



ROT/WE'RE
NOT DONE

Eileen
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ROT

I thought that this was a great invitation, to discuss a private obsession so of course I casually took fifteen pages of notes and brought my own mic stand ha—it's all very impromptu. My first thought was “wolves!” I'm totally obsessed with wolves and I could easily spend more money on protecting wolves than anything else in my life. Because the carnage of wolves in America is horrendous. They are being killed at this incredible rate in the West and it always peaks with some horrible photograph of mounds of dead wolves in Idaho on the internet and some laughing man standing there with a gun and like *bam*, I give them thirty five more dollars. Cause you just get this sick feeling when you look at that proud pile of dead wolves, and I thought, “that actually has something to do with spoilage,” which is my topic. I'd rather explore the topic more locally, with how I actually live with it.

Which is about thinking. I noticed that as soon as you decide that something is an obsession, and you're going to talk about it, it stops. And even though I was thinking about wolves, I was constantly thinking about spoilage, which I always

think about. But as soon as I moved into spoilage, spoilage stopped. Once, when I was in India in the '90s, I went to a wildlife preserve and there was a leader who was going to show us some tigers. So he was creeping along, and we were all in a single file line behind him, and then every now and then he would sort of crouch and freeze, and we would all freeze, it was a total cartoon thing. And any obsession is like that, because as soon as you crouch and freeze, you don't see anything, the whole notion of looking for the thing that way is not going to work.

Probably the most distinct way I think about spoilage is with vegetables. I eat them but it's very hard because you buy them, you eat a salad one night and then the vegetables rot. Because you don't stay in. You're a person who eats vegetables but you also go out.

And then I thought maybe the whole thing with spoilage has to do with class. It's classed in the same way that people think incest is classed, or violence is classed. Like only poor people are having sex with their kids or beating them up. But we know that's absolutely not true. Rich people are also abusing their kids, and so I think people with money are also having these same feelings that I'm





having about the salad. But what they do is they just go out to dinner every single night, and they never buy the vegetables! I think that's the way that a rich person would get around this. Or they would have a cook or a servant who would make the vegetables for them, and then take them away. So these things would never brown in their bin.

I feel like dogs are a huge part of spoilage. If you have a dog, then you have solved the spoilage problem to a certain extent. You go out and get a hamburger, and this huge thing appears in front of you at a restaurant. You have a few bites and are already seeing that this exciting appetite is going to end, you know it's always best if you just slice it down the middle, cut the burger in half for the dog. You've invited another body to put your spoilage into, so spoilage doesn't ever happen, it goes some place else.

I think overeating is massively related to spoilage. Because this extra food exists on your plate and you "don't want to waste it." You got this from your family, because you have parents—and I don't want to say "mother," I don't want to feminize the whole parent thing—these are adult people who have little people, and those are children, and

these adult people feed the children. And because the adult people have this big spoilage thing about food, they use the children as sort of dumpsters. They look around at all of the extra food sitting on the table, and they're like, "have some more, have some more!" And always they're just putting it in little flesh baggies (kids) and having it go away. An aspect of any relation to spoilage is that you need to create a system to make it invisible. And that's part of what children are, little dumpsters.

I didn't eat publicly for years when I was young, and that's a whole other story. But later, I had a wealthy friend who would take me out to eat, and after we finished she would say to me, "you know, I can tell that you're working class, because you always clean your plate." And this was a hugely humiliating moment, because up until that moment, I had always just thought about myself as just a good eater. Which is, if you think about it, one of the least sexy things in the world. Like when you do a computer dating thing, you don't say, "likes this, likes that, goes to the movies, is a good eater." So at that moment, I realized that I had to hide my shame. There was nothing cool about being a good eater, it was a class identifier. So from that moment on, I





started to over order, or just leave huge amounts of food on the plate. And that's not about making the food go away, it's about making the food as designator of class go away.

