

Harbour Winn (HW): We have...

Ashton Arnoldy (AA): Ashton Arnoldy

Karen Schiler (KS): Karen Schiler.

Marie Howe (MH): Marie Howe.

HW: Harbour Winn. And...

Matthew Hester (MHe): Matthew Hester recording.

HW: Alright, so our process, Marie, is we all three have written down questions, whether we would ever burden you with... [*AA laughs*]Some of them are redundant, or we...one person will go or get at more compellingly, maybe. So who wants to start?

AA: I have a question that could relate to the class you were just talking about. So, your poems take on a range of perspectives beyond your own. Spiders, crows, meadows, siblings, mothers, brothers, and Biblical figures, with even Mary figuring [in]. Acknowledging this multiplicity of perspectives echoes our growing ecological awareness. Do you think poetry plays a role in making this relational worldview more apparent? And also, you've talked about finding or rediscovering the deep feminine, and so, I wonder how those things might relate in your perspective.

MH: Your question is so intelligent I feel like you should answer the question. [*group laughs*]I got nothing, um...that is such a beautifully phrased question...

Well, patriarchy has not helped us. I mean, it's built bridges and all that, but we have to change our relationship to everything else that's alive around us, and poetry is I think at the forefront of that. Some of the poets who I am very interested in, Robert Hass has written extensively, Brenda Hillman has written four books about the land mass that we call California, and I think that our relationship to the rest of the living world is changing, gratefully. We are realizing we are not the center of the world or the universe at all and that our work, our art, has to reflect that.

I do not feel like I have done that very well, but I am becoming more and more interested in people who are trying to do it differently. Even our syntax and point of view and speaker and the poem and all these things are set up so that the human is in the center. How to make poems that are available and accessible is something really important to me, and also how to enact this other way of seeing. So the eco-poetics movement is, I believe, a movement that celebrates poems that don't see the human speaker as the central point of reference. And that's hard to do. We're used to being egocentric in that way and the rest of the world being just merely perceived by us.

But the more I learn about the world, the more relational I feel toward it, in relationship to it. Even to say 'it' is wrong, all wrong. [*AA laughs*]How do we speak?

AA: Yeah, it's in the language.

MH: Like we said before we started taping, what do we call what we used to call 'nature' since we are nature? What do we call all that is? And now we know all the interconnectedness of everything. The more we learn, we have to come up with a new way of speaking. You can do that.

AA: *[laughs]* I can try.

MH: Can you think of poets who do that?

AA: Well, actually, I just took poetry this semester so it's just recently blown up in my life. So I was telling Harbour you're kind of like that threshold artist for me. And so I couldn't really...

MH: I think you'd be really interested in Brenda's work. Some of it's difficult. Do you know Brenda's work? She wrote these four books, *Cascadia*, *Pieces of Air in the Epic*, what's the last one...

HW: I haven't read her last one.

MH: I'm crazy about her work. Some of this is really experimental. You'll probably find it interesting, the last book is a little bit more accessible. But she's really interested in this eco-poetic movement. Well we all have to be, I mean look what's happened? I mean, it's ridiculous.

AA: Yeah. Just by virtue of being alive we're a part of it.

MH: We're killing everything.

KS: One of the things that we talked about...well, first let me say that Ashton does wonderful work himself. I still can't believe that you're just coming to poetry. And something I see that he does, I think you do it in your work, even if it's not specifically eco-poetics, but encouraging this attention to moments that then...really it's a closeness of attention.

You talked last night in the teacher's workshop about how poetry should be aware of life and death in the same moment, and how to engage with the weight of death while still feeling fully alive, and how those things work together. I think to write that kind of poetry, one has to also live with a certain amount of attentiveness and then, perhaps, corresponding vulnerability.

I was wondering if you agreed with that or if you had any thoughts on how, as an aspiring writer, as writers who want to help write attentive work, how do you negotiate any attempt at vulnerability? Is it dangerous or sort of risky to be a poet, always paying attention to those moments?

MH: Well, again, your question is a poem itself, it's so beautiful what you just said. I have my students write ten or twenty observations a week, and they at first resist this. It's hard to write what you actually see, we often write what we think about what we see, so the first weeks are. "Nope, that's not an observation. Nope, that's what you're thinking. Nope." I'll say, "What'd you see this morning?"

"I saw a bunch of...a group of people really who love poetry."

"No, I can't see that. What'd you see? What'd you see? What'd you see? What'd you see? What did you actually see? What did you actually see? Not what you thought, no summary, what did you see?"

"I saw a green bottle top on a brown, shiny, polished table. Well that's no big deal, a green bottle top on a brown, polished table."

“Yeah, but it’s actually there. You actually saw that.” So partly it’s like [Rainer Maria] Rilke says, learning to see. Practice seeing without putting yourself in between. Now we’re always going to be there, we’re always going to mediate, and we’re going to see what we need to. I ask them to have faith that they’ll see what they need to.

Jane Kenyon has this gorgeous poem, one of my favorite poems of hers, called *Campers Leaving*—1980-somewhere, 1981—and it’s just what she hears across the lake, the campers, the little campers, across the lake, and the very last of the poem is, “One day I heard someone say simply ‘I need the pole.’ Sometimes, when the wind is right, it seems that every word has been spoken to me.”

And Rilke has that great, those lines in *Duino Elegies*, where he says “The Springtimes had need of you. The violin playing in the upper window needed you to hear it.” I mean, you walk by and there’s the violin, it needed you to hear it. The Springtime needs you to see it. So this witnessing to what is actually around us is part of our job as humans and artists, I think, and to not try and cloud it with what we think about it.

They’re not allowed to use similes, either, or metaphors, which is also difficult in the beginning. So just to really say what they see. And then they begin to see that what they see is itself, and also it could be what [T.S.] Elliot called the objective correlative for what they are experiencing, too. We all walk outside, we look in the same direction, and we all see what we need to see. And we all see what’s there, but we all see different things. That’s partly what we do to practice attentiveness.

