

## Favorites from 2010

It was another exciting year at *Roadrunner* thanks to many: the poets who sent their ku to share, the Scorpion Prize judges—Marjorie Perloff, Rae Armantout, and Tom Raworth—who took the time to read each issue thoroughly and thoughtfully before offering comments that added to our appreciation of poems. There were the contributors—Fay Aoyagi, Eric Selland, Hiroaki Sato, and Jim Kacian, as well as both Tom Raworth and Alain Kervern who took the time to be interviewed, and Michael Healy who provided French translations. And a heartfelt thanks to our readers and those that take the time to provide feedback. We want to acknowledge some highlights from volume ten by offering some brief comments.

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.  
March, 2011



# **Paul's Favorites from 2010**

**stay with me  
with the light out  
and water glass**

**feel free to stay here  
there's a system you  
always said that**

**Richard Gilbert**

*(from issue X:1)*

How many readers get the feeling they're eavesdropping on both of these scenes? They are Carveresque with all of their withheld parts. Are they old lovers? The progression in the second of these is particularly interesting, going from the speaker's politeness in the first line, which might imply a distance between these two people. And in the next line, coming to "system" it gets tenser—after all, what is more formal than a system? "You always said" suggests to me that a considerable length of time has passed since they've seen one another. He's heard it several times before. Though the rhythm is nearly conversational, I find such a timid intimacy about both of these.



**three heavy horses in rape where I can not stop**

**Clare McCotter**

*(from issue X:3)*

Intriguingly, McClotter leaves room for interpretability here by choosing to go with one-line. She could be conveying a profound sensory encounter, a psychological letting-go, a rapturous surrendering unrestrained moment in wide-open rape fields among horses at rest, or possibly in gallop. Is she observing them or is she atop one? How close she is to the horses is not revealed. Her use of the adjective “heavy,” at first glance, might sound redundant, but the alliteration between “heavy” and “horses” enhances the ability to express this experience in words.

She could be there in these rape fields on foot—in the way of three speeding horses—and having to make a break for a fence, a tree—the nearest place of safety—in which case, the poet vividly expresses the alarm she would have felt.

But I’d say “heavy”, more than anything, conveys that the horses are in foal. If this is the case, perhaps it is the poet hearing her proverbial biological clock ticking, and the pregnant horses elicit feelings of maternal urges which have been suppressed, and stir something in her, to the point where she cannot help but let them surface.

One chilling reading takes “rape” as a verb in its most horrifying sense. Viewed thus, we see the three perpetrators as “heavy horses”, large brutes. Making these associations, one goes cold. To completely outrule the possibility for this reading, the poet might have used “rape fields” or “fields of rapes”. It might have been more noticeable in three-line as:

three heavy horses  
in rape  
where I can not stop

or:

three heavy horses  
in rape where  
I can not stop

We've seen haiku from the poet with horses in them before, so this last reading—the dark flip-side to the one first mentioned—may be a stretch, but nevertheless, it's a possibility. While not oblique, Clare McClotter has built into this poem psychological dimensions where readers can fill in the details, and we might find a little more each time we return to it.



**one by one they fly to see it broken**

**Scott Metz**

*(from issue X: 1)*

One way I've read this . . . I think of ancient bird migrations here trusting nothing but their instinct heading toward their wintering places. The poet taking this in, with the knowledge of what climate and environmental damage has done to them, could be filled with a sense of guilt, pity, or gloom. "One by one" painfully drags the scene out. A shadowy mixture of emotions make up the tone of this ku—sympathy, anger, hopelessness, but above all I find a sensitivity to the realities of a changing world and the natural balance which has been disrupted: what we've lost; what may not be recoverable. Poets have long seen birds as representative of nature itself and after all the harm we've inflicted on the natural world and its inhabitants in the name of progress this is a difficult scene for a poet to absorb, let alone express. Ending with "broken" reinforces the dark poignancy of this ku. It comes off of as more than a mere observation. Metz also is able to place us in the now-damaged habitations these birds will arrive at, and we might imagine ourselves seeing them through their eyes.



**Osiris  
reconstructed  
buttercups**

**Peggy Willis Lyles**

*(from issue X:2)*

Connections surely can be made here to Osiris, the Egyptian “god of the afterlife”, who, according to myth, was murdered by his brother, chopped into fourteen pieces, and scattered all over Egypt. His wife Isis was said to have searched and collected the parts of his body and reconstructed it.