Many of the spoilage issues that I have gotten in touch with in recent years are kind of about being alone. When you are alone in your apartment that's when you really start to discover what your spoilage issues are. I've gone through a breakup in the past year so I'm freshly single. And relationships are also units where you work out your spoilage issues. One of the things that you always do when you live with somebody, is you open the refrigerator and pull something out and sniff it, and you extend it to them and ask, "is this okay?" And then the other person stands there smells it, and you have this back and forth. Ideally, you would both be in the same relationship to spoilage, which is not always the case.

One of the things that I think about, in that moment that you're sniffing the milk to see if it's any good, is medievalism. At some point in the '70s, I suddenly had this attachment to the medieval, and I sort of identified with it. I knew that they had a really wide berth for spoilage in the Middle Ages. Everything smelled, so how could you tell if *this*

smelled good or not? The whole world stunk. And even though there were certain downsides, like the bubonic plague, for me it served as a kind of inspiration for how I could live more easily with spoilage. I started to realize, it might smell bad, but why don't you taste it? I knew that they were living a little bit closer in the Middle Ages to the whole spoilage issue, and I could get a little closer too. So I started to notice, sometimes something started to smell bad, but if you tasted it, it would be a little bit sweet. And I would say to the person I was with, "it's a little bit sweet." And they would say, "that's disgusting." So you take in that feeling, the feeling of their disgust at your level of spoilage, and you would be secretly angry at what a waster this person was. Which is not the sort of thing you ever want to say to somebody. It's sort of up there with being a good eater, you don't want to talk about waste in your relationship.

All of this in some ways has to do with money. What I need to do when I think about money in terms of spoilage and waste is go back to my youth, to when the banquet of spoilage and waste really was getting set up in my life. By youth I mean like mid-twenties to late-thirties, I think of that as youth.





I mean youth in terms of free-standing youth, like alone in one's apartment, setting up your own habits. And I have to say, there's a weirdness about this *because* my youth was in the '70s and '80s, so it was like we were all in these weird little apartments in the East Village. I suspect that youth is somewhat different if you don't actually get to do that now unless you have a trust fund. But we were doing that, and so I'd be alone in my apartment being poor, invisible even to myself, setting up house, and a lot of what was going on in that apartment, was me wrapping bread, very effectively.

I want to step away from that just for a moment—from the wrapping the bread, which of course has to do with preservation—to someone that I was in love with in my youth. This person was married and she had kids, and she was sort of the opposite of me, which was absolutely so much of what the sexiness was about. She would just walk down First Avenue, buying enormous quantities of great-looking bread, and when she got to her apartment she would throw it down on a cutting board and put cheese there, and start cutting it. And it would all be out there, open, like this giant display. I thought it was the sexiest thing in the world because part

of me thought, *it's hardening*. And it filled me with fear, this way she had about bread. She didn't even care! She just did it again tomorrow. It was a very sexy powerful image.

Back to my tiny little apartment in my twenties and thirties: What I wanted more than anything in the world was just to be free for a very long time. And I didn't want to work, and basically, I wanted to be home, being a poet. And I meant that in a long way, and I meant that in a short way, so what I had to have was a future. What my future meant—in a real literal sense inside my apartment—was coffee, there had to be coffee inside of the apartment for there to be a future, and there had to be bread, and there had to be a little bit of butter. And I basically felt like if I had these things, then I could sort of see a future, in this very incremental way. There had to be cigarettes too, but they are completely not a part of this story so I'm not going to deal with them at all today. They have a whole other gestalt I think. So I want to get to the core thing about bread, which is that time makes it hard. That's the thing that actually freaks me out about bread. It's sort of like flowers, in that it's a little bit alive, and then it isn't.¹ I learned

¹ And in both cases the smell stops.





that when you bought a loaf of bread, that if you didn't close it, then the first slice would get hard, and then the one behind it would be hard, and then the one behind that would be hard. I would look at that loaf as it was hardening slice by slice, and think *Wednesday...Thursday...Friday...* it was like I saw my time shrinking. And it would send me into a panic, I'd look at this loaf and I'd feel this feeling and I'd think, *I'm not going to have any bread.*

