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Guest/Topic: Alison Kopit on *Exile and Pride* by Eli Clare

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Monica Trinidad: Welcome to The Lit Review, a podcast sparked by a moment of urgency, recognizing mass political education as key for our liberation struggles. Every week, your hosts Page May and Monica Trinidad will chat with people we love and respect about relevant books for the movement, everything from history to theories around gender, to sci-fi, and beyond.

We know that political study is not accessible for a variety of reasons; the high cost of books, academic jargon, the failures of our underfunded school systems, time barriers, and more. Our hope is that this podcast helps address some of those issues, making critical knowledge more accessible to the masses. Think Spark Notes in podcast form. I'm one of your hosts, Monica Trinidad. Thank you for listening.

Hey, everybody. Welcome to episode 26 of The Lit Review. Today we're here with our guest, Alison Kopit. She's going to be talking about the book *Exile and Pride: Queerness, Disability, and Liberation* by Eli Clare.

Alison is pretty amazing. Alison is the disability arts organizer with Bodies of Work and also the arts administrator and access bitch with Rebirth Garments, which is an amazing project. I actually got a chance to participate for the first time at Fed Up Fest this year. Yeah, you should check it out. Go on Facebook, look up Rebirth Garments.

So Alison is also the co-creator of the Not Sorry Project and on the editorial board of *Monsterring*—It's a literary magazine for disabled women and non-binary folks. She's also currently a doctoral student in disability studies at UIC. So thank you so much for being on our show, Alison. How are you doing and how are you feeling today?

Alison Kopit: Yeah, I feel good. I'm really happy to be here. I'm really inspired by all the plants around. I'm really excited to talk about this book. It's probably the most important book to me that exists.

Monica Trinidad: Wow.

Alison Kopit: That's awesome.

Monica Trinidad: Well, perfect.

Alison Kopit: We're going to talk about it. Yeah.

Monica Trinidad: Awesome. Cool. So who are you? What do you do and why?

Alison Kopit: Sure. Well, I guess I'm lots of things. I'm an avid pickle-maker. I'm a queer and disabled artist scholar. I am a disability art activator and access instigator in all the spaces that I creep my way into. I identify as a time traveler and queer crip person who uses femme identity for subversive intent. Yeah, I think I do all of it.

I'm also a doctoral student in Disability Studies, which I guess is maybe relevant as well. I try to integrate activism and art into my scholarly work. I guess all of it I do because I believe in disability justice. I believe in kinesthetic experiences and taking charge of our representation, and because I care about art and creative ways of knowing.

I've been here for coming up on five years. I'm from Cleveland, and then had a brief stint in the West Coast and came back here.

Monica Trinidad: Don't we all have a brief stint in the west coast?

Alison Kopit: Just a little taste.

Monica Trinidad: Just a little, like five months, and then we come right back to Chicago.

Alison Kopit: Yeah.

Monica Trinidad: Cool. So tell us about this book. What led you to read this book? What is it about, for folks that have never read it before?

Alison Kopit: Sure. So this book is, I think, a really phenomenal intersectional text that examines the intersections of queerness and disability, environmentalism, class, and rural upbringing. I read it because I had had a friend who took a mini-series class at Oberlin with Eli and loved his book. He talked to me about it a lot until I finally got around to reading it.

I had a queer identity at that point, but had not fully developed a disability identity. Some of these folks with less apparent disabilities I think come around to that a little bit later, because we are taught the disability is bad and sad.

And so, I had worked in the disability community for many years with adults with IDD, but I read this book and it became the first disability studies book that I had ever read, and am so grateful that my first introduction to a political disability awareness was with something so intersectional and so complex that also felt really accessible to me, even though I had no disability studies background at that time.

So now it's like eight years later and now I have a master's in disability studies, and that's what I do with my doctoral work. But it was so early on. Yeah, I guess that's how I read it and how I got here now.

Monica Trinidad: Awesome. Can you tell us a little bit about the author, Eli Clare?

