

Satirical burlesque stories

# Grotesques

PAUL VAN OSTAIJEN

‘Novellas that attempt to make a fool of people,’ is how Paul van Ostaijen once described his grotesques. In these astonishing texts full of absurd blow-ups, he lashed out against the wrongs of his time, mercilessly unsettling all logic.

The city and eroticism are the primary themes in these grotesques. Like in the infamous story, ‘Ika Loch’s Brothel’ (Het bordeel van Ika Loch), in which a madame rules her clients with an iron hand. Or in ‘The City of Builders’ (De stad der opbouwers), where the inhabitants of Creixcrol fill their city with so many buildings that an inhabitant who ventures to demolish something cannot be executed because there is no room left for a scaffold. The pieces are hilarious, but always highly critical of society and its unbridled progress.

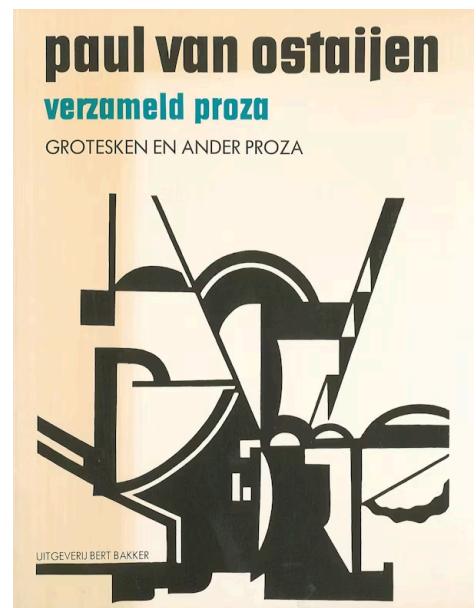
## Very well worth discovering

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Van Ostaijen’s grotesques try to drastically derail everything that seems familiar, obvious or logical. The image created is of human activity in which arbitrariness and unreason hold sway. They show us that the concept of freedom is little more than an *idée fixe*. Van Ostaijen had a stylistically very pure, niggling pen and a highly-developed sense of humour, which is remarkably dry and as such has effortlessly stood the test of time.

Every avant-garde movement since the interwar years has drawn inspiration from Van Ostaijen’s work, and yet at the same time he has developed into the most enduringly popular modern Flemish poet

GEERT BUELENS



## AUTHOR



**Paul van Ostaijen** (1896-1928) touched on an immense variety of literary genres, which he imbued with the impetus of the new. He was a great innovator and experimenter in the Dutch language, not only representing the contemporary trends of modern poetry, such as French cubism and German expressionism, but also contributing to the development of these schools through his work. This lyric poet and intrepid form experimenter also engaged in theatrical criticism, pondered art and politics and was a poignant essayist.

**ORIGINAL TITLE** Grotesken (1926-1932)

**RIGHTS SOLD** English (Ika Loch's Brothel / The University of Massachusetts Press), German (Suhrkamp), Spanish (Ediciones del Ermitaño), Norwegian (Den norske Bokklubben), Portuguese (Desarrumo), Arabic (Sefsafa), French (Samsa), Amharic (Hohe)

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