



Portrait of Joris van Casteren by Stephan Vanfleteren, afgekocht.

# As If Their Activities Could Explain Something: Joris van Casteren and *Het zusje van de bruid*

Hilde Van Belle  
KU Leuven Campus Antwerpen, Belgium

**Abstract:** Joris van Casteren (b. 1976) is undoubtedly one of the most famous literary journalists in the Netherlands. In his stories he creates a peculiar atmosphere by drawing on diverse elements, such as the choice of topic, original perspectives, and his typical, dry, matter-of-fact style. His breakthrough came with his 2008 book, *Lelystad*, in which he describes his own coming of age in a brand-new city built on new Dutch land. In *Het zusje van de bruid. Relas van een onmogelijke liefde* (The sister of the bride: a tale of an impossible love), published in 2011, the writer goes back nine years in order to describe his own love story with a rich, intelligent, and artistic, borderline patient who is addicted to alcohol and drugs. The book caused a stir, and Van Casteren was reproached for transgressing the limits of privacy and morality. This study argues that Van Casteren challenges the boundaries of literary journalism by using different techniques. One is an absence of explicit emotions that he combines with suggestive and sometimes slightly bizarre signs of those emotions. This aligns with the abundance of scene and the absence of interpretation and judgment. The study argues that the effect of distance and uncertainty generates an open atmosphere that allows the author to touch upon basic human questions, such as loyalty and responsibility, as well as the creation of meaning and sense, and the limits of understanding both one's own motives and those of others.

**Keywords:** Dutch literary journalism – Joris van Casteren – rhetorics of nonfiction – literary journalism – literary criticism

Already at a young age, the Dutch narrative journalist Joris van Casteren (b. 1976) enjoyed a fine reputation, with much-appreciated articles about Nigeria, once promising but now forgotten poets and authors, and life on the edge of society in the Netherlands. One of his best-known early reportages, for example, is “De man die 2 1/2 jaar dood lag” (The man who lay dead 2 1/2 years) and the gruesome discovery Van Casteren investigates by interviewing the man’s neighbors and relatives. The book was published in 2003.<sup>1</sup> The autobiographical *Lelystad*, published in 2008, was received with praise as well, although some fellow citizens felt insulted by the negative way they were portrayed.<sup>2</sup> But when Van Casteren’s next book came out in 2011, the warm receptions turned frigid. It seemed that the journalist had crossed a line in his *Het zusje van de bruid. Relas van een onmogelijke liefde* (The sister of the bride: a tale of an impossible love).<sup>3</sup> In this book about his failed relationship with a wealthy woman suffering from borderline personality disorder,<sup>4</sup> Van Casteren describes a tumultuous love story that had ended nine years before, with Joris walking out. Two critics immediately accused the writer of hypocrisy and pummeled the book.<sup>5</sup> Not long after, the newspaper *Vrij Nederland* let him know that it would no longer need his services. A heated debate ensued about love, responsibility, and the ethical standards of narrative journalism. By 2019 Van Casteren’s career was again thriving, and he enjoys again the status of well-respected author. But the arguments that came up in the debate at that time deserve a closer look.

This study examines the perceptions of narrative journalism that emerged from the intense debate. In order to understand why *Lelystad* was successful and exactly which line was crossed in *Het zusje van de bruid*, a concise analysis of the two books is presented. The focus next will be on the explicit statements formulated by critics, in an effort to explore the rationale of the implicit standards that support their critiques. Finally, a discussion of the author’s characteristic style as well as the subject matter will raise key issues for literary journalism. These include the relationship between writers and their sources, and the role of journalistic stories as a quest for new meanings.

### Young Joris in Lelystad

On a hot June day in 1976, the young Van Casteren family moved from a tiny apartment in Rotterdam to a house in the newly built city of Lelystad. Firstborn son Joris was only five months old. The little family joined the thousands of pioneers who were attracted by this new Dutch conquest of water and the utopian project it represented. Thirty-two years later, in the 2008 book he published about his childhood and youth, the writer summarizes his experience.

In *Lelystad*, van Casteren describes his youth in a setting that is populated by his divorced parents and their new partners, and the many classmates and neighbors with whom he roamed the cheerless housing blocks. Dozens of sad life stories and events are depicted: idealists argue, couples betray each other, small traders go broke, officials make statements, hotheads resort to their fists, hustlers are caught, and real criminals go free. About his father's job interview, Van Casteren writes: "My father got on well with the members of the education committee. He had long hair, just like them. They wore John Lennon glasses and clothes they made themselves out of colored fabric. My father repeated what he had written in his letter. My mother sat there in silence."<sup>6</sup>

Joris is an intelligent boy with great powers of observation. His school life is determined by the pedagogical experiments of all too idealistic teachers who are given free rein in Lelystad. Order and structure are taboo, with boredom and lack of direction the consequence. On this subject, he writes:

The children who grew up in Lelystad only had themselves as an example. There were no previous generations who had achieved something, who had left their mark on the city. The city did not exude the triumph it was meant to; there was no triumph to speak of. Was it possible for people to be proud of a set of new homes built on a desolate plain?<sup>7</sup>

It is for that reason that Joris and a friend decide they are "also going to join in the vandalism."<sup>8</sup> He ends up being detained at the police station a couple of times, but fortunately he is too young to be prosecuted in earnest. His budding love life consists mainly of a series of disappointments. But one day, while he is watching a television program, what he sees and hears ultimately changes his life:

That evening . . . I stumbled onto a public channel with a documentary about Dutch experimental poets. I saw sleazy men with unkempt hair in smoky spaces babbling incoherent texts. I heard unknown words that sent sparks through my skull.

For a while I was confused. It was the feeling I had when I entered a cathedral for the first time in the old country. Useless pomp and circumstance which blew your mind, disruption which disturbed all logic.

The poetry activated an area in my brain that had never been activated before. In Lelystad I had never seen anything or anybody aiming for something higher, or it must have been the artists who had remained unknown, smearing clots of paint on their canvases and taking them to the art loan center.

That evening I discovered what a metaphor was. In Lelystad things were just as simple as they were. A mailbox was a mailbox, a parking lot was a parking lot. Trees did not look like crooked statues, they had been neatly

and properly planted. Nothing looked like anything else, everything looked like itself. Lelystad was a serum against your imagination.

