Nancy Rosenblum

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"The Retreat Master Talked About Guilt and I Listened" is reprinted from *A Packet Beating Like a Heart* and "You Must Change Your Life," which won honorable mention in the Alice Jackson Memorial Competition, is reprinted from *Electrum Magazine*.

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The Retreat Master Talked About Purity and I Listened

Eloise Klein Healy

I could not let myself know and the priest said
well, yes, it is a sin but more than that
it's a cheap imitation of something else
but I could not let myself know
the hot swelling was not guilt since by then
remembering mouths and blind tongues in their dark touching
made my whole body order itself to sit
up very calmly and straight ahead
look at the priest and not look
right or left or it would seem to the others
that I knew in a way I shouldn't know
what he was talking about
and knew more about guilt than I could say
and could not say no to what I did.

Tongues, how kissing began standing then sitting
with the top down and sea air and the kisses
moving to the throat, the deep spot on the neck,
the tongue there, and the priest in my mind
with his tongue saying,
we know what it's a cheap imitation of
and the hand sliding from the wheel to my blouse,
brushing my breast, touching my shoulder,
I could not let myself know it or stop it,
my breast where Jesus would have lain as a baby,
the priest saying Jesus wanted us pure as a baby,
that kissing a boy shouldn't make a girl feel different
than kissing a telephone pole
and I thought of the Blessed Mother
and if her lips would chastely press that wood

but how a tongue could send words along wires
connecting straight to that spot in my lap,
felt it start with the tongue
and scared as the bra slipped over my nipples,
while under my hand, my hand under his hand
pressing my hand, I could not get away,
closed my eyes tighter, opened, my hand on hard cloth
then curling hairs and what I had not seen,
and him touching my leg and the priest saying
it was my fault
that this might happen if I kissed
or held or let those feelings for a boy fool me.

So I could not let myself know I knew
the warmth started first, then the wet he rubbed
in the wet and I felt my body pressing me
and the priest said this kind of touching
was for married people only and I felt a married feeling
as fingers moved in and out of me
while I thought no all the time and could not let myself know
in my body's hot lurch under a boy's fingers
that I wanted that married feeling in my tongue,
on my tongue a heavy flesh my mouth knew
was no substitute for something else
like the feeling I was not supposed to know spurting into a kleenex
and because it was wrong never into me.

You Must Change Your Life

from "The Torso of Apollo"
–Rilke

Eloise Klein Healy

The stories say your animal
will tell you what you must do.
The tale from Nicaragua adds this:
that life in the city is cleaned of the animal
and you must go to the trees
so your animal can tell you what to change.

When I write about trees
I know I'm talking about love.

My animal is a tree
and my trees are birds
and my birds are animals
who burst from their walking
into a sky waiting for this transformation
as if it had nothing else to do
but receive.

Whenever I change my life
I ask myself have I listened
to the right breezes.
They are the tongues of all tongues
and the laughing enemies of all borders.

Have I listened enough
beyond my first knowledge
that my animal
is the largest of plants?

Eloise Klein Healy: An Interview

Marlene Pearson

Northridge Review: In your poem, "A Mile Out of Town" you said that as a child you were:

> Gene Autry and Roy Rogers,
> A football player in white sandals, . . .
> A running bedraggled Pygmy in loose curls, . . .
> All of it beginning to be a poet.

When and how did the poet begin?

Eloise Klein Healy: Well I don't know that it happened all of a sudden in one day. But I was just talking to a friend of mine about this yesterday, another writer friend, and what we both came up with was that we really like words and that's why we are involved with writing in some way because basically, even beyond stories or even beyond poems, we like the fact that there are words, and with words you make up reality. When I was very small, my mother read to me all of the time. I think that it became a fact of my life that I knew that there was another reality that words dealt with. That has always been part of my existence, the fact that there is what you live and there is what you say about it, and then there is how you say it which then makes it another reality all together. Not that it isn't true. I'm not saying that it changes the reality, but I mean that when you start to make those decisions about what you will say and how you will say it, that transforms reality in certain ways, and makes it another kind of reality. I think that has always been developing in me since I was little, since I learned that words do that. Now some people learn that drawing does that, or painting does that or singing or playing a musical instrument. But for a poet it's definitely that words do that.

