

# Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion

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| Number 1

Article 3

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9-30-2008

## Real Estate Downturn

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### Recommended Citation

Huber, Sonya (2008) "Real Estate Downturn," *Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion*: No. 1, 3.  
<https://doi.org/10.15760/harlot.2008.1.3>

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# Real Estate Downturn

Sonya Huber

This piece began in the heat of a real-life dilemma: the real-estate market tanked and I was stuck with a house in Columbus, Ohio, long after I moved to Georgia. Neurosis and anxiety demanded that I think of every possible way to get rid of the darn house, and as I became more desperate, I became willing to sell it even for scrap materials. Luckily it sold (finally) after a year on the market. I used this essay to joke about some real-life challenges, including the fact that someone broke into the vacant house and stole all the copper plumbing. The idea of real estate "investment" was a good target, because I will never, ever, ever again believe the idea that owning a huge chunk of earth, boards, and wiring is a good investment for me personally.

I'm interested in the problem of what to call this. Some have called these kinds of essays "lyric" or "speculative" because they are rooted in the real but are clearly a product of the writers' imagination. It seems like there's a link to what happens in the madness and hyperbole of prose poetry. The terminology attached to this kind of stuff (see McSweeney's for much more of it) drives a lot of people to extreme irritation—why not just call it fiction? You, my good friend, can call it fiction if you want to, and I won't mind. I've written fiction, too, and I will say for myself that this feels different, because the exaggeration sounds like me—in my real life and my real voice—as I complain and obsess to excess and then for sheer enjoyment. I do know that I resist calling it fiction because—although I'd like it to be completely untrue—this exactly captures the state of mind and range of options I contemplated.

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**For Sale:** Great little house available ASAP—we're moving out of state. Perfect starter home: 2 bedroom, block garage, nursery alcove off the master bedroom. Fully updated electric and plumbing. \$75,000 OBO. Linden neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. House comes with security system, fenced yard, within walking distance of 4 schools. The crack problem in the house behind us has been completely addressed, and the police are very attentive and accessible. We know a mortgage person who will get you a loan even if your credit is really bad and you have no down payment. I have to be honest: you will hear gunfire at night, but it's usually pretty far away. Either that or it's firecrackers.

**Sunflower Retreat:** Cozy craftsman-style writer's cottage available for three- to six-month residencies. Enjoy the vegetable garden, sit on the porch swing, mingle with the lively residents in a stimulating and colorful urban environment. Full kitchen and laundry facilities. Fenced yard—bring your pets! Located in Columbus, Ohio, this retreat center right on the bus line offers

access to a burgeoning art scene, the nearby facilities of Ohio State University; the bucolic scenery of northwestern Appalachia is within an hour's drive. Immerse yourself in a dynamic setting and feast your eyes on the parade of Midwestern American that's off the beaten path. Cost is only \$100 per week. Submit 10-page writing sample (poetry and fiction only) along with CV and cover letter to [sunflowerretreat@mail.com](mailto:sunflowerretreat@mail.com). Three letters of reference should be sent directly from referees familiar with your work.

**Ebay Powerseller:** See our other products! Large lot of off-white aluminum siding; truckload of aged, honey-brown authentic oak craftsman-style trim, including crown molding; large truckload of bricks (also ok for clean fill); copper pipe (good for scrap or reuse) (update: taken 12/14/06); wiring for electrical projects; stainless steel refrigerator, \$200 (works, guaranteed no DOA, small dent in door, comes with stainless steel surface wipes); stainless steel oven, \$200 (self-cleaning, have not checked to see whether this function works but never used); stainless steel sink & laminate countertops; assorted hand-made oak cabinetry; one large lot scrap wood and trim with some white paint; HUGE lot of oak flooring from 1920s, beautiful!, perfect for refinishing. 4 truckloads top soil, perfect for gardeners or landscapers, best offer. Toilet, claw foot tub (some paint on feet, some staining), bathroom vanity and mirror; roof trusses. Backyard pergola, porch boards (some warping, still pretty good); 300 cinderblocks and 2 vintage garage doors (broken but easy to fix); 7 large trays of assorted perennials; poplar, oak and fruit trees (medium-sized; buy 3 and get small flowering crabapple tree FREE!); misc. handrails and light fixtures, as-is (see pictures); vintage windows perfect for restoration project (some sashes broken); plaster walls may be demolished at will for \$10/hour, perfect for anger-management classes or individuals (call first, provide own tools, owner accepts no liability). Broken plaster for clean-fill available SOON-check back frequently. Truckload of gravel, \$100 (you load). Mismatched pieces of fencing free with pickup. Pickups encouraged; discount for salvaging and packing material yourself (but call first); shipping calculated based on UPS plus \$12/hour handling charge. All material sold as is, may have scuffs and other signs of normal wear and tear. Serious bidders only!

**Global Warming Safety Zone Compound: Investor Prospectus:** Using an aggressive prediction model, the oceans are estimated to rise 7 meters by the year 2050 if the ice sheet of Greenland melts due to global warming. Even under more conservative climate models, Columbus, Ohio is set to become a major population center for those fleeing the coasts and resettling from submerged coastal and island nations. The U.S. government's refusal to act on this issue further sweetens the deal for investors looking for a "sure thing." The city of Columbus boasts robust infrastructure and higher education facilities as well as land for development and subsistence farming and testing of new food crops. Downtown and older neighborhoods will become increasingly attractive as wood for new-build homes becomes scarce and transportation costs for materials become prohibitive. Solid 1920s construction and block garage will withstand changing weather patterns. Mortgage for this property is due to be paid off in 2032, making this a complete profit generator. Large yard perfect for urban gardening; block garage ideal for tool storage and hoarding of surplus foodstuffs. Request detailed information and brochure from [customerservice@hotdeals.com](mailto:customerservice@hotdeals.com).

Sonya Huber, an assistant professor of creative writing at Georgia Southern University, is the author of [Opa Nobody](#) (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), a mixed-genre exploration of German family history and activism, and the online essay "[How Do I Write?](#)" She is a 2004 graduate of The Ohio State University MFA program. More information is available at [www.sonyahuber.com](http://www.sonyahuber.com).

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