

[PDF] The Undertaking: Life Studies From The Dismal Trade

Thomas Lynch - pdf download free book



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Description:

"...I had come to know that the undertaking that my father did had less to do with what was done to the dead and more to do with what the living did about the fact of life that people died," Thomas Lynch muses in his preface to *The Undertaking*. The same could be said for Lynch's book: ostensibly about death and its attendant rituals, *The Undertaking* is in the end about life. In each case, he writes, it is the one that gives meaning to the other. A funeral director in Milford, Michigan, Lynch is

that strangest of hyphenates, a poet-undertaker, but according to Lynch, all poets share his occupation, "looking for meaning and voices in life and love and death." Looking for meaning takes him to all sorts of unexpected places, both real and imagined. He embalms the body of his own father, celebrates the rebuilt bridge to his town's old cemetery, takes issue with the of this world, and envisages a "golfatorium," a combination golf course and cemetery that could restore joy to the last rites. In "Crapper," Lynch even contemplates the subtleties of the modern flush toilet and its relationship to the messy business of dying: "Just about the time we were bringing the making of water and the movement of bowels into the house, we were pushing the birthing and marriage and sickness and dying out." Death and fatherhood, death and friendship, death and faith and love and poetry--these are the concerns that power Lynch's undertaking. Throughout, Lynch pleads the case for our dead--who are, after all, still living through us--with an eloquence marked by equal parts whimsy, wit, and compassion. In the last essay, "Tract," he envisions almost wistfully the funeral he'd choose for himself, and then relinquishes that, too. Funerals, after all, are for the living. The dead, he reminds us, don't care. --*Mary Park* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Kirkus Reviews Eloquent, meditative observations on the place of death in small-town life, from the only poet/funeral director in Milford, Mich. Poets like Lynch (*Grimalkin and Other Poems*) tend to be more respectful about death and the grave than novelists like Evelyn Waugh or journalists like Jessica Mitford. Lynch lives by the old-fashioned undertakers' motto, "Serving the living by caring for the dead" (as opposed to more mundanely providing, as one seminar put it, "What Folks Want in a Casket"). Taking up the family business, Lynch philosophically bears his responsibilities in Milford, which has its statistical share of accidents, suicides, murders, and grieving survivors. His essential respect for the living and the dead notwithstanding, his shop talk perforce has its morbid aspects, such as making "pre-arrangements" with future clients, reminding families about uncollected cremation ashes, taking middle-of-the-night calls for collection, or, in a rare filial obligation, embalming his own father. But the author has a sense of the absurd possibilities of his business, even a whimsical scheme to run a combination golf course/burial ground. In one of the livelier essays, he reflects on the competition--both professional and philosophical--fellow Michiganite Dr. Jack Kevorkian, with his no-muss suicide machine, poses to Uncle Eddie's postmortem-clean-up business, Specialized Sanitation Services ("Why leave a mess? Call Triple S!"). In the high point of these dozen essays, he combines his profession and his vocation, delivering the dedicatory poem for the reopening of the restored bridge to Milford's old cemetery--"This bridge connects our daily lives to them,/and makes them, once our neighbors, neighbors once again." Already excerpted in *Harper's* and the *London Review of Books*, this thoughtful volume is neither too sentimental nor too clinical about death's role (and the author's) in our lives. (illustrations, not seen) -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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