Alison Kopit: Sure. Yeah. So Eli is a disability activist and essayist and poet. He has a really incredible history with all kinds of political activism and environmentalism. He's from rural Oregon, Port Orford, Oregon, and comes from a logging town, and so has a really complex relationship with where he's from and also his environmentalist identity.

But he wrote it in 1999, which I think is relevant to talk about, because it's now 18 years later and it's still ... I mean I just read it again this week and it's still so relevant and it still feels so complex.

Monica Trinidad: Yeah. Can you just explain a little bit about how Eli lays the book out?

Alison Kopit: Sure. So I think the thing that is very beautiful and also can be challenging is that there's so much non-linearity woven throughout this book. It's creative nonfiction and there's a lot of memoir in it, but there's also a lot of theory written into it.

I think that that is part of the way that he eases people into a political disability consciousness is through weaving stories that are diverse. I think some are ... People can relate to more than others, but people find bits all through it that really resonate with them. Then through that, he's also weaving in important parts of disability consciousness and things about the disability rights movement that were really important and relating them even to histories, disability histories, about the freak show and making connections across various disability communities from various times.

So he's doing a bit of time traveling through there as well, that he has conversations with people who worked the freak show and he has these beautiful dialogues that allow you to time travel with him a little bit.

Monica Trinidad: When I think of exile, I think of not having a home or being forced out of your home. I know he mentions a little bit in here the body as home. And so, yeah, can you just talk about that part a little bit?

Alison Kopit: Absolutely. He works with the idea of exile in a lot of different ways. A lot of this book is about his experiences with abuse and the various ways that our bodies are stolen from us through abuse, through trauma, through various suppressions. And so, I think a lot of this book, he's grappling with sexuality after abuse and understanding identity after trauma, and how do you find home in your body and figure out your body and figure out your identity after those things have been taken from you in some ways.

He also understands exile as in ... I mean he has such a complex relationship with his home, like the body as home, but also with where he comes from. So he is a queer disabled person who grew up in a very rural area, and there are ways that he has felt exiled from that place for various reasons and doesn't want to return or knows that he couldn't return. And so, exile, I think, is something that happens from the inside out, like from the body and radiating outwards, but also from the spaces that we live in and the spaces that we leave.

Monica Trinidad: So why the exile and pride together? Why is that the title?

Alison Kopit: Oh, yeah. I think a lot of it has to do with coming into your own and coming to be able to claim your identity and to take it back and to find home in your communities and to find home in new spaces, in new spaces that you live, in new communities that you're traveling through, and to find spaces of joy and pride throughout.

I mentioned earlier about how disability, we were taught, is bad and sad and that there is this thing about disability identity that we have to unlearn that. That's not something that just gets into your head and that you can live through. And so, I think that there is something about meeting communities, and for a lot of identities, for queer identity, for disability identity, and what happens when you get to be immersed in community or when you get involved in political activity and can grow pride through that and practice pride through that.

There's this beautiful poem by Laura Hershey, who's a disabled poet, who wrote this poem called You Get Proud by Practicing. I think that a lot of what he's doing is practicing pride and then exploring it in all these different ways.

Monica Trinidad: So in the beginning of this book, right in the preface, it's like the first three lines in this book, it's like ... I guess it's written a decade after the initial release of this book. He says that he gets asked the question all the time, is like, "What do you want readers to take away from this book? Why do you want to write this book?" and he says, "I want non-disabled progressive activists to add disability to their political agenda, and at the same time I want disability activists to abandon their single issue politics and strategies," and that his answer is as true as from 1989 to 2009.

So I'm curious, what was the political climate in '99 that he's talking about? What was he talking about in terms of what was he seeing in the non-disabled progressive activist movement that was leaving disabled folks out of the political realm, and vice-versa? What was he seeing in disability activism that was leaving things out?

Alison Kopit: Yeah. It's such an important question and it's really still relevant now. The disability rights movement has been criticized a lot for single issue politics. I think what Eli does that's so brilliant is demands coalition. I think his work does not make sense without integrating a politic of coalition into it.

