



From the Miami Book Fair International 2009

Tao Lin

author of *Shoplifting from American Apparel* (Melville House Publishing)

KENNEALLY: Welcome, everyone, on behalf of my own employer, Copyright Clearance Center, which makes it possible for me to be here. My name is Chris Kenneally. I'm the Director of Author Relations for Copyright Clearance Center, and the host of a program we call Beyond the Book, which is a free podcast on iTunes, and at beyondthebook.com. We'll be podcasting this discussion later this month, so if you know people who might gain from listening to it who can't join us today, we invite you to pass along that word.

Want to thank the organizers of the Miami Book Fair for inviting us to join you today. It's a pleasure to be back here in Miami for the fourth year, and a great opportunity to get away from the lousy weather in Boston. So I appreciate that as always.

Joining me today is Tao Lin. Tell you a bit about Tao Lin. He was born in Alexandria, Virginia in 1983, the son of Taiwanese immigrants. His father was a pioneer in the field of laser eye surgery, and soon moved the family to Orlando, Florida, where Lin spent his childhood. He moved to New York City in 2001 to attend New York University, and he earned there a BA in journalism, and won an undergraduate creative writing prize. He became well known while still an undergrad for his literary Website, Reader of Depressing Books, which took a close and often controversial look at mainstream literary culture. He's published a number of books, but we're here today to talk about his latest book, a novella, *Shoplifting from American Apparel*. All of his books are published by a terrific independent book publisher called Melville House, and they have done a terrific job, I believe, in bringing to the reading public a fine young writer, someone who is capable in all forms. He's written poetry, short stories, and novels. And Tao Lin, thank you very much for joining me here at Miami Book Fair.

LIN: Thank you for having me.

KENNEALLY: What I'd like to start with is sort of riffing from a review that was in the *Guardian* newspaper in the UK just yesterday, which was a fine review of *Shoplifting from American Apparel*. And it sometimes is the case that it takes a British critic to notice things about American writers that are interesting. And



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because your character's name is Sam, and he mentioned another Sam, Samuel Beckett, I want to start by asking, is there a literary ancestor, or anyone who you appreciate most of all, as you sit and write yourself, who you thinking, gosh, if I could write like him or her, that would be a wonderful thing.

LIN: There are, and it's a group of writers, I think, that were called the K-Mart Realists. And they wrote mostly in the late '70s and early '80s. And they include Joy Williams, Frederick Barthelme, Ann Beattie, and sort of on the edge of that, Raymond Carver, who is the most famous of them. And then there's a few other people not grouped into anything that I try to copy in some of my work, Lorrie Moore for short stories, and for poetry, Matthew Rohrer.

KENNEALLY: Well, in that particular group, and in your own work, there's something that looks – well, it's contradictory in many ways. It appears to be very easy, by which I mean that they're very direct sentences, they're not complicated in terms of just – like a Henry James sentence, where it was famously said that he chewed more than he bit off, because he just ran on and on and on. It's very direct, very crisp, and it appears to have been sort of tossed off. I imagine, though, that it must take a tremendous amount of work to achieve that effect. Or maybe I'm wrong. Do you sit down and write and rewrite and write again to get down to that really shiny nugget, or is this something that comes out in the first draft?

LIN: I do rewrite a lot. And in some of my work there are really long sentences. And when I work on those, as compared to the short, direct sentences, I think I work the same amount. So I do edit a lot.

KENNEALLY: Well, that means it's not as easy as it looks. And the other piece of it that I think a reader will notice – and it seems in some of the reviews for *Shoplifting* this has come across – is how, again, in spite of that simplicity, there's tremendous power. These are very moving books, not just *Shoplifting* but the short stories that I've read, are surprisingly emotional to me. And this combination of funny and sad make them almost romantic, in a way that I don't mean boy meets girl or anything like that, but romantic in a sense that evoke a real deep, almost nonverbal emotional response. How do you feel about that?

LIN: Seems good.

KENNEALLY: It seems good. Well, it's meant as a compliment. (laughter) But for you, are you – how would you describe your emotional relationship to these characters?



