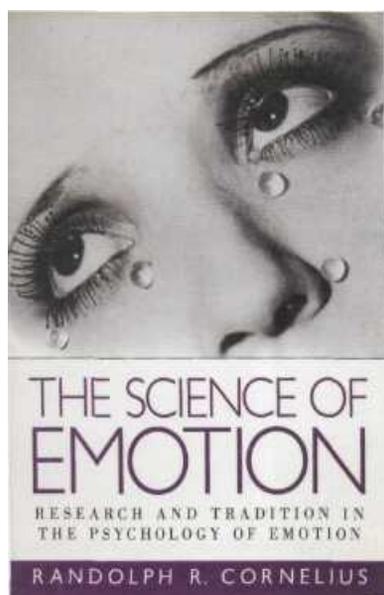
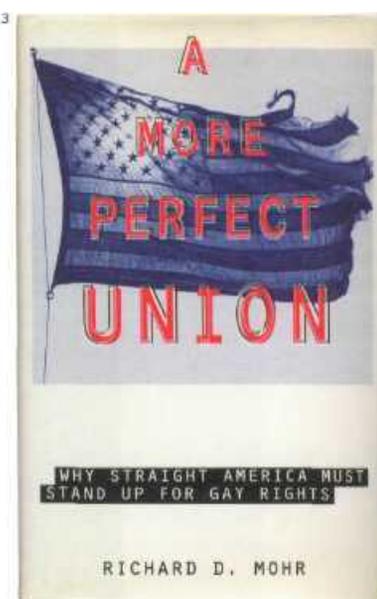
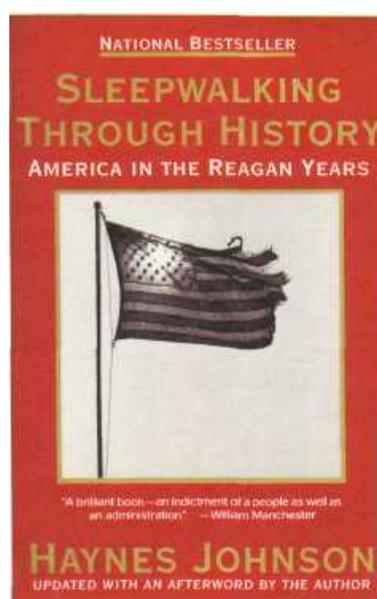


# Bookshelf photo shop



1. *Tears* by Man Ray, 1932. Unknown designer, 1996. Man Ray wins the prize for the most photographs used on book covers (more than 30 at the last count), though some are portraits for biographies.
- 2 and 3. *American Flag*, by Robert Mapplethorpe, 1977. A tattered but defiant American flag provides a trenchant metaphor for one book on the Ronald Reagan era of American political life and another about gay politics; the use of Mapplethorpe's photo makes the symbolic link even more compelling.
2. Design: Charlotte Staub, 1992.
3. Design: Mary Maurer, 1994.



For many years, I have haunted secondhand bookstores, spending hours searching for rare classic photography books that I could not afford when younger. And it was while prowling these aisles that I began to spot familiar images from the history of photography. Such images appear frequently on the covers of novels, textbooks and volumes of poetry; books whose subject matter does not always correspond with the (often iconic) photographs that graced their jackets. Curious about the relationship between cover and content, I began to assemble a collection called 'Covering Photography' that numbers more than 1000 book covers, and includes at least 300 photographers. These images span the history of the medium, from Nice'phore Niepce, Louis Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot through to Cindy Sherman, Carrie Mae Weems and other contemporary practitioners.

