



*Walking Through the Horizon*  
Cover Detail: "Atmospheric Mood"  
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## Margaret Holley: Four Poems from *Walking Through the Horizon*

### WALKING THROUGH THE HORIZON

It became my definition of summer, that July  
full of dog days, between jobs, between loves,  
a peace of idleness and heat punctuated by lightning,  
when I wandered my two rooms barefoot on wood floors,  
tall windows curtained in leaves, the cricket-pulsing air  
conditioned by iced drinks and the fan's hum.

Sirius the dogstar hid all day in the lion's mane  
of the sun, and with every step I took, a horizon  
I had once looked forward to passed through my cells,  
a subliminal verge. Sunset after sunset flew by me  
unnoticed and only showed up in the west. The best  
time to go out was eight or nine at night to drive

under Montgomery Avenue's lamplit foliage, windows  
down, radio low, a rising rattle of locusts escorting me  
home to another long novel, its endless sentences making  
my loneliness feel almost nineteenth century, almost  
someone else's. I had nothing to do but wait for fall  
to haul me up to speed and tear my rapt attention

away from the nothing, the lull that it rested on,  
tropical days in the doldrums, barely adrift into evening  
or a tomorrow or an August that promised never  
to arrive, enchanted insomniac nights of dozing  
and waking in a film of sweat in a sleeping house, safe  
inside its moat of ferns from any news of the world.

It's a memory I've hoarded for twenty-some years  
and still claim in moments of déjà vu when time stops,  
its seed case cracks open, as a storm cracks open,  
a whole summer happens in one hour, and I know again  
what Plato's paradise of souls awaiting rebirth is made of:  
birdsong, thunder, green, cicadas, and heat.

First appeared in *Schuylkill Valley Journal*,  
then in revised form in *Prairie Schooner*.

## RE-READING "FOUR QUARTETS"

When the year 1962 was inscribed in this book,  
one of your last Christmas gifts, I was eighteen,  
your eldest. What did I understand of these quartets?

Or of all that had happened, and would happen, to you?  
You were gone before I knew what I would be  
thanking you for in different forms all these years.

I've read them in several dorm rooms, mine  
and others', seduced by their music and high calling,  
but not understanding much, still being a Prufrock,

enamored with walking the same Cambridge streets  
Eliot had walked, feeling his book's strange weight  
in my hands when he died in my junior year.

In my rooms on Via Roncaccio with the view  
through palms and cypresses to Lugano's roofs  
and slopes falling steeply into the lake, with the lights

of Corona twinkling at the summit of San Salvatore,  
I read them. Among cobbled streets and piazzas,  
I learned more about the waste land than I wanted to.

I read them in a two-room apartment in Pennsylvania,  
its tall windows filled with oak and maple leaves  
filtering the fluorescent aura of science labs

and the globes of street lamps glowing on collegiate  
gothic façades and lit night windows, when all I did  
was annotate, comprehending even less.

Last night I read them with the lights of Phoenix  
wavering in the dusk beyond palms, mesquite,  
and one tall cypress taper beside Black Mountain.

And today I read them on my lunch hour at work.  
I've always pictured Burnt Norton as a charred ruin,  
and now I learn that this manor house was named

for the former house that had burned down.  
Burnt Norton, with its rose garden, rose from ashes,  
haunted but whole. *Home is where one starts from,*

he says. Actually I am coming to feel that home  
is what I travel toward, search for, learn to find,  
and that this dialogue is part of the destination.

Traffic streams north and south on Hayden,  
as I close up the office at five into rooms full  
of a medley of grays and sun through slatted blinds.

I let the CD play on through Track 3:  
“Transformation” for flute, cello, and strings.  
Cars move, music moves, even the light moves,

but I don’t move for a minute, while something  
passes through me, *a lifetime burning in every moment*.  
I’ve asked myself what I want to live to a hundred

for. Now I try out an answer: to understand  
these lines, these movements, this music you  
have given me, a life that goes on unfolding

as if it meant to gradually gloss every image  
and phrase in this poem I have barely begun to  
fathom, and for which I thank you again:

the endless task, the workday ending in revelation,  
a moment of presence infused with past,  
future, poetry, sunlight, music, and mystery.

First appeared in *The Southern Review*.