LIN: I would say that the characters are me, or the main character in whatever work, it's just me. And I'm trying to convey an emotion I felt before.

KENNEALLY: So a lot of writers are shy of admitting that their work is autobiographical, and they don't want it to be thought of as autobiographical, because somehow that diminishes the work. You're not in that group, then? You don't mind letting people know that many of the characters, perhaps even Sam in *Shoplifting from American Apparel*, is to some extent autobiographical.

LIN: No, I don't see how that can have any negative effects to admit that.

KENNEALLY: Do people, when they meet you, expect you to be like Sam, then, or like any of the other characters.

LIN: I think so. But –

KENNEALLY: Do you think you disappoint them, or do you think they're – are they surprised that you are so close to the characters?

LIN: I think I disappoint anyone I meet, so, yeah, I disappoint them.

KENNEALLY: Well, you're not disappointing me yet, but we're going to have to work on it. Maybe you will at the end. (laughter) What I wondered about, too, was the way you started as a writer. We'll talk, hopefully, about your childhood, and just what the influences of growing up here in Florida might have been on the work. But when you arrived at NYU, it was immediately after September 11th.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: So a New York really literally changed by events into a new world. At the same time, it's a world where the digital revolution that has made possible blogs and YouTube and so forth really began to come into its own. You took advantage of that. You were a critic online, you had your own blog, Reader of Depressing Books. Why did you choose to go and set up the blog, and to offer your critical assessments of these works to the online world? Was it something that was meant to engage people in conversations, or were you just hoping to establish a reputation? What was behind that?

LIN: I think it was a little bit of both. At that point, I knew that I wanted to do something with writing as my main career thing in life. So I had been reading other literary



blogs, and I thought that I could just write like that, and get the same amount of readers.

KENNEALLY: And it's funny, we were talking with Bob Garfield in a different program about how the Internet makes available a kind of world of publishing that wasn't available before. If before the Internet existed, you wanted to do that very thing, you would have had to submit your critical reviews to some editor, who would have said yes or no to the particular review, and you might have waited six months or a year or longer to see the review published. Instead, you had a blog, you set up the Website and started writing.

LIN: To me it's not that different than what someone would do 20 years ago, because if you just start a blog, no one's going to read it. It's not like you can just get even like 50 readers. And it's equivalent to me, I think, of 10 years ago, printing out little pamphlets, or even just handwriting them. And if you work a certain amount on that, you'll have 10 readers. And I think if you work the same amount on a blog, you'll have like 10 readers. It takes a lot of work to get hundreds of readers.

KENNEALLY: Well, some of the things you did were really quite creative, to say the least, and perhaps we can mention a couple. And there was one in particular I wanted to ask you about. It's about building that reputation. It says here – and I'm presuming you had some hand in this short bio in your book – but it says that you became known for staging outrageous conceptual art events in support of your books, such as giving a reading where you repeated the same sentence over and over again. I have to ask you what that sentence was. What was the sentence?

LIN: It was – it's part of a poem, and the repeated line was, the next night we ate whale. I don't think it makes sense unless you hear the entire poem.

KENNEALLY: Well, maybe we might ask you to read it later on. But so the next night they ate whale. Then you blanketed New York City with stickers saying simply, Britney Spears.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: What's behind that?

LIN: At first it was an idea just to – it was to promote this poetry book. And someone had the idea to just have a cover of the poetry book, and then next to it say Britney Spears, so people would see Britney Spears and then go look at the sticker, and then see the cover of the poetry book. But then it seemed – that seemed – that's not



something I would do. It just seems like too – not artistically satisfying. So I just removed the cover and had it only say Britney Spears, which seemed funny to me.

KENNEALLY: Well, it obviously all together has begun to work, because the critical reviews for your work, as I say, have been rather strong. But let's pause for a moment and give the audience an opportunity to hear from *Shoplifting from American Apparel*, and perhaps you could read something from that.

LIN: Yeah. I'll just read from the beginning.