Then we listen, we spend a week writing just what we overhear. We spend a week touching, we spend a week tasting, we spend a week smelling, so all semester everybody’s writing observations every week. That’s really a joy.

Then, of course, we become trained to look and see and listen as we walk around the world more. We live in our heads a lot of the time, or if we have earbuds in we’re listening to the ear music. I was on a bus in New York and I was trying to get out the back of the bus and it was those doors that kind of stuck, y’know? I turned to the woman next to me and I said something like, “The doors are stuck,” and she didn’t do anything. I said, “The doors are stuck,” and she said, “I can’t hear you, nobody can hear you.” She had earbuds in. “I can’t hear you, nobody can hear you.” I was horrified. I pushed open the doors and got off the bus.

But vulnerability and paying attention...what’s vulnerable about that?

KS: Well, for example, last night when you were talking about facilitating in workshops or in classes, the willingness on the part of the student writers to just share what they’re, you know...don’t worry about it, don’t overthink it, don’t labor it.

MH: Yeah, just do it.

KS: Yeah, and so, there’s that feeling of either risk or vulnerability, you’re about to take a step but you’re not sure you’ll make it.

MH: Well again, I think the poem is really trying to always speak to us, so if we just stop trying and let the writing occur without too much...I mean move in with an intention, but then you write, and it’s just like, “Woah, here’s what got written from me.” But also, it’s just learning to let go and see what happens. I mean, a poem is an experience, not the record of an experience. The poem itself is an experience, and an experience [where] you never know what’s going to happen as you’re having it. It’s what’s happening. That’s, I think, the difference between a poem that feels alive and a poem that may look like a poem, sound like a poem, but you

don't feel that *zztt* from it because it's a record of an experience not the experience itself. Even if you're writing about something that already happened, you have a new experience writing about it that occurs in the writing of a poem. It happens right now.

I don't know if that answers your question, but...

KS: It does, thank you.

HW: I think in ways you're talking about... Marie and I already shared that we like the South Korean film called *Poetry*, but the character, the woman, I can't remember her name right now, but the character within the film... or there is a character within the film who is a poet who is teaching a poetry class, and he says that a person writing a poem should first write intensely about the experience and not worry about form and craft until later, or that craft will find its direction from intense feeling. [It] sounds to me like you might connect somewhat with the advice of this poet.

MH: Yeah, I do. I think we humans, we have built in techniques already within us. We use them every day. We know the value of repetition, parallelism, of using a different kind of syntax. We know, we do it, we speak to each other this way all the time. Frank O'Hara said you just, you go on your nerve, or it's like you're on a wave. Now that doesn't mean that you don't go back and edit, say it again, you know, try, but there is a love of accuracy, I think, in every writer that is the determining factor so often, and that love of accuracy is so important that it already is shaping the thing as you're moving along.

I don't let people in my room say the word 'A-W-E-S-O-M-E', for example, because that's the word that strikes me as the most inaccurate contemporary word, and it's stolen the power from the word that used to mean 'an unutterable experience'. So, we start, first off, just saying, "You can't any words that just go *bleegh*, it has to be really what truly is it." Again, it goes back to these observations, and after about ten weeks in they're allowed to use similes and metaphors and they don't even want to anymore.

That's really interesting, too, because when we talk about how a metaphor or simile is, in a way, it's a lie, but I love them, but it's asking you to look away from a thing, and in the space between the two things a third thing or a fifth thing or tenth thing occurs, and that's a whole other thing that occurs. So we begin to just add technique after technique, and by the end of the class, hopefully they're using many of them with both more abandon and more confidence, and enough to forget them again. I guess that's it. What'd Rilke say about experiences, you have to have these experiences and then forget them so they become blood, they become part of you, so that one day, when it rises up again, it's a kind of blood remembering.

I don't know, I feel like I'm blathering a little bit. I don't know if I answered you question, Harbour, or spoke to it enough.

HW: No, I think you're really continuing with what Karen was asking. I think the questions were related.

MH: I feel like some of the mistakes, and I think it's a western mistake, is thinking you can teach someone rules and then they're going to come into the room through the rules. No one does anything for that. We don't sing because we have rules about it, we sing from an overflowing of feeling. We sing in the car, we sing in the shower, we sing carrying the groceries in because we're overwhelmed by feeling. So it's always the deep movement of the soul itself, that it wants to utter something, and I feel like that comes first, and everything else collects from the original desire to express it. But the rules first? No. I wouldn't want to enter a room that had rules, myself.

I think that came from a kind of thinking, back to the patriarchal thinking, if you will. We were just talking at lunch about... Krista Tippett had someone [Tiffany Shlain] on her show, and it was the daughter of the man who wrote the book *The Alphabet [Versus] the Goddess*. Do you remember that book?

HW: No, I don't.

MH: I want to say his name is Shane or Shrink [Leonard Shlain]. It was a big book, kinda back in our day, maybe back in the '70s, but I think it's worth looking at again. It's about the alphabet and the image, and how the alphabet won out in western culture. It turned our expression about experience into a linear, syntactical experience, and the image doesn't do that at all. The image holds so many things at once. He says that's where we went awry with the alphabet, choosing the alphabet over the image, and it was, in his view, the patriarchy over the matriarchy, the feminine, the deep feminine. I'm sure things aren't this clear cut, but it's an interesting thing to think about.

I actually have a poem in the new book about this, about... it's called *The Girl is in Love with the Letter 'M'*, and I was reading a book about how, when we learn to read, we create a self by learning to read, but by creating that self, we also separate from the world that we long for, and we reestablish our relationship often through reading. So it's this double—

AA: Feedback loop.

MH: Yeah. Reading. These are interesting questions.

AA: I have a question that might relate to identity and that kind of construction of it. In poems of your like *In the Movies* and *Practicing* and *The Boy*, questions related to gender and sexuality and identity are present, and fluidity. So having not taken the conventional route [of] what it means to be a woman back in the '70s, '80s, like getting married and having a child—

MH: I was married, just to say.

