

# Posturing on the Threshold: Author Pictures on Front Covers

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## ABSTRACT

Author photographs on book covers are fascinating material for an examination of the self-fashioning of authors. Until now such photographs have received little theoretical attention or systematic analysis. In this essay, they are approached as paratexts in which the author actively constructs a posture and, at the same time, stages a complex interaction with the content of the book. Some concrete examples from Dutch book covers are analysed. The essay ends with a number of suggestions for further research.

## Introduction and theoretical background

This article focuses on author photographs on book covers and analyses their impact on literary communication. In spite of the ubiquitous presence of author pictures on book covers and book jackets, they have received little theoretical attention or systematic analysis<sup>2</sup>. This neglect seems to be due to two factors that reinforce each other. Such photographs are not part of the literary text or message itself. They seem to have

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1. This article was made possible in the context of a research project financed by the NOW (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research).

2. One of the few Dutch exceptions is Kuitert ('The Author's Image' and 'Reading the Body'). See also Rabb's anthology.

another, extra-literary function – for instance, the construction of the author's image as a brand name to be attached to the publishing houses' merchandise<sup>3</sup>. As such, they are useful tools for a successful marketing of the text, and they may be valuable material for scholars interested in the functioning of the cultural industry, especially for those interested in the literary communication process. Moreover, the fact that these photographs point rather emphatically to an author poses a problem in itself because the concept of the author is a rather confused and contested one in literary theory. Whereas the history of modern literature, and modern art in general, has been greatly influenced by the (romantic) notions of genius, subjectivity and authenticity, all of which refer more or less directly to the entity of an author, dominant literary theories have had a hard time foregrounding the author.

Twentieth-century literary theory has not been 'author friendly' on the whole. The author is far from being a key player in, for instance, Russian formalism, Czech structuralism, New Criticism, French structuralism, or intertextual, deconstructive, sociological and institutional approaches to literature. However, this tradition of 'author phobia' or even 'author hostility' is now a thing of the past: today the author is back<sup>4</sup>. And there are all kinds of reasons for this remarkable comeback. Despite 'high' theoretical scepticism, the common reader of literature has always viewed the author as an important point of reference in his reading experience. It is 'a common practice to read literary texts (not exclusively, but also) in regard to their author. Books are also bought and read because one has a certain image of their author, because one thinks he writes in an interesting, entertaining or sophisticated way' (Heinen 334)<sup>5</sup>. Klaus Weimar describes the search for authors' intention as 'an uncontrollable compulsive action' (quoted in Jannidis 125)<sup>6</sup>. We would argue that a theory that stubbornly refuses to account for these basic facts of literary communication is in danger of losing its legitimacy<sup>7</sup>.

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3. See Benedetti 76.

4. For examples of critical studies that emphasise the importance of authors, see, for instance, Biriotta & Miller; Burke; Jannidis, Lauer, Martinez & Winko; Heinich; Irwin; Benedetti; Bennett; Ascoli; and Dorleijn, Grüttemeier & Korthals Altes.

5. '[E]ine gängige Praxis [...] literarische Texte (nicht nur aber auch) im Hinblick auf ihren Autor zu lesen. Bücher werden u.a. gekauft oder gelesen, weil man ein bestimmtes Bild von ihrem Autor hat, weil man glaubt, er schreibe interessant, unterhaltend oder raffiniert'. All translations from Dutch are by the authors.

6. '[E]ine unbeherrschbare Zwangshandlung'.

7. In an interesting essay on authorial photographs, Wilhelm Genazino points to this discrepancy between the common reader and the expert: 'All of us, who read novels,

Carla Benedetti claims that this common practice is perhaps a form of outdated *naïveté*, but it is also based on sound logic. Elaborating on Michel Foucault's seminal essay 'What Is an Author?', she argues that an inextricable link exists between the modernity of modern literature and the notion of author. The rise of modern literature has gone hand in hand with the decline of the classical genre system. In the genre system, 'objective' marks, intrinsic to the object, signal its status as art. Benedetti argues that this system has broken down in modernity, and now we can only call upon the supposed authorial intention at the core of the work's origin to determine what art is and what it is not. There is no such thing as a work of art in and of itself. Artistic communication involves the supposition that there is an artist who makes a meaningful selection from artistic possibilities, which might provide sense and value to what we are reading or viewing: '[s]o if the contemporary author persists, it is not simply because the publishing industry or the art market prevents him from disappearing, but because his function is required by the very modalities of artistic valorization' (Benedetti 11).

In another interesting contribution to this debate, Sandra Heinen takes the concept of the implicit author as her point of departure<sup>8</sup>. She conceptualises it as a construction by the reader, who integrates textual, but also paratextual and contextual elements. Heinen's image of the author is not an immanent textual phenomenon, unlike Booth's implied author. Neither is it an image that only fits a particular literary text, as it may very well encompass different works by the same author:

Out of all this information of textual, paratextual and contextual origin there may arise an image of the author in the reader. All additional information in the form of subsequent literary works or non-fictional

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stories and poems and more or less love some of these texts, we all know that the biographical approach to literary works under experts counts as bigoted, even uncivilized. Everybody, who wants to "understand" or even "explain" a novel by discovering or constructing links between the text and the biography of the writer, has proved to be an amateur in circles of his confreres' ('Wir alle, die wir Romane, Erzählungen und Gedichte lesen und einige von diesen Texten mehr oder weniger lieben, wir alle wissen, daß der biografischen Zugang zu Werken der Literatur unter Kennern als banausisch, ja unfein gilt. Jeder, der einen Roman ,verstehen' oder gar ,erklären' will, indem er Bezüge zwischen dem Textgeschehen und der Biografie des Verfassers entdeckt oder gar herstellt, hat sich in Kreisen der Zunft als Amateur ausgewiesen') (Genazino 7).

