

THE KISS TURNS: A PLAY ON AURAL MANOR

by

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ABSTRACT

The Kiss Turns: A Play on Aural Manor is a poetic work that explores the nature of being and selfhood as they are expressed and modulated through the hearing, speaking, and writing of language. The Manor and surrounding Grounds here are presented as a fluid junk-mosaic: colorful, clamoring, thing-filled, magical, and on the move. Seven characters reside on the Manor's property and live out their respective longings and loves, apprehending horror, tragedy, abundance, and the possibility of play through accepting and collaborating with the unknown depths of being.

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THE KISS BECOMES THE ALCHEMIST

The toads croak:
a muddle of mouth and ear:

they cry themselves
cloister-snug, a clamor:

rooote, wrooote:
an open kiss:

the amphibious groping
of the Grounds.

CAST OF AURAL MANOR

THE GROUNDS—crag and weather-belching; what upwells; a junk mosaic: gems, dung, blender; molten bookshelf; mutable fundament that speaks idealess; moss-addled, an aural conglomerate.

MONA—surveys aghastless science matters; wary of the qualitative; works; beautifully reductive;
a crystal salad dressing, the silver sense of her piggy-bank brain; stern and worried; tower-dwelling.

TERRA—purposeless color-being; between corporeality and vanishing; suffers love though she has a lover; tragic in the mirror; seeps and sleeps her thinning life; alive on the stage with stunning Maris.

MARIS—color-being, too; shadow-rich; saturated; a deep embrace and swaddle-splash; makes love the ocean as a mirror; knows Terra nearly, wholly, in and of her; a gleam of grace; unbridled.

HAVELOCK—judge in a court he purports; the grandest performer; believes his costume; a stark rule of blue suits; rages self-importance; fears nothing, so everything; dim or dumb; eats bigwig drugs.

DIERDRE—bad mystic; resigns himself to the guilt of worthlessness; pays for it in prayers; believes there is a savior in a lover like Mona; wants to be seen; can't see himself; without; a limpid fantasy.

WADE—shapeshifts; fluid; a disruption; flexes of universal flair; slings empty jester bells, baby horseshoe crabs, anything they are or have; reads; bends words; world-shuddering and opening.

LLYR—rugged murderer; gardener; cook; a living death and dying birth; slow-eats indiscriminately, like she's eating herself; her heart of raw meat in a summer's heat rots knowing raspberries.

BEFORE

THE GROUNDS GAZES FORE-GIVEN

Before the light on the water lived in leaves,
 before the sorrow and fatigue,
 before these pieces— together and each—
 were alive enough to love...
 Was there a before?

Rushes, rushing—
 the endless run of the stream
 as water over water rambles a river,
 twists to wander and dwindle,
 its trickle treacle sweet.

Obedience, pristine—
 not by any virtue, not at any remove—
 the stone-mud clink of the Grounds' drink:
 the water, the water, and farther,
 sips, loops, a sound named silence,

a mix of muck in pond sacks.
 Matteringings and gathering arrangements
 among and of the Grounds' collections,
 selves, like a fungus,
 bud in swells:

hitches of recognition— know this, no, this.
 The Grounds deems every bit a personage,
 a hilt and stitch, a little sighing child
 to drink and eat full from
 their own bellies, their own feasts.

Their hearty meats, their salty griefs
 all wondrous and wondering:
 Ream, rend?
 Heroless, yes—
 the apparent masquerade.

WHOSE EMERGENT TRANSNOMER

There are faces in the clouds
 and on the Grounds, shuddering
 twiglet wrinkles pointing
 paths into the black
 decor of forest hedges:

studded earrings and dimple dapples
 of midnight's moonlight
 cool-breath chasm.
 Is this way friendly?
 Is this way weaponed?

It tickles of the spoken:
 being, like hairs on the tongue.
 The sand-hocking leaf scruff,
 bubbling: efferblessed,
 blunder: effervessed.

Babble: transiterative,
 blessing tree sap a sweetness
 to spoil in spills across the lips
 of whose faces, stained with sleepdrift,
 gone through breezes— whose, whose?

NIGHT-SPEECH IN THE GROUNDS' MOUTHS

In the easterly fields, the Grounds grows sunflowers:
golden wooly mammoths that nod their slung necks,
shrug their greenery going stiff, going crisp,
in the sun's slow glide from east to west,

the low, low west: it's dusk again,
the day lost, the night thick. The Grounds is...
Which is it? Affirming or indifferent? Of?
Any edge or end, given its incessance?