AA: Oh! Sorry. [laughs]

MH: It's okay. I had a million boyfriends and then I was married. Every bad boy poet in America was my boyfriend. [room laughs] But that was a long time ago.

AA: But so just this general questioning of what it means to be a woman. Also, you expressed for the early part of your life, you thought you just wanted to be a guy until you figured out what that meant, so I just wondered if you could speak to that discovery and the larger process of finding freedom in a world that prescribes roles for you.

MH: Well, every artist is everything. Look at Leonardo DaVinci. I feel like every artist gets to be everybody. What did [John] Keats say? "A poet is the most unpoetical of all creatures because a poet becomes everything he or she gives her attention to." So, in many ways, who the writer *is* is important and non-important. The fluidity of a writer is that one wants to enter into everything and imagine what that's like.

He called Shakespeare the greatest person to be able to do that. Shakespeare was everybody. He was Romeo, he was Juliet, he was Juliet's mother. He was the nurse, he was the monk. He was the head of the Capulets. He was everybody. He was the drunk, he was the soldier. I mean, that's why we adore Shakespeare, right? Every single

one of those people is real to us, and Shakespeare imagined what that was like. In many ways, that's our happy freedom is being able to imagine our way, and we want to imagine our way, into being everybody.

It also happened that I came of age just when feminism was coming of age. When I was in graduate school, we were not taught any female poets. 1980. I mean, we were taught Elizabeth Bishop and Mona van Duyn. My friend Georgia Heard and I, I said, "Let's see if anybody wants to come over and read women. We need to read women." We all want to know who's writing--this was 1980, Sharon Olds was about to publish her first book, Lucille [Clifton] was about to publish her first book--the women were just beginning to come to the door, and we had this anthology of women writers that Muriel Rukeyser had put together, and it was called *The World Split Open*.

So I put up a little sign on the bulletin board at Columbia School of the Arts, and I said, "Any women who want to come over to Marie's apartment on Tuesday night to read women poets, here's the address." Well, scrawled across this within a matter of days were [*frat boy accent*] "Lesbians," "Can't Guys Come Too?" like, you know, all goofy. Anyway, we thought, "Well no one's even going to come." My apartment was tiny, it really was, a little bit bigger than this office. It was about as big as a bed when you unfolded it, the couch. It was a Columbia apartment.

Thirty women came, packed in, and everybody wanted to know: "How can I be a writer and not kill myself, not be an addict, it's okay if I'm a lesbian, but can I have children? And live?" And we went through the book, and we tried to find people who had done such things. Here's who we found: Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich. We found those two women. Everybody else was dead. Of something. This was serious to us, this was really serious, [a] matter of life and death. I mean, this wasn't done. We needed to find a path, we needed to see.

Little did we know that there were women everywhere that were doing the same thing and, by 1983, *Satan Says* is in the world, Sharon's first book, and Lucille, and Jean Valentine, and more and more women, and then women of color, and Audre Lorde, and all these different people. Sexualities kicked open, busted open, from the binary way of looking at it; Adrienne Rich, you know. So this was all our thoughts, this was everything we were thinking about in those years, and it was liberating.

I wanted to be an artist, and I didn't know how to do that and be married in the old way, I just didn't understand that. [It] didn't mean I didn't have long relationships, I did, but I just didn't want to do that, didn't know how to do that. Didn't know how to do that. I think a lot of people in this particular generation of like ten years didn't know how to, and we're still floating through, we're now in our sixties, but there's that generation of people, women, a lot of women. A time of greater sexual freedom and sexual experimentation, but a desire not to necessarily marry right then, right away, if at all. I think it was a bubble; I mean, I think it's still happening, it's in the culture now, but there is a certain group of people that moves through the world as that bubble, inside that bubble.

Now, of course, fluidity is becoming...I mean, *Transparent's* on TV. I saw the most amazing thing. Louis CK. Do you know Louis CK? The comedian?

AA: Yeah.

MH: Well you know he has this new show [Horace and Pete], have you seen it?

HW: I don't really watch TV, to be honest with you.

MH: I don't either. I don't have a TV, but you don't need one. This is the most ama-, this guy's a genius. He's a genius. He has this new show, apparently that you can get off his website, but if you just go on YouTube, just do this tonight, go on YouTube and [search] 'Louis CK Transgender Woman'. On his show he has this, it's like this-, it's not funny, it's not a funny show, it's him and Steve Buscemi, they run a bar and it's just, really it's about masculinity. This is why I love Louis CK. Louis CK is one of the *men* who are beginning to question. Let's deconstruct masculinity. Which is what has to happen. It's like white people having to deal with our racism. It's not people of color's problem, it's our problem. Louis CK is taking this on, he's been taking it on for months and months and months now.

There's this amazing thing, it's about 30 minutes long, where his character wakes up with a woman who spent the night with him—woman of color, turns out—and she is leaving, she didn't mean to fall asleep, kind of a drunken thing. Then this whole thing about is she transgendered or not transgendered, and who did he sleep with, and did he feel like he slept with a man or a woman or a woman or a man or what? The conversation that follows is five years ahead of its time. Five years ahead of its time. It's amazing. I bow to him. It's amazing, five years ahead of its time. When you see it, you'll see what I mean. It's so profound and complicated for this character.

Anyway, we're way off poetry. [*AA laughs*] But it's art is what I'm saying—

HW: Sure.

MH: —and Louis CK really knows that art is the place where we can be pushed forward into these complicated questions. That's why I admire him as an artist so much, because he is going into areas nobody will go into, way past *Transparent*, really thinking. And she never tells him. She never says. You don't really know. Is she? Isn't she? Is she? Isn't she? Who is she?

AA: So it's really just what that means for his masculinity. We have to think.

