

# Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion

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## Harlot of the Hearts

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# Harlot of the Hearts

**Kaitlin Dyer**

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*This Creative Nonfiction piece, written two years ago and before my promotion to the Harlot editorial board, describes the personal growth I experienced through this project and the wonderful people involved with it during that time. I'm hoping that I can get you to read it without being teased absolutely relentlessly for it, but I know the chances of that are fairly slim. It's worth a shot anyhow, don't you think? Here's to making a fool out of myself.*

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I don't have sisters.

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His office is more like a cubicle with a door, but that honey-colored door eases open softly against my touch and he smiles as he looks up. A little too angelic with the May sun back lighting him.

"Hey."

"Hey. I have my time sheet for ya," I say, handing him the piece of paper.

"Alright." He scribbles a signature across the bottom while continuing with the conversation, "How's the—what do you call it? World Culture, um, uh—"

"World Media and Culture Center?"

"Yeah."

"It's alright. They have me making templates. You know, CSS and all that."

"Yeah, I'm supposed to check those out."

"Are you?" I didn't realize that my work needs to be approved by my boss. Usually, if the client's happy then that's that.

They're just glad to get a final product. But, then again, as a Student Technology Consultant, I spend a lot of time teaching instructors about unfamiliar technologies, not working for departments like this.

"Uh huh. How do you like it?"

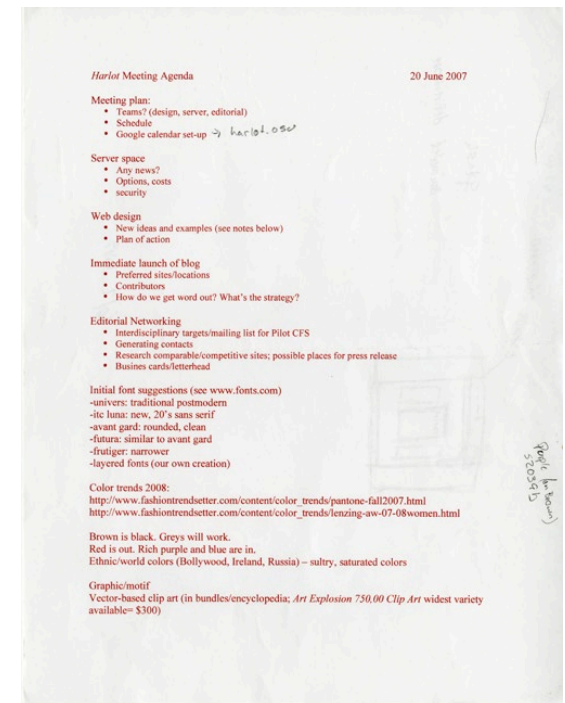
"Uh, well, I'm not much into code. It's okay. Though, I mean, I am getting used to it, but Abhijit said that he needed a video project done after the templates. I wonder if he's just trying to motivate me," I say, pointing out my preference for film editing over website design.

"Smart man," Dickie says, mixing granola into his yogurt and taking a bite.

"I guess."

"Actually, there's this project, these people that I'm meeting with soon, that I think you'd be good for."

"Oh, yeah? What's that?"



Harlot meeting agenda  
June 20th, 2007. Opens as pdf.

"It's this group of grad students. An online journal named Harlot. It's about rhetorical studies. I think you'd be interested." I remember getting those emails. I remember ignoring them too. It called for serious server-side work that I just don't know, but if Dickie says I should be there, then I'll be there.

"I mean, I'll be out of town July and half of August—"

"Warren's not going to be able to work until Autumn quarter either, but I'm keeping him in the loop. You want me to email you about our meeting?"

"Yeah, that's cool. Anyway, I'm headed out. I'll talk to ya later."

I shimmy through the corridor and out of the building. *Harlot? Who names their site "Harlot?"*

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327 emails in my inbox concern *Harlot*.

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Date: Thu, 24 May 2007 16:17:26 -400  
To: Kathryn, Matthew, Augustine, Chris, Warren, Kaitlin,  
From: Dickie  
Subject: An online journal: Harlot  
CC: Catie, Kelly, Vera

Ok, I've gotten statements of interest in the Harlot project from Matt, Augustine, Chris, and Warren.

