

La règle du jeu

By Chad Masters

*“The awful thing about life is this: Everybody has their reasons.” — Renoir, *The Rules of the Game**

*“There are two kinds of people in New York: those who think everything is free, and everyone else. And an entire class of people who feel the need to say, to me, quite often, “Kaitlin, there’s no such thing as a free lunch.” Yeah and I got my personality from a book.” — Kaitlin Phillips, *No Yolo**

In 1939, the French director Jean Renoir released *The Rules of the Game*, a dense, now-storied text of social criticism, on the eve of World War II. Regarded as one of the masterpieces of cinema, it was a colossal failure at the time of its release. Today we can watch the bourgeois in parallel to their help navigating love across their respective classes, mapping it onto the media of our choosing, whether *Gossip Girl*, *Normal People*, or the lolcows and/or literary (micro-)celebrities of Downtown Manhattan — like Renoir’s work, another iteration of work about society. Our canon is littered with these types of works: from Austen to Balzac, *The Red and the Black* to *The Great Gatsby*. And naturally we enter the fray between life and literature, where these tomes provide maps that often shape our understanding of the social before we live it.

A book can be a book. It is often many other things — a move in the game of social snakes and ladders, an alignment of one’s politics into specific camps and factions, a body of text that seductively offers itself to adaptation, to a transmutation across forms. And there is the question as to whether a book *remaining* a book is a success — many people write books, very few write masterpieces.

Cyril Connolly’s *The Unquiet Grave* begins with this question of the masterpiece, demanding it of the writer, calling it their true function, while rejecting “excursions into journalism, broadcasting, propaganda and writing for the films”. Originally published under the pseudonym Palinurus, Connolly jumps from fragment to fragment, quotation to quotation, probing at the ideals of literature, beauty, society, and man. It is a series of masculine thrusts at overarching questions, a book that slowly came to be recognized as a masterpiece, though the recognitions of literature exist largely separate from the mass culture that emerged in the 20th century, a culture which has since splintered into several fragmentary streams.

There are many different types of writing, just as there are different types of books. Bernard Berenson, one of the most important figures to have held the title “art historian”, is a seminal example of how broad a writing practice can reach. A Lithuanian emigrant to Boston in the late 1800s, he would matriculate from Harvard after transferring from Boston College in order to take courses in Sanskrit while majoring in literature. Despite failing to secure a fellowship, he managed to secure passage back to Europe through the assistance of patrons, the most prominent of which was Isabella Stewart Gardner. During his travels his interests shifted from literature to the visual arts; he met Mary Whitall Smith, whom he began a close collaborative relationship with. They would author works together and eventually marry in 1900 following the death of Mary’s ex-husband, settling in Florence at *Villa I Tatti*, which following their lifetimes of work, now houses Harvard’s Center for Italian Renaissance Studies.

Berenson's published works include not just works of art criticism but also letters, notably with Isabella Stewart Gardner, and diaries. In the early 20th century Berenson would strike up a secret partnership with Joseph Duveen, known then as *the* art dealer, known now as the model for Larry Gagosian. As such, Berenson wrote not just texts but movement — the migration of paintings, of masterpieces, from the walls of aristocratic families in need of a more liquid currency and into the collections of the industrialist robber baron classes of America looking to purchase wealth and prestige. During this stage of Berenson's life, little was published — rather his letters, conversations, and salons at *I Tatti* inscribed themselves upon the world, shaping canons and schools of thought that would outlive him.

In a 1947 diary entry, Berenson notes an incident with a British former diplomat visiting the villa, who does not know who Connolly is: *"Made me realize again for the how-manieth time since my youth how tiny was the world we, the real intelligentsia, live in... Perhaps in the course of time the name will reach his class as those of Yeats and George Moore. We intellectuals row feebly a small boat in a vast ocean which knows us not."* [In a 2024 essay](#), literary critic Christian Lorentzen takes to task a school of thought, prominent in academia (which is to say not prominent), that views books as industrial products, analyzing how shifts in corporate publishing have changed the novel and its reception. Towards the bottom of the piece, Lorentzen drops a piece of gossip: *"The editor-in-chief of an independent publishing house recently told me that she believes there are about 20,000 serious and consistent readers of literary fiction in America"*.