But, yeah, the early disability rights movement was also mostly led by educated, physically disabled folks who did incredible work, really important work. But also there are so many disability identities and a lot of folks who were left out of that and a lot of other issues that were left out of it. I mean he comes from a working class background and also a rural background, and noticed that the disability rights movement was centered in cities, as were most social movements.

I think now there is a movement to move ... We talk about the movement away from disability rights and into disability justice. Disability justice works with a very strong anti-oppression politics and relies on more diffused power hierarchies and more intersectional awareness. That's not something that was present in early disability rights movement.

I think another part also is that Centers for Independent Living during the advent of AIDS were not serving folks with HIV and AIDS. And so, there was this disconnect there as well that a lot of queer folks were left out of receiving services that they could have received. And so, I think that's a huge thing too and became a part of the divide that they were told to go elsewhere.

That's something that he taught me. We had a recent conversation about it. It's not something that is written about in many books. It's not something that we claim as our history, but it is. So there's a lot of work now that's

being done by disabled scholars that are really trying to integrate more intersectionality into their work, but it is slow.

But, similarly, disabled folks have been left out of a lot of social movements. I mean even if we think about the structure of a protest, that's not accessible to a lot of people. It's not accessible to folks with anxiety disorders. It's not accessible to folks with physical disabilities, some of them. It's not accessible to elderly folks who might be disabled. It narrows who can participate.

A lot of queer spaces ... I mean I've done some recent research about queer spaces that disabled people have been left out of also. So what happens when you have a disabled queer identity and you can't access spaces? What does that do for identity formation?

So I think that he sees a lot of those gaps and grapples with how do we deal with that and how do we fill the gaps and how do we explore what is in the gap and what's happening there.

Monica Trinidad: So I flipped to one of the pages in the middle of the book and he mentions the medicalization of disability. Can you break that down? What does that mean?

Alison Kopit: So when Eli talks about medicalization, he talks about it in relation to the decline of the freak show. At the time of the decline of the freak show, medicalization was on the rise. And so, folks who had been deemed freaks were then channeled into a medicalized system.

Monica Trinidad: When you say the freak show, you mean the literal ... Like the side shows in circus sort of thing?

Alison Kopit: Absolutely.

Monica Trinidad: Oh, wow. Okay.

Alison Kopit: I mean Eli has a really ... He does some really brilliant work about excavating the freak show and the ways that it objectified people of color and disabled people and folks deemed gender-deviant, and the ways that all of those oppressions work together in the locus of the freak show.

But the medical system uses disabled folks in lots of ways, folks with physical disabilities. A lot of folks have been experienced being put on display for medical students and the ways that they were seen as almost their own exhibit in very dehumanizing ways. Disabled people have been institutionalized, and still are institutionalized, at hugely high rates, which

is also a point of intersection with queer folks as well and many other groups of people.

But, yeah, I think that when Eli talks about reclaiming the body, a lot of that has to do with the ways that people are medicalized and the ways that also disabled people are taught that they should be reaching for a cure all the time. Why not get better?

He uses examples like the MDA telethon, the Jerry Lewis telethon, that Jerry Lewis recently died. But for years, that was this opportunity to put disabled people on display and use pity as this way to raise money. They were medicalized through that and they were told this is so bad and why not cure it?

Eli writes about the ways that we've been medicalized and the ways that ableism tells us that we need a cure. But he says, in short, it is ableism that needs the cure, not our bodies. He goes on to say, rather than medical cure, we want civil rights, equal access, gainful employment, the opportunity to live independently, good and respectful healthcare, unsegregated education. We want to be a part of the world, not isolated and shunned. We want a redefinition of values that places disability not on the margins as a dreaded and hated human condition, but in the center as a challenge to the dominant culture.

His recent book that just came out this past year goes back in and really excavates the idea of the cure. He looks at it in all of these really beautiful and complex ways, yeah, that we are medicalized through all of these different means through doctors and psychiatrists and teachers. I mean medicalization is not just happening in a doctor's office. People diagnose other people on the street.