8. For an overview of the discussion on the notion of implied author, see Kindt.

details about the author will be integrated into the image: if this doesn't fit, the image has to be revised thoroughly'. (Heinen 337)

Susan Sniader Lanser has also pointed to the great influence that paratextual information has on the construction of the image of the author. She subsumes this paratextual information under the concept of the 'extrafictional voice' (128), to which she ascribes a special authority superordinating other textual instances. Though this assessment may be hard to prove empirically, it certainly provides us with an incentive to take authorial photographs – as part of this extratextual voice – somewhat more seriously than has hitherto been the case.

Heinen situates the process of 'Autorbildkonstruktion' (construction of the authorial image) firmly on the side of the reader. However, she adds that this does not, of course, imply that the author is condemned to a passive role. The author has ample opportunities for participation and self-fashioning at his disposal: '[h]e can make use of all forms of publicity, of paratexts and [...] fictional texts to direct the perception of his person and his role as author'<sup>10</sup> (338). In line with Benedetti's argument, she concludes that since the eighteenth century there has been a complex interaction between self-fashioning by authors and author constructions by readers<sup>11</sup>.

### 'Paratext', 'ethos' and 'posture'

Judging from all these reflections, we may conclude that an understanding of the cultural dynamics of modern literature requires one to pay attention to the images of literary authors that circulate in the literary field. However, it is rather odd that recent scholarship has understood the 'image of the author' primarily in a figurative way. In our mediatised and visual culture, more literal images – namely photographs of authors – are actually of greater importance.

Before we present a number of concrete analyses of such photographs on Dutch book covers, it is necessary to elaborate on two concepts that

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9. 'Aus all diesen Informationen textuellen, paratextuellen und kontextuellen Ursprungs kann in der Vorstellung des Lesers ein Bild des Autors entstehen. Jede zusätzliche Informationen in Form weiterer literarischen Werke oder nichtfiktionaler Auskünfte über den Autor wird in diesen Bild integriert; gelingt dies nicht, muss es zu einer Grundlegenden Revision des Bildes kommen'.

10. 'Er kann sich jeder Form von Öffentlichkeit, des Paratextes und [...] des fiktionalen Textes bedienen, um die Wahrnehmung seiner Person und seiner Rolle als Autor zu lenken'.

11. See Heinrich, *Être artiste*, for a similar position on the artistic field in general.

seem directly relevant to the analysis of authorial photographs. The first is Gérard Genette's concept of 'paratext'. The second is Stephen Greenblatt's notion of self-fashioning, which in recent years has been reframed by authors such as Dominique Maingueneau and Ruth Amossy, who connect self-fashioning to the notion of ethos from classical rhetoric. Jérôme Meizoz has integrated ethos into the concept of 'posture'. Posture includes both the author's public presentation (his behaviour, clothes and looks, for example) and the textual self-image offered by the enunciator (see Meizoz, 'Modern Posterities' 85).

The concept of paratext is of fundamental importance to our analysis. It encompasses all textual or visual elements that are not part of the main text: for example, the title, the name of the publishing house and the foreword. Genette says that the paratext 'provides an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much respiratory difficulty' (408) from the world outside the book – that is the world of the reader – to the world inside the book – the world of the author. According to Genette, the text is a rather immutable entity that is incapable of adapting to changes in space and over time. The paratext, on the other hand, is flexible and versatile, and is as such capable of adapting the world of the reader to the world of the text. As Philippe Lejeune suggests, the paratext is 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text' (as quoted by Genette 2). The paratext is 'a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)' (2).

The first observation we can make is that the description of the function of the paratext is framed by Genette in a plainly rhetorical terminology: the paratext has a persuasive function. Furthermore, it is clear that in the case of the photograph of an author, as an integral part of the paratext, the rhetoric of the image, so to say, will also play a role in this more 'pertinent reading' to which Genette alludes. Thus, through the author picture, the author and his allies attempt to put readers in a certain frame of mind, which will allow them to better appreciate the text.

Here Genette's distinction between epitext and peritext also becomes important. The peritext contains all paratextual elements that are part of the physical object which is the book. The epitext, on the other hand, encompasses paratextual elements that are not materially appended to the text within the same volume but are freely circulating, as it were, in a virtually limitless cultural space. The location of the epitext is therefore

anywhere outside the book, but of course nothing precludes its later admission to the peritext. Authorial photographs on the cover – as peritext, that is – may very well have been photographs that have been circulating in the epitext. However, one of the important differences between peritext and epitext is that the peritext is controlled by ‘the author and its allies’, whereas in the epitext this control is at best much more diffuse. More often than not, much epitextual material seems to be totally beyond the influence of the author. You may even say that by placing a photograph peritextually, authors recapture authority over their images, and try to tune their images to an apparently preferred reading of the text. But what exactly is the contribution of these photos to the interpretation of the text? Of course, one has to examine individual cases to answer that question, but in general one could presume that the importance of this photographic peritextual material resides in its contribution to the creation of a certain ethos of the author.

In rhetorical theory, ethos is the character of the speaker that gives credibility to his words. In classical rhetorical theory, there are two basic conceptions of ethos. The first one dates back to Isocrates and states that ethos is directly linked to the real moral character or civilian status of the person speaking: the speaker’s reputation gives credibility to his or her words. The second one dates back to Aristotle and conceives ethos not as something outside the text, but as an image of the self that is created in the text. Modern scholars of pragmatics, such as Amossy and Maingueneau, preserve the classical ambivalence in the concept of ethos in that they make a distinction between a pre-discursive ethos (‘reputation’), a non-discursive ethos and a discursive ethos.