I quickly learned that at a certain point in life, a person doesn't really want a whole loaf of bread. You could simply have less, and that would be a better system. In the East Village of the '70s and '80s there were lots of little bakeries, which were incredible, because if you had a dollar you could go into one of these little bakeries, and they would sell rolls for like thirteen cents. So you could buy like three rolls, and then go and buy a beer for later. You would have spent your dollar, and you would have this incredible future. Three days. You had dealt with the future, and you would know that now the whole day is free, today is completely free. Especially if you wrapped those little rolls, that's the key piece of this. So I know that plastic bags are really bad—and of course who in their right mind would

spend ninety-nine cents and buy a box of baggies in 1978, that wasn't going to happen—but there were all these free plastic bags. And I know that plastic bags are horrible, and they wind up in trees, and if you cut open a beautiful seabird you'll see a Pez dispenser, and a condom, and like three plastic bags. But at the time that I'm describing, the plastic bag meant that I could take those three rolls, and wrap them really tightly, and shove them in the refrigerator, and everything was okay.

Is this making you relaxed or really anxious?

So you had time, a future, you felt joyous, but then, the butter starts to taste a little funny. It's weird how spoilage starts to resemble sweetness, like it hits this really high note and then has this wide crash. That's the nature of things rotting. It's funny, I'm thinking again about when you live with somebody, and you open the refrigerator together and they say, "there's no bread," and then you look in the refrigerator and you say, "there's bread," you're looking down at your exquisitely wrapped loaf. You can kind of tell how the relationship is going at that point in time because the person sort of knows what you're like and sort of knows what you do. So if things are okay in the relationship they just





sort of go “uh-huh,” and it’s left at that point. If you love somebody you’re gonna leave their weirdness alone. They do that. At this point in my life I actually do trade in loaves. I work a large system, I’m past rolls. And I don’t like freezing, but the thing is, freezing really works. It’s like being god. You can have a whole loaf of bread, and you put it in the freezer, and you have it forever. You don’t like it, it’s not good, but you just have it.

This is part of what happens in a relationship, and the history of one’s spoilage, you realize that you have to make a little room for spoilage. You have to let it be around a little bit. My mother, she’s ninety-three, and she freezes things. And everything she freezes tastes okay. It’s very strange, it’s okay for her, and if you’re with her it’s okay, but if I freeze something, it’s not okay. So I’ve found that I have to let the spoilage in a little bit. Part of what’s changed in my own personal system is money—I’m not as impoverished as I was in my twenties or thirties. I realized today that how I know that I have money at this point in my life, is that if I get a traffic ticket, I feel like it’s not a huge crisis. And that makes me really happy, if I get a ticket now I’m not screwed for two weeks. And I don’t really think that

money means time, but what I’ve moved into is a larger house of cards, which is more like life and death, it’s sort of like macro-spoilage, like *dead*. So the small smell of things going bad is not the worst possibility. So I feel like I’m in the place now where I can take whatever spoilage throws at me. I’m still obsessed with it, but I feel like I’ve had to create this new system where it’s like *Yeah, let it rot...*

But on the other hand, there’s still kind of a problem, and it’s a problem still with bread, because it’s not about having a dollar and it’s not only about wrapping the bread, and it is somewhat about accepting the fact that the bread will rot, but it’s more like this problem of having to go to Whole Foods, you know? And it’s weird because sometimes you just can’t, you won’t, go to Whole Foods. It’s sort of like a spiritual index in a way, willingness to go to Whole Foods. And then you walk into Whole Foods on Sunday and see that incredible line, and you’re like *no*. And you walk out. And that’s great, it’s an example of a good quick decision. But other days, and this is something very interesting to me, I think, *yes*. And I get in that line that is so long, and I stand there with my loaf of bread, and I think *I can do this*. And this incredible beneficence comes over me,





just watching all of these cute people, and they're having like, food fights about what they got or didn't get, and you just kind of let all the time pass. Time has a rotting quality too, and you just stand there in the rot of it.

