HAIKU IN THE WORKPLACE

Archival Feature

The Haiku Foundation
Introduction to Haiku in the Workplace

From October 2014 through April 2016 Haiku Foundation president Jim Kacian offered a weekly column on haiku for the London Financial Times centered on the theme of work. Beginning next week we will share these columns with the haiku community at large, along with an invitation to join in the fun. Send us a poem on the theme of the week, from the classical Japanese tradition, or contemporary practice, or perhaps one of your own, which you might even write for the occasion. The best of these will be added to the column.

Let’s begin our new feature with a consideration of work in the broadest terms: what is work to you? And how has it come to be featured in your haiku?

The First Week’s Theme: Work (in General)
Haiku in the Workplace:  
**Work (in General)**

Let us begin with our general topic — work itself. Work ennobles us, bores us, captivates us, grinds us down, enables us and steals our time. It’s likely the thing we will spend the most hours of our lives doing (apart from sleeping). It is central to our self-image. It feeds us, and it consumes the time we might use to find other ways to feed ourselves. We love it and hate it, wake up with it on our minds, will do nearly anything to get it off our minds. It is a constant in our lives, and an absence. Let us consider, then, the work we make of work.

Several of you played with the concept that work never ends:

```
busy days
rush on from each other
a thought
 [Julia Clark]
```

Is the self-awareness of the third line self-admonishing? Or is it a step outside the realm itself?

Some attested that work recognizes no authority:

```
I am the boss
I come home
I change the diaper
 [Evan Flaschen]
```

Of course we recognize the poet is laughing at his own circumstances, where his dominion in one setting has no purchase in another. But a straight reading might be that it is the changing of the diaper that makes him the boss — a somewhat darker take.

And most recognized there are compensations:
the joy of work
comes in a wage packet —
so many positions

[David Dayson]

Again, the quizzical third line opens the poem to interpretation: is this a reference to the circumstances of the many workers in the office? Or perhaps to a cast of mind that is set loose by the weekly paycheck? Or even the sexual combinations such a paycheck might produce? The words don’t quite say, which make the poem open-ended, and leave us with no certain recompense for our work in parsing.

There were a number of poems testifying to the specifics of work. This one was cleverer than most:

it’s just work —
a tax inspector
nails their files

[David Dayson]

The neat reversal of the ultimate line puts us in mind of just the sort of devious machinations tax inspectors indulge in, while the throw-away first line means to have us believe there is nothing personal in it — just business.

My three choices this week all offer a kind of bleak despair before the seeming perpetuity of life lived in chains for the foreseeable future. This is certainly not the only possible take on work, and probably is likeliest for those of a certain age: no longer innocent and invested with energy to change the world, but decades to go yet before retirement is an option. I don’t know if such a description fits these poets, but it fits the personae of their poems.

My third choice goes to this chilling picture of depersonalization:

inside my office
I cannot feel
the snowflakes

[Evan Flaschen]
The poet knows she is missing something, something presumably she has felt before, but the office anaesthetizes her. Is the solution as simple as stepping outside the confines of the room? We can’t say, nor can we be sure that she hasn’t been immobilized by her numbed condition.

Our second place poem presents an equally grim snapshot of the poet’s circumstances:

```
two screens
with text and numbers
forty six weeks
[Julia Clark]
```

There is a kind of stasis to this picture, which is renewable each year in exactly the same way. Such a prospect is deadening, but there is a hint that the poet is not dead inside — there are six weeks left unaccounted for.

How do we defeat this encroaching paralysis? More work? Perhaps our only recourse short of resignation (in either sense) is that wonderful human invention, wry humor:

```
Sisyphus
dreams of promotion —
a larger rock
[David Dayson]
```

Casting our plight in light of a famous laborer reduces the personal sting, and at the same time recognizes the mythic scale of our labors. The ironic wish for an increased load undercuts our sense of its difficulty, and at the same time notes that this is self-inflicted. We may still need to push that rock up that hill again tomorrow, but at least we’ll be clear-eyed and refreshed for the challenge. Beautifully managed, and a fine poem with which to end.

