



Between Fact and Fiction

Gerard Reve and the Writer's Portrait*

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Stuffed rabbits, plastic Christmas trees, donkeys and garden gnomes are among the last things one would expect to see in a typical writer's portrait, let alone military uniforms, crucifixes and other religious icons. Yet these are precisely what one will find browsing through the collection of portraits of the controversial Dutch writer Gerard Reve, acquired by the Rijksmuseum in 2011.¹ A significant proportion of the five hundred or so portraits spanning almost sixty years, from 1947 to 2004, show Reve engaged in a peculiar kind of one-man show, hugging real and stuffed animals, posing in front of shrines to the Virgin Mary, dressed as a military general, or drinking heavily.

The plethora of unintelligible objects proves less arbitrary when considered in the light of Reve's reputation as a writer, which started to become increasingly contentious in the 1960s. The objects in the portraits figured extensively as emotional fetishes in his semi-autobiographical letters from this period, and continue to play an important role in his later works. Collected in the bestsellers *Op weg naar het einde* (On my Way to the End, 1963) and *Nader tot U* (Nearer to Thee, 1966), these letters earned him the controversial status of the first openly homosexual Catholic celebrity in the Netherlands.

Fig. 1
NICO VAN DER
STAM, *Gerard Reve
by a window, holding
a glass and a book*,
1966. Gelatin silver
print, 240 x 180 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-37-4;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

With this knowledge, the seemingly unimportant curiosities in the portraits come to embody pivotal themes in the author's life and work. For example, in 1966 Ronald Sweering portrayed Reve against his bedroom wall covered with dozens of male pin-ups from the erotic magazine *Body Beautiful* (fig. 2). It was three years after *Op weg naar het einde* had outed Reve as one of the first openly homosexual Dutch celebrities. The skulls, coffins and gravestones figuring in the portraits emphasize Reve's fascination with death (figs. 3, 4). Real and stuffed donkeys in the 1968 portraits by Eddy Posthuma de Boer and others allude to the 'donkey trial' of 1966, when Reve was prosecuted for heresy for presenting God as a 'one-year old, mouse-grey donkey' whom he 'possesses three times in his secret opening' (figs. 5, 6).²

Other stuffed animals, such as the panda and the rabbit appear as emotional fetishes throughout his oeuvre. A caged teddy bear in portraits by Eddy Posthuma de Boer and Steye Raviez features in *Brief uit Camden Town* (Letter from Camden Town, 1963) as one of Reve's sexual fantasies, in which his ex-boyfriend's new partner is a caged panda subject to Reve's will and mercy (figs. 5, 7). Mild (and not so mild) forms of animal mutilation occur early on in *De avonden* (The Evenings, 1947) and *Werther Nieland* (1949).



Fig. 2
RONALD SWEERING,
*Gerard Reve in his
bedroom in Huize
'Het Gras',
Greonterp, 1966.*
Gelatin silver print,
241 x 298 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-26-8;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

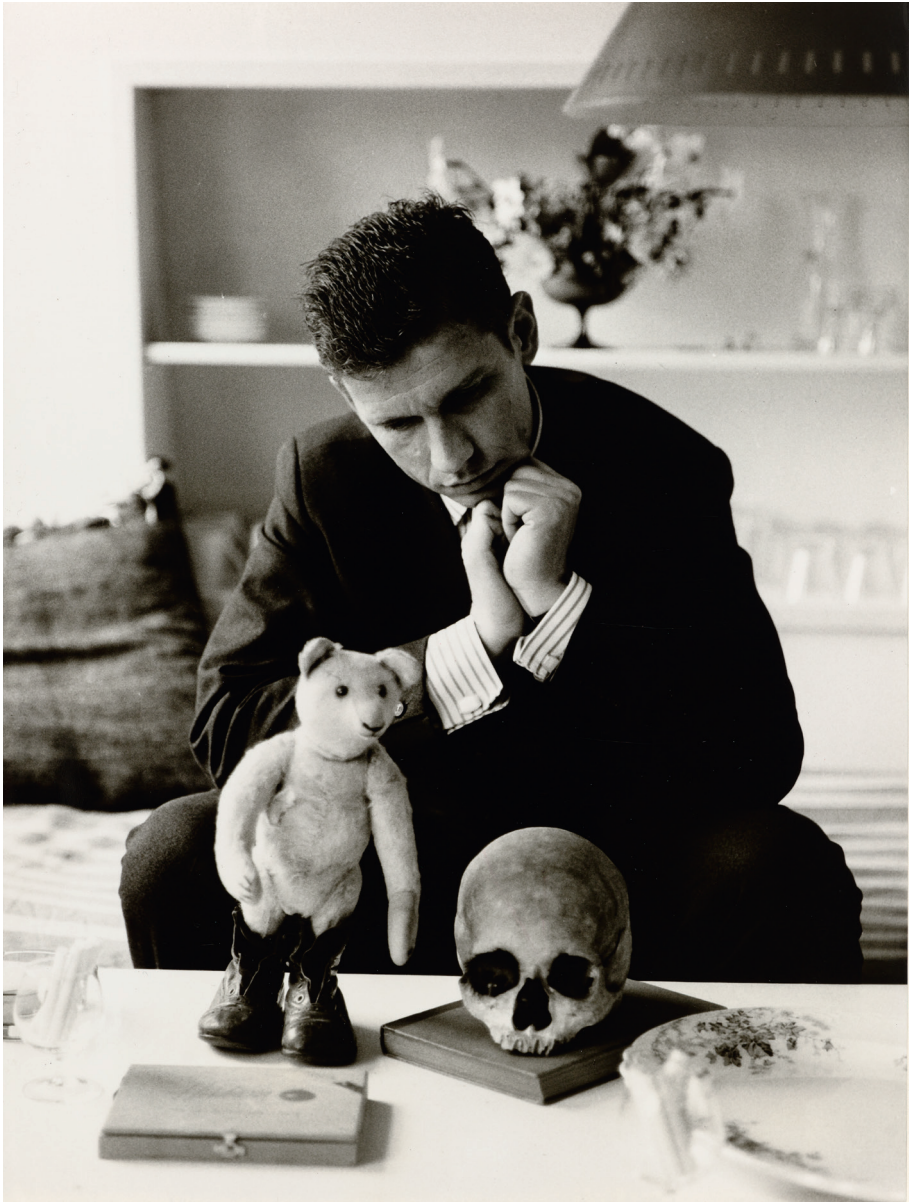


Fig. 3
NICO VAN DER
STAM, *Gerard Reve*
contemplating a
teddy bear and a
skull, c. 1966-68.
Gelatin silver print,
240 x 180 mm.

Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-37-1;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.



Vincent Mentzel

Gerard Reve

Fig. 4
VINCENT MENTZEL,
Gerard Reve posing
with a wine glass
and a skull beside a
statue of the Virgin,
Greonterp, 1969.

Gelatin silver print,
320 x 240 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-49-5;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