To be brief, I see Lyles finding the couple’s spirit and essence all around her—looking past their tribulations—as we arrive at the lightness we find in buttercups. And we could even take “reconstructed,” as the past tense verb of “reconstruct” as suggesting this work has been done by the hands of Osiris himself or perhaps his wife. I tend to think that Lyles is implying that what Isis represents is embodied by the buttercups with their simple beauty and persistence, and, in this sense, the same strong woman’s presence that we find in many of the haiku Peggy Willis Lyles left for us emerges.

And just to put this out there, I wonder if she has she got the extra-solar planet HD 209458 b, otherwise known as Osiris, in mind? I can’t say I know if it’s visible with a telescope. Perhaps taking in the heavens on a clear summer night, she thinks of this planet discovered in 1999. I perceive at least a hint of concord between science and religion or spirituality.

A mere three words conjures up several possibilities. However Osiris comes across, the progression of the poem makes us think deeper about buttercups, the natural world and our place in it, be they occupying a container—plucked and displaced on a windowsill—or randomly growing around her. I think of cracked sidewalks, unkempt lawns, the left-wild spaces where buttercups are left alone to flourish,

places we have a tendency to overlook, and how we might be given a taste of something spiritual, a place in the grand scheme of things. We'll miss Peggy's poems, but she's left us all so much, and we are grateful for that.



**hurricane season**

—

**the first bite in the apple  
missing**

**Gary Hotham**

*(from issue X:2)*

With the memory of Katrina still hauntingly vivid, “hurricane season” immediately catches our attention. It’s followed by an interesting multi-hyphenated break (Hotham has been using these effectively in recent years) that has a deep cutting effect. We peer in. The striking way the poem ends—with the first bite missing from the apple—invites a pause from readers. It’s here where we are left to wonder why it is that the apple is left unbitten. With an apple, there’s no shortage of symbolic associations that can be drawn. We might see the act of not eating the apple hastily and pausing for a moment of contemplation as one individual’s intimate reflection on lives lost to, or forever changed by, a hurricane. Abstaining from the pleasure of eating the apple can be a private remembering or paying of respects, but that’s just one way of reading it. Hotham allows readers to partake in the quietude of this moment by sharing with us this subtly thought-provoking poem.



**rain swept off  
the roiling lake  
i murdered a nap**

**William M. Ramsey**

*(from issue X:2)*

A curious and inviting poem from William Ramsey. The third line catches us off guard. Scratching our heads, we might ask how we are to take, “I murdered a nap.” We might perceive an allusion to Shakespeare’s, “Macbeth doth murder sleep,” those famous lines, and recall how the guilt from having murdered King Duncan, along with the voices that haunted him, tormented MacBeth and kept him from sleeping. Do the agitated waters here stir up some feelings of guilt? Does the commotion keep him from getting his nap, or has it induced one of those sleeps that seems to pass in a flash?



**seems to know  
what I'm made of  
the taxidermist's eye**

**Peter Yovu**

*(from issue X: 2)*

How the psychological parts and elements that make up the mind can be objectified, albeit dehumanized, here and likened to the “stuff” that fills once-living creatures for mounting on walls is rather eerie. I sense a disharmony between the speaker and the taxidermist, and see Yovu—forever the ironist—preserving, in the poem itself, the tension between the two. The poet with his craft constructs these three lines from a living moment, in a way not unlike any of the mounts that the taxidermist has done.



The following are other poems from last year, and though without comments, each is equally as engaging as those above:

**lake—someone's  
swimming thru  
yr blindness**

john martone

(X: 3)

**i clap for spring  
and banish a key  
more minor than mine**

(X: 2)

**pig and i convicted by our aphorisms**

Lee Gurga

(X: 2)

**the lighthouse  
invites the storm  
then lights it**

Malcolm Lowry (Garry Eaton)

(X: 1)

**a hierarchy of apples in the moonlight**

Fay Aoyagi

(X: 1)

**arsenal reduced to ruins just bright your speaking**

Susan Diridoni

(X: 3)

**an ad for a device that allows one to “touch truth”**

Philip Rowland

(X: 2)



# **Scott's Favorites from 2010**

**Anorexia plus Silicon  
June gets a bruise  
then it starts to rain**

**Chris Gordon**

*(from issue X:3)*

This ku plays interestingly with the tradition of nature poetry. The first line creates a mathematical problem of modern dilemma: what is beauty?; what is natural?; what is artificial? How do these entwine in the 21st century? ‘Silicon’ presents us with a kind of double-edged sword: it’s not just used to remold the modern human, it’s also a “metonym for the American high-tech sector”, and something that held and holds enormous sway over our modern life and world.