Since beginning this column in September 2014, we received thousands, and published hundreds, of haiku, senryu, short poems, adages, apophthegms, epigrams, monostiches and the like. We hopefully learned some of the differences between them, and some of the approaches and techniques that might improve the ones we write. Most of all, we shared poetry, which is a very great thing in a world that does not reward such enterprise. We often think in poetic terms, but there is little
cultural incentive to note it, or write it down, or find a way to give it to others. So the task devolves upon us, and for its own sake. I was privileged to do this work for the 18 months this series ran, and hope that it was only the beginning of an evolving practice for us all. Writing, too, is work, and like all the work we undertake, it has its costs and its rewards. If you invest in your writing, and give it to others, you will be rewarded many times over, and in ways you cannot possibly foresee. It is these rewards of community and connection that to my mind far outweigh any monetary compensation we might receive. I wish you continued inspiration, and good writing, the best of work.

**New Poems**

Snow melting
in March . . .
my mother’s new smile

In addition to honoring my mother, this haiku is for the caregivers, and all who help us be well.

*  

oh, my mother . . .
all her life laying eggs
this queen ant
 — Ernesto Santiago

*  

work what better way to spend it
 — Michael Henry Lee

*  

*
pressing tasks —
she begins to write a haiku
instead
— Marion Clarke

*

snowdrifts . . .
quitting my job to write
paper piled before me
— Charlotte Digregorio, Cicada 22 (1996)

*

board meeting...
few zigzag lines
in each notepad
— Aparna Pathak

*

last days: how his uncle
used to test cotton bolls
round & round his palm
— Sheila K. Barksdale

*

here on the fourth floor
the vending machine works
harder than I do

*
another Monday
hot clouds of coffee
at every desk
      — Rachel Sutcliffe

*  

autumn rain –
in the teachers’ room
so much silence
      — Maria Laura Valente

*  

sunday cleaning
together with rubbish
goes an old broom
      — Nikolay Grankin

*  

the job
what i am
not who i am
cog
in the machine
honeybee

slow meeting
sneaking in
a haiku
      — Christina Sng
whole work day!
on my lawn far and wide
molehills
— Marta Chocilowska

winter blues...
a customer mocks
my accent
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

only so many hours
with a necktie . . .
cherry blossoms
— Tom Sacramona

summer school
one learnt foreign word
for each dive
— Vessislava Savova

weekly powerball
one number from never
working again
— Ron Scully
lunch break
finding food too
hard to swallow
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

night sky
on the office window
I face my face
— Debbi Antebi

rain-streaked windows
a day filled
with pivot tables
— Deborah P Kolodji

suicide
he said no one would care
standing room only
— Bruce H. Feingold

working from home
the project
counted in pajama hours
— Lori Zajkowski
Poets’ responses were surprisingly sympathetic towards the idea of “boss” in this latest round. Many chose to project an image of a person making difficult decisions at a personal cost, an admirable figure who shoulders responsibility:

    tiger stripes and eyes
    mark out his stride; his proud stance
    fierce yet lonely
    [Sarah Leavesley]

though at least one poet made a distinction between similar roles:

    a leader
    bends with adversity . . .
    a boss just snaps
    [David Dayson]

My third prize winner chooses to feature the heroic aspect of the boss in his milieu:

    as the sun crawls up
    and Big Ben chimes us in,
    his third black coffee
    [Sarah Leavesley]

We admire the tenacity, the will to purpose, and appreciate his sacrifice, grateful that it’s not us. My second prize elects a different aspect of the leader, recognizing human frailty as part of the package:
turbulent flight
the chairman
grips my hand

[Marion Clarke]

This is a complicated poem, it seems to me. Though it can be read as an exposé, in truth it suggests this leader has his fears, like all of us, and is willing to face them — he is flying, after all. And he is willing to let others witness these anxieties. This could have the effect of actually bringing those in his employ to a closer understanding of him, a human response. And of course fear of flying doesn’t necessarily make for a lesser leader where it matters most.

