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LOADING THE IMAGE

A critical and creative thesis presented in
partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Creative Writing

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Abstract

This Master of Creative Writing research project consists of a collection of lyric and prose poems, *Sea Glass*, and an accompanying exegesis, “Loading the Image.” These works were written to explore the creative and critical opportunities inherent in a photograph album. Both exegesis and poetry collection reflect my research into the ways in which the contents, form and meaning of a personal, family photograph album could be represented in a series of auto/biographical and ekphrastic poems. Specifically, I asked how an emotional response to certain kinds of photographs could be reflected in poetry and how a sequence of such poems could be ordered in a collection so that the experience of reading the poems resembles the experience of viewing an album. The poetry collection accounts for 70% of the thesis and the exegesis for 30%.

The exegesis investigates photographs and albums within two contexts which are in turn reflected in the collection in individual poems and in the sequencing of the whole. The first context is concerned with the concepts of *punctum*, *studium* and *that-has-been* described by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. These concepts, and my reading of other theorists interested in the relationship of the photograph to its subject and how this relationship is perceived by a viewer, suggested analogies between photographs and lyric poetry. Parallels between the experience of looking at a photograph and reading or writing a poem about a photograph are explored in the exegesis most specifically through an analysis of Ted Hughes’ poem “Six Young Men” and, in the creative component, through the lyric and ekphrastic poems I wrote for inclusion in *Sea Glass*.

The second context is concerned with photographs and photograph albums as instruments of social history. Here, critical writing from authors Annette Kuhn and Martha Langford on how albums and their contents provide connections with the past through memory-making offers insights into the use of photographs for life writing. These insights are explored in the exegesis in reference to selected poems from Lyn Hejinian and Kerry Hines and in *Sea Glass* through auto/biographical poetry and in the sequencing of the collection.

My research into theoretical responses to photographs and albums inspired me to develop a creative project for which I wrote a series of poems to represent individual photographs and the experience of viewing them in the context of my family album. These poems include ekphrasis of the photographs as well as prose and found poems which are meditations or commentary by a speaker who represents a present-day viewer of the photographs. My reading of Barthes, and in particular his insights into how a photograph might evoke an emotional response from a viewer, encouraged me to consider how ekphrasis of a photograph could itself evoke such a response. The collection is structured so that it reflects the way in which the implied author of the poems comes to understand the contents of the album. Here, Langford's discussion of the role of a domestic photograph album in the recitation of family stories suggested how *Sea Glass* could be sequenced to tell the family story contained within the poems. By drawing on these contexts I aimed to replicate the visual storytelling capabilities of an album in a poetry collection where poems represent the photographs.

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