NR: What did your mother read to you when you were a child?

EH: Robert Louis Stevenson's, *A Child's Garden of Verses*. That's primarily what I remember. This was all before I was two years old. As soon as I could learn to read, I was off on my own reading. It was to me the greatest experience in life—

learning to read and learning to write. It was absolutely wonderful. I died to learn handwriting. That was my goal in life. It seemed like the most thrilling thing to be able to do, to do what was in those books. I was very disappointed when I went into the first grade and I found out that you didn't do handwriting until the second grade. I could see no reason to stay. I knew printing. Why sit there for a whole year while they did printing?

NR: You mentioned going through an experience then transforming it into words. How successful are you in changing words into a new reality?

EH: I think what I find happening is that even the best poem is not exactly what happened. And that's alright because I think there is no "exactly the way it happens" in the world. Just to remember an event alters it in some way because you don't have the whole thing going on. Your memory and your predisposition tend to want to know certain things more than others. You start to shape that experience in unique ways. I think that a poem is successful when there is some kind of a balance struck between what I thought I wanted to talk about and what I eventually talked about. I think that every poem is a compromise. There is nothing that is really pure rendering of an experience. It's not that way. It's always a little bit shaped. Sometimes it's even better. It's possible that the way I would say it gives another dimension to it. It makes it more understandable to another person. It puts a coloring on it that maybe wasn't apparent in the first place.

NR: How does the visual affect your writing, such as artwork or paintings?

EH: I have a lot of friends who are visual artists. I printed a couple of broad sheets of my poems, and involved in that is design, color choice of inks, the illustration. I've done a lot of photography, so I think that the visual element is really there all of the time. And I've worked with a lot of visual artists who wanted to put writing into their work so I think that there is quite a lot of crossover between the art forms. And maybe the way that we study them in school causes our arbitrary divisions to occur. But if you look at the lives of painters and writers, often painters write things and writers draw. James Thurber, for example, illustrated lots of things. Also, William Blake spent his whole life as a working artist. So it isn't that these art forms are really ever separate. It's the way that we deal with them that's separate. It separates us in a way that is totally unnecessary. In fact I think we see in our own time very

interesting resynthesizing in something like performance art in which people who are interested in theatre and in visual presentation and in writing take all those parts and put them back together and say "why can't one person make all of those things?" Why not? What's the big deal about it. You are visioning something, you are seeing something. Why can't you also deal with all of the forms that it might appear in? I would like to do that a lot more myself.

NR: How do you initiate a poem?

EH: I think that I just try and cause something. Then I see where it will go. That's one way of doing it. For example, the Artemis poems that I'm writing, I had an idea. But I didn't know what it was going to turn out to be. I only knew that I was interested in that goddess figure as she appeared in a lot of different cultures. Actually, I didn't start out with Artemis. I started out with Diana because her name and even the linguistic elements of her name come from an older time than the Roman time. As I started to research that, I thought well, instead of Diana what I really want to do is take a look at Artemis because I was interested in the huntress aspect—the solitary hunter. And then I started to do research on her and I began to understand why I had gone that way. It was because in my own life I was trying to find out what solitude meant. So there was something in there that was drawing me and making me be interested. So I caused myself to have something happen. I've done that a lot of times with certain projects where I have started and then I followed it. It's like you throw a path out in front of yourself and you don't quite know where you put it. Does that make sense?

NR: In order to accomplish that you must need time and space. Virginia Woolf said that a woman needs a room of her own in order to find this solitude you seem to be talking about. Once you mentioned that some women find the solitude to create in their cars. A lot of your poems make references to driving. Where is your room? Is it, sometimes, in your car?