MH: And we're implicated, too. Yeah. It's very, very...it's brilliant, and moving, and funny, and sad, and...wow. It's great. Awkward. There's no background music; he strips it all down. Awkward. It's really great. 'Louis CK and the transgender sleepover'. Do it.

So yeah, I think artists have always cared about this stuff, and we have to work this out. Women are still being raped and killed by men all over the world. Right now! Every, what, how many seconds? I just, I need to know these numbers.

KS: I want to say seven, but I don't even know.

MH: That's in this country, but all over the world? I mean ISIS, sexual slavery, murdering girls, killing girls, abducting girls. It's almost as if the poison is just coming out, coming out, coming out, coming out, and we can see it now. We have to see it, speak to it, understand it, own it, in all of us.

Sharon Olds once said to me, "How do you deal with your internalized sexism?" and I was so young I'm like, "What are you talking about?" [*room laughs*] I didn't know what she meant. "How do you deal with your internalized sexism?" Then it took me like a year later, [and] I'm like "Oh, that!"

Sharon's done such great work. Well Muriel Rukeyser, "Whoever despises the clitoris despises the penis, whoever despises the penis despises the clitoris." I mean, what a thing to say. In the 50s, right? 60s? Amazing woman.

HW: Yeah. So much of what you've been talking about in terms of your artistic identity seems to relate to, so far, to the experience of being a woman, the experience of sexuality, but in your identity there's Catholicism. You're a liturgically infused person. You are a daughter, you're a mother. How are these other dimensions of your identity, how do they converge with what you've already been sharing?

MH: Well I think they're in the books. I think they're all in this next book, too. I grew up with a sense of the divine in this world. I just was at this amazing conference at BU of theologians. It was a theo-poetical conference. Do you know about it?

AA: Well I saw the video—

MH: What video?

AA: —from March 30th of you at it. I haven't watched the whole thing yet.

MH: Oh my gosh. Did you see the Q&A part?

AA: No, I didn't get to that part.

MH: Oh, I can't believe you saw that.

AA: I just saw it today! *[laughs]*

MH: It was fascinating, because I was with, the day before I met with eight women, some of the most important theological thinkers in the East Coast. Karen King, who is now working on the Mary Magdalene Gnostic Gospel fragments, she just has been given a piece of papyrus that actually refers to Mary as Jesus' wife. So all these amazing women, and we were so much all on the same page, everybody. Then we went into this theo-poetical, wonderful people, and I got to thinking about how we all have to begin to be in the same room, how we, we all know this, we're too in our own camps. You know, the people who want to vote for Trump and the people who don't interact at all. We need to interact. We need to do stuff together. The police and young black men and me and...I don't know, all of us. It happened at the theological place, this one guy was asking me about these observations, and he said, "But don't you want them to seek the divine?" I said, "But the divine is in the things." And he was like, they were, a number of people were very much in disagreement with that.

Isn't the whole hope of human life integrating yourself until you're one, until all those parts of you feel integrated, as much as you can be integrated in a culture that disintegrates them? It feels as if that's the work of art, for me, is trying to pull them all together, and in this book [*Magdalene*, 2017], the carnal and the spiritual, Mary's trying to come in. I didn't read some of those poems, but there's a poem, Mary Magdalene is just, it's called *On Men, Their Bodies*, and it's a list of all the penises she's known. A celebration of them. It's not, I hope I'm not objectifying.

AA: You read that for the theo-poetics—

MH: Did I?

AA: Yeah.

MH: It probably was perverse.

AA: I hadn't heard that one before, you should read it tonight. *[MH and AA laugh]* You should, I thought it was good.

MH: It's really interesting because, to make her a person like myself, not somebody who was a prostitute, but just a woman who's had a lot of erotic experiences, and to let her remember them.

AA: Yeah, not to keep them under, 'cause that kind of shaming of the body and sexuality is a part of that division.

MH: Yeah. So the mother, I mean, I have a good friend, Victoria Redel, who's a wonderful poet, and she has written a book of poems called *Swoon*. In the book there's wonderful poems about her kids—she's a mother of two boys, she's a divorced woman—and then there's also poems that are really erotic. One of the poems takes place against the wall of her living room when her kids are asleep in their bedrooms, and I love that poem because the mother of these boys, it's sex up against the wall in her own home, and not with a husband, there isn't a husband, there is a man who is a lover. It was sort-of unnerving to people, but in fact, that's where people have sex, they have sex in their home with their children nearby. To bring it all together, that would be nice, to bring it all together somehow, the erotic, the spiritual...like we said about everything that is, not to have the splits, the separations. Still to live a moral life, a conscious life, but not to have those splits.

HW: I grew up Catholic, and I wasn't out of a Catholic ghetto until graduate school. I feel both blessed and condemned.

MH: Where did you grow up?

HW: New Orleans and Houston, Texas.

MH: What kind of education did you receive? Was it Jesuits, was it—

HW: Jesuit high school and college.

MH: I knew that about you without you even telling me.

HW: But I mean—

MH: So where'd you go to college?

HW: Springhill College, it's a Jesuit college in Mobile.

MH: Sure, I grew up with Jesuits, too. My brothers were all taught by Jesuits.

HW: So, I mean, I think your poetry is condemned and blessed with your Catholic roots. I mean, I basically like who I am, and so I really can't condemn that, but yet, I need to breathe other oxygen.

MH: Louise Gluck grew up with the Greek myths. They're all through her poems, the Greek myths. They are portals for her, and I see these stories as portals toward deeper humanity. There's no church at the end of the corridor, there's no priest, there's no nun. There's just the corridor into something larger than myself. I feel like these characters provide that for me. Any myths that we grow up with, if you grow up Jewish and you have all those stories. I love that I have them. My sisters find this amusing. They do not share any of, they're like,

“What? How do you know this stuff? How do you remember this stuff?” And I said, “I don’t remember it, it just *is* in me.” I love these stories, they’re deeply, deeply interesting to me.