Those too young to have seen any society but their own are faced with a question: whether to accept the "Always Has Been" meme, in this case with respect to the relative levels of literacy over the previous generations. Whether Berenson exists today as a faded myth is a matter of relativity, but the man who significantly shaped what we know as Western Culture has been relegated to languish in a greater degree of obscurity than Duveen [1], the man he made rich. Similarly, modernist critic Hugh Kenner's "The Pound Era" relation to poet Ezra Pound presents a fascinating study of the latter being lifted into prominence while the other slid, like Berenson, into the trenches of academic knowledge.

Whether or not the arena of culture is actually shrinking — Merlin Carpenter at least believes so when it comes to art [2] — the number writers who earn a living from writing words, a very limited position to begin with, is in decline. As such, the simple things, like writing a book, have become complicated, necessitating many other forms of writing to enter the arena.

My First Book opens with a love story. Honor Levy brilliantly titles it "Love Story". There's a link to [a website](#) (honor.baby/lovestory) where one can view the memes referenced in the story. If you remove the backslash, you end up on a promotional site for the book, with links to purchase it from a number of booksellers, quotes from articles featuring Levy, and links to reviews, press, and print publications the author has appeared in. A number of these articles went viral, as did screenshots of quotes from Levy, both of "Love Story" and of things she's said to journalists.

Of course, this assumes *My First Book* to be the starting point, rather than the culmination of over half a decade of writing. In addition to publishing short stories in *Tyrant*, *Heavy Traffic*, and the *New Yorker*, Levy has mythologized her past across several magazine profiles and newspaper interviews. In *The Face*, she details going to the premiere of her ex-boyfriend Eugene Kotlyarenko's movie and

meeting the journalist Kaitlin Phillips, who sent her writing to Giancarlo DiTrapano, the founder and editor of Tyrant Books, who liked what he read and decided to publish her.

This rendition of events per Levy in *The Face* is the kind of drastic simplification necessary for magazine publishing. Kotlyarenko isn't named in the piece, Phillips is reduced to an "arts publicist" rather than a writer with her own history, let alone "[Modern Love Story](#)" in *Vogue*, nor is Phillips directly connected to making Levy's placement of "Good Boys" in the *New Yorker* possible. It's necessary to show the factory, but for the most part, the meat must be made in private.

Levy's "Love Story" is about a boy and a girl who exist only as pronouns. She jumps right into the Internet Language that serves as her biggest point of marketability, using "giving" and "serving" before "IDK" s, "GIF" s and heart emojis began to populate the page. She uses signifiers, but ones that exist for the masses — there are no niche references to online communities that she's been part of, only namedrops of *A Goofy Movie* (1995) and *The Notebook* (2004) which eventually stretch into the slightly 4chan territory of roastie and wojaks, albeit those terms left that locale years ago. After piling language upon language, the story closes and you're left wondering what *actually* happened. Levy writes: "*It was a love story, it all was, everything is, and always has been.*"

In an interview with *Spike Art Magazine*, Levy explains that she couldn't use images in the story because of copyright issues, before going on to discuss the autobiographical nature of the book's narratives. "*A lot of writers' first books are about putting their childhood memories in, little details from their past. At the time I was conceptualizing the book, there was a real personal-essay boom - I had just become aware of cultural criticism.*"

Phillips's "Modern Love Story" on the other hand is not fiction but a personal essay. It starts with an 18 year-old Phillips at boarding school finding out her father was a serial cheater, and then goes into the hate she has for him because he ruined her stories, before narrativizing a saga about a man that she is/isn't dating, peppered with small flexes — an advance on a ghostwritten YA novel, who she was sleeping with before him, this new man's niche social capital. The essay ends with her finding two things — that her new man became her boyfriend and "*it – the perfect story*".

There's a tension between Phillips's body of writing and Levy's. Both share a predisposition for self-mythologization, yet Levy seems much more preoccupied with how language functions while Phillips is busy writing worlds.