Monica Trinidad: Right. This is actually reminding me ... As we talk about this medicalization, it reminds me of the conversation we had with Pigeon. Pigeon was on this show and talked about an intersex book and just being intersex. We got to this point of talking about the power of the freak and just finding power in being a freak and reclaiming that.

I've noticed that coming up a lot in this book. Reclaiming freak and finding pride is an indirect opposition to internalized depression, so that both those conversations are wrapping up into themselves here.

Alison Kopit: Yeah, and what does it mean to insist on reclaiming your body, mind, and continuing to claim it as yours and continuing to find love and joy in it when it keeps getting taken from you and it keeps getting analyzed? How do you continue to grow pride and live in yourself and call it yours?

Monica Trinidad: I want to return back to talking about protests, protests in disability. I think because this is a podcast for organizers and it's a podcast focusing on we don't have time to read books, but we know that these books are important. So let's talk about it. Does Eli Clare talk a little bit about ADAPT? If not, can you maybe talk a little bit about ADAPT and what they were doing and what does ADAPT stand for folks that don't know?

Alison Kopit: Sure. ADAPT is a direct action disability rights group that is still doing incredible work across the country. Yes, there's a nationwide network, but there are ADAPT centers in many, many cities. Chicago has a big ADAPT group that does some really amazing work. They are often associated with the group Not Dead Yet, which is also a direct action disability rights group.

So they've done a lot. I think when they began, they were working with accessible transportation, and they were a huge part ... I think the reason that Chicago buses are accessible. But they've also done protests at nursing homes. They'll blockade politicians' offices. They were associated with a sit-in that was in 1977, which occupied the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare offices in San Francisco. That was a 25-day sit-in. So they've done incredible work. He writes about them and their role in the disability rights movement and what they've done.

Monica Trinidad: Yeah. I've seen a lot, especially around Medicare, in the recent couple of months, where folks from ADAPT were just on the front lines, holding it down at offices, just doing sit-ins and blockading. Still doing direct action stuff, but then also seeing who isn't showing up, who isn't out there supporting them and seeing, still, that lack of intersectional and coalitional work.

Alison Kopit: For sure. Yeah, a lot of those folks are folks that don't participate in other protests and other direct action work because it's not accessible to them. And so, I think ADAPT is always disability run. I'm sure that there are allies that do protests with them, and PAs and people that become invisible in the stories but are there.

Monica Trinidad: So why do you think that an organizer or activist or community member, why should anybody ... But in particular an organizer, why should they read this book, especially in this moment that we're in right now?

Alison Kopit: I think it's an incredibly accessible introduction to the ways that disability oppression, class oppression, queer oppression, racism, and environmental destruction are all intertwined. I think it's really important for organizers ...

To me, it's a good book for organizers to make the leap to understanding disability justice, because he talks a lot about other movements. And so,

people who are familiar with social movements and are familiar with organizing, it's a great opportunity to start incorporating disability politics into organizing and start thinking about what it means to have a fundraiser or an event that is up two flights of stairs or to create spaces of inaccessibility in other ways, and to start thinking about how disability politics need to be integrated into anti-oppression politics.

I think it's a great example of how it's not only important but necessary to examine each issue from all angles and to not shy away from the ones that contradict each other. Eli really ... I think he really demands and seeks a complex analysis at every turn of this book. So there are ways that we have sometimes conflicts within communities or things that seem like they can't be figured out because it's just how it is. I think he really pushes folks to get in there and to see what is going on.

I think he does such an incredible job of theorizing communities and thinking about how to build coalition. He wants work to be accessible to disabled loggers. He wants disability cultural work to be accessible to folks in nursing homes and folks who are institutionalized. He really deeply believes in accessibility in those ways and not locking our work up in academia to only be discussed in really heady ways. He really, I think, seeks to find answers on the ground and to dig through our histories and find the connections that are present in our histories and also carry us through now.

Monica Trinidad: Yeah. I'm thinking a lot about the ways that ... As organizers, we make the effort to ... Like when we're doing an event and we say, "Oh, this space is wheelchair accessible," but that's not it. That doesn't mean, "Oh, it's wheelchair accessible. Great. We're pro-disability justice. We're totally on board." It's more than that.