EH: Going in between things has been often where I am. There is a lot of time spent in between. I think that is a time that a lot of poems in *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* tend to explore. I'll be thinking about something and the actual physical circumstances of my life are in an automobile. So the pressure of those two things together makes one be the metaphorical vehicle for the other one. I think that is proven then by what happens in *Ordinary Wisdom* because I'm out in a place where I'm totally in the country and I'm isolated from every body. I don't have electricity. The poems all sound like

they come out of a place like that. They're contemplative. They aren't fast. The language is very steady and smooth. Nothing is being piled up. There aren't a lot of consonants popping up against each other. The form is much more traditional. I really think that poets are very much creatures of place. Look at someone like Richard Hugo who was up in Montana writing. The whole story of his life is being worked out in country bars and places that have burned down and old towns and fish that he's caught and streams that he has waded in and long highways that he's driven on. Those places become what carry the message. I think that working in Los Angeles, you are going to have a lot of that in there. You can't help but have some cars in your life.

NR: When do you do most of your writing?

EH: Whenever I can. Sometimes I can get a day a week now, but that's pretty hard—to get a whole day. I took last summer off and wrote and that was great. I just had six or seven weeks of uninterrupted time in which all I had to do was wander around my house and do whatever I wanted. I didn't have to be anywhere. I didn't have to call anybody back because I turned on the answering machine and said I'm not really available much at all to anybody. And it was wonderful. Because I find out that when I have time, I do write. It's not that I have a writing block at the moment. It's that I have a work block. I have a lot of things that I have to do and I can't write as much as I want.

NR: What kind of influence has teaching had on your writing?

EH: Well, I think that I tend to want to be very clear. I've been teaching for twenty years as of next year. I understand how people understand things because I've taught lots of different kinds of brains. When I write a poem, it's really important to me that people understand me. I know that in some theoretical circles that is a kind of stupid notion—being understood in that way is not an important critical test to some people. I think it's not only because I have taught a lot, I think it is because when I was a kid I grew up in a restaurant. I learned that you deal with whoever comes in. Life is dealing with lots of different kinds of people—not just people who have had poetry classes, or not just people who have college educations, but just people. I don't think it's bad that my poetry is pretty much understood by people who don't know anything about poetry. In fact I kind of like the fact that if somebody reads my poetry he or she gets a notion that maybe they can understand it or maybe that even they could write something. There's a lot of elitism in what kind of audience you want to

aim for. I think that this is one of the things, particularly in America, that we should look at a little more in terms of the way we deal with art. We make art very far removed from most people's experience. I think that is an important experience for human beings to have— not just that they look at something, but that they would like to do it too. I think that the Olympics proved that on the level of sport. If you look at all of these wonderful, well-trained athletes then maybe the next time you go to the gym you have a feeling about why you do it.

NR: Did the Olympics have anything to do with your choice of Artemis?

EH: No, but I think that it did do something about the way I looked at the female athletes because I'm really interested with the Artemis figure in dealing with someone who is muscular, physical, solitary, a hunter who basically owns the woods. You know the Robert Frost poem asking whose woods are these? Those woods are Artemis' woods. There's no doubt about it.

NR: Did you work with Judy Grahn in the idea of myth?

EH: She used to be my neighbor. She lived down the street from me for about a year. Now, she is my friend although she lives in the Bay area. We don't see each other as much but we talk on the phone pretty regularly. I have a very good relationship with her, not only as a friend but as a poet. We do talk about things that relate to poetry—how we find things out or what we think is important to be doing. It's funny, it's not like some snazzy salon talk. It's like going down the road or going to the airport, or going to the grocery store. It's just normal talk about what is it that you do or what did you read. She's a very generous person. In fact, most of the people that I know who are poets are extremely generous. She knows that I'm working on Artemis so she gave me some references in a book that she has just written. She said I should look into these two people; they are probably Artemis figures. I'm looking for a certain thing for her that she wants to know. My job is to try to find a certain book for her because Judy needs that footnote. Those kinds of connections are regular daily life connections and they are also quite marvelous.