Moses goes up to the mountain and says, “I have to see Your face” to God, and God says, “You can’t see My face, you’ll die.” He says, “They won’t believe me unless You show me Your face,” and then God does that astonishing thing...okay, first, Moses is the only person who can talk God into anything, which is a riot right there [*AA laughs*] because God changes His mind over and over again with Moses. But then He says, “Okay, see that rock? Get into the niche of that rock, so turn your back to me, and I’m going to walk by. I’m going to show you My backside. I’m going to turn around, too, so My back is going to face your back.” He essentially showed His backside to Moses’ backside, and Moses is still so seared from the radiance that his whole face is burned and bright red. He has to wear a veil for the rest of his life. It’s amazing to me, that story. What are you going to do? It’s one of the greatest stories in the world. He comes down and he has no idea that his face is just radiant, but also seared, until they tell him. I love that story.

So, for me it’s a way, it’s not an end. And for you, too, I betcha.

HW: A process.

MH: A way, yeah. A way through. But we also grew up, I grew up with great nuns and great priests. I mean, we grew up into the Catholic left.

HW: Yeah, I grew up with incredible Jesuit priests. Incredible, and the Vatican, too.

MH: Yeah, and thinking. We were talking earlier that we both were aware of the Berrigans [Philip and Daniel], the priests who were against the Vietnam War and nuclear proliferation, still are. Phil’s dead now, but Dan has been arrested, what, 80 times? Martin Sheen has been arrested with them so many times, too. The actor, Martin Sheen. I grew up with people who were constantly being arrested for peaceful demonstrations against the Vietnam War, and nuns and priests who really passionately believed in justice. Extraordinary people.

I’m about to go to Baltimore. Phil Berrigan and Liz McAlister, who taught Art History at Marymount, they were secretly married, and after she left they married and formed a house called the Jonah House in Baltimore. Have you ever been there?

HW: No, but I’ve heard a lot about this.

MH: I want to go there. I’m going to go there in a couple weeks. I was thinking of trying to go there to see what it’s like. They raised their kids there. Interesting.

Those writers, too—Dan Berrigan’s poems, Thomas Merton’s poems, Simone Weil—they really integrated politics, theology, humanity. They tried to bring it all together to be one person, which maybe is what Jesus was trying to do. I just read this great thing on Northrop Frye about [William] Blake’s Jesus. Have you read that?

HW: A long time ago.

MH: So great.

HW: Will Blake is a guide. *The* guide.

MH: Yeah, he is. Northrop Frye talks about Blake's Jesus as being a man of imagination and that nobody, this is one of the poems in the book, nobody ever knew what He would do from one moment to the next. You could never expect, you could never predict what He would do. He was that imaginative. Wouldn't that be amazing, to be around someone like that?

KS: And there's so much transformation in all the stories that he does, where things just become something completely different.

MH: And women, and men, women. Every parable has a woman and a man. Two. Women, women, women, women, women, women. So interesting.

KS: If you don't mind me rerouting things a little bit toward a more selfish end, as a teacher, I love some of the techniques and instructional tricks or things that you've got in your kit that you use with people. I'd love to hear a few more, and if you want to share any sort of a favorite.

MH: Here's what I'm going to ask you. I ask people to do what I want someone to ask me to do. It's that simple. What do you want someone to ask you to do?

KS: So you model it along with the more 'do it' at the same time, which you mentioned last night as well whenever you have them do a little writing exercise.

MH: So you're a writer. What do you want someone to make you do today?

KS: Let's see. See things in a fresh way.

MH: No no no, how do you do that?

KS: Give me a small assignment.

MH: What is it? Give it to me. Give it to yourself right now. Okay, we're your class, you're going to ask us to do what you want someone to ask you to do. "How do we see things in a fresh way, teacher?"

KS: *[to AA]* Plug your ears 'cause it'll come next week.

[room laughs]

KS: I'm just joking since he'll hear it in class. But, we're doing some revision—

MH: You're not answering.

KS: Yeah, I know, well...okay, I'll just give you the assignment then, is that...

MH: Yeah. What do you want someone to ask you to do?

KS: Rewrite something from a different perspective.

MH: Like what? What do you mean by different perspective?

KS: So, perhaps from the perspective of an object that's in the poem. So, if the poem has a character that's looking at a vase or out a window, maybe, or the perspective of the fencepost that is in their gaze or the tree that they see.

MH: That's an interesting one. Often that's hard, because how can a fencepost...you might get some silly poems. But often what I ask people to do is move the frame, which is what you just did. To move the frame. Let's say you were going to write about something that happened a year ago. Let's say the day my brother died. *BOOM*, that's the big subject. There he is, dead at noon. Literally, noon, in his room, in his bed, hot day, shade banging against the window, John [Howe].

Now, I move the frame. I literally have my kids do this—and when I say my kids I mean 60-year-old women, too—like this, move it a day before, an hour before, half an hour later. Same scene, the apartment. Move it and describe what's happening. Half an hour later we're unwrapping deli sandwiches in the kitchen. John's body's still in here. We're in the kitchen. So, it's just interesting to move the frame off the center thing.

What's fascinating is that I just did this with those eight women, those amazing theologians, Harvard, BU, BC theologians, all women, amazing women. I asked them to pick a really important event in their life, really important, not to mention it, and to move the frame to an hour before or a day before, and to put themselves, physically, in their mind's eye, somewhere, so they can really locate themselves. Like, if I'm in this chair in your office, Harbour, I can't see what's behind me. I'm literally in physical space. Then you just describe what you see.

Well, nobody believed this would happen but it happens every time, the DNA of the event is in what you see when you move the frame. Do you understand what I'm saying? So, what they would describe seemed like nothing to them. I said, "Now, what was the event? That's your title." Then everything that they saw they realized had to do with that. It's the unconscious, the unconscious knows everything, it does all the work. So pretty much everything I do I just try to trick the conscious mind into just going somewhere so the unconscious can do its work. That's what writes the poems. It's never the conscious mind. So I just think of a million tricks to trick myself.