In Lelystad there was no symbolism. Nowhere could you see an ornate façade, an Ionic pillar or a baroque tympanum. Not one building or object depicting something. There was nothing that referred to the battle that had been fought against water.

Lelystad had been made by practical people who didn't want to leave anything to chance. Every possible onset to chaos had been restrained beforehand. Lelystad had no unexpected forms evoking associations. The only thing the agricultural engineers from the Civil Service were unable to keep in check were the hallucinatory cloudscapes being blown across the city at high speeds.<sup>9</sup>

Joris decides to start writing poetry, swaps his jeans for camouflage, and becomes a punk. As a result, he becomes more alienated from the environment in which he grew up, as people react angrily to his new image. Nevertheless, he can still count on his parents—the story of his youth ends with a move to Utrecht, where he is admitted to the School of Journalism. It sounds almost too good to be true: a bored youth from a disadvantaged city sees, by coincidence, a program about experimental poetry, discovers the existence of metaphors and symbolism, decides to start writing poetry, and ultimately becomes a respectable (narrative) journalist.

*Lelystad* could be called a story of invention. In writing a book about his youth in Lelystad, the author invents both his own and the city's destiny. He shows how he grew up in a city without symbolism and without any reference to its history, a city designed by engineers and architects and their naïve ideas about order and functionality. In separate chapters, Van Casteren recounts in well-documented detail how their dream of a new world evolved over time. He describes how Cornelis Lely (1854–1929) devised the ambitious plan to drain the Zuiderzee, how Cornelis Van Eesteren had designed a stunning “urban plan,”<sup>10</sup> and how the “pragmatic” engineers rejected the architectural project because they wanted to build functional houses, totally devoid of imagination, in perfectly straight avenues.<sup>11</sup> Joris quotes: “‘Perhaps all those modular units were constructed too neatly,’ a doctor said. ‘An overdose of urban planning logic can also lead to planning neurosis.’”<sup>12</sup> Van Casteren discusses the power struggle between the engineers and the local authorities, the crime, the desperation, the boredom, and the many well-intentioned rescue projects that failed one by one. Unfortunately, “The agronomic engineers thought that their architectural order would also produce a social order,”<sup>13</sup> he writes, “but nothing appeared to be further from the truth. Initially the idea prevailed that unemployment, psychological distress, and crime could be labeled as childhood diseases; yet, in the 1980s the city derailed completely.”<sup>14</sup>

As a witness from inside, Van Casteren brings the city to life. This arduous labor of invention also shows in the way the narrative is presented. The style is rugged and dry, and the story is told in short, plain sentences without much dialogue. Poignant descriptions with telling details and striking quotes afford the many folksy stories a tragicomic undertone once in a while, as this unembellished description might demonstrate: “Children with extreme behavioral problems attended his school. While my father tried to implement the principles of Maslow<sup>15</sup> in practice, one of those children started hurling chairs.”<sup>16</sup> Expressions of emotions or judgment are rare, which adds to the strikingly enigmatic tone of the book.

### Plain Style Meets Shocking Story

These characteristics of style and tone reappear in Van Casteren’s next book, *Het zusje van de bruid*. The story, however, is different. The title, which translates literally with its subtitle, as “The sister of the bride: a tale of an impossible love,” recounts the love between Luna,<sup>17</sup> a wealthy, intelligent, beautiful, funny, and talented borderline patient who is addicted to alcohol and drugs, and Joris, a journalist who writes articles about social injustice and about promising authors who have fallen into obscurity. The story’s structure is fairly traditional and unfolds more or less chronologically, from their initial meeting through an intense and erratic relationship and ends with their final parting. The first-person narrative describes how Luna, already in the first encounter, at her sister’s posh wedding, draws all eyes to her as a result of her personality: quick-witted and funny, sophisticated, unconventional, and unpredictable. Luna tries to rebel against her rich parents by building her own life, yet after every relapse she succumbs to their care once more. Joris recounts their best times, as well as their lowest lows, and details his attempts to protect Luna from herself. He talks about her work, her family, her friends, and his job: the interviews, the writing, the magazine, his colleagues.

The peculiar style of the writing repeatedly challenges, testing the limits of the reader’s understanding. In fact, the presentation of the material in no small part propels the dramatic tension: the sharp contrast between the dry, matter-of-fact writing and the tragic story in all its shocking detail. From the very first paragraphs of the book, troubling flashbacks penetrate the mind of the narrator at the beginning of his quest: when he is sitting in his car, almost a decade later, looking at their house in Amsterdam, having decided to write their story.

I got into my car and drove over there. I parked in a space under a linden tree on the side of the street opposite the house. Sticky drops fall on my car: honeydew, secreted by greenflies feeding on the leaves of the linden tree. I just went through the car wash yesterday.

Things went okay for me. In the self-dimming inside mirror I see the children's car seats in the back seat. One blonde hair of the pretty, clever, sweet mother hangs on the headrest of the electrically adjustable passenger seat.

Between the car and the house, the water of the Oude Schans is splashing. Boats full of tourists pass by, pleasure yachts with German flags. From the Oosterdok they sail into the city, under a steel bridge, where the traffic of the Prins Hendrikkade crosses over. Houseboats lie by the quay. If I were to step on the gas, I would land on the roof of the Casa Aqua.

At the opposite side a parking space is free. I quickly drive to it. I park the car in reverse and hit a bike that falls down, clattering. Now I'm standing right in front of the house. Only the street and a narrow sidewalk are in between. I see the winding staircase behind the reflecting windows on the first floor. At once I hear again the sound of the winding staircase.

A wire is dangling from the windowsill under the windows of the second floor. It was wound around two flower boxes that used to stand on the windowsill. We had bought them with her mother, at a garden center in Wassenaar.

Not so long afterwards she wanted to climb out of the window. Her mother held her by her legs. She tore the wires loose and pushed the flower boxes down. They landed next to a man with a dog, who kept screaming for quite some time.

Eight years ago, I was in the house for the last time. Afterward I returned a couple of times to look at the house, in the evening, when it was dark, to see whether there was any light on one of the floors.

I wandered around, along surrounding alleys and streets. Everything in her proximity was filled with meaning. At a construction site near the Oude Schans I saw workers who were pouring concrete in the middle of the night. I started to take notes, as if their activities could explain something.