NR: Judy Grahn has been influenced by Adrienne Rich. Has the "common language" theme influenced your writing?

EH: Oh yes. I don't think that there is any way that if you are a woman writing these days that you can avoid the issue. And if you do avoid the issue, I think it is probably bad for you

because it is an issue in the world. It's as real as saying that we have problems with nuclear war. It's something that's here, that's been raised, the power ratio between men and women is, and has been, terribly inequitable, and that has done something to form the way both men and women are. It hasn't been good for either side. If you don't address that as an issue in your work in some way, I don't know what world you are in. I think that I have often felt the pressure of some of the topics that other women poets have written about when I have had nothing to say about those topics, or I haven't known what I thought and I would start to explore it. In a bad way I would feel that I had a responsibility to deal with that topic along similar lines. That can be pretty restrictive. I know that I've said that you have to deal with these issues, but I want to make a fine distinction. It gets to be restrictive when I think that I have to deal with the issue in the same way they all did. What if I even have a different attitude? Because there is such a thing in the movement as being politically correct. You say "PC" to a practicing feminist and she's going to know what you're talking about. There have been lots of politically correct things to do and lots of politically incorrect things to do—things to say, things to think, things to wear, places to be. It's like any other movement, it's no different. So for a while there were lots of poems about moons. I thought what in hell do I know about the moon? So I started, quite fortuitously, living according to the moon instead of the calendar. I did that for a while. I lived from full moon to full moon, and I tried not to think of whether it was the first week of the month or the second week of the month. In fact I just got a moon calendar as a present for next year. So I think maybe I'll go back on the "moon calendar" and see what that's about. It's a very different way of structuring your time. It has an actual, physical affect on the way you think or feel.

NR: Do you feel a pressure to deal with feminist topics?

EH: Just like anybody else there have been things that I haven't particularly wanted to think about, and then there is that added thing of well, maybe I'm going to have to write about this. I don't think a consciousness change ever stops, and once you learn something it gradually leads you to understand that you have to learn something else as well. There have been so many wonderful books that have come out by women poets in the last ten years that it has just been a barrage of things to deal with. There are people who are standing up and saying "Think about this!" It's not always easy to then respond and say, okay I'll think about that and I'll

try to give you something back about that. It's tough. But I feel that I had to do a tremendous amount of reaching and stripping stuff away just to respond. Whether or not I have been successful in my poems, I don't know. I can't always say that, but just to even have that stuff working, it may not even show up in a poem yet. I don't know. I really believe in an archeology of poetry. So many things are in layers and even to get to where you want to go, you might have to write thirty layers down to the thing that you really want to talk about. So I think that these topics have pushed me through some layers that I had to go into.

NR: I noticed in *Ordinary Wisdom* that you picked Oriental characters which then initiated a poem for you. Do you still look for things to initiate your writing?

EH: With the project that I'm working on, the Artemis poems, I haven't had to worry too much about what I'm going to write about. I've had things that have caused me to write about certain subjects. Now I have a backlog of topics that I have started for myself that I have never gotten a chance to finish. I think that I said at my last reading that I was doing an exploration of my family, where they had come from, what kind of cultural heritage I had being raised as a white person in America. And it opened up to me after starting to do it, actually going to my parent's house with a tape recorder and asking about things and talking about people who I remembered but, being a child, not knowing much about those people. So I had my impressions and my parents knew things. I was also trying to find out a lot about my grandparents and my great grandparents. I didn't have a lot of familiarity with some of them. So I have all of that other stuff yet that I haven't even gotten finished. I don't know if I'll ever get to even work on it a lot. But I'm not feeling lost for topics currently.

NR: There is a broad divergence of form and content in your two latest books, *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* and *Ordinary Wisdom*. How do you account for this?

