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Fourth world| [Poems]

Lary Kleeman

The University of Montana

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FOURTH WORLD

by

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B.A. Colorado State University, 1988

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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for Dorothy Virginia and Robert. Willard Kleeman
Before Writing a Poem

I shiver each step
before morning sun

breaks clouds into shards
of Pueblo pottery

rephrasing heat
into black and white

snakeheads hissing
this is silence

your silence.
Bundles of Sticks
Orchids

Estonia, 1992

This is where Wagner must've dreamt Tannhauser. At least, a scene like this:
Snow, some firs, but so much more snow than firs. Old women wrapped in shawls measuring the road to town. Bundles of sticks on backs and then what? We laugh—we can't help it. Tiui pushes the long-runnered sled past her village. There have to be wolves in dark this dark. At least old Communists. But then we haven't the desire to talk. Her hands clutch manifestoes of coat. We grapple. Not grapple, but give back the good heat that our lives had lost. She says yes. Yes and orchids. She loves orchids better than the large-handed man who sells them outside the bus station in his leanto of flowers and light.
Passport Photo, 1994

There I was, lying on the studio's counter between a woman and child I'd never known. None of us had smiled in our photos. Some years before, I'd strolled into a smalltown Colorado courthouse for the same. Back then, smiling was like cracking an egg. Fact is, I'd been raised within reach of a wilderness called Oh-Be-Joyful but have since come across other country I'm still chewing on. Take the cold night streets of L'vov, Ukraine. Trolleycar sparks light storefront windows. Inside, shelves of dust, canned beets and piss yellow soda. Salesclerks in slate gray housecoats stare with geologic indifference.

What is it to grow old with no choice but to wear out?
The ancient Carpathians are wearing down. Mountainfolk weave dead crows and mud into their clothes. Eyes quieter than cinders. Faces plain as milk. Sheep dodge barreling ex-Soviet army trucks. One babushka drags a long-handled axe walking the railroad tracks. Another, in black, about bowls me over rounding a corner with a pine cross not meant for a grave in Newsweek.
Viht Making

After we pass, some sway headless in the Baltic breeze.
In Kusta's hands, cut birch shoots shape into fans:
Placing and replacing so that each young limb fits.

We won't use these vihad until winter
when, in the fireglow of sauna,
we'll take them into hand and thrash ourselves
amid the hiss and steam of water.

We carry the leaf bundles on a pole
balanced across our shoulders.

As we walk the road back, Kusta takes long strides
and tells the story of the woman who once held the knife
but unsheathed it and gave it to the man. The man left her side
feeling he was mightier than the forests.

Kusta's pace quickens. He abandons broken English for Estonian.
I try to keep up, but lose whole sentences. What little I catch
I quietly repeat to remember: Öö, vaenlane, surm. The story ends
but my quiet chant continues: Night, enemy, death.
The Understory

No, you were right to judge my past. I was medieval, a church beyond the village's warm hearths and walls of drying nets.

The islandfolk grew old trudging to me every winter. They ate my salt before turning home for water.

Narrow windows. The martin's cloudtumbling call. Death would fill me, standing room only.

But how I would stand, cold glistening stone, when rain threw itself without.

It took her scent, like wet willow, her knees, bared and bent warm at my altar before I awoke to false candles.

I kicked doors to fiery sunsets.

Then came the vagrants on December nights—they burned the oaken pulpit, board by board.

I was no longer a church but walls that sank in soil and leaf until handfuls of rock clutch ed in cedar-root, tumbled by slow half-grind of earth and ice into the understory, broadleaved and crying jays bluer than any sky that works to stay above.
After Reading Chekhov

Irina bakes cakes with lemon sprinkles on frosty angel food.

What a lot of flowers you have!
All my life I've been hanging
about little apartments
with two chairs and a sofa,
and a stove that always smokes.

I watch the wasps out back: they gather grass or hair,
they stock their nests against the physics frost completes.

What if one were to begin life
over again,
but consciously?