Now it is different. It's during the day, and I brought a laptop. My car is an observation post. I drove here from my house on the other side of the city. I know I will write about her. For a long time I suppressed this urge, to avoid offending anyone.<sup>18</sup>

However tragic the story, the narrative style is remarkably plain and dry. The book consists mainly of descriptions of settings and events, and quotes or short dialogues. Concise, paratactic sentences accumulate into short anecdotes that follow each other like staccato beats, often with no clear link. The first-person narrator rarely reveals any of his own thoughts. He is even less inclined to interpret or comment on the events described, or on how Luna thinks. This lack of introspection and interpretation creates a sense of alienation, an aura of mystery. The narrator appears to have no control and becomes lost in the course of the events. From the beginning the writing is presented as a painful quest for meaning: "Everything in her proximity was filled with meaning. . . . I started to take notes, as if their activities could explain something."<sup>19</sup>

The narrator's focus is entirely on Luna. Her words and actions propel the story forward and determine, to a broad extent, Joris's actions. Again and again, he tries to repair the damage she causes and get their lives back on track. An example:

Two days later the magazine organized a dinner party at a Lebanese restaurant. Colleague A., colleague B., the older married woman, and the daughter of the philosopher were there too. "Are you still with that whore?" the older married women asked. "He's with a junkie now," said the daughter of the philosopher.

Luna called. I ran out of the restaurant in order to understand her better. She was in Wassenaar lying with a bottle of vodka in the bed in the spare room where her granny stayed on visits. "I put out a cigarette on my arm," she said. "I feel really relieved, now I can finally go to sleep." Colleague B. opened the door of the Lebanese restaurant. "What would you like as a main course?" he asked.

The next day I went to Wassenaar. Luna lay in the spare bed with a bandage around her arm that had been put on by the G.P. in the morning. She tore off the bandage and almost proudly showed me her arm. I saw seven dark red, superficial burn marks, shiny because of the ointment for burns. Some burn marks were so deep that they could bring a rolling marble to a stop.

She had also tried to swallow her entire supply of Seroxat. The Shell director had jumped on top of her and had managed to make her spit out the pills.

I sat on the edge of the bed. "I will not do this again, Sweetie," Luna said. "From now on things will really get better."<sup>20</sup>

Joris appears to stumble endlessly from one situation to another. The two women at the table are also ex-girlfriends of his, which gives this tragic passage a comical feel as well. The tragicomical tone sometimes seems to appear in the naming as well: except for Luna and Joris, the characters are never called by their names. Instead, they are supplied with a set description: Luna's father is called "The Shell director," a neighbor is "the poet that was also a publisher," and his wife: "the wife of the poet that was also a publisher." The title of the magazine for which Joris worked is also withheld, referred to only as "the magazine." This penchant for periphrasis creates a new enigma for the reader: on the one hand it could be an attempt to create (professional? ironic?) distance, or to emphasize alienation, while on the other, it seems like a running gag intended to provide a little respite from the tragedy of the theme.<sup>21</sup> It is definitely an allusion to the idea of source protection, both a journalistic code and a popular style element in realistic novels.



### Adverse Critical Reaction

Two established critics drubbed the book, thus setting in motion a controversy in which supporters and opponents of both man and book engaged. Creating this kind of controversy is definitely an old media trick—any attention, good or bad, is good for book sales. However, it also pays to look closely at the arguments and try to work out the norms on which the criticism and the defense are based.

The most personal attack comes from Natasha Gerson, critic at *De Groene Amsterdammer*, the magazine where Van Casteren worked at the time of his relationship with Luna. “The magazine” does not come off well in the book: colleague A., Joris’s brother-in-law, for example, appeared to act as a middleman purchasing heroin, via an editor-in-chief, for Luna’s father, who wants to help his daughter cut down on the drug.

Gerson begins her piece, which is titled, in translation from the original Dutch, “Journalistic degradation of a relationship con artist,”<sup>22</sup> with an extensive disclaimer: Gerson is not acquainted with Van Casteren, has no bone to pick with him, and is even less familiar with Luna. Moreover, Gerson writes the piece in her own name, not in the name of the editorial office, which she had to convince to publish it. “This piece is published in the magazine that appears here and there in the book. Yet, I had to insist to have it published, because the editors weren’t all that enthusiastic about it. And I agree with them that any attention to this book is too much.”<sup>23</sup> Nobody could accuse her of an ad hominem attack; when she goes after Van Casteren, she claims the attack is based on his work. Yet she “does not intend to discuss the quality of the book.” Rather, she wants to challenge it “as an example of journalistic degradation,” and to do this formulates “an appeal for a moral revival in the publishing and media world.”<sup>24</sup> It is not just Van Casteren who is reproached—the publisher and the Dutch Foundation for Literature that awarded him a grant for the book are blamed as well.

Van Casteren is accused of “insensitive disloyalty” toward his former girlfriend. He is a man “devoid of soul” who wrote a book “with less introspection than the riff-raff described in criminal biographies.” According to Gerson, the most shocking aspect does not even concern the explicitly described, abusive situations in which the out-of-control characters end up. She provides a series of examples of similar stories that have appeared recently, both fictional and nonfictional. Rather, what is so outrageous to Gerson is the audacity with which the main character, a famous journalist, “exposes” himself as “a parasite and relationship con artist.” Van Casteren’s so-called love is nowhere to be found in the journalistic piece: his familiar, anemic “I’m-a-journalist” trick obviously does not work this time around,

for Gerson. The only thing he's up to is to profit from Luna's wealth and to continue benefiting from her mental confusion: "which brings" Gerson to her "actual charge: from the outset, his so-called love appears to rest on the possibility of the delayed account of a tourist watching from the sidelines. Tenderness is rarely involved, and sex does not seem to play a role either. More importantly, he never had any intention of actually helping her at all."<sup>25</sup>

According to Gerson, Joris faked his love so that he could write this "semi-literary, semi-finished product" later on. She goes on to paraphrase the whole story, in which she roundly denounces him from beginning to end, trying to demonstrate his cowardice, heartlessness, and cynicism, as well. She calls Van Casteren a jerk and, among other things, a well-educated upstart who "is not completely right in the head," who tries to present himself under the guise of journalism. People like him should not be given free rein on such delicate subject matter, she concludes, even if such a book might make a good addition to their journalistic resumé.<sup>26</sup>

The journalistic standard focused on here is both ethical and thematic: a journalist should not write about his own failed relationship with an unstable woman, out of respect for her and her family. But instead of presenting good arguments for this claim, Gerson moves from her indignation about the allegedly immoral act of publishing such a book to blaming the I, that is, the narrator and main character, for taking the position of a tourist watching from the sidelines and omitting introspection. She then concludes with an overall accusation of the author's despicable personality and his presumed lack of love. His decision to write and publish the book is confused with the way the main character, that is, Joris, is presented and with the judgment about Joris's bad behavior and his lack of love for Luna. (Unfortunately, as is the case with many failed love relationships, the question as to why it failed is complicated, and anything but a simple matter of guilt). Gerson did notice Van Casteren's "anemic 'I'm-a-journalist' trick,"<sup>27</sup> which shows that she is aware of matters such as style and composition, but this did not prevent her from mixing up things.