Alison Kopit: Absolutely. What does your content look like? Are people wearing scents? What's in the food that you're serving? Are there PAs available? What are the bathrooms like? Are there flashing lights? Are you using synthetic fog? Are you using incense? Are there chairs available? Can people find spaces to sit? There are so many ways to examine accessibility on physical levels. Also, interpreters and captioning and audio description also for folks with sensory disorders and other folks who use those services.

But there are so many ways, I think, to examine accessibility on physical levels and nonphysical levels with content, and also ideological levels. Do you have disabled people in leadership?

Monica Trinidad: Exactly.

Alison Kopit: If not, why not? Do disabled people come to your events? Even if they're in accessible spaces and disabled folks aren't coming, there's probably a reason why. And so, I think that is so important for organizers. There are some concrete ways to make changes that aren't hard.

Monica Trinidad: Right. That's what I was getting at is the ideological piece. It reminds me of when organizations are pro-queer, pro-trans, pro-POC, but then it's like, oh, but then it's an all-white organization in leadership or there's no trans people in leadership or at your event. So it's that piece, too. It's like it's not just about making the space physically accessible. It's like, well, how are you holding and embodying disability justice in your work?

So is that something that Eli gets through is how do you make your work intersectional and how do you intersect the queer justice and racial justice and economic justice? How do you wrap all of those things in? Which I know is a huge question. It's the question that we're always asking ourselves. How do we make our work intersectional?

Alison Kopit: Well, and Eli does some good work in explaining how to do that. But I think the even more brilliant work that he does is he pushes us to ask the questions and provides so much material that is so much information and you learn so much. But I think what he does more is just demands critical thinking and demands complex analysis.

And so, I think from reading this work, I came away with so many more questions and start ... At the time I was working in IDD community. Again, I didn't have a disability identity myself, but was starting to form ideas about my own disabilities. His work, I think, creates such fertile ground for asking questions bravely that you might never have the answers to. But the more that you get in there, the more you're going to find and the more work you're going to be able to do to make the connections and to build the coalition even if you don't have the answers. I think that he provides that in such a generous way.

Monica Trinidad: That's beautiful. Yeah, asking the questions you're afraid of. Oh, yeah, I know. It gave me feels. I was like you have to ask those questions. That's how you affect change. That's how you actually move forward in the uncomfortable and in the unknown.

So I forgot to mention in this episode is that we have a little audience here, actually. And so, we have some amazing organizers in Chicago and activists in Chicago that are here with us today. Somebody has a question, so I'm going to pass the mic.

Speaker 3: So I read the book several years ago. It's been a minute since I cracked it open. But one of the pieces that had the biggest impression on me, I think

partially because I grew up in the west coast and I grew up in the Portland area, was how just immersed this story is in his own coming up in Oregon and in a logging community. It just really asks challenging questions about environmentalism and where race and class meet, our relationship to the planet.

That's not an arena I'm used to talking about ever, but I was just like, ah, I want to make sure that there's some comment on that and how is environmentalism wrapped into this conversation.

Alison Kopit:

Yeah, and I think that's so important because that's a lot of work that intersectional analyses often don't even get to. Because it's such a personal part about his experience, he not only gets to it, but gets into the personal aspects of it and the educational aspects of it and the identity stuff that's all intertwined in there.

So the second chapter of his book is called Clear Cut: Explaining the Distance, and it's about Eli's relationship to the environmentalist movement, but through the lens of his upbringing in a logging town. Through this, I think he asks people to think more complexly about their homes and what it means to grow up in a rural area, and to love and feel nostalgic for aspects of where they came from, but also to feel a great conflict with it.

But, yeah, and also how classism comes into that. So he talks a lot about his educational system and the ways that he was taught without being encouraged to ask questions that natural resources like trees and fish and water are renewable. That's all part of the logic of living somewhere that's funded through timber taxes. That's where the money's coming from is through timber. And so, why teach environmentalism somewhere that depends on that funding?

