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Masterful essays that illuminate not only how we die but also how we live.

Thomas Lynch, poet, funeral director, and author of the highly praised *The Undertaking*, winner of an American Book Award and finalist for the National Book Award, continues to examine the relations between the "literary and mortuary arts."

Bodies in Motion and at Rest: On Metaphor and Mortality Details

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Nicholas says

I know it's novel, but who ever thought about asking a mortician or a funeral director about life? Usually they trade in the wares necessitated by the problem of a body gone the way of eternity. And be that as it may, this book is replete with metaphors that sing the praises of the living, the hard truths of love, and provides a professional perspective on not just death, but how to live before you get there.

Bronson says

I love a good surprise book. I don't know where I got this one from, if it was given to me or if I picked it up at a bookstore and put it on the shelf but I recently picked it up and I couldn't have been more impressed. It's a memoir / collection of essays. He gives his thoughts on life, death, marriage, divorce, alcoholism, poetry, funerals, kids, and cats. Its intelligent, witty and poetic.

I don't often underline in my books but I always wanted to have a pen or pencil handy when I read. There are some great insights and his mastery of language and expression is so much fun. I'll be recommending this to a few friends. Its too good not to share.

Ron Mohring says

A mixed bag, in my opinion, which is too bad because I'm a huge fan of Lynch's poetry and feel also that The Undertaking was an amazing book. There's just a lot of talkiness here, and repeated themes and pseudo-hip references that remind me of elderly relatives--"Stop me if I've told you this before"--yes, yes you have. This book could have been pared down by half because so much of the good writing really soars, especially the meditations on alcoholism.

So sorry to not have liked this better.

Joan Lieberman says

Needed a second edit.

Longfellow says

At the bookstore, I pulled this book off the shelf and started reading "The Way We Are," an essay near the middle of the collection. This kind of capricious approach to reading is not unusual for me. What is unusual is that I read the entire twenty page essay; after reading several pages on the floor, I sought a chair and

finished the essay, engrossed and oblivious to my surroundings.

Lynch is gifted with words, and these essays demonstrate that his eyes, ears, and other senses are open to both life's miracles and its tragedies, however small or large. I was convinced after the second page of the Introduction that this was a book well worth my time. Thanks to a mix of wry humor and serious contemplation I was not disappointed.

While one could generalize Lynch's themes as love, sex, and death, these labels are too specific; it is life with all its predictabilities, surprises, and nuances with which he is concerned, and he writes about the entire scope with originality and insight. Though he repeats themes and even sentences at times in these essays, each essay is well worth reading because his capacity for profound expression of the common human experience is exceptional.

I read another review of this collection that noted these essays feel somewhat like a repetition of his first essay collection, *The Undertaking*, which won a National Book Award, and I trust this evaluation.

Nonetheless, having not yet read that first collection, I recommend this second one. Some of my favorites were "Bodies at Motion and at Rest," "Wombs," "The Way We Are," and "Y2Kat."

Ella says

This was overall a good read. Even though I think it strayed off topic fairly often and I definitely didn't agree with all of his thoughts, Lynch has a wonderfully entertaining style. I especially enjoyed the title essay, along with "Funerals-R-Us" and "Reno."

Bonnie says

Thomas Lynch is a published poet, an award-winning essayist - and a small town funeral director. He writes about the everyday, everyman business of life and death. "Bodies in Motion" presents wide-ranging essays - some humorous, some poignant and all thought-provoking. There is the essay about big-business funeral companies (Funerals R Us) trying to replace the small, family-owned funeral parlors in the US. Their biggest promoted product: pre-planned funerals. Do-it-yourself beforehand to save the work, distress, inconvenience, etc. of your loved ones when you die. Don't let your funeral details be a burden to your children. Lynch's response: why not be a burden to your children, they were a burden to you all your life. They should know what you would like and not like. And, funerals are for the living - a stage of grief that they need to own and be a part of.

The funniest essay for me is entitled: "Y2KAT" with its opening line: "By the time you read this, the cat will be dead". Lynch doesn't hate cats; he hates just one cat - that belonged to his former wife - who he also hated (and honored with a scathing published poem) Of course, he ends up after the divorce with the cat. It is only fitting - after reading the excerpts of the poem about his ex-wife, that the author write an essay about the cat - and hoping for its demise. Very funny.