In her zeal to cast Van Casteren as a hypocrite, Gerson goes a good deal further, proposing that his fascination with Luna was based solely on the possibility of publishing their story later on. She extracts the "evidence" for this from the book itself. This is her argument: From (the way he describes) his behavior in the story it seems evident that Joris did not love Luna (1), so the only reason for his relationship with her is the prospect of writing a book and making money with the story (2). Because it is clear that (2) does not necessarily follow from (1), this slapdash line of reasoning rather demonstrates how Gerson is keen to tarnish Van Casteren with both personal

and professional misconduct.<sup>28</sup> In short, Gerson confuses the question of journalistic integrity with ill-considered and unreasonable judgment about a lover's (mis)behavior.

A clearer focus could have generated a stronger case. It is indeed obvious that the book touches upon certain boundaries of journalism. The question of intimacy between a journalist and his source, for instance, is interesting to develop. One of journalism's core issues is journalistic accountability and the corresponding relationship between the journalist and his or her sources. Yet, in the case of literary journalism, personal involvement by the journalist is widely accepted, as immersion and subjectivity are tools that render depth and meaning to the story. John Pauly, for example, studied how New Journalism brought such issues to the fore: "As a style of cultural politics, the New Journalism forced journalists and fictionalists alike to confront what it means to be a writer and to be written about, what writers owe their subjects and readers, and by what habits society organizes its practices of public imagination."<sup>29</sup>

Even more, scholars such as David Eason explore how, for many New Journalism writers, the roles of actors and spectators are no longer clearly defined and observing is considered as an act of analysis as well. As such, those writers depart from many forms of journalism where the interpretive stance is maintained, where passive spectators bear no responsibility for what they watch, and where the distinction between lived and observed experience implies that "real life is someone else's."<sup>30</sup> One might ask whether Gerson is sufficiently aware of such important narrative journalism issues.

In his response to Gerson's accusations, Van Casteren could easily push at an open door. He posits a rigorous division between personal motivation and the final story: "However, entertain the thought that I had indeed sought this situation out in a calculated effort, like a war reporter purposefully setting out for the battlefield, even still it remains peculiar to employ this as a case against a book in a review." He states that the quality of a book has nothing to do with the personal experiences and intentions of the author, nor with the way in which he processes those experiences in the book.<sup>31</sup>

Although Gerson promised not to discuss the quality of the book, she brings up matters of style and genre. "If it had been fabricated, we could have said that the drab rendering of the awful first person was a brilliant stylistic device," she states.<sup>32</sup> To her, the case apparently is different when it comes to fiction: when writing, poor losers can depict themselves in any possible despicable way, but journalists are not supposed to create any despicable first-persons as drab depictions of themselves. In summary, Gerson claims that personal failures must not serve as a source of inspiration for journalism but as

a source of inspiration for fiction, in which the fictional first-person narrators are also given the stylistic freedom to drably depict themselves. This reveals that she subjects the content as well as the style of narrative journalism to specific norms and restrictions. If the story was made up, the drab rendering of the awful first person might have been considered a brilliant stylistic device. But the story is real, which means an embargo on publication, and, in violation hereof, the instruction to be clear about your responsibility in questions of love and remorse. Gerson tries to draw a clear dividing line between the two genres and impose strict regulations upon literary journalism.

Criticism of style and genre choices forms the basis of Elsbeth Etty's piece "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden" (Leading a dangerous life safely together).<sup>33</sup> Etty, who, unlike Gerson, does not venture onto the thin ice of heavy moral and personal accusations, instead pretends to focus firmly on the literary problem itself. In her opinion, the book fails because the highly sensitive and tragic subject matter is not suitable for a report. She maintains that nonfiction is capable of producing stunning literature, but that it is not the appropriate place for mystification. In his previous book, *Lelystad*, Van Casteren succeeded in gracing ostensibly banal details with meaning, she claims, but what worked for a dystopian story like *Lelystad* fails entirely in one about a failed love affair. The author has not found a literary solution for this problem, she argues, so the book devolves from tragedy to banality.

Moreover, in Etty's opinion, Van Casteren does not do what a journalist should: instead of bringing the truth to light, he conceals it, despite the "ceremony of seemingly objectifying words."<sup>34</sup> By concealment she refers to the simple fact that Joris's fellow players are not referred to by name, and in so doing she oddly ignores the general journalistic code of source protection that the author applies here, albeit ironically. Obviously, in a case like this, with a famous journalist talking about his own past, it is not difficult for an inquisitive person to find out who the sources really are. But the point here is that Etty accuses Van Casteren of concealing facts and therefore not doing what a journalist should do.

Etty explains the problem of the "objectifying words" as follows: "Apparently the story about a dangerously ill woman and her family cannot be objectified by the author. Finally, Van Casteren is more than an observer: he is a party involved in the drama, perhaps partly to blame for Luna's plight."<sup>35</sup> By this she most probably means that because of his personal involvement Van Casteren cannot present the story objectively. Etty does not accuse Van Casteren of immoral behavior, as does Gerson; rather, she claims that deep personal involvement prevents writers from rising to the adequate stylistic standards of narrative journalism, even if they try to. In her conclusion, she

connects this psychological inhibition to the genre question: “A journalistic reportage is not the most appropriate genre for something as intimate as the failure of your relationship; poetry or fiction lend themselves better to the expression and conveyance of the feelings accompanying this topic.”<sup>36</sup> The psychological matter has been turned into a question of genre: complex feelings and intimacy do not belong in journalistic reportage.

