

radic indentations and digressions from his initial capitalization convention. One suspects Tomassi is verging on a more conscious experimentation with form.

Readers will learn to look for Tomassi's profane lexicon: lightning, cigars, coffee, Italy, sweat, and bleach – signposts through a maze of wistful relatives and neighbors. My favorite poems are "Milestone," about making one's name in history, "Amalia," about a forgotten relative, "Boy and Girl," for its long, lean form on the page, "Mortar," for its brevity, "Fetch," about a knowing dog, "Backyard Orpheus," a tale of a strange deformity, and the humorous "Rear View." The book's poems show a diversity of subject and narrative power that should enlist many fans for Tomassi.

Lightning!  
What I thought were my hands  
Are a pair of mason's trowels.

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*At Dusk Iridescent: A Gathering of Poems, 1972-1977.*

Thomas Meyer.

Jargon Society, 1999.

257 pages. \$40.00 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Jim Cory*

It's hard in a brief review to generalize on the best work of a quarter century by a poet as accomplished as Thomas Meyer. Every poem in his new book commands attention, each shimmers with the energy it's made of. *At Dusk Iridescent* draws on work published in 11 previous volumes. The poems appear on the page without date or chronology, an approach that forces us to take each on its own terms. The book moves from form to form – part of its surprise and charm – and includes free verse, sonnets, epigrams, inventions, translations, and dream journals.

Like his masters, Dante and Duncan, Meyer is a spiritual wanderer, a wayfarer. He tells us his aim is "to draw / Up what is felt like well-water." Admirable as image, more so as ambition. But even as his imagery reaches for what is instinctual, and archetypal, his dense, reverberant lines – "single, golden / unready / and leafless / like thought" – grapple again and again with the effort to reconcile feeling with its shadow, reason. His poems, in effect, make a record of the interplay of nature and consciousness. That tension supplies the driving force for this work, and gives it its strength.

Meyer's poems often challenge us to find a way inside. In "Parts of the Story" and "Illuminated Electrically," the poet supplies us only with densely compact pieces of information. For readers who want to get it, the task is to reformulate the compositional context. This takes the idea of the poem as a written replica of

internal discourse to a whole other level.

"Sex is what these poems are all about," Meyer writes in "Venetian Epigrams." But that generalization could describe a large portion of his work. A subtle but powerful undertone of Eros registers throughout, most often in the sonnets ("Threesome," "A Comfortable Security") but not just there either. "Tom Writes this for Robert to Read," which originally appeared as a chapbook, weaves back and forth from domesticity to desire, much as its likely inspiration, William Carlos Williams' "Asphodel." In this piece, as in the sexy, intricately constructed sonnet sequences, Meyer lays down a flirtatious tone of casual intimacy, drawing us into the flow of his thought from just the right distance, proving Freud correct in his insistence that thought and instinct – i.e., sex – are never far apart.

t-shirt, jeans, the socks  
no, leave your underwear on  
height of intimacy,  
white cotton

Meyer combines economy of expression with exuberance of spirit, a continuing quest for faith with solid intellectual concerns. This is a poet able, for instance, to summarize a half-century's experience in a couplet ("How much there is to touch / How little to say"). "Intimacy, I'm aiming for, not tedium," he writes in "Sonnets for Sandra." His poems display a mastery of line, form, and style that is never less than confident, and he uses them to raise, if only by suggestion, the questions that have no answers.

The redness of the rose. Without that red, or the rose itself, we'd  
have no world, nor possible color.

\* \* \*

*The Dying Animal.*

Philip Roth.

Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

156 pages. \$23.00 (hardback).

*Reviewed by Kevin McGowin*

Am I missing something, or is this guy just the faux-metaphorical failed erotic purveyor of the Updike crowd? I mean, I tried. After somebody gave me his book (\$23, which seems to be the going rate for hardback fiction this year) and I couldn't get through it. Just like I couldn't get through *The Ghost Writer* literally last week! Or *The Great American Novel* two years ago. Or *American Pastoral*.

I got through *Portnoy's Complaint* about a million years ago, and for time-out-of-mind Roth has been living in Manhattan, writing it over, and over, and over