EH: In the first place, *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* was written largely in Los Angeles, a major urban area. At that time in my life I was streaking around everywhere. I had a lot of turmoil going on. And I think that is very apparent. It's a book about a lot of disappointments in a way. It was also a book that was put together as a collection of poems. It was not written according to a plan. It came out of sixty some pages and the script was originally about twice that large. So these

poems came together because the publishers and I decided that these poems had some relationship with each other in that way. They represented a person in an urban situation doing certain things, and dealing with certain issues.

NR: And not according to chronology.

EH: No, they are not chronological. It's how they each sit with each other. The other book, *Ordinary Wisdom* was written in a six week period of time. I was in a totally rural situation. I had a plan that I wanted to follow. I had definite boundaries of what was going to be in there. Also, my life was very different although I don't think that the turmoil I was going through in my life when that book was written is evident. I think, instead, that sounds like it's coming from a person who has really got a lot of things settled, though I didn't feel that. I was almost on the way to having some stuff settled, but probably I knew that it was settled unconsciously. That's why those two books are so different. They were made out of totally different cloth.

NR: You have near the center of *Ordinary Wisdom*, a poem, "Making a Sacrifice." This was a disquieting poem to me.

EH: Yes. When I was down there, one of the things on my mind was prayer. I don't know why. I was thinking about the way people pray and why they do it. And that's a poem that is supposed to encapsulate everything. But it's a big job for one little poem. I don't even know if it gets anywhere near it, but I was thinking more about the wilder, primitive aspects of prayer in which you take something that is real important to you and you kill it for somebody else. That's very far removed from the kind of namby-pamby prayers that we now have in most of our religions. Like that poem says, "Prayers are easier./ they don't splurt blood all over the bushes/ and the stone steps." I was reading a lot about religions that used animal sacrifice. I was thinking about how some forms of prayer are so violent and immediate. You can look at them and you can see what they're about. I think that the prayers we have are unclear. You don't know what they are about. They don't say anything.

NR: In your poem, "Dear Friend, My Priest," the speaker says, "You belong to a small god." What part does religion play in your poetry?

EH: It plays a big part. I think it's one of those pressures in one's life to behave in certain ways. I went to Catholic school every year of my life but one. I went to grammar school, high school, college, and graduate school. I have a theology

minor. I know a lot about religion. I even, in my senior year, considered going into a religious order. I also suffered a great disappointment in the whole set-up. I found that there's a big difference between what the church says and what it does. And I, for one, am not going to believe it anymore. So my involvement with institutional religion ended at that point. Now, this is not to say that I don't have a lot of spiritual interests. I do have a lot of those kinds of interests, but I have felt that the religion from my childhood was very repressive, very much directed toward building a complacence and a rote religious feeling. I just think that's not what I want to do with any kind of spirituality that I have.

NR: I see a meditative quality in *Ordinary Wisdom*. Does Eastern religion play a role in your thinking?

EH: Yes, I have read a lot of stuff about Eastern religion. I have had many friends who have been involved in various meditative mediums. I have some other friends who have been involved in Buddhist practices. I have taken Aikido which is a martial art that's very spiritual and a totally non-violent martial art. It has a lot to do with getting things in the universe into a proper relationship. You put forces into balance. I think that's a lot more interesting way to talk about religion. I've read a lot of Chinese poetry, Japanese poetry, and I'm sure that has had an influence.

NR: Was that part of your plan in *Ordinary Wisdom* since you were using the Chinese ideograms.

EH: I made a plan to do it, then I had to figure out how to do it. Actually I kind of did it backwards. I went to China after I wrote that book. I don't always do things sequentially.

NR: Do the poems make their own form?

EH: Yes. For example, in *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* the lines are really long, the poetry is really dense. If you look at it on the page it almost looks like it's prose. At that point I was just trying to run real long lines out because I had a lot to say and it was rushing out even though it wasn't being written in a rush. A couple of those poems in there took almost a year, but they look like someone just went "bam, bam, bam, bam." But it's not true. Those lines got constructed word by word by word. But when I read them what I wanted them to sound like was this big rush of emotion, energy or craziness. Then there have been times when I really wanted to write little tiny skinny poems. But for me that's the rarest thing of all. I basically don't like little skinny things.