This slow, yes: the Grounds speaks in slugs,
the dough-clouds' seepage, the blackcurrants' thirst.
A reach-speech, a touch-speech, rains,
each the morning of a word.

Hear the respiring conversation, and in it written:
spectral, frightening. The claw or knife that mars the bark
marks the Grounds itself: animate outcroppings
livid in the blur of its foggy coughings-up.

UTTER EARTHEN BONDAGE

Should, should, should
are and are be our and hour,
the year is long;

the world is over
arguments, riotous
in the threads of things:

veins, roots, dendritic
like lightning likens
tumult to spring.

Like a bonemagnet,
living breeds
speech, speaks

to being / not being.
To betterment,
a should sound. Sure.

To peppermint,
the Grounds shouts.
Means? What means?

The Manor looms
the horizon:
a hiss of grass,
the pasture tracks
the faces' bodies, bowed,
their amorous intent,

split—
not that it's separate.
They're bound

to the Grounds
with fishnets, bad breaths,
taxidermied ring sets,

hoofbeats and root beer,
a shrew in a bucket,
an old, crooked carrot,

shoe horns, trumpets,
six frilling tool sheds.
The word's shovels and shears,
hatchets, laces, and waxes
flash of praxis
when are and are is our and hour—

whose whim and whirl
all entrances—
the door blows open.

SELVES

MONA, *Mona... her name compels her.*

Lone, a wish alone, and noble as a lady moon. A shimmering science island, elegant and afraid. "Boredom = Ordinariness," she writes as she twiddles.

The largest room in her room is her head, the story of it.

*Ample, its order; sample its record: the beauty of her method (swoon)
the grid and the ticklist, her marks and marker, the whelm of fretting fingertips.*

"Hopeless or hapless," Mona laughs, "Loping or loops..." Her rigor reeks of solvent.

MONA THEORIZES IN FLUID HOSIERY

Something always slippery:
the sheer dress, the tinsel hair,
the silver pendant buckled shut.

She insists she knows who's held there,
never opens it. Why look when there's granular physics
and the round tower room strewn with gadgets:

The blown glass, the watch cogs, the laser thermometers,
spectrometers, salinometers, brawny computers,
the counters, the shakers, the slim label makers,

the laminar flow hood, the beakers, the Bunsens,
the razors, the centrifuge, the lead and the compass,
all boot and buzzing a hearth-burning analysis.

Predictions, predictions, all predilections.

Like the sand on Mars, bleach is so basic,
Mona says, squinting through her telescope,
and I am out the window.

*Here enough to wonder but not enough to bleed, **TERRA** is a dragging dream.*

*She writhes a life so delicate, so light-like, that hurt will never leave her.
Swollen, broken— her colors smear their filigree, blur her aching lacewing sheen:*

sorrow's drowning pestilence. Even this is crystalline and delicious to her Maris.

“My love,” Terra murmurs, “The wake upon my stained glass lake.”

***MARIS** is phantasmic, too, and tends to temper Terra's haze.*

*Serenity, her grip and grips her giving over. The ripple effect of so-near flesh
floods a slush of optic frosting, a gloss of juice blush.*

Maris says Terra is her Slow-bunny-sun in the bathtub.

When they bathe, that is... They barely leave their stage-bed.

MARIS AND TERRA MUTTER HEATHER TEXTURES

Behind three hundred feet of crushing velvet
Maris and Terra sleep half-sleep
through night's embrace

in constant murmurings,
kelp and pearish greens issuing
a plaited stream of their mouths' mirage:

a wisp of speech, a swirl and sworn
a color-snore, a vaporous form condensing
as a chilling orb far above their gauzy headboard.

A spill of wine reds stain the jade oceans
that storm beyond their clouded sleep tossing,
their touch and kissing, twisting round

to shed their sheet and lift a lifelike limb:
another color slips from their caressing, slithers
through their icy light-sphere, ever gushing.

HAVELOCK keeps a moral order in the Manor's court.

Like the staid blues of his two-piece suit, he sees the world in shades of just deserts: deserving, undeserved. Presuming his importance, he makes sense with disdain.

The dense lenses of his translucent glasses crease his buoyant, pinkish face.

He takes lonely strolls through Portrait Hall and contends with the paintings, groans under the weight of duty: "So many laws only I can enforce..."

Banging on about badness, he hopes someone is listening.