Jonathan Hiskes says

America's favorite undertaker-poet muses on death and life. The essay on drinking and alcoholism in Lynch's life and his son's was surprisingly good. So was the piece that begins "It is always a choice between the soft-porn movies and the Gideon's Bible.

Kitty Russell says

I'm going to start by saying that I really enjoyed this book and would give 4.9 stars if I could. This is another of those books I picked up on a total whim in the library, knowing entirely nothing about it but for the few words on the back. The book is actually a collection of essays rather than one single story and has a feeling of a short story collection, each story is separate and unique. There is unity though, although each essay may vary in topic they blend surprisingly well together.

Dealing with life and death and other challenging aspects of being human(the bit in between) could make reading this downheartening and depressing, but it's not. At all. Lynch has a beautifully poetic way of writing (as people have said, it's evident that he's a poet) about memory and experiences, with a gentle kind humour towards it all. It's also extremely honest.

The **only** reason this didn't get 5 stars is because I didn't enjoy the story about the cat (as much as some did) and there were some bits that delved too far into the funeral business to my liking. I get that he's an undertaker and the history of his profession, I really enjoyed all the discussion about the old way of funeralcare versus the McDonalds funeral (keeping the family name etc) This sort of discussion is very relevant to all of us, whether we have to deal with death or not, McDonaldization is very much a part of our society and it's books like this that remind us just how far afield that culture has become.

...But all the facts and figures about this thing being owned by that company lost me a bit, especially when it felt like this topic had made it's point and big, presumably American funeralcare names were thrown at me again and again. Perhaps it's because I'm a brit and am completely unaware of any of those big name companies. Or because the slightest mention of statistics send me cross-eyed. Who knows?

Connor Bounds says

I enjoyed this book just slightly less than his first work, "The Undertaking."

Tamara Murphy says

Oh my, I enjoyed these essays. Really, how can you put down a book that starts with this sentence:

"So I'm over at the Hortons' with my stretcher and mini-van and my able apprentices, young Matt Sheffler, because they found old George, the cemetery sexton, dead in bed this Thursday

morning in ordinary time."

Thomas Lynch is a writer (essays and poetry) but he is also an undertaker -- second generation of an Irish Catholic family in an idyllic town in Michigan. His work caring for the dead and their grieving loved ones provides a perspective most of us do not bring to our blank pages. Grief informs him through his daily encounters at work, but also in his daily life as a single Dad, recovering from divorce and alcohol, teenagers and a hearty, hostile cat.

This is a book I want to own and visit again often.

Stephen Selbst says

Thomas Lynch is a curious combination, a poet and a funeral director. His essays, on life, death, families, poetry and alcoholism are shaped by his deep sensitivity and his true gift for expression. I didn't love all of the essays equally, but most of them stayed with me. His prose has a truly haunting clarity and elegance that I admire.

Pandoraswhttigr says

One of my favorite books to date. A great perspective that has stuck with me since I read this in middle school.

Ammie says

Witty and filled with slightly caustic humor juxtaposed against very thoughtful and sincere meditations on mortality and the higher purpose of funerals and end-of-life memorials. Lynch covers more ground than I expected, going from abortion to why Eve's apple-picking wasn't such a terrible thing to his son's love of fishing, and overall the handling was quite delicate. One of my favorite essays went between his hatred of his son's cat, his love for said son, his relationship with his ex-wife, and how all of those relate to poetry, and the streams flowed so smoothly into each other that it inspired me. Lovely.

Jamie Howison says

There is so much good writing in this book, starting with the opening few lines of the Introduction: "People sometimes ask me why I write. Because, I tell them, I don't golf. This gives me two or three days a week - five or six the way my brother was doing it before he had a midlife crisis and took up rollerblades." As soon as you read that, you just know that the ride is going to be a good one. And for the most part it was, though I have to admit that I bogged down about two thirds of the way through, which is something that simply did not happen for me with Lynch's earlier book, "The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade." That book was more focussed than this one, and it all just hung together in a way that "Bodies in Motion and at

Rest" doesn't. Maybe Lynch needed a more determined editor who would convince him that not all of these essays needed to be included in this collection?

I do have to say, though, that pieces like "The Way We Are" (which includes both a rather transparent narrative of the author's alcoholism, as well as really helpful set of insights on prayer) are just so good that I still have to give this one 4 stars.
