

DRAMATURG NOTE

We live in a world where we are becoming more conscious, on a day to day basis, of issues like social privilege, implicit bias, and geopolitics. But are we as competent and informed as we would like to be? In *That Poor Girl*, Jen Silverman probes the distinction between appearing “political” or socially aware and actually deeply understanding these issues. At the same time, she explores how social media has made us hyper-aware of how others perceive us, encouraging us to play out our politics and activism online.

The characters in *That Poor Girl* are all struggling to be socially conscious, or at least to create the illusion of consciousness for their social circle. They know, at least in an abstract way, that they have privilege. But the nuances of what this privilege means and how to use it in the service of social justice eludes them. What they do understand is how to make an impression on social media. They are experts in spectacle and online persona. But as Silverman demonstrates, it’s easy for the spectacle to overshadow the cause. *That Poor Girl* exposes the ethical quandaries that arise when our activism collides with the world of social media.

In the first decade of the 21st century, social media seemed to offer new possibilities for activism. The Arab Spring and the Occupy Movements both used social media to organize protests and expand their message to a global audience. But as quickly as the spark was lit, it seemed to die out. Critics noted that social media promoted “slacktivism,” or the tendency to post about an issue without taking further action. It’s easy to change your Facebook photo or retweet a video, but much harder to call your government representatives, show up to a march, or volunteer your time. Online platforms gave us a way to feel like activists and to present ourselves as socially engaged in our online profiles.

Social media has also promoted the notion that getting noticed is a means of self-fulfillment. You can create an image of yourself based on the content you post. No matter the platform, you have the ability to advertise your “best self.” This lends itself to things such as curating an Instagram aesthetic or only posting the most exciting life updates to Facebook. We have the opportunity to present ourselves as interesting to not just our inner social circles, but the entire world. After all, within the world of *Poor Girl*, the most unattractive thing you can be is *uninteresting*.

But what happens when the need to be interesting becomes your guiding principle? What if the need to create something shocking overpowers the message you wish to communicate? Have we become numb to the spectacle? In recent years, we have seen increasingly violent or traumatizing events shared on social media, from the shooting death of Philando Castile to online suicide challenges. Have these events become commonplace, normalizing violence in the public eye?

What trending topics hit your social media feed today? Yesterday? A week ago? Do you remember the most shocking events from the past week, or have you already moved on? We are barraged daily with information, social causes, political debates, and, yes, violence. What stories and truths are buried in this fast-paced spectacle? What is the truth of Alyssa Long? And at what point do the other characters stop caring?

Social Media Milestones

2004	Facebook launched
2005	YouTube launched
2006	Twitter launched
2007	Tumblr launched
2010	Instagram and Facetime launched
2011	Snapchat launched
2012	Facebook has 1 billion members; Twitter has 185 million active users