An old man with an armful of wood trips, goes down on cement,
one leg kicks the air as he grunts in the dark, alone.

Then each of us, I think,
would try above everything
not to repeat himself...

Irina draws water from the outdoor pump.
She never moved to Moscow.

...at least he would create
a different setting for his life,
he would arrange an apartment
like this, with flowers
and plenty of light.
The Lighthouse

The sky stuck to it last I saw.
Has the ship sunk?

Flat, the night is flat,
a sailor fallen from his perch,

the masts in ruin,
the ship, cement

and moss-green.
A church spire or mountaintop

sinking under waves.
I climb the iron ladders

to the roof. The candle I hold
has blown out.

My feet shift. There's shouting.
I shred the map and then the letters.

I want more wind, more window-rattling wind,
too loud to hear the waves.

Tomorrow, I'll go along the shore with rake in hand
to turn the weeds, the moss-green rocks.
Beyond the Frame
The Woman in Matisse's The Red Room

She could bear it no longer: arranging the fruit forever, cruets never tipped, each weighing down the tablecloth, its red the red that begs for more attention. Not once had she lifted eyes or shifted feet—her torment lasting eighty years or so. No violation—art, not life—till now: She turns, murders the pose, breaks gestalt's hold and runs beyond the frame's dumb wooden rule. For years the tea was boiling--its whistle blowing incessantly, insanely, in her ear. That taken care of, she opens the pantry, hoists her skirts and sprays piss. She wipes her brow then drops her hair from buns held long in place. She gazes back through doors to red, the red that begs for more. Do walls begin or end in this red room? She never could question before, always bent in black and white, her apron certain around her waist. And what of trees that bloom like cotton plants outside the picture window? She had been a fixture--strange keeper of kept secrets: the blue flowers and vines that climbed the walls but never grew. No longer dead for art, she'll finger cups of cappuccino, talk
for hours with lovers south of Rome.
She'll never visit a museum--
the coast is simpler, warmer, less objectionable.
Is that onion or apple at table's edge?
The light won't say.
From where she stands, the fruit resists a name.
Painting Lesson

Is it easier for a forest
to_______with a sky behind it?

Some firs just stepped out.

It's coming together now:
Waterjar.

clink clink

Half buried
fences, a bunker staring
one-eyed--I tell you

they are there but
of no consequence,
without______,
and that history evades the easel.

He turns,
shakes a brush at the
frozen lake:

I'm trying to get the water just right.
Watercolor

Suzanne trusts color more than line. It goes back to kindergarten, where she first drew forests of pines bottom-up, not top-down. She listens to her intuition, brushes the sun to the left in a smooth gray sky where lines of birds bleed behind blue branches.

She tries a deeper blue, for it's evening in her painting or just about the time when colors seem more assured of themselves. A sparrow opens its throat and spills its song from willows. Suzanne rests her brush and listens: She hasn't found a color for song.
Lady in the Lilies

The old lady in the lilies leaves nothing more to the imagination of June growth. She bends to cut, trim and neaten. A vision of order clears before her gloved hands. The unsavory sight of hybrids, seedlings and groundvine gone wild offends the old lady in the lilies. Is nothing more reassuring than green leaves? A jay, watching the chore, scolds her. She stops, looks at her gloves as if she'd sinned to cut, trim and neaten. A vision? Of order, she believes that it helps the good to prosper. To snip at deviance and decay impassions the old lady: in the lilies, nothing is more.

Having replaced her worn-out gloves with a new pair, she'll work through dinner, past the silence of robins to cut, trim and neaten a vision of order.

The flowers fade from her dress as she darkens into the bent caretaker who'd come before to cut, trim, neaten. A vision of order--the old lady in the lilies leaves nothing more.
His Answer

She wanted cattails to sway above her bed,
their slender green freedom in a frame.
This would complete her décor d'humus: the leopard
frogs continuously coupling in the terrarium,
the potpourri of damp leaves.

At the oceanfront boardwalk she met a painter named Victor.

He blew gull's feathers from palettes baked in sun.
Cattails? he asked.

