

October 12, 2016 - Before finding online success as the author of the Twitter account, @sosadtoday, Melissa Broder was a poet with three well-regarded collections (*Scarecrone*, *Meat Heart*, and *When You Say One Thing But Mean Your Mother*) and poems in a number of journals (*POETRY*, *The Iowa Review*, *Guernica*, *Fence*, etc). In 2016, she published a collection of poetry called *Last Sext* and the autobiographical essay collection, *So Sad Today*. Her dog's name is Pickle.



As told to Brandon Stosuy, 3336 words.

Tags: Writing, Poetry, Anxiety, Multi-tasking, Success, Sex.

Melissa Broder on the difference between poetry and Twitter

You were a known poet before your anonymous Twitter account took off. Was it tough coming forward and saying, "Hey, I'm Melissa Broder, the poet, writing these tweets"? Social media is generally seen as a lesser form of writing.

I was definitely afraid when I came out as So Sad Today that people would take me less seriously as a poet. I usually assume the best in people except for when it comes to their perspectives of me and then I assume the worst—because I'm usually thinking the worst about myself. The same thing happened when I decided that I was going to publish a book of essays, that I was going to the dark side as a poet by going prose.

Also, in my poetry, I try to stay away from any language that is disposable and time sensitive. I think it's just a desire for something elemental or natural in this world. Whereas with my Twitter, I'm always having sex at Cheesecake Factory. I allowed myself some of that disposability and pop in the essay book as well. And, as is usually the case, I'm thinking about myself way more than anyone else is, and thus I'm judging myself way more than anyone else. It's both freeing and depressing to remember that people aren't thinking about you that much.

In general, do you approach your tweets differently than your poems?

My tweets come from the ego, the part of my brain or self that wants to be witty or funny or prove something, whereas with the poems I try not to use my conscious mind at all. With the poems, in the initial draft, there is nothing to prove, nowhere to get, no one to impress, just a channel inside that is hopefully clear language and subconscious knowing.

Some of the best tweets get born that way, too—like they are born whole almost. I would say, though, that my poems get better with edits, whereas if you have to edit a tweet a lot it might not be a good tweet. When I edit a poem I ask "is this true?" and what I mean by true is not truth in a reality sense, but true as in does it feel right in my bones. Whereas with a tweet I'm mostly asking is this good or funny. And if you ask that too much about anything it turns to shit.

An example of this is the difference between my @melissabroder feed and my @sosadtoday feed. The @melissabroder feed has always been edited, honed, and carefully crafted, and thus has way less followers

than the So Sad Today feed, which began out of desperation and sometimes still is me just shitting out whatever I need to get out so it doesn't eat me.

You mentioned referencing food and sex in your tweets. That theme shows up in your poetry, too, though it feels different when it does.

They manifest differently, but they both come from a place inside me that's just like "fuck it."

Why do you write about it so often?

When it appears in my tweets, it's a wish fulfillment. Also, I have a hard time in my life letting go and being silly. I always forget to do that, but I really enjoy absurdity—not the bad absurdity of existence, or the terrifying absurdity of when you look around and you're looking at people and you're like, "What is this?," and you're full of anxiety. There's another kind of absurdity that I think is just like a playful one. I actually think it's probably a very good counter to anxiety, because you're sort of lolling with things, which is what I think humor allows you to do.

I don't know when I first started. I mean, certainly there is a great history of food and sex. We can think of *Seinfeld* when George brings the corned beef sandwich into bed, or maybe it's pastrami, to kind of marry his great loves together. You know what would make sex even better? That would be a pastrami sandwich. I also have in my life a history of really loving—as a poet I guess, too—of being really into sexting. Pushing things and wanting to go really hard in the hot end of that scale, but sometimes also wanting to create a humorous narrative of different places where one can have sex.

I don't remember what my first food and sex tweet was; it might have been from another secret account where I think it had to do with fucking a pumpkin. I had this other secret account for a little while that no longer exists. I think it was on Halloween, it was about fucking a pumpkin. I just loved the way it felt to tweet something like that. I think it's not only aspirational. A lot of people love food and sex, love both food and sex, so it's not a strange thing to love. They're two areas, especially food, where I can feel sort of repressed. To merge the two is the ultimate letting go, but also it's just silly. Like fucking a pumpkin; it's funny. It's so fun to explore fucking a pumpkin.

One thing I've noticed: when you tweet about cereal, your teen followers get excited. What is it about cereal in particular? Those aren't necessarily food and sex tweets; they're often just about your love of cereal.