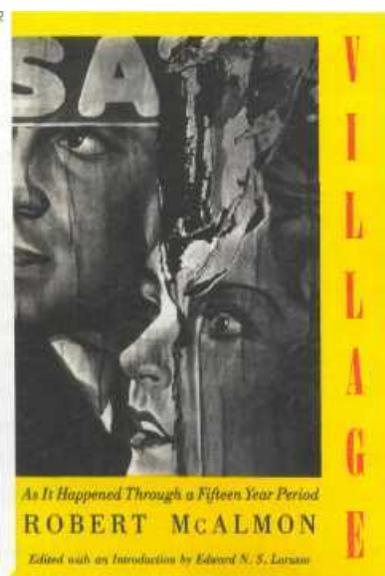
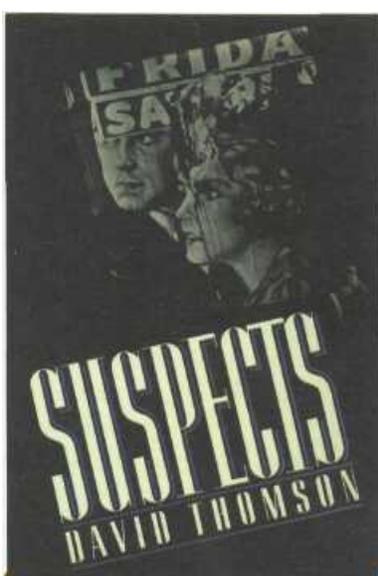
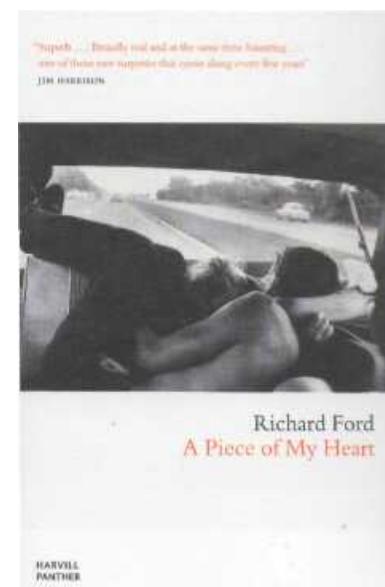
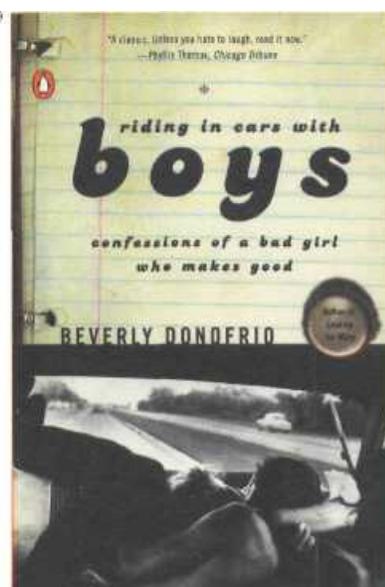
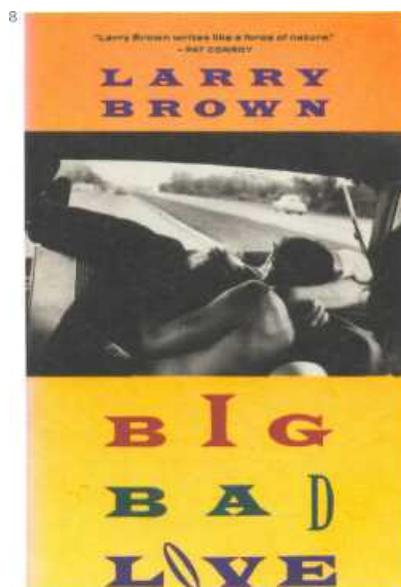
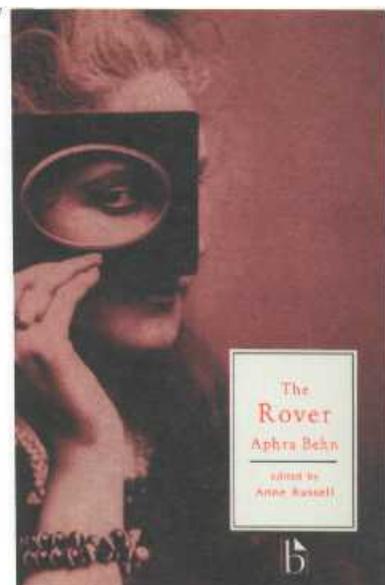
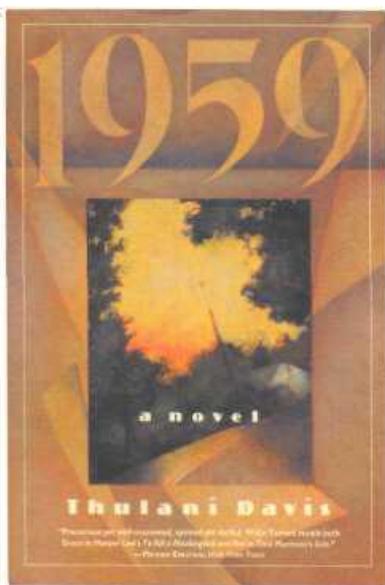
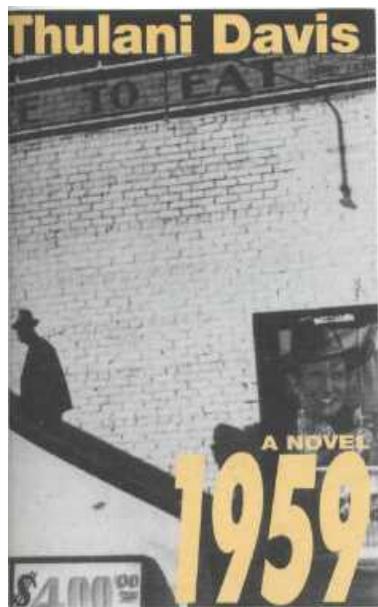
During its transformation from photograph to book cover, the original image is often cropped, coloured, reversed or otherwise manipulated to fit the aesthetic intent of the designer or the more practical concerns of the publisher. The original photograph, conceived as an independent aesthetic object, is consciously re-used, either as a visual cipher for a book's subject, or as an attention-seeking sales device. This prompts a question: how does such a shift in context affect a photograph's meaning?