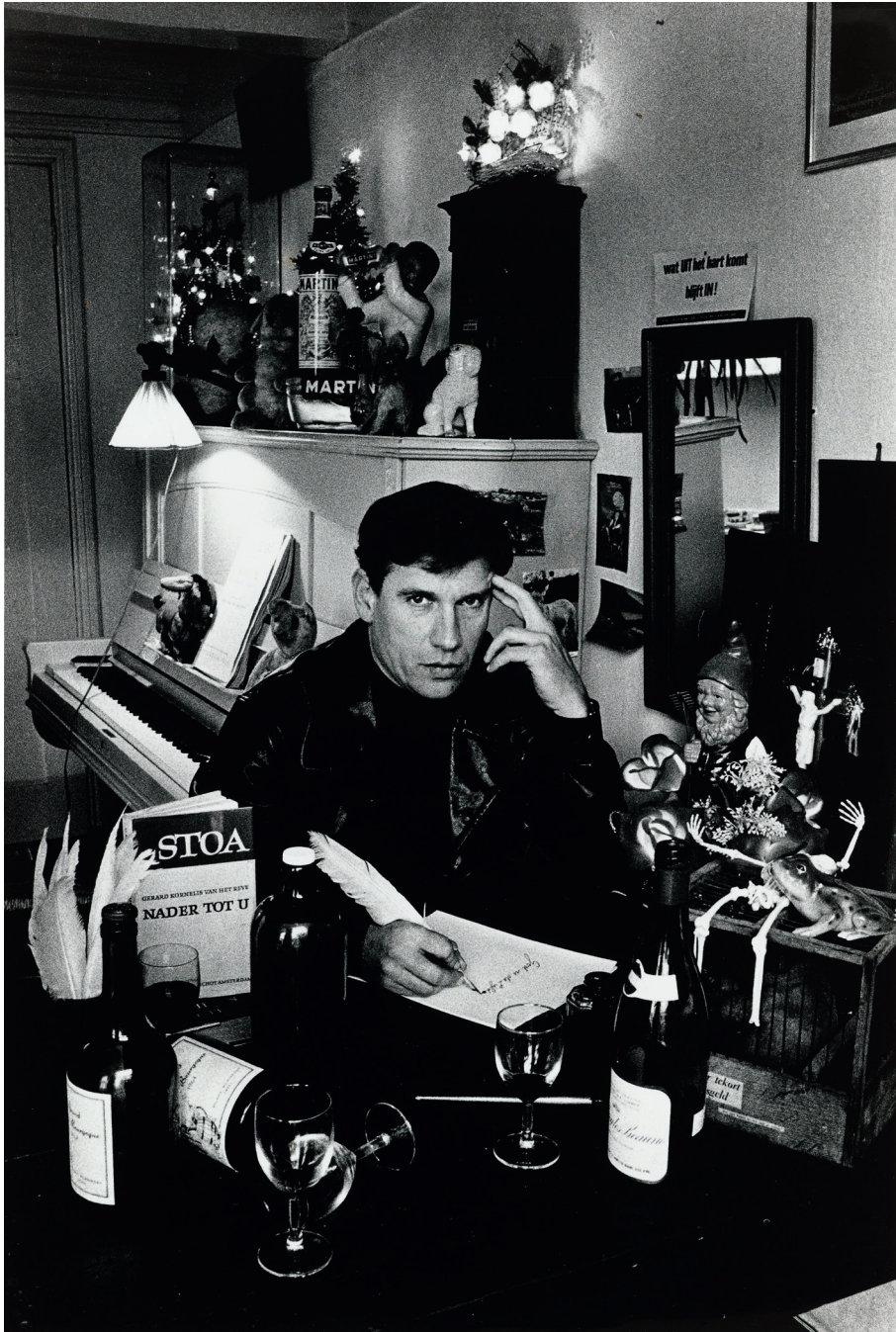


Fig. 5
EDDY POSTHUMA
DE BOER, *Portrait
of Gerard Reve,
writing on a sheet of
paper with a quill,*

*surrounded by
various objects,*
1969.
Gelatin silver print,
302 x 204 mm.

Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-40-3;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.



Fig. 6
NICO VAN DER
STAM, *Gerard Reve*
with two donkeys
in *Le Poët-Laval*,
France, 1975.
Gelatin silver print,
180 x 177 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-71-6;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

Fig. 7
STEYE RAVIEZ,
Portrait of Gerard
Reve with a glass of
wine and a quill,
November 1968.
Gelatin silver print,
199 x 292 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-31-7;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.





The main character projects his feelings of despair and affection on to the stuffed rabbit that repeatedly occurs in the portraits (fig. 8).

This manner of visual representation proves congruent with a worldview the writer calls 'Revism'; a way of imbuing trivial daily objects, (sexual or violent) rituals and events with a higher meaning. As well as forming a unique visual biography of some fifty-seven years of the writer's existence, this peculiar portrait collection invites us to reconsider the role of the portrait as a representational genre. It is not merely the physical likeness of the portraits, nor the voyeuristic view of the celebrity's daily reality that is on display, but the carefully crafted

allegory of his thinking. The staged symbolism in Reve's portraits documents his unparalleled exploration of the potential of photography to visually construct an iconic artistic persona, which is thoroughly intertwined with the protagonists in his oeuvre. Reve once said, 'I find the idea that a writer's biography is totally irrelevant to the study and understanding of his work rather stupid.'³ Since there is no clear generic distinction between the images that were created for documentary purposes and those intended to illustrate books, posters and postcards, portraits of the writer cannot directly be considered documentary. As a cross between portrait, still life and 'genre photography' the photo-

Fig. 8

JOOST EVERS
(ANEFO), *Gerard Reve with stuffed animals on his lap*, 7 January 1969. Gelatin silver print, 178 x 209 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-F-2011-21-39-1; gift of the heirs of Gerard Reve.

graphs should be considered a continuation of the semi-fictional world Reve created in his novels.

Fact, Fiction, Photography

The Reve portraits shine new light on the vast number of writers' portraits already in the Rijksmuseum collection and elsewhere. They add a chapter to a long tradition of photographic representation of a writer in relation to his literature. From the nineteenth century onwards, writers were often portrayed looking pensively into the lens or sitting behind a desk, sunk in thought.

Reve appropriated this cliché image of the lonely genius and took it to the extreme. He exposed the existing visual stereotype and went on to create his own, leaving no medium unexplored. Reve consciously presented a controversial public persona in numerous photographs, interviews and television performances. He did not hesitate to pose for a giant poster issued by the Dutch 'king of posters' Verkerke, shot in 1968 by Eddy Posthuma de Boer (see fig. 5). The writer looks at us from across his desk, two fingers pensively at his temple, quill in hand, as he writes 'God is Love' on a sheet of paper. The Christmas

tree, gnome, crucifix, donkeys and teddy bears are lavishly represented, as hyperreal figments of his imagination. The photographic portraits thus constitute an ambiguous narrative in which it is impossible, if not irrelevant, to separate fact from fiction.

The photographic portrait has raised questions about the relationship between essence and appearance from the outset. When Daguerre patented the Daguerreotype in 1839, he deemed the medium a 'chemical and physical process that allows nature to reproduce herself'.⁴ Henry Fox Talbot published his calotypes under the title 'the pencil of nature' in 1844. The medium's claim to the truth formed the basis for pseudo sciences of physiognomy (features of the face), phrenology (shape of the skull) and pathognomy (expressions of emotions) which pursued the belief that the outer man is a picture of the inner, and the face a revelation of the whole character.⁵ For example, Duchenne de Boulogne famously documented the 'gymnastics of the soul' in his *Mécanisme de la physiologie humaine* (1862) (fig. 9) by photographing how muscles in the human face produce facial expressions, and Hugh Diamond used the portrait as a medium to scientifically analyse his patients' inner psyches.⁶

It would be foolish to consider ourselves exempt from similar superstition today. Looking at the Ultima Thule portrait (1848) of writer Edgar Allan Poe, we tend to see a tortured genius rather than a lunatic, a clown making a face at the photographer, or simply a bad portrait taken by a clumsy studio assistant (fig. 10). Taken days after his suicide attempt, the haunting expression on Edgar Allen Poe's face would have made an exquisite case study for De Boulogne and Diamond; the photographic portrait perfectly recorded the sitter's sorrowful mental state. In a letter sent to Poe in 1874 by biographer John Henry Ingram, his fiancée Mrs Whitman explained that it

Fig. 9

ADRIEN
TOURNACHON,
Electro-Physiologie,
1854-56, fig. 64.
Albumen print,
120 x 92 mm.
From G.-B. Duchenne
(de Boulogne),
*Mécanisme de la
physiologie humaine
ou analyse électro-
physiologique de
l'expression des
passions*, Paris 1876
(second ed.), plate 64.
New York, The Metro-
politan Museum of
Art, inv. no. 2012.140;
purchase, The Buddy
Taub Foundation Gift,
Dennis A. Roach and
Jill Roach, Directors,
2012.