In 2013, Phillips wrote a piece for the *Columbia Daily Spectator* titled "All-American Bloggers", focusing on Cat Marnell, Karley Sciortino, and Marie Calloway, getting early narrativization practice while still an undergraduate, add penning the early stages of the playbook that epitomize Levy's relationship with the press: "*shock value is best retained when it is delivered by a woman- especially one who is young and beautiful, in the public eye, and unwilling to divorce her persona from what could be construed as questionable social choices*"[3]. Following undergrad (she didn't finish), she entered the magazine world, with the bulk of her output concentrated on diaries for both n+1 and Artforum — the former outlet published her work on sex, the latter her party reportage.

Of particular note is a fiction piece she published with n+1 in 2017, entitled "Winners". It reads like a diary. She goes to a gallery dinner on the Upper East Side wearing polyester, talks about a waitress

she knows who married into the Calder family after getting pregnant, and presciently riffs on scamming a year before Anna Delvey would break out. The story closes with a description of a podcast episode about Shirley Goldfarb, famous for being painted by David Hockney. Goldfarb would write a mantra in her diary: *“Win lose. Lose win. Win, lose.”* It’s unclear what is and isn’t fiction; Phillips’s construction of her public persona in relation to the text makes it compelling.

This approach centering *The Game* would reappear in a 2018 profile of Ottessa Moshfegh in *The Cut* titled: “Ottessa Moshfegh Plays to Win”. Phillips constructs a narrative around Moshfegh as someone who doesn’t like playing games — but who had decided that if she had to play games, they would be for exceptional prizes. After spending most of her 20s loafing about, Moshfegh goes to Brown for her MFA and leaves with the Fence Modern Prize in Prose, then heads to Stanford for a fellowship, cranking out books and garnering acclaim in the process. Central to the story of Moshfegh is her talent and her self-belief — *“She has a winner’s mien. She believes herself to be “exceptional,” and expects her life to be “amazing.”*” One gets the feeling that Phillips is talking about herself as much as she is Moshfegh.

Eventually the Phillips diaries would come to a halt and her Tweets, Close Friends stories, and holiday gift guides all became must-read items — if you could get your eyes on them. She focused on her work as a publicist and started her own practice in 2022, announcing it in the *New York Times*. In a sense, she ceased to be a culture writer and assumed a new role as Culture Writer. In “The Pound Era”, Hugh Kenner offers an astute summary of the role of the publicist in relation to art and writing:

“Movements bear on the painter’s place in a market economy, where the writer’s situation is a little less anomalous. In proportion as his book attracts attention, and then for so long as it pleases, the writer draws money from its sale, but the maker of a picture is paid only once. Expensive resales profit only the resellers. And what he is paid bears no necessary relation to his effort and intelligence, but only to his fame... It may also be a stock as carefully tended as that of a holding company. What the buyer of a Picasso purchases is just that: “a Picasso”, a share in Pablo Picasso’s reputation. Picasso shares command high prices. To make a living therefore, such a man incurs the obligations of a dual career: the painter’s, the publicist’s. The painter makes pictures. The publicist shapes nothing — bubble reputation — into “Picasso” or “Braque” or “Warhol”: the heady entity in which people will buy shares in the act of acquiring one of the signed artifacts.”

Only the game is slightly different now. There seems to be a threshold of fame that a writer of literature can accumulate, and very few are going to sell enough books to make it count — so they need to shape their respective *nothings* into reputation. “Moshfegh” walks at fashion week, “Spivak” does an Aesop campaign, “Rooney” gets a television adaptation. All the while, Phillips oversees a system of capital exchanges in the New York media economy. She gets her client’s stories placed with journalists, often young, who in turn are hoping to get ahead in the world, whether it’s a book deal, writing press releases for a large gallery, or currying favor with the elites in reach — *Quid pro quo* status quo, and there’s always somewhere to go. There’s a level of invisibility at play in these systems, something the *New York Times* canonized by quoting her Tweets in her profile: *“There’s something cringe about me but there’s even something more cringe about caring about me.”*

And so two players linked up to play the great game. The social game. The one that you can read about over and over again in all the different society novels. Levy would pop up in a 2021 piece about the *Drunken Canal*, saying that she’d rather be Warhol than Solanas. She would build her own cross-platform cult-following by posting hard through the “Vibe Shift”, whether on Twitter, her

numerous Instagram accounts, TikTok, or Substack. There was the question of what would happen to her book following the death of DiTrapano, but it would eventually be picked up by Penguin. A flurry of pieces would accompany the 2024 release, the placements almost certainly stewarded by Phillips. Levy was circulating and Phillips was playing her part — but then what?

