruse presque Negre" which appeared in a magazine for "international avant-garde constructivism" called *Het Overzicht*,

\(^{31}\) IV, 361

which was edited by Michael Seuphor, later a publicist of abstract art in Paris, and Jozef Peeters, painter and promoter of modernism in Flanders. Poems of this kind van Ostaijen was planning to publish in a first "definite collection" under the name of First Book of Schmoll, the title of a piano book for beginners. 33

The same year he tried with Casar Jespers to organize a group of post-impressionistic painters and sculptors. He sent a circular letter to Permeke, de Smet and others but the enterprise failed. 34 Also in 1924 van Ostaijen became book salesman in a shop called Iris, branch of the F. Sele Antiquariat in Antwerp.

Then in the next year Het Overzicht collapsed because of a break between Seuphor and Peeters the latter talked to van Ostaijen and Du Perron about plans for a new magazine, De Drifeboek. 35 At the same time he met Gaston Burssens, the only Flemish expressionist poet whom van Ostaijen recognized. Du Perron and Gaston Burssens are the first and only literary

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33 Dutch title: Het Eerste Boek van Schmoll.
34 For orientation about Flemish painting it can be said that Gustaaf de Smet and Constant Permeke belonged to a group called "The Second Group of Latem" which contained many expressionists. In 1914 the group split: Frits van den Bergh and de Smet went to Holland, Permeke, Daeye, van de Woestijne and Tytgat went to England (From: Catalogue Verzameling Tony Herbert [Brussels, 1957]).
35 de Rooover, p. 17.
friends van Ostaijen had. To this triumvirate he devoted an article called "Brussels, Du Perron and I," in which he says that amidst the great seriousness of Dutch literature it is a lack of seriousness which keeps them together; especially since "seriousness is a specific Dutch commodity."

He concludes: "Therefore Du Perron and Brussels, if we like to see our praise in print, let us praise each other, because it's useless to wait for other praise. We'll never be able to catch the Dutch seriousness (this Dutch seriousness, which is guilty of the fact that Brussels, that lighter city, was lost for Holland)."

The same year he went to Brussels and with a friend opened an art shop, called "La Vierge Poupine," which lasted about a year. The selection of artists who exhibited their works at "La Vierge Poupine" illustrates again van Ostaijen's grasp of what was representative of his time; Ensor, Magritte, Brusselmans, the brothers Jespers, Frite van den Berghs, de Smet, Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Braque, Marie Laurencin, Kandinsky, Klee, Campendonk, Kokoschka, Archipenko, Brancusi and others. At the end of 1925 he started giving lectures --he aspired to become a professor of poetry-- of which one,

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36 Vorgers, p. 18.
37 IV, 373.
38 de Hoever, p. 20.
given before the Brussels alumni circle, "La Lanterne Sourde," is called "Directions for Use of Poetry." In it he described some of his poetical premises which he defined in an essay, "Evidence of Parallels between Modern Painting and Modern Poetry." There he makes a distinction between "romantic" and "organic" expressionism, terms to which we will return later.

The next year he needed a rest because of tuberculosis, and in the spring of 1927, when he was trying to become a contributor to the Volksgazet and get a job at the townhall of Antwerp, he had a breakdown. His friend Rene Victor took him to a retreat and after a couple of months waiting he was taken to the sanatorium Miavoye-Anthee between Namen and Dinant. His activity did not decline; he wrote to Jozef Muls, Du Perron, Burssens and Jespers, and read the books and magazines which they kept sending him. Financial aid came from his brother Constant since his father would not help him, "the old miser" as Burssens called him. At the end of the year Du Perron came with plans for a new magazine. They decided to call it Avontuur and van Ostaijen wrote the introduction. He was sorely disappointed to find out that Du Perron had decided

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39 Dutch titles are consecutively: "Gebruiksaanwijzing der Lyriek, Paralipomena" and "Proeve van Parallellen tussen Moderne Beeldende Kunst en Moderne Dichtkunst."

40 Borgers, p. 21.
on two minor figures as contributors for poetry and criticism. He had considered Du Perron as one of his supporters and wrote to him: "I lost a vote today on which I counted and that should be enough for me for a while," but he added: "All right, I'll go ahead without supporters," and helped with the administration and contributed some poetry.  

March 17, 1928, he wrote enthusiastically to Oskar Jespers that he would come to Antwerp to spend the good months there. The next day he was found dead in his bed. Two days later he was buried by six inhabitants of the village and his friend Gaston Burssens, who had come from Antwerp; none of his family were at the funeral.  

March 19, 1932, he was buried near Antwerp and November 8, 1952, he was reburied officially in the Honorary Park of the Antwerp Cemetery under a memorial stone designed by Oskar Jespers.

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41 du Hoover, p. 24.
42 Ibid., p. 25.
MUSIC HALL

As can be said of any first collection of poems and certainly of the poems of a nineteen year old boy, the poems of Music Hall show an unevenness in content, style and outlook. At their best they introduce the reader to the poet's awareness of his inner self, his medium and the world around him.

The themes of Music Hall vary considerably. The first poem, "Music Hall," from which the collection received its name, describes a single evening at a music hall. It consists of five parts. The first part (four lines) describes the music hall with red and green lights waiting for the customers. The second part (27 lines) describes how the music hall draws its visitors; the third part (249 lines) describes what goes on in the music hall; a danseuse, an old gentleman
in the public thinking:

Little dancer, little dancer,
So many hundred per month,
Be a little princess, a little princess
For so much per month.

So much saved per month,
Often a small gift,
Oh, my little beautiful woman,
Isn't that worth your love?

And moreover, I'm no bothersome man,
Per week I only come so many times,
Never any more,
I couldn't do it, the years do hurt me.¹

Further on there is a movie, a juggler and the audience,
which is like

One living soul. Every person is another person,
And all the others are again this one person,
Who knows himself happy,
Because he suffered with the heroes [of the movie]
And in its soul -- the soul of all
United here in the Music Hall,--
Struggled for goodness,
And was glad, when
No more
Cowardice did win²

The fourth part (30 lines) describes the narrator's reaction
to the Music Hall and the fifth part (41 lines) describes
what has happened when the people have left the hall:

Thus the Music Hall is without soul,
When the people
Have left the house
... The soul of the Music Hall lives along the streets,

¹ I, ll. Translations are verbatim; the rhymes, when given, are the Dutch rhymes; in this case abab cdec fff.
² Ibid., p. 16.
Thousandfold in broken talking.
The soul has been torn to shreds,
And has forfeited its unity.3

Another poem called "Remembrance" describes the speaker's love for all people in a park where he is taking a walk.

Besides these two poems we find a poem about a bicycle (which enables the speaker to enjoy the spring landscape), about the age of chivalry (in which the lady for whom the battle is fought is seduced by "the lowest stable boy"), about autumn (which is either the season of "fusty sadness" because the sun goes away or is a happy season because the sunrays make the speaker feel that "life, good as a mother, did pour/a horn of I-don't-know-how-plenty/over the heart of the lost son/as reward for his unthankfulness" while before he had told himself "you shouldn't expect too much of life"4), about a relationship with a girl, about being drunken and about a passing woman. Then there is a group of poems the themes of which are strongly dependent on form. The text of two short examples is as follows:

Now is of Californian gold the time;
The dying sun gathers
Its forces for a long trip,
The last of that day, towards earth.

There the sun for the last time
Her dying woeful golden splendor
Has collected in a glass tram porch.5

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3 Ibid., p. 20.
4 Ibid., p. 48.
5 Ibid., p. 68; rhyme is abbb ccc.
and:

Oh, my soul is pure sound
In this hour of pure color;
Sounds which tendril high
In a frantic garden of scents. 6

We find this variety of themes reflected in the poems which have been translated from *Music Hall* 7: "Young Spring" deals about "brief happiness" enjoyed with two girls, "Song" belongs on the one hand to the sequence of "Now is of Californian gold ...." but, on the other hand, looks ahead to the poems of *Feasts of Fear and Agony*, and "It's so that past the boundary ...." reflects van Ostaijen's individualism which we find in his essays.

Although van Ostaijen's vocabulary reflects an inheritance from the poets of 1880 (see p. 8) in such words as "sun threads," "silken rain web," "white virgin dress" and "farandole," we also find that he introduces some neologisms ("tingeltangeltingeling," "alemperslieren") and such modern words as "pennies," "cinema," "cigarette," "bike," "nickel," "electric bulbs," "tent," "office" and "bordello." His imagery still includes "parental hearth" or "friendly hearth" for


7 The translated poems have been selected on the basis of their translatability (some good poems are not translatable because of their dependence on rhyme and rhythm which cannot be transferred into *English*), of their quality as a whole (some other poems contain better passages but are less successful in other parts) and of their representativeness.
home and such metaphors as "sunbeams of happiness," a heart as "hard as a diamond," or as beautiful as a "very fine crystal glass," but we also find "give my heart like a tennis-ball," "the grey folds of the mist" and the "white-sailed sun." Van Oostaijen is already very conscious of rhyme and meter. He uses alliteration abundantly ("schitterende schitterende prael") and we find full rhyme ("bespaard-waard"), "rime riche ("maand-maand"), assonance ("vrouwtje-cadeautje"), double rhyme ("senten-prenten") and internal rhyme ("lijen graag-vrijers graag"); in meter he either lets rhetorical accent coincide with metrical accent, as in:

Grøené hospéls kómen,
Wedérkréén lóme,
Grøené hospéls draïsé
In dér léchtén laàié.

or juxtaposes the word accent with the rhetorical accent, as in:

Oók tréurénís
Om hét gémís
Ván wat niet ís, 9

Here and there occurs a wrenched accent as in: "Naar mijn liefde óntstónd/op een Herfstávod." The regular pattern of the last word is "Herfstávod." The grammar of the poems shows the following particulars. He makes some contractions for the sake of the form, such as "verraan" instead of "verraden" and "d'ëenge hoop" instead of "de enige hoop."

8 I, 14; the final n drops off in every-day speech.
9 Ibid., p. 15.
He inverts the sequence of parts of speech in some cases as in "van zon en van een laatst geluk doorweven is de dag" instead of "de dag is doorweven van zon en van een laatst geluk" (in English: "... interwoven is the day" instead of "the day is interwoven ...". We find run-on lines: "From my cigarette rises Salome, and also/Her veils are woven from the round smoke," and end-stopped lines as in "I can't find my purpose for life, today/How difficult I carry the burdens of the day." There are many poems in which the lines consist of short parts of speech or even single words. Two examples are:

Filterregen zijpel zacht
In mijn hart uw klamme klacht
En ontacht;
Ne zacht, in de nacht
Die m'in purper wacht. 10

***

Juffer Lola, dit is waar,
Danet met stappen,
Happe
Ranke,
Op het klanken
Van een lustige gitaar. 11

Also, the translated poems show van Ostaïjen's capacity of utilizing form: "Young Spring" receives its light irony from short sentences and diminutives; the rhyme and rhythm of "It's so that past the boundary ..." give the poem an ironic tone by emphasizing the friends' disapproval and the poet's

10 Ibid., p. 69
11 Ibid., p. 73.
actual happiness, an emphasis which is not lost through translation; unfortunately the aa bb cc rhyme of the Dutch version of "Song" could not be maintained in English.