That is certainly enough to proceed. I know that Warren with NOT be here this summer but may join the team in the fall, so I'll try to copy him on most emails. I hope that the rest of you will do the same. I CAN pay people this summer to work, but I need plan out your summer before I leave.

-----  
Dr. Richard (Dickie) S.

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"You know, I was gonna email you—I was gonna email a lot of people—but I was gonna write you last night," Vera, my 27-year-old boss and co-founder of *Harlot*, says, looking over to me as I search Adobe Illustrator for a specific pigment of red for a logo. #c1282d should do well. I've been working on *Harlot* with her for about five months now.

"Oh, yeah? What about?"

And then there's a flash of hesitation in the way she looks at the ground before continuing on, probably looking for the right words, "Well, I thought—my time isn't so strapped right now that if you need to talk we could do that." That's a lie. She doesn't have time for anything but studying for her candidacy exams coming up within the next month or so.

"What?"

"Well, it just sounded like you needed to talk the other night."

Oh, now I get it. This is about my mention of late night difficulties. All I had said was "I don't sleep very well. I think too much." There were no stories about how there was enough time to inspect the white balls of fuzz ground into my brown carpet at 2 a.m. when I'm pacing from the mirror to the bed, from the bed to the mirror, from mirror to dresser, dresser to bed. No, it was simply, "I have issues, Vera. Now, go home." But with that, she proceeded to tell me that I should get in a set pattern and condition myself, Pavlovian style—that I could listen to music without words, or read a particular book.

It wasn't my intention to make her worry about me, but is it wrong that I like that she does? Is it wrong that I like having someone look out for me when she doesn't have to—to have her go out of her way to include me in her life?

I move to a different computer, one with Internet access, to look for an email Dickie supposedly sent me, while Vera sits eating Quaker Rice Cakes that she'll proclaim she couldn't believe she ate, because they're "loaded with sodium." Yes, Vera, God will surely smite you for eating Quaker Rice Cakes. Right after He gets done with that infernal trail mix. She looks over my shoulder, while her long skinny fingers break the circular wafers into smaller consumptive pieces, "I just

know that it can be hard for really creative people." *Am I a really creative person? My mother says I'm the pragmatic one.* "You remind me of a friend of mine. I mean, you remind me of myself, but you remind me of her too."



Kaitlin and the boys, 1991.

"What's so wrong with her that you'd be worried about me?"

"Nothing. It's just—I think you're very smart, but I think you see a lot and that can be hard." Oh no, she's hit the optic nerve, and I know enough not to look back at her or else the tears will come. I want to say that I have never fit in anywhere. I have always been too quiet, too mature, too sensitive, too responsible, and too distant for the chattering small talk of cocktail parties. I want to say that her kindness makes me feel included and wanted, but the words come out as, "I'm just a very private person. I don't talk about a lot of things."

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Up until the age of thirteen, I was the only girl out of five grandchildren.

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From: Dickie  
To: Kathryn; Matthew; Augustine; Chris; Warren; Kaitlin; Louie  
Cc: Catie; Kelly; Vera  
Sent: Monday, May 28, 2007 10:58:27 AM  
Subject: Re: An online journal: Harlot

I haven't heard from everyone, but I'm heading out of town for the week, so I'm cutting to the chase and setting our Harlot meeting for Tues. evening (6/5) from 4:30-5:30 at Mad Mex. at the Gateway Center, my treat.

That early it should be quiet enough to talk. We can try to get one of the round tables in the back corner. Please come if you can and we'll put together a plan for HIS. In the meantime, if you geeky folks can go out and find out what kinds of stuff we will need to install on the HIS server sandbox.

Ok, off to Louisiana. See you soon.

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Dr. Richard (Dickie) S.

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Having disentangled myself from a conversation that was running much longer than necessary, I jaunt down the stairs to the second floor and on to class during this Fall quarter of 2007, but everyone's in the hall. I ease down by Catie, who is sitting legs crossed, coat in hand.

"Are they really still in there?" A bit peculiar considering my cell phone states that it's two minutes to the start of our class.