Well, I have a deep love of cereal. I think that when you have a deep love of something, like a deep passion for it, and someone else has a deep love of it and you tweet about it, that resonates. Cereal is a very easy thing to love. First of all, there are so many varieties. I love things when there are so many varieties. It's why I can't vape. I'm an addict. Basically, I quit smoking 12 years ago and I still chew a ton of Nicorette. I think this fits in an interview about food and sex because part of why I started smoking was it curbed my appetite, and I picked up smoking at the time when I had an eating disorder in high school. They fed on each other. Also, I think nicotine is actually a stimulant, and so, it's been a low-key way of treating my depression.

I don't know how I got on that from cereal! Oh, so now I just chew Nicorette. They have so many flavors of gum—fruit, mint, cinnamon—and there are infinite more in the world of vape, so I know I could get really into it. There are some things you can get addicted to where an element of the addiction is the different delicious flavors, or different attributes. When I was a big stoner before I got sober, there were a million different kinds of weed and accoutrement and that element was really fun. I think with my alcoholism, I could also kind of couch that in different kinds of liquors, different kinds of alcohol. With something like cereal...

I don't think I'm addicted to cereal. I just think I love cereal, and I've managed to walk that line of just loving cereal. It hasn't ever hurt me. And with cereals, there's also many different types, which is such a beautiful thing. I'll combine Special K Red Berries and Special K Chocolate Chunk and create a new experience. That's how I feel about candy, too. I love things where there's a lot of different types to explore, to combine. I love cereal mini boxes in particular, because it's controlled portions. I love controlled portions. They make me feel safe. When I get a thing of cereal mini boxes, they make me feel

safe, yet abundant. There's an abundance of choice, but I know each one is only going to be a certain, finite amount. It's binge-proof.

With teens, I think that some of the things that I love about cereal might be some of the things that they love about cereal. Maybe not every teen is obsessed with calories, so it might not be that element of the mini boxes. But it's a comforting food. Cereal can be seen as a safe space. When a teen feels—or when a human feels—passionately about something, or loves something, and maybe hasn't put words to how or why they love it, and then someone else put words to it, it's like a celebration. So that could be part of the attraction.

You've become a spokesperson for teens.

I don't know if I'm a spokesperson for teens. Maybe, but I would never say I'm speaking for them, because I actually think that they are better than me. I think that I, as a teen, was probably in a lot of ways better than me now. Parents are always terrified for the teen years. There's something awful about a teen, but there's something very noble and beautiful about a teen. You still have some of that purity of childhood where you're still able to get excited about things, and things are new. It's almost psychedelic in the way that time can expand and contract, and one day for a teen can be really long, and you can really be in a moment and it can really be everything. Whereas when we grow up, we've lived for more of those days, so a day is just less. A day is shorter, and maybe time is not as malleable.

But I wouldn't say that I'm a spokesperson. What I would say is that I still feel a lot of the feelings that a teen might feel about the world. First of all, there's a mourning in being a teen, as much as you hated your childhood. I didn't really like being a kid. I couldn't wait to grow up and have control of my life. But there's still a mourning in being a teen because there's that loss of some element of childhood innocence, and some element of being taken care of. Then there's also a longing, a powerful longing, you're starting to get all of these romantic feelings, and your body, and so there's a really powerful longing. I think that I currently tend to walk through the world in a state of longing and mourning. So in that sense, I haven't lost that sensitivity of being a teen. But, I'm an adult, and one thing I've learned how to utilize as a tool is words. I still have some of the feelings that I had as a teen, but I'm able to put them into words that I as a teen, or that a teen in general, might not be able to do yet. Because they just don't quite have the vocabulary or, in retrospect, the hindsight.

Is writing about food and sex liberating for you?

100,000 percent. 100 percent. It's a liberation from my seriousness. It's a liberation from self-consciousness. It's a liberation from maturity, in some ways. It's a very teen boy thing to want to fuck on top of a fig newton while eating a fig newton.

It's not really something that you hear professionals talking about very often. It's not around the water cooler. You don't really hear people talking about fucking in the candy aisle at CVS. It's also a juxtaposition of two of my great loves. Again, a lot of people love food, a lot of people love sex. A lot of people have issues around sex, some people have issues around food. For me, food is sexy. I don't know that I necessarily want food in the bedroom. I think that I'm already too distracted with sex as it is. It's hard for me to focus, so it's more like what are two wonderful things? What are two wonderful fantasies? And what would happen if we combined those? Truthfully, the combination might not, in reality, be that great.