I also think that there's something about money that's related to spoilage. As I said, I'm not poor right now, I'm sort of okay. But money has a perverse side too, because if you have money, sometimes it's exciting not to spend it. It's sort of like being really clean. You have money, and you're okay, but you decide not to spend it, and it feels really clean, it's sort of like not having a body. This point is so difficult I might not even be able to make it. It's like wanting to leave a lot of food on your plate, so no one knows that you're working class. Not spending money is sort of similar to that, like hiding from the exchange that you could be in, and somehow you feel slightly preserved by this. It's some form of insanity that I'm describing. If you don't spend money, and you have a loaf of bread that's really preserved, and you don't have to go out to Whole Foods, then what you wind up with is a sensation of being in your home with someone taking care of you. Like that loaf of bread is doing it. It's a strange, frozen, adult feeling.

Which reminds me of something else, which is that what's special about childhood is that you never thought about any of these things at all. There was not one moment when I was a kid when I thought about anything spoiling, or rotting, or going bad. It absolutely didn't exist, it wasn't a question you dealt with. But you did see something when you were a kid, and that's maggots. Did you ever see maggots? I saw maggots when I was a child, I've never seen them again, but I saw them. You only need to see maggots once in your life, right? Remember the first time you saw a dead body, or maybe the second time...there's a certain, incredible shock of seeing a dead body for the first time when you were a child, like you never get over that shock.

I totally understand that impulse to take a picture of a body at that moment. When they first invented photography, the first thing they wanted to do was to take pictures of dead bodies, which is really weird. But absolutely not! This is absolutely what I've been talking about, which is that the body is there, and then it's going to rot, and then it's going to vanish. And the thing that's so great about taking a picture, is that a click, with a camera or on my phone, means that for that second, it's okay that





all of that stuff is going to happen. And it's interesting, at this point in the world, it's like our whole life, our whole copied world is in this stasis right now. We now have a whole entirely copied world and everything is sort of okay because of that click. We sort of have it under control.

For me the scenario of mortality, and ruin, and spoilage from earliest is strangely the film *Of Human Bondage* with Kim Novak. Has anyone seen that movie? Okay Kim Novak is really hot, she's incredibly beautiful, and Laurence Harvey is in love with her. By the end of the film she's dying of syphilis. She's clearly gone bad, she's been a prostitute, she's lived on the streets. He still loves her, has agreed to see her, and she has all of this horrible makeup on and looks wretched. There was something about that that was so exciting and dirty to me as a child. I wasn't into dead girls, but maybe ruined ones. Let me explain. This will get a little weirder too. I remember telling Alex Katz about this movie, *Bob le flambeur*, which I think means "Bob the gambler," and immediately he was like *oh my god, that was the movie with the incredible girl with those great thighs that were gonna go bad in a moment*. And he said it with huge excitement, like what was

so hot about this girl was that her hotness was going to change, like she never had a career, she was one of those very beautiful people that you see in a film once, and everybody was like *who is that?* and that was her whole career. And that's exactly what he remembered about that film, and of course I remembered her too.

Her intense beauty and sexiness was all that glory and then it was gone. The way people love the beauty of working-class kids, you know there's a whole fetish about working-class kids, especially among the middle class and the upper middle class, is exactly this thing. People are really excited about children of the working class, who are beautiful, because what they are excited about is the fact that these kids won't be preserved. They are looking at people who are really beautiful for a moment, without all of the accoutrements of the middle class, or wealth to kind of buff that beauty and give it lessons and feed it well. No, this person is going to live on McDonalds and sit on the couch. What the person who looks at the working-class kid feels, and this is a very gross kind of gloating, is that it is a stupendous accident that I'm seeing you now like this. And I have to say, either sadly or grossly, that I sort





of think this way about love. This is where we're going now. When we feel incredible love for a person, we take a picture somewhere in our hearts, and in a way there is a question about whether it will ever again be so bright. No. It will rot. This love will rot. And that just makes me want to mention the rot of the orgasm. When I think about sex and I think about coming, all my life I've thought about it as this system where there is all this brightness that then caves in on you. It is this incredible moment, and then the moment is *not*. And you're sort of like a cadaver of love and sex after that moment. And you lay there feeling tender, like meat about to go bad. Smelly.