My top choice, however, takes a completely different tack, employing a metaphorical element to reflect an idealized conception of leadership:

off stage . . .
the piano tuner’s
silent joy

[David Dayson]

A piano tuner is probably not most people’s idea of a boss, but here he is emblematic of someone who has done all the necessary work, behind the scenes and silently, to bring off the concert to perfection. He is willing to allow the personalities of the world to shine as they must, knowing he has made it possible, even if few others do.

Is this the way your boss operates? What a great example for you. Let him know you know.

New Poems

once again this week
my boss belittles me
finding new words

overcast sky
and my boss’s
matching suit
— Nikolay Grankin

being patient
for the wrong boss
a fat paycheck
— Ernesto Santiago

casual Friday
dressed down
by the boss

the boss’
jumping reindeer tie —
year-end bonuses
— Radka Mindova

Old teacher
Still writing
with a blue pen
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo
the boss
but she doesn't know it yet
baby daughter
   — Christina Sng

self employed
telling my boss
to get lost
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

basement office
I ask the boss
for a raise
   — Terri French

Christmas jumper
the accounts director
even dorkier
   — Marion Clarke

annual review
my boss evaluates
my haiku
   — Amy Losak
* 

whispering
stops immediately
as the boss enters
   — Kristjaan Panneman

* 

capricious boss . . .
autumn whispers
in the office
   — Mohammad Azim Khan

* 

silvery moon
the boss slips into something
more revealing
   — Michael Henry Lee

* 

headmaster’s glare —
suddenly I become
a pupil again
   — Maria Laura Valente

* 

after work
another boss
at home
   — Olivier Schopfer
March equinox
my boss hands me two tickets
to Kyoto
   — Marta Chocilowska

*  
a slave at home
working on the computer
boss's a real driver
   — Paul Geiger

*  
seeing the guv'nor
I am even more annoyed
with my smile
   — Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy

*  
dress suit tie
all thumbs
groping for words
   — Betty Shropshire

*  
late at work
I bypass
boss's cabin
   — Aparna Pathak
new boss
she calls herself
a friend
— Ralf Bröker

a forcefield
around the figurehead
office Christmas
— Marietta McGregor

a hard day . . .
i take over the boss’s tic
when he leaves
— George Swede, *Frogpond* (1997)

passing spring
my boss has his eye on
boxwood pruning
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

morning darkness —
at the office before the boss
to get some work done
— Jennifer Hambrick
singing to me
a honey-do list —
morning meadowlark
— Chad Lee Robinson, A Hundred Gourds 5:3

office politics . . .
just a pretty face
at the helm
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

sunny weekend
I run into
my boss’ smile
— Debbi Antebi

Secret
Santa
draw
the
boss’s
name
— Deborah P Kolodji
Kayu in the Workplace: The Office Flirt

I anticipated that we might see two distinctly different approaches to this topic. On the one hand, there would be the flirters, evincing a brazen confidence in their animality, as condensed in this week’s third choice winner:

Coffee by the desk
An evening drink or two
Coffee in the morning
[David Pilling]

On the other hand would be the observers, who found the actions of the flirters to be, well, brazen and confident, as opposed, perhaps, to their own actions. They may approve or disapprove, but they would be doing so mostly on the sidelines. It is an observer who can note the following, this week’s second choice:

mistletoe-curling charm
he breathes she thinks —
mouthwash
[Andy Coleman]

But I should have thought further. It is a combination of these personae that resides in most of us. We would be that casual flirt, and at the same time that cautious swain. Physical and sensitive. Bold and meditative. George Clooney and Colin Firth. If only, as in this week’s top winner, in our dreams . . . :

immobilised . . .
frozen in a text trance
of e-yearning
[David Dayson]
New Poems

office stud
the way he mispronounces
fax
— Terri L. French

* 

circling
around me
a fly
— Ernesto Santiago

* 

what she could have said
went right through me all night
could have been the flu
— Ron Scully