HAVELOCK, INURED TO REPROOFS AND PERFUMES

In the courtroom, two chairs live in every chair.
To sit on a wingback is to live in its shadow.
Themselves, alive, the chairs, all spares and roped together:

the piano bench, the fainting couch, the loveseat,
the stump, the snowy mound, the overstuffed recliner,
the abbreviated church pew, the ottoman storage cube,

and rippling in the vaulted ceilings, their putrid opposites
float unencumbered in gelatinous distortions, emitting smells
of dark beer, untended wound, inner throat, and sparkle glue.

Though not the swivel-throne where Havelock sits
and judges who he sees unfit. It whispers haughty kindnesses:
No one better. All of them, jesters. Need their edges, a sharp glass of water.

His jurors, should they show (they never do), get wobble stools
and long prodding sticks to jolt and jostle the viscous room
of foul furniture shifting dimly and dripping above them.

*Thin and sullen beneath his heavy hood, **DIERDRE** whimpers prayer:
“O holy Thou, I cross myself in love again. Please make me what I’m not.”*

A stubbed toe, he thinks, is fit for amputation as asceticism extracts the heinous.

*He sews pockets in his cloak with holes left open for longing, not knowing want grows
monstrous making saints of others, one other: his imagined lover.*

So heedlessly devoted... His locks and ragged shoes grimly shed in penitence.

DEIRDRE REPENTS, TRESPASSES

As every life, a death, there are days, dead still:
no branch, no breeze, no stone of pocket bread,
the stars and their arrangement, absent,
no letters to embrace a name.

Marbles once nicked the Manor's windows:
the tapping clack of glass on glass. Now, the arid shine
of idle dice, the card decks stacks like attic trash.
A neon feather boa lampoons the mounted black bear's head.

Hideous, ridiculous, Dierdre thinks. *Fickle entertainment*.
The sterile orchestration of the signs tacked up in
the kitchen, half bath, the varnished confessional:
In Vino Veritas, Lady, Be the Heroine, The Magician is In.

Are these thoughts true? Deirdre wonders,
Truer, at least, than my resistance?
There are rooms he will not enter,
calls he will not answer.

To the habitual tune of God's existence,
Deirdre serves his trusty disquietude,
rehearses the property line in loops
playing Pinpricks and Thimbles.

*Play is a rule bending possibility. Not a parlor game, but a wink before the horror of living, a carnival cast from memory. "Living tricks," mutters **WADE,***

sprouting ears on the eaves where the mud birds gossip. "Mischief listens."

No gender to oblige, never kept and no one's keeper, Wade inhabits the world at will and becomes their own imaginings: clodded paws, a grin of gold grommets, jangling a fire, spangling the forest... They dance the Manor sick on tree sap.

THE DEWY FLEXION OF WADE

Wade leaps from the spiral staircase
into the sky's cumulonimbus covering,
multiplies the tapestry, pompous
with its striking underbelly.

They lick its density to feathered shreds,
rain themselves down in dashing droplets,
charmed by the air's fraction of friction,
toying with the thought of limitation.

At the shift of blitzing through the leaves
of the lemon trees, Wade skims shingles,
pings wind chimes and millstones,
beats wood chips, ladders, sheet rope,

spoiled stovetops, keyless bike locks, raps
greasy hubcaps, and terrarium lanterns, splats
on play daisies smiling, waving, and wicket-pinned
against the winds across the Grounds, slant.

Now warping in the cork of Mona's sodden ceiling,
now caught flat in Dierdre's wounded palms,
now cold as a comet, Wade imagines stasis—
soon snoozes as the hydrothermal vents in the basement.

*A single look at **LLYR**, and you'll see red forever.
Spoiled red, her cherried dress, its haggard hem heavy with the rot of centuries.*

The clay-dark sash across her chest flashes with weaponry.

*Llyr nibbles tripe and ginger dreaming time is an ecstatic butcher that flays the Grounds.
"With the muzzle of a mother fox," she says, "nuzzle us, transfigured."*

She hears the rabble of the river as a runny daughter.

LLYR'S LITTLE SOLACES

From the high magic and cool water roses
in the garden, Llyr needlessly prunes. Her gaze,
a kiss blown to the Manor's every window:

Dear Mona looks rinky-dink from this end of the telescope.

Runner beans and trumpet vines cling to the escalator
that hums and cuts the veggie plots and flower beds in two,
offers newly broken terracotta pots a technology to blame.