She leaned in and lowered her voice:
Should there be more—mist or morning light
that pours through pines at pond's edge?

He turned from her and her cute provoking habit
of casual comeback and dug among his works
past sunsets, gulls on piers, children playing in sand.

He found it behind the rest, his answer:

Not framed, but the Franciscan's
brown robe fell like a shadow, entering
from the left, what could be the east.
At center stood the Hopi,
waist-high in corn,
peering from under their black bangs,
windows to the fourth world.
Holy Orders

1.
I return to my work of painting angels on panels—
globs of white light, stickfigures, tin foil stars—
the Clearing-of-God's-Throat version.

2.
Brother Theophane never returned from the belltower.

His soup bowl at his spot.
The rope, never replaced.

Each window in each cell cracked open
for the song of blackbirds to call us to Matins.

3.
I return to my work of painting angels on panels.
I've tried so hard at getting them to speak.

Then came the moaning
in the fourth panel
of the Head-Between-The-Knees version:

No marble or marble pillars or pillars of clouds
but the Abbot nodded.

After the Great Silence he led me
to the Room of the Holy Relics:
Stilts and flashlights;  
a double-or-nothing keno game in the corner.

4.
I forgot to mention the blackbird  
found frozen to the cross, its head  
halfway under its wing.
I Forget I Am Between Walls

When she touches me I float on oceans of snow peas and chant Chaucer
to ripening vineyards and name her Jamaica or Israel

morning star

she rises like hashish her lips promising quiet
to Lebanons resurrection to Saigons

and when she touches me I am Cézanne’s peaches
riding tablecloth waves

as our hips move with pleasured forgetfulness
revising Euclidian geometry to the swish of old gin

while excited gold-helmeted Gilgamesh
sings home is somewhere close in the dark

when she touches me I forget I am
between hours or words or walls.
Bare-Ribbed Boats
From the pine porch he watches Theo hobble beside the baler,

Theo's cap tilted like a dog's head cocked for snakes or sudden wings. Prone to dizzy spells, Gus curses his crossword when not watching the haying. Between cigarettes he tosses a sentence to the dog at his feet. We've got a right to be mean.

All rumble and spit, the tractor starts again. Dust rises in its wake.

What's a five letter word for steadfast? Begins with an 'L'.

The three-legged blue-heeler snaps at a fly.
Edwina

Hoes the red soil with a sharpened stick.
Buries totems:
small dry explosions-about-to-happen.
Kachina eyes, tiny thunder-beings,
each planted in need, in prayer, in mesa shadow.

Edwina Little Bird walks barefoot today.
Makes the journey with her whole body, row by row.
Fingers smooth soil, toes tamp.
Magpies read the language of her prints:
earth will crack, in time.
Inez

There are nights and there are nights. Don't ask me for his name, hon.

He was only another roof bent over me and holding

my body from floating after the rain stopped raining.

His gutters leaked. His shingles rattled.

After the rain stopped raining and with my hair streaming into pillows,

I dreamed open a window like sky.

Do you know what it is to wake to rough hands,

a strange face, windows nailed shut?

It's looking up at tarpaper, looking up at tarpaper, hon.
Jazz

1.
We exchange currency at Chateau On the Hill--
ten kulahs to the buck.
Fedora begs for more coin. She rubs
her soft beret along the dark spine
of my walking bass. Ah, my

Lovely Porkpie! Behind the red door you wait
with your three-cornered love. Ah, it burns!
Boot The Presidents of the United States of America.
Snap-Brim--the quick look of goodbye. A done deal,
Diadem Eyes. Ah, but that lovely turban of hair!

2.
I'm drunk on her. A ten gallon funk.
We take the stage. Sailors curse and yell.
I strum. Vega and Tiara do "Fiero Sombrero!"
before the Clog Dance in Red.
Stovepipe's on the sax.