Nature is brought into question further in the second line: is it nature/a chunk of season anthropomorphized, or is it a woman’s name? Whatever the case, it’s/they’ve been injured, and the misreading/double-reading adds depth.

This ku, i feel, captures our early 21st century zeitgeist, stabbing us with our modernity, our culture, and our world at every turn, every curve, throwing us into a reflection upon it and what we’re all surrounded by on a daily basis (our “new” nature; our artificiality). The first line is affective in this way especially in that it forces reflection: what does Anorexia plus Silicon equal exactly? It’s an unfinished equation we’re forced to reflect upon and complete. In the third line, darkness sets in again and nature excretes its naturalness, doing what it does and can only do. At the same time, this line lightens the load, bringing back a bit of familiarity and comfort along with it (the nature poem doing what it so often does and is expected to, which is, oftentimes, reporting a bit on the weather). What’s fresh about this third line though is the “semantic shift” it creates in the poem, taking us on a journey from culture/industry/capitalism/media/the body/nature v artificiality, to a strange melding/double-reading of body and nature in the second line, to nature itself. And yet, while the third line (the ku’s culmination) appears more “natural”

and “in-line” with nature poetry, i can’t help but wonder how natural that rain really is. Emotionally, it weighs the poems down with sadness, the raindrops not being unlike tears or acid rain or weather that’s uncharacteristic of the season.



**in the garden steel ears for dreams come whistling**

**Darrell Lindsey**

*(from issue X:2)*

The ku that comes to my mind when i read this poem is Kaneko Tota's

梅咲いて庭中に青鯨が来ている

ume saite niwachuu ni aozame ga kite iru

Plum in bloom, and all over the garden blue sharks are visiting

*(trans. by Hiroaki Sato)*

Different poems of course, but i couldn't help from recalling Tota's ku when i read Lindsey's. Not to compare/contrast them too much, and an argument of intertextuality/allusion might be stretching it, but one thing they share is a surreal element of surprise: "blue sharks" and "steel ears". Another, of course, being the garden.

The seasonality of Lindsey's is more inviting to explore, for me, because the seasonality is somewhat, in a dream-like way, hidden, and hence more mysterious; for me, there's more of an invitation as opposed to a new/fresh/unusual (outlandish?) combination, as in Tota's melding of plum blossoms and sharks.

Something else: i find that this ku has a physical effect on me. It makes me feel like i've become something of a garden statue: solitary, still, forever in wait, watchful, listening, thinking. . . .

What i especially like about this ku by Lindsey though are the rich layers within it, the "misreadings as meaning" it offers me. It has "grammatical ambiguity" but also

“imagistic fusion” and a bit of “the impossibly true”. At different times, with different thicknesses of fog and light in the brain, i find/construct meaning in the fragments “garden steel” (fencing, barriers, statues, the contradictory make-up of ‘garden’ and ‘steel’), “steel ears” (real and/or preferred or unknowing deafness, parts of a statue, the heartless Tin Man?), “ears for dreams” (the auditory sense attuned to a place where reality, subconsciousness and the imagination play), and “dreams come whistling” (a marvelously fresh way to express the way dreams arrive, not through the nose, or eyes, but through sound, inviting readers the possibilities of the whistling being perhaps sinister, a harbinger of darkness, anxiety-ridden and dreadful/fear-drenched, or, on the other hand, a source of light, playfulness, and fun). A delightful invitation.

In addition, “the garden” as an intertextual, Western, allusion is attractive and freshly done, creating within the poem a balance of the ancient (“the garden”), the now (“come whistling”) and the future (“for dreams”), presented, interestingly, out of order in the poem.

Read all at once makes for me an astounding experience: a poem which is not simply (or simplistically) *about* an experience but *is* a multi-layered experience unto itself. An immensely rereadable ku.



## Clicking back to Hyper, Kansas

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

(from issue X:3)

A ku that playfully, and ironically, twists time, space and consciousness, yet also acts as a kind of mirror for us to reflect upon our modern life as well as a life not far behind us.