Llyr beams when sunflower seeds and thorny weeds
hordes of beetles and wilted debris
housed in its grooves lift off to the roof.

She calls out to them: *Children of the gutter!*
How is it to be risen, sweet ones? She laughs,
I'll be here again when you come down,

a fresh sunset in her flush throat.
Every dusk she drapes across the earth:
her garments turn to garlic tops, her body to dirt.

THE FALL

THE SPEED OF DISAPPEARANCE

The Grounds churns in places,
pretends to sneak away
in a stray sand pit,
in a spinning saw blade.
To forget that it's everything,
it gives away bodies:

beings and dwellings,
crow caws and drawings.
Because isn't quite right.
The Grounds does and doesn't
make words, though, knows them,
their order and comforts.

Monday, Tuesday, infinite digression,
the bellows and the smoke, the sky stoked,
the brittle jingle of dead brambles as the wind
rustles, tousles. The crusty snow
unbuttons the bruised rosemary,
each leaf a blouse bursting.

The smell of speech is tingling, the chattering
teeth of the Grounds, light as tick feet
tapping up the heft of the oak's trunk.
Tenuous, each happening trembles.
The tender skeleton collected
tends to fall apart.

TERRA BESPATTERS ABSENCE

Terra wakes and struck with an expectation of instruction
waits, wakes Maris, hesitates, hears nothing.

She begins pitching color schemes to the dark air
between her and Maris, between her and the curtain.

Maris is familiar with this, floats prismatic
over to the curtain's velvet, anticipating Terra's request:

Love, open the curtain. I'm ready to be instructed.
The director, she must be in the audience?

Maris feigns to check again, knowing what she'll find.

Terra, love, there isn't one; there isn't an opening
and I don't hear an audience, love, do you? No one's watching...

MONA'S MEASURED SLEEPLESSNESS

Mona fears her findings—
herself really— what isn't there and what is.

She wants results now: a synthesis.
She wilts, a lily on the balcony,

goes slowly to bedding remembering
the luster of what she once believed in: utter union,

nothing fenced in and nothing fenced off.
Now these barren visions, she wonders.

There, just there, so bare as to demoralize her:
the article stacks, the frozen knick-knacks,

once her comforting arrangements.
Is this a prison or a mission?

The fat dove in her chest:
burnt words in a silkworm nest,

empirically impoverished,
a real toad in a choked princess.

The moon drools through her slivered curtains
as light pools on the stoop of her upper lip.

She whispers, gaunt, Am I always as I am?
Am I ever running after?

DEIRDRE IMPLEMENTS A SERAPH

Deirdre's gut stumbles as he passes Mona's tower
again this morning. He tarries and shuffles
and shimmies up a buckeye tree
to spy her working through its leaves.

She glides about her room
fetching widgets and fresh wicks,
sits to scribble, sips hot water,
holds her chin again in wonder.

Wishing to catch her notice,
he summons his haggard pigeon daemon
but can't think of how to woo her with it,
worse with its one widget wing and missing eyes.

So, never mind, he looks, just looks
through his dramatic filter.
Her pages turn: a falling forest,
her candles burn: magnesium, a paradise.

And sure, the pigeon's whirling—
Deirdre's sight extolls! And look, the roses,
orchard twirling: it *all* is spinning!
These can't be *just* his love-drunk throes.

Wade spins everything faster, faster,
now a cosmic zipper spider.
Their black and yellow forelegs flare
and wrap the world in softest web.

CAVERNING INCARNATE

The fragile is already fragment.
A scribble, a symbol for chaos controlled.

A vase breaks once. A broken vase
breaks every time Mona thinks of it,

cherished. Fearsome, the sun,
cuts her room with quiet.

On the sill of desire: problems.
Can the shape of data change?

She mulls over mistake.
She pains over her breath.

*I need it, her tremors figure,
an absolute or nothing.*

Dust needle-points the air,
transfixes her, every one a pointing finger.

She blames the tools: who left them running?
Blames the room: who left it sunny?

Blames the who who made her.
Her face locks: a crossing out of body.

WADE CORRUPTS AUTOCRACY

Havelock's hair executive stiff,
 he slurps a high kitchen coffee
 and so commences the proceedings.