I'm banging-out brain buckets.
Damn this! Between sets, Crusher
hands me a gin-on-the-rocks.
Hey, don't sweat it Skull Cap,
it's just a gig. Yeah, just a gig.
Maia

When I find things I can't fit into my pocket, I'm at a loss

I love: grandfather cottonwood, eastern Colorado sky,

the way she said water.

The way she cradled a shirtful of green apples from her father's orchard.

Summer evenings she'd wander gardens, saltshaker in hand, ready to taste the ripeness.

Our last time together:

A small branch fell from her hair.
Middle Age

I follow a cart of hay
that creaks
down a mountain road.

The rope has burned
my neck
blue.

The driver looks away.
He cocks his head
and whistles.

Keeping up, stumbling
behind. Triangles
in the air:
the three-voiced call of the crow.
Photo Hanging on the Cabin Wall

Snow collects on your shoulders.  
Your hair is wet, so are your eyes.  
The wind-in-the-trees never ceases  
wrapping you in bluegreen distance.

I follow my dreams into villages  
where bare-ribbed boats weather  
atop stone walls. I'm an old man  
with an armful of wood.
Victor

At the sidewalk cafe
I like to imagine women
when I see them:
how one might fold her arm
behind her head while greeting
the morning in bed;
what she might whisper,
or whether she'd whisper at all.
And this one,
her dress as much a part of her
as tossing branches to a storm,
lending a look to the wind,
a sense of passage,
the scent of leaves broken open
on wet sidewalk.
Another Kind of Compass
Parrots

And if not parrots, then bats or falling fruit
keep me awake my first week in the jungle.

Not really a jungle—a rainforest. Rain.
A daily afternoon sermon.

Mad parrots slamming my tent.
Each thwack a spasm.
They hit and slide off.
Sometimes they squeak.

And if not parrots, then bats.
Or, falling, fruit grown heavy, too heavy for the crowns of trees
to hold above the soil.

So many nests.
So many nests not entered into my notes.
And if not?

Knees to chin, I rock to rain.

Parrots then bats or falling fruit,
parrots then bats or falling fruit.

Or

Slash and burn. Parrots. Then bats. The ashes of.
Like winter, but much colder.
My collapsible stove has less to do with fire.
I have less to do with my mouth.

Bats sound the night with click-clicks.
I cut a hole to note the moon.
The Pileated Woodpecker

We stamp our feet and rub our hands
and wait for its ebony beak,
the fiery red that flares its head,
its wings, its sudden wings that stun the pines
with wind-loud strokes.

Its flight at dawn--
night's last black unhinged--
unsteady shadow seeking grubs and mites
beneath the ponderosa's bark.

We point and gasp, shout, Look and There;
in frosty morning air it slow-drums from trunk to trunk.
It sounds each tree, each stump:
Thack-thump thack-thump thack-thump.

We watch its need
to hollow trunks,
the wooden walls of home.
Unseen Horses

I'm wrapped in blankets.

I wind my way past empty pots
that line the walls for rain,

rain so seldom cracks widen
but go unnoticed.

I hold the sacred cornmeal. Small handfuls.

Alone, I've reached the place of jumping off.

Only rock's quick drop, mesa's edge.

I give the gifts unopened, clean.
I set them on the rocks. I sit and wait.

Unseen horses kick dust to distant unheard thunder.
Stork's Nest

Before parting I warned you
of leeches and ticks,
gave you my axe,
its blade another kind of compass.

To cleave is to swing,
to swing is to break
the attention of waiting,
the spell of morning.

By noon we'd found the treebound mess. Stringlike vines hung
unanswered as if the composer
had left in a fury,
disheartened by the feeble imagination of sticks.
Feathers had caught on branches--branches, not spires, not wind.
Wyoming Blizzard

Horse-muscled wind.

Another kind of thunder.

What was considered empty

is no longer left to consider.

An army could march into this place without regard for the question of enemy position.

Which is to say God

needn't argue so loud.

There's no question of enemies, only

how long before
Unblinking the Sun
Vendor's Song

Old gods are terrible to look at when
they weep, their moans flagellate the still,
soft-skinned morning air so that forgotten birds
hidden among pines dark and feathered
before evening, rise with song,
a song of light to come,
not one light but many flames
forward-pressing, dressed in sackcloth.