Sam woke around 3:30 PM and saw no e-mails from Sheila. He made a smoothie. He lay on his bed and stared at his computer screen. He showered and put on clothes and opened the Microsoft Word file of his poetry. He looked at his e-mail. About an hour later it was dark outside. Sam ate cereal with soy milk. He put things on eBay, then tried to guess at a password to Sheila's e-mail account, not thinking he would be successful, and not being successful. He did 50 jumping jacks. God, I felt fucked lying on the bed, he said to Louis a few hours later on Gmail chat. I wanted to fall asleep immediately, but that isn't possible. I need to fall asleep any second now, just fall down asleep. I played video games, said Louis, Perfect Dark. I killed people for two hours and I got bored. I know what you mean by impossible. This is fucked, said Sam. You know those people that get up every day and do things, said Louis. I'm going to eat cereal even though I'm not hungry, said Sam. And are real proactive, said Louis, and like are getting things done, and never quit their jobs? Those people suck. We get shit done too, said Sam. Look at our books. I know, but that brings in no money, said Louis. Are we like that we're bohemians or something? Our bios, they lived in poverty writing their masterpieces.

KENNEALLY: Well, you know, you were quoted in that article in the *New Times*, not the *New York Times*, the *New Times* here in Miami, ahead of the book fair, about how while it would be – you would prefer that people buy the book, it's OK if they steal it. What did you mean, and how does the way that publishing is changing, and the way people are getting books and getting music and everything, make a difference to you as an artist, as somebody trying to do this as a profession?

LIN: I think I just meant that, if people want to steal it, I'm OK with that. I think I get less money from that, because even though the bookstore's going to pay – already paid for it, if someone steals it and then it's the last copy, in the computer it's going to say they have one copy left, so just never reorder it. But it's – I was just saying I'm fine with that, I guess.



KENNEALLY: Well, you've certainly made a lot of the work available and done things online. Are you still really actively writing and publishing work online? Do you still have the blog, and how much of a piece of what you do is the blog today, and how much of the writing for the books is more important to you?

LIN: I still have the blog. The blog's turned now mostly into just linking reviews of my work. And publishing things online, I would say almost everything I publish is online. And even the print stuff, it appears online. And I think that's where most people read it.

KENNEALLY: But as a boy, you would have been growing up, as young as you are, still in a world that was before the Internet. When did you fall in love with writing and books, and what made you want to write in the first place? Can you tell us about that?

LIN: I don't think I ever fell in love with it. It was just more that – it was just something to do. And I wanted to write partly because it was something to do, partly because in college my professors encouraged me. So I thought I'll be able to do it as my main career thing in life. And then partly because I had read a few books that I liked a lot, and I wanted to reproduce what the books made me feel in myself, and I guess others.

KENNEALLY: And yet, as you began writing, as I say, before the Internet, so much of the work is shaped by the forms that people use today to communicate. So in *Shoplifting*, there's a lot of texting going on, there's Gmail going on. And this critic in the *Guardian* pointed out that you make no effort, by using italics or any other indicator, to separate that kind of communication from all the other communication that goes on, whether it's nonverbal or verbal, Gmail or text, it's all one stream, if you will. Is that how you feel about it too?

LIN: Yeah. I think if I did use italics, or presented it as it looks on a computer screen, that would be trying to make like a sociological comment about it, which I don't. I'm just focused on the effects that the words have on a reader, and the emotions that people can think that the characters are feeling based on what they're conveying using the same language they would on the phone or in person as they do in Gmail chat.

KENNEALLY: It seems, though – and again, this is the mysterious power of your writing, to me anyway – is that, while forms like Gmail, e-mail, text, have a kind of unemotional affect to them – it's very hard, in fact people often say that e-mails are dangerous because people's meaning can be lost. You can't read a facial



expression in an e-mail. You can't understand what's really behind the message, and people misinterpret messages in business and life. And yet, you're using those forms to convey this really important emotional message. How do you do that? It's a heck of a trick.