* 

his right hand to back to back to business as usual
— Betty Shropshire

* 

office cat boldly
pads carpet casting glances
tail curled in a hook
— Kevin Trammel
office babe
her blouse getting lower
as she rises
—— Marion Clarke

office whispers
her underwriting
showing again
—— Peggy Bilbro

the office flirt
in the elevator
she’s all business
—— Michael Henry Lee

wrapping me
around her little finger
a paperclip
—— Mark Gilbert

Holiday Party
the boss steers his wife away
from the office flirt
—— Marilyn Appl Walker
year-end party
everyone becomes
the office flirt
   — Christina Sng

* 

carpool gossip
on the floor mats
yesterday’s snow
   — Elliot Nicely (*bottle rockets* 21)

* 

office party —
I’m watching wedding dresses
the day after
   — Marta Chocilowska

* 

sparks fly
a circuit-breaker
at the android plant
   — Marietta McGregor

* 

drawing close . . .
a new trainee smiles at me
like Mona Lisa
   — Nikolay Grankin
she gets a rise
out of her boss
the office flirt
— Johnny Baranski

office party
she moves
from plate to plate
— Mohammad Azim Khan

punch-drunk . . .
he picks tinsel
off my hair
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

eyes twinkle to boost
better collaboration
under mistle toe
— Csilla Toldy

slips out
in his groping eyes
my woolen scarf
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi
exchanging glances
during the coffee break . . .
steam rises from my cup
   — Olivier Schopfer

xmas sweater contest —
her v-neck plunges
below see level
   — Jennifer Hambrick

elf on the shelf
the office flirt returns
to her cube
   — Tom Sacramona

office flirt
invisible mistletoe
in their pocket year-round
   — Lori Zajkowsiek

Christmas School Party —
kissing under mistletoe
Maths and History
   — Maria Laura Valente
office party
my crush and I take off
our masks
      — Debbi Antebi

the shape
of the office flirt’s blush
secret santa
     — Brendon Kent

stolen glances —
flushing red cheeks
but not with cold
     — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo
Haiku in the Workplace: Promotions and Bonuses

Receiving a bonus or promotion is a tricky situation to deal with. Either you are the recipient, which is personally gratifying but can create the risk of arrogance in you and enmity in others; or else you are the observer of the event, which can cause jealousy and feelings of persecution and inferiority. Finding a balance through this complex emotional battlefield is no simple matter. Marion Clarke encapsulates this fraught emotional situation with a surprising and effective fourth line: “top corridor . . . / a colleague’s well-wishes / from the bottom / of her heart.” And of course those left behind are equally discomposed, as this poem, also by Clarke, illustrates: “the fixed smile / of the other contender / — limp handshake.”

My three winners this week take this as the background to their considerations. With tongue firmly in cheek, in my third place selection assesses the scale of his accomplishment:

wage bonus
I go for a larger bag
of chips with fish
Alan Summers, England

Modesty and self-effacement may be the best means of making our promotion more palatable to others, allowing them to discover that you haven’t really moved out of their orbit.

My second place selection offers a similar sense of self-abasement: not too self-important to recognize that our activities are no grander than that of invertebrates scuttling the beds of oceans:

new office space
the hermit crab checks out
a larger shell
Marion Clarke, Northern Ireland
It’s hard to be too envious of anyone who identifies with such company. My top winner this week makes a similar identification (though it would seem to be identifying someone other than the self):

```
little snail —
you climb so high
birds can see you
   David Dayson, England
```

The archness of the observation is telling and yet not overblown: the poem does not detail downfall, or incipient violence, it merely suggests the circumstances for such. The poet leaves it to our imaginations to fill in the (gory?) details. It feels like a perfect revenge in its own unassuming way. But what puts it over the top for me is its (I feel intentional and) express conversation with a famous classical Japanese haiku:

```
Hey, snail!
Slowly, slowly climb
Mt. Fuji
   [Issa, tr. Jim Kacian]
```

Such aspirations in a snail would be incredibly grandiose, but of course Issa is making fun of his own, and our, projections onto the snail. Scaling the heights may seem folly in itself, but our new poem suggests that, more, the poor snail is exposing itself to forces it hardly knows exist. We can even consider the poem a kindness on the part of the poet, a cautionary tale in ten words. Perfect.