The most interesting decision Levy made during her rise was to start the *Wet Brain* podcast with Walter Pearce, best known for his role with casting agency *Midland*. After a year of engendering a very specific strain of Internet culture to her large and growing audiences, she chose to write with speech. At the same time, a few other California-to-New-York upstarts, hoping to make their mark in the arena, would start *Forever Mag* — a derivative cross between Levy’s program and Tao Lin’s Muumuu House. Among the many hours of conversation on *Wet Brain*, which ranged from discussions on Rx Papi to gossiping about Alana Champion’s favorite characters in *In Search of Lost Time*, is a particular fragment in which Levy discussed the idea of being “Sally Rooney’d”, better known as being optioned into film and television.

Being Sally Rooney’d kicks your writing career into a feedback loop — you get money for the option rights and the adaptation will ideally bring you more readers. Given Levy’s filmmaker ex-boyfriend (who lauded praise on *My First Book* on his Instagram stories) and Hollywood background, it’s not far-fetched to imagine that there was some sort of scheme in place to help make this happen. Even *Wet Brain* guest, downtown scenester, and “Hyper-NPC” rapper Blaketheman1000 was gunning for social positioning to help him secure a role working on music for the adaptation of Sean Thor Conroe’s *Fuccboi* (which doesn’t seem to be happening). Yet despite this riff on the podcast, Levy published a book that is not particularly suited for adaptation, with its focus on language being its dominant quality throughout pieces like “Internet Girl”, “Good Boys”, and “Z is for Zoomer”. Simply put, nothing (and everything) happens in these stories — it is incredibly difficult to imagine them as a visual narrative. It is incredibly easy to imagine them as lowiqhonorlevy TikToks, grabbing your eyes through the feed and then disappearing into digital ether.

Meanwhile, the word on the street is that Lena Dunham is optioning something from Madeleine Cash of *Forever Mag* fame instead. In crypto markets they call it “frontrunning” — when someone has the same idea as you, whether they stole it or not, and then they beat you in the sprint to execute it. Of course, this is all gossip and speculation.

There are winners and losers in the literary game. Levy, and Phillips, are still winning — writing their worlds, engineering visibility, and converting those views into sales. On Goodreads, *My First Book* has 228 reviews and 653 ratings. 103 people are currently reading it, 4,231 people want to read it.

Renoir’s film ends with a man getting shot and killed. The moment is momentarily shocking before the characters quickly move on with their lives. They depart the estate where the weekend party was being held and two remark how rare a thing class is. It mirrors the release of a book — pomp, fanfare, and then the silence of the text taking hold.

But the social scene is still their great masterpiece—creating one, and then once they realized they’d done it, parodying it. — Kaitlin Phillips on Bernadette Corporation, SSense

Footnotes:

[1] [Kaitlin Phillips](#): *This is out of character, but the last book I read in one sitting was Duveen: The Story of the Most Spectacular Art Dealer of All Time by S.N. Behrman. The subhead is an accurate descriptor of the book. A few months ago, a friend texted me to come have a drink at Larry Gagosian's house, and his butler—they call them house managers now, but you know what I mean—was so attentive and I got so drunk and was so awed by how all this money can be consolidated in one place that I went home and, well drunkenly, ordered this book, which apparently Larry really likes, because he fancies himself the 21st century Duveen.*

Duveen was successful because every time someone tried to embarrass him, he just agreed with them and laughed harder than anyone at whatever insult they were levelling in his direction. Maybe that isn't the thesis of the book, but it's all I took away from reading it. Well that, and you sell more paintings if you go around pretending to refuse to sell to just anyone.

