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## Portrait of Lonliness as a carousel in the Off-Season

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# Wade: Portrait of Lonliness as a carousel in the Off-Season

## MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FINALIST

### PORTRAIT OF LONELINESS AS A CAROUSEL IN THE OFF-SEASON Julie Marie Wade

Whether *riding gallery* or *merry-go-round*,  
the difference merely semantic

& the wooden animals always looked sad &  
the cartoon melodies could barely mask their sorrow

At night, in November,  
the triage of autumn leaves forsaking snow—

a moment that, like all other moments, would pass before she could grasp it  
like a boy she had kissed once under mistletoe

his face in the glow of lights from a neighbor's Christmas party—*oh, I'm sorry*,  
he said, startled, not having realized that it was *she*, not having intended to kiss *her*

Each day dawned such a costume ball she had no use for Halloween, *masquerade* or *camouflage*—  
the difference merely semantic—the breach in herself between who she was &

who she seemed                    *inexpressible*    *inconsolable*  
But here again, in the realm of kewpie dolls & bumper cars & music boxes,

all arbitrary fanfare & slow-settling fog as she followed  
a trail of stale popcorn across the chalky hopscotch squares:

She remembered being Gretel in another life, ending up as she was not supposed to be,  
pregnant at 15 or unsexed at 45—a world of extremes, of laying awake nights

clicking her retainer against her teeth, thinking how this word  
meant also *to hold onto, to keep*                    but instead

her mouth was only meant to be changed                      And that difference, she knew,  
was not merely semantic or purely poetic                      irony diffuse but subtle

So she had stumbled again onto the way we contain our  
opposites, how we struggle to stop seeing ourselves & our world so clearly

Hence, the proliferation of all those funhouse mirrors,  
the *spectacle* that inverts to become the *debacle* that enfolds

to become the *manacle*, chaining us to our own first intentions, forcing us to return,  
which is called *anaphora* or *recursion* or *ring-around-the-rosie*,

depending on your discipline, depending on who you are  
this time, & who you intended to be