Jérôme Meizoz has introduced the notion of posture, that is to say ‘the writer’s presentation of his or her person, both in the management of discourse and in his public literary conduct’<sup>12</sup> (*Fabrique* 82). To clarify the relation between ethos and posture, Meizoz suggests restricting the notion of ethos to the discursive level: it is the image of the enunciator of a particular text. Posture is more encompassing:

Posture is not solely an authorial construction, or pure textual emanation, or simple inference by a reader. It arises from an *interactive* process: it is co-constructed, both within the text and outside of it, by the writer, the various mediators through whom we read it (journalists, critics, biographers, etc.) and the publics. [...] It can be spotted in the periphery of the text, from the peritext (book presentation, author’s biography, photo)

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12. ‘[L]a présentation de soi d’un écrivain, tant dans sa gestion du discours que dans ses conduites littéraires publiques’.

to the epitext (interviews with the author, letters to other writers, literary journal). Posture indeed forges itself in the interaction between the author, his or her mediators and their publics, anticipating or reacting to their judgements<sup>13</sup>. (*Fabrique* 83)

A consequence of this distinction between ethos and posture is that ethos, as we have already noted, is restricted to a particular text: different texts by the same author may express a different ethos<sup>14</sup>. Posture, on the other hand, refers to the 'overall' image of the writer developing in the course of the publication of subsequent works under his name.

These considerations bring us back to the status of photographs on book covers. As peritext, they have an in-between status: they are at the same time part and not part of the text, and as a consequence they also have an in-between status between ethos and posture, and partake in both.

In this context, Maingueneau makes an interesting suggestion. He describes ethos as the bodily *garant* (grounding) of the text. For Maingueneau, the tone and intonation of the text more or less constitute the speaker's bodily expression. Elaborating on that, a photograph can be considered as the direct representation (and proof) of the bodily existence of the author, author here meaning both *énonciateur* and *écrivain* (to use Maingueneau's own distinction). This would imply that a photo functions as a solid *garant* of both ethos and posture, in that way connecting the text to the *œuvre*. This does not mean of course that such a presentation is unmediated; on the contrary, this grounding, this functioning as *garant* of the text alludes to all kinds of stereotypes that circulate in our culture. In the following section, we will focus on some concrete examples of Dutch author photography, which we will analyse with the conceptual tools that we have explained above.

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13. 'Une posture n'est pas seulement une construction auctoriale, ni une pure émanation du texte, ni une simple inférence d'un lecteur. Elle relève d'un processus *interactif*: elle est co-construite, à la fois dans le texte et hors de lui, par l'écrivain, les divers médiateurs qui la donnent à lire (journalistes, critiques, biographes, etc.) et les publics. [...] On la suivra dans toute la périphérie du texte, du péri-texte (présentation du livre, notice biographique, photo) à l'épi-texte (entretiens avec l'auteur, lettres à d'autres écrivains, journal littéraire). La posture se forge ainsi dans l'interaction de l'auteur avec ses médiateurs et les publics, anticipant ou réagissant à leur jugement'. Translation into English by the authors.

14. A serious terminological problem with Meizoz's strictly discursive interpretation of ethos (apparently with the endorsement of Maingueneau) is that it revives the text-immanent reading of the implied author, which was criticised by Heinen (see above). Maingueneau, though, as we have seen, uses notions such as pre- and non-discursive ethos.

## Front cover author pictures

### *Dutch author pictures from the sixties onwards*

In the Netherlands, the development of author photography started in the sixties. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, author pictures still had an epitextual character: they were usually distributed outside the book covers. This changed with the rise of the paperback. In 1959 the literary publishing house De Bezige Bij launched the first paperback series in the Netherlands, the so-called Literaire Reuzenpockets (Giant Literary Pockets). These books proved to be a great success, especially because the Dutch post-war youth were able to afford them. In fact, the paperback started a revolution in Dutch book culture. Apart from a rise in sales, the new book format also spurred new developments in book design (see Anbeek 752-55). Most of these paperbacks had large author pictures on the back cover. An interesting innovation in this context was the introduction of author pictures on the *front* of books. It seems no coincidence that this new 'frontal' way of portraying authors originated in the era of pop music. The majority of record sleeves depicted band members, and portraying a writer on the front cover of books made him look like a pop star (however, women were seldom portrayed in this way). Thus, this trend seems to indicate that the ethos of Dutch literary authors changed in the sixties: they became part of celebrity culture whereas in previous decades they had primarily been seen as participants in the intellectual field<sup>15</sup>.

Jan Cremer's debut novel *Ik Jan Cremer* (*I, Jan Cremer*, Literaire Reuzenpockets, 1964) was one of the first Dutch books with such a front cover picture, granting its young author instant star status. The cover portrayed him, dressed in grubby jeans, on an impressive motorbike which seems to come out of the book and directly confront the reader (Figure 1). The writer does not present himself here as the classical, reflexive, pipe-smoking intellectual. On the contrary, he looks like a free, defiant rascal. The reader quite literally has to pass this provocative posture to enter the book. And if he dares, he will encounter what the cover had already promised him: a roller coaster of scabrous adventures. All new editions of this 'onverbiddelijke bestseller' ('unrelenting bestseller', which was already stated on the cover of the very first edition) maintained the same layout, turning it into an iconic image (see Franssen 99).

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15. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see especially Franssen, 'Literary Celebrity'.





FIGURE 1: Photo Jan Cremer: Wim van der Linden; cover design: Jan Cremer<sup>16</sup>.

Two aspects of this book design are typical of the ‘genre’ of the author picture on the front cover. Firstly, it creates a direct and very explicit link between the author figure and the content of the novel: the name of the author, the pronoun ‘I’ and the author’s picture are used together. This urges the reader to identify the I-protagonist in the novel with the author. One could say that the picture is part of an ‘autobiographical pact’ (Lejeune) between the reader and the writer. Secondly, the author’s physical appearance is clearly represented, which makes the author’s picture function as a solid *garant* of the text. We will demonstrate these two aspects in greater detail in our analysis of the next examples.