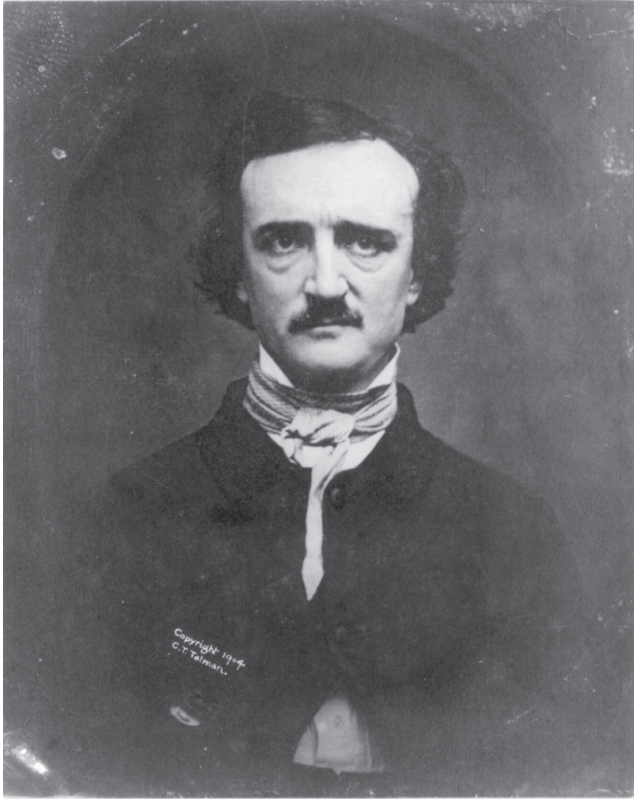


Fig. 10

W.S. HARTSHORN, *Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1848. Photograph of a daguerreotype by C.T. Tatman, c. 1904. Washington, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, inv. no. LC-USZ62-10610.

‘was taken after a wild distracted night ... and all the stormy grandeur of that via Dolorosa had left its sullen shadow on his brow. But it was *very fine*.’⁷

The Ultima Thule portrait is one of the first images to visually conflate the writer with his protagonist; the portrait takes its name from a poem by Poe in which he describes a place outside the known world where only the mind can go. It is as if we stand before him while he speaks the words: ‘I have reached these lands but newly/ From an ultimate dim Thule/ From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime/ Out of space – out of time.’⁸ The photograph not only reflects Poe’s mental state at the time of its production, it has come to symbolize his entire melancholic oeuvre, thereby reconciling the factual photograph with the fictional realm of literature.

As soon as the writer became the subject of photography, the medium

became subject to literature. The first novel ever to feature the daguerreotype, Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables* (1851), voiced the contemporary uncertainty as to the medium’s exact powers. The medium is described as a magical tool revealing ‘the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon’.⁹ The transcendental power of the photograph becomes apparent in the portrait of the villain, which harboured the subject’s true evil personality and revealed his deceitfulness like an early photographic *Picture of Dorian Gray*.

For this reason, Honoré de Balzac cautiously refused to be photographed. He told a friend ‘every body in its natural state is made up of a series of ghostly images superimposed in layers to infinity, wrapped in infinitesimal films.’¹⁰ Given that he was convinced the daguerreotype would strip away a layer of one’s person, it is unsurprising that we know of only one photograph of him, in which he looks uncomfortably away from the lens, his hand protectively over his chest (fig. 11).

Inventing a Photographic Self

Little did Balzac know that the medium would do the exact opposite. Instead of robbing the sitter of his personality,



Fig. 11

LOUIS-AUGUSTE BISSON, *Portrait of Honoré Balzac*, 1842. Daguerreotype, 820 x 670 mm. Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Institut de France. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Institut de France)/Gérard Blot.

Fig. 12

MAULL AND POLYBLANK (ANEFO),
Portrait of
Henry Wimshurst,
English inventor,
1 January 1860.
London, Science
Museum/Science
and Society
Picture Library;
inv. no.
1980-0002_0052.

photography became a means for people to reinvent themselves. 'The photographic studio emerged as a new social space in which sitters could compose and record an image of how they desired to appear for acquaintances, strangers, and posterity.'¹¹ Early daguerreotype studios in the United States vied with one another over the most elaborate choice of backdrop, which was added 'to reflect the sitter's interests, attitudes or aspirations'.¹² The most interesting example in the United Kingdom was the studio of Maull & Polyblank, which produced beautiful studio portraits of scientists and other prominent people with attributes indicating their profession. An exquisite image shows Henry Wimshurst posing next to a model of the *Archimedes*, the world's first successful propeller-driven steamship, built by Wimshurst in 1839 (fig. 12). The photographic studio became a theatrical space between truth and pretence, a means to publicize the true self, or invent the self on the spot.

Julia Margaret Cameron was the foremost photographer to exploit the narrative character of the medium in her portraits. Portraying the artists and authors among her society friends as cherubs or literary characters, she aimed 'to ennoble photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real and ideal and sacrificing nothing of Truth



by all possible devotion to Poetry and beauty.'¹³ Looking at her acquaintances carrying harps and lutes in the most elaborate photographic allegories, the confusion as to how the photograph should relate to truth seems less naïve.

Suspicion was not unwarranted, as it was only a matter of time before the blurred line between fact and fiction was further explored, for example in the 'composite photographs' by Henry Peach Robinson and Gustave Rejlander, fictional scenes composed of multiple negatives. Peach Robinson's artistically staged tableau of a dying girl caused public outrage, illustrating the nineteenth-century struggle to reconcile the realism of the medium with its imaginative potential (fig. 13).

In an attempt to upgrade photography to the creative status that art and literature enjoyed, William Lake Price published *A Manual of Photographic Manipulation, Treating of the Practice of the Art, and its Various Applications to Nature* in 1858. It was the first book to treat the medium as a creative vehicle for the imagination and not as a means to record reality. His images are often fantastically theatrical tableaux vivants from history or literature, such as his *Don Quixote in his Study* (1855) (fig. 14). Antiquities are

Fig. 13

STEVE RAVIEZ,
Fading Henry Peach Robinson, Fading Away, 1858.
Albumen print made from five separate wet collodion negatives.
Bradford, Royal Photographic Society/National Media Museum/Science & Society Picture Library,
inv. no. 2003-5001/2/23282.



Fig. 14

WILLIAM LAKE PRICE, *Don Quixote in his Study*, 1855. Albumen print, 324 x 283 mm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. 3-1976.



scattered at his feet, books are piled high on a desk and arms and armour lean against the walls. This is clearly not a realistic depiction of how a writer would most likely have sat in his study, even in the seventeenth century when the novel was first published. But it is very informative about the way in which a portrait's setting could construct and communicate an imagined identity of real sitters.

The photographic studio thus became a space for imagination and storytelling. It is no wonder therefore, that Balzac and his literary colleagues were somewhat reluctant to embrace this new medium, which not only prevailed over fiction but could replace it altogether. But embrace it they did: Dickens, Wilde, Baudelaire, Hugo, Mallarme and even Balzac eventually could not withstand the advance of the hugely popular cabinet card and the *carte-de-visite*, patented by André-Adolphe-Eugène Disderi, which were fervently collected during the 'cartomania' of the French bourgeoisie.

One of the few contemporaries who seemed to fully grasp the power of photography as a mould for the public persona was Oscar Wilde. Although Dickens had quite early understood the potential of the mass medium, selling his portrait to market his lecture series in the United States, it was Wilde who

played with its deceptive qualities. While on tour in New York in 1882, he had his portrait taken by Napoleon Sarony, a famous New York portrait photographer and an acknowledged master of celebrity photographs (fig. 15). Known for his theatre photography, Sarony depicted the twenty-seven year old Oscar Wilde as a romantic dandy in fashionable attire, promoting Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *Patience*. Wearing a jacket, velvet waistcoat, silk knee breeches, stockings, and slippers adorned with grosgrain bows, he played the ultimate *poseur* and staged a sublime caricature of the aesthete and the dandy.

Wilde and his aestheticism were brilliantly satirized in the operetta, as well as in the portraits. As Wilde impersonated his theatrical character, which was in turn moulded after his public image, he managed to establish a visual Droste effect or recursive image in which the portrait constituted a representation of a representation. Whereas the nineteenth century bourgeois was defined by what he produced,

Fig. 15

NAPOLEON SARONY, *Portrait of Oscar Wilde*, 1882. Albumen silver print, 305 x 184 mm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2005.100.120; Gilman Collection, Purchase, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee Gift, 2005.