NR: So it's very important to you how a poem looks?

EH: Yes. And I also don't like to indent much. I always want to go right over to that left margin for some reason. I don't know why it is but I find that very few of my poems have anything that's kind of in the middle, then over at the edge, then back in the middle.

NR: Do you feel that poetry is a verbal art form or a written art form?

EH: Well, I really tend to think of poetry as verbal most of the time. I tend to think of the sound effect of poems. That's what I think of first. Then what it looks like on the page is second. That's another distinguishing factor between *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* and *Ordinary Wisdom*. I have always had a feeling that *Ordinary Wisdom* is a book that's meant to be read by the reader and not necessarily heard. Even when the book first came out, I didn't like to read it aloud at readings. I felt that they were quieter and tinier and more vulnerable and it was almost as though they shouldn't be so loud. But I really believe in my own life as a poet that I like to go out and read poems. I always find that I do want to go out and I do want to take things to where people are. I do want people to hear. I think that is another factor in why I like to write things that are fairly clear. I would like people to be able to understand it when they hear it. That will set me up for judgement because many people don't feel that way. That might make a poem much too easy and therefore it's kind of like a throw away poem. My answer to that is that any poem I take out to a reading, I also know that if someone reads it and starts to look into it they are going to find more than just that top level.

NR: Do you consciously strive for understatement?

EH: No. I just consciously strive to tell the truth about a situation.

NR: Do you work at the typewriter?

EH: Very rarely. But with these Artemis pieces, they've all been done on a typewriter. I wrote the first one in pencil. I was exercising and this idea came into my head and I thought, Oh God, I've got to stop exercising and write this thing down. I really didn't want to. I wanted to finish my exercising, then I wanted to go work. But then I thought oh no, I'd better go do it. So I got up and wrote some of it down, then went back to do some more sit ups. Finally I thought, no more exercising for today. I went downstairs and put some paper in the typewriter

and I did five pages. I just stayed there for the next three hours. Sometimes I'd just sit around, look out the window, then write some more. Finally, after four hours I decided that I just had to stop. But I very rarely do that; so that too is a new feeling and I don't know where that comes from.

NR: Virginia Woolf said she needed quiet during periods of writing so the character could live. Does a fictional character live with you through the day? How does she assume herself?

EH: Sometimes I try and say to myself what's going on right now to get a feeling for it. I'm trying to let myself know that I really don't know what's happening but that I like it. I try to leave it alone to the degree that I don't think I have to start making it be something. I pay attention to the fact that I have an idea, that I know what it's about and I don't push it. At the same time I tell myself to work on it, which is different. Don't push it, but work on it.

NR: Do things happen in you that change your poetry or are you changed from looking at your poetry?

EH: Both of those things have happened. I have written stuff that I didn't know what in the world it was about, then after I read it I thought, my goodness, look what I have said, look what I have been thinking about and working on in myself. What's this? And other times it has been the opposite way. I think that I've experienced both ways. I don't necessarily prefer one over the other. I'm willing to take whatever I can get.

NR: In your Artemis poems, did you do extensive research, and if so, where?

EH: There are certain dictionaries of gods and goddesses. Also, I pay attention to art. I really want to look at Greek vases and statuary and get a sense of what Artemis was wearing, who was with her. Beside dogs, what other animals are associated with Artemis? These kinds of things are what concern me. I talk to people and ask, "What do you know about Artemis?" I interview people. I ask, "What do you think about hunting? What do you think you are hunting?" Things like that. It doesn't really matter where I get my information. Often one book will lead to another. It's kind of like doing a term paper only I don't have to keep myself within any boundaries. There's as much fortuitous getting off the path as there is staying on it. I just try to go.

NR: You mention dogs in several of your poems as in "A Mile

Out of Town": "There was always a half-breed dog/ to follow me home." Was there really a mongrel that followed you home when you were a child as you write about in your poems?