**New Poems**

```
my stare
after my colleagues
after our boss
   — Dejan Pavlinovic
```
spinning
the rest
of the plates
— Ernesto P. Santiago

recession —
the end of the year bonus
a two euro scratch card
— Marina Bellini

Christmas bonus
grudgingly re-gifted
to Uncle Sam
— Terri French

odds of snow —
no Christmas bonus
this year
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

bonus
in the new economy —
you get to keep your job
— Jennifer Hambrick
headbumping
the glass ceiling
tangerine dream
— Marietta McGregor

mea culpa
the boss gives me
a raise
— Shloka Shankar

holiday bonus
making time and a half
again this Christmas
— Michael Henry Lee

Christmas bonus —
a little less in the red
my bank account
— Pasquale Asprea

first bonus
in mother’s hands
my promise
— Billy Antonio
year-end bonus
first girls night out
without the kids
    — Christina Sng

long waiting —
at last the squirrel
steps up the ladder
    — Pravat Kumar Padhy

before Christmas
my office’s armchair
became more comfortable
    — Nikolay Grankin

assistant super’s bonus
your own work and
all of the manager’s
    — Jan Benson

budget restraints . . .
Christmas bonus hour
cancelled again
    — Samantha Sirimanne Hyde
promoted
for her brilliant business mind
bottle blonde
— Karen Harvey

* green-eyed envy
around the water cooler
whose bonus?
— Marilyn Appl Walker

* newly appointed headmaster —
can’t help giving marks
during briefings
— Maria Laura Valente

* this year again
no pay raise
one more crack in the ceiling
— Olivier Schopfer

* working overtime
I celebrate
my promotion
— Debbi Antebi
his elevator
To the top
The boss’s son
— Brendon Kent

at the greasy spoon
he relishes
his promotion
— Charlotte Digregorio (Modern Haiku XXX:1, 1999)

showing off one more
inch of her cleavage . . .
annual bonus
— Christina L. Villa
Haiku in the Workplace: The Post-Holiday Season

Post-holiday blues is a real ailment:

decorations
come down — Post Tinsel
Stress Disorder
[David Dayson]

perhaps not quite so of-the-moment as PTSD, but much more widespread. And in this case, entirely self-inflicted. The sugar high of the holiday season induces a sugar crash in the dark days that follow:

after holidays
the repeat episode
of January gloom
[Ernesto Santiago]

which we often compound by setting ourselves unrealistic goals of how we would like to be, or behave, or appear, in the new year:

tinsel packed away —
we turn to detox diets
next year’s holiday
[David Dayson]

No wonder things seem so glum!

January chill —
slipping up on broken resolutions
[David Dayson]
The good news is that things usually get better — we become realistic about our resolutions, daylight lasts longer, and we get back on a more even keel with our emotions.

pine tree discarded —
we recycle ourselves
into New Year
[David Dayson]

One of the ways to expunge our gloom is by writing about it! I hope these helped. I was intrigued by the number of poems that employed literary techniques in this batch. Such techniques are generally eschewed in haiku, which traditionally has aimed more for a ding an sich approach to content. But I think these are worth noting. We find, for example, straightforward personification:

January strides in —
New Year’s resolutions
softly tiptoe out
[David Dayson]

as well as metonymy (where a related term is substituted for the word itself — this example uses two):

panto season ends —
a hoarse dame and a lame horse
limp into New Year
[David Dayson]

and this clever version of onomatopoeia:
onomoneywoe —
credit card bills after
oniomania
[David Dayson]
My three winners this week all do the work that these already-mentioned poems do, but in addition capture their moments in specific images rather than general terms. My third choice, for instance, is exactly what we think a haiku ought to be:

```
all that remains —
pine tree needles pricking
stockinged feet
[David Dayson]
```

We have a clear image relevant to the theme — remnant pine needles — and an activity where we might notice them — walking in stockinged feet. The small pricks are exactly that, on their first level, but also open to a second reading, wherein they become emblematic of the little impingements of the season, the letdown following the big day. The opening line works well enough, though it does have a slightly portentous feel in this context, which is why this does not score higher. The circumstance of our second choice is nothing if not self-induced:

```
gloom unfestooned —
a long hangover spills
into New Year
[David Dayson]
```