Two allusions come to mind when i first read this ku.

The first is *The Wizard of Oz*. On one level, the “clicking” is Dorothy tapping the heels of her ruby slippers together, helping her awaken from her adventures/dreamworld and return to her real, true, not-so-Oz life in Kansas. In a modern sense, it encapsulates our zeitgeist, the computer age—the “clicking” being, instead, the computer mouse/button, not ruby encrusted shoes (or pure silver in the original book), going from one reality to another and, at times, not knowing what is real/true or not. And so certain themes become apparent: mechanization, freedom, reality, dreams/imagination, computerization, time/speed, concentration (and the inability to as well): the rush and hyper-speed of modern life.

The second reference, for me, is Jim Kacian’s

as far as the eye Kansas

Both taking advantage and playing artfully with time, space, place, and language.

Grammatically, does the comma in Pfleuger’s ku create a distinct, explicit place (Hyper, Kansas)?, or two places far removed, as in a list (Hyper and Kansas)? Whatever the case, “Hyper” lends irony to the poem in that it’s quite the opposite

of Kansas (a place commonly/culturally generalized as moving at a slower pace, less “active” (*hyper*) life-wise, as well as scientifically/culturally). If it *is* a place *inside it*, one existing within the other (“Hyper” being the lesser/smaller of the two), then it brings “Kansas” into the modern era/modern times (not unlike what this ku is in some ways trying to do with its own genre. Another irony?). And then, of course, is the question: is Hyper, Kansas a real or imagined place?

Lastly, this ku is “pointing to a missing subject” or, more precisely, “pointing to a missing *place*”. After all, the poet is “clicking *back*”. Not forward. Not ahead. And yet, as a haiku, it most definitely is.



**the struggle to get a lily to stay in water after all**

**Kala Ramesh**

*(from issue X:3)*

It seems we're finally starting to see connections, relationships, and nods to our own English-language haiku literature, done with depth, artistry, and heart instead of the emptiness and transparency of a bad joke or pun (or an attempt at connecting to an ancient haiku/hokku which more often than not simplistically comes across as tired, formulaic, and/or over-used).

Here, at least for this reader, the allusion points to Nick Virgilio's lionized

lily . . .  
out of the water,  
out of itself

Ramesh's ku ends irruptively, though on a perfect note ("all") that throws the reader into reflection, if not right back to the beginning of the poem. What is 'after all' referring to exactly? "[A]fter all" the struggle? "[A]ll" the hardship? "[A]ll" the love? "[A]ll" the sharing? All of that and more it seems. An invitation that is infinite, and i imagine that for some that is uncertainty is agonizing..

Contrasted with Virgilio's ku, Ramesh's implements the shadow of humanity, making it more apparent and less symbolized. It's as if Virgilio's lily has been plucked from its source, is away from its natural habitat, and is now being dealt with on a more personal, individualistic level.

In addition, Ramesh's ku carries with it the emotional experience of trying to make somethings beautiful, to make something stay put, or to stay a certain way—the

balance of naturalness and artificiality, suffering and joy, comfort and hardship. The poem's one-line structure, the "speedrush" of reading it, heightens all of these aspects of it. Slowed down, each part of the poem, depending on how a reader reads it, can go off in many different directions, finding different destinations and pressure points.



**half mile down  
the shell blue eye  
of the canary**

**Patrick Sweeney**

*(from issue X:2)*

One reading of this ku by Patrick Sweeney offers us the possibility that it's based on direct experience, "half mile down" being ambiguous then. In this case, perhaps the poet traveled a half mile down into a valley or down a mountain, wherein the poet might simply be stating what it was they found there or came across: a canary. At which point they looked into one of the bird's eyes, dead or alive.

Or is it a "half mile down" inside the poet? Is it a poem of the interior? In which case the bird, and its eye, become more meaningful, more symbolic (a thing that has been materialized out of the poet's feelings and emotions).

Or is it a combination of the two?

Yet another reading offers a playful, fantastical, strange, unique trip to an unknown, yet familiar place, not unlike entering a rabbit hole to Wonderland, or awakening in Oz, wherein we've actually entered a canary's eye (or one of *the* canary's eyes) and travel, magically, a half mile down into its "world".