"They're *really* still in there." In any other situation I'd say that was supposed to be mocking, but this was irritation. Catie exudes that sense of the friendly neighborhood poet who hates being angry at anything or anyone. Her aggression is passive and subtle: the quick sideways glance and clinched jaw, the inflected word or sigh. This is the woman who would bring us cookies and milk for our last day of class. Not just cookies, cookies she baked and not just milk, but organic milk. Still cold. From a cooler.

Sometimes I wonder if it was irony or synchronicity that led me into Catie's class. It certainly wasn't forethought. At a *Harlot* design meeting, she mentioned she was teaching a poetry class at the start of the quarter and since I knew I had signed up for a poetry class, I asked her what time and day it was. Ta-da! I, apparently, had signed up for hers. I remember her pleading with me not to drop when we realized I was in her class.

"It's gonna be really, really fun. Don't drop," she insisted. "Is that gonna be weird? Don't let it be weird. It'll be fun. Don't drop my class. Please."

It was fun and even though the class ended, I still go to her office hours. Admittedly, I like that someone so smart and talented would spend her time with me.

"Ugh, I just feel like balling up into a corner and sleeping," I say, bringing my arms and legs into the fetal position. Taking twenty credit hours of coursework and working simultaneously was draining the energy from my body.

"Well, you're welcome to crawl under this desk if you want." I get flashes of my dog curled by my feet at home and decline the offer. "Do you like Kathy's class?" she asks.

"Yeah. I mean, I wish I had more time to spend on the poems, but that's more my issue. Actually, I was just talking to Kathy about this one poem I'm working on that uses the basic CSS structure for its format. I was having a hard time with it."

"Right—"

I cut her off before she has a chance to ask the questions floating in her head. "You know, what significance does the structure have to the work etc. etc."

"Yeah." I can see her mind start turning the possibilities over—the eyes lowering, her hand covering her lips. "So, what exactly is the poem doing?"

"It—well,—here, I have it with me." The backpack zipper flies open and the slightly less than crisp paper comes out for her to take and hover over, scrutinizing the piece, playing the different options over in her mind, and I watch. I wait. "What do you think?"

\*\*\*

My brothers once chained me to a tree. If I were to tell this story in person, then that's where it would end... but actually, I told them they could do it. I wanted them to like me, I wanted them to play with me. I didn't expect for them to walk away and leave me to squirm my way out of the chain.

\*\*\*

From: Kaitlin  
To: Vera  
Sent: Thursday, February 14, 2008 11:13:09 PM  
Subject: E musica

You said something about sending music your way. The one I played after your class was BB Brunes' "[Dis Moi](#)". I'm pretty hyped about Subsonica right now, though. "[Nouva Ossessione](#)" is pretty cool too, but slightly uncharacteristic of them.

Juanes' "[La Camisa Negra](#)" is a fav of mine.

"[Je suis jalouse](#)" by Emily Loizeau— "[L'autre Bout Du Monde](#)" is quality too.

"[Tunak Tunak Tun](#)" by Daler Mehndi (more for sentimental reasons, though.)

Kate Nash's "[Foundations](#)" intrigues me in its mixture of high versus low diction.

[Milagro Acustico's](#) generally pretty good. Sicilian culture is so interesting.

And some people that deserve more attention:

[Donora](#)

[Sidecar Kisses](#)

[Griffin House](#)

[Brett Dennen](#)

[Kingsomniac](#)

And now you know I spend way too much time listening to music. You also know why it's dangerous to ask me for music recommendations.

-Kaitlin

Date: Thu, 14 Feb 2008 20:25:57 -800 (PST)  
From: Envera  
Subject: Re: E musica  
To: Kaitlin

...And I'm a moron when it comes to music. Really.

Thank you for this. Really.

And sleep well tonight. Really.

Take good care :)

See you,  
Vera

From: Kaitlin  
To: Kaitlin  
Sent: Thursday, February 14, 2008 11:34:19 PM  
Subject: Re: E musica

Really!?

Date: Thursday, 14 Feb 2008 11:37:29 PM  
From: Vera  
Subject: E musica  
To: Kaitlin

fer realz.