The conception of the “long hangover” captures our theme perfectly, and is easily visualized (saving us the pain of experiencing it ourselves). The choice of verb sloshes it into greater detail, and leakage seems apropos in this context. There is also the darkening effect of that repeated “oo” sound in the first line. All these indicate the poet’s control of his material. This week’s top choice:

```
winter shelters close —
under cover of moonlight
homeless disappear
[David Dayson]
```
is also, of course, keenly noted and sharply etched. The first line clearly limns the situation with no waste. And the third continues on to the expected consequence. It is in the second line that this poem rises above the descriptive. There is something about it, real or imagined, that deepens the sadness of this already sad situation. “Under cover” feels furtive, and to have this take place under “moonlight,” which is, after all, illuminating (if not quite the sun), creates a sense of unexplained menace. There is a sense that this dispersement, though visible, is yet invisible, and the emotion evoked cheapens the gaud of what has come before, even if it was heartfelt. The author abides by the strict syllable count here, too, and this formal element makes the whole event more structured, which makes it worse, as though this loss is built in to the system, unavoidable. Such treatment can feel padded out in some instances but feels perfectly natural here. The good news is that this season already behind us. We have another 50 weeks to gather the strength to face another holiday season. We probably should get started.

**New Poems**

after the holidays  
the Grinch still perched  
at the bosses’ desk  
— Terri French

*  

before dawn —  
the alarm clock reminds me  
end holidays  
— Maria Teresa Sisti

*
after the holidays
a company
of hangovers
  — Ernesto P. Santiago

*

holidays over
the tight constraint
of this tie
  — Rachel Sutcliffe

*

post-christmas lull
the queen bee
can’t get no
satisfaction
  — Roberta Beary

*

the wintering
of my corporate path
an email from H.R.
  — Jan Benson

*

rough morning
a carton of kefir
cools my hand
  — Nikolay Grankin
*  
Santa came  
Santa went  
I am still here  
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

*  
stray tinsel —  
iridescence  
in the web  
— Beth McFarland

*  
back to school —  
I still write 2016  
in the daily log  
— Marina Bellini

*  
post holiday  
everyone in the office  
on the same diet  
— Michael Henry Lee

*  
january airtime —  
the messiah has come  
and gone  
— Jennifer Hambrick
cold January —
compelled to accept
the new contract
—— Pasquale Asprea

back to work
a Christmas tree in the gutter
fragments of tinsel
—— Paul J. Geiger

January office memo
new year changed
by hand
—— Peggy Bilbro

early morning street
the sound of wind
through abandoned Christmas trees
—— Olivier Schopfer

first morning
the fog in my coffee
dreams an office
—— Brendon Kent
end of holiday —
the beginning
of a new countdown
— Maria Laura Valente

eating paperclips
this attempt to be ready
for the office manager
— Alan Summers

the new moon
Christmas lights blinking
at an empty room
— Debbi Antebi

half price sale
black leather daily planners
retired too soon
— Ron Scully

post-holiday stress
the office inflatables
in a slow meltdown
— Marilyn Appl Walker
January blues  
yet again I rewrite  
my resolutions  
— Marion Clarke

end of holidays  
the coal miner checks  
his headlamp  
— Pravat Kumar Padhy

on my bookshelf  
seeking *Think and Grow Rich* . . .  
finding *Walden*  
— Charlotte Digregorio (*Frogpond* 19:1, 1996)

post-holiday week  
the coffee machine  
all to myself  
— Christina Sng

post-holiday time —  
after all these calories  
difficult decisions  
— Goran Gatalica
tropical vibes
at the watercooler
Bali short break
   — Marietta McGregor

post boxing day
all those wishes
in my trash box
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