They are terrible to look at, the old gods,
behind altars of market with plastic tags
dangling from their feet--the feet of birds
shot for their colors and wing patterns and
meat as the vendor's song of price and sale
rises like spring's song of the saved sun
blinding men and women who wander
among the stalls pricing scrap and hair.

Is there peace in this--in the conch shell's curl,
its pink and cream spiral beneath empty blue
or brooding gray, an open ear, an abandoned ear
of some old cur lost along the littered shore
one frothy night of spring-wet rambling when fences
were less than fences and walls and other dogs
cornered it? It pulled its head back with a howl
so hard, so toothy, it undid itself.
They crouch without soiling their sundresses. If caught,
They shout an alternate strategy in Russian.
They are the Chosen People -- lovable and sought --
They carry maps of Gondwanaland in glass jars

They fashioned from the perennial arc of pain.
They have an innate fear of standing still. See how
They run? Nomads at heart, they look at mirrors knowing
They are only as good as (and not even that).

They pepper the earth with lost luggage and goodbyes.
They keep to themselves on subways or when, often,
They head south of the equator in search of green.
They are a magic show in which the smoke is real.

They are divided into Us and Them.
They raise their fists whenever the chant is started,
They shall live without doors, They who are Them. Amen.
They hand deliver Beauty, day or night.

They rise like dry ice and are as impatient, for
They know that to know is not to know (enough).
They reorganize life--from Prozac to plastic.
They will to their heirs their worn-out lumbers and cares.
Seven Ways of Looking at a Satellite Dish

I.
On a hill in the desert--
The sun, the song of a cactus wren
And the dish.

II.
I fall asleep in its curve.
The blackbird and I and the weather
Exchange maps in dreams.
Their's, filled with stars. Mine, empty, official.

III.
Tripod of hollow bones desiring flight.
A blackbird perches on the tripod.

IV.
A man in a pea jacket makes notes in a book.
He stands in the snow
Beside the dish at the center of the snow.
The wind lifts a page, a strand of hair.

V.
Frozen in regard of Heaven!

VI.
Because God tapdances.
Because Greenland is empty of blackbirds.
VII.
The blackbird cocks its head
to listen to the hail
striking the dish.
Fourth World

1.
I just saw the puppets and they're cool looking.

2.
It's dark. The ticket-taker greets the children:

Please Wipe Your Feet Before Entering.
Silk curtains and skullcaps. A backstage built at the end of winter when afternoons return.

3.
I'm wrapped in blankets.

I wind my way past empty pots that line the walls for rain,

rain so seldom cracks widen but go unnoticed.

I hold the sacred corn. Small handfuls.

Alone, I've reached the place of jumping off.

I give the gifts. Unopened. Clean. Unseen

horses kick dust to distant thunder.
The sun has come. I sit and wait.
My hands have just begun to warm.

5. It was entirely sharp, the way he spoke to students: Wrong again, miss Artichoke—No, there's no word in Biblical Hebrew for doubt. Now what's the word that's often used to greet or say farewell among the Jews? You there, behind the pile of dead starlings—undress and acknowledge red, yellow, white playing within you. Go ahead, we might hope, wish day come, not choose not to be. The headmaster bounced his whip off his knee—the boy was sure each thwack would leave a scar.

6. First Chill--then Stupor--then the letting go--

7. Little Charles spilled his milkduds. At fifty pence a box, his Mum will throw a fit. Nevermind Her: The puppet prince just lost his head. It rolls, an avocado pit, a pit without, a pit within.

8. I told the puppets it would be o.k.
9.
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.
The strings are tangled bad. But shows go on.
I hadn't thought his death undid so much.
At least the kids are here, each sipping Coke.
My partner's wristbone hangs from balcony fourteen. They think the sound it makes is cool.
Without his hands, his voice, the show's amuck.