Van Ostaijen's outlook on life swings from one extreme to another in Music Hall. The speaker of Music Hall" and "Remembrance" feels a distinct union with mankind, feels that being together with his fellowman implies a purpose of goodness, while the speaker of 'Autumn' feels alone and is satisfied with being alone because he finds a special beauty in his solitude. The speaker of "Quarrel with Grete" displays a sort of fatalistic attitude toward the inevitability of a quarrel while the speaker of "Retribution" has great confidence in the goodness of life. The speaker of the "Bicycle Trip" feels happiness and light pouring into him, while the speaker of "Noceur" and "Boredom" tries to cope with life's ennui and darkness. Then also the speaker of "Return" feels his growing love for Flamingantism and feels that love as a support for his unrewarding work, while the speaker of the"Age of Chivalry," "Young Spring," and "Tune" is a relativist who feels that humor will save him from life's harshness. Then there is a set of poems which stand by itself because of its lack of a clear viewpoint ("Evening," "Miss Lola," and "Song"). Of course, there have been poets who have brought these extremes together, but van Ostaijen clearly has as yet no standard by which he distinguishes what
he wants to denounce or subscribe to. At this stage his poems are a record of a great sensitivity. Of the translations "Young Spring" and "It's so that past the boundary ..." are good examples of van Ostaijen's humor. Both poems show a detached and light-hearted spirit which we find in The First Book of Schmoll. The "Song" is representative of the poems of the type of 'Now is of Californian gold ...."

Some influences on the van Ostaijen of *Music Hall* are fairly easily discernible. The clearest influence derives from Guido Gezelle and Herman Gorter. A few examples from Gezelle which suggest van Ostaijen's cadence of 'Groene hoepels ..." or "Ook treurenis ..." are:

De wintermuggen zijn
aan 't dansen, en een ontendon,
zo wit als muldersmeel,
zo wit als molkenblomme.

***

't En is van U
hiernederwaard,
geschilderd of
geschreven,
mij, moederken,
geen beeldenis,
geen beeld van U
gebleven. 12

And from Gorter:

'm,
Zonder een rimpel,
Alleen met de wimpel
Hoog in de mast, der zon! 13

---

12 From Guido Gezelle's *Als de Ziele Luistert* (Amsterdam, 1944).

The feeling of unity with mankind as we find it expressed in "Remembrance" may be traced to Jules Romains' *Ame des Hommes* (1904) in which the latter expresses the concept that a group of individuals can have a single soul; the concept started a sort of phalansteres in 1906 called "la Vie Unanime." This movement of "unanimism" was strongly influenced by Whitman's poetry which was much in vogue at the time and which emphasized the basic good of humanity. Another influence on "Oh, my soul is pure sound" is the principle of "correspondences" which came from Baudelaire; the principle of this "mystic participation" caused an associative context to take the place of a logical-constructive context, something which van Ostaijen capitalized on later. In Holland the reaction against rhyme as an undesirable imposition on language and the choice of words as being too romantic had actually set in around the turn of the century (Theo Reeder, for example) but it is during the time van Ostaijen started writing that Arp purposely made the image autonomous in the poem and that A. Kok and Theo van Doesburg (from "De Stijl") did the same to sound. An example from Kok is:

Da
Domb
Da
Domb
Da
Domb

Druach
Da
Domb

---

14 Discussed by Rodenko, p. 11.
In trying to determine where van Oostaijen's achievement lies in *Music Hall*, we find that he is more successful in his handling of sound and rhythm than in his handling of metaphors. He depends rather heavily on such commonplace functional images as friendship compared to a "strong tall tree," a misunderstanding compared to a wall which is being built between the speaker and his love or a music hall compared to a woman "hiding the poverty of her body," but he is able to make them interesting, through his adaptation of sound and rhythm; for example, the following excerpt from a poem in which the speaker goes to visit his girl:

I am in the well-known street and count
The houses past which
I still have to go, so that I quicken my step,
Because I feel close.

I ring
And wait
And count
The time.
'Tis still
In the street
No complaint
Through the solitude.  

The shortness of the second part suggests that the speaker is holding his breath, but after a moment relaxes and looks

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15 Ibid., p. 44
16 I, 50; rhyme scheme is abab cdcefghe.
through the street. His word consciousness can be illustrated by an example from "Age of Chivalry" in which the lady says that only the knight who wins "wil ik deze nacht, als echt-genoot," meaning "do I want tonight as husband"; the effect is created by breaking the word "echtgenoot-husband" in two parts, so that "echt" meaning "marriage" in "echtgenoot" receives its other meaning in Dutch which is "true." The result is "true companion" besides "husband." Van Ostaaijen's humor is already well developed; it maybe somewhat heavy in "Age of Chivalry," but it is subtler in the same poem of above in which the narrator goes to visit his girl, when it turns out that she is not at home; he looks at the candy he is holding in his hand and adds in brackets: "100 gram." We find the same irony in the intermezzo of the gentleman in "Music Hall." Actually he is at his best when he is able to relinquish his melancholy tone for a light and detached irony such as we find in the translated poems "Young Spring" and "It's so that past the boundary...." Another example is the last stanza of "Tune" where the special rhythm of a light song together with the refrain "Falderideine, Falderidom" lend the tune its irony:

Sometimes I have wished I were dead,
Falderideine,
Now I hope that a new darling
Will bring new happiness in my heart,
Falderideine, Falderidom.17

17 Ibid., p. 76.
When we consider that at this time his strength lies in his awareness of the sound and rhythm of language, it becomes clear why some of the best poems of *Music Hall* are poems like "Now is of Californian gold..." and a translated poem like "Song"; because when capitalizing on sound and rhythm he is most in command of his material.
it's so that past the boundary I stand,
At which every normal man
Does have to halt.
Not long ago a friend did me rebuke,
Because it's past the normal--which to him is good--that I do look.

But fate--or who?--did want it so,
Because for me uncommonness was kept apart.
Not I am uncommon but it is my fate of life.
With my friends it was always the greatest longing
After a great love, in the new spring.

But my love arose
On an evening of the fall,
My great love just outside the town,
In the wide park, by people--shall we say the normal ones?--entirely deserted.

My love grew strong in the cold winter,--
Some very beautiful flowers grow then,--
That's why my love is of a beauty infinitely fine,
Although it be uncommon--perhaps regretted by that friend of mine.16

16 ibid., p. 57.
Song

In my heart a peculiar creature
that dances a bizarre tango I did resurrect,--
I don't know how, so vague it is--
From an old sarcophagus.
While it dances, I hear it sings
With motley mirth about melancholy-pregnant things.

_______

19 Ibid., p. 70
Young spring

In the young spring--
Oh, how foolish,
No more myself I manage--
In the young spring
Two little Jewesses,
My heart seduced
And lead me to brief happiness.

Now I go without a penny--
Remember in the spring are we--
Solitarily the streets along,
Contents of my purse are gone,
Like of noble states the treasury
On the posters of election day.

While along the streets I wander,
My entire capital I did invest--
Oh what fun--
In dew from heaven
Hoping that in the young spring
It may bring me many dividends,
High because of large percents.

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20 Ibid., p. 75.
THE SIGNAL

The first group of poems from The Signal, under the title "Songs of Real Life," is introduced with a quote from Suarez' Le Portrait d'Ibsen which says: "Le premier homme en quête de Dieu est un artiste. La recherche de la vie a fait la religion et non la crainte de la mort ...." This quote together with quotes from Else Lasker-Schüler and Kurt Hiller ("Held ist wer sich opfert, nicht wer geopfert wird.") indeed describe the spirit that pervades the entire collection.

The themes are the following. In "Summer Rain Song" the rain which cleans the world before the sun comes through is compared to John who prepared the world for the Messiah; after the rain is over 'the sun looks over the defeated army of clouds. In "Evening Sun" evening is celebrated as bringing

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1 See Biography, p. 9.
the enjoyment of everyday life" and as bringing to life "the slaughterhouse of illusions, the tentacular mainstreet."

"The Still Song" shows us that it is our divine task to be prepared because he who leaves the bridegroom of life outside will stay sterile for life." In "Song for Myself" the poet compares his life to a boat which has to be navigated to the "rich harbor." In "Song" he says that "you have to feel happiness like a bath/you yourself are part of happiness...." Of a number of poems devoted to van Gogh, Ensor, Else Lasker-Schüler, Schwob and James, the poem "Vincent van Gogh" speaks of art as being "the all-overwhelming and all-encompassing love." The task of life is to "transform everything, to torment, to kill into beauty," and when "suffering becomes life/life ceases to be suffering." Finally, the title poem (consisting of four parts) draws in the first part a parallel between Christ and the Jews, and Christ and the Flemish:

But God was in his son the godliness of the resurrection; so God will be in our struggle for freedom.2

Another part ("To a Mother") says:

Your son, dear Mother, fell not for the right cause, but his blood was distorted by all, because no more do we have human goodness. But I, we, we all are murderers of your son and every word like honor and hero is scorn and derision.3

2 I, 135.

3 Ibid., p. 139
The last part asserts:

He who is called by God to give the signal,
he should gather first for forty days in the desert
the force to find the image of God in himself.

The desert that is the immensity of searching. There
is no path, no track;
the voice only says: 'Here starts your life, find
the path.'

Then there are several poems of which the theme is love; to
this group belong the two translated poems "Desire" and
"Lullaby of the Beloved One."

The imagery of the poems, as the themes already suggest,
is predominantly religious. We find this quality in a choice
of words and names like "jubilation," "chastening," "Hosannah,"
"John," "Baptist" and "Saviour," and in such metaphors as
the sun being the Saviour and the rain being John. In "Song
for Myself" and "The Signal" the temptations of Christ's forty
days in the desert are either mentioned or alluded to. In
"Song for Myself" the narrator tells himself to trust his boat
(first temptation: do not recoil from your task), he asks
himself whether he is not following the voice of the Loreley
(second temptation: do not misconceive your task), and he won-
ders whether his boat can be wrecked (third temptation: use
the right method to achieve your goal). "The Still Song" refers
to the parable of the ten virgins as an admonition to be

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4 Ibid., p. 142.
prepared for God, and "Vincent van Gogh," "Babel" and parts of the "Signal" all refer to one or more meanings of the resurrection of Christ. If not religious, the imagery is at least lofty and the poems have such a labored form that one cannot suppress the idea that the poet had to force himself to give the entire collection its unanmist ideal. The coming of the evening in "Evening Song" is described as "the evening wins the battle" and a streetcar in "Summer Rain Song" is described as a poodle "which rises from the water/carefully pushes aside the reed/waves a fan of water grains." It is the choice of superlatives and the use of the formal "you" that creates a lofty atmosphere in "Evening Song": "The greatest glory is vanity and small/but the smallest atom of the life granted to thee/thou wilt accept in thankfulness." The translated poems show the same long metaphors as for instance in "Lullaby for the Beloved One" the day is compared to a vase of flowers and the metaphor of the "Eastern King" gives the poem its lofty tone.