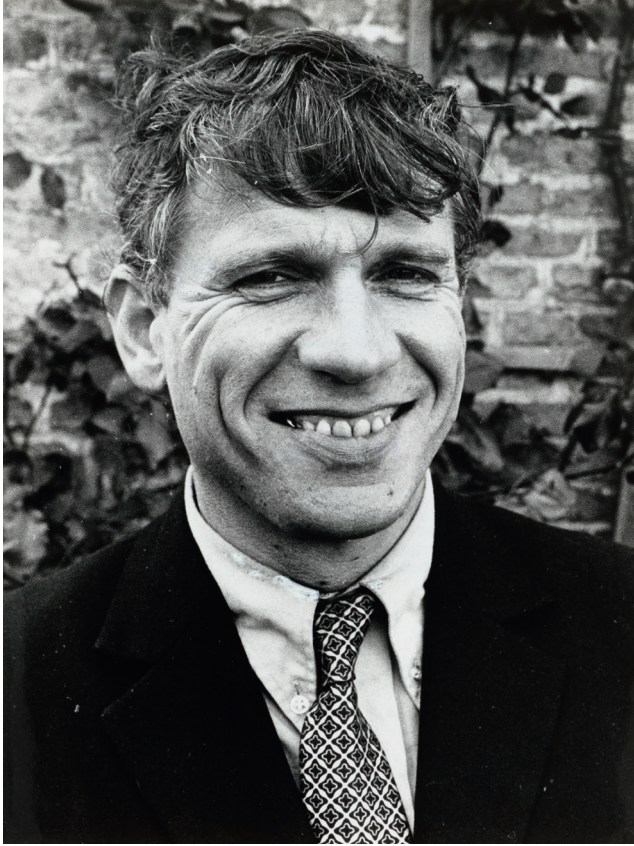


Fig. 16

VINCENT MENTZEL,
Portrait of Gerard Reve, 1969.
 Gelatin silver print,
 235 x 178 mm.
 Amsterdam, Rijks-
 museum, inv. no.
 RP-F-2011-21-49-1;
 gift of the heirs of
 Gerard Reve.

the dandy produced the self and sold it.¹⁴ Transforming himself into a concept, a hyper-real copy of his own imagination, Wilde cleverly exploited as well as criticized photography's potential to market a reified self.

Portraiture as a Marketing Medium

Gerard Reve seems to have looked very carefully at the pictorial trickery of Oscar Wilde, Julia Margaret Cameron and other romantics and advocates of the aesthetic movement. Reve, too, posed as the protagonist of his semi-autobiographical books, thereby navigating the ambiguous status of the photographic portrait and his writings into a grey area between the biographical and the fictional. Like Oscar Wilde, Reve had his portrait made while impersonating himself.

Cultivating his own stereotype, he managed to render his personal trivia into mystical symbols, and exalt his portraits to a well-nigh allegorical representation of his writings.

According to Posthuma de Boer, who frequently photographed Reve in his house in Greonterp from 1968, one photo can be chance, but a series makes a phenomenon. He believed that 'a slightly caricaturized portrait often helps to make someone more recognizable'.¹⁵ We all know Dürer's portrait of Erasmus through its endless reproduction, and the ubiquitous Ultima Thule portrait is known exclusively through its reproduction, since the original has long been lost. Reve understood the power of repetition, and ensured his portrait photographs were reproductions of his public image in one way or another. The series portraying Reve in a similar vein from the late 1960s through to the 1990s forms a visual template that left his public image relatively static over the years. Instead of documenting the passage of time, the reiteration of Reve's stereotypical imagery projects the timelessness of a trademark.

An attempt to reconstruct a photographic session with Gerard Reve suggests a professional poseur who actively employed visual means to ensure his person remained contested and therefore mediatized. When Vincent Mentzel arrived in Greonterp for a shoot in 1969, he found Reve drunk and with the blood from shaving cuts on his collar (figs. 4, 16). A portrait series followed during which Reve drank lots of wine and made sexually explicit gestures before the camera. Leaving aside such provocative behaviour in front of the camera on Reve's part, the photographers' accounts, as well as private photographs taken by his then partners Willem van Albada and Henk van Manen ('Teigetje' and 'Woelrat') reveal a dissonance between Reve's real living environment and his portraits. For

example, the personality poster gives the impression that *Nearer to Thee* was written at this magical desk, but it was actually written in the attic dubbed the 'Nearer to Thee-Room' by Reve and his partners. This sober and Spartan room was the antithesis of the surreal iconographic allegory of the writer in his study (fig. 17).

A carefully crafted photographic image developed out of a lengthy and informal engagement between Reve and the photographer that sometimes took place over the course of several days.¹⁶ According to Posthuma de Boer, it was Reve who industriously started gathering his paraphernalia and took up quill and ink to write his provocative slogans.¹⁷ Reve's involvement was also facilitated by the photographers' exceptional creative autonomy at a time when the photo editor was barely a full-time profession. Reve and his photographers gratefully took advantage of their freedom, standing at the forefront of photography's transition into an important medium in its own right.

Photography was but one accomplice in a larger quest to mythologize his persona. Both text and image formed Reve's weaponry in crafting an intricate story around his person made up of a few facts and many fictions. By working under different names, pseudonyms and alter egos, Reve had created an ambiguous self-image from the very start.¹⁸ One of Reve's first alter egos appeared in 'Conversation with Reve', published in *Tirade* in 1958 by R.J. Gorré Mooses. What neither the readers nor the editor of the magazine realized was that Mr Mooses was a fictional journalist, invented by Reve himself. Over the years Reve claimed to have befriended the Queen, or to have served as a lieutenant in the Dutch East Indies, or to be a descendant of a Norwegian maritime officer who died in the battle of Narvik. Regardless of whether the medium was factual or fictional, Reve's literature, interviews,

television appearances and photographs were all part of an intricate mythmaking process.

'Long Live Capitalism'

Reve's initial flirtation with what photography could and could not do in reinventing the self gradually became a social experiment. In the 1960s, at the height of his fame and controversy, he started explicitly presenting himself in photographs and on television as a Catholic, a homosexual, and a conservative anti-communist, even a capitalist. The image by Eddy Posthuma de Boer shows Reve writing 'God is Love' on a sheet of paper, whilst in a similar image by Steye Raviez he writes 'Long Live Capitalism' (fig. 18). For an artist from a communist family and in a period of socialism, when traditional religious and socio-political barriers in the Netherlands were breaking down, this was absolutely unheard of.

Indeed, Reve had quite explicit views about the importance of image building. From 1964 onwards he presented himself in interviews, letters, books and radio or television shows as a 'citizen-writer' or 'national writer', distancing himself from the image of the artist-genius. By adopting the visual media of TV and photography, rather unconventional for a writer, in an act of shameless self-promotion regarded as unacceptable for artists, Reve deliberately distanced himself from the bohemian leftist kind of artistry he much despised in some other Dutch writers. 'I have always been annoyed by those so-called artists who rebel against society. Who think that not washing, not getting up until the afternoon and running up debts make them an artist. I call myself a citizen writer because I am just someone who is trying to earn a living, an ordinary person.'¹⁹

In *De Overschatting* (The Overestimation, 1948), a manifesto against the fetishist idolization of the artist-genius, Reve despised the 'exhibitionist pose of modesty' that his colleagues



Fig. 17
RONALD SWEERING,
Gerard Reve writing
at a table in an
empty room in
Huize 'Het Gras',
Greonterp, 1966.
Gelatin silver print,
240 x 297 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-26-13;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve

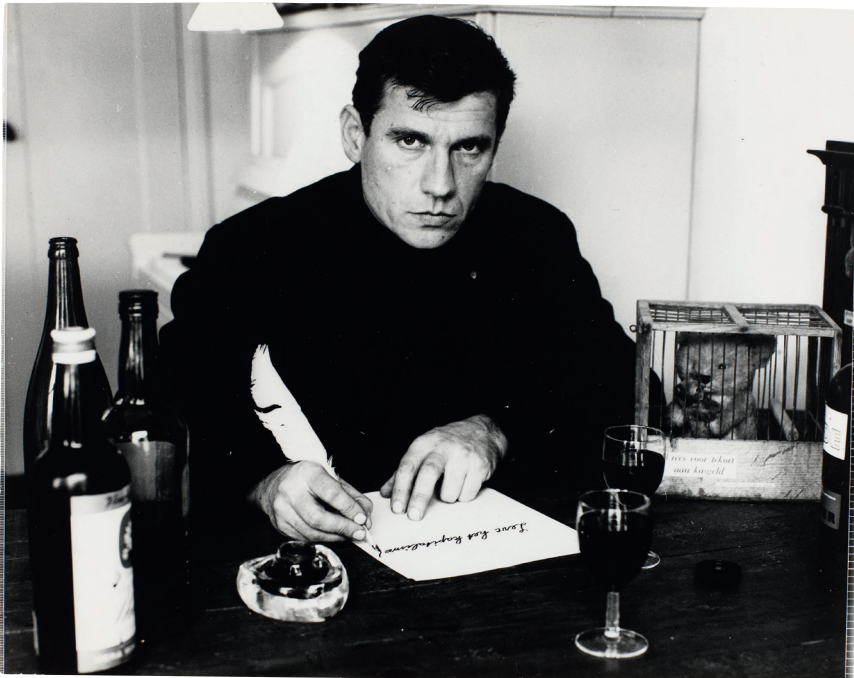


Fig. 18
STEYE RAVIEZ,
Portrait of Gerard
Reve writing,
November 1968.
Gelatin silver print,
203 x 253 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-31-8;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.



Fig. 19
RONALD SWEERING,
*Gerard Reve at the
kitchen table in
Huize 'Het Gras',
Greonterp, 1966.*
Gelatin silver print,
241 x 264 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-26-1;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

adopted.²⁰ Instead of denouncing the pecuniary value of art as was expected of a true modern artist, Reve argued that the most legitimate reason for a writer to write was money – all else was vanity.²¹ To prove his point, Reve had himself photographed in his small, unimposing house in Greonterp and at work on the land in France, posing as a labourer or a farmer. Changing his clothes three times in a session for Ronald Sweering, he posed in his Sunday suit leaving the church, wearing clogs and carrying a shovel, or making a cheese sandwich (fig. 19).

Reve denounced not only the artist-genius, but also the socialist intellec-

tualism of the 1960s, personified in his rival and antithesis; his brother Karel van het Reve. An image of Reve looking furiously at his brother was taken by Steye Raviez during a TV interview with W.L. Brugsma in 1974 (fig. 20), in which Reve explicitly distanced himself from his academic brother saying, 'I am of a different kind and I am more sensitive and passionate, a romantic, I live in mythology, I live in religious imagery, in symbols, I am not a rationalist, I am a completely different person from my brother.'²² Raviez's image has come to symbolize Reve's rivalry with his brother, and modern society at large;



Fig. 20

STEYE RAVIEZ, *Karel van het Reve, Gerard Reve en W.L. Brugsma during the broadcast of the television show 'Brugsma uit Bellevue', 17 March 1974.*

Gelatin silver print, 200 x 307 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-F-2011-21-59-8; gift of the heirs of Gerard Reve.

the struggle of the mystic against modern intellectualism, the symbolist against the scientist, and the survival of Catholicism at a time of socialism and the breakdown of religious traditions in an already predominantly Protestant country.

Kitsch and Cliché

But by the time of the interview very few people still believed in Reve's romantic intentions. That same year Reve had invited a fanfare orchestra to celebrate his decoration from the Queen and was shown smugly playing the cymbals (fig. 21), only to have himself photographed with his medal while he piously lit candles before a pietà (fig. 22). The confusion as to whether he was still being genuine was increased by the spectacle of Reve, dressed in a sequined suit and surrounded by cherubs, hosting his own 'Grote Gerard Reve Show' broadcast by the National Broadcast Foundation in 1974. The show featured



Fig. 22

CHARLES VLEK,
*After receiving his
 decoration Gerard
 Reve lights candles
 at the altar of
 the Madonna in
 St Martinuskerk in
 Weert, 1974.*
 Gelatin silver print,
 738 x 177 mm.
 Amsterdam, Rijks-
 museum, inv. no.
 RP-F-2011-21-65-2;
 gift of the heirs of
 Gerard Reve.



Fig. 21

RONALD SWEERING,
*Serenade for
 Gerard Reve by the
 St Antonius fanfare
 orchestra on the
 occasion of his
 appointment to the
 Order of Orange-
 Nassau, Weert,
 29 April 1974.*
 Gelatin silver print,
 205 x 255 mm.
 Amsterdam Rijks-
 museum, inv. no.
 RP-F-2011-21-62-2;
 gift of the heirs of
 Gerard Reve.

all the tirelessly repeated themes in Reve's life and work, and inevitably ended with a dialogue between Reve dressed as a teddy bear and God represented by a donkey. Somewhere between kitsch and camp, the show was both the epitome and a parody of Reve's mediatised stereotype.

Reve kept tirelessly pushing the boundaries of self-plagiarism in his writing too. Whereas *Op weg naar het*

einde and *Nader tot U* were praised for their authenticity, *Lieve jongens* (Dear Boys, 1972) was widely regarded as more of the same. In a review of *Lieve jongens*, J.F. Vogelaar accused Reve of having become the Pinocchio of his public: 'The masquerade has been elevated to a style. ... A side effect is that the till rings with every sentence, giving the *horror vacui* a silver lining.'²³ The epitome of Reve's experimental

Fig. 23

KLAAS KOPPE,
Gerard Reve,
standing by a wall
with a pickaxe on
his shoulder, Drôme,
 France, 3 July 1993.
 Amsterdam, Rijks-
 museum, inv. no.
 RP-F-2011-21-119-1;
 gift of the heirs of
 Gerard Reve.

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self-repetition was the novel *Bezorgde Ouders* (Parents Worry 1988) which, according to Reve, was his debut work *De avonden* multiplied by four. The book opened with a nearly identical sentence, and revisited the same format and themes. The emotional fetish of the stuffed rabbit was replaced by a teddy bear that the protagonist had found in the garbage. With *Bezorgde Ouders* Reve practised what he preached: 'You can be a great writer and write nothing but clichés.'²⁴

Reve's response to the critics denouncing *Lieve Jongens* was to ask who else he should repeat but himself. In defence of his mannerism, Reve placed himself in a visual tradition of religious and romantic symbolism, arguing that originality was overrated. 'I know now that everything new and

original is bad and worthless.'²⁵ In his lecture series at Leiden University he praised the cliché as a 'gift of God' making the most unintelligible of thoughts communicable to everyone, and advocated a literary 'ban of the unexpected', arguing that the strongest emotive response lay in the narrative's predictability. 'To tell the truth: doesn't our whole life, that "rehearsal of a play that will never be performed", consist partly of clichés and for the rest of, sometimes even bad, kitsch?'²⁶

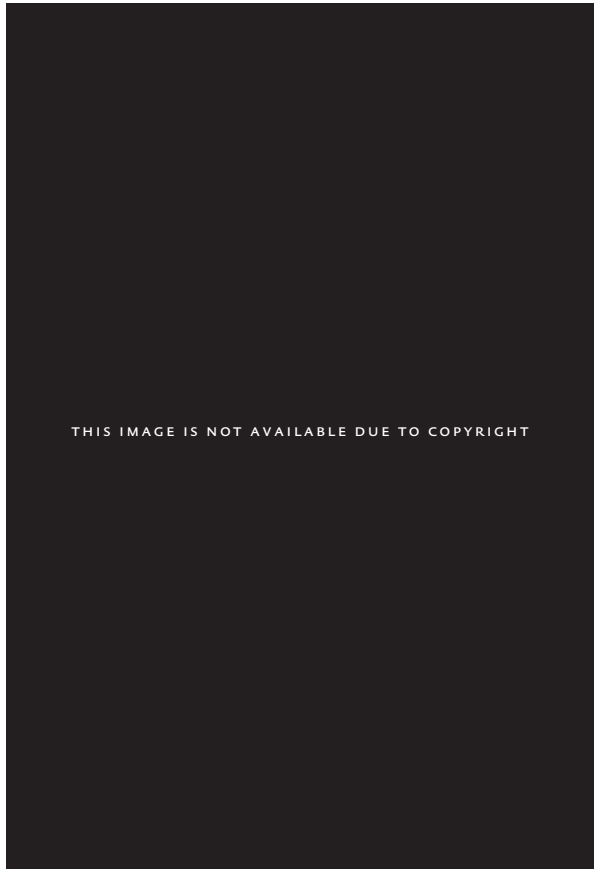
The Tragedy of a Clown

In 1975 public tolerance was tried beyond its limits when Reve, wearing symbols including a cross, a swastika, and a hammer and sickle, recited a racist poem in Courtrai, Belgium. This performance might have gone down

in history as one of Reve's clowneries, were it not for the interview in the dressing room after the performance, in which Reve expressed his doubts about Dutch immigration policy. An interview with his colleague Boudewijn Büch followed, after which Reve was considered an outright fascist by many. In a letter to Simon Carmiggelt, *De taal der liefde* (The Language of Love 1972), Reve had made a statement about his alleged racism – 'I am not simple-minded enough and far too intelligent to be a racist, but the accusation and its lucrative effect have set me thinking. All I have to do is introduce a protagonist who speaks ill of all sorts of inferior coconut pickers and defends the honour of "our girls and young women" and the money flows my way.'²⁷