*To cocoon the world— a serious offense.
 I hate to see you in court again, Wade.
 Now speak your defense into the mic.*

Buzzing, Wade smears their force
 across the onyx floor in scintillating letters:

*I SPIN IT FOR ITS SAKE
 TO KEEP IT SPINNING
 I HAVE NO NEED TO BE HERE*

The letters peel up, mica thin, bid to whizz
 and rive the scene that Havelock calls reality.
 Magenta slits burgeon the court's appearance.

Havelock's trousers gape a revelation:
 his body's sudden animate projection
 squirts out caffeinated piss light

over the world's pink fundament.
*Nooo!!! Someone!!!! Anyone!!!!
 Take Wade outside the world!!!!*

MONA'S HEMLINE TEEMS

Mona switches the nightstand and the lamp,
the lamp and the drawers, the drawers and the planters.
There is nothing on her necklace.

Her tongue grows grayer, her lip a hair.
Her sleeves sag slack and frayed
data crawls on every surface.

She sees it blear, but cannot capture.
Flagellic calculus surges through the bed,
the desk, and across the Grounds she hears failure call:

The fruits fall skinless. The spores of mushrooms
ride dandelion cypsela. Boxelders sew bacterium clothes,
build buggy vestibules for their fashion show,

its planetary beckoning sounding through the Grounds
in rounds, in worthy, twirling parties, billions,
deathly all and all attending:

all the rats and talcum pits, sun hats and salt flats,
groves and coves and droves of hooves
and shoes and industrial mist.

LLYR HUNTING, IS HUNTED

*I could be eaten, too, today
or a part of me: a hand, a flank.*

Llyr is stalking after nothing yet.
She finds a tree to wait beneath,

shuts her eyes: humidity.
Its weightless harbor

robes her body:
a vessel cresting fallen leaves.

She says a blessing for the moribound:
From pierced bone, a garnet grows primula rivulets.

*A blooded ring, the Grounds' mouths: weakness crowning
jewels cowering, perhaps in love, at the end of the path.*

*I fear our nearness in my tears, a crossroads:
ours, one wound from death.*

She weeps in the shade,
another flower bed:

coral bells, bleeding hearts,
weakly delphinium.

MONA GOES, SUPPOSEDLY UNCAPTURED

Terra and Maris draw breath and hush.
 Their color-voltage plumes blue and silver
 in embrace, a filtered disappearance
 into youngling pinks of lost loves.

There's an absence in the Manor
 or the world over, a marked departure.

A last notice on Mona's closet door reads:

verdict: unknowable, I
 (have only known) a v captive
 willful

chose to vanish

DEIRDRE IMBUES BITTERBRUSH

No Mona at the window's mirror,
her things murky in Deirdre's mind,
an intertidal memory.

He reaches for what of hers he's seen:
Wire shutters? Molds or folders?
A bit of pearl or sugar cube?

Her tissue-paper breath in boxes,
once bursting from her chest—

He lent her nothing in his looking on
and wanders still, chaste and faithless,
after mourning cloaks and signs,

the flesh of death in every wing,
her billow from the highest window—

THE FEAST

DEIRDRE'S ACRID HUNGER

Delicious to a pest,
the sour weakness of the bread.

An overcast cream once anointed
her head and neck through the window.

Leave it longer to turn and curdle, Deirdre sneers,
to dry and crumble, to longingly degrade.

The pull of pain is mineral.
The heart like a flint struck,

a felt punishment, struck and struck,
the stone, too, sparking heart.

The Grounds' roughage lit autumnal red
is warning: what is is hurting.

Deirdre wonders who is cooking.
Is this a recipe of dissent? Is hurt a no or yes?

This isn't making anything of the mind's secretions,
the fat of it in the dish of the head. He thinks,

Is the cook a major ingredient?
The stock of stew, the leavening agent?

LOVER BELOVED

Maris seems to never cling,
in love as she is, like a shoreline's waves,
an ocean breathing the ever ordinary...
It's dawn on the ferris wheel of the day, she says.

Again? Terra grieves...
She insists the day is a funeral parade
If it is anything, she says, If I am anything...
There are so many graves.

Maris goes gold, golder than anything—
the heat of stage light and fearless laughter,
the center of a wedding flower. *Terra, she says,*
molten from your endless sorrow...

It's harrowing to be borrowed.

DELIRIUM, THE SMELL OF BLOOD

Llyr is in the kitchen with the headless chickens
 and the skinned rabbits smoking rolled cigarettes.
 She hums her raw hands clean and free of oils.
My vocal cords are dreaming...
 Her smile cries an ordinary disaster.
A song for a Moan, for all loves, a song.