10.
Kachinas dance all day at Oraibi.

Saffron rain falls
from the old man's hands.

Corn pollen prayer.

Talasi.
Kuwanlelenta.

We are caretakers
of a world we've thrown
out of balance: Fourth World,
Tuwaqachi.

11.
Outside the pueblo, a radio:

hey, hey,
my, my,
rock-n-roll
will never die.
better to burn-out
than to rust,
hey, hey,
my, my

12.
My lands! Her Royal Highness, Queen Amnesia,
will hold a ball for Christmas! Read below
for details. Read on! I can't, I haven't spectacles.
I will--here, give it here. Click, click. (My we're
moving slow). Well, it says admission's free
but each must bring the following: one hobbled horse
with golden shoes; a pink nosegay from France;
two strangers knowing nothing very well
about The Nutcracker or goose flambe;
a child under a stocking cap and twelve
decrepit painters who'll attest, I cannot paint
what then I was. Sounds fun! Let's go!
Clip clop  clip clop  clip clop  click click

The children clap and clear the auditorium.

13.
You haven't answers, wearing birch bark shoes
(there are faces growing in the earth).

A slight unnerving breeze has blown industrial spewage,
its guava green, on shore. The seagulls ask without ceasing.
The right questions. Begin with them: unseen strangers.
Before old age. Shall this generation waste and want?
Shall they empty and unstring?

14.
The seventh variable is annual
destruction of animal units or prey
destruction rate. The minimum kill was chosen
as a convenient value for studying
the effects of the other variables.

15.
A piece of dough
and bowl of water
for the best of us.

The tourists--
upset again:

no Mahi-Mahi
on the menu.

16.
In all this world there is no creature
but Thou Shalt Have.
Waiting for an Upward Gesture

Like a childhood
or surface of childhood or colors

framed by storefront glass. Like impatience
of crowds. Mime.

The finch sang each morning from those trees
barren of leaves.

Miserere?
It sang with a red bristle of

breastfeathers, with an open throat
to what would rise.
Cordelia

Up, then. Hoist it up, Lear -- never mind her silence unblinking the sun. It's done: Her need for you to dream her return.

What? You haven't seen her cage before? The bowl of water, the stars she's hung from string? Look up, then. Hoist it up, Lear! Never mind her!

Send her, her cage, this ship, to the wind and brine then stand back, as a father will, waving off your need. For you to dream her return,

curse right angles, then sweat and toss -- be the storm! The heart's a boat that won't give up. Then hoist it up, Lear. Never? Mind her, old man: She'll ask you (across the sea) what stars are made of, what volume the sky. She'll whisper there's need for you to dream. Her return,

if it happens, will be less than tribal but foreign to your eye. Your heart, a tattered flag. Lift it up, then hoist it up, Lear (never mind her need for you), to dream her return.
Notes on "Fourth World"

44. Oraibi is perhaps the oldest continuously inhabited community in North America. The Kachinas are spiritual intermediaries for the Hopi. The chief function of the Kachinas is to bring rain. The Kachinas are invisible forces of life and are visible only when the Kachina dances are held in the spring and autumn. Every spring the Kachinas return to live among the Hopi for six months until the corn is harvested, then they return to their winter home in the San Francisco Peaks.
52-3. According to the Hopi origin story, we are currently living in the Fourth World, World Complete, Tuwaqachi.
78. "...think not of yourselves, not even of your generation...think of those yet unborn up to the seventh generation...make all of your decisions with those generations in mind...the faces of future generations are looking up from the ground..."--Oren Lyons, faithkeeper of the Onandaga Nation.
83. V. Keats, "Ode On A Grecian Urn," 1.46.
89-91. The Third World, Kuskurza, was destroyed by a flood. Before the flood, Grandmother Spider gave each of the Pure Ones (those who had harmony in their hearts) a piece of dough and a bowl of water and then were sealed in reeds. In this way, the Hopi survived the third purification and emerged into our present world, the Fourth World. They would have to live lives of poverty and humility while being the caretakers of the earth.