In response to this and other passages in *De taal der liefde*, his fellow writer Harry Mulisch wrote a furious pamphlet called 'The irony of irony' in which he accused Reve of using irony as a means of getting away with his racist statements. 'Anyone who speaks ironically, says the opposite of what he means, but so that the other realizes it. Van het Reve says what he means, but so that the other does not realize it and still thinks he is being ironic.'²⁸ The confusion as to whether Reve was being serious or not lies in the fact that Reve seems to have momentarily stepped out of the protagonist role and let his own voice speak in his letters and novels. As in his photographs, Reve stages himself in his writings, leaving many at a loss as to whether this person is meant to represent Reve himself, or a fictional impersonation of himself.

Despite public criticism, Reve consistently cultivated his own visual and literary stereotype. Following Ronald Sweering and Nico van der Stam, Klaas Koppe continued to photograph him working the land like a farmer in the 1990s (fig. 23), and in front of statues of the Madonna,



crucifixes and skulls, or with a painting of a nude boy in the background (figs. 24, 25). The boyish smile has vanished, however, and the photographs seem to betray a slightly forced routine. An image by Eddy Posthuma de Boer from 1996 shows Reve, now an elderly man, staring out of the window and raising his glass to all the editions of *De Avonden* that lie on the desk before him (fig. 26). Though as utterly clichéd and melancholic as Reve prescribed, this image lacks the playfully ironic undertone that always ensured ambiguity as to the writer's intentions. Whereas the early portraits by Raviez and Posthuma de Boer had managed to transform kitsch into meaningful symbols, and simultaneously mock and mythologize the cliché of the writer in his study, this portrait of the aged

Fig. 24
KLAAS KOPPE,
Portrait of Gerard
Reve, posing by
a crucifix, 1994.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-125-1;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

THIS IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE DUE TO COPYRIGHT

writer, sitting at his desk looking back to the past, is poignant. 'The biggest mistake one can make is to see Reve as a static person; the early Reve is not the same person as the late. Reve died unacknowledged, having lost control of his public image. He had never realized he was to become hostage to his own image. People started laughing as soon as they saw him, that is something you have to live up to; the tragedy of the clown.'²⁹

Sadness also prevails in the very last image of Reve, taken by Rineke Dijkstra in the home where the writer, now suffering from dementia, spent his last days (fig. 28). A classic head-and-shoulders portrait shows a confused elderly man who according to Dijkstra seemed unaware of her camera. Though the portrait is beautifully taken, Dijkstra herself expressed doubts about representing Reve in this fragile manner, which hardly reflects the remarkable person he is known as.³⁰ One of the earliest

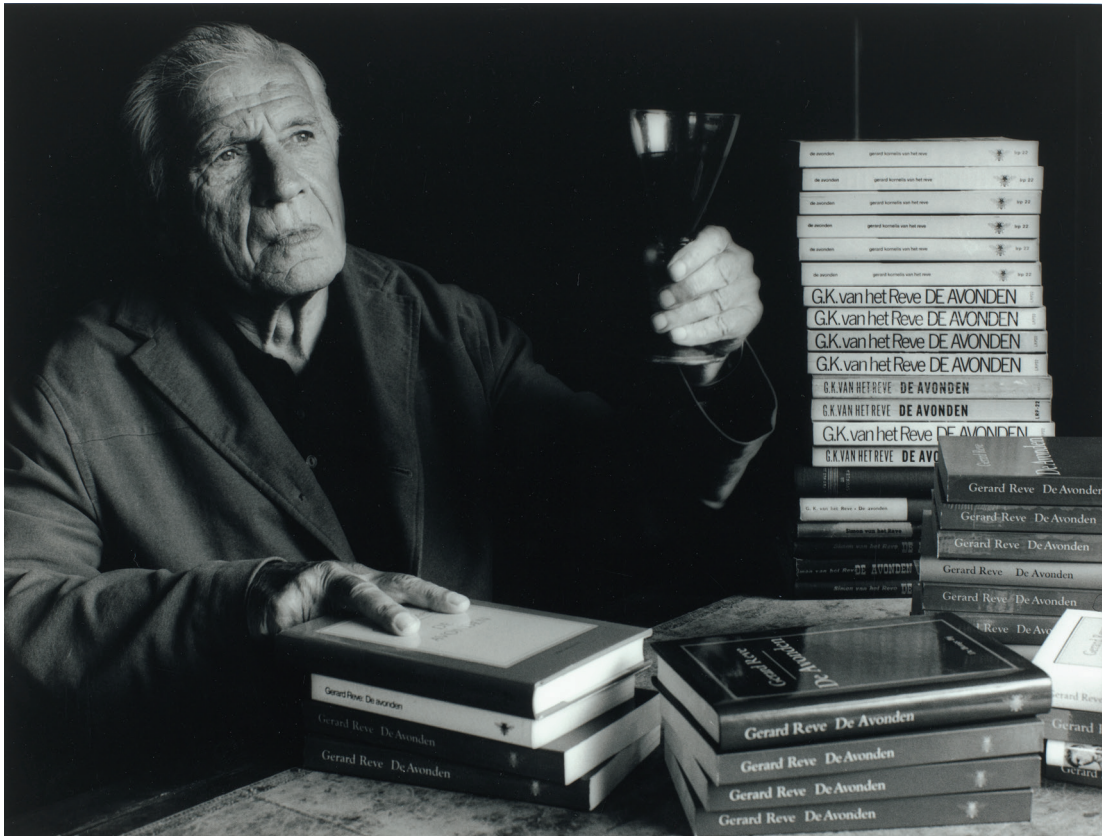
images in the collection by Annelies Romein depicts the writer staring out of the window while holding a book (the Bible?), absently absorbed in his musings (fig. 27). First and last image alike radiate a nostalgia and solemnity reminiscent of Nadar's portraits, but uncharacteristic of the way in which Reve was to construct his public persona during his lifetime. The two images form the framework within which Reve explored the possibilities of portrait photography in relation to his literature. The photographs firmly position the collection within the genre of the writer's portrait, and form the traditional parameters with which to contrast Reve's reinterpretation of the conventional writer's portrait.

As such, it is not the single portrait that can inform us about the person behind the book. Like his books, the Reve collection should be read as a semi-autobiographical narrative within which the writer consciously framed himself in relation to his literature. A

Fig. 25
KLAAS KOPPE,
Portrait of Gerard
Reve, writing at
his desk, 1995.
Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-127-1;
gift of the heirs of
Gerard Reve.

photograph of Reve's desk, taken by Stephan Vanfleteren after his death sublimely summarizes Reve's unconventional relationship with portrait photography: again we see the writer's desk, we can identify a vase with an image of the Virgin, and a stuffed animal exits the frame. In the midst of these objects sits an obituary card with the portrait by Rineke Dijkstra (fig. 29). It is as if Vanfleteren retook the Verkerke photograph, this time replacing the sitter with his representation. This is a portrait of a portrait, the ultimate reification of Reve's image, which has become a symbolic object in and of itself. With this final allegory Vanfleteren frees Reve from the framework of convention in a last playfully nostalgic continuation of the writer's struggle to invent a timeless self.