So the environmentalist movement is often associated with a middle upper class community. And so, what does it mean to be from a working class place to be an environmentalist, to have family that is really roped into ... And family and friends and community and your whole schooling wrapped into being a part of a logging town, and who has access to environmentalist knowledge. I mean it's about how we're producing knowledge and who's producing it. It's not coming from that school system. And so, how do you grow into environmentalist identity when you're coming from there?

I think he struggles with that a lot. Maybe I can read this quote real quick. "I am the activist who has never poured sugar into a cat's gas tank, but knows how, the activist who has never spent a night on the top of a Douglas fir slated for filling the next morning but would, the activist

who has never blockaded a logging site or a logging executive's office as I have military complexes. I am the socialist with anarchist leanings who believes the big private timber corporations like Weyerhaeuser and Georgia Pacific are corrupt, and the government agencies like US Forest Service that control public land are complicit. I am the adult who still loves the smell of wood chips, the roar of a lumber mill, who knows out-of-work loggers and dying logging towns. Living now on the edge of corn country, I am the writer who wants to make sense."

I think that making sense is something that he continues with through the book and through all of his work, because he wasn't given access to that knowledge. He grew into it later when he was living in urban centers, where queer community was different and political organizing was different, and just the kinds of knowledge that were flowing through the communities were different. And so, I think that that is something that he continues to work with and continues to grapple with as a very staunch environmentalist, but also someone that has this rural history.

Speaker 4: Yeah. So this is all so wonderful and great. I have not read the book, but I'm interested in ... And you've touched a little bit on it, but hearing more of his analysis on race, just because a lot of the times, I think, when I think about disability in race, people of color tend to be or have historically been and continue to be classified as disabled in their existence in schools and as people who are homeless and all these other things.

I also can't talk about race and class separately. So I don't know. I'm just interested in hearing more of his analysis on race and how he talks about it then. Also, I think time is really important, too. So this book was written over 20 years ago. So how that has possibly evolved or not. So, yeah, that was a really long explanation.

Monica Trinidad: Yeah. No. I think when you're talking a lot about ... Especially now that you're bringing in the environmental piece, to me, I think a lot about Little Village or I think about where I grew up in South Chicago, which was a heavily industrial ... We talked about this in the last episode. It's a heavy, industrialized ... It was a steel mill town. And so, the rate of asthma was so incredibly high over there.

But then also it was mostly working class, poor Latinx and Black people that were living in that neighborhood. People in that neighborhood were deemed as immobile or incapable of action or incapable of this, or using words like that, or paralyzed because the work that they're doing ... They need to do the work. Using words like that to describe people of color or poor people in the neighborhoods that I grew up in was something that I've experienced a lot.

So, yeah, that's something that I wanted to add, to elaborate on Gabby's question, is just like how does Eli talk about race and class and gender, all of those things together.

Alison Kopit: Well, and it's so interesting, the words that you're using, like immobilized and paralyzed, almost demands a disability analysis, which we could talk about for a really long time-

Monica Trinidad: [inaudible 00:37:04].

Alison Kopit: ... the ways that all of those are dancing together and what that means. But absolutely. I mean I think a lot of it has to do with ... He talks a lot about the kinds of access to social movements also. He talks about the Stonewall 25 and how that was seen as this important moment to queer community and also was so inaccessible to ...

I mean he talks about ticket prices and how he would go and socialize with folks but couldn't buy a ticket to the dance, and how people are left out without really any questions being asked, because there are ways that racism and classism comes in in very loud external ways. But also mostly what's happening is these kinds of discreet forms of oppression where people just aren't given access to social movements or aren't given access to certain kinds of education and are objectified in all these different ways.

I think that's a connection also back to medicalization that we were talking about earlier and the ways that disabled people have been objectified and medicalized also has a race analysis component to it. His history of the freak show goes into a lot of that and how people of color were objectified through there. Yeah, but there are places that social movements are located that exclude people of color and exclude working class folks, or even meetings that are held in hours that working class folks can't attend, for instance. That's one of those discreet, insidious ways that racism and classism is happening.