[to AA] Did you think of something?

AA: Well, maybe not...well, I guess considering if I were to have you do something, I'd have to ask myself what I wanted someone to have me do. So I thought clapping in someone's face [AA *claps in someone's face*] to elicit the first thing that would come out would be...I don't know. I guess, if there's something that I want other people to have me do then it's probably on the kind-of tip, you know? That's the only thing I could think of, or what I was thinking.

MH: Somebody actually clapping in front of your face?

AA: I guess, yeah, some kind of sudden shock that jolts you out of what you were thinking at the time.

MH: How can you shock yourself in writing? Let's say there's no one in the room, let's say you're all at your desks in a classroom, how can shock yourself?

AA: I could lay back in my chair, like that, or write with this hand, or...

MH: You could do something physically, and you can push yourself in some situation that is in your life that will jolt you out of your, our complacency. If we realize that today all of us are going to get in cars and then we

were going to hit a truck, and if we knew this, then everything that would happen between now and when we left the building would become really important, wouldn't it?

AA: Yeah, definitely.

MH: So even something like that where you imagine, you know... sometimes I'll just ask, and I ask myself this, "Write the last poem you're ever going to write. This is it. That's it. Last thing. You have ten minutes, go. Put everything in it, everything. Don't save a single thing. Don't save anything. Everything has to go in it that you want to put in it." That's interesting right there. You just have to push it all in. Then I'll say, like, "Now, no more than fourteen lines." Push it all in. Constriction. Abundance, constriction. So already, your mind is busy with that, trying to figure out how to do that, and then the unconscious can do the work, the heavy lifting, but the mind is going, "Fourteen lines?!" So if anything, that's what form is for.

Form is also pleasurable, right? We love form. If every single one of these poems were different it'd be weird. So we like a form, but also form can produce something graceful and beautiful, and it can also constrict enough so that you're forced to do things you wouldn't ordinarily have done. That's what we're always trying to do. Break out of, as you say, your normal thinking, your, "I want, I want, I worry, I want, I worry, I want."

AA: Into the future.

MH: Yeah, into the future, right. What do the Buddhists say? Fear, regret...what is it, religious things? *[a pause]* It's pretty much anxiety, anxiety, anxiety.

[group laughs]

AA: I have a question that's kind of on a different topic and it deals with...just something I was preoccupied with. So, you talked about poetry as prayer, with its roots in the sacred, and you've talked about it being a way to...an intimate discourse with the divine or the eternal. You have two poems called *Prayer*, and there's a 'you' or something that's being addressed. I listened to that NPR interview with Terry Gross and she asked you about the 'you', and you said you didn't know, at that time, if you believed that it was a 'you', per-say. So I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about how you conceive of it now and, if you can, how you orient yourself toward it, and then maybe a little bit about how that's developed throughout your life.

MH: Going back to the poetry, I feel like I grew up with these wonderful models of poetry as prayer—John Dunn, George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson—these poets have affected me a great deal, and they're so funny. Dunn is so funny. But all of them, they were writing as if their lives depended on it. Those prayers were written really, truly out of desperation, most of them. There is this crying out from the wilderness, I mean, the psalms are that, this has existed, this is what poetry...ONE of the functions of poetry, there's a million poets who don't think about this and this is not their concern at all. Let's just please acknowledge that. This happens to be one of my concerns, but for many people it's not.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of time, or the beginning of human utterance, I'm sure our utterance was crying out for help or for companionship, for guidance, for...whatever. That cry happens, no matter what I conceive of it is being cried out to. I'm now somewhere between a Buddhist and I'm like, I'm a...I met this wonderful priest, have you ever heard of this guy? His name is Robert Kennedy, he's a Jesuit who spent 20 years in Japan as a Zen student and now he's a Roshi in Jersey City. He has a Zendo that I love because he's a Jesuit Zen Master. I think that's where Thomas Merton ended up, too, don't you?

HW: Probably so.

MH: At the very end there with *The Asian Journal*. Really these intersections, you know. So, I say ‘you’ because it’s relational. It could be within me, it could be you. It’s just part of the outcry. Jane Kenyon, again, is a wonderful, wonderful poet. She went to India with her husband, Donald Hall, and she came back and she felt as if her—she was a practicing Christian, every week, really devoted, who had a spiritual guide, a spiritual director—and she felt robbed of her god when she was in India. She was so affected by what she learned and saw there that she wrote a poem like, “They’ve taken my god.” This personal, human god no longer was as real to her after [visiting] India for a month.

Everything’s a metaphor. Magdalene, in this new book, works, struggles with this too because she has a teacher, and like any one of us who has a spiritual teacher, it’s complicated. I remember going to hear Thich Nhat Hanh—do you know who he is, the Vietnamese monk?—who many people, many people revere and follow. He’s an extraordinary man, and he’s brought mindfulness meditation to the United States. I went to Omega, and when I went to go sit down, hundreds of people had been there earlier to put their pillows down so they could be in front, so they could all be right there, and I thought, “Oh, here it is, there it is. The scramble to be in front, to be close to the teacher.” And I understood! I wanted to be, too. I didn’t understand that the way to do that was to go hours earlier and put your pillow down. But it was so grabby, and I thought, “Oh, we’re all so grabby. I’m grabby. They’re grabby.” I was in the back, and it was fascinating. I think of Jesus of being like a Thich Nhat Hanh or any of these wonderful [figures]. The Dalai Lama. Everybody wants to be up front, to be next to the Dalai Lama. What would the Dalai Lama say about that? “Don’t bother,” right? “You’re also Buddha.” Like, *tcchk tcchk tcchk*, you know?

This Priest, Robert Kennedy, wrote a wonderful book called *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, and he talks about being in Japan studying with a teacher. There was some back and forth dialogue, a common dialogue, and in answer to it, he said to the teacher, “I know you are the Buddha,” and the priest slapped him across the face really, really hard. Love that.