Fig. 26
EDDY POSTHUMA
DE BOER, *Portrait of Gerard Reve raising a wineglass, sitting by the complete (?) collection of editions of De avonden*, 2001-10. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-F-2011-21-141-1; gift of the heirs of Gerard Reve.



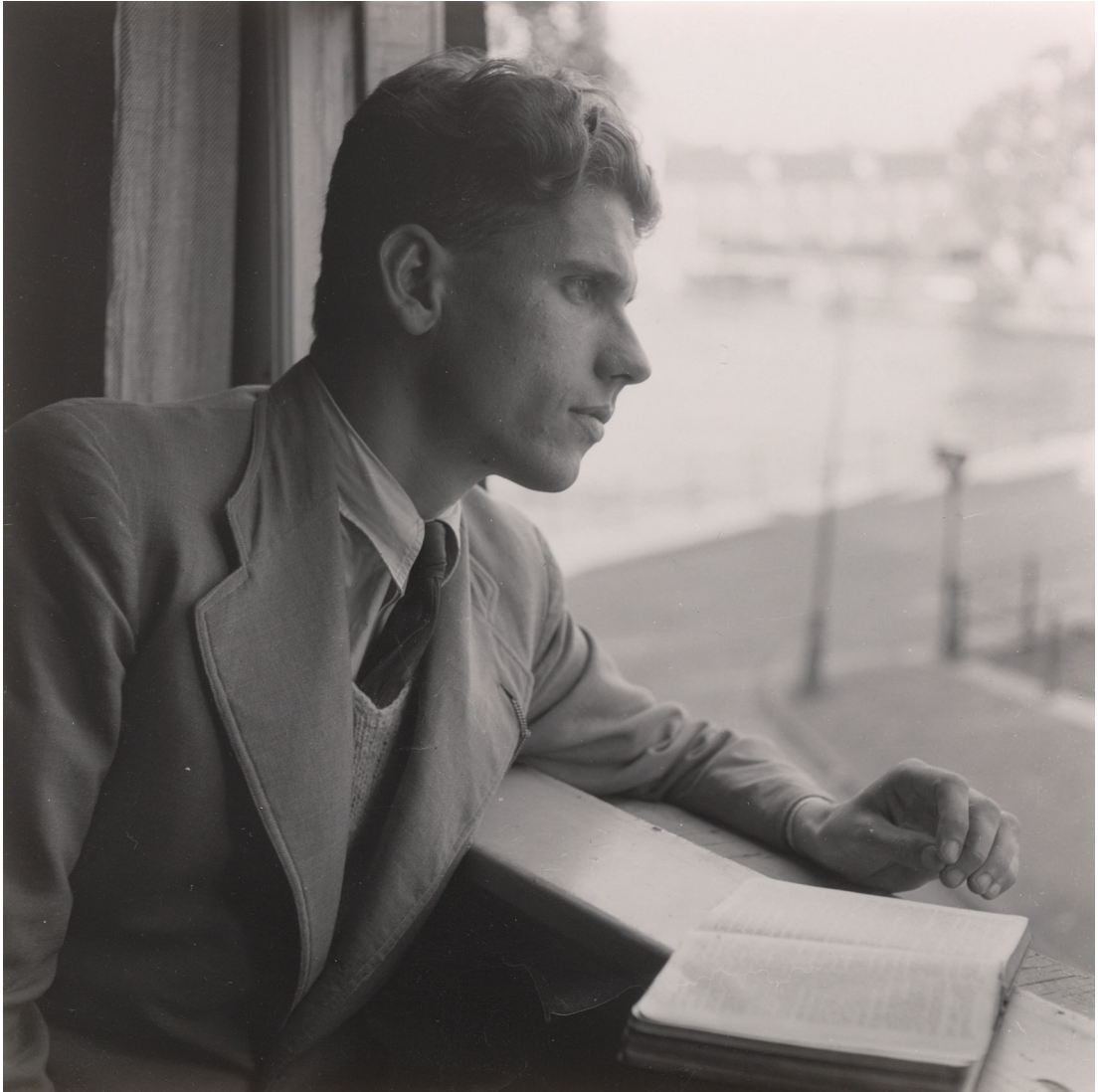


Fig. 27
ANNELIES ROMEIN,
*Gerard Reve, looking
out of a window, a
book on the sill, 1947.*
Gelatin silver print,
202 x 202 mm,
printed later.

Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-1-1;
gift of the heirs
of Gerard Reve.

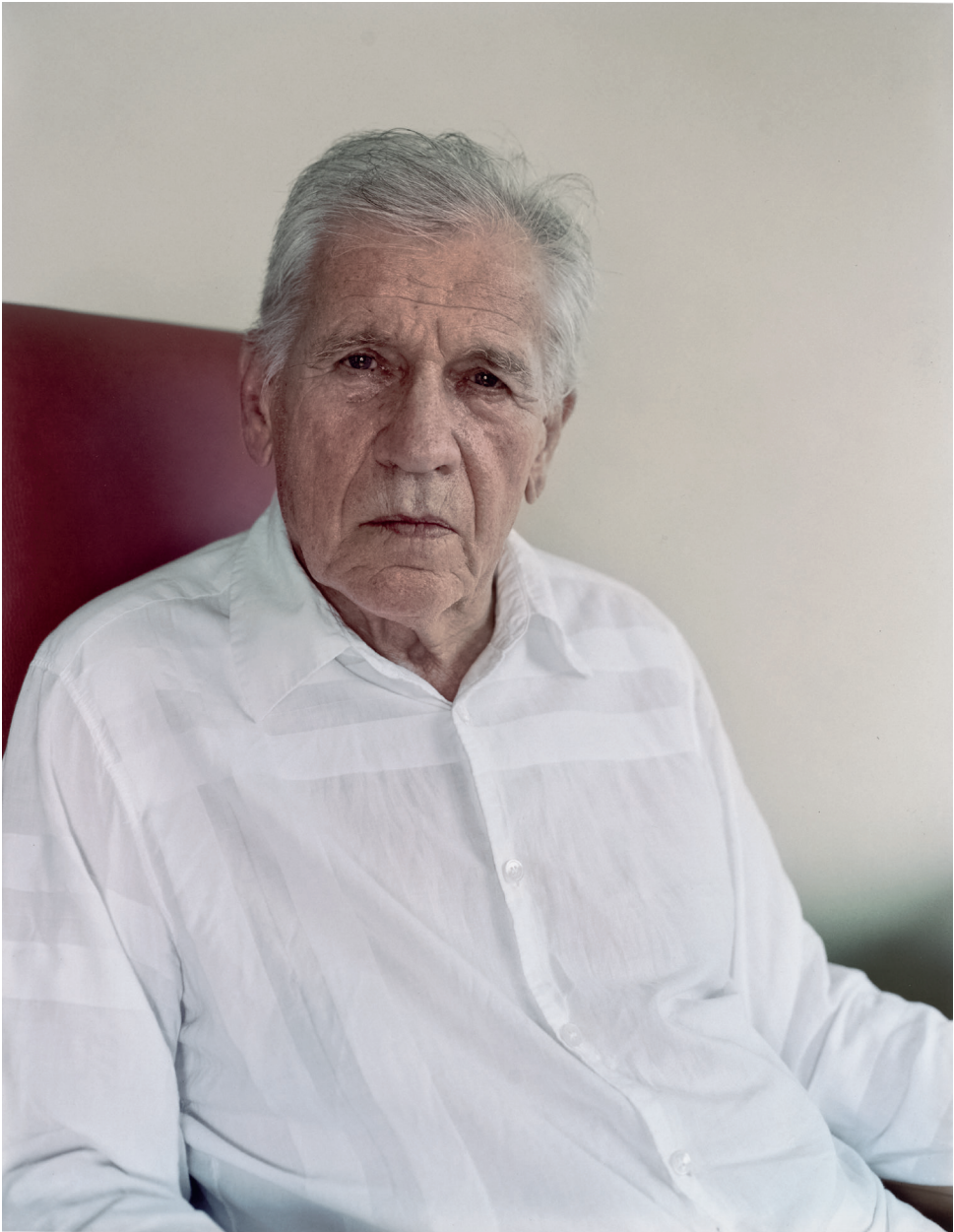


Fig. 28
RINEKE DIJKSTRA,
*Portrait of Gerard
Reve in St Vincentius
Care Home in Zulte*,
17 August 2004.
Inkjet print,
387 x 300 mm.