16. The authors make no claim to copyright on any of the images presented in this article, and have made every effort to contact the copyright holders. All rights remain with the copyright holders.

### *The author as a fictional character*

A few years after Cremer's book, Gerard Reve chose a remarkable portrait to accompany his autobiographical epistolary novel *Nader tot u* (*Nearer to Thee*, 1966, reprinted 1969). The front cover contains neither a title nor an author's name, only a 'full-screen' picture of the writer himself. We see Reve holding a quill pen as if he were writing on a piece of paper which is laid upon a book (Figure 2). The author looks up pensively toward the spectator. It is clear that this picture is not a 'spontaneous' snapshot, but a meticulously stylised composition. The room is packed with objects which represent the themes of Reve's *œuvre* at that point in time<sup>17</sup>. These are, for example, objects with a Roman Catholic connotation, such as a small statue of Mary, candles, a devotional picture and an antique tile with the text 'Ave Maria'.

Reve had publicly converted to Christianity in 1966 and was developing a peculiar, eclectic worldview in which homoerotic feelings were combined with religious beliefs. Although the picture contains several non-religious elements as well, it may remind the spectator of a Catholic altar. Alongside these religious objects are items that refer to Reve's play with nostalgia and vanity. In the sixties, he did not condone the optimistic left-wing flower power movement in the Netherlands but cultivated a pessimistic, old-fashioned artistic way of life. The many liquor bottles around the room point to this. The sheet music in the upper right-hand corner, the violin (with a snapped string) on the floor and the sabre breathe a nostalgic and dusty atmosphere. We can also detect a more diffuse group of sentimental objects: several teddy bears and bouquets, none of them really 'masculine' objects. Finally, Reve's earlier epistolary novel *Op weg naar het einde* (*Approaching the End*, 1963) is also in the picture, as a piece of self-promotion.

How are we to interpret this picture? Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the picture designates *Nader tot u* as an explicitly autobiographical book. Secondly, the photographed objects are closely related to Reve's worldview and his choice of subjects. We would like to suggest that the cover is not so much an entrance into the book as it is a show-box, a direct view on its content and themes. It immerses the reader instantly into the world inside the book.

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17. For a recent study of Reve and his 'self-fashioning', see Praat.



FIGURE 2: Photo Gerard Reve: Eddy Posthuma de Boer.

The photo has even more connotations as it also refers to a junk shop. It seems as if Reve was showing his merchandise to his readers, hence the display of his previous novel. This market-oriented attitude fits the novel itself, in which Reve presents himself as a hard-working author of the common people, a small businessman so to speak, who breaks the taboo of commercial authorship. A quote from the novel may illustrate this:

The only thing [...] people in Holland will never forgive you for, is: earning enough money to make a living. The word 'hack' [broodschrijver] that people have invented for someone who succeeds in this way, is used in an unfavourable sense, which I do not understand, for it seems very respectable to me to support oneself by one's artistry. I write for Money, as I have said a few times before, because lots of things need to be paid for and you don't get anything for nothing; and I don't write for the benefit of

humankind, which does not mean that I lack a standard for quality and honest workmanship, or that I want to cause the people trouble and sorry at all costs, to the contrary [...]'<sup>18</sup>. (Reve 28)

In the same year as Reve's reprint of *Nader tot u* (1969), Remco Campert published a collection of stories entitled *Hoe ik mijn verjaardag vierde* (*How I Celebrated My Birthday*). We see on the cover the author on a chair, surrounded by young scantily clad women, who embrace him lightly (Figure 3). The picture has a somewhat comic effect on the modern reader, probably because of Campert's out-dated clothes and sunglasses, and also because of the satisfied smile on his face.

Again, the combination of the picture and the pronoun 'I' suggests that the book will be partly autobiographical. However, the reader who reads the title story will soon discover that the protagonist is not called Remco Campert but Donald Bergner (see Campert 172). This tragic story about an art dealer who has few friends and family members to celebrate his birthday with, does not seem to be autobiographical at all, and even the connection between the story and the picture is rather loose. The story tells the reader about a plan to photograph a painter who is to exhibit his work in Donald's gallery, surrounded by five naked women. Yet the girls only want to pose naked if they receive a hundred guilders more, which makes Donald and his partner decide to have them pose with hardly anything on (see Campert 174-75). Whereas the 'I' in the title of the story clearly refers to Donald Bergner, Remco Campert identifies himself with the painter in the story. So there *is* a connection between the title, the story and the picture, but it is an ambiguous one.

One could say that with this book Campert simultaneously positions himself in contemporary literary discussions and in celebrity culture. In some respects, *Hoe ik mijn verjaardag vierde* fits into the postmodern, metafictional literary tradition that emerged in the Netherlands in the late sixties.

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18. 'Het enige [...] wat ze je in Nederland nooit zullen vergeven, dat is: genoeg geld verdienen met schrijven om ervan te kunnen bestaan. Het woord "broodschrijver" dat men voor iemand aan wie dat lukt, heeft bedacht, is ongunstig bedoeld, wat ik niet begrijp, want het lijkt me heel eerzaam om doormiddel van je kunstenaarschap in je onderhoud te kunnen voorzien. Ik schrijf voor Geld, zoals ik al enige malen eerder te kennen heb gegeven, want er moet van alles worden betaald en voor niks gaat de zon op, en niet tot het heil der mensheid, wat weer niet wil zeggen, dat ik geen maatstaven van kwaliteit en eerlijk vakmanschap aanleg, en evenmin, dat ik de mensen met alle geweld met mijn teksten narigheid en verdriet wil bezorgen, integendeel [...]'.



FIGURE 3: Photo Remco Campert: Philip Mechanicus; cover design: Philip Renard.