First Action —
remember password
then google ‘Easter’
   — Mark Gilbert

poinsettia
droops faces retirement
iris arrives
   — Trilla Pando

post holiday blues
my suntan fades
as i wade through emails
   — Jennifer Sutherland
This week’s submissions mostly divided themselves into a trio of contexts. The first of these, as we might imagine, is “the office” or workplace itself. One poet finds balance in the office environment by inviting the natural world in:

office window-sill
spreading crumbs
for blue-tits

Katherine Gallagher

Another notices that the office finds its own balance:

a sudden burst of
laughter behind a closed door
Friday afternoon

Lynne Rees

And another suggests that a balance has been found (though perhaps enigmatically) in the very act of writing about it:

a phone rings
in an empty office—
poet’s day

Tim Gardiner

The second context, which I’ll call “screens,” is the pervasive (and cursed) mediator between these realms of our lives. What a modern affliction this first poem reveals:
A quick weekend trip—
I managed to sneak away!
To check my email
Kerstin Dittmar

And no less touching and pathetic:

emails stack up
on the flickering screen—
a hoover wails
Tim Gardiner

The third context is outside the office—anywhere else, really. That’s where we might notice that our family obligations are getting short schrift:

The weekend is old
By the time I fully hear
My children’s laughter.
Gwyneth Box

Or else we might notice a different sense of our selves—I am almost tempted to say, a kind of freedom:

Along the cycle path
sycamore seeds and dragonflies
speed me homewards
?

And then there is the sad situation of imbalance—the other way:

all balance no work
a Starbucks of CEOs—
Gen Y selfie
Andrew Coleman
I couldn’t decide on just three poems this week, so I hope you will permit me the license of sharing my favorite four with you. My third place poem is from “outside the office:”

in the park
wind ruffling
my portfolio notes
Judy Kendall, England

This poem uses a slight misdirection, so that the third line can surprise and amuse the reader, and deepen the import. What seems perfectly idyllic—a moment in the park, the wind rising gently—brings us home again to the fact that we’re only taking a respite from our work. But finding a way to bring such a respite into a busy day is itself a kind for victory, and the poem celebrates that without actually naming it. My second place winner is from “the office,” and is a kind of “screen” poem as well:

weekend overtime
the kids all smiling at me
from a photo-frame
Lynne Rees, England

This poem is very well crafted, with the third line again timed for maximum surprise and impact. It’s also a 5-7-5 syllable poem, but so skillfully managed as not to seem wordy or over-long, as is often the case with such efforts in English. And of course it contains worlds of emotional power—not only the yearning for actual face-time with those kids, but also the sense of necessary sacrifice in forgoing that time to supply them with other things they need. My co-winners this week are both selected for their pathos, their exact limning of an emotionally fraught moment without excess or comment, and their command of the form. The first:
the programmer
woken by a sleeping screen
to offline loneliness
David Dayson, England

captures an element that is perhaps new to the world: the collocation “offline loneliness” I think to be quite special. Has it ever been possible to be more lonely than within the context of ubiquitous interconnectivity? Has social media made lack of contact unbearable? We can envision the woken programmer, bathed in the soft glow of diodes, feeling quite unattached in a world of electrons, and feel her pain all the more keenly for our own “screen” experiences.

The second:

home from the night shift
a quick kiss in the doorway
as she leaves for work
Andrew Shimield, England

achieves much the same pathos but in the human realm. This poem is a beautiful illustration that symmetry is not always balance. The price we pay for our daily bread can be higher than we even imagine, so the recognition of the processes by which we pay can be essential to our finding our balance. Writing such a poem can be a first step towards assessing the choices we make, however inevitable they may seem.

Congratulations to all who submitted for your willingness to address these issues, and I hope the process not only challenged but enlightened you. Most of all, keep writing!
day’s end . . .
cleaning women on the bus
speak their mother tongue
   — Charlotte Digregorio (*bottle rockets* 24, 2011)

* 

sleep hacking
the number of hours to work
or not to work
   — Ernesto Santiago

* 

always in a hurry —
the children are grown
without my knowledge
   — Maria Teresa Sisti

* 

working overtime
I almost forget
my way home
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

any day
I write a poem
is a good day
   — Mark Gilbert
commuting home —
I call to give him
dinner instructions
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

back from work I reassemble the pieces of my true self

circus juggler
his wife, his mistress
on the same night
— Johnny Baranski

sunlit margins
ever left-justified
laissez faire nights
— Jan Benson