Amsterdam, Rijks-
museum, inv. no.
RP-F-2011-21-145-31;
gift of the heirs
of Gerard Reve.

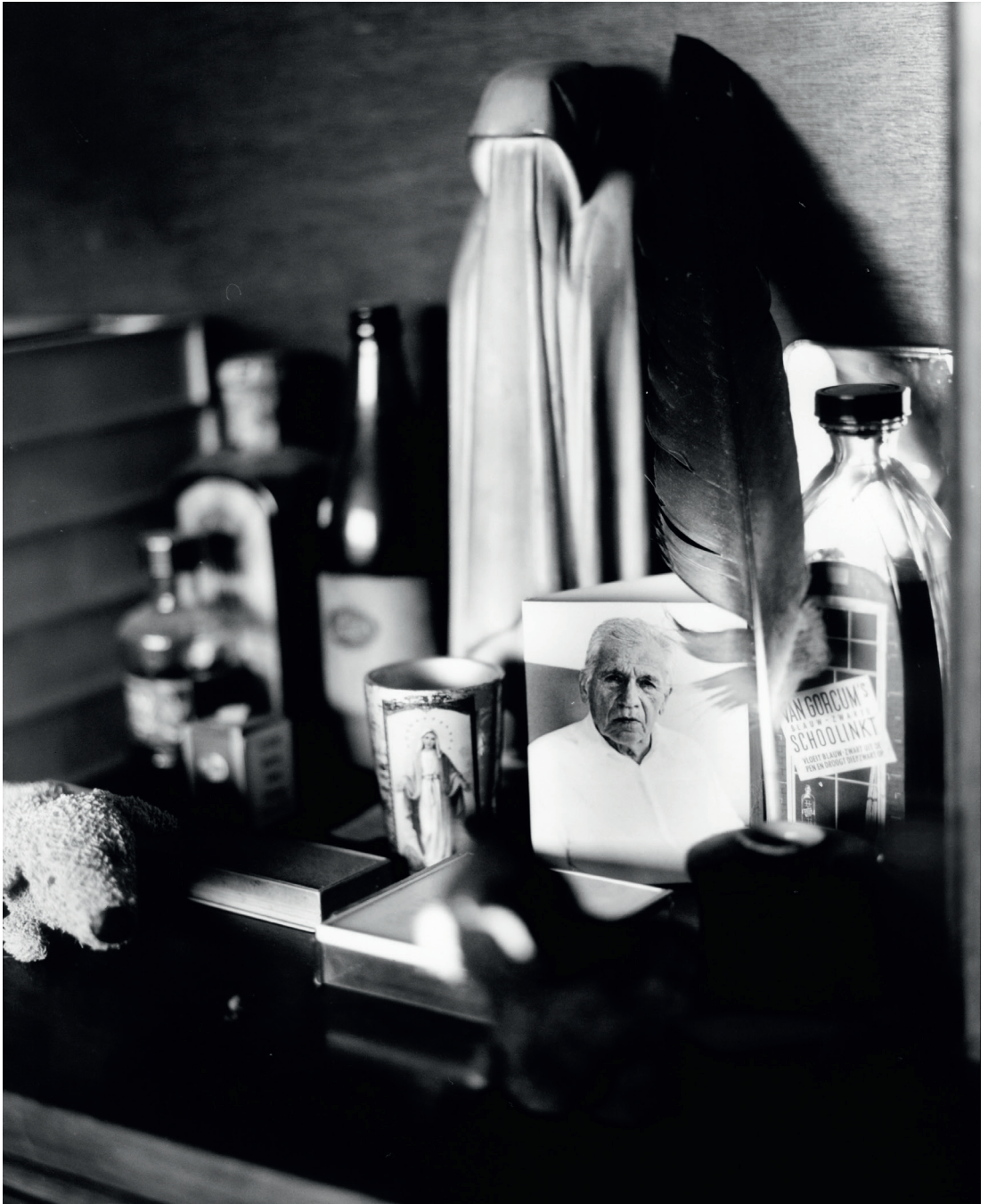


Fig. 29
STEPHAN
VANFLETEREN,
Gerard Reve's desk in
Machelen-aan-de-Leie
with a mourning

card portraying
Gerard Reve made by
Rineke Dijkstra, 2009.
Digital file.

NOTES

- * This article is an elaboration on the research by the same author, see H. Haest, *Between Ad and Allegory: Marketing Portraits of Gerard Reve*, Amsterdam 2013 (*Studies in Photography*, vol. 12). The *Rijksmuseum Studies in Photography* was funded by the Manfred and Hanna Heiting Fund, enabling young researchers from all over the world to explore our photography collections, conduct research at the Rijksmuseum, and publish their findings.
- 1 Inv. nos. RP-F-2011-21-1-1 to 145-33.
 - 2 Gerard Reve, *Nader tot U*, Amsterdam 1966, p. 120. Author's translation.
 - 3 Quoted from B.G. Antonissen and C. Oorthuys, *Reve|Hermans. Een Anekdote*, Rotterdam 1988, p. 4. Author's translation.
 - 4 Quoted from G. Clarke, *The Photograph*, Oxford 1997, p. 13.
 - 5 R.A. Sobieszek, *Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul 1850-2000*, Los Angeles 1999.
 - 6 M. Boom and H. Rooseboom (eds.), *A New Art: Photography in the 19th Century: The Photo Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, Ghent 1996, p. 60.
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 - 8 Ibid.
 - 9 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, Rockville 2008 (first published 1851), p. 72.
 - 10 Quoted from S. Sontag, *On Photography*, London 2002 (first published 1977), p. 158.
 - 11 M. Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, London 2002, p. 64.
 - 12 Ibid., p. 68.
 - 13 Ibid., p. 96.
 - 14 J. Lubbock, 'Adolf Loos and the English Dandy', in P. McNeil (ed.), *Fashion: Critical and Primary Sources – Vol. 3: Fashion and Urban Life*, Oxford 2009, pp. 3-18.
 - 15 Eddy Posthuma de Boer and Simon Vinkenoog, *Beeld in zicht*, Weesp 1984, p. 92. Author's translation.
 - 16 Klaas Koppe in interview with the author, 30 May 2012.
 - 17 Eddy Posthuma de Boer in interview with the author, 25 May 2012.
 - 18 Reve has published as Simon van het Reve, Gorré Mooses, Willem van Albada, Gerard Kornelis van het Reve, and Gerard Reve.
 - 19 Gerard Reve in interview with Jouke Mulder, 'Ik moet werken, anders word ik gek,' Elseviers Magazine, 29 April 1972, pp. 81-95.
 - 20 E. Praat, *Verrek, het is geen Kunstenaar. Gerard Reve en het schrijverschap*, Amsterdam 2011 (diss. University of Amsterdam), p. 61.
 - 21 Gerard Reve, *Op weg naar het einde*, Amsterdam 1963, p. 77.
 - 22 OVT radio broadcast, 'Brother, Where Art Thou', 21 August 2011.
 - 23 J.F. Vogelaar, 'Lieve jongens robotten. Van het Reve versjachert alles, desnoods zichzelf', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 28 March 1973.
 - 24 Quoted in T. Rooduijn, *Revelaties. Gerard Reve over zijn werk & leven*, Schoorl 2002, p. 61.
 - 25 Gerard Reve, *Zondag morgen zonder zorgen*, Amsterdam 1995, p. 44.
 - 26 Gerard Reve, *Zelf schrijver worden*, Leiden 1986, p. 104.
 - 27 Gerard Reve, *De taal der liefde*, Amsterdam 2004, p. 78.
 - 28 Harry Mulisch quoted from *Andere Tijden*, 'Het Raadsel van Reve', 16 December 2003.
 - 29 Piet van Winden in an interview with the author, 20 June 2012.
 - 30 R. Kagie, J. Vullings and R. Dijkstra (photography), 'Gerard Reve: De laatste jaren', *Vrij Nederland*, 15 April 2006, pp. 10-16.