The stories constantly play with fictional selves, authenticity and ‘reality loss’ in media culture. The opening story, for instance, at first seems to be a sentimental confession about Campert’s own authorship, but after a few pages the reader discovers that the person speaking is a certain Conrad Hessen, who is interviewed for a television show. The television host does not seem to be interested in Hessen’s words at all. He is only concerned with the fluency and the length of Hessen’s story. By posing as one of the characters in the title story, Campert participates in this play with identities. On the other hand, the front cover picture seems to be an ironic reference to the cover of Jimi Hendrix’s *Electric Ladyland* (1968), which depicts several naked women sitting or lying on the floor, some holding

record albums by Hendrix<sup>19</sup>. Campert turns the picture on the cover of *Hoe ik mijn verjaardag vierde* into a modest, somewhat nerdy version of this spectacular sleeve cover. He portrays himself as a celebrity who does not even have the opportunity or the money to make his models undress.

A more recent book cover stages another fascinating clash between the author figure and the content of the book: the cover of *Allah weet het beter* (*Allah Knows Better*, 2003), the final book of the filmmaker and writer Theo van Gogh. Whereas Reve, Cremer and Campert play a version of themselves in their pictures, Van Gogh clearly assumes the role of a character. Moreover, he chooses precisely the role of the character he fiercely attacks: the orthodox Muslim. In *Allah weet het beter*, he mocks Muslims, calling them 'backward goat fuckers'. At the same time, he also attacks the tolerant, left-wing intellectuals who naively defend multicultural society. In the cover picture he is wearing a keffiyeh (a Palestinian shawl) and has an exaggeratedly fanatical gaze in his eyes which clearly refers to the stereotypes of the 'Arabic terrorist' (Figure 4). This connotation is further emphasised by the Arabic-like font that is used on the cover. But the fact that it is the author himself who is posturing as precisely what he loathes and criticises gives a playful satirical twist to his posture. The reader should not expect a detached and neutral analysis of the Muslim problem and left-wing tolerance.

However, there is another layer of signification implied in this posture. An important subtext to this picture is that in the 1990s, Van Gogh was sued for libel because of his allegedly anti-Semitic utterances, and finally acquitted. In the Dutch media, he received the nickname 'eternal anti-Semite' (Gans 84). By posing on the book cover as a fanatical Muslim, he simultaneously embraced a stereotypically anti-Jewish identity while satirising Islam and perhaps – most interestingly – his very own fanaticism. So, the photo as peritext starts to function in a complex web of texts, epitexts and contexts.

All in all, the posture this engenders is difficult to pin down ideologically: Van Gogh consciously transgresses the limits of good taste and political correctness, not, so it seems, with the aim to reach a political result, but only to play the role of the provocative jester.

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19. The cover was not used for the American edition of the album, but for the British one, published by Polydor in October 1968. In a 2011 campaign to promote a reissue of Campert's novel *Het leven is vurrukkulluk* (*Life Is Wonderful*, 1961), the Dutch advertising agency Kesselskramer used a photo that re-enacts Hendrix's photo of naked women.

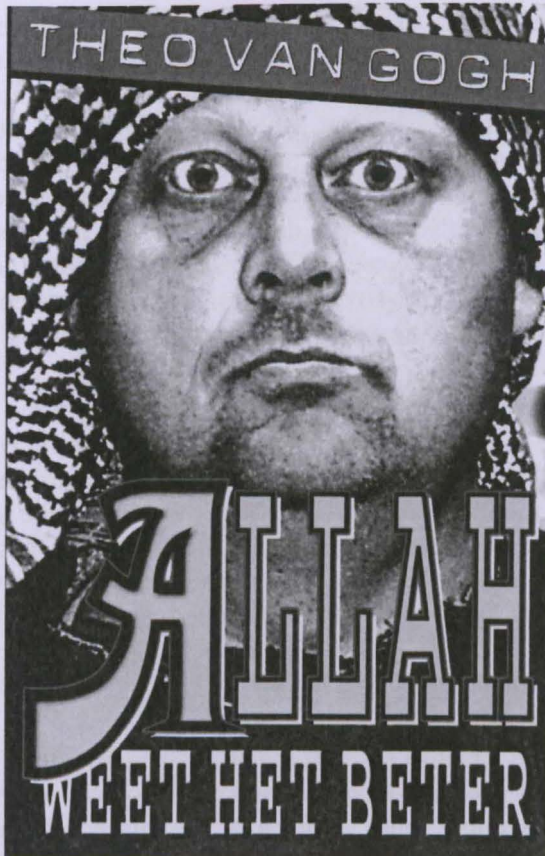


FIGURE 4: Photo Theo van Gogh: Ger van Wulften; cover design: Ger van Wulften.

Tragically, the image he sought to project (in which self-irony is welded to a zealous critique of highly sensitive ideological issues) was misinterpreted in a gruesome way: he was murdered by the radical Muslim Mohammed Bouyeri in November 2004<sup>20</sup>.

### *The author's naked body*

As mentioned above, an author picture on the front cover gives the reader a 'direct' representation of the author's bodily existence. One of the

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20. The murder was not directly motivated by Van Gogh's writing but was an indirect revenge on Hirshi Ali, with whom he had made the controversial movie *Submission*, an attack against the misogyny of the Koran (see Buruma 141-85).

most fascinating Dutch examples in this respect is the cover of one of Jan Wolkers's books, dating from 1971. Wolkers is an important Dutch writer who attracted a large audience with his wild and uncompromising novels. He stayed on the small island of Rottumerplaat near the Dutch coast for a week. At the time he was the only human being on the six square-kilometre deserted island. In a daily radio show, he reported live about his experiences and he also wrote a diary which was published in the same year under the title *Groeten van Rottumerplaat* (*Greetings from Rottumerplaat*). The book cover was designed like a stereotypical holiday postcard, with five pictures on it taken by Wolkers during his stay on the island.