[2] [Merlin Carpenter](#): *Perhaps the art world is shrinking.*

[3] [Kaitlin Phillips](#): All-American Bloggers

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By S. Paul

- 1) Now the shadow of the column *is* – it is rare to find a column that leaves a shadow. This is a problem of light, just as it is a problem of construction. The materiality that once led to visibility has become problematized. This has happened before and will happen again, as this issue of the visible is of light, of construction, but most importantly of vision.
- 2) The brush descends the length of the toilet, down into the bowl. Fecal matter is swept from the sides, disinfectant is sprayed, the mechanism functions, and a porcelain veneer of cleanliness appears. *“Anyone with a taste for traditional architecture must agree that the Japanese toilet is perfection,”* wrote Junichiro Tanazaki. The light of the East and the light of the West are contrasted. Almost a century later and they are blurred. A finger points to the blue light of the screen romantically. The point becomes a stroke. An interface is unlocked and in the blur of light is a change in time. Tanazaki writes of the Western fountain pen in relation to the traditional brush, of Western paper in relation to Japanese paper: *“An insignificant little piece of writing equipment, when one thinks of it, has had a vast, almost boundless, influence on our culture.”*
- 3) In the hollow of the valley is a first person shooting. An “I” in the hollow of the valley, shooting polyphony. The first-person shooter is loaded, clips full of bullets, riddled with associations: *Jesus died at age thirty-three. There's thirty-three shots from twin Glockes, there's sixteen apiece, that's thirty-two, which means one of my guns was holding seventeen, twenty-seven hit your crew, six went into you.* The first person refers to perspective, rather than the matter of who shot first. Eugene Onegin and Alexander Pushkin serve as reminders to the importance of shooting first in a duel. The duel is set by social conventions. Both men read to construct their realities, just as Don Quixote did, before setting forth to write realities.
- 4) Now the voice of the second driver arrives, their vehicle following. When the matter of visibility is fraught, sound can appear – it can be perceived before light. It is natural “Columbine” appears in a text like “My First Book”. The book is the result of reading, of the construction of realities, and the attempt to create new buildings of language. Next to Columbine is an I: the first-person shooter reigns dominant. Less than six years before Columbine, *Doom* the “father” of the gaming genre was released. Perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold read the game. They wrote death. And death was reinscribed, whether reduced to a signifier to be heard by the first-person of an Honor Levy story, or to be a dominant leitmotif of Bunny Roger’s exhibitions, where the I is an omniscient mass of voices, collected from the Internet.
- 5) Now the house is empty, like the anime animal eyes of *Love Story’s* Juliet Capulet. The eyes look at death and the I’s look at death. Attempting to read the romance is traversing a field of signifiers. Memes, movies, mythologies. A re-rendering of language seen outside the traditional boundaries of literature. “Giving”, emoticons, and “words that aren’t in the Bible”, set against Orpheus and Eurydice, Adam and Eve, Bella and Edward. But is the house empty? How to peer inside the house that Levy constructs? The light of the references is blinding, the foundation is unstable. A language that is and isn’t hers, picked apart by

vultures of industry, attempting to masquerade as a façade, a veranda, a pillar.

- 6) The whole house is empty, like *Internet Girl* in 2008. So little, so free, so empty. The I's of *Internet Girl* recall the moocow that was coming down along the road. A coherence is present, the union of light visibility casts shadows. The whole house is empty, like an eleven year-old girl who hasn't yet read the hundreds of millions of websites waiting for her, and its lines and shadows, its construction, can be drawn. Levy writes with lists, with ASCII art, with instructions to Google Borges's *On Exactitude in Science*. Like Balthus, she paints pre-pubescent innocence with light, only to drag it through thinspo forums and execution videos. Language changes. Lower-case letters are made capital; honor becomes Honor.
- 7) Between the remaining gray paint, peeling from the walls, fragmenting into chips, light dims. Is the whole house empty? *Internet Girl* fills a bedroom, necessitating a departure. And the hallway and the office and the dining room are empty. There is no table – ergo, no seats at the table, nor a Last Supper. The bread is not the body, the wine is not the blood. The eucharist as described by Paul is never witnessed. The contents are uncontained, they flow out into the world, they become the world. Levy, like the taxes and conscriptions that define her name, imbibes the world, but cannot keep it. The construction crumbles.
- 8) Now the shadow of the column isn't. The candle burns out, light and shadow collapse into illegibility. There are angels and forever after Honor Levy writes The End. It is impossible for the author to reassure a spectator concerned about the fate of the hero after the words "The End." After the words "The End" nothing at all happens, by definition. The only future which the work can accept is a new, identical performance: by putting the reels back in the projection camera.