There is no simple answer to this question. The relationship between cover image and book content runs the gamut from strictly literal to highly

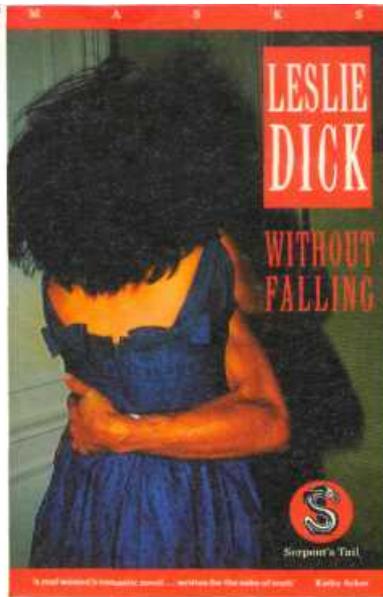
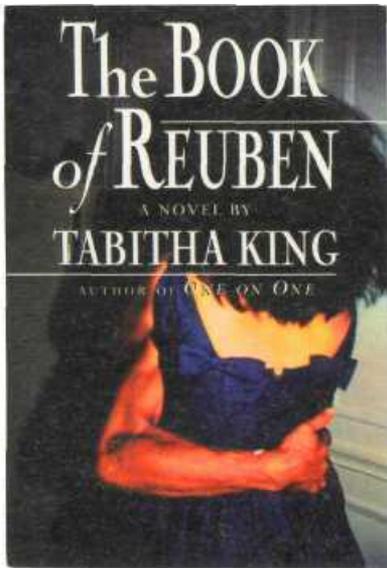
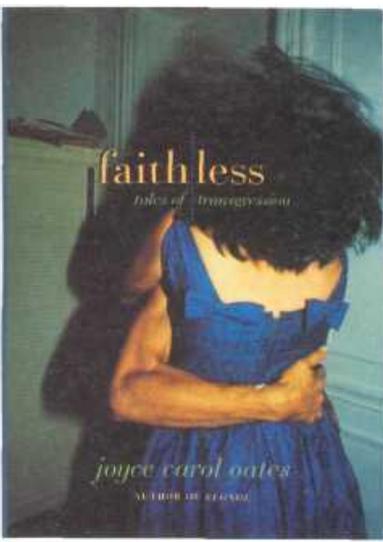
symbolic. A biography, for example, will often have a photo of its subject on the cover; whether that photo is by Richard Avedon or a more obscure talent, its connection to the book's main theme is direct and precise. Books about war often employ images by the likes of Robert Capa, W. Eugene Smith, Don McCullin and Larry Burrows on their covers, but the connection of those images to text, down to the specific war and battle, is usually a linear one.