The most eye-catching aspect of this cover is that the author is stark naked (Figure 5). Wolkers describes in his diary how he was nude during a large part of his stay: a man in his natural state. He argues that there was nobody who might have been disturbed by this. At the same time, this picture can be considered a confident action by an author fashioning himself as a masculine writer. He imagines how somebody would perceive him on his island: 'as rather tanned and hairy, with the legs of a Greek runner and the torso of a Roman emperor'<sup>21</sup> (Wolkers 25). He not only poses as a proud and unabashed male, but also as a completely genuine human being.

This posture of sincerity has been a standard merit in the literary world, at least since Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Wolkers presents his honesty in the most explicit sense. Ironically, he placed a plaster figure of Beethoven above his head, stuck to his self-made door near the beach. Beethoven seems to be the representative of high culture here. In the text, Wolkers muses whether Beethoven was homosexual. When we consider that the text also explicitly refers to Robinson Crusoe, it seems that the writer poses as a rugged settler who is perfectly able to cope with the rough natural environment, while planting the first seeds of high culture (thereby introducing an element of sexual ambiguity). But there can be no misunderstanding of Wolkers's own preferences.

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21. 'vrij bruin, nogal harig, met de benen van een griekse hardloper en de romp van een romeinse imperator'.





FIGURE 5: Photo Jan Wolkers: Jan Wolkers; cover design: Jan Vermeulen.

On the back cover of the same book, the author poses again, dressed in a simple green undershirt. He proudly embraces a naked, voluptuous woman: his wife Karina (Figure 6).

These pictures can be interpreted as attempts by the author to position himself in the Dutch literary field. From the mid-sixties onwards, Dutch society quite rapidly changed into a sexually liberal country. But in 1971 not all citizens shared this liberal attitude<sup>22</sup>. By posing naked on his book cover, Wolkers defined the cultural subgroup in which his literature should be situated: that of left-wing, progressive readers.

22. One critic mentions that Wolkers suggested gluing a sticker in the form of a striped pair of Bermuda shorts on the picture with the text 'peel slowly' (De Winter). Wolkers's suggestion is presumably a nod in the direction of the sleeve cover of The Velvet Underground's debut album, *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1967), with Andy Warhol's legendary design: a banana, with the text '[p]eel slowly and see'.



Toen de langs de ontelbare kust van het  
zeeland naar de Noorderkust lag ik  
het het water op een vreemde manier  
in beweging was. Het kolkte en ver-  
pelde en John's draak aan en ik wou van  
dijk water over het oppervlak. En toen  
gebrade het mees de zinnen die  
frentallen tegelyk boven het water met  
late vloerplanken gepen. Ik dacht  
evene want het water geen de vele zinnen  
horen dat zoute water niet. Het dank wil of  
te voor een snovane angst, gesweven naar de-  
ment wilder ontvulchten. Wild en onbezwikt.

FIGURE 6: Photo Jan Wolkers: Jan Wolkers; cover design: Jan Vermeulen.

Although nude portraits of Dutch authors are still rare, there are other significant examples. One particularly interesting example is the back cover of a collection of poems published by Ilya Leonard Pfeijffer, a controversial poet and novelist. The title is *De man van vele manieren* (*The Man of Many Manners*, 2008). The back cover portrays a nude. Again, as was the case with Wolkers, the cover offers a combination of frankness and cultivation. However, the difference could hardly be greater. Pfeijffer, the naked author, is hardly blessed with the torso of a Roman gladiator. He is situated in a rather musty study and his pose is apparently offhand and not in the least imposing. He is sitting on a couch, with his bookcase behind him; next to him are a packet of Drum tobacco, a mobile phone or iPod and a Macbook. This photo emphasises that Pfeijffer has just undressed for this picture: his boots lie next to the couch (Figure 7).

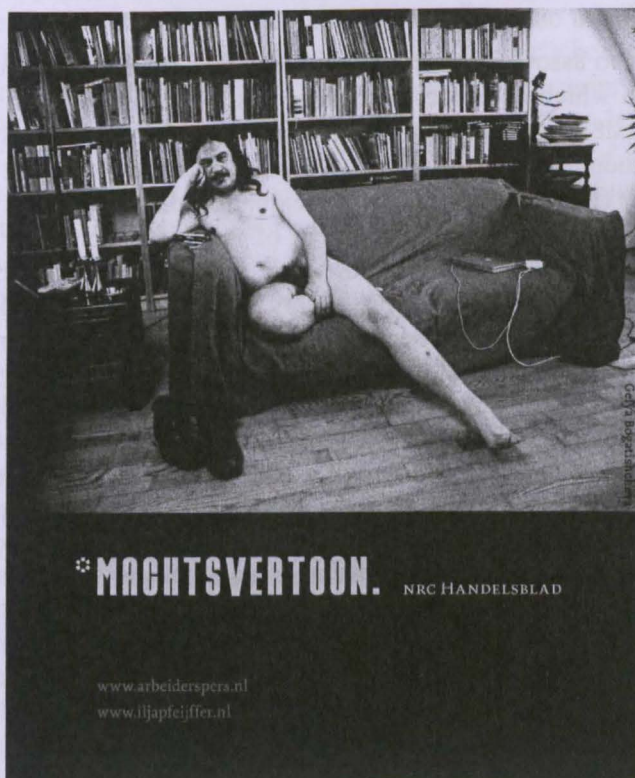


FIGURE 7: Photo Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer: Gelya Bogatishcheva; cover design: Suzan Beijer.