We're Not Done

(A conversation between Eileen Myles and Mike Albo after Eileen gave an improvised lecture on the nature of spoilage, 2014)

MIKE ALBO: Wow there is so much so much so much...

Eileen Myles: I'm not going to get any dates out of this, and I know. I know, so I won't feel bad.

MA: No you totally are! First of all, it sounds like you have really good orgasms so that makes me want to date you. So, definitely the poorer you get, the more spoilage you see, and this happens to me, week by week. If I feel like I'm rich one week, there'll be nothing in my refrigerator, but the minute I'm poor, I have this shitty kale salad that I made that I eat until it's like fossil fuel. Do you feel more susceptible to spoilage when you're single or when you're with somebody?

EM: I have spoilage shame when I'm with somebody.





MA: because you feel like you're not doing your job or something?

EM: Well because I like to play things a little looser, a little weirder, and I'm often with people who have higher spoilage standards. So single I watch it avidly, it's like I have a greenhouse in my refrigerator or something, I'm tending it, paying attention.

MA: It's such a sweet moment to think of you saying, "Here, smell this, does this smell bad?" to someone.

EM: Very intimate, right?

MA: But if you, like me, found a dead, desiccated mouse in your apartment yesterday, and you were the only person who was cleaning it, does that make you feel more lonely, or...I'm sorry to project on you.

EM: More lonely. I think I'd be more lonely. Can we talk about the smell? The smell of dead mouse in your apartment smells sweet, right? It's blood, but it's a sweet smell.

MA: Okay...

EM: I don't mean that I love it and I want to go eat this mouse, but...

MA: I weirdly didn't even smell this mouse. It just suddenly dropped out of my cabinet. I didn't even know it was there, and it was suddenly there.

EM: Well you've gotta leave the mouse around to smell it.

MA: Oh, good idea! Thanks for the tip. So, you like the smell of rotten things a little bit, is it sort of like the smell of gasoline?

EM: I'm sort of willing to give it a little time, I think.

MA: Spoilage to me sounds like an orgasm. Because you have the sweet moment, and then there's a wide crash, that's what you said. And then you're lying there like a cadaver, spoiling.

EM: I think there's a real relationship, right? I mean I think sex is dying and rotting.



MA: Does your obsession with this go towards non-edible things, like Netflix? And like when things pile up, like *New Yorkers*?

EM: Oh! I didn't even go there! But yes. In fact I don't read *The New Yorker* because I can't bear subscribing to *The New Yorker*, because I can't bear seeing those magazines pile up, it's really painful.

MA: Do you feel as a person who was here in the '70s and '80s, before there was a recycling program, do you feel that we are now able to stave off our obsession about spoilage a little more?

EM: No, it's worse, because you used to be able to put stuff out on the street a lot, and know that somebody would take it. So not only putting food in other bodies, but putting shirts on other bodies, and...cups. You have a cup, you're like *fuck that cup, I don't want to live with that cup anymore*, you put it out on the sidewalk, and the cup would be gone! Now the cup will sit there in a humiliated way for like three days, or an angry superintendent from the building next door will throw it in a dumpster. Or I'll put books out on the street, and I'm afraid that they

really are just going into a dumpster instead of going to some excited person. So, it's too clean. And it's a problem, I think.

MA: Final question before I open the floor: What is "fresh" to you? What is the most fresh thing? A flower? An orgasm? What?

EM: I think waking up just when the coffee really kicks in, I think that is an incredibly fresh feeling.

MA: I reread so much of your stuff today, and you mention coffee so much.