Fiction is a better place for (real) emotions, she claims, and the book fails because Van Casteren, as a journalist, prevents himself from expressing his emotions. As proof of this, Etty refers to a passage in which the first-person narrator says he feels nothing (during a heroin trip that Luna asks for). Etty interprets this “flat, colorless tone”<sup>37</sup> that emanates throughout the book as a (failed) attempt at journalistic distance: “It was raining. I didn’t care about getting wet, nothing mattered any more. I didn’t feel any love for Luna, I hardly felt any love for anything.”<sup>38</sup> This example is a highly problematic argument, as it clearly proves the exact opposite: in this passage, Joris fully reveals his feelings of pain, loneliness, and despair. There is no sense whatsoever of a “flat, colorless tone.”

Etty’s problematic interpretation of the quote reveals an interesting confusion. To her, fiction is the place for complex emotions, whereas journalism only renders simple and straightforward emotions. Apparently narrative journalism style should not only be careful with the expression of emotions, but it should in the first place be simple and straightforward enough to be read on a literal basis. The underlying norm in this matter is one of literalness, once again giving in to the idea that in journalism, facts are facts, and reality can and should be presented *as it is*.

After a series of questions about Joris’s personal motives—Is his journalism unbiased and detached enough? Is he showing aggression toward former colleagues?—Etty wonders why the author does not reveal any of his motives. She subsequently refers to a passage in which the author finally divulges something about himself: “‘Why were you with someone like that?’ asks the young man. I told him about my earlier obsession with suicide victims and junkies, that I also wanted to commit suicide or be a junkie. I just wanted to be able to do it safely somehow. ‘I thought that would be possible with her.’”<sup>39</sup> With regard to this confession too, she scoffs. Joris wants to live dangerously, but safely, somehow! He demonstrates that he has no answers, she argues, and that he does not understand what Luna wants. Once more Etty refuses to show any understanding for the complexity of paradoxical desires, for the confusion and despair of the young Joris, who has succumbed to the irrational lure of danger and transgression. She concludes (rightly so!) that she simply cannot understand the book’s purpose: “*Het zusje van de bruid*

is not fiction, not literary nonfiction and is in no form or fashion whatsoever, journalism. At most it is a failed account of a failed love.”<sup>40</sup>

Gerson’s and Etty’s remarks appear to set quite a few standards for narrative journalism, briefly listed here:

- Do not write about your own failures, errors, and tragic loves (ethical standard);
- And do not write about intimate, personal themes.
- If, however, you do write about sensitive themes such as tragic love:
  - Show introspection;
  - Do not write as if you were a tourist watching from the sidelines;
  - Do not play the “I’m-a-journalist” trick;
  - Clearly express your feelings of love, despair, and remorse;
  - Write about tenderness and sex;
  - Be explicit with regard to your intentions;
  - Do not write about a wealthy woman who struggles with borderline personality disorder (embarrassing);
  - Do not describe any “disgusting” scenes (unless they are new in the literary tradition);
  - Do not write about your own writing activities or about your writing colleagues (embarrassing);
  - Do not omit any “facts” (provide all names);
  - Do not apply for any grants or funds; and
  - Draw clear lines of distinction between fiction, literary nonfiction, and journalism.<sup>41</sup>

In short: according to Gerson and Etty, literary journalism must respect a limited theme choice and employ a clear style that allows for straightforward interpretation. This way of thinking differs from the general appreciation of literary journalism, as it is expressed, for example, in Thomas Connery’s observation “that literary journalism attempts to show readers life and human behavior, even if what actually emerges is life’s incomprehensibility and the inexplicability of human behavior.”<sup>42</sup>

In the following sections, the grounds for the critics’ underlying assumptions are discussed.

### **In Defense of Method**

When Van Casteren receives an email from the editor-in-chief of *Vrij Nederland*, informing him that he is no longer welcome because of his “views on journalism,” he decides to respond. In “Leg jij die pen maar neer” (Just keep your hands off that pen),<sup>43</sup> he describes his book as “a highly

intimate, literary-journalistic account concerning my relationship with an incredibly wealthy girl with borderline disorder, and with whom I was head over heels in love.”<sup>44</sup> He tells how disastrous the relationship was, how he finally ended it, and how he continued to struggle with psychological problems for years. Writing the book, on the advice of a writer colleague, seemed “a painful process but also one of enlightenment.”<sup>45</sup> In terms of tone, Van Casteren continues, “It had to be an affectionate book, devoted to her. But it also had to be brutal and ruthless, the way it often was with her. I wanted, as always, to present the shocking situations dryly, stripped of emotion. I leave the interpretation and judgment up to the reader.”<sup>46</sup>

Here the author places emphasis on his method. He assures that it is no different in *Het zusje van de bruid* from his other work. He explains why he is always so frugal when it comes to making emotions explicit: he leaves it up to the reader to interpret and judge, even in such disquieting situations. Van Casteren describes how he struggled to find an appropriate form for his story, and why he chooses to be cautious with interpretations and emotions. These concerns dovetail with the findings of scholars such as Connery, who considers the interweaving of style and meaning as precisely forming a crucial interface between literature and literary journalism: “In a literary work, and in literary journalism, style becomes part of the meaning conveyed; the structure and organization of language interpret and inform.”<sup>47</sup>

Chris Anderson takes this idea even further. In his work on the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of nonfiction, he claims:

Nonfiction reportage is more than informative: it is an effort to persuade us to attitudes, interpretations, opinions, even actions. The rhetoric of reportage is subtle—it must be interpreted, the texts read carefully for nuances of imagery and tone—but it is there, powerful and persuasive. Hollowell, Weber, and Hellman have demonstrated that the use of point of view, symbolism, and other literary techniques makes the New Journalism inherently and consciously “fictive.” Only a naïve reader, they suggest, ever regarded *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* or *In Cold Blood* as literally true or free of the author’s shaping attitudes and perceptions.<sup>48</sup>

Van Casteren is well aware of the challenges he poses to the reader. He realizes how puzzling the contrast between the dreadful situations and the dry tone must be. The reader, who is at a loss as to how to think of it, is encouraged by this reticence, and maybe comes to realize how the silences of the narrator reveal not only the helplessness of the characters, but also the very process of interpretation and meaning making. This is what Anderson means when he writes “that these broadly ‘literary’ devices are perhaps more importantly rhetorical strategies for shaping the reader’s attitudes and perceptions.”<sup>49</sup>