Other topics allow more wiggle room. Similar versions of Walker Evans' *Tom Movie Poster*, taken at Cape Cod in 1930 and first published in his seminal *American Photographs*, are found on the covers of at least two books. *Village* (a 1990 University of New Mexico Press reprint of Robert McAlmon's 1924 novel) investigates, according to its jacket blurb, '... the quiet desperation of life in a North Dakota Prairie community,' while in *Suspects* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) David Thomson employs poetic licence to track the arc of fictional movie characters' lives. That the original Evans photograph can represent these two unrelated topics with equal fidelity is a testament to its graphic power and semiotic complexity.

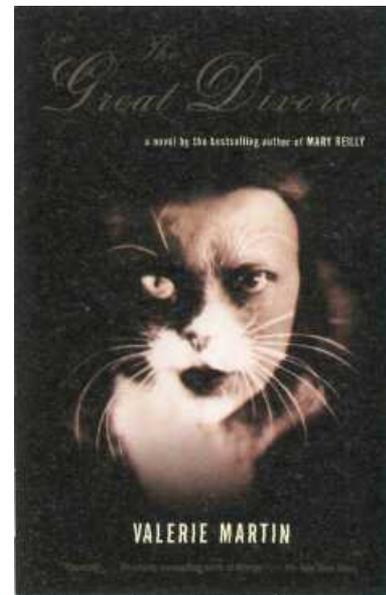
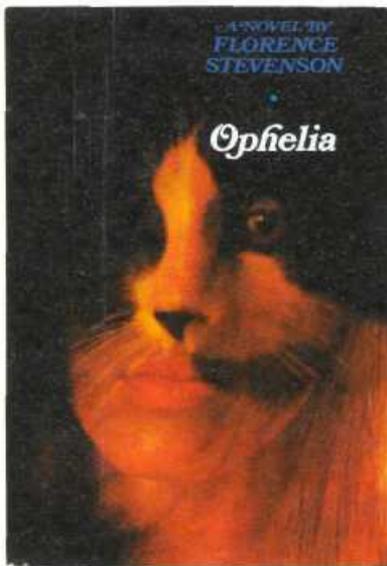
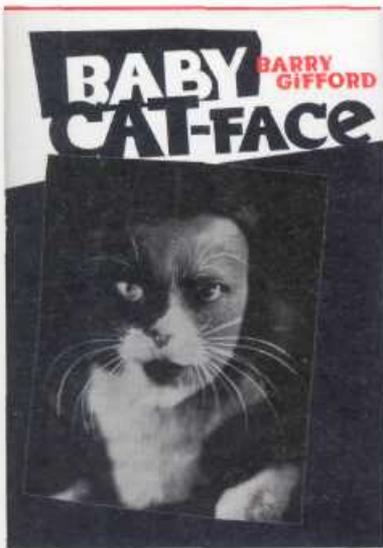
Reversing the equation produces equally interesting results. Editions of *1959*, Thulani Davis's coming-of-age novel set in the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, use images from at least two major photographers: Marion Post Wolcott's graphically striking picture of a black man climbing stairs to the 'Colored' entrance of a movie theatre (1992, Hamish Hamilton



4. *Negro Man Entering Movie Theatre by 'Colored' Entrance* by Marion Post Wolcott, 1939. Designer unknown, 1992.
5. *After Nan Goldin's Sun hits the road, Shandaken, N. Y., 1983.* Cover illustration and design: Honi Werner, 1993.
- 6 and 7. Full picture and detail from *Countess Castiglione* by Pierre-Louis Pierson, ca.1860.
6. Design: Denise Breslin, 1981. 7. Designer unknown.
- 8-10. *Unfilled* by Magnum photographer Bruce Davidson, 1950s, from his 'Brooklyn Gang' series. 8. Design: Lorraine Louie, 1991.
9. Design: Joseph Perez, 1992.
10. Unknown designer, 1996.
- 11 and 12. *Tom Movie Poster* by Walker Evans, 1930.
11. Design: David Quay, 1985.
12. Design: Tina Kachele, 1990.