EM: I love coffee. Once I quit coffee and it was the saddest thing I'd ever experienced. I mean it, I quit coffee and at first it was okay and for about a month I felt amazing, I went camping, I performed and I remembered things. It wasn't like I was this jagged person, I was just kind of relaxed and saying my lines, and it was incredible. And then I came back to New York in the fall, and it was like this mountain of sadness suddenly moved in front of me. It was the saddest thing I'd ever felt in my life, and I thought *I can't live, I can't live*. And I just bought a



cappuccino, and I sat on the floor shaving my legs thinking *okay*.

MA: And coffee doesn't really spoil, either. You can have coffee around forever, and it's not like it's going to go. The other last thing that I wanted to say, is that I'm so glad that you eat bread and you're not one of these fucking gluten people. You eat it.

EM: I sometimes buy gluten-free bread in homage to the people who I've dated who ate it. And then I think *what am I doing that for? That's really sad*.

AUDIENCE: What part of your life decided that you were going to speak about spoilage?

EM: My domestic life. Because I really was thinking about wolves, and then I was doing all this weird shit I always do in my apartment of wrapping things, worrying about things going bad, and I thought *Oh, no, you're really crazy, you think about this all the time*. One of my rules of life is to try and notice the thing you're actually doing, rather than the thing that you think you should be doing. Because I really don't like to work, and I'm really lazy, and so I try to do

the thing that is involuntary, and make that be work.

MA: I have a good idea for you: You should compost! There, I'm your therapist, give me \$160.

EM: But wouldn't you have to have something outside, where it goes?

MA: No, I think people do it in their apartments now.

EM: But what do they do with it?

MA: They put it somewhere...the park I guess? I don't know.

EM: Yeah that's the problem. I've done it before, I lived in Belfast in fall and I composted, it was great. I dug a hole, and I took a picture of it and put it on twitter: dug hole, put garbage in it. It was incredible.

MA: And did you feel better in your life?

EM: I felt great! I loved it.





AUDIENCE: I love the idea of the image being out there, and that's holding us back, that puts up the dam. You send a photograph out there, to Facebook, and it feels like stopping time.

EM: Yes, it's the anti-spoilage world, it's intense.

MA: Like I was saying, I re-read you all day like a stalker, and in your book *Skies*, there is a lot of that "here's the moment" stuff going on. There's one where you're in the backyard and the petunias are shivering, and her hair is this way, and it's like this nonspoiled moment.

EM: That is absolutely true, that is the nonspoiled moment. I think that's why I'm a poet, because it's the one thing I do to say *I remember, I saw it, I was there*.

MA: You also say, "poetry is energy, and then the words come later," so there's this idea that that's the freshest thing, right?

EM: It's true, I think that something before the words is even the real poetry.

AUDIENCE: Sometimes butter is a little bit sweet, or milk is a little bit sweet. What is that sweetness after spoilage?

EM: It's not after spoilage, it's early spoilage. First it smells slightly funny, and then it smells...you know I think that I would need a chemist to tell me. You know how butter gets this weird sickly sweet, and I think it must be doing something.²

MA: I have another idea for you: You should ferment! You should ferment things.

EM: What's that drink that people drink?

MA + AUDIENCE: Kombucha?

EM: Kombucha. I'm always dating people who drink kombucha. But I'm like an alcoholic who doesn't drink. And again, alcohol. All alcohol is spoilage. It's fermented, it's ruined. It's all rotting things. So maybe the high of getting drunk is the

² The woman I love, and I think she is dumping me at this exact moment... I have her butter. I won't explain that at all. I dedicated this book to her and now she is gone.





sweetness before the horror of the things that you do or the awful hangover you'll have the next day. Just tossing theories out.