Van Casteren continues his response with a comment on the genre issue. He callously undermines Etty's plea for another genre. "Etty thinks that it is better for books about disturbing topics that come dangerously close home to be fiction. Then we always have recourse to 'Thank God it's not true. It's just made up.' Yet, the unmasking of this open-ended interpretability is precisely where literary nonfiction packs its punch."<sup>50</sup> With these words Van Casteren identifies an important aspect of the problem. In his opinion, the themed, moral, and stylistic limitations Etty imposes on journalistic work reveal primarily how she attempts to protect herself from the tragic, complex, and paradoxical situations of the "real" world, a world in which people, for example, can realize that they want to lead *a dangerous life safely somehow*. Here Van Casteren staunchly defends strong literary journalism stories that do not shun tragedy and complexity, leaning upon the familiar topos that reality surpasses fiction.<sup>51</sup>

Fictional and nonfictional stories often appear to have to satisfy different sets of criteria. Critics seem to prefer fiction as an appropriate genre for complex themes. Fiction relies on the freedom of imagination and relieves writers from moral (Gerson) and psychological (Etty) worries. Yet, the preference for fiction can be a way of ignoring the stylistic opportunities that come with nonfiction. As Pauly puts it, somewhat wittily:

Literary critics enjoy debunking the realism of nonfiction stories, for they hope to affirm the fictiveness of all narratives. Having settled journalism's hash, philosophically speaking, critics can deny all claims to representation, and hence free the literary imagination from its earthly entrapments. I would agree that all narratives are fictions, and that realism mostly means a set of shared stylistic conventions for dramatizing authenticity. I would also maintain that the New Journalism offered something as a form of journalism, not just as a disguised, inferior form of fiction. The New Journalism can still remind us that the truth of all writing is a matter for social negotiation.<sup>52</sup>

Possibly, this realism is what Gerson and Etty expect from nonfiction. Van Casteren is definitely inventing a style that does not fit into this tradition of journalism. There is rather another tradition to which Van Casteren's work might refer. In his work on the social, cultural, and historical framework of the New Journalism, Eason has shown how reporters place themselves in relation to the traditions of journalism. In this well-known classification of realist versus modernist writers, Van Casteren would undoubtedly fall under the modernist category:

Realist reports reflect faith in the capability of traditional models of interpretation and expression, particularly the story form, to reveal the real.



Although the reports acknowledge cultural relativism in their attention to the various symbolic worlds of their subjects, this awareness is not extended to the process of reporting, which is treated as a natural process. Modernist reports call attention to reporting as a way of joining writer and reader together in the creation of reality. Narrative techniques call attention to storytelling as a cultural practice for making a common world.<sup>53</sup>

In *True Stories*, Norman Sims writes that “Eason himself has lost interest in the distinction. He recently said it was the experimentation that made New Journalism interesting for him. ‘I think of it primarily as a series of literary experiments, less a thing than some ventures’.”<sup>54</sup> Eason’s words might very well apply to Van Casteren’s work: it is the experiment with new themes and forms, it is the rhetorical invention of bringing actual themes to life.

### And What about Luna?

Now there is place to further consider this cultural practice by turning to other critics and their contributions to the views of reality. The critics agree that Joris should have taken better care of himself and the sick young woman Luna, at the time. Their judgments of his writing the book range from immature behavior to cold calculation and hypocrisy. Fortunately, one critic succeeded in contextualizing these judgments more broadly and thus also produced a more effective interpretation of this behavior. In “Requiem van een onmogelijk verzet” (Requiem of an impossible rebellion), Gijsbert Pols denounces the “new prudery” and taboo related to talking about one’s personal aporia before it has been fully processed and “been afforded a place.”<sup>55</sup> Joris appears nowhere as the ideal son-in-law. Pols says: “The Joris van Casteren in this book is someone who hangs apathetically above his own life, unable to assume responsibility for himself or others, impotent when faced with his own emotions. However, he has written a great book.”<sup>56</sup>

Pols understands the criticism put forward by the “sensible people,” but as a “fool” Joris is able to consider life more profoundly: “He understands it better—and not just when it concerns Luna.”<sup>57</sup> Here the tone of the book, which shows the turbulent struggle of characters that desperately try to escape their misery, is acclaimed. According to Pols, the book is also a struggle against the mentality of the “sensible” people around them who, out of decency, want to comply neatly to social norms:

It is a mentality that experiences this well-being as self-evident, views happiness as a right and is incapable of imagining an existence beyond a Saturday afternoon’s shopping. If something goes wrong, we quickly find a solution and should that one not work, we move on to the next one and the next, and the one after that. *Het zusje van de bruid* portrays a version of the Netherlands that is imbued with this mentality. . . .<sup>58</sup>

This is also Luna's struggle, in Pols's opinion. It is precisely the "sensible" that Luna desperately tries to rebel against. Luna's wealthy parents live in this "solutions-oriented country," a country that lives in denial of all forms of pain and misery, a country in which a name and a solution are deftly devised for each problem, a country in which rich, beautiful, intelligent girls should be happy. This is where Pols brings out the socio-critical aspects of the book, and he immediately succeeds in extricating Luna from the obvious role of voiceless victim the critics had intended for her, in total conformity with the social norms of the solutions-oriented country, a country in which language is straightforward, and people are classified in clear categories of victim/culprit, ill/healthy, or responsible/irresponsible. By not stowing Luna away in the well-defined category of illnesses, Pols demonstrates how critics all too easily disregard the socio-critical and psychological subject matter of the book:

Luna is aware that this solutions-oriented country is a lie. She knows that it excludes, pretends, and murders and robs and destroys in order to keep the lie in place. This is why she repeatedly brings up 9/11, takes a Nigerian journalist to her father's villa, takes photographs of a semi-demolished district in Lelystad and, after the example of the *Bloomsbury Group*, wants to begin a literary salon.<sup>59</sup>