But a prayer is an outcry.

AA: I think you answered my question. *[laughs]*

MH: “Love bade me [welcome].” Do you know that [*Love (III)* by George Herbert]? You probably know it by heart. “[Yet] my soul drew back. Guilty of dust and sin.” I love all those prayer poets. Dunn, especially, he’s so sexy, and he’s so spiritual. Did you ever read [*To His*] *Mistress Going to Bed*? You know that poem? It’s hilarious. He’s trying to get her to take her clothes off, and he says at one point, “O my America! my new-found-land,” he calls her. *[MH and AA laugh]* Then there’s another one where he’s trying to get a woman to go to bed with him, and she refuses, and he says, “But look, this flea that’s flying around the room, this flea has bitten me and it’s bitten you. We’re already intermingled, we’ve already had intercourse inside the body of the flea. So what we’re about to do is just—

AA: The same thing.

MH: —nothing.”

[group laughs]

He’s so funny! It’s called *The Flea*, it’s really great. He’s the same guy who really...you know, “Batter my heart, three-person’d God.” He’s really...

[to KS] So, did you come up with other things you want people to ask you to do?

[group laughs]

KS: So many.

MH: Well the other thing, you know, Robert Hoss, once, when I was a graduate student in Columbia, he came in for a five day thing. He sat and he asked us to do, he just said, “Just, just write what I ask you to write,” and he did all of those, like, “What have you noticed at the Delis? In the street these days? Write a little song. Tell a story about something you’ve seen in the last week.” He asked us to do 25 things. He said, “Okay, go home and integrate all that and write a poem. You’ve just written *The Wasteland*.” [KS laughs] Essentially, he just went through *The Wasteland* and he discerned what the inner structure of each moment was, and he just asked us to do that. It was fabulous! You can do that. Take poems you love, discern the inner structure, and ask yourself to do that.

KS: I love that.

HW: What is being a mother, how has being a mother impacted you? Besides a wonderful poem like *Hurry*.

MH: Dragging my daughter around after me. Well pretty much, being a mother, as anybody... [to KS] you have children.

KS: I do.

MH: [to HW] You have children.

HW: Yeah.

MH: [to AA] Do you have children?

AA: No.

MH: Well, you know, you’re a failure at it. It’s just constantly [KS laughs] you’re finding out what you did wrong. So that, that’s funny. I was constantly aware of all that, and then...you know, I think after John, after the poems I wrote about John, I became so interested—I always loved Robert Frost because of the dialogues in his poems and the conversations. Crazy about Robert Frost, the way people walked around and said stuff and sat down and got up in his poems. So, a lot of that comes from Frost.

And I listen to my daughter a lot. I often just record what she says and does, put it in poems like I did with John, because it’s just gorgeous stuff. It’s funny, I mean she really said that thing in her course. I wrote it in a letter to somebody, and he wrote back and said, “You know, this might be a poem. Really. Type that out.” I was just telling it to him, this little story, and I think that just to have somebody in your life who’s constantly saying surprising, interesting, contradictory things. She’s like a foil for me. She’s so different from me.

So that becomes just a huge part of who you are as a person, as you guys know. It’s such a relief to care about somebody more than you care about yourself. That’s a good reason to have a child any way you get one. I was as old as you could be when I got, you know... and it was such a relief. It’s also really hard. There’s no time, there’s no revelry those first years. I couldn’t get over that. There was no interior life. That was very hard. I found that very hard.

[to KS] How old are your children? One?

KS: Three.

MH: Three? Wow. See, I can't even speak. *[KS laughs]* How old are they?

KS: Oh, no! I have one, he's three.

MH: Ooh.

KS: I have one child, he's three years old. He may as well be three children. I mean, I know exactly—

MH: There's no revelry, there's no interior life when they're around.

KS: No, no.

MH: They're just, they want you to be out there with them. I was used to just being able to be in my interiority, and that was just, that was just gone, wiped out. I couldn't believe it.

KS: But it also was wonderful in the way that, which I think you're saying as well, the attention, it's right there. They—

MH: They're now, now, now, now, now, now, now.

KS: You really have to be present.

MH: They live in the now, now, now, now, now. That's amazing. Now, now, now. Three, a boy?

KS: Yeah, yeah. And such capacity for loving everything, that's a lot of fun, but I know that's what everybody says.

MH: It is amazing, and the joy of minute to minute to minute is so much fun.

KS: Yeah. He discovered the word 'actually', and it's like the most incredible thing that he just loves trying it out.

MH: Actually...

KS: How fun they— *[laughs]* I'd forgotten that's a really cool word, 'actually'.

MH: I adopted Inan when she was three, so she came speaking Mandarin. I tell her, "The hardest thing you'll ever have to do you've already done." She was essentially abducted, brought to a new country, and told to sink or swim. She had to swim, and she did. She was fluent in a year, pretty much. But oh, those first months. Oh she was so frustrated. Not to be able to be understood. That's hard. I think of 'actually'.

[to group] We done here, guys?

HW: Ashton, have you got, do you want to?

AA: I could ask a question about living in the present, and today, and busyness as an affliction, and how much of that struggle is in your poetry. You've expressed concern, which is understandable [*laughs*], especially for the future. So I wonder, for you, specifically in your daily life, how do you, if you do, if you can, balance between having to be connected—like with your job and as a poet who's traveling around, with being connected, engaging with these devices, them demanding your time—with not and staying present? Then going forward in the future, collectively, do you have any thoughts?

HW: I think this is what we have to really think about, all of us together. We were talking about this at lunch, too. On one hand, the Internet really has become the world's brain, and if we didn't have to deal with the heads of country, we could just crowdsource the answer to all the problems, right? We could say, "Okay, hunger: solve it," and everybody could just participate and we could figure out a way. I think that may happen. I think we might actually begin to use it as the world's common brain someday soon. So there's that, which is amazing.