The emphasis on the content of The Signal is such that contrary to Music Hall where rhyme and rhythm often took a place next to content, their role is subservient in The Signal. Almost everywhere long vowels enhance the lofty text; notice the "e" "a-aa," "ei-ij" and "oe-o" sounds in the following example from "Apple":

Toen mijn ogen de ronde vrucht hadden bekeken
en toen zij hadden begrepen de appel zoals hij
werkelijk aanwezig was,
toen zeide mij die vrucht: er is iets in de vaak
verlaten boomgaard
van wat voorbij is, dat nu eerst als goddelijk
schoon te begrijpen is,
omdat geen herleven aan deze herinnering nog
verbonden is.5
[italics mine]

and similarly in "Summer Rain Song" the "e-e-e" and "oe-oe"
and the alliteration of the "w," "g" and "r":

Wit gewassen wegen,
straten na omhelzing, in vreugde en herusting
neergelegen,
bomen der boulevards, herauten van de levende zege,
klare klaren en, roes van herlevende leven,
rein van reiniging.6

In the translated poems we find the same subserviency of form
as we do in the other poems. Both "Lullaby for the Beloved
One" and "Desire" have long sentences and nowhere do we find
such cooperation between form and content as, for example, in
the excerpt quoted from Music Hall on page 32. Most poems have
long lines with the exception of a few such as "Vincent van
Gogh." The following lines are from the fifth part of that
poem. The English text is: "Christ, Redeemer. The Cross/gathered
all suffering./Then he threw away the house/of his suffer-
ing." The throwing away of the house refers to the abandonment
of the body at the resurrection. The poem is one of the few
examples of the successful use of form; van Ostaaijen placed
"het kruis" so that there is a natural emphasis on "het huis"

5 Ibid., p. 106.
6 Ibid., p. 88.
which now gets the necessary attention:

Kristus, Verlosser. Het kruis
vergaarde al het leed.
Toen wierp hij weg het huis
van zijn leed.7

Another example of the same is:

de sous-chef ziet in zijn brilleglazen
hoe achter hem, bij het aansteken, de groene lichten
even rijgen en dansen,
kort-breed: reverence en crinoline,
in which the words "dansen" en "reverence" rhyme with the
result that "crinoline" receives the emphasis. A very good
example of how van Ostaijen links together the parts of a
poem can be found in "The Still Song" where consonance, me-
trical and rhetorical accent work together:

Voor de zoveelste maal heb ik Botticelli over het
land zien gaan,
die bloemen zeelt.
En weer strekken de bomen hun geweldige bottende
takken,
levensdrift die de Japannezen begrepen.
De avond weerhoudt zich te vallen, de mensen haas-
ten zich in dit jong getij,
arme schelpvissera met de wilde hoop:
tans zal de vloed hun rijkdom zijn.
De huizevlakken en hun toonpreksies, die zijn de
afstand tussen hun en mij,
verdringen mij naar het diepst van mijn geweten.8

As was noticeable in the example from "Vincent van Gogh"
von Ostaijen still uses run-on and end-stopped lines.

7 Ibid., p. 103.
8 Ibid., p. 92.
9 Ibid., p. 104.
He also still inverts the syntax of his sentences as in the following line: "wijl ik slechts vaag weet mijn leven incompleet" instead of "wijl ik slechts vaag mijn leven incompleet weet" (italics mine).

In determining van Ossaijen's outlook on life in Music Hall, we found that one of his dilemmas was whether to be unanimist or individualistic. In The Signal he emphasizes unanimism with all the possibilities at his command; the unanimist dream returns everywhere:

To be wind, and blow in the tree, in all trees.10

***

The world is brimful of goodness11

***

Oh young man, who goes yonder, oh brother, oh

my equal 12

***

Sing the glorious song of the Internationale, but don't do this while denying each other's ethos, but in understanding it, that is to love. Judge the Germans according to their ethos and the French according to theirs;

***

Understand the old race of the French spirit, which still grows in the ever-renewing shadow of the cathedrals of Chartres, of Reims and of Rouen;

Understand the young spirit of Germany which is looking for room;13

10 ibid., p. 119.
11 ibid., p. 128.
12 ibid., p. 117.
13 ibid., p. 147.
He even goes so far as to call the lights of the shops in
the main streets the "images of beautiful security of exis-
tence amidst the great doubt of the evening," or to call the
people who return from work "an unknown army against those
who oppose their righteous march." This sort of imagery might
suggest that the speaker of The Signal fully managed to be
"sucked into the stream, the powerful, the renewing, the song of
my father Whitman, song of the Mississippi, song from an Eng-
lish sailor tavern, psalm of nostalgia and longing!" But
this is not quite true. On the one hand, he is obliged, once
he has taken his stand, to criticize those that cannot be in-
cluded in his new world and he calls the people in a cafe:

Blase rastas; next to them homely fat bellies—
all appearance again—ladies ever nicely winking:
all rebel builders of the same drivel profoundness.

On the other hand, it is his humor which comes through, al-
though encumbered by his serious mission:

Hunting for riches, hunting for glory, hunting for
love,
especially hunting for love, opened again by royal
degree.

... the newly rich butcher, virgin body coveter,
pays with a supper, a bowtie and a hat,
same system as that of the civilizers in the tropics:
for hunting is hunting and hunting is opened.

The attempt at unity of form and content in The Signal

14 Ibid., p. 149.
15 Ibid., p. 118; "rasta" comes from "rastaqueur"; i.e., a
man living richly from obscure or unknown financial means.
16 1, 95.
prevented van Oostaijen from reaching the level that we were looking for after having read the best of Music Hall.
The metaphors of The Signal are too heavy; in the poem "Joy" he says: "A carriage could go over my body/this could not even hurt my joy," or in "Summer Rain Song": "Villages embraced in the desires of the wind/forgotten and thrown away after pleasure; loose, soft caressed wheat head of hair/of the beloved one." Both his humor and his sense of rhyme and accent are drowned in the lengthy lines. For instance, if we consider the translated poem "Desire" we may assume from such words as "beauteous babe" (the translation maintains the connotation of the Dutch words), "white bed" and "kissed the pillow" that an ironic tone is meant, but it is lost in the lofty imagery of the second and third stanza. An example where rhyme and meter best cooperate with the theme are the first lines from "Song":

Heel licht is het geluk; niet saam te dringen. Een woord is nooit zo licht als 't wel behoort; vleugels die wijd opengespreid zijn, trillen in de lucht, maar afstandloos van de huizen, waaieren open, in breder vlucht en verdwijnen zonder spoor. Maar het geluk blijft daar aanwezig, al is geen spoor ook merkbaar.17

In English: "Very light is happiness: not to compress. A word/is never as light as should be/wings widely spread, flutter/in the air/but without distance from the houses/fan open, in

17 Ibid., p. 121.
wider flight/and disappear traceless. But happiness stays there/present even though no trace is noticeable."

The year of publication of The Signal is also the year of publication of van Ostaijen's "Expressionism in Flanders." Here van Ostaijen defines what the new art —and rightly so in his opinion— tries to do:

The work of the impressionists was the sum of object plus its subjective interpretation after a sensual and consequently limited investigation. ... The expressionists have a greater appreciation of the value of the object. The object as a means of communication between subject and spectator —it is as such that the bourgeois opinion of art attaches so much importance to the object— has disappeared completely as absolute necessity. The object receives its greater value from elsewhere, although in expressionism it is seldom fully objectively communicated in its entirety and according to its outer proportions; the great value of the communicated object as "Idee en sich" not only keeps on existing but on the contrary after centuries of neglect is brought back by this conception of art. ... The l'art pour l'art formula is an elevation of esthetics to cover a complete lack of ethics. ... The inner socialist spiritual communion was replaced by an outer formalistic beauty. ... The l'art pour l'art formula was actually a compromise through which the artist could believe in his independence necessary for his vitalism, without this independence being so complete that it could hurt the bourgeois ... in his sovereignty.... Impressionism gave the objective expression a shortly analyzed impression, while the reverse is now becoming of primary importance, i.e. the subjective expression of an impression aimed at synthesis. This as far as the artist is concerned. As far as the public is concerned this subjective expression, coming from the artist, has to operate through a synthetic impression. In impressionism the objective expression operates through investigation of the episodic correctness in the treated subject, which is an analytical operation. The subjective impression, on the contrary, has to effect a synthesis in the spectator, as the word "table" evokes the object "table" and a color immediately evokes a psychological value (suffering-happiness). This is the first method of understanding the subjective impression. The second possibility is to find the inner necessity of the forms and colors, which amounts to the spectator's adaptation to the essence of the creating subject. As far
as the spectator is concerned, the medium between the immediate strikingness of a represented idea and the research after inner motives is gone; the medium which is impressionistic criticism, at the same time accepted by the bourgeois art taste, is the intellectual search after the stylizing value of the artist. Thus we also have subjectivism in impressionism but its expression is determined by external necessity, i.e. the generally recognized and traditional standard. ... Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism together with the politico-philosophical and literary activism represent the spiritual as opposed to the materialism of the bourgeoisie, or in a general art-historical sense, the ideoplastic after centuries of physio-plastic .... Impressionism is something beautiful like a work of Renoir, that is all; something beautiful one does not want to possess nor be. Admiration but no love. Impressionism is intellectualism; it does not affect the heart. ... When the public no more tests a work of art on allowed art stereotypes but only tries to understand the life of the work of art; when it understands this work of art as a living being, like animal or plant, and when it makes the logical conclusion that the spectator, in order to approach this work of art, must put his mind in the place of the supposed mind of the work of art, then it has made a simple but necessary step. As people are carried away by a musical not because of external content, but because they really put themselves in the spirit of their heroes, so they will have to understand a plane of color. 18

In other words, van Ostaijen's criticism of the impressionist artist is that he did not take the wrappings off his object, wrappings meaning the social connotations which both artist and spectator attached to the object; consequently, the l'art pour l'art formula did nothing but emphasize these social connotations which is a repetition of appearance rather than essence. Van Ostaijen rejects the analytical perception which is preoccupied with appearance and substitutes a synthetic perception which is preoccupied with the essence of an object;

18 IV, 11-21.
this is the substitution of the ideoplast for the physioplast. The result is that the spectator has to abandon all hope of finding familiar connotations when entering into a work of art in order to understand it. The connection between the spectator entering into a work of art and the artist entering into the common ideal of humanity is obvious, but the connection is based on assumptions too hopeful for a man as relativistic as van Ostaijen.
Lullaby for the Beloved One

That slowly will close the lids of your eyes
to carry the languid velvet of our night.

Like timorous white vases has been our day
vases, which happily arranged the flowers of amorous play.

Now you'll go to sleep, my softly loved child,
for your eyes must open tomorrow: a fresh leaf trembling in
morning breeze.

Now you'll go to sleep, my sweet child, in the valley of
your hair;
soon it will be day and we'll go gathering bouquets again.

Tomorrow an Eastern King will come, with, for both of us, new
bridal clothes;
him, arm in arm, like children in a wood, we'll be awaiting
both.

Do squint your eyes now, my weary leopard
and stretch your loins to your delight. Ach du, ... du.