Pols claims that Joris is attracted by this radical pursuit of a reality in which real questions can be posed. When Luna does not succeed in executing these projects and seeks salvation in increasingly drastic methods of self-destruction, Joris is apparently "sensible" enough to retreat and seek his salvation elsewhere. According to Pols, the small references to the happiness Joris apparently found in the meantime also add a touch of hope to the book.<sup>60</sup> In his interpretation, Pols shows how nonfiction plays a role, in Anderson's words, "as a form in the cultural and ethical debate of our time."<sup>61</sup>

Most other critics berated the views described above: they talk about the (alleged) hypocrisy, speculate on the real names of the characters, and discuss the less than flattering way in which Van Casteren portrays his former colleagues. Van Casteren lets slip to Frans Oremus "that my method as I applied it in this book [*Lelystad*], as well as in my articles, is very highly acclaimed by the literary and journalistic world, but as soon as I turn my gaze to their small worlds they scream blue murder."<sup>62</sup> This might very well be a valuable argument, which should remind the reader in the first place of socio-political questions about authorship and readership. What does it mean that narrative journalism often focuses on marginal groups, and where is the line between pity, indignation, and voyeurism?

### Wordlessness

These questions also reveal a critical difference between *Lelystad* and *Het Zusje van de Bruid*. Educated readers can easily sympathize with young Joris growing from a streetwise kid into a respectable journalist. The story about the same journalist who gets completely lost in a tragic love story is more difficult to digest, especially within a context that is difficult to define. Not only are Joris and Luna complex and ambiguous characters, but their families, friends, and colleagues are not always clearly defined. For example, Luna's well-heeled parents are not unequivocally portrayed or presented as the direct cause of her problems. And the critique of the solutions-oriented country has not been picked up by everyone. In contrast, the stories in *Lelystad* are clearly placed in a sociological context: the many characters can easily be viewed as examples and victims of the derailed society in Lelystad.

Yet, in both stories Joris is a powerless, rudderless, first-person narrator who keeps his motives mostly to himself. By leaving out interpretations and emotions, Van Casteren reveals the power of language and the underlying cultural assumptions of stylistic conventions. Interestingly, there is a striking coincidence with the principal theme of nonfiction, as it is formulated by Anderson and in the outline of Van Casteren's project. To Anderson, contemporary nonfiction is absorbed by its own rhetorical dilemma. This shows, for instance, in Van Casteren's metadiscursive elements, preoccupation with the limits of language, and fascination with wordlessness. Anderson writes:

My central concern in interpreting this work is the relationship between style and theme. Form is the shape of content, Ben Shahn has said. In contemporary nonfiction, as in all literature, style is best understood as a reflection and enactment of a content and a point of view. In fact, I will try to show that the principal theme of contemporary nonfiction is its own rhetorical dilemma. The writing of Wolfe, Capote, Mailer, and Didion is profoundly metadiscursive, concerned with the problems of style and expression and language in America, and in this way it provides all the terms we need for understanding its internal workings and its cultural value. What preoccupies all four writers, whatever their ostensible subject, is the effort to convey in words the inexplicable energies, intensities, and contradictions of American experience. Though in very different ways, Wolfe, Capote, Mailer, and Didion each define their subjects as somehow beyond words—antiverbal or nonverbal, threatening or sublime; overpowering and intense or private and intuitive—and then repeatedly call our attention to the issue of inexplicability throughout their descriptions and expositions. A self-consciousness about the limits of language is the structuring principle of their work. Wordlessness can be positive or negative in these texts, energizing

or threatening. It can be personal or communal. It is something to find and something to claim. Yet whatever its nature, it generates a rhetorical challenge for the writer. As they themselves define their task, Wolfe, Capote, Mailer, and Didion must push language to its limits, explore the edges of expression, intensify and expand the power of words to reach the level of a sublime and inexplicable object.<sup>63</sup>

In his work, Van Casteren doesn't really *discuss* his rhetorical dilemmas. Rather, they are enacted by the sometimes-disruptive silences of the narrator that result in an enigmatic style. Scenes and quotes are surrounded by a certain absence, a certain wordlessness. It is Van Casteren's way of exploring the edges of expression, the limits of language, and (therefore) the limits of the reader's thinking and understanding.

### Conclusion

The search for meaning and importance is an existential theme for all (young) people, but it is extraordinary how Joris van Casteren, the boy from Lelystad, was able to express this escape from a stifling environment that was totally devoid of imagination. This search is consistent with the enigmatic style in which he rarely interprets or evaluates events and leaves questions unanswered. He does not adapt to the stylistic conventions of journalistic realism. He refuses to assume the obvious role of the self-assured and judging guide. He also refuses to engage in the socio-realistic tour, in which characters are presented only as pitiful victims and readers allow themselves to be overcome by the familiar and predictable feelings of indignation and compassion. And lastly, he refuses to adopt the all-too-comfortable ironic tone with which narrator and reader take pleasure in the floundering characters of a dismal city.

When Van Casteren recounts the story of a personal "impossible love," for which no clear sociological or philosophical context is provided, he violates apparently unwritten laws and crosses indistinct boundaries. Some critics feel the need to bring him back into line, using vague and dubious arguments. It is evident that literary nonfiction conjures up quite different expectations than does fiction, and that these expectations involve far more than the factual guarantee alone. Journalism, where reporting on the facts is paramount, is subject to all kinds of criteria that are imposed by this reality. Van Casteren's work challenges these criteria, because it reveals that language, meaning, and interpretation are subject to ambiguous and unspoken laws that are based on personal, historical, cultural, and social structures.

Van Casteren's more recent work also looks for these boundaries. In *Het been in de IJssel* (The leg in the IJssel)<sup>64</sup> the author is obsessed with his investigation of the origin of a human leg a fisherman found in the IJssel

river. Van Casteren talks to police officials and the court involved in the case, as well as relatives of the suspected victim. *Mensen op Mars. Relaa's van een manmoedige poging* (People on Mars: the tale of an audacious endeavor)<sup>65</sup> is based on interviews with candidates for a planned reality show that would select a few people to take part in project Mars One, a megalomaniac mission to colonize the planet Mars, without any possibility of returning. Van Casteren visits the candidates and outlines the staggeringly intense way in which they experience the various selection rounds. The reality show in question never took place, and project Mars One is now dead and buried as well. Van Casteren's most recent book is about Piet Van der Molen, a hippie-like senior who managed to hide his dead mother's body for over two years "because she told him to" and because he didn't know how to start a new life without her.<sup>66</sup> Again, Van Casteren presents a true story about a situation most readers would rather not be confronted with. The VARA television interview with Van Casteren and Van der Molen can be watched on YouTube.<sup>67</sup>

In *Lelystad*, Van Casteren describes how his very first series of articles, about the atmosphere in the local pubs, was discontinued, due to angry pub landlords.<sup>68</sup> The book about his relationship with Luna, which appeared approximately seventeen years later, also stirred up ill feeling. Van Casteren clearly has found a way to probe some boundaries of literary journalism. His weapon is suggestion: by presenting a narrator who repeatedly seems to lose himself in the events, he succeeds in creating a world that consists of the quest for importance and meaning. It is precisely by refraining from predictable interpretations that he reveals their predictability and makes room for less comfortable perspectives.