The idea, also, of being able to personify food. You know, like having sex in a cinnamon bun, or a soft batch chocolate chip cookie going down on me—it's like the idea of ultimate release. These are all foods that I don't allow myself daily. The other thing, too, is why don't I allow myself these foods, except for in diet versions? It's because of a feeling that I am not enough, I'm not okay, I need to do something to my body, like my urges and my body cannot be trusted. I think the same could be probably said about sex. The idea of a cookie going down on me and offering me this great acceptance, like "You are okay, I love you. You are okay, you are deserving of pleasure." I can trust that I can let go in a sexual area, in terms of my food appetite.

You think of appetite, and ...my friend always says Bill Clinton was a man of appetite. I don't know, he's just always talking about Bill Clinton for some reason and we like to laugh about that. But it's true,

Bill had a sex problem, and he also couldn't keep his hands off the Burger King. I would say that I am a woman of appetite, but I am also a very fearful woman. Those two things can come into conflict.

When you're writing about sex and food, you never really write about sex with vegetables or tofu or anything. For you, is it always something that's forbidden?

100 percent. My life is already a giant vegetable. Which is not to say that I don't eat a pint of ice cream every day, but it's always this diet ice cream. I also eat a lot of Quest bars. I like the Chocolate Chunk ones. There's a lot of that sweet faux junk food in my life. I love diet junk food, it's my favorite place of feeling like I can have a large amount of something that's not going to cause me to hate myself after.

As for vegetables, I can have as many vegetables as I want. It's like, great. I'll be eating vegetables and I'll be like, "I looove vegetables" but given the choice, if I could eat either vegetables or go on a bender of pizza, giant bags of candy from those candy stores where you mix all those candies, like all the gummies, all the chocolates, all the fake cheese products and infinite pad Thai, and both of them would cause me to look the same, I'd be choosing the other shit hands down. I probably would never touch a vegetable again. Built into the joy of the vegetable is simplicity that it's not going to hurt me. But the fantasy is something else—something that I'm afraid could hurt me and ends up embracing me. With vegetables there's no need for wish fulfillment, because I'm in the vegetable game everyday. I am on the front line of vegetables.

Have you ever thought about putting together all of your food and sex writing as a collection? A cookbook, maybe?

A cookbook! I'm the worst chef. I haven't thought about putting together a cookbook, but an anthology would actually be interesting. Maybe in like 15 years. I feel there's a lot of food and sex in *So Sad Today*; like there's an essay about eating disorders and then I'd say 2/3 of the rest of the book is sex. It's like food, sex and my struggles with mental illness, which you could say has a lot of overlap into my experiences with food and sex.

I think that a lot of times writers write out our obsessions for our whole lives. Even in my poetry, food used to be appear a lot more, it doesn't appear quite as much anymore. Sex always appears, and death and fear of existence. I mean that's pretty much what I'm doing. Yeah, I think that could happen at some point.

But as for a cookbook, I'm a terrible chef. It's a bad bad scene, it's a bad scene when I cook. I am a microwaver, what I do is microwave.

I imagined some kind of cookbook/sex manual. I don't know what that would be entirely. I thought about that old movie *Nine and a Half Weeks*, do you remember that?

Actually, that's one of my favorite movies. Now the food and sex scene in *Nine and a Half Weeks* isn't my favorite part, but I love the longing of that movie. I wonder if the combination of food and sex could ever be actually sexy for me, or if I always make it silly. The idea of a Roman feast is so hot to me. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think the vomitoriums were disproved, but the idea of feasting, fucking and going to a vomitorium—that is some serious hotness. That is the ultimate decadence.

Maybe even before an anthology or a cookbook, I could see writing either a short story or a longer piece, involving a food and sex fantasy. There is something I have actually been thinking about lately, about a love story of sorts, or a piece of erotica. While it didn't involve food in the bedroom, it definitely... Well, we can just call it a one woman's journey from gummy candy to stir fry. One woman's sexual odyssey from gummy to stir fry. It's sort of a surrealist idea. Of course, there's a whole history of aphrodisiacs. You know, personally, I would rather fuck in a burrito than eat an oyster. I feel like having sex within the layers of a burrito would do it more for me than eating oysters.

What happens if Twitter's suddenly gone? Like, what if the company folded, and you could no longer tweet and have an outlet for these thoughts?

I think, for me, it would be like getting sober off of any other drug. At first there would be the habitual moment where I think to reach for it—to numb out, or change a feeling—and it wouldn't be there. There would be mourning, as there is with any other kind of loss. Ultimately though I think there would be a return to spirit, and to a deeper selfhood, that I have been running from for a long time—so much so that I forgot it was there.

Name

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Vocation

Poet, Essayist, Dog Owner, @sosadtoday

Fact

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Melissa Broder Recommends...

Panic Away

My fav crisis hotline or if you are not in the U.S., this list of hotlines

My playlists

The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker

Arctic Zero frozen desserts microwaved and Quest Bars