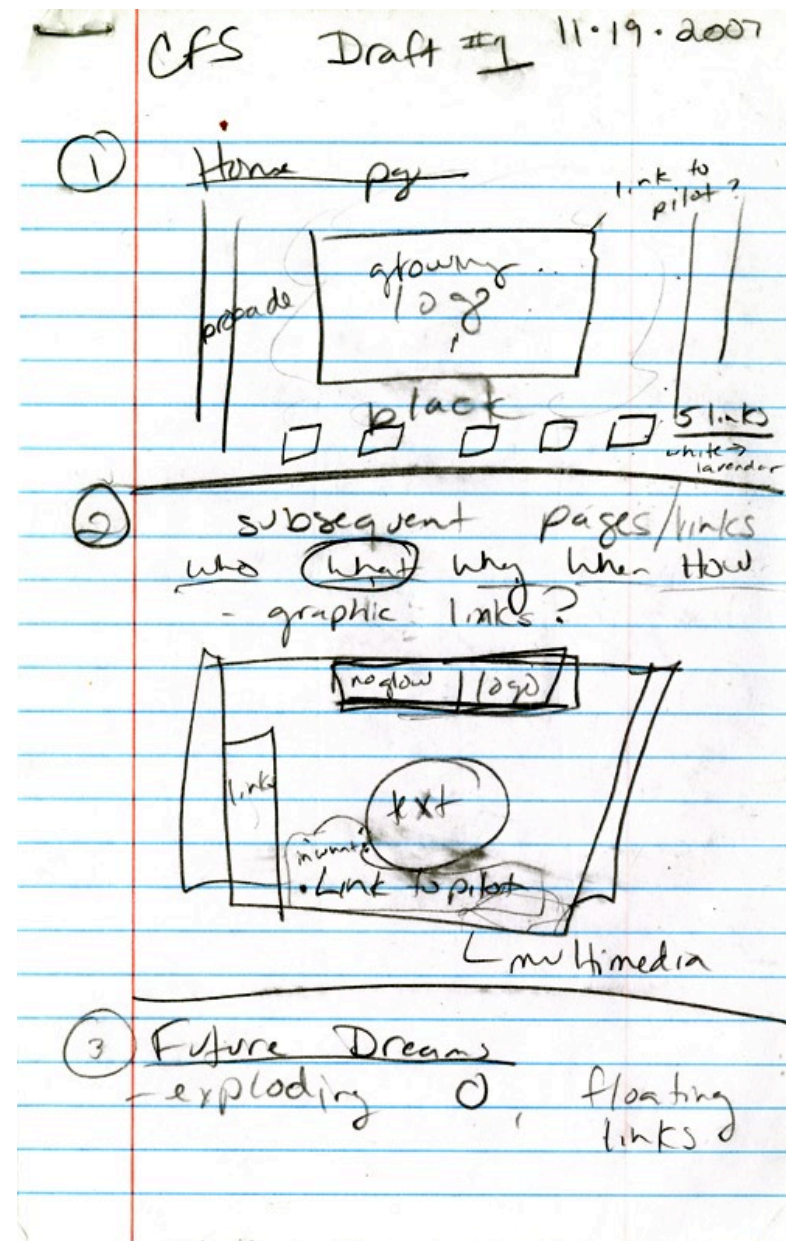
v.

\*\*\*

There are seven people around a table at Mad Mex and I am significantly outnumbered. Now, it seems rather inappropriate to wear my blue button-down blouse, particularly in this hot spring weather, for these 20 and 30-somethings, but a client is a client and I dress to impress.

Five Harlots sitting at a table, one begins introductions with, "I'm Katie, this is Vera," and then just starts pointing, "Catie, Tim, Kelly." *Wait, there are two K/Caties?* Stretching across a table made for ten to shake hands is rather uncomfortable, but the criss-crossing pattern I make reminds me of cat's cradle. I bet we could've made a cup and saucer out of arms and fingers.

Vera, I recognize. Dickie says she's supposed to take over his primary duties for the Student Technology Program when he becomes the director of the Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing. Matt wanted the job since he's graduating. Speaking of which, shouldn't he be here? I thought there were "interested" parties coming, but I'm the only STC sitting at the table, next to my boss.



"I'm Kaitlin."

"Sorry?" No one ever hears me when I first open my mouth.

"Kaitlin. My name's Kaitlin."

Dickie places his hand on my shoulder and looks to this group, "I thought she would serve as a point on design." What? A point? I'm a point on design? I don't think I know anything worth knowing about design, but my mind tells my lips to move and they spread into an uneasy sideways grin.