EH: I always had dogs that were made out of who knows what because I lived in a farming community, and people did not have dogs as pets as much as they had dogs that worked on the farm either to help bring the cows in or to guard the property. Cats were not pets. They were there to deal with the rodent population in the corn bins. Where I come from the animals worked. A purebred dog wouldn't have a place in this kind of community because it couldn't work. You have to have animals that are sturdy and hefty and can be out in the cold weather. That is where I learned about dogs. I just like the way dogs approach life. They tend to be kind of relaxed in most instances. They do their job as dogs, but they like to hang around a lot. They also have an interesting approach to going places. They go right where their noses go. I think that maybe that's what I try to do when I get myself loose enough to write poetry. What's interesting to me is to just put my nose down to where the scent is and just go.

NR: Do you write fiction at all?

EH: I'm starting to. I didn't think I was old enough to write fiction for a long time. And now, I think that I am old enough.

NR: Why didn't you think that you were old enough?

EH: I hadn't lived enough. I hadn't lived enough ways. I had been a good Catholic girl for such a long time, and I had to find other ways. I had to be able to look at other people and really look at them. I couldn't look at them with my ideas of what they were doing but just look at them. So, in learning to do that, I'm going to be writing some fiction. I did a little bit this summer. I made a commitment to myself that I was going to at least start and finish one story. So I did that this summer and I sent it out to a couple of friends of mine and I'm waiting to get it back, and they are going to tell me what they think. Then I'll probably make revisions on it. I have another story in mind, but I think I haven't learned enough about it yet. In order to write about stories I have to learn about them from writing them and not from what I know about them and how they are *supposed* to be. The first story that I wrote this summer was in a very traditional format. There were people and they do something and then they do other things and then there is a change in them. They do something else. And then it's over. But the next thing that I would like to write is not like that at all.

In fact I think it's probably much more like a long prose poem. It's going to be called "Kissing." I was inspired at the Everly Brothers concert that I went to this summer when I realized that tons of their songs are about that.

NR: You wrote another poem with a humorous tone involving another level of religion with kissing, "The Retreat Master Talked about Purity and I Listened." Could you tell us about that?

EH: That is a deadly serious poem. I mean, I know it's funny. I meant it to be funny. But at the same time it's really, to me, one of the most serious poems I've done in terms of really female experience, and also, the other issue that's in there that's always an important issue to me is what do I know that I know I'm not supposed to? I think that's a real issue for women. What do I know that I'm not supposed to know? And I know that I know it when I'm not supposed to know it.

NR: Don't those kind of things awaken from poem to poem?

EH: Yes, and slugging it out through your life, really. I think it comes in there first. It's just hard to tell one's self the truth. There are so many things that we are trained to believe that we are not supposed to see. We know we are not supposed to know them. We see them, we know them, we feel them, but they aren't supposed to fit into our frameworks, so we make them not fit into our framework. And then, I think, when you get your consciousness raised about something, suddenly all of those old things that you have stuck somewhere, jump out. And then comes the price of paying for putting them away where they didn't belong. Everything in my religious training was aimed at convincing me and all of my contemporaries that women were to be held responsible for any sexual transgressions that men committed. That's what that poem was about, that no matter what happened, because I was the girl, I was going to be responsible, and the second part of that was I was not supposed to feel anything that I was feeling, and if I did feel it, I was supposed to pretend that I didn't know it. And it seems to me, that with that kind of thinking, how can you be responsible for anything because it is a double bind. You're not supposed to do something, but in order not to do it, you've got to know it, but you're not supposed to know it. So how in the hell are you supposed to figure out what you're going to do? That's like taking somebody by the throat and literally choking them to death. It doesn't pay any respect to feelings—only to some line that gets drawn somewhere, and you aren't supposed to even know that there is a line drawn.

At the same time you're more responsible for where the line is. So that's why I think that poem is to me a very serious one in its intent.

NR: In an artistic sense, do you find the female experience different from the male experience?

