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Author Website

thomaslynch.com

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CONTACT

jbodwell@godine.com

Bone Rosary: New & Selected Poems

Thomas Lynch

A selection of the very best from one of America's most thought-provoking writers: poems on life, faith, doubt, and death that read like memoir, essay, and story. As *The New York Times* wrote, Thomas Lynch's work is "likely to resonate with many who have come face to face with life's most important questions."

Lynch—like Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams—is a poet who writes about real things with language rooted in the everyday yet masterfully infused with power:

*I have steady work, a circle of friends
and lunch on Thursdays with the Rotary.
I have a wife, unspeakably beautiful,
a daughter and three sons, a cat, a car,
good credit, taxes, and mortgage payments
and certain duties here. Notably,
when folks get horizontal, breathless, still:
life in Milford ends. They call. I send a car.*

Thomas Lynch spent his career as an undertaker in Midwest America—and in his off-hours became a writer of exceptional insight. *Publishers Weekly* calls him "A poet with something to say and something worth listening to." This collection presents 140 of Lynch's greatest poems drawn from his previous books, *Skating with Heather Grace*, *Still Life in Milford*, *Grimalkin*, *The Sin-Eater*, and *Walking Papers*, as well as new work, collected for the first time. This is a collection for who loves all the questions and mysteries—big and small.

ADVANCE PRAISE

"An undertaker takes you under, and Thomas Lynch has made a fine career of that. His poems, while respecting the mighty surface of earthly things, take us under the apparent world to where consciousness is alive and shimmering with joy and loss, blindness and epiphany. His voice has that kind of lilt that can charm, if not birds from the trees, then readers from their treehouses."

—Billy Collins

"Hymns to the homely, burlesques of the prideful, blessings for the newborn, laments for the lost: these are the circuits of devotion in *Bone Rosary*. Nowhere in our suffering century have the concordances between the ceremonies of faith and of friendship been more eloquently brought to life. Reader, we live in a dark time. May you be, as I have been, restored by what you find in these pages."

—Linda Gregerson

A Brief Conversation with Thomas Lynch



Thomas Lynch is the author of five books of essays, a book of short fiction, and five books of poetry.

He was a National Book Award finalist for *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*, and has received the American Book Award, the Heartland Prize for Nonfiction, the Denise Levertov Award, the Great Lakes Book Award, and the Michigan Authors Award.

He lives in Michigan—where, since 1973, he has been a funeral director—and in Ireland where he keeps an ancestral home.

While you've rightfully become revered as an essayist, you began your writing life as a poet. How do you approach the forms differently, or when do you know a topic is something you want to tackle in verse rather than prose?

Both have an acoustic property—as if it were a spoken, a said thing rather than a written and read thing, and so the sounds that words make when they are gathered together has something to do with both genres. Whereas poetry seems to concentrate on subtraction, a whittling of the lexicon into essential utterance, prose will accommodate some addition—the lengthening sentence, the contingent phrasing.

You published your first book of poetry in 1987. How do you feel your work has changed (or not) over the past thirty years?

Skating with Heather Grace, my first book of poems, was published in 1987. The more work that finds its way into a public, published form, the more critical I've become of the work in words. The notion that these published things on the shelf might outlive me makes me more attentive to the shortfalls and imperfections and slower to consider anything done and dusted. I keep revising.

If you had to pick the one poet whose work got you going as a poet, who would it be?

That would be Michael Heffernan, poet and former professor, whom I met in 1967 when I was a student and he was professing at Oakland University in Rochester, MI. He was the first living poet I'd ever met.

What are you working on now?

A long fiction that has taken me hostage for the past dozen years. And essays on a variety of topics.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I like reading and watching films, and talking with a handful of people who will talk with me.