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*Hilde Van Belle is professor of Dutch and rhetoric at KU Leuven Campus Antwerpen, Belgium. Her main research interests are narrative and persuasive strategies in the media, rhetoric, and literary journalism. She is secretary of the Rhetoric Society of Europe vzw, and editor of Verbal and Visual Rhetoric in a Media World (2013) and Let's Talk Politics: New Essays on Deliberative Politics (2014).*



### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Van Casteren, “De man die 2 ½ jaar dood lag,” 175–91. About a man who lay dead for two-and-a-half years, this work was re-published as one chapter in an anthology of his original articles that bears the same title.

<sup>2</sup> Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 316 (from the 2017 edition. All translations by Griet Vercruyssen, with many thanks for her help with the translation work).

<sup>3</sup> Van Casteren, *Het zusje van de bruid*.

<sup>4</sup> Borderline personality disorder is characterized by impulsiveness and by a long-standing pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, behavior, mood, and self-image, with symptoms often including intense anger and fear of abandonment. “Diagnostic Symptoms Explained: The essential feature of borderline personality disorder is a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts.” American Psychiatric Association, “DSM Definition: Borderline Personality Disorder,” para. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Gerson, “Journalistiek bederf van een relatiezwendelaar”; Etty, “Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden.”

<sup>6</sup> Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Van Casteren, 180.

<sup>8</sup> Van Casteren, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Van Casteren, 182–84.

<sup>10</sup> Van Casteren, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Van Casteren, 86.

<sup>12</sup> Van Casteren, 124.

<sup>13</sup> Van Casteren, 316.

<sup>14</sup> Van Casteren, 166.

<sup>15</sup> Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” 370–96. In his now famous hierarchy of human needs, Maslow describes the hierarchy as moving from physiological needs to safety and security needs, social needs, esteem needs, and, finally, self-actualizing needs.

<sup>16</sup> Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Luna (cf. lunatic?) is not her real name. The only real name used in the book is Joris’s, the narrator.

<sup>18</sup> Van Casteren, *Het zusje van de bruid*, 7–9.

<sup>19</sup> Van Casteren, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Van Casteren, 119.

<sup>21</sup> Kregting, “Noem het dan ook geen liefde” [Don’t call it love, then], 177.

<sup>22</sup> Gerson, “Journalistiek bederf van een relatiezwendelaar.”

<sup>23</sup> Gerson, para. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Gerson, para. 1–2.

<sup>25</sup> Gerson, para. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Gerson, para. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Gerson, para. 7.

<sup>28</sup> The fact that Gerson bases her severe judgments about the relationship

solely on this book and not on other sources is another gap in her argumentation. In the assumption that it is so crucial to prove Van Casteren's guilt, Gerson might well have made an effort to interview authorities about the matter or even other characters in the book. However, she gives no evidence that she tried to do that. The omission puts her argument on shaky ground.

<sup>29</sup> Pauly, "The Politics of the New Journalism," 125.

<sup>30</sup> Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 196–97, 196.

<sup>31</sup> Van Casteren, "Leg jij die pen maar neer," para. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Gerson, "Journalistiek bederf van een relatiezendelaar," para. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden."

<sup>34</sup> Etty, para. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Etty, para. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Etty, para. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Etty, para. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Van Casteren, *Het zusje van de bruid*, 201, quoted in Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden," 14.

<sup>39</sup> Van Casteren, 201, quoted in Etty, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden," para. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Etty writes, "*Het zusje van de bruid* is not fiction, not literary nonfiction and is in no form or fashion whatsoever, journalism," para. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Van Casteren, "Leg jij die pen maar neer."

<sup>44</sup> Van Casteren, para. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Van Casteren, para. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Van Casteren, para. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, *Style as Argument*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Van Casteren, "Leg jij die pen maar neer," para. 12.

<sup>51</sup> To be fair, Van Casteren does take this interlinking of fiction and open-ended interpretability rather far. In doing so, he overlooks the paradox (or mystery) that readers can sometimes be moved more deeply by fictional stories than by real stories.

<sup>52</sup> Pauly, "The Politics of the New Journalism," 122.

<sup>53</sup> Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 192–93.

<sup>54</sup> Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, 246. From this perspective, Joris van Casteren would definitely belong to the group of interesting writers.

<sup>55</sup> Pols, "Requiem van een onmogelijk verzet," para. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Pols, para. 3. It is interesting that Pols does not speak about Van Casteren's role as a journalist and the standards outlined by Etty and Gerson. In the second paragraph he categorizes the text as an autobiography and reviews it as such.

<sup>57</sup> Pols, para. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Pols, para. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Pols, para. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Pols, para. 18, refers to the second paragraph of the book. See endnote 18, above.

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, *Style as Argument*, 3. Anderson's full quote reads, "The more important question is the role of nonfiction as a form in the cultural and ethical debate of our time."

<sup>62</sup> Oremus, *Joris van Casteren rekest af met De Groene*, para. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Anderson, *Style as Argument*, 4–5.

<sup>64</sup> Van Casteren, *Het been in de IJssel*.

<sup>65</sup> Van Casteren, *Mensen op Mars*.

<sup>66</sup> Van Casteren, *Moeders lichaam* [Mother's body]. On the back cover, Van Casteren is dubbed the "Truman Capote of the Low Countries."

<sup>67</sup> Joris van Casteren and Piet Van der Molen, guests in the talk show, "De Wereld Draait Door" [The world keeps turning on], on the Dutch BNNVARA-channel was published February 28, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KDrDv0ApkQ>, retrieved July 9, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 206.

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