BETWEEN LIVES

Flying westward, Philly to Phoenix,  
PHL to PHX, ticker symbols for the old

and the new life, I turn my watch back  
to do three hours of morning over again,

at cruising altitude on a one-way ticket,  
the phase of moving where I just sit still.

I'm sure I've brought plenty of baggage,  
but I've left all my keys behind, keys

that locked me in as often as they let me in.  
Thus my consent to this flight. I recall

my in-laws' myna bird who would not  
leave his cage. "Stand back! I'm an eagle!"

he squawked but clung to his perch.  
I think of Leonardo dreaming of wings

fashioned of cloth, rods, and cables,  
the immense, slow-motion labor to lift one

human body into the high caravans of sky.  
I wonder how much of me is still aloft

in the air of my old office, my home.  
How much of me roams those rooms

at night watching leaves cover and uncover  
the street lamp, watching the snow fall?

And what remnant of me is left to sit here  
in this airplane 37,000 feet off the earth?

A ghost of my late self. The plane is a *bardo*,  
a Buddhist place between lives, where souls

congregate, dazed, quiescent, waiting out  
our forty days to rebirth – a dim metal tube

flying above the clouds with the shades down,  
so many sleepers hardly suspecting the openings

toward which we travel. I'm still in love with  
my past life – pin oak and red maple woods,

Pennsylvania rain percolating down into roots,  
the cobbled streets of southern Switzerland,

Michigan Dutch elms sifting sunlight, birds  
swooping, memory moving through what it

loves, which is all of it, hopes, grief, fear,  
each narrow bed, each mansion of stars.

Strange to see us seat-belted into rows,  
dozing off and on to the engines' drone,

sipping drinks, reading the world's news,  
or novels, or taking in the in-flight movie,

as we leave the miles and years behind us,  
like the contrail I imagine tailing this plane,

a cloud wake of leaves, crumbs, lists,  
drafts flying like calendar pages, leaving too

my last qualms, the final droplets of doubt,  
my myna brain with its habitual anxieties, all

evaporating over Missouri, Oklahoma,  
New Mexico into the luminous blue.

First appeared in *Atlanta Review*.

NIGHT BLOOMING IN PAUL KLEE

Having spent all day as a draftee  
slathering gray paint on bomber wings and bodies,  
while planes flew and crashed around him  
in the loud Bavarian air,

he returned at dusk to his quiet room, where,  
from muddy fields and the waste of war,  
he drew a vivid hue, a twilight and midnight blue  
through his brush into *Night*

*Flowers*, 1918: uncurling ferns and palm  
fronds, a rocket-shaped watchtower, a pendant  
sunflower, and a black orb all swim in a sea  
of sapphire and ultramarine.

With so many fellow painters dead – August Macke  
fallen at Perthes, Franz Marc in the mud  
of Verdun – Klee was exempted  
from front-line duty and so did his best,

while the planes roared overhead, to dive through  
iris and blackberry blue to a beauty  
one note deeper than dread. *This week*, he wrote,  
*we had three fatal casualties; one man*

*was smashed by the propeller, the other two crashed  
from the air. Yesterday, a fourth came plowing into the roof  
of the workshop, turned a somersault, and collapsed  
upside down in a heap of wreckage.*

I drive the Pima Freeway home with war news  
on the radio and the sky stained with smoky liquid,  
a purple and tulip-red cloud smear,  
a blue-bottle aura, tinctures of air

as untouchable as music. The work day's end  
is the dawn of another kind of mind, half-enchanted,  
as lush as carpets of roadside lupine  
as rich and pure as his palette.

The car radio relays the sounds of gunfire  
from time zone to time zone, reporting on dawn  
flushing the desert air over there  
while here, to the west of the freeway,

the last of our dusky pink is being charcoaled out.  
To the sound of bombers heading

home empty, I'm all too glad to drive on  
into the magical blues

of his painting, *Nächtliche Blumen*,  
which I like to translate as "Night Flowers,"  
because it does. Remember this morning's live update  
from the hotel? *Night is falling on Baghdad*,

*and we can see the explosions.* We see them, too,  
the sudden white blooms, even though evening rises  
like a blue morning glory closing around us,  
or a bushful of larkspur,

that bouquet held in the ground's fist,  
its very slow explosions of indigo opening  
into violet-white at the heart of each floweret,  
the wild eyes of the world.

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