AUDIENCE: [Really hard to understand]

EM: I think writing is saving shit. You get this thought, and instead of just having this great thought, you write it down. And then I think, the thing about being a person who does anything, is that you have too many ideas. You are going to buy groceries, and some of them are going to rot, and some of them you are going to eat. And it's like as long as you're doing a percentage of what you thought, you're doing something. If I think about when I first started to write, if I ever got stuck it's because I got so many ideas. I wrote term papers in college that were like a crazy person throwing up. I had these great ideas, but there was no road, where all of these ideas could be laid down so that anyone could ever walk on that road. So I feel like being a writer is getting better at picking out just a little bit of stuff and putting that down.

MA: So there is a point when something becomes

unspoiled as a writer, and that's publishing something.

EM: It's been rescued.

MA: What about that grey area though? Do you have notebooks and legal pads like that where you're like *shit, what am I gonna do with all of these ideas?*

EM: And then that gets into the world of one's papers. Like libraries buy this stuff.

MA: So you convince yourself, you're like *oh that'll go to a library, it will be fine.*

EM: Oh yeah! It's true, books are containers. Every time I've written something for no money, I think *It'll go in a book, it'll go in the book of my essays.* And it actually happens! Maybe it didn't happen for twenty years, but it really did happen. So then you think all those notebooks will go in a library. So the library is like the dumpster of the writer's career. And you're lucky if you get that dumpster as opposed to the actual dumpster where many writers' careers have gone, right?





AUDIENCE: I have never spent that much time thinking about spoilage, but I've been struck by how much it figures into everyone's daily life all the time, and then I started thinking about zombies. And I was wondering if you ever think about zombies, and why it is such a prominent image in the culture. It seems like this nexus between spoilage and (inaudible 4730)

EM: I can't help thinking of zombies as having something to do with this increased unreality feeling we have from all of the technology we use to connect. My only real zombie experience was in my own life, when I really did too many drugs once, and I took a friend to the airport. I had been up for several days at this point, I was taking so many drugs, and I was feeling great, I was like *sure, I'll take you to the airport*, and I came back from the airport on the train, and suddenly it was full of zombies. And it was really scary. I just knew that every single person on the train was a zombie, and I was freaking out. It was like a toxic thing. And I think that the obsession with zombies means that the culture is sick. And we're really thinking that people are dead when they're not.

AUDIENCE: What do you think is the relationship between spoilage and creativity? Spoilage comes out of an excess of life.

EM: Utter, I think it's utter. I think you sort of want to or need to sit in the spoiled place and make something. I fell in love with a house recently that I didn't buy. I didn't buy it because I didn't have enough money, but also because the people selling it were spoiling it by fixing it. It was a great wrecked house, it was such a wreck, and such a mess, it was a ruin and it had big windows, and I thought *I could write in this house, I know I could write in this house*. And it was the feeling of being in the middle of a ruined space.

MA: Which is also the kind of person you said you're attracted to, right? Kind of ruined?

EM: Did I say that? I think it feels true.

MA: You don't want someone who is too clean and fresh.

EM: No, I'm very excited by the flaws in the person that I fall in love with.





MA: Even though, “the love will rot”?

EM: It will get even more flawed. But it’s the connection, the co-rotting. Not that they’ll rot and I won’t. We’ll rot together.

MA: This is going to sound really therapy-ish, but did your mom yell at you about cleaning your plate?

EM: I think I got points for being a good eater. It was one of the few good things I did.

MA: But did you get punished?

EM: I got punished for not eating certain things, I still can’t eat those kinds of things today.

MA: Like what?

EM: Orange foods. Except for carrots I can’t eat any orange vegetables because my mother made me eat squash, and really couldn’t bear me not eating my squash. And I couldn’t bear it, it’s horrible! It’s because it’s sweet. It was like this adult sweet, not a kid candy sweet, but an adult sweet

that freaked me out as a kid.

MA: You have a very strange sweet palate, I have to say. It’s a wide range of sweetness.

Endnote:

‘Rot’ was originally commissioned as a talk for a curated night about obsession in PEN’s World Voices Festival 2014 and then it was published, I’m not sure if just the talk or the interview too and it was in PEN America: A Journal for Writers and Readers 2015. My interview was with the writer and performer, Mike Albo.