



Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography

Timothy Dow Adams

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On the surface, the use of photography in autobiography appears to have a straightforward purpose: to illustrate and corroborate the text. But in the wake of poststructuralism, the role of photography in autobiography is far from simple or one-dimensional. Both media are increasingly self-conscious, argues Timothy Adams, and combining them intensifies rather than reduces the complexity and ambiguity of each taken separately.

Focusing on works by Paul Auster, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sheila Ortiz Taylor, Sandra Ortiz Taylor, N. Scott Momaday, Michael Ondaatje, Reynolds Price, Eudora Welty, Wright Morris, and Edward Weston, Adams explores the ways in which text and image can interact with and reflect on one another. Photography may stimulate, inspire, or seem to document autobiography, he demonstrates, but it may also confound verbal narrative. Conversely, autobiography may mediate, motivate, or even take the form of photography. Because both media exist on the border between fact and fiction, Adams argues, they often undercut just as easily as they reinforce each other. Exploring the interrelations between photography and autobiography uncovers an inherent tendency in both to conceal as much as they reveal.

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