LIN: It just seems much more accurate and effective to me to try to convey something through an e-mail than in person, because it seems like people's facial expressions are not – are almost never accurate to what they're feeling. Like if I'm saying something that might offend someone, I'll probably be like grinning the entire time while saying it, and they'll think I'm joking or something. But in an e-mail, like the words are exactly what you mean, and there's nothing distracting from it, because you have more time to edit it to make it more accurate.

KENNEALLY: Well, I think you just said something interesting, which I wonder whether everybody else caught, and that is, you are thinking about your e-mails as a writer might think of them, whereas I would imagine not too many other people do. I'm thinking about the way that I see most people, when texting is happening, it all seems to be very much rat-a-tat, very fast, not a lot of opportunity to reflect. Twitter would be the same, and I know you do tweet from time to time, so you've got that 140-character limitation. In a way, that forces a kind of crafting on people, because you have to find some way to say it all in that short space. But mostly, texting, e-mail, is very much off-the-cuff.

LIN: Yeah, to some people, I think. To people who don't edit themselves even when – a lot of people, I think, edit even what they say to people in real life, just so they don't just keep talking and make the other person feel bored or like they want to get away from them. So I and other people, I think, edit e-mails and texts in that manner, just to not – just to like make the message as short and clear as possible, so – as like a considerate way to talk to someone.

KENNEALLY: Well, as well, the effect in *Shoplifting* comes from that editing process. I get a sense that all the characters, particularly Sam, the main character, is aware of himself, really very much aware of himself, obviously very much aware of his surroundings, notices things that might escape other people. But he seems to be very aware of himself, and all the other characters, too, seem to have a kind of – not theatricality, but an appreciation for the fact that they're being observed by others. They aren't simply, as you say, not reflecting. They're all very reflective characters. Does that seem to you to be true to perhaps people in that same age group today? Are young people more concerned about taking care with what they say than people might have been in the past?



LIN: I don't think so. I think what distinguishes most of my characters is that – not that they're more observant or self-aware, but that they're more willing to let something bad happen to themselves than someone else. For example, if they got really sad, they wouldn't like go to a bar and get drunk and fight with someone. They would just rather just kill themselves. They would rather just be really sad alone than –

KENNEALLY: Right, they seem to be willing to accept what's happening to them. They're not going to react, as you say, if something is happening and they're going to take action. In fact, at the beginning there, it talks about those kind of people who take action, who get up in the morning and are going to do something, they suck, that summarizes what many of these characters in your book feel.

LIN: Yes.

KENNEALLY: But yet Sam has a bit more than that, though. He's stronger than that, isn't he?

LIN: I think he's just accepted it so much that now he's able to use it, I guess, to function. Like first you feel really bad, then you – I guess after you accept it, then you change into something else, where you can do stuff, I guess.

KENNEALLY: Well, let's talk about the title, because you admitted that it's autobiographical. I have to ask you, then – did you get caught shoplifting from American Apparel?

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: You want to talk about that?

LIN: I was – during that time I was shoplifting a lot to sell what I shoplifted on eBay as my main source of income. So I was on my way to a reading, and I wanted a new shirt to wear, and I tried to just walk out with it, because that usually works with other things, but they had undercover cops, and they caught me.

KENNEALLY: So the episode in the holding tank, which is a really critical moment in the book, is that drawn from that experience?

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: Yeah. How long'd you spend?



LIN: Maybe just four hours, I think.

KENNEALLY: Long enough, I'm sure.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: Yeah. Maybe you should read something from that, find something from that.

LIN: He's in a holding cell.

KENNEALLY: And we should say to people who may not be familiar, my sense of holding cells, holding tanks in Manhattan police stations is probably not a four-star hotel.

LIN: This one was pretty nice, I think. There was a cot. After the holding cell, they take you to central booking, and that part is not good. But this part was clean, and like cot and stuff.

KENNEALLY: Well, maybe give us a little bit of both.