19 I, 106.
any a beauteous babe through the dumb long night
for the naked presence of her lover pitifully tried,
she kissed the pillow in the large emptiness of her white bed,
as if she wanted to lull asleep his weary head.

Her head was anxious amid wild scent of hair,
his arms grasped in fearful desire for that uncertain joy
that did not offer itself, as a bitter order
to her desire, through the night -- a non-resistant door--.

Her fingers caressed the body's nakedness and shivered;
his own body which was left unsatisfied and tired, concealed
by this caress, the night like a single living breath,
quivered.

Her breath was dissolved in the breath of night,
his desires languished into final sleep.
any a beauteous babe in the heavy, sultry night.

20 Ibid., p. 113.
The contents of *Occupied City* can all be gathered from the individual titles of its parts (see p. 13), but with *Feasts of Fear and Agony* we do not arrive as easily at a topical sense of what the collection has to say. The latter is a collection of very mystical poems which try to arrive at a sense of world order which encompasses both murderers and housefathers (*"The Murderers"*), and which encompasses both a conscious God outside ourselves and an unconscious God within ourselves (*"Barbaric Music"*). Thus we find that "Fatalistic Tune" tries to go a step further than the "Song for Myself" of *The Signal*, in which life is compared to a boat and in which the speaker relates Christ's three trials in the desert to the navigation of his boat; in "Fatalistic Tune" the speaker enters into the possibility that his boat is wrecked; i.e. whether he used the right method to achieve
his divine task. In the "Priere Impromptue 1-3" the poet searches for the God within himself whom he is not able to find because, while he is bound to the tree of good and evil," he cannot find the reason of the fall, in other words he does not know where he is being tempted. In "Song 6" he tries to make himself susceptible to the "all-beginning start."

The words of Occupied City are from all aspects of everyday life and the words of Feasts of Fear and Agony are predominantly sexual ("whores," "birth," "afterbirth," "impregnation," "monthly period," "bellies," "breasts," "hips," "thighs" "flesh," "sterile," "vaginas," "nude," "naked," "sex," "lesbian" and "homosexual") or religious and mystic (Christ, Dionysos, Logos and Eckhardt). Although the imagery of Feasts of Fear and Agony is distinctly different, some of the flesh imagery has been carried over into Occupied City, such as the "balloting breasts football bellies" in "Threatened City." In neither work are there any similes. Instead, one image follows after another, witness the following passage from Feasts of Fear and Agony, describing a fight between a murderer and his victim:

shoes shod with iron are solid
firm shot in the belly
let go
Let go
sighs

1 I, 158.
In order to make a statement about rhyme, meter or syntax, we have to look at what van Oostaijen does typographically. Neither work has any punctuation except a very few exclamation and question marks. *Occupied City* is done in such a wide variety of typographical devices that no copy will do the poems justice unless it be a facsimile copy; in some cases the text represents an exact reprint of the texts found in advertisements (such as the entire unit entitled "Rimmel's New Cosmetics" in the translated poem "Order to Mr. So-and-So") or newspaper headlines (such as "Sieg!" at the end of the translated poem "Threatened City," which is printed in letters of one inch size). The typewritten copies of the translated poems try to make all the necessary distinctions where possible. In *Feasts of Fear and Agony* van Oostaijen uses several colored inks and different sizes of writing; in the translation footnotes give the necessary information. In creating a "rhymed" unit, van Oostaijen makes use of assonance, as for instance the "e" in the following quote from "Threatened City," in which the separation of the first syllable from "Exodus" creates the effect:

\[ \text{EXS} \quad \text{OD} \quad \text{E} \]

Altijd manneen
zonderling marionettespel van God de Vader\(^2\)

[italics mine]

Elsewhere in the same poem we find that assonance, consonance

\(^2\) II, 34.
and typography serve to create continuity: "KNarsen KNoken Rammelen Ribben," which was translated: "GNashing KNuckles Rattling Ribs." In Occupied City typography is more a device to create continuance of a unit than in Feasts of Fear and Agony, where we still find some of the methods of The Signal: witness the following example in which the rhyme of "meer" and "heer" creates the relationship between the two images (English text: "Where there is a golden chain there is more/ stab yell blood bears gold/the yell is fearful gold notes of the state bank/best hits the knife an intoxicated gentleman"): 

waar een gouden ketting is is meer
steek gil bloed baart goud
de gil is bang goudnoten van de rijksbank
best treft het mes een beschonken heer

As far as accent is concerned, van Ostaijen juxtaposes metrical, ehtorical and word accent very intricately and every page provides examples. An example from "Threatened City" where rhetorical and metrical accent coincide is: "wraak-ken auto's rijten donkere lappen van de nacht" (English: "wrecks automobiles TEAr dark patches of the night") where the natural accent both in English and Dutch falls on the verb; an example of a wrenched accent would arise in a word like "makesBERe" where the natural word accent falls on the second syllable instead of the third.

Syntactically, van Ostaijen creates his images by both

3 I, 156.
regular and inverted order of parts of speech, and by letting nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs stand by themselves, grammatically but not poetically unrelated. This saves him from having to make sentences which distract the reader's attention from the central image. Here too he uses typography extensively. For example:

in the evening

gathers

a newspaper woman

the pieces

of a cracked heart

which
dropped

from a car

The result of this method is that "in the evening" also belongs to the part that went before, that "gathers/the pieces/of a cracked heart" becomes a unit and that "in the evening/a newspaper woman" becomes a unit. If van Ostaijen wants all parts to stand by themselves he puts them centrally:

in the depth sits quartet

sounds whirl

not in depth

stay

An example of how effective these devices can be:

Dumpa a country all its legs
dumps a country all its arms
dumps a country all its arsenals
all copper iron tin
all soldiers buttons
all that it finds

dumpa a country

4 Ibid., p. 184.
5 Ibid., p. 180.
6 II, 39.
Both *Feasts of Fear and Agony* and *Occupied City* are a reaction against the unanimism of *The Signal*, the former of which shows a search for a deeper truth within oneself and the latter shows a search for social truth. When van Osteyen arrived in Berlin, two movements were thriving: Dada, which had just started, and expressionism, which had reached its creative peak during the last years of the war. Dada exerted greatest influence on *Occupied City* and it is a special aspect of expressionism which we find in *Feasts of Fear and Agony*. We find this described in an introduction of Otto Mann to *Expressionismus*:

> Es scheint dem gebildeten Menschen selbstverständlich dass er nicht mehr Religion, sondern eine philosophische Weltanschauung besitzt .... Der Dichter erfährt sich seitdem zuerst als weltanschauliches Offenbarungsorgan und seine Dichtung als Medium, in welchem Seltsicht manifestiert. Vor dieser neuen, gleichsam religionen Sendung des Dichters tritt die Aufgabe des Künstlerischen Gestaltens zurück. Es erscheint wichtiger was er offenbart als wie er offenbart. ... Der Expressionist sucht weltanschaulich zu dem nichtsäkulisierten Menschen zurück.... Der Mensch ... soll "hier" das Reich des sich selbstgehörenden Menschen errichten, ... Der Expressionismus ist einer letzter radikaler Versuch das Verhängnis de modernen säkulisierten Kultur durch den metaphysischen Bezug des Menschen auf eine wieder als metaphysisch begriffene Wirklichkeit doch vom Menschen her zu bannen. Seine These ist nicht Gott, sondern der metaphysisch erfüllte und bewegte Mensch. Die kirchliche Religion scheint ihm auf diesem Wege ein Hemmnis; die Kirche scheint ihm zu den Traditions Ordnungen zu gehören, die nicht mehr Gefasze des ursprünglichen religiösen Lebens sind. ... Es gibt ein neuer Mut zur Dichtung.

Let us take another look at *Feasts of Fear and Agony* and at

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what we called a deeper truth within oneself. The speaker, who is in ecstasy, finds within himself another self which has the appearance of a woman and which frantically "dances everything away":

my feet are different shapes which I do play
    to the law of myself
    so are
    my
arms
my belly which challenges itself
I who watch the dear that dances
    and that am I

When finally the real self stabs a knife "between the breasts" it dies because "the dance dies" and the speaker's last words are:

carry me away as long
    as my body is warm

The distinction between the body and its heat is related to the watching self and the dancing self. The dance originated in fear:

my for fear of the word fearing life
    my in fear dancing body,

which is fear of an uncontrollable power in spite of which one has to live (the murderers are afraid of the police, the gentleman is afraid of the murderers, the dancing self is afraid of the body which it wants to "tear to pieces/till the/body/hangs in rags") or better:

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8 I, 194.
9 Ibid., p. 199.
10 Ibid., p. 245.
FEAR IS
the dance of the things that have become toward
un - becoming

The meaning of the dance is that it leads to the new logos
(logos - word, as in "in the beginning was the word") of
oneself:

Dancing is being impregnated
being pregnant
 timidity
of the word which became
fear
dancing is
being full belly
of the seed
of the word

The old logos has lost its value because "all becoming has
un - become/in the Being Word," or elsewhere "what is born/is
dead." The old logos and the new logos interact and the
highest unity is where "the BEING of all things is striving
Not to Be/to BE IS NOT TO BE." This mysticism, the sexual
imagery and the mentioning of Christ and Dionysos together,
makes clear why van Ostaijen says:

professors, here is the last gnostic
he smokes a cigarette while he partakes of
the Eucharist
and yet
and yet
I would like to be nude

In the translations we find this gnosticism in Priere Impromptu
where Christ and Dionysos are linked in the search for

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11 Ibid., p. 255.
12 Ibid., p. 243.
13 Ibid., p. 230.
the "light of God," or in "Song 6" where the speaker equates the absence of the knowledge of good and evil with physical nudity. In order to decide what the outlook of life is in Occupied City we can consider the translations which are representative of the entire collection. What above was called a search for social truth is found in the juxtaposition of such events as the building and shooting down of cathedrals, in putting together the romantic song "Puppchen du bist mein Augenstirn" with a description of torn bodies, or in showing the conquerors waiting before a brothel; the truth which the speaker establishes in this manner reveals a misanthropic outlook which does not question God but rather shows Him as a protector of brothels and as a collaborator. As a result, in looking for van Ostaijen's humor in Feasts of Fear and Agony or Occupied City, we find none in the former, and a humor not far removed from cynicism in the second; witness such lines as "tell me songs and I will tell you/whether/you left the city or won," and a poster of the "Grand Circus of the Holy Ghost" announcing "the appearance of Religion, Emperor and State, the World Famous Trio."14

During the same year in which he published Occupied City van Ostaijen wrote a manifesto called "Et Voila" for a magazine Het Sienjaal. Parts of that manifesto follow below:

14 II, 91.
The content is determined by the subjective vision, by
the viewpoint of the artist. From analysis the contents
of a work of art cannot be approached completely. The
content has no expediency for the spectator or the reader.
The content of the work of art cannot be defined or
explained. The content either is there or it is not.
Consequently it cannot be avoided that some will master
the form of a certain school of art while essentially
they have nothing in common with it. The first premise
stays: the visionary or synthetic energy of the artist.
The grasping after and the grasping of what happens.
This grasping can only be synthetic, cosmically intuitive;
not analytical, not scientifically dividing. It is going
to the last step of the intelligible. There is the Wonder
which can be understood only when the Wonder enters into
the subject and the subject into the Wonder. The highest
form of art is Ectasy. Form and content shape an indivi-
dible whole in the work of art. If we consider form and
content as separate elements then this happens only as an
avoiding construction for criticism. In reality form and
content in the work of art cannot be separated. The content
is not related to the form like cause to effect, as criti-
cism usually thinks. In the work of art the form does not
determine the content any less than the content does deter-
mine the form. In the completed work of art nothing is
left of this causal connection. The work of art is a unity.
The work of art is closed and without beginning like a
circle. The work of art is an organism. The work of art
is a living being. As such it is in itself, Individual
in the first sense of the word: in itself, indivisible.
That is why the task comes out of the artist: deindividu-
alization. Because the work of art has to be an organism
through itself and is so in itself. As such why
a work of art has to be determined by its own matter and
spirit and not by law of a foreign body and foreign spirit.
... Poetry is word art. Not the communication of emotions,
but the form of the word does localize the vision. Certainly
not communication of thoughts. Poetry communication of
thoughts! Why not? poetry, a morality codex in rhyme! A
carpenter has to make a good table. Not a moral table, not
an ... ethical table. The same way with the poet. Only the
poem which is good in the sense of poetry justifies the
poet's existence. Ethically the poet meets the phenomenality
not through the theme, but only through his viewpoint.
Ethics are in every artist's attempts: attempts for de-in-
dividualization. Printed poetry is printed word art. Thus
the possibilities of the print as related to word art can
be fully utilized. For example: the rise and fall of the
lines, thin and heavy letters, cascades of falling words
over the page, even different types of letters: many means
which suggestively represent in typography the rhythm of
the spoken word. Bridges from poet to reader. As a means
to make the reading person a reader. There is no academy
no higher institution where poetry is taught technically.
This would be fortunate, if it were not already a misfort-
tune. It is a misfortune because gradually the opinion
has grown that poetry has nothing to do with style. Art
of course has nothing to do with style. But every local-
ization of art, and thus poetry, does.... In poetry,
poems are still generally made according to a precon-
ceived framework, or the reverse when there is no
framework, but then there is no tension. The extreme
are chosen instead of a synthesis. The poet puts the words
in their place—and exactly because of that, not in their
place—and these words immediately become rigid. They do
not contribute to determining the further development
of the poem. They have no independent power, no dynamo.
Or the reverse, when they do have dynamo, but then it is
not within the field of activity. In the first case the
words are dead and are treated like hearses. A word can
give a different direction to the development of the poem.
The art criticism generally balances between the extremes
of conventional investigation and lyrical auto-psychology.
Criticism is initiation. And not a confession of the
criticaster. Criticism only has to answer two questions.
The question after the visionary in a work (the spiritua-
listic content) and the question of the equivalent tech-
nical realization of this vision in the work of art.
Together toward a balance of vision and formal realization.
It remains possible to approach a work of art intuitively
with another method. This method again is creative art and
no criticism. This method belongs to poetry; the
theme of the poem is simply the artist or a work of art.
Modern art criticism combines both possibilities: the
critical-analytical and the synthetic-intuitive. It brings
a bad poem instead of logical criticism. 15

Here van Ostaijen is less concerned with the spectator than
he was in "Expressionism in Flanders," his emphasis falls on
the "actity" of the work of art, a term which he borrowed
from the Scholastics and which means "existence in itself."
By this he means that a work of art should not be dependent
on laws of either artist or spectator, but on laws inherent

15 iii, 84-90.
to the essence of the object; the search for these laws is a process of de-individualization. This is a logical development of the essay of 1916, but a new concept is that of the artist as a craftsman, like a carpenter who should be concerned with nothing else than making a good table. It is the concept of craftsmanship which will receive all his attention in the following years.
Fatalistic Tune

Crimson
script
done by no hand
I know you
causeless
Mane Thekel phonograph of the harbourside parodian
v o x c o e l e s t a
emaciated land
emaciated people
we surge
on the sea
wreck
floating wreck
isn't there any shelter for wrecked people
wreck float sea boiling
sea
roar doom
beautiful it was once
someone played BACH in
the next room
The wind blew the wreck again in the
sea
song of the wreck
rocking song
me and you
ebb and tide
live and decease
rocking song
rock the silence
FEAR
of my wrecked being

---

16 I, 200. The manuscript of "Fatalistic Tune" is written in black ink with the exception of the words "Crimson," "Mane Thekel" and "beautiful ... room," which are written in red.

17 The name "Mane Thekel" seems to be a light bulb advertisement in Antwerp; it is mentioned as such in "Evening Song" in The Signal as "letters of the eternal 'Mane-Thekel-Phares' of days and of light."

18 "Roar-doom" is in Dutch "loei-en-doemen" in which the vowels are similar.

19 The order of parts of speech is in Dutch: "Blew the wind the wreck ...," while the actual order in Dutch should be as it is in English: "The wind blew the wreck ...."
my voice
merely sounds far
not myself
I always feel the tune
of the rocking song
of the wreck
Waves that gnaw
rodents
gNawing Teeth
in my Flesh
in my weak
loins
waves gnaw
bore my forces
I struggle
so struggles a wreck to the shore
I struggle
myself to death
rocking song
about the dead
wreck

20 "Waves gnaw bore my forces" is one sentence; "bore" might be a verb in English, but in Dutch it is distinctly an adjective.

21 "About the dead wreck" is one phrase; the inflection of the adjective "dood-dead" shows this in Dutch.
Priere Impromptue 1

My house is in the plains and without protection
It is cold within my house
the wind blows to death the lamp's light
and the snow whirls an even colder tune
in my house
plains in the plains
child I seek to shelter there is no corner
where I can shiver well
It is nude
CUP I'll take God's gift
    like a great happiness
and the cup of suffering--
he who is the gate to what is not limited by a gate--
I take off my lips
and drops out of my child hands
broken
Such is the nudity of my house
without suffering or joy
it is unlimited
    not infinite
thus I am a ball in the play of evil
wails which are hopeless
because the way to God is God himself
EVERYWHERE I SEE THE HAND OF GOD
which proportions
and makes me a silent prayer
before the dumb sea and the cry of things which
are noiseless

PRAY GOD to give the cup which cannot
    be refused
it still drops out of my hands
fearful am I and strange to me this unknown
    event
still the agony is not such that I apprehend apprehensionless
in the misunderstanding of agony and joy
Still do I flee from oneness to twoness

So whirls the snow a colder tune
in my house that is no house
because of it still being my house
So the wind whistles in the small plains

---
22 I, 204. The manuscript of "Priere Impromptue 1" is done entirely in black ink.
amidst the plains

I know these words a clear notion
myself
and those who are without guard and searching

So is this still stammering a sharp stone
from sharp stone words tender bread when
THE MIRACLE IS

---

23 The four lines ending in "house" and "plains" end in
Dutch in "huis is" and "vlakte"; this has been maintained
in English by "house" and "plains."
Prière Impromptue 2

I lay
down all wearing of false Jewels
Still no light glittering being firmer
I lay down the fine clothes
realize the false ornament

but
nude I am cold
the light of God

enshrouds me
not yet
he has warm who spreads heat
radiating
from the glow
of his dissolved craving

I know the way
and yet
everything is a pool
Before me is the light of

an abyss
then I must go
where I forget the darkness lies
there where is light

There is LIGHT
where I seize it
where my craving without noise and without craving
where my craving without noise and without craving perishes in the light
where I forget the darkness lies

I know the way
the signs are
apocalyptically clear
but I hesitate to walk over the water
which is but dark
for whom
does not see the light

24 I, 213. The manuscript of "Prière Impromptue 2" is done entirely in blue ink.

25 Lines 2 and 4 both end in Dutch with the preposition "af"; the rhyme has not been transferred except for the partial rhyme in the words "jewels-clothes."

26 "Lies" and "light" are the same words in Dutch except for spelling.
Fast forty days
in the desert
in shriek madness the last day temptation comes to
offers gems
the hermit balm the lepers
their body
decays
a rotten rain of flesh
but their metaphysical Being Glitters
Redeemed over the desert

Christ and Dionysos are here and there
I am bounced
now why is also Christ bouncing27
the ball
Christ is at the sea of Galilee
and has Dionysos come to me with bunches of grapes
the desert starts to glitter
the hyena carrions spread a dull stench
over which is our hometown
40 40 40 days feeding feeding
oh forty days
with the smell of decomposition

27 The words "reflecting" and "bouncing" are the same word
"kaatsen" in Dutch.
I can't collect stamps
I can't collect pin-ups
I can't compile amarettes
or any wisdom
I can't do anything
why don't I turn off the lamp
and don't I go to bed
I want to attempt
being naked
nude who knows well frozen purple
and paleness
Isn't that like the all beginning start
I don't want to know anything
I don't want to ask
why
I become no stamp collector
I will begin to give my debacle
I will begin to give my bankruptcy
I will give me a piece of torn poor soil
a trampled soil
a moorland
an occupied city
I want to be nude
and begin

---

28 I, 231. "Song 6" is written in black ink.

29 The word for "pin-ups" used by van Ostaijen is in Dutch "vrouwefotos" which literally means "pictures of women," not the usual word in Dutch; this would be "naaktfotos."

30 Van Ostaijen also uses in Dutch two different words "nude-naked."

31 This line literally reads in Dutch: "Is not so the all beginning start."
Priere Improvisate

God now I come on the uplands from the uplands one sees

Thy LIGHT
that kindles the light in me
I see the forces of descent the same FORCE

as the forces of ascent
there is no FALL

Thou art descent
like Thou
art

Thou art WORTHLESS still I stand bound to the TREE OF GOOD AND EVIL and am
only worthless because I still do know values THOU ART
superficial in surface deep in depth ascending in ascent fall in fall WHY search for ascent in fall why is rising good and falling evil

the surface is as surface as the depth depth

ON THE UPLANDS
IS
NO MORE VALUE

32 I, 233. The poem is written in blue ink.

33 The image of the "uplands" is found in the fifth part of "Vincent van Gogh" in The Signal where we read: "The road of the Redeemer/the road of suffering/uplands of happiness."

34 A literal translation of lines 10-13 would read in English: "You are descent as you ascent are," the sequence of which is normal in Dutch; the inversion in English is of no consequence since the four lines are a single unit in the poem and since "ascent" and "descent" can be put together typographically in both languages.
**Order to Mr. So-and-So**

You will be forgiven much because you have seen many movies

we know inside out
the palm of our hand

fantômes Zigomar with Z trop long

THE STEEL PRISON

graves
macaroni movies princesses
apataches

and

the topshow Cheri Bibi

fatalitas

"Dieppe o mon pays natal je t'ai quitté en forcat; vicomte je te revois"
or
"Je croyais m'être mis dans la peau d'un honnête homme; ME voila dans celle d'un assassin."

