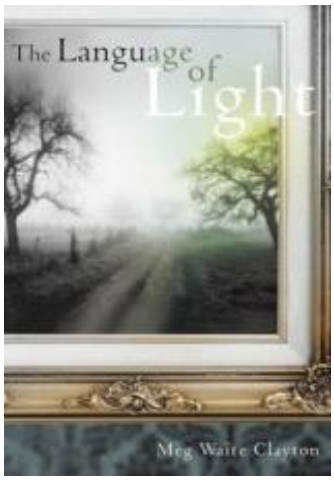
The Language of Light

by Meg Waite Clayton



About the Book

Set in the old-moneyed horse country of Maryland, the story of a young mother trying to put her life back together after the death of her husband

Nelly Grace moves her two young children to a privileged, horse-breeding world in the Baltimore countryside, after the unexpected death of her husband. Struggling to build a new life, Nelly finds herself swept up in the traditions and social politics of this insular world. Emma, the matriarch of the fox-hunting community, offers Nelly guidance and friendship until past and present secrets begin to unfold.

Encouraged by Emma and her grown son, Dac, Nelly rekindles her desire to become a photojournalist, like her father. As she sets to work with her camera, though, she realizes her success is tangled up not only in her feelings about her husband's death, but also in her relationship with her father, a man who has allowed fame and ambition to come before his family. Then her father comes to visit, and Nelly's fragile new beginning is thrown into chaos.

A brilliant old-fashioned read, filled with secrets and surprises, **The Language of Light** is a beautifully told story of a woman moving into the future by uncovering the past.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think Nelly Grace moves to her father's ancestral farm at the beginning of **The Language of Light**? Why does she hide her love of photography from her father? Why doesn't she give herself permission to succeed as a photographer?

2. Nelly and Emma are both women who aspire to be something different than what is expected of them. Do they succeed or fail? How do the differences in their backgrounds and their generations affect their choices?

3. The first Nelly sees of Emma is "a stranger riding across my bridge on horseback, wearing a hat" (p. 8), and Emma appears in various hats throughout the novel. Is her riding cap or the old brown suede hat she wears while on her tractor different from her other hats? Does this say something about her?

4. Is Emma Crofton a woman you would want in your life? What did you like best about her? What did you like least? What is the truth about Emma?

5. Do Nelly's feelings about her husband's death change over the course of the novel? Are they different from her father's emotions about her mother's death?

6. Does Nelly fall in love with Dac, or with his image of her, or neither or both? Is her relationship with Dac similar to her relationship with Wesley?

7. Does Nelly's father love her? Does he support her choices? How does his perception of his relationship with Nelly differ from hers?

8. Does Nelly long to be like her father, or does she fear becoming like him, or both?

9. Nelly, Emma and Willa are all mothers devoted to their sons. Does their love for their children help each of them move forward or hold them back?

10. What does Nelly learn from her father's hidden photographs?

11. What is the "language of light" referred to in the title? How are images of light used throughout the book?

12. In a book about images, what was the most striking image of the novel for you? What photographs have you encountered in your life that have influenced you? What photographs make you most uncomfortable?

13. What do you think a photojournalist's obligations regarding the privacy and dignity of the individual subject are? How would you balance these obligations against the public's right to know?
Was Pat right not to make his hidden photographs public?

14. What does the fact that Pat's photographs turn to ash at the end of the novel say about his life? What does Nelly's burning them mean? Was she right to burn them? Would you have?

Author Bio

New York Times bestselling author and book club favorite Meg Waite Clayton is the author of nine novels, most recently the instant *USA Today* bestseller TYPEWRITER BEACH and the international bestsellers THE POSTMISTRESS OF PARIS and THE LAST TRAIN TO LONDON. Her books have been published in 24 languages, and have been finalists for the Bellwether Prize (now the PEN Bellwether), the National Jewish Book Award, and the Langum Prize. She also

writes for major newspapers and magazines, mentors in the OpEd Project, and is a member of the National Book Critics Circle and the California bar. She lives in California and Connecticut.

Critical Praise

"An engaging and compassionate portrait of an artist learning to embrace the full potential of her power. Meg Waite Clayton writes with a photographer's precision, clarity and care."

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