LIN: All right. A drunk man with blood inside his ears and on his face and shirt was put in the cell. Sam saw that the man looked like Caucasian boxer in *Rocky 5* that is trained by Rocky, and then betrays Rocky. I get punched in the face at Starbucks and I get thrown in jail, screamed the drunk man. You motherfuckers. I hope you motherfuckers are really enjoying your jobs. Fingerprinting people like me while fucking national security, matters of national security and fucking terrorists. This isn't fair. You motherfuckers. He sat on a bench. He stood and said, all right, I'm the king of this cell. Everyone sit down. I'm the king of this cell. He touched a skinny Hispanic. Hey, man, don't touch me, said the skinny Hispanic. I don't do nothing to you. I didn't do nothing to you. Don't touch me. The drunk man looked at the skinny Hispanic. They shook hands. I'm covered in blood and I'm in jail, screamed the drunk man. This isn't fair. I'm going to ass rape you so hard. That's – there's –

KENNEALLY: These are the little taste of the accommodations there in the holding cell. Well, how hard is it as a writer, admittedly autobiographical, to recount those kinds of experiences? Many people would rather people don't know, or many people would probably rather be thankful they got away from it without having to relive it in the way that a writer has to relive something that comes from their own experience over and over and over again. Must be hard work.



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LIN: I thought it was fun to be in there, and interesting, so I liked reliving that part. And if I'm having a really bad time, I also like reliving that, for some reason.

KENNEALLY: Well, you got a little bit of both in that particular incident. I urge you all to take a look at *Shoplifting from American Apparel*. They are on sale outside. Probably you shouldn't steal one, but Tao won't mind, I guess. And I also want to recommend the short stories. There's a whole series of books published by Melville House publishing, and we've got – and I hope I pronounce this correct – the title of a novel *Eeeee Eee Eeee* –

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: Right, I get that right? OK. A collection of poetry called *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*, and then a collection of short stories, my favorite, called *Bed*, all of these published by Melville House Publishing. You're working on a book that'll be out next year, I believe?

LIN: Yes. Or, no, it's already finished. It'll come out next September.

KENNEALLY: And you also are in a band, we read, a band called Jesus Christ the Indie Band.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: You want to talk about that a little bit?

LIN: I'm in it with the writer of hipsterrunoff.com, and pretty much I just recorded like two minutes of me reading poetry or other stuff, and he did everything else.

KENNEALLY: Great, well –

LIN: I don't do – I'm not really – I don't do anything (inaudible).

KENNEALLY: But it's interesting to think of you extending yourself in all these ways. There's even a Tao Lin store online.

LIN: Yeah. I sell art, surprise packages of things from my room, and my books and stickers.

KENNEALLY: Britney Spears on the stickers, or –



LIN: No, I'm out of those stickers.

KENNEALLY: OK, those are collector items now. Perhaps they're available on eBay, I don't know. It's been fun chatting with you, Tao Lin. Thank you for putting up with my questions, and –

LIN: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: – I appreciate the opportunity. Do we have questions from the audience here? Anybody want to inquire about Tao and the work? Yes?

M: Do you still shoplift, or how do you make a living?

LIN: I don't shoplift that much any more, because if I get caught again, I don't know what's going to happen. Because I got caught again after American Apparel. I make money from just like selling things on my blog. And last year I sold shares of my next novel and made \$12,000, so I had been living on that. And before that, I had part-time jobs, since going to college.

M: What's the thrill of shoplifting? Is it a compulsion?

LIN: No, it's just –

KENNEALLY: It's a business model.

LIN: Yeah. (laughter) Yeah, it's just for money.

KENNEALLY: Yes?

M: If you had to cite another artist or another artist's body of work outside of poetry and fiction that you think is most like what you do right now, who would you say?

KENNEALLY: Like you mean like a film director, or –

M: – arts –

KENNEALLY: – musician, yeah.

LIN: Maybe Joe Swanberg, the film director.



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M: Joe Swanberg?

LIN: Swanberg, yeah.

KENNEALLY: Can you tell us why?

LIN: He's about my age, and he's had like five movies out, and it's just similar to my writing, I guess. Sort of realistic, plotless, or not really plotless, just – it just seems like real life to me.