God the Father brings the last act
stage manager arch angel Michael
seers blockade submarines foreign races
the beginning of the end
the breast is empty

the child throws away the bottle nurses-cry

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

is the most fitting novel

everything attempted
we are at the end of all isms isthms
of all cathedrals
of all prophets
of all cathedras

are stunned

with the single positive


---

35 II, 9.

36 The image "last of the Mohicans" had been used before in "New Way" from Music Hall where the poet says: "now like a last Mohican/my friend has gone on."
that we won't do a damn thing
thic mec miche\(^{37}\)

Nihil in all directions
Nihil in all sexes
Nihil in all languages and
dialects
NIHIL in all orthography

turning nihil

Nihil in Andreas cross
NIHIL in crux antiqua
nihil in vagina
Shut to build and shoot down cathedrals
others guilty
naturally
citron nature

others makes children
the promise of purity costs nothing

flatly refuse
statisticians bishops generals allowed pleasure
to count children
Deo Gratias

amen

and children which are mishap or accident is simply learning
to defend oneself

turning nihil
rectangle nihil
triangle nihil
pyramid NIHIL

37 The words "with the single positive that we won't do a damn thing/thic mec miche" are in Dutch "met het enige positieve dat wij het verdommen nog een mik te doen/mik mec miche." In Dutch the word "damn" is used transitively in the following expression: "I damn it to do a mik meaning "I won't do anything." The first problem arising from this difference is that the sound transition "mik mec miche" is gone, which has to be restored since "mec" and "miche" are French words meaning pimp and a fellow who has a prostitute for mistress, both images which are part of the poem. The second problem occurs in the lines "flatly refuse/statisticians ..." where in Dutch the verb "damn" returns in the same sense as before together with a synonym. It seems best to abandon this particular aspect and retain the semantic aspect for the benefit of the lines "to count children" and "to defend oneself."
YOUR moral the one plausible thing for us
to do
the trains have the dull rhythm of
tired people
positive is to convince oneself
of emptiness
of loam and clay
of ordinate and abscissa
the realization of full emptiness
of ideal phrases
emptiness hollow lungs lie body
hollow lungs aimlessly in themselves
let the ministers make children the priests the generals
turn around turn yourself around why not turn yourself around
around its axis earth the other way

omega

Rimmel's New Cosmetique
For fixing the Hair, Whiskers or Mustachious
and giving them a beautiful gloss & natural
black or brown colour.
El Rimmel, Parfumer

Du rouge pour les levres

goess again out of circulation
circulation
goess about circulation

ometa
omicron
Alpha (letter not margarine) beta delta eta theta

38 The words "one plausible thing for us/to do" are in English in the original.
manager I want to be but our heroic ideals
burlesque apparel
honesty with tophat and dress coat
religion tiara cardinal red
metaphysical with little angle wings and
crowning

we knew all songs 3 evolution of Walzertraum in three languages

of Lustige Witwe to Czardasfürstin
streak over all syrup operettes
similisentimental songs
TANGO RRRouge
Dans mon Pays English melody French text

sous le ciel de l'Argentine
only still stands counterpoint to Jazz-Band
six o'clock in the morning grey street
FRERE JACQUES

Sonne les matines

all is empty
frere jacques
the last berned
hollow sea wreck
t'en fais pas

lame bus through street lived to weariness
lary trains through land
mountains sea valley sea mountains
sea sea sea
wreck

lary trains

be loaded

rigolo gigolo zigoto
si tu veux faire une petite ballade
you have balladed through Europe
your expectations die

Utah Indians Aztecs Place Blanche

and it is not your least merit
inventor of the geographical map
EUROPE according to EROTIC ERDS
we know Europe so long so long
stretched out stretched out flat and in altitude
geological
stream bed
political
religious
commercial
and all that and all that
toward
this erotic map is a necessity
soon private teachers will
teach courses
about this invention till now of humanity
at Korfu the women are this way

legs thighs breasts
Berlin Germany Brussels Amsterdam Bucharest London Paris
her perfume fleurs Houbigant Lonchamp Maisons-Lafitte maquereau
niche rígolè gisèlè gòsès ehrliche frau
and you saw for five minutes
the necropolis
of the Acropolis

39 "Be loaded" is used in the sense of "being drunk."

40 The words "maquereau" and "goussé" mean pimp and guy.
will have fallen all cathedrals
cannibals
Hannibals generals
ideals
colonels
bordellos
perhaps
will there be room
for a self-evident beauty
pure
unknown

is IT not destroyed
one and eternal
will stand purer

make earth pure
vermin weeds

maybe sometimes we'll say j'ai soupe
d'en avoir soupe

Nihil
again take core shape
these simple words

prison letters
simple sound words
simple stuttering of man for love

and all this grey cell
not the entire poor life
of dolorous people long for thistles

and are these cross stretched countries
no great Christ
full hollow wounds

and this echo hollow feeling of
weariness
not as was earlier Good Friday

...
Threatened City

vise march mortars
march mortars
Puppchen Du bist mein Augenstirn
Puppchen mein liebes Puppchen HEIL DIR IM SIEGERKRANZ
parade of one day and one night through Brussles
Arme von Kluck
John John John a Zeppelin
the basement fast go in

sine zwei sine zwei sine zwei sine zwei
Irissian Prussian
march mortars

We stand my brother les homnes au balcony
the flickering land
the far steeple and the blazing fire
the sack of the trampled army
the masochistic march
the dust of summer

the mud of the autumn

the entire road 200 R C automobiles
split night by 200 automobiles
200 sirens

and thousand CLashes of shrapnels
around the blazing tower
which perished in the flame
and the fleeing the endless procession of the fleeing
and the cows which think it's damn annoying
and the accompanying lice
and all that and all that
until morning it became
Puppchen Du bist mein Augenstirn

The stepping of the city
the fortresses will keep will fall will keep will fall
the stepping of a city in fear

rising desiring

42 II, 23.

43 Both in English and Dutch, adjectives are always separate from the noun; in Dutch "masochistiesemaraj" is written as one word and has been left one word in English.

44 The word "shrapnell" is written in English.
the military whores retreat in the fortified city
all whores from the entire country
and all that marches that does the trick
along the boulevards the teeming boulevards
in the evening PRUSSIAN BLEU light of white renards
va leurs in the red renards
fear and desire
what
brings morning
the paper boys fortresses will keep
the heavily threatened city to be defended to the last
lies trembling body pale
a sallow pool in the evening Prussian Bleu and the danger
stands the time stands panting the time stands space
still
till
it
bangs
bang clang bangs clangs bang clang pep
air displacement in Gosh major
and counterpoint
Flight displacement in Gosh minor
bombs bang

and the shell shells itself in a house (record time mail order)

house goes in flames
flickering of flame before moon
moon before the flame

moon

The City Stands Still
so is the city cut
through were the wires
and are all dancers stunned in their crazy round dance
are we or do we play a macabre play
the drawing room public of the 18th ditch
only the shell is positive
city theatre buffoons

Comet of Halley
besieged city
hurry up gentlemen 15 minutes left
just enough
is pepette
the generals the souteneurs the patriots the demimonde
goose flesh of the demimonde that's no advertising
that's no satin no silk no moire
that's goose flesh
fall the shells in spite of your pepette charity

the shells
fall
fall
fall
fall
don't drop

cannon coitus
ca va ca viens ca viens ca va
basement flight of a bordello
balloting breasts football bellies
tulle gold silver veil Mimi Manon paillette and teeth
the patronne en grande soiree
there is no time to dress
the shell falls
without

un client mesdames voyons
in the basement trembles the flesh kilo like
tremble breasts shakes the flesh shiver thighs
makeup creeps on grease mugs full of fear45
and the droll eastern splendor
tulle paillettes
progress of science
chattering teeth gold and fillings this time
Gaby-Hecamier has no loot to escape
tailoring too old-fashioned cutting impossible
Ah c'est la merde merde pour les Boches merde pour tout le monde
the tall Irene is particularly cold silver snake stitches
watch out for the rats
bordello screams: chickens push together
house next to an abandoned piano

45 The English translation of this line is slightly ambiguous
while the Dutch version is not; "creeks" refers to "little
streams" of make-up and "mugs" refers to "faces."
oh oh si vous voulez l'amour
profitez des beaux jours
C'est le moment qui
NOW autorace - fleeing - flight
growing through the
piercing
arrows
glowing
wrecks automobiles tear dark patches from the night
wrecked team
irregular sacking trampled people
crapped soldiers dead animals
crapped dead
masochistic march
steps drink the street
thirsty steps drink aridity
step steps steps step
CADAVER rattling rusted cannons
macabre dance iron ribs

CLAP perring
ribs
beCLANG
caseKIDS

fall

and
robbers fall in houses lighter than shell
philanthropy

save all pieces of value
rattle team flee
trampled army
streams of automobiles screaming yellow light
lashing autobus OLD TOM GIN stiff street

cars wagons caissons
machine guns cannons

GNashing knuckles rattling ribs
flee

to them

46 The words "Old Tom Gin" are in English in the original.
screaming sirens light streak in
B-E-L-T

screaming staff car

lie bodies close to the city
arms

leGS
SM
RA

step ping leg go don't go forward

was nothing forgotten at the defense line
not the king the private first class in the first trench
toujours la
or his steel helmet
God God perhaps the king was forgotten
or his steel helmet
and tomorrow he is pictured with steel helmet
for new stamps
seasickness the minister president

drab drab grey day
grey grow from exodus
salute threatened city
salvation along the north

year market
carroussel
people and things
perambulator
hatbox
lamp glass
hours the same things
has God left this nation
the whores forget to cut
they only flee
as if one can't both flee and cut
but
the president of the Board of estaminets saves the honor
his tophat
and tricolor sash
united we are strong
DIEU PROTEGE LES ESTAMINETS
silver letters
the procession watches
false sp ring
you can walk on the heads
couldn't one also symbolically step
kilometer counting
kilogram
kiloliter
kilowatt
kilokwatt
kilokwatta

Fame of the Netherlands
Kwatta = de Ruyter plus 2 Tromp plus 2 de Wit
they took from me
B.S.A.

Birmingham Small Arms
3 fusils
a splendid piece the pride of my family
always perambulator hatbox lampglass baby
finest for

E. X.
O. D.

Always people
curious puppet show of God the Father
or of Siderius (for astrologers)

fleeing monsters
fleeing people
fleeing army
the three generations flee

47 The names de Ruyter, Tromp and de Wit refer to Dutch national heroes; Kwatta is a brand of chocolate.

48 "Birmingham Small Arms" is written in English in the original.
defeated army

from all sides people round the city
easy city
long people roads
tell me songs and I will tell you
whether you left the city or

won
march mortars
Puppchen mein liebes Puppchen
private teachers Darwinproof
the entire province - Pommern peons
Oberleutnant zum Befehl
imper Puppchen
eins zwei eins zwei eins zwei eins zwei

DREI

was wer hat Donnerwetter wer hat
das gewagt
eins zwei eins zwei eins zwei
KAISER (not the motor racer)
Gott mit uns
Gott
mit
uns

at the other side of the river is PARIS
Kultur Tradition du Volnay 69
es lebe der Kaiser
der jute jott

tramples
march

.