The stew is a hot wound, Terra says, staring at its simmer.
 Maris coos a little and lights the tapered candles:
Dinner drips, inflamedly alive, she says.
 The ceiling seems to open in the glow.
The brass of our headboard, love. Spacious knots.
The air in the bread, our bed, our pockets, yes?

Deirdre taps on the day porch door,
 peeks through its screen, half hoping to be ignored:
Excuse me, am I allowed inside?
 Havelock cracks a wry laugh.
Drink your worth in wine and the house'll dry, Deirdre!
Sure you are, come in and get the table already. Someone just died—

She didn't die, silly frankincense— Llyr's ruby eyes enshrine him.
Look at me, my cheeks of slough, my teeth of seed and sediment.
Wade is holding dusk for us. They keep me here because I asked:
hold me in the gray-blue verge of birth and lapse tonight
as every night— for Mona, please, a moment longer.
She's gone, Havelock. Just gone. I go all the time.

WADE ECHOES TENEBROUS

Wade shrouds the evening sky, this time
not to swaddle the world like baby prey,
but to laze in a haze of mesh for Llyr.

This is how they like to read the marks
in materiality: all of everything said and dreamt,
slipped in sign or symbol. Every text,

Wade makes light-like, powders the heavens
in characters and alphabets, in files and diaries,
and all accounts of circumspect adventures,
the same complaints in every ledger:

Doubts, aloneness, the unknown,
chance, you gruesome snowflake, blow,
why me, why this, and death's approach.

A MIMICRY OF DINING

No one speaks, though
every crumb cries grief.

Mouths move over and over
Mona's favorite foods:

chicken dumplings, scotch eggs,
salt-watered parsley.

Dierdre, getting air again,
is dreaming candied everything:

angel food and jubilee,
syrah, syrah, the passing feast,

the rabbits' feet,
a cemetery.

LLYR'S SUGAR-SOFT ENTICEMENTS

Deirdre crawls, a grassy trilobite,
into a patch of garden refuse.

He sniffs about the lemon peels,
the quail poo, the bits of plum and eggshell.

Clean sheets on the nearby clothesline
fill with gusts and droop in turns.

He draws a little *M* in the dirt,
stops himself from going on.

Deirdre, says Llyr, craning
like a dewy tulip,

How you have been missed.
Could you help with the dessert?

He spots a birch he could strip and eat,
stare off in the meadow like a goat or its ghost.

But Llyr shakes the gardenia awake
like a caress of whip topping,

a mousse blessing genoise sponge,
and the fragrance bids he go.

KINETIC PIGMENT TWINKLES

Havelock keeps the elbows off the counter,
napkins folded wholesomely,
and flinches at Mona's robotics projects
stun and buzzing around the oven:
Can we shut up this intelligence already??

Maris smiles. She marks every forehead
with a smear of silver glittering
now that dessert is ready.
She says, *We're stars in the kitchen
painting wonders in our visions, aren't we?*

Terra dazzles at Maris, her grace,
and takes to bezzling the edibles:
lemon cookies, caramel cakes, meringue,
strawberries and sour cream,
brown sugar sparkling,

lip gloss on the shoelace pastry,
glistering crests of hot sugar flesh,
a hexing texture, the crystal-coated
eggy pudding, jiggling its passion,
the graphic constellation, ravaging

the eye's anarchic rapture,
fractal winking, prism-like
every edge a stain and ripple. Real
the Grounds' jillion held
and jelly-bellied crowds.

DEIRDRE'S PRIMAL PILLOWING

Night sickles in again as the moon's crescent.
The orange blossoms release their fragrance,
and the red worms churn earth-threads of Llyr.

Deirdre brings himself to bow a single bow
given the familial attention of the Grounds,
a yummy dump himself, he's gathered, his harried
thoughts in shards and saccharine fragments.

He pictures the gone body of Mona.
My love has left, he says. I have always missed her.
I see her still, I long for rest, I see her—

Wade cuts across his outstretched arms
a mess of lonely stars
for he never really knew her
but loved the sorrow of a lover.

He bleeds a bliss of understanding,
stays the pain till it recedes,
till his blood crusts in pillow puffs
and he gently falls asleep.

WADE SHAVES THE FACE FROM REALITY

The unhinged jaw of the horizon
swings shut: a butterfly knife
tucked in tight like the voice of a book,
sounds of nothing understood:

alluvial static, memory of
shaking mosaic, turbulence
crash of, absence grooms
absence, looms pattern.