EH: I think that it's different, very different. I think there's even a difference in female experiences from woman to woman. I think that if you look at the kind of writing that women have been doing in the last ten years, one thing that's going to pop up immediately is that there is a difference in female experience between lesbian poets and straight women poets in terms of what kinds of topics each group may feel important to deal with, such as differences in language usage, in relation to the topics which are covered, different attitudes toward any number of things. Take a look at Adrienne Rich's poetry in the development of her work and in the way her topics are moved around. Then compare her with somebody like Denise Levertov. Those two women are having very different experiences of the world as women. And, in that case, it has to do with sexual orientation in some ways. You can't ignore that fact. Or look at Judy Grahn's work. She is bringing up a different set of topics. So I think that those experiences are different. I don't feel that it is a bad thing that men and women have different experiences. I think that it is a bad thing if we try to say all writers have the same experiences and that there's no difference.

NR: How do you feel about literary criticism? Do you write literary criticism yourself?

EH: Well, I do some book reviewing which I don't necessarily call literary criticism, because the things I write for the *L.A. Times* are really just book reviewing. It's not going into very much depth about where this book fits in the world of literature. It's mainly a synopsis of the book and a way of telling the reader whether he or she should buy it. I have done some writing for the newspaper that comes out of New York called *The New Women's Times and Feminist Review*, and in that instance I had an opportunity to do a little bit more in depth study. And last year I did something for a program at Cal State Long Beach which was about feminist imagery in the last ten years in relation to spatial dimensions. It's another one of those areas that I'd like to do more of, but when?

NR: You mentioned that in *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* you included about half of the poems that you originally intended.

Where's the other half, and have they been published?

EH: You know that's a real question that I've been thinking about lately. Where are those poems? I actually have a pretty good idea of where they are. There's one poem that didn't get published which was totally accidental. We sent it out to be reset because the typesetter had set it wrong. The typesetter never sent it back and we didn't notice it until the book was already published. But I know that it had already been published in a magazine. Some of those poems were published in other places, but I don't have much energy to get them together because it seems to me that that's over. That period of time is over. The energy that I have, and the time that I have are not enough to do that kind of project. Maybe if I'm good enough, someone can do that when I'm dead. It's not something that is on my mind, thinking about what will happen after I'm dead. I'm mainly thinking about when I'm awake. That's my biggest concern.

NR: When you write a poem that you like, do you usually hold it for a collection or do you send it out to be published.

EH: I send them out. I try to look around and find someplace that might like it. I've got some stuff out in the mail right now, and I've just had some poems accepted for an anthology that will be published soon. In fact, I'm now revising some of those pieces. I don't send out as much as I should. It takes time, so there's the factor of not having time enough. Sometimes, if I have a day in the week to write, I will take the day to write rather than type up copies of poems and package them up and make a submission. That's one of the reasons that I just bought a computer. I want to get all of my poems on a computer so that when it comes time to make a submission I can cut down the steps of typing up the poem new or go to the xerox shop to get it done. It will take me some time to get the poems on the computer, but I think that in the long run it's going to make me feel better about submitting poems. We'll see. That's my plan.

NR: Barbara Walters once asked in one of her interviews, "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?" How would you respond to that question?

EH: It's interesting that you asked me that because my poems are filled with trees. One of my poems says that when I write about trees I know that I'm talking about love. To me, trees and forests and branches and leaves are somehow what love is metaphorically. I think that trees are the greatest

things in the world. I, at one time, had an extremely close relationship with an Italian Cypress at Immaculate Heart College. It was near the library steps. That tree and I were friends. And even now, on my way to school, I take a certain way to come here because I can drive through a little tree farm and I think that it is just an amazing feeling to be able to drive through the tree farm. There are a lot of little trees and they are all going to be planted someplace, and I like that a lot. In fact, they were planting different trees on campus this year; I wish I would have been able to go and see that. I plan to plant some trees this winter. Trees are as much above as below, and I really like that idea. Poems are like that too. Love is like that. If I were going to be any tree right now, I think I'm still interested in Cypress trees.