KENNEALLY: So that's the effect you're after, is a kind of – to use a fancy word – of verisimilitude, to try to convey to people what things are really like.

LIN: No. (laughter)

KENNEALLY: No?

LIN: I guess his work is – I don't know, if I just conveyed what it was like it would be – that would be like 1000 pages. So that's not really what I'm after. I don't know what I'm after.

KENNEALLY: So it's not realism, maybe is it surrealism? Is it something beyond realism? I think you go into that in the book, don't you? Isn't there some passage in there or somewhere you've talked about surrealism and realism. What's the difference for you?

LIN: It's realism in that it's realistic, but maybe edited or – yeah, edited down to the point that it seems surreal.

KENNEALLY: Again, I assure you and the audience, that's not an easy trick. Do we have any other questions? Yes?

M: At the time you were printing Britney Spears, Britney Spears, was that before or after she started having the problems? Was that before, when she was –

KENNEALLY: When she was still a good girl, you mean, before she became a bad girl? Is that –

LIN: That was after. I think it was the time when she wasn't – she hadn't been in the news for a long time.



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M: So you're kind of putting her back to –

LIN: Yeah, I was –

KENNEALLY: I'm sure she appreciated it. Yeah, we had a question in the back?

F: Yes, can you tell us an author that you feel influences the way you write?

LIN: Yeah, for each of the books it's different. For my story collection *Bed* it would be Lorrie Moore, specifically her book *Like Life*.

KENNEALLY: You want to talk more about that? What is it about Lorrie Moore's work that appealed to you? Were you reading her at that time that you were writing *Bed*?

LIN: Yeah. I read her constantly probably the last five years.

KENNEALLY: As a writer – it's funny, I think a lot of writers, when they start out, want to write because they've got a story inside to tell. But then you make a step where you recognize that there's a lot to learn from other authors. You feel that way?

LIN: Yeah. I think I read first, and then wanted to write. I didn't want to write and then read.

KENNEALLY: And what did you learn from Lorrie Moore when you were reading her over and over?

LIN: Just that when I read other short story writers, it seemed like I could write something, and I guess not work on it that much. But when I read Lorrie Moore, I guess she raised the expectations a lot, like you could work on a sentence for a really long time, and you would be able to see the difference between that and something that hadn't been worked on that long.

KENNEALLY: In the sense, like any good teacher, she made it difficult for you, sort of put a demand on you that you might not have had before.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: Any other questions?

M: Since you use technology a lot, what's your take on eBooks?



LIN: I don't know. (laughter) I guess –

KENNEALLY: Are the works available as eBooks?

LIN: I don't know. (laughter)

KENNEALLY: I'm not sure if I know. Yeah, yeah. Would you like somebody to be reading *Shoplifting from American Apparel* on an iPhone? Would it matter?

LIN: I don't really care how they read it. Some of it's online. So I don't really have a take on it. I guess some people like it. I don't – if I had a lot of money, I would probably just buy one of those, just to have it. (laughter) But I think I still prefer holding a book, and reading it, just so I can turn the pages easier.

KENNEALLY: And I have to say as well that these are really nicely made books. They fit in the hand well, they are well designed, very simple, but yet very artful. And his books, they just make you want to pick them up, seems the design.

LIN: Yeah, I'm very happy about how they designed it, and the covers and everything.

KENNEALLY: We've got another question in the back there.

M: I'm trying to (inaudible) have a message or something (inaudible).

KENNEALLY: What's your message?

LIN: I don't have a message. Just to – the same way I would be talking to a friend, and just telling him how I feel. That's what my books are like, I think.

M: (inaudible) your novel.

LIN: What do you mean?

M: (inaudible) very free-spirited, the way he talks (inaudible) especially the excerpts you gave.

LIN: What do you mean by free-spirited?

M: (inaudible)



F: (inaudible) restate the model (inaudible) have a purpose, right (inaudible) your experience (inaudible).

LIN: Yeah. Because I don't have a purpose, I don't think. So books don't.

KENNEALLY: Good question, though. Definition of free spirit is one we could talk about all afternoon, probably, and everybody would have their own idea.

M: (inaudible) writing, do you feel like writing gives you a purpose? Does it help you create?

KENNEALLY: Yeah, does it make a difference that you're a writer?

LIN: Well, I think I have purpose in each moment, like I want to eat, or I want to make a friend or something. But when I say no purpose, I mean like, if I sometime think about it overall, like I have no purpose. But the books do give me purpose day to day, just like I can work on a book, and that's purpose, or try to make money from it, stuff like that.

KENNEALLY: Would you teach writing? Somebody offered you the opportunity?

LIN: Yeah. I've tried to get teaching jobs, but no place will have me. I don't have a master's degree.

KENNEALLY: That seems odd. You've got four books, a fifth coming out, but you don't have a master's degree, so that's going to prevent them from hiring you.

LIN: And I think they just don't think I'll be a good teacher, also.

KENNEALLY: Well, you could prove them wrong, I'm sure. One more question or two? Yeah, sure. We'll go with you.

M: This is my first time seeing you in person. I've seen a couple of videos of you reciting poetry. You have a very specific cadence and a way that you talk. So if your books were to be made into audio books, would it matter to you who read them, or would you want to read them yourself, or is there someone that you think would be perfect for it?

LIN: I would prefer that they be read in a monotone, like I speak. If I was given the opportunity to read them, I would do it.



KENNEALLY: It would seem to me that the connection, the autobiographical nature of the books, and the very – that the curious – what – the critic there in the *Guardian* said that they were deliciously odd. That deliciously odd characteristic could only be conveyed by you. It'd be hard to imagine Meryl Streep pulling that off, you know? Yes?

M: Yeah, I just wanted to ask your opinion about something you're involved with, the blogging, e-mail. Some people think that in the modern world we're in, with like everything being done on computers and blogs and e-mail, and on personal level, a lot of text messaging, things like that, where people aren't necessarily face to face. Some people think it's like the greatest thing in the world, it can allow for real – more – like accepting more direct, you can be in a way more personal, that you can take your time, get to know people sometimes, or you can be very spontaneous (inaudible) closer to your friends, just like that, you don't have to hope that they're home, you communicate right (inaudible) right away with the text messaging. And other people think it's like the demise of civilization as we know it. It's like no one's really being personal any more. What do you think? When you think of the future, the way society's going, is it better for community, is it better for people getting to really know each other, feel close to each other, or is it –

KENNEALLY: Well, you said, Tao, just to add to that, it's a good question. You said that it works for you, anyway, right?

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: You say, in fact, if I heard you right, you would prefer to communicate, or you communicate better in e-mail than you do in person. Is that fair?

LIN: Yeah, or more accurately would be the most accurate description. I don't –

KENNEALLY: You communicate more accurately.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: In e-mail.

LIN: I don't necessarily think that's better, just more accurate.

KENNEALLY: And do you think generally people are more or less accurate in e-mail?



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LIN: I think people have the potential to be more accurate, but that doesn't mean they're going to be more accurate, because someone who doesn't think about what they say will just type –

KENNEALLY: They'll just blurt it out anyway.

LIN: Yeah.

KENNEALLY: Yeah.

LIN: And my view about it, to answer your question, I think it's just different than before. I don't think it's better or worse. It just has certain effects. I don't think it's better or worse, just different.

KENNEALLY: Well, I've enjoyed very much talking with Tao Lin. I've enjoyed the contributions from the audience today. I want to thank you, Tao, for being here at the Miami Book Fair with me.

LIN: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: Your new book is *Shoplifting from American Apparel*, published by Melville House Books. There are a number of books that they have published, including *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*, a collection of poetry, another novel, *Eeeee Eee Eeee*, and – I love that – and *Bed*, which is a collection of short stories. On behalf of the Miami Book Fair, my employer, Copyright Clearance Center, and for our podcast series, Beyond the Book, I want to thank you again. My name is Chris Kenneally. Have a great day.

(applause)

END OF INTERVIEW