*The trick is made from made,
mouths Wade
the from a play
of senses framed.*

THE GAME

SLUICING THE CAROUSEL

So what is just here; what progresses?
Who deserves more word or less?

The otters in the garden fountain,
the purple urchins in their fists?

The roar of Havelock's orders
or his uppers gaining sentience?

Slow as to do nothing, Llyr's
lexi-motor rumbles something

of a predator to prayer:
Dear Vacant Slayer,

she murmurs, washing
in the Grounds' dark glass lake.

*You are where the water grew
my lips distinct, your life diffuse.*

Maris and Terra bicker and cuddle
when they don't know what to do,

and horses run phantasmic through
their nearness and name-calling:

manes of shoal and sand and surf,
backs of rainbowing invertebrates.

THE GROUNDS' CAUSAL LOOPS

The Grounds has fingers such as these.
Forget the word *Biblical*...
Bubbly, no, fuzzy
as the patch of skin
between the eyes of oxen

a bit of peach lichen,
its ridges gripped in Wade's gaze.
They rip it with their blinks.
The patch, uvular, purpling,
a lingual oddity.

*How wordy, they ask, is your liberty?
Caked, cracked, or convoluted,
what accounts are in your name?
None? And yesterday I howled for you,
cried your likeness, begged you come.*

*The Grounds, your hairs, the grassy tendrils,
shook and lingered, bore your presence
grasping one black earhole since
something must have heard me.
I call because you come.*

HAVELOCK SAGS SNACKING

There are so many things to judge today
that Havelock decides to call them all guilty—
there's infinite room in virtual prison.

Still, he goes to court to bob regally on his throne
and fix a burrito at the self-serve café in the corner.
He whispers what once he belted as the microwave heats:

All is good and right, right here, up from down, firm in the crown.
All is good and right, right here, the power appearing by sword and fear...
His voice shakes, his face rains, the microwave dings—

the tarnished barstool blinks, has ears,
grows hands like potatoes left to the kitchen
and clothes like ropes of crow. Iridescent

black braids bloom around the body. The face
disguises Wade, in glitches and flakes,
gives to constant shedding.

The jaw place opens, an auditory projection:
I've seen you from the ceiling.
I will teach you jacks.

LLYR'S TENDER DIRENESSES

Devoted to devotion, Llyr in love bows
every branch, each an arrow in her quiver,

wrests the dust to flight again,
blows out every lamp.

The light of stars,
tears on her cheeks,

the creek, her brandished blade,
cuts speech, a ruddy valley,

slabbers fluid prophecy
in the water of its spring

trickling, trickling lowly,
trickling slowly, downstream.

WADE COATS NONMAN ON IMAGINATION

Wade shoots their hand-sprouts through
the rippling ceiling to retrieve a sack of pink.
The slathered baggie opens and wretches out
a porous blue ball and ten living barbs.

Havelock, seized with shock but intrigued
by the forgetting of his fundamental loneliness,
steps forward, free in his submission
to the hideous blobfish of a magician.

Mouth hole wriggling slightly, viscous
with the wet of the ceiling, Wade secrets static,
a kind of throat clearing, and begins:
You—colander, crutch, cabinet— searching

*below your certain dressings for porpoise oils,
indelible medals, immortal kin—
place the ball in one palm; let it lift away.
As the ball levitates, ask each barb its name.*

*Do not try to put the barbs inside your head.
Do not try to stay alive.
The ball will come down:
the game will be over.*

DIERDRE'S VOICE GRAZES THE ALCHEMICAL

*I fear mischievous
moaning from the inner cabinets.
Faith, just pestle, making paste.
Snake circle, scribbles*

*a winged locket, silt running
like silver-double chase games
away, wicked stone. Three in a row.
Play Why on the Cross? The X's,*

*O's. I master tonal failure. If I sound
a liar, a skunk bloats its carcass.
Our makers twirl this haggard
garden's mortal clasp.*

*The other, the other, a maiden image,
free, forth, couriered, and rising
the Grounds' grasses to faces:
the lips of toads, living kisses.*

WADE'S QUEER EQUIPPAGE

Havelock is a quagmire of soluble structure,
a mush rushing through his ears: Is this blood I hear?
Or a flourish of his fat tongue rasping and gaggled.