Oafie's Choice

by Mmle Kempf

— *Of course I know Honor Levy — who doesn't?*

I couldn't believe I said that but I did. With my friends. I mean *mon amies*. On the balcony of my Belleville flat, sipping Beaujolais.

Paris. July. The sweat of the Olympics is everywhere. It's hot.

Which makes me hot.

I like it better here — the scenes don't revolve around meme pages and Internet clout, and the constellation of Kenyoberlinnington combines signifiers that are basically worthless. Sure, if I had gone to Middlebury I'd probably be able to speak better, but language is changing, it's one of the main things Honor lets you know, so my stumbles through slurred words shouldn't matter that much, I figured they would get it — portmanteau was French in origin.

The thing about Kenyoberlinnington is exactly what Drake rapped about Houstatlantavegas — girls, especially girls like me, get stuck there. The club moves from the quad to the metropole where we dance and dance and dance. Honor went to Bennington. She lets you know. She got cancelled there. It's in the "Cancel Me" story. I guess she doesn't actually mention Bennington by name in the story, but if you're reading her then it's like you *have* to know that. She's like Bret Easton Ellis. Or Donna Tartt.

Bennington's known for its writers, that's why she went there. For the myth. Or the meme. I'm still trying to figure out the difference. And also why Document Journal had nothing better to do than ask some writers to produce some "[We got Barthes at home](#)" texts for their summer issue. And also why I wasn't invited to contribute.

Sometimes it feels like I'm talking to a wall with all of these Beaux-Arts people. I mean I love them and they're *tres chic* and *j'adore* when we go *bison bison* but it's like almost all of them are totally unaware that the name of their school rhymes with Chief Keef's last name, let alone have listened to *The Cozart*. At Kenyoberlinnington you have to cultivate and demonstrate your taste and opinions, refined ones, from studying Hipster Runoff and mu/ and laughing at Pitchfork, so that you can climb to the top once you hit the -pole. You have to be on the Internet, but you have to be careful, because the Internet can get you cancelled. So many things can get you cancelled — Honor sagaciously reminds us of this.

— *Oh but speaking of Chief Keef, I was watching the livestream of him performing at [Adin Ross's birthday](#). It made headlines because he let Adin say Nigga even though he's ~~Jewish~~ white. In the story, Honor writes about people being cancelled for using slurs. But that video doesn't even remind me of that. Instead what matters is that there's a kid in a Sarah Lawrence College sweatshirt, which is where Rob went. He's also from Los Angeles, like Honor. The 6th sentence of "Cancel Me" reads "Rob is canceled". Someone from LA told me his last name and that he couldn't stop raping. I Google'd him and found his court case. There's*

another Honor story that talks about this — Googling I mean. It's called *Internet Girl* and —

— *Oafie! We get it! We don't know zees people or zees school. Bezides, do zey not teach Derrida in Ohio? Il n'y a pas de hors-texte! And we already had zis type of language writer. Do you not know Guillaume Dustan?!*

Uggghhhh. Typical rude French people with their typical overly academic approach, with their Prix Goncourt's and complete absence of Alternative Literature. You might run into a girl every now and then who knows about Heavy Traffic or Muumuu House, but it's so rare. And anyway, like I said at the beginning — *I know Honor*. I mean I don't *know her*, but we're mutuals on three different accounts of hers and sometimes we interact, and like this Derridean matter of being “outside” the text changes and it's like — what even is *the text*? And I think that's like *the question* of the novel now. You know after the Internet and everything. Because there's never been an Internet before *My First Book*.