! S I E G !
From all places where Thou art shown
in the occupied city Thy dreariness does moan

on all corners one has hanged Thee
to catch pennies in an offertory

Yet Thou hast found communion with the mass
when into Thy warm wounds its arms it casts

Into Thy wounds to deafness our hands we thrust
and blind we are in dumb distrust

Priests and popes Thy body did desecrate
taught to believe our hands Thy wounds palpate

Churches for Thee were built
down the walls runs silver and gilt

So small so dull is our faith
as is before Thy image the dancing flame

On every corner Thou BUFFOON
of kindness and perceptible pain were shewn

Amongst us reunited Thou art in all Thy icons
with the occupied city Thy crying hollows stones

Below Thy statue I know from the pipe the rain
does make a hole in the stone but that also is Thy pain

Thou art among us changed to a different pattern
peined Buffoon and Thy Mother is a sobbing slattern

A God like a Buffoon is all we can distinguish
our times are so fed up with grief and anguish

50 The poem consists of twelve couplets which have the following rhyme in Dutch: aa bb cc dd cc ee ff gg hh ij kk gg. With as much attention as possible to the imagery an English rhymed version of "Sous les Ponts de Paris 1-2" has been attempted; in Dutch not all lines of both poems possess the same syntactical order which regular Dutch has and this liberty has been utilized for the translations. Dutch uses the polite "you" which is not necessarily translatable by "thou"; however, considering the biblical context, the "thou" form seems the most appropriate.
**Sous les fonts de Paris**

Thy last humanization is for the crowd alone
I have seen Thee deserting the front

They did not glean Thy arms that were thrown away
Holy Deserter, this relique could not be used

At this hour in all churches should be shown
Thy deserter's figure and Thy arms that were thrown

I saw Thee swinging among the occupation from town to town
faded and flat tired out and worn down

I have seen Thee in my occupied city
in a dancing hall the music stopped when Thou entered

its slow waltz the rhythm of Thy face was stronger so
in kisery than a broken cello

and the gigolos and the whores light their slow "ALT" danced
only to the miserable rhythm that Thy Face enhanced

I saw Thee in a stinking slop
Thou went together with a Landsturm man

Among the demanded unemployed Thou didst stand
when to Germany long trains with the threadbare went

Thou didst keep guard on top of the dyke
with chill whores in the raining night

Now Thou art weary and bluffed
the misery again in Thee full stuffed

The rain drips from Thy filthy soaking wet hemp beards
over the city

Drips together with the rain over
all filth of the city Thy shocking rhythm

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*51 Ibid., p. 77. The poem consists of thirteen couplets with the following rhyme scheme: ab de ff gg gg hh ii jk ll mm nn op qr.*
Good News

Good news from the front
directly received radio by
les Dames de la Charite Cretienne
coming an entire batallion Feldgrauen
the king alone in the trench
Is he fleeing? a king doesn't flee
Samson he takes ass jawbone
beats a batallion down
and the other 50% into flight
Then he cleans the jawbone of the Kraut blood
it was a batallion from SACHSEN-COBURG-GOTHA

In the next trench stands the crown prince
also alone
also comes a smaller group of enemies
and beats this smaller group smaller small (proportion)
Otherwise respectful
the Krauts retreat
Why
They were Bavarians Es lebe Wittelsbach

52 Ibid., p. 90.
POSTHUMOUS POEMS

If we consider the content of the posthumous poems, the majority of which we assume that van Ostaijen wanted to include in The First Book of Schmoll, we find no dominating theme like unanimism, mysticism or dadoism. There are poems on pastoral scenes ("Frost," "Landscape," "Winter," "May," "Unconscious Evening") and on society ("Belgian Sunday," "Life"), and there is a group of musical poems ("Berceuse," "Waltz," "Melopee," "Polka," "Polonaise," "Charleston"). Since the translations are fairly representative of the entire collection they illustrate what van Ostaijen tries to achieve. What seems random association at first, turns out to be an attempt to arrive at a description of an object by balancing its different aspects. For instance, in all three poems The Old Man," "Frost," and "Evening Sounds," he juxtaposes the
audible and the visible such as the voice and the appearance of the old man, the whinnying of horses and dripping of water and the moon and the fields on the evening, and the reverberating sounds and the brightness of a frosty atmosphere. In "Homage to Singer" and "And every new city ..." he juxtaposes the absolute and the relative, such as the "every new city/flower that withers" and "everywhere is nowhere," and the "everybody has a right to a sewing-machine" and "everything is appearance." He juxtaposes devotion and caution in the "rosary" and "glass pieces" of "Sun burns the rosary ...." In the sound poems "Very Small Music Box" and "Berceuse presque Negre" he juxtaposes the intonations of different sentences such as "here is ... Iris" and "where is Iris," and "the chimpanzee won't play" and "so much water goes into the sea." In other words, where before he looked at his object in terms of a message (The Signal), or in terms of a mystical meaning (Feasts of Fear and Agony) or in terms of moral incongruity (Occupied City), he now tries to look at his object in its own terms.

The extravagant typography of Occupied City has been abandoned but the lack of punctuation and the use of position as an aid in clarifying accent, intonation or syntax has been maintained. The preference for certain words, as we found in previous collections, has been dropped except for the introduction of a Dutch-Flemish nursery rhyme vocabulary mainly used in the musical poems. Van Ostaijen frequently makes
use of alliteration, consonance or assonance, a practice which has been transferred as much as possible in the translations. Thus we find the alliteration of the "s" and "t" in "Evening Sounds" which suggests the dripping of water; we find the assonance of "brick-shrill," "heaven-helmet-spread-banner-tense-step" and the alliteration of "brick-bright" in "Frost," which all suggest the reverberation of sound, as does the consonance and assonance of "boots beat lucid." He also often uses rime riche as for example with the words "play" and "sea" in "Perceuse presque Negre," the words "table" and "fish" in "Marc greets the things in the morning," and the word "ring" in "Very Small Music Box." We find no wrenched accents, because van Ostaijen brings metrical and word accent together with rhetorical accent, or to put it differently, he does not impose on the natural accents of the language but instead utilizes them to the full. Consider the following use of a trochee in "Sun burns the rosary ...": "watch out/hère lie/glass pieces," or of an enaplease in "Very Small Music Box": "分校/India is/in a soap bubble/Iris" and "häng the bubble/ón a ring/and the ring/ón your nose." Van Ostaijen uses both end-stopped and run-on lines; an example of the latter is found in "A beautiful face ..." where the third line is broken off after "if" which adds to an ironic effect.

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1 The translation follows the Dutch accentuation.
When we try to determine van Ostaijen's outlook on life in *The First Book of Schmoll* we find nothing like "the world is brimful of goodness" of *The Signal*, the "why is rising good and falling evil" of *Feasts of Fear and Agony*, or the "Dieu protège les Estaminets" of *Occupied City*. In *The First Book of Schmoll* the relativist van Ostaijen makes the object speak for itself by itself rather than have himself speak for the object. This does not mean that we find nothing of the poet in the poems—we do find his humor and his choice and composition of images—but it does mean that he managed to put himself in a position to weigh both sides of a question. In other words, he has found a synthesis between "the images of beautiful security" and the "gooseflesh of the demimonde," which enables him to utilize his humor again. It now takes the form of irony (which assumes the presence of the humane of humanity) rather than cynicism (which assumes the absence of the humane of humanity). A look at "Homage to Singer" and "Threatened City" shows that the difference between the humor of *Occupied City* and of *The First Book of Schmoll* is that in the latter the reader can recognize himself and laugh at himself, which he could not when "God was protecting the brothels." He also has found a synthesis between the romantic and the real or to put it differently, he is able to incorporate such images as "moon fountains" and "steel heaven steel helmet" without becoming sentimental or purposely trying to incorporate machine imagery like Leger,
When we read some fragments from van Ostaijen's theories, it turns out that this relativist viewpoint is exactly what van Ostaijen was striving after:

The poet is trouvère. Nothing else. Court-jester! Nice to think of the possibility, but too complicated after all (the costume): trouvère and --preferably evangelical--court chaplain. This from the viewpoint of poetry .... Trouvère! Ridiculous idea, these days? Perhaps. But theoretically indisputable. The poet is trouvère. It cannot be less than an axiom. And why not these days? Are there no cabarets and music halls? Main point: not to bore the public. Thus: Aesthetentum, literarisches Cabaret, usw.? The cabaret is in decay like the university, the church, the exchange, the brothel. How paradoxical it may sound to some: a poet is an aesthete. .... Art is a desperate attempt to fill the emptiness, to regain purity. The unconscious prospect of each artist is knowledge of the deficient, without hope of completion. Without this fundamental knowledge poetry is only: tristitia poet. Sweet de Musset, (From a letter about the typography of Occupied City)2

In considering the viewpoint of poet opposite audience: Moens [the poet whom the author is considering] says: "ethical calling." To which I answer: "a poet, like a magician, is an attraction feature." Moens still says: "The audience is not tired or where the poet speaks, the audience shouldn't be tired, or still, the poet shouldn't bother about the audience being tired." Rightly so. When it is announced: "No. 7, poet so-and-so will read poems," the audience yawns. That is impolite but understandable. Up to this poet so-and-so now to do his best and interest the audience. Not as the audience saw the other magicians do. But the good magician loves his trade; he wants to remove the discredit that it has. He finds new tricks --not the eternal chicken and the hat-- so that the public is interested and cries "How about that!" The magician poet bows and disappears .... The public comes in the music hall to be carried from the music hall into a different atmosphere .... This the magician knows: he acts like a sorcerer and meeting them in their desire, he carries the people into an imaginative atmosphere of the occult. The poet does not as if; he does. In the first place

2 IV, 105.
he surprises the people, then he abducts them. Poetry is eternal, but a poem grows from momentary tension: the desire to see things for the first time. The pleasant surprising of the audience. It has nothing to do with the pleasantly surprising. Rather could one say the contrary but it would be wrong to establish that as an absolute criterion. The toreador does not surprise the bull pleasantly; he keeps the bull busy. Main thing that the bull should not do: choke. (If so, the bullfighter of the party concerned finds different ways to keep the bull busy.) (From "Modernistic Poets")