Monica Trinidad: Is there a specific chapter in this book that you feel people should ... Like if people didn't have time to read the entire book, is there just one chapter that is in this book that can really just summarize the entire book, or not even summarize the entire book but just a really important chapter that has a lot of key messaging that he's really trying to emphasize?

Alison Kopit: I mean I think the very beginning, The Mountain, he talks about the mountain as a metaphor. It's just a couple of pages, and I think it's really powerful. The mountain is used as this metaphor that we're always trying to get to the top, but there are these people who live down at the bottom who are living there.

He says we live down here at the bottom because we're lazy, stupid, weak, and ugly. We decided to climb that mountain or make a pact that our children will climb it. The climbing turns out to be unimaginably difficult, and this way that we are always taught to be striving to get up the mountain. Why are we doing that? What if we make home right here?

He talks about the experience of disabled folks and how we have these images of these overachieving disabled people and how that is seen as so good and can you believe that this person did this thing, climbed this mountain, and they were blind, and that then we're held to these standards. Why are we?

And also how disabled people are seen as so inspiring for doing such everyday things, driving a car, having a boyfriend, things that are not incredible feats, but just because they did it well disabled, like what a wonderful thing. He goes into why that's so complicated and how that creates all of these problematic ways of thinking about ourselves and what we can do and what we should do and who we should be.

Then he goes into talking about home and how he says, "I will never find home on the mountain. This I know. Rather, home starts here in my body and all that lies embedded beneath my skin." I think it's a short first chapter and I think it's a really good way to start asking some questions about how you think about disability and why you think that way, and how you might become more expansive in thinking about that. Yeah. So I mean I think starting with The Mountain is a beautiful thing to do.

Monica Trinidad: Awesome.

Alison Kopit: And also the Freaks and Queers chapter is also so ... I mean they're all so beautiful in so many different ways.

Monica Trinidad: Great. Thank you so much. So, again, we're talking about the book Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation by Eli Clare here today with the amazing Alison Kopit and also some really amazing activists from Chicago that are just here hanging out, listening, and chilling on a Friday night, because we're a bunch of nerds, and drinking lots of wine. We have two almost empty wine bottles here.

But, Alison, I want to close out with your favorite quote from this book, or maybe not your favorite but maybe the most important quote in this book. Then we'll just wrap it up. Thank you so much for being on our show.

Alison Kopit: Sure. Yeah. Thank you so much. I think the part that I keep going back to that I think encapsulates a lot of both his poetic language and the way that he really deeply works with intersectional analyses is from the final

chapter. It's called *Stones in My Pocket, Stones in My Heart*. He opens by saying, "Gender reaches into disability. Disability wraps around class. Class strains against abuse. Abuse snarls into sexuality. Sexuality folds on top of race. Everything finally piling into a single human body."

"To write about any aspect of identity, any aspect of the body means writing about this entire maze. This I know and yet the question remains: where to start? Maybe with my white skin, stubbly red hair, left ear pierced, shoulders set slightly off-center, left riding higher than the right. Hands trembling traced with veins, legs well-muscled, or with me in the mirror dressing to go out, knotting my tie, slipping into my blazer, curve of hip and breast vanishing beneath my clothes, or possibly with the memory of how my body felt swimming in the river, Chinook fingerlings nibbling at my toes. There are a million ways to start, but how do I reach beneath the skin?"

- Page May: Thanks so much for listening to another episode of The Lit Review, a podcast where we interview people we love and respect about books for the movement.
- Monica Trinidad: We are your co-hosts, Monica Trinidad.
- Page May: And Page May.
- Monica Trinidad: Two Chicago-based organizers.
- Page May: Special shout out to The Lit Review's very own sponsor, The Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership out of Kalamazoo College.
- Monica Trinidad: Keep your eyes and ears open for another episode next Monday, same time, same place.
- Page May: Want to hear about a specific book? Email us at thelitreviewchicago@gmail.com or find us on Facebook.
- Monica Trinidad: And if you like this episode, give it a shout out on Twitter or Instagram. Our handle is @LitReviewChi.
- Page May: Keep reading.
- Monica Trinidad: Keep reading.