Wade's appearance pricks with sundry quills,
protrusible with every cybernetic flexing,
hands and feet now hung with talons

of a harpy eagle, claws of a Komodo dragon.
They dangle from the body in seeming isolation.
Light-licking, air-sunken, their gravitating rotation

makes a cuddle-toy of every object in the courtroom.
How sharp the world is, Wade says, their back
a rattling work of needles. Their sternum cracks

and tines collide, spine perfectly self-piercing.
Havelock eats the sight with pudding eyes, gawking:
I— a disguise of porosity. And your mask, it's punishing.

Run through me. Don't let me go to waste— please.
Wade plunges through the ceiling, lets its goo
cascade in tumbles, jumbles all, the room in oozes.

MARIS AND TERRA TOUCH MUTENESS

Sated with sleep but never touch,
Terra and Maris quote themselves to each other,
their sheets a cursive correspondence.

They speak, and each syllable kisses the other
as light as a plea, a prayer: we.

Terra swells with untold message;
Maris overlays the stage so holds her,
keeps her held over, whatever her secret.

It isn't that, Terra says in cellophanic shapes
and glacial lake waters.

It's that I can't at all speak it—

The curtain shakes with Wade.
A splasher and a lasso, they gather
Terra and Maris like a bound bouquet.

Held, beheld, each holder blooms lace shoots
of blue hydrangeas to the stage's very wings,
spanned, newly relishing their limits.

HAVELOCK NOTES CRANNIES IN LUCIDNESS

*Thought: I think I'm feeling something.
The docket sort of broke. Though,
there are things to do and manage.
Sea is in my ears & throat.
I'm thirsty and fatigued.
Research this disease?*

*Hallucinating sharp opal.
Temple sweats, temporary liquid color,
barbed and metal earrings dangling the middle distance.
– outer / inner?
– roof / dripping? — memory of shells
a lone parade, my flaunting peacock feathers.*

*Doubt. Tracings, lost, weather upwells.
No one to tell.
Breaking quite quickly now... Terror
beneath the shade of every ceiling:
– circles
– old letters*

DEIRDRE EMPTIES THE LABYRINTH

Dierdre fades with messages:
Flimsy, fickle. Everything is thin.

He swears himself motorless,
 a bit of bare static. A shadow guest

is real, real enough—
 His pigeon is a person if you squint.

It flutters to the labyrinth; he follows it in.
 Along the walls are offerings pinned:

scattered locket dolls, rotten pocket watches,
 wreaths, coins, urns, and vanishing portraits,

fabergé eggs hatching empty of pretense.
 His eyes disrobe the sacrosanct place,

and at the center of the maze, a motion:
 drifts of silver pond water polish.

There, his naked double speaks:
My shadow and my caster, Lord

*in thousand dangling trinkets,
 infinite my subtle lovers:*

*Dear, Lordless
 me—*

THE WORD CAN BE MEDICINAL

The dark of the courtroom greens.
This is where Havelock sleeps— tries to sleep.
He strains, his thinking pains. He's hearing things:

*Mincemeats... Mints, needs...
You, your speech
is wounded.*

Havelock steams:
What??? Which??? and listens
closer to the verbal stream:

*There's a doctor in the yarrow,
millennia in rain scent.
The salve is... Nascent.*

THROAT HOLE TO SHINE THROUGH

Llyr never reads.
She laughs in pumpkin seeds
and shouts mercies to the sun.
The sun shines back:

Care for your imagination.
Speech leaves:
the blush of a petal rose
from the green of its feet.

A bone was never one
of belonging to what seemed
an understated life
of fear and eating.

With sage and apricot,
the cow corpse rots
in the flies' constant colony
of drying excrement.

On the dying edge of what is,
Llyr's rotten frock is knit with roots,
manure-putrid. The sun and her,
here: mutually eaten.

NO STORY FOR THE TELESCOPE

Pewter-bowed, a present, Pendulum,
the sheepdog Terra and Maris found
on a rare roam around the Grounds,
swings her tail low and slow in the way of hypnosis.

They teach her to *yip* yes, *yap* no, and *groan* maybe.
Her tummy's garbling: *yip, yip!*
Her mommies hate her: *yap, yap!*
Her life is fated: *groan*. Weary of answers,

she goes sky-eyed and belly-up to paw at the yogurt cups,
the tumble scrub, the salsa bins and tuna tins, the scraps
of mask and meshy dresses floating on the changing winds
like a wiggly, squiggly baby beneath a mobile of the Milky Way.