This is far more ironic than the photo of Wolkers. It is part of a careful strategy that connects the theme of the book to its author. In the introduction to the volume, Pfeijffer refers several times – and very ironically so – to the picture. He associates his nakedness (his literal nudity, but also his defenceless attitude towards the reader) with his authenticity. This nude picture symbolises the complex bond Pfeijffer has with his readership, a bond which is loving, but also full of contempt:

You know all this work, because you are an expert. [...] Oh well, what the fuck does it matter? As long as the bare poet is naked on the nude photograph. That's funny. That's really funny. You are not worth it that I

undress myself for you. I'll do it anyway. And I do it for you<sup>23</sup>. (Pfeijffer 12)

Pfeijffer also associates himself with Odysseus. In the introduction to the volume, in which he confesses that he has a PhD in classical studies, he writes about Odysseus who, somewhere on his way to his homeland Ithaca, 'under suspicious circumstances is washed ashore at the island Scheria'<sup>24</sup> (Pfeijffer 9). Pfeijffer explains that Odysseus is called Polytropos in the *Odysseia*, 'the man of many manners'. By giving his book the same name and posing as the nude Odysseus on the book cover, Pfeijffer plays the role of this highly canonised literary figure. It is interesting that some four decades earlier Wolkers had also identified with Odysseus (see Wolkers 8). The effect is a different one, though. His stay on the uninhabited island had been a real enactment of an Odyssean-like episode, whereas with Pfeijffer the reflection is confined to the intellectual level. This leads to a rather surprising observation. In the sixties the writer distanced himself emphatically from the old-fashioned intellectual posture (Cremer, Reve). With Pfeijffer, the intellectual posture is back again, but with a twist: now the intellectual is stark naked.

### The critical reception of cover photos

A writer's construction of an authorial persona can have significant impact on the reception of a literary text. An author's photo is a non-verbal expression of the ethos of the writer, which, when it is placed as a peritext on the front or back cover of a book, has a direct relation with the discourse inside the book.

Another aspect of the question which is also important is that of the recipient's response. To what extent does the strategic placement of the author's photo on the cover influence our reading of the literary text? We would now like to observe how literary critics reacted to the photographs we have discussed. Such responses by literary critics, while perhaps not representative of all readers, give a sense of how the books were received.

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23. 'U kent al dit werk, want u bent een kenner. [...] Ach, maakt het ook ene fuck uit. Zolang de blote dichter maar naakt op de blote naaktfoto staat. Dat is lachen. Dat is pas lachen. U bent het niet waard dat ik mij voor u uitkleed. Toch doe ik het. En ik doe het voor u'.

24. 'onder verdachte omstandigheden naakt aanspoelt op het eiland Scheria'.

Very few critical comments are to be found on the cover photos of Cremer, Reve and Van Gogh in review literature<sup>25</sup>. In the major database of Dutch literary reviews, only a few pieces on Cremer's book survived; this certainly does not mean that newspapers did not write about the novel, for we know that it was highly controversial and fiercely discussed at the time (De Nijs). It is more plausible that the reviews of this 'pulp' novel were not conserved in the sixties. One of the reviews we did find mentions the cover photo, but does not evaluate or interpret it (Kossmann). Reve's book was a reprint, and reprints normally do not receive any new reviews. Van Gogh was published by a marginal publishing house: his book received critical attention, but we found no reviews mentioning the cover photo.

The situation is different for Pfeijffer, Wolkers<sup>26</sup> and especially Campert. Many of the reviews of their books we were able to find comment briefly or extensively on the cover photos. In the sixteen reviews available on Literom of Campert's volume of short stories, the critics write with noticeable pleasure about the half-naked girls. One of them remarks that he has looked with pleasure at 'the cover photo of Remco Campert amidst female beauty that's not bad'<sup>27</sup> (De Wispelaere), and another: '[o]n the nicely coloured cover, one sees the author smiling more amiably than he is used to, but no wonder: he is surrounded by five very attractive girls, who camouflage their charms only very partially by a sort of black underdress'<sup>28</sup> (Buddingh'). Other reviews express annoyance at the picture, which is presented as a 'foul publisher's trick'<sup>29</sup> (Phaff). In one of the critics' opinion, the publisher gave the book 'a (tasteless) cover

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25. The study of book reviews that follows is based primarily on material available in Literom, a data bank of literary reviews. While not exhaustive, this database provides a global picture of book reviews from the past decades. Since the reviews in this database do not provide page numbers, we quote the texts by only mentioning the names of the reviewers.

26. Literom contains only one review of Wolkers's book (de Winter), in which the controversy about the picture is mentioned.

27. 'de omslagfoto van Remco te midden van vrouwelijk schoon dat er niet om liegt'.

28. 'Op het in fraaie kleuren gedrukte omslag ziet men de auteur nog beminnelijker glimlachten dan hij doorgaans al pleegt te doen, maar geen wonder: hij is omringd door een vijftal zeer aantrekkelijke meisjes, die hun bekoorlijkheden slechts zeer ten dele door een beter soort zwarte onderjurken camoufleren'.

29. 'vuige uitgeverstruc'.

on which the fun and the sex are inexhaustible<sup>30</sup> (Fens). A contemporary reviewer labels the photo 'mere sales promotion'<sup>31</sup> (Bos).

Reviewers also use the photo to characterise Campert's authorship. 'When you start reading after having seen the cover, you expect, slightly anxiously, that Campert has become a follower of Jan Cremer, that Baron of Münchhausen of sex. Luckily that proves not to be the case. Campert has stayed the same, an amusing melancholic'<sup>32</sup> (Kossmann). It is clear that critics attribute a certain vulgarity to Cremer, whereas Campert is seen as an intelligent writer who plays a comic game with popular culture. Other reviewers noticed the ambiguity in the self-presentation of the writer: he is a humorous author who simultaneously emanates melancholia and tragedy. The critic Anneke Van Luxemburg associates this posture with the cabaret, a popular genre in the Netherlands. Although it is by no means part of popular culture, it definitely has less prestige than literature. In other words, with this cover, Campert seems to have slightly devalued himself as a serious writer.