The book has hyperlinks. There's one on the first page that goes to [honor.baby](#), where there's a bunch more links. Some go to blog posts, some go to press, some go to interviews, some go to her socials, one goes to her ★★ ☞ ☹ * ✦. *Substack* ✦ °° ☼ ✦. She made it all so Joycean you know. It's not just about the book. If you really care, you'll read everything, the same way people read Stanislaus's letters.

And there's this [academic paper](#) about Lynn Hershman Leeson that I love. I mean I love her, like absolutely *j'adore* her, and I have since New Media Art Class at Kenyoberlinnington, and I was so proud to say this and talk about these things before [the retrospective](#) of her films at MoMA and her show at [Bridget Donahue](#) and the [Interview Magazine](#) piece that went along with it. Cultural capital *bébé*, even when we're not in the capital of culture.

— *Oafie!!! What was in zis papier?*

Fuck. I was losing my patience and had to uncork another bottle of Beaujolais. The paper was about a persona that Hershman created and embodied, through performance, through dolls, and eventually virtually via Second Life. OG e-girl shit — I hate when people act like Molly Soda and Allison Harvard invented anything other than a footnote. And then the paper goes on to talk about Joyce Carol Oates and gossip because Oates wrote short stories, some of which were about her colleagues at the University of Windsor in Canada. But instead of being published in *The Drunken Canal* or *Forever Magazine* (my fav), they ran in *Playgirl* — like *trés scandalous!*

Hershman's persona was named Roberta and was probably inspired by a Roberta in one of Oates's stories. The paper, written by a Roberta Mock, quotes Irit Rogoff saying “[*Gossip*] is not fictional, but both as oral and written form, it embodies the fictional [and] impels plot” before listing off strategies that apply to Hershman and Oates, but are also essential to Levy: “*the construction of narrative through gossip and ephemeral documents, the centrality of voyeurism and surveillance to these narratives, the onesidedness of the documentation, the slippery ambiguity of an identity that blurs fact and fiction, a person who blinks in and out of sight*”.

- *See! This is why it's important! The Kenyoberlinnington myth. The canceled people. Her filmmaker ex-boyfriend. It's like "if you know you know" you know —*
- *Oafie! We are tired! And you ignore so much! I mean you are ignorant! This already happened here! In the 90s! You Americans think you invented everything! "Language changing" — that is there in Dustan, he brought the language of the club, of unfettered gay bedonism into literature, he used slang and Anglicisms and hipster speech. He was influenced by Bret Easton Ellis, and by the literature itself, not zis "Kenya Berlin Town" and ze myths that surrounded the writer.*
- *Oui! And his writing was so shocking! It upset people. I don't think zis Honor is upsetting anyone. I read ze book and she only used "faggot" once. Dustan describes a Kong Toy, ze one for dogs, being shoved up an asshole, how ze asshole stretches, how you have to be careful not to break ze sphincter. There's no zex in ze Honor. Or there is, but she only has zex with her computer.*
- *C'est vrai! And Dustan did "autofiction" before it had ze big Moment in America. Zis Honor... I don't zee what is New, what is Good. She is like... how did you say... Molly Zoda y Allizon Harvard. Zis is a footnote. And zis is like what Gucci Mane said... vous are lost in ze sauce.*

One by one they all turned on me. They didn't care about the artist as a network. About [Honor Levy's Tiktoks](#). They said that the book was unoriginal. That the prose was lacking and uninspiring. That it was bland — there was no sauce, only a cult of personality offering the illusion of flavor. They said that Dustan made films too. And that he fucked in the films. That they were beautiful. And then *mon amies* bent me over the balcony, like *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* — Meme! I tried to tell them — *pour le backshots avec le strapon*, they said.

— *Oafie! Zis is your choice — Kenyoberlinnington or une éducation Dustanienne.*

And I couldn't believe that I'd said all that but I did. With my friends. I mean *mon amies*. On the balcony of my Belleville flat, sipping Beaujolais.

Paris. July. The sweat of the Olympics was everywhere. It was hot.

Which makes me hot.