\*\*\*

My oldest female first cousin is nine years old to my 21.

\*\*\*

Franz Ferdinand's "40ft" rattles my phone across the table during winter break and I jump to answer it before the entire library stares at me.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Kaitlin. It's Katie. Sorry, I just got home, so I'm trying to organize myself. Warren and I were just at that meeting about Drupal."

"Yeah? How'd it go?"

"It was okay. Not very promising for Harlot, but for other things it'd be alright."

"Right. Uh, yeah. I just had some questions for you." Flipping open my ratty tatty blue folder, I pull out a list that I'd been collecting since that morning. "So, uh... uh, it's just, uh, um—"

Katie starts laughing.

"What?"

"I'm just listening to you trying to get a sentence out."

"I guess my, uh, thinking process becomes extremely apparent when I'm on the phone."

"I'd say so."

"So, the logo. For some reason Photoshop wants to take out more pixels than it should when we shrink the image down. So, it has to be filled in and sharpened pixel by pixel."

"So, you're saying that you'd have to sit there and fill in the missing edges one pixel at a time?"

"Well, yeah, but, I mean, I already did." *How else would you get a sharp-edged image? And that's what you want isn't it?*

"Oh, you've already done it?" There's real surprise in her voice.

"Yeah, I just wanted you to look at the picture I've created before I go and make a Flash file for it." I work on emailing the pics to her and then wait for her approval. In the meantime there's not enough noise on this line.

"Sooo, awkward silence," I say.

"Oh, is it awkward? I just assumed I was waiting for you to work on whatever."

"Yeah, you are, but I can talk and do this at the same time and I felt like filling the void."

"Yeah. What're you up to today?"

"Uh, nothin' really. I've been doin' this stuff since about 10."

"10? This morning? You've been working on stuff for six hours? God, your eyes have got to be tired."

"A little." Really, they weren't, but when it's Katie, I just concede to whatever she says. Her energy is so insistent that there's no reason to even try being contrary.

"You need to stop working." I don't think I've ever had a client tell me that.

"Well, I will. I'm just gonna do this flash first."

"No. Stop. Go out and have a drink."

"A drink?"

"Yeah, do something other than spend your day working during winter break."

"Well, I'm planning on finishing up soon."

"And then you'll do something fun, right?"

"Yes, ma'am." I go home and slide into bed early. Sleep is fun. I do try, though. I try to listen. Before going to bed, I make plans to hang out with my friends the next night.



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The book isn't even half an inch thick, but hard and sturdy like poetry should be—the strongest point in the most compressed of terms. As I lean back into the pillows stacked against my metal bedframe to read this book a professor has recommended, one piece of paper falls from the back. A printed name jumps from its folded surface: Catherine Elizabeth Crabtree. *My God, they find me everywhere.*

Miss Crabtree, you become my bookmark.

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I have been called a star, buddy, superstar, rock star, and dahlin', because, according to Katie, I "rockity rock."

\*\*\*

Here comes Matt, at last, up to this full Mad Mex table. "Hey, sorry I'm late. Parking can be kinda brutal."

Introductions are repeated, but his confidence makes everything go much quicker. He orders a beer and jumps into conversation immediately.

"So, we'd like to make this all open source. Do you think that's possible?" Katie remarks.

Back end? Oh, I so defer to Matt on this one. As long as I get to use my Adobe Suite, I'll be happy, so please don't make it *that* open source.

"Chris seems to think it shouldn't be too difficult. Some modifications would have to be made and I don't really know enough to tell you in depth what they'd be, but I don't think it'd be too bad."

"Cool. Now, what're your majors?"

"I'm a history major," Matt says.

"I had just assumed you were computer science people."

"Nope. We're both in the humanities," I interject and begin to relax.

"What's your major?"

"English."

"Oh, so you really do belong with us."

I smile, a real smile this time, and say, "I guess so."

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*Kaitlin Dyer is a graduate of The Ohio State University and senior editor for Harlot. She is currently grooving to [Renan Luce's "La Lettre"](#), [Adonis Agel's "Shiki Shiki Baba"](#) (even if it totally emphasizes women as a commodity), and [We Were Promised Jetpacks](#).*

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