Then there's the interior life, which I worry is disappearing. Not only in myself, but in everybody in our culture, in the Western culture, because we're just so externalized. My life's unmanageable. I mean, it's as unmanageable as anybody's. I'm addicted to my phone, I don't have a TV, I never had a TV, but I'm...the news, checking the this and the that. I know I'm deeply joyful when all that's turned off, but because I'm an addict, it's like I can't just have one. It's really better if I just leave the phone in the other room and turn it off and go to my desk, and then hours pass. If it's anywhere near me, forget it. It's like having a box of Oreos. I'm just [*eating sounds*], it's impossible.

It's difficult, and everybody I know's trying to work out this one. How you live, as you say, your relationship to these devices, and then to be with each other, and then to have a relationship with one's inner, imaginative life, contemplative life, I guess we'll call it, where you read and you sit and you're quiet and you take it in and you process things, to use your word earlier. I mean, this is what is getting lost with the wholly externalized culture. So, I'm struggling like everybody else.

For me, and maybe for many of us, I need severe methods, severe situations. We tried to do a thing for a few hours a day where we would put our phones away in a box, and then we forgot about it, and now it's back. So we have to have a talk about it, my daughter and I, because it was so nice! When we, from five to eight, we just put them in a box and everything changed for those hours. Just five to eight. It was really great.

[*to AA*] What do you do?

AA: Well, when I'm trying to go to sleep, I leave my phone, I did this last night, at the very opposite end of the room, keep it quiet. In situations like these it's nice because I just turn it off so it doesn't interrupt, but then I'm not bothered by it. And recently, I've been keeping myself, or only allowing myself to check my email once or twice a day whenever it's absolutely necessary.

MH: That's good.

AA: So things like that, but it's almost like it has to be a kind of collective agreement, otherwise, because someone might miss out, but I guess it starts with individuals, too.

MH: How do you wake up, where's your alarm, is it on your ph—

AA: My phone.

MH: Yeah, me too. *[to HW]* What's your alarm?

HW: It's not the phone, it's a traditional one.

MH: You have an alarm clock?

HW: Yeah.

MH: That's great. *[to KS]* Do you have an alarm clock?

KS: No, I use my phone as well.

HW: My phone's two rooms away. *[AA laughs]* Where my desk is, not where my bedroom is.

MH: That's so brilliant. Do you have a ticking alarm clock or an electric alarm clock?

HW: Electric.

MH: It's a good idea. I walked out, I got up early yesterday morning because I left the house at 6:15 to get on the flight, and my daughter was still asleep, but her computer was open. She was like this *[mimes sleeping daughter]*, and next to her her computer was open, and her phone, her phone and her computer were both there. I just thought, "Oh my god."

Yeah, I think we have to regulate it. Self-regulation begins there, but I think we'll figure it out.

AA: Yeah, something will happen.

MH: Do you know about Freedom? Do you know about Mac Freedom? Do you know about this? It sounds like you don't have a problem, Harbour.

HW: I don't understand what you said, what kind of freedom?

MH: It's this thing, it's like 10 bucks a year, that this guy invented, and you, it's 10 bucks a year, and you sign onto it, and it says "How much freedom do you want?" and it turns off the Internet on your computer for as long as you want. An hour, two hours, three hours, four hours. It really makes a difference when you know you can't—now, if you have a phone, then you can just check on your phone, but if you put your phone somewhere else, your computer becomes a typewriter again. It's not the infinite. It's good, a lot of writers use it. Freedom.

KS: My husband uses it, now that you explained. He described it to me, and I didn't know its name but—

MH: Yeah. It's cool. It just says, "How much freedom do you want?" and you go, "180 minutes," and then click *[snaps]* okay.

HW: Tell me the name, I'm still not understanding the name of it.

MH: Freedom.

HW: It's just called Freedom?

MH: Mmhm.

HW: And it's like an app, or what is it?

MH: I guess it was an app before there were apps. If you just Google 'Freedom'...well, no that would be wrong...'Freedom Computer', 'Freedom Program'. *[AA laughs]* I just got an e-mail, actually. Do you want me to find out?

HW: Sure.

[a cacophony of laughs and jumbled words, leading to the point that MH should look after the interview]

MH: No, I just heard...well, I'll look for it because it said something about, "Millions of people have used this, and now we've done something to make it easier," so I'll tell you, later.

HW: Okay. Alright.

MH: It's great. It really changes the vibe in the room. *[to KS]* So he does it, you don't.

KS: Yeah. Well, he's working on his dissertation, so he's at home in his office all day—

MH: Writing.

KS: —and so you can see the need for it is really clear. I think he did give himself something like 180 minutes so that, at least during that time, he couldn't worry about all the things he doesn't know about his dissertation topic and looking them up, but instead has to just write.

MH: Well that's the thing, otherwise you're just constantly looking things up. This way you make a list, and then you take a break and look it up, and then you go back to your writing. It's really good, it's the way it used to be when we would look in reference books.

KS: It's a great idea.

MH: It's fun to experience it.

AA: Yeah, I'm sure it reduces that anxiety that kind of—

MH: That back and forth, back and forth.

AA: Like, "Aah, all this stuff I don't know that I could know, and all these articles I need to read because I'm behind and other people know things, and..."

MH: I know.

AA: That feeling.

MH: Yeah. Who wrote these lines, Harbour? I think it was Auden. "Where is the wisdom we've lost in information?" Where is the *mmm mmm mmm mmm, mmm mmm*. I think it was W.H. Auden.

HW: Sounds like it could be him, but I'm not sure.

MH: He wrote these 40 years ago, and it's about this very thing. Accumulation of knowledge, but without wisdom. Like, just information, not as a...I'll try to find it. I believe it was Auden.

HW: Well, thank you Marie.

MH: Thank you guys.

HW: You've given us your time and yourself. Thank you.

MH: Thank you.