***

Expressionism wants to eliminate all causality which is not rendered by the poem or painting itself. It wants only a pictorial causality for painting, a poetical one for poetry. ... [I distinguish] "Romantic expressionism" after the vibrating tone which dominates in it, and "organic expressionism" -- in twenty years one will perhaps be able to say classic expressionism -- after the in itself determining-determined function of the elements in the work of art of this direction. ... Campendonk says: "The romantic expressionists stop where the painting actually starts. [In a romantic-expressionist poem we find] sentences which merely confirm the feelings of the poet, ... the quantity of the feelings is increased by means of which the poet thinks to achieve a rise. ... The construction of the poem is the pathos itself, ... the sentences can be moved around. ... A poem of the organic-expressionist direction carries its own causality once the premises are defined. It develops itself out of itself; in this dynamic causal determination no piece can be moved around. ... Close as modern poetry is to the discovery of the possibilities of the most subjective sensations, it did not yet discover an arranging principle which accepts and dismisses. ... [Organic expressionism] tries to standardize the expression of the emotion. Plastic and literary syntax employ the basic rules. Romantic expressionism tries to word its emotions as broadly as possible in order to carry the elan from the field of emotion to the field of technique especially trying to maintain there the vibration of the elan. ... The romantic-expressionist optics are the same as those of impressionism, namely a grouping of experiences, heightened by the compositionally uniting pathos of the expression. The organic-expressionist optics are those of the first vision, of the first conscience of the outside world, of the first platonic remembrance. Consequently, more Gezelle than Whitman. ... From the point
of a priori theme, the romantic expressionists have more to say than the others. There is more narrative content .... The frequent use of an image ... is from a poetical viewpoint and in spite of the general pathetic emotion, ornamental. ... In organic-expressionist poetry ... all movements are equal, consequently in this poetry the images within one poem are not numerous and also there is a tendency to eliminate the image entirely. The frequent use of the image divides the poem into two levels, one of the compared and one of the comparing. It disturbs the rhythmic-organic coherence by the existence of these two levels which necessarily become dual values; also the autonomous growth of the poem out of the unconscious is disturbed by the constant appealing to the intellect. A series of images is in the development of the poem like an opening in a background with perspective. At first sight this replacement of the organic-expressionist poets, namely the association, does not seem too separate from the image. Enough however, to reach this main point: keep all parts of the poem at the same level. In the subconscious all experiences are equal to each other. From these experiences the poet chooses the ones which can be placed in the level of the poem around a poetical center, according to poetical development and with the thin tie of association. In contrast to the image the association does not make a difference between spiritual or technical values. (From "Test of Parallels between Modern Plastic Arts and Modern Poetry")

***

The most common rhetorician and the youngest college boy have more to say than I do. I only want my lyricism. Lyricism is a bacterium which up to now has been little studied. I want pure lyricism and a more esoterically determined poem. When I am told that the determinants of any good poem are esoterical, I will admit that the other party is right but I can save myself by pointing out that esoterics have become technique itself. Against the demonic lyricism nothing a priori compositional can hold its place. The lyrical bacterium is a glutton which eats everything it meets on its way. The logicality of a poem can only be measured by the logicality of the organic development between beginning and end. As the organs to the organism, the words are determining and self-determined. The poem has no subject, it is subject itself. Not the poet is important but the poem is. The I remains

4 Ibid., pp. 229-245.
the highest good, but not the I of the poet but the I of the poem. . . . Free verse is too free for me because I don't know what to do with the freedom. I am probably told that I feel myself, because it is clear enough that my verse is free verse. Excuse me, dear contradist, free verse has a continuable cadence; my verse, on the contrary, is instrumented. This continuable cadence of free verse does not allow words to develop independently into organs, it always runs on like a plover which has to watch the egg. And the poem is neither plover nor runner. Every now and then, the poem stops and turns back. The vers libre-ists never syncopate. In free verse words seldom have profundity and time is smooth and alike without interruption to "duree pure." A word in free verse has no independence, no aseity. Thus free verse never offers the highest possibility to sensitize the word. . . . For all things as there are: the goodness of the human being, purer life and vegetarianism, poverty of street girls as jumping-board of humanely feeling poets in triestitie-post condition, the Homeric battle with sentences between eight and ten in the evening, the humility and the pride, the attic or the Empire bed, all of these fail to move me. Neither does the cult of the car, the airplane, or what is called the confirmation of our roaring era. In short: all serious literature. Out with the priests and the other ministers, Out with the improvement of humanity but long live the improvement of the race horse breed. Because: Long Live Pegasus, under the name of Foxtrot II. (From "Directions for Use of Poetry.")

We find developed what we already had found in "Et Voila" namely the concept of the poet as a craftsman, now not as a carpenter but as a good magician who loves his trade, and the concept of the poem as existing in itself (aseity), now argued against the romantic poem which is denounced as being an accumulation of images without an arranging principle.

What is new is the idea that the poet is a sorcerer "who carries the people into an imaginative atmosphere of the occult" which experience is interesting to them because they

5 Ibid., pp. 321-323.
want to be "surprised" and they want "to see things for the first time." Unfortunately, van Gogh died before he could develop the latter view of the function of the poet.
Is frost

the brick rows break bright and sharp
roads rend

Shrill bells the bell
of the streetcar in dizzying space
high hoop
steel-heaven steel-helmet

Toward lucid spreadbanners tense step
boots beat the street to clamorous space

Is frost

bricks break sharp
boots beat lucid
bells bell shrilly
bright
bright
bright
dizzying space clamors

6 II, 160.

7 This line reads literally in Dutch: "Break bright and sharp the brick rows," which is as unusual in Dutch as it is in English; a literal translation into English would cause confusion however, because "break" in front of the sentence would make a request sentence, which clearly is not the case in Dutch because of the inflection of the verb; the run-on effect has been maintained in English by inverting the noun-verb sequence. The same problem recurs in line 12, where in Dutch the noun-verb sequence has been inverted, which again in English would make a request sentence; consequently line 11-13 all have been put in regular noun-verb sequence. In Dutch, lines 13-16 are as follows: "schellen de schellen schel/holder, holder, holder" in which the assonance of the "e" is obvious; this could only be transferred by the alliterating "b" in English.
Homage to Singer

Swinger

Singer

sewing-machine

Hear

Hear

Floris Jespers bought a sewing-machine

what

what

yes

Jespers Singer sewing-machine

what do you mean

yes

I'm telling you

Floris Jespers bought a Singer sewing-machine

why

howcome

what does he want

Yes

he will

what do you mean

Circules

because

SINGER'S SEWING-MACHINE IS THE BEST

the best

why

how's that

who says

everything is appearance

Singer and Saint Augustine

Genoveva of Brabant

also has a Singer

die Jungfrau von Orleans

A Singer?

yes

yes yes yes I'm telling you a Singer

don't you understand English Sir

Circulez

Bitte auf Garderobe selbst zu achten

I want a sewing-machine

everybody has a right to a sewing-machine

I want a Singer

everybody a Singer

Singer

singer

meistersinger

Hans Sachs

---

8 II, 168.
has Hans Sachs no Singer machine
Why does Hans Sachs have no Singer
Hans Sachs has a right to a Singer
Hans Sachs must have a Singer
Yes
that's his right
the right thing
Long Live Hans Sachs
Hans Sachs is right

he has a right to

SINGER'S SEWING-MACHINE IS THE BEST

all people are equal for 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

Why
how's that
what does he want
what will he do

Salvation Army
Bananas atque Panama:

the man's right
he's right

right he is yes
yes

why
who says so
where's the proof

yes he's right

Panem et Singerem  Panem et Singerem  PANEM ET SINGEREM
Singerem Singerem

SINGER'S SEWING-MACHINE IS THE BEST
A beautiful face has the newspaper ad
CREME LA NYMPHE
she would be very beautiful if
she had no freckles
what a pity when such a beautiful woman has freckles
spots
as in the case with this ad
sinuous hair
the arch of the eyebrows
and the sweet mouth
and the full cheeks
and the dimples
but as was said
what a pity about those freckles
nevertheless there is
CREME LA NYMPHE
head dispensary branch offices everywhere available
the what-a-pity can be removed
thanks to head dispensary and branch offices
are there no more freckles in the world
and you
most beautiful one with waved hair and tempting lips
you
who adorns the last page
of the latest news
I can love
because you thanks to the nymph-ointment
will be from now on
without freckles

or spots

9 ibid., p. 174
Berceuse brassee negre

The chimpanzee won't play
Why won't the chimpanzee play
the chimpanzee
is
sick of the sea
So much water goes into the sea
feels the chimpanzee

10 Ibid., p. 195.
Marc greets the things in the morning

Hello little fellow with the bike on the vase with the flower

hello chair and the table
hello bread on the table
hello fisherman-fish with the pipe
and
hello fisherman-fish with the cap
cap and pipe
of fisherman-fish
hello there

Hee-ello fish
hello dearest fish
hello little fishkin of mine

---

11 Ibid., p. 199.
Poem

And every new city
flower that withers
leaf yellow through Fall

are all cities that way
are they all that way
that way they're all

Everywhere
everywhere and nowhere
everywhere is nowhere
evrywhere

the same candy sad in glasses
sparkles drink there is no thirst

a tune is everywhere

of love and adultery

are all cities that way
are they all that way
that way they're all

---

12 Ibid., p. 200.
Very small music box

Amarillis
here is
in a soap bubble
Iris
hang the bubble
on a ring
and the ring
on your nose
Amarillis

Shake your head
and the light
plays in the bubble
with Iris
Shake too much
the bubble bursts
Amarillis

Where is
Iris
Iris was just here
Amarillis
on a ring
and the ring
on your nose

Nosy-nose
Amarillis

13 Ibid., p. 209.

14 In Dutch the word for "bubble" and "bell" is the same, "bel," for which there is unfortunately no equivalent in English.
Poem

Sun burns the rosary
sun burns the glass piece
Child watch out
here lie glass pieces

15 II, 222. In "Modernistic Poets" van Ostaïjen says the following: "With mere observations of phenomena which are put next to each other, the possibility exists, seemingly with the least effort and because of the poet appearing to step over the subjective, to pronounce the subjective (the knowledge for the phenomenality of things) through the subtlety of the interval: 'sun burns the rosary, sun burns the glass piece/child, watch out, here lie glass pieces.'"
Because for grown-ups

When chance has the sandman come once more
--but he'll come no more--
we'll go to sleep and dream
of a dream
that was not dreamt

Oh all those well do sleep
who know their door is bolted

16 Ibid., p. 235.
Evening sounds

There must be hoofs behind the edge
of the blue fields along the moon
in the evening you hear on distant stone roads
horse hoofs
then you hear all silent delusion
from distant moon fountains drips sudden water
--you hear the sudden dripping
of evening water--
the horses drink hastily
and whinny
then one hears again their trotting stableward

17 Ibid., p. 238.
The old man

An old man in the street
his small story to the old woman
it is nothing it sounds like a thin tragedy
his voice is white
like a knife that so long was whetted
till the steel was thin
Like an object outside him hangs this voice
over the long black coat
The old meager man in his black coat
seems a black plant
You see this stasps the fear through your mouth
the first taste of an anaesthetic

18 Ibid., p. 244.

19 The word "stasps" is a neologism resulting from the words "stiff" and "gasp"; the Dutch word is a neologism probably resulting from "verstokt" (stiff) and "snikken" (gasp).
SUMMARY

This paper has tried to provide both an introduction and a perspective to the poetry of Paul van Oostaijen. After a biography which showed what different "cenacles" van Oostaijen had been in touch with, a survey was made of four periods of his life, each marked by different collections of poems, the last of which showed that the poet had found a synthesis which enabled him to use his humor and a varied imagery including both the romantic and the real. If we can make a generalization and say that the problem of the twentieth century is that of finding tangibles in order to establish any of the angular points of the triangle "You-I-the Word" van Oostaijen was one of the first who was aware of it, who discussed it from an artistic viewpoint and who was able to come up with an answer of his own. In his concept of "thoroughbred" poetry we may be able to trace influences from expressionism or from Mallarme, but his poetry reflects an amalgamation of both sound and image which is his own. What is most important, however, is that his concept of poetry led him to objectify his experiences in such a fashion that he was able to establish symbols which carry a truth within themselves.
LIST OF WORKS CITED


Gezelle, G. *Als de Ziele Luistert*. Amsterdam, 1944.