13-15. *The Hug*, NYC 1980, by Nan Goldin. Note the variation in colour and contrast. The image on 15 has been flipped, presumably for compositional reasons. 13. Design: Roberto de Vicq de Cumplich, 2001. 14. Design: Leonard Telesca, 1994. 15. Design: The Fish Family, 1987. 16-18. The self-portrait *Cat and 1*, 1932, by Futurist photographer Wanda Wulz, has been reproduced as often as signature images by many of her better known contemporaries. 16. Design: David Blankenship, 1995. 17. *After Wanda Wulz*. Cover photography and design: Lester Krauss, 1968. 18. Design: Megan Wilson, 1994.



edition) has a more direct correspondence to the novel's subject matter than the jacket of the 1993 edition from Harper Perennial, on which designer Honi Werner has rendered a semi-abstract painting from a small, central detail of Nan Goldin's dreamlike *Sun hits the road, Shandaken, N. Y. 1983*.

Metaphor takes centre stage when a book's subject involves love and/or sex, particularly when poetry is the form. Poems by their nature have a more abstract relationship to literary content, and the juxtapositional possibilities of cover and subject for a volume of poetry are often limited only by the designer's imagination. Karl Blossfeldt and Eugene Atget both seem popular choices for poetry, romance and memoir; a single Blossfeldt image, *Bryonia alba*, can be found, with slight variations in cropping and colour, on the covers of two poetry collections and a memoir. Photos by Andre Kertesz or Brassai contribute urban sophistication and a sense of mystery to romance and seduction, while Magnum photographer Bruce Davidson adds grit. In fact photographs from Davidson's early 'Brooklyn Gang' series are by far the most popular book cover choice of his many bodies of work; his iconic image of two teens necking in the back seat of a car appears on the softcover editions of Richard Ford's *A Piece of My Heart*, Larry Brown's *Big Bad Love* and Beverly Donofrio's *Riding in Cars with Boys*.

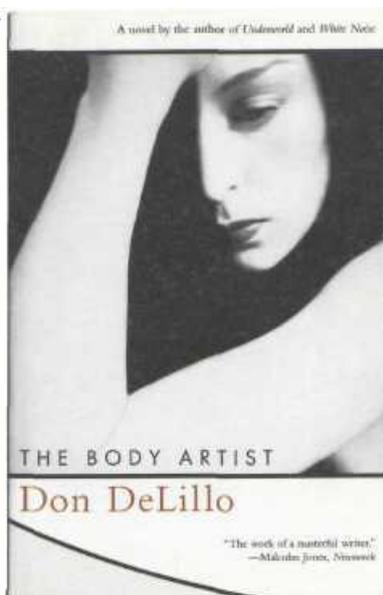
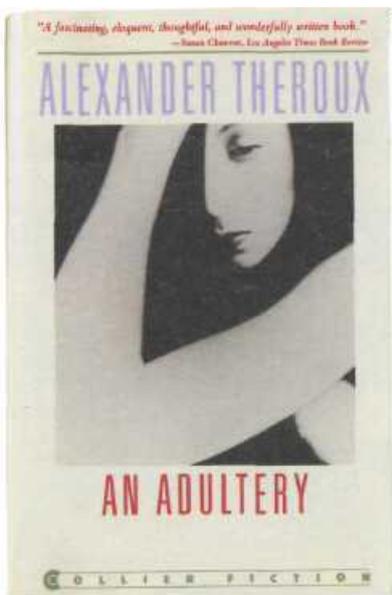
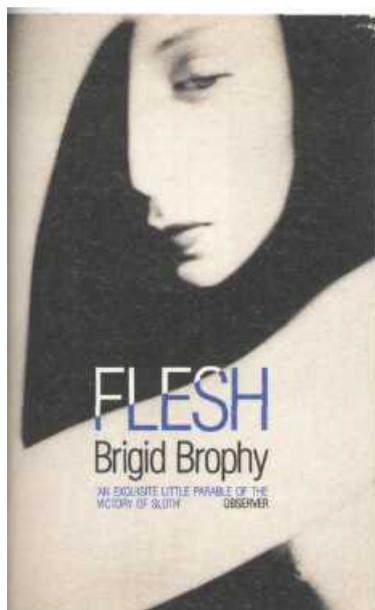
If a cover idea calls for nudity (or what passes for nudity in mainstream publishing), the list of photographic candidates is long. The most striking

use of the human form in book jackets comes from Bill Brandt's 1961 opus, *Perspective of Nudes*, work from which can be found on the covers of at least half a dozen books, perhaps most notably *Cherry* by Mary Karr. Brandt has also scored at least one triple play: his signature image *Nude, London*, 1952 covers recent reprintings of Brigid Brophy's *Flesh*, Alexander Theroux's *An Adultery*, and Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*.