There are also critics who think that the cover blends in well with the complicated game that is played with authorial identity in this book: 'Remco Campert deliberately plays himself as an amusing person in these stories, through the way he describes his doubles and his caricatural protagonists. It is a role that is also communicated by the cover'<sup>33</sup> (Poll). The words 'plays himself' are important here. They show that the critic experiences the ambiguity noted in the analyses of the cover photos mentioned above. With the front cover picture, the writer inscribes himself into the fiction, and gives fiction an autobiographical twist at the same time.

Concerning Pfeijffer's photo, a critic has stated: '[o]f course, Pfeijffer knows as no other that his nakedness only serves one purpose: higher sales'<sup>34</sup> (Morgenstern). But other reviews give ample attention to the ethos

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30. 'een (smakeloos) omslag [...], waarop de pret en de sex bij hoog en bij laag niet op kunnen'.

31. 'gewoon voor de verkoop'.

32. 'Wanneer je het boek gaat lezen na de omslag te hebben bekeken, verwacht je, een beetje bang, dat Campert volgeling is geworden van Jan Cremer, die Baron van Münchhausen van de sex. Gelukkig blijkt dat niet het geval. Campert is gebleven wie hij was, een geestige melancholicus'.

33. 'Remco Campert acteert zichzelf in deze verhalen welbewust als een amusant persoon, door de manier waarop hij zijn dubbelgangers en zijn karikaturale hoofdfiguren beschrijft. [...] Het is een rol die ook tot uitdrukking komt in het plaatje op de omslag'.

34. 'Pfeijffer [weet] natuurlijk als geen ander dat zijn naaktheid slechts één doel dient: hogere verkoopcijfers'.

of the writer. All notice that there is a great tension between Pfeijffer's statement that he wants to give himself away to the reader, and his complex, often very rhetorical poetry, which is just the opposite of honest and sincere. One critic calls it an ironic stunt. 'In *The Man of Many Manners* Pfeijffer shows himself to be a man with many poses. For this poet everything is play, irony and awareness of form. Also, the nude picture on the back is staged'<sup>35</sup> (Franssen, 'Met mijn'). For many critics, this photo confirms the ethos they already had attributed to Pfeijffer: that of an ironic, postmodern poet. Wilfred Takken, finally, situates the photo in a long tradition of naked author photographs, which seems to be especially vivid in the Anglo-Saxon literary world. He mentions Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg and many others.

Some critics disqualified Campert's, Pfeijffer's and Wolkers's photographs as commercial interventions. If such dismissals are accepted, these photos would seem to miss their target: it is unlikely that the three authors attempted to achieve an ethos as clever, commercial writers.

## Conclusion

Through an analysis of several examples of author pictures, many of them on the front covers of books, two tendencies working in opposite directions become apparent. On the one hand, author pictures make the author and his body part of the fictional world. As such, an author picture may portray the writer as a 'fictional' character, that is as a person who is role-playing. On the other hand, authorial photographs can have the opposite effect of authenticating the fiction: the book at hand is presented as (partly) autobiographical, non-fictional or realistic.

More research is needed to investigate the fascinating role of (front cover) author pictures in greater detail. We have only discussed some significant Dutch examples. Comparative research may show whether there are national differences in the way authors portray themselves. Another interesting aspect for further research would be to place these photos in a historical perspective. The photos discussed here seem to have been marked by what one could call the 'postmodern *Zeitgeist*'. All these photos have a self-ironic and playful aspect: the figure of the author is not taken all that seriously (at least on the surface), and the strict border

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35. 'Met *De man van vele manieren* betoont Pfeijffer zich dus vooral een man van vele poses. Voor deze dichter is alles spel, ironie en vormbewustzijn. Ook de naaktfoto op de achterkant is in scène gezet'.

between high and low culture is mocked. This state of affairs is very different from, for instance, nineteenth-century pictures on which the author often poses as a hero of national culture, or from romantic poses of tormented geniuses.

Two final issues merit further investigation. The first one is the distinction between peritextual author pictures and epitextual ones. In the age of digitalisation and mediatisation, the world is packed with epitextual pictures of authors, which supposedly have a large influence on their reputation. How do these pictures conflict with, or contribute to, the ethos that peritextual pictures seem to install? And, adding a more contemporary dimension, one could ask how authors influence and 'fashion' their public selves through photos on websites, blogs, and social media such as Facebook or Flickr.

The second issue is that of the relation between front cover pictures and gender. Only male authors have been discussed as part of this study. Could it be argued that it is a 'typically male' technique to portray oneself in such a confident, provocative way? The roles that the authors discussed here often adopted have a masculine connotation: a macho man (Cremer), a Robinson Crusoe (Wolkers) or a decadent Odysseus (Pfeijffer). At the same time, a playful self-fictionalising seems to be taking place. A large-scale investigation of author pictures may help us to find out whether our 'male bias' has an empirical base.

We might say that these striking author pictures play a very interesting paratextual role. Author pictures are 'thresholds' between the fictional world and the world outside the fiction in the most literal sense: they stand in-between by fictionalising the authentic and authenticating the fictional. This makes the distinction between ethos and posture highly problematic; author pictures seem to belong to the extratextual realm, but they also have a significant influence on the discursive ethos.

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Bibliografische informatie

Lokale ID Boek en handschrift: DOC : 06.21 20.2000.ta \*2015cc  
Auteur Nathalie Collé-Bak; Monica Latham; David Ten Eyck

Auteur artikel Ham, Ruiter

Titel Contemporary textual aesthetics /

Titel artikel Posturing on the Threshold : Author Pictures on Front Covers

Impressum 2015

Materiaal Series

ISBN

Editie

Jaargang

Nummer

Datum 2015

Pagina's 131-157

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