The ku plays with time, and especially space, making one feel almost weightless in the midst of reading it, not unlike a bird. Why a half mile? Why not a full one? What happens there at that half mile marker? An ending? A new beginning? A realization of where one has gone, where one has been? Is it *only* a half mile down (not a long distance), or is it, in fact, a great/vast distance? The specificity is concrete and tangible, yet mysterious and inviting.

Sweeney's ku has the painterliness of hokku by Buson: the blue of the eye, the yellow of the canary's plumage. Emotionally, there's strength and life in these colors, but also delicateness. The adjective "shell" is perfect, conveying softness, fragility, even a coastal, oceanic landscape/world, even a sense of something having washed up on shore after a great journey.

The canary itself though perhaps points towards a reflection on death and destruction. The canary is known to be the only bird that can fly through a hurricane safely. Also, canaries were formerly used by miners to warn of dangerous gases ("canary in a coal mine"). True or not, perhaps Sweeney is playing with these "mythologies".

On another level, the poem works through its watchfulness, its noticing, its stillness, its ability to pierce, and its ability to involve the reader in this, if not *make* the reader act in these ways—not unlike Wallace Stevens'

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

from "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917), a poem, or *part* of a poem, that creates a perfect, imaginative balance of stillness and movement, starkness of color (black and white), life and death, singularity and abundance/multitudinousness.



**that we could flower where the earth is so**

**Peter Yovu**

*(from issue X:3)*

A wonderful sense of invitation here, openness, and universality. A balance of beauty and ugliness/destruction. The ku causes one to reflect on place, time/era, culture, country. To look around oneself, at one's surroundings, at one's environment (a certain reading might, in fact, lead one to a heavy meditation on environmentalism and pollution). The ku seems to ask us to appreciate, and find the sacred and sincere, yet be critical and, in fact, critique. There's sadness, but not a defeated attitude. And yet there's also hope and joy. It gets to the heart of what life so often is when one truly looks without being blind. It shows an appreciation of life, while being realistic about the good, the bad, and the ugly.

One possible reading i found that interests me is the ku's Issa-like quality, wherein the cuts and jumps in the poem have the poet speaking to a flower, and looks like this:

that we could[,]  
flower[,]  
where the earth is so

expressing a kind of kinship with Nature/the wild and whatever is infringing upon them. The flower is human-like, and the human flower-like, displaying a tight bond on this planet—an intimacy, a fellowship. The “we” emphasizes this reading.

The ku points to two missing things: “that we could” points to a missing *verb*; “where the earth is so” points to a missing *adjective*. i'm drawn to completing the

first “link”, as in: “that we could” love, “that we could” survive, “that we could” grow, “that we could” FLOWER.

“Flower” in the ku acts as a kind of power pivot word.

The second link of the ku points to such conclusions as: “where the earth is so” polluted, “where the earth is so” violent, “where the earth is so” ruined, “where the earth is so” cold, “where the earth is so” deceptive. And so on.

Both cuts are abrupt and throw us into a space of reflection, watchfulness, pulling/pushing the reader to complete and create the thought/feelings/imagery. Yovu’s ku, at different times, makes me think of certain moments from Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man*, or Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.



Other favorites of mine from 2010 on par with the above:

**that point of white before christ muscles in**

**Helen Buckingham**

(X:3)

**prunes and apricots in terms of feminism**

**Lee Gurga**

(X:3)

**the old names for countries levitating the Pentagon**

**Eve Luckring**

(X:1)

**vulture the chest's last organ**

**john martone**

(X:3)

**drawing a breath  
old elephants go there  
to die**

**Carolye Rohrig**

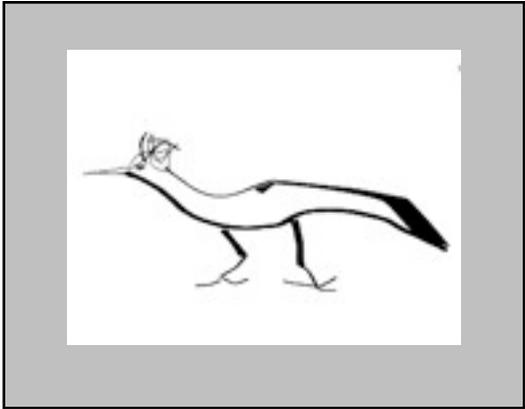
(X:3)

**a delay in large leaves**

**Philip Rowland**

(X:2)





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