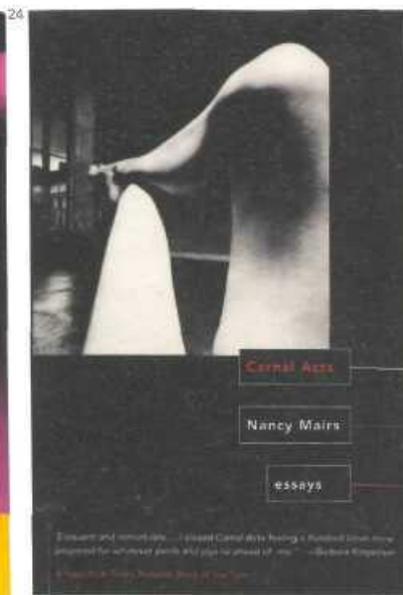
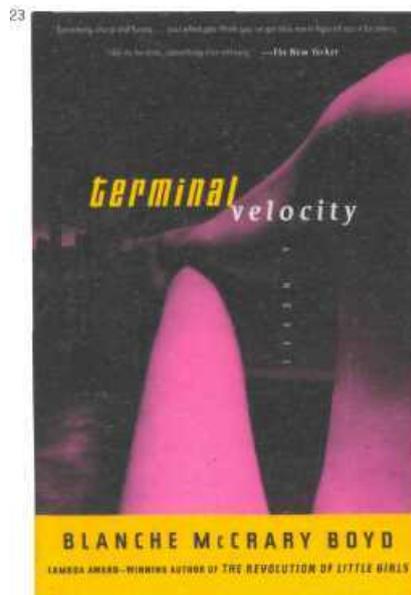
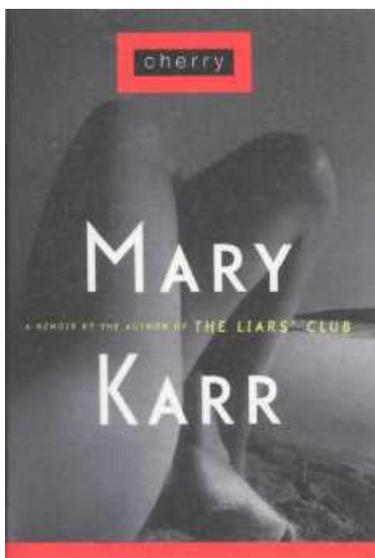
True and fictional crime is well covered by Weegee, as one might expect, but if I had to award a prize for the most curious cover in this category it would go to the 1990 Faber & Faber edition of Emma Tennant's *Two Women of London*, a revamping of the Jekyll and Hyde legend, sporting Clarence John Laughlin's surreal, nostalgic double-exposure from 1947, *The Masks Grow to Us*, on its cover, flipped, doubled and coloured blue with hot red accents.

There are many discoveries yet to be made. This book cover collection, still expanding, can be viewed as an alternative take on the nexus of literature, graphic design and photographic history. ©

The author is currently building a database and website, hosted by Boston College. In approximately six months' time, anyone with access to the internet should be able to view the entire collection, organised by author, photographer, designer, publisher and publication date.



19-21. *Nude, London, 1952*, by Bill Brandt. 19. Design: unknown, 1990. 20. Design: Lee Wade, 1988. 21. Design: Francine Kass, 2002.  
 22. *St Cyprien, France, 1951* by Bill Brandt. Design: Paul Buckley, 2000. The image has been flipped horizontally from the original.  
 23-24. *Eaton Place Nude, 1951*, by Bill Brandt.  
 23. Design: Calvin Chu, 1997.  
 24. Design: Sara Eisenman, 1996.  
 25. *The Masks Grow to Us* by Clarence John Laughlin, 1947. Design: Irene von Treskow, 1990.



The original image is cropped, coloured, reversed or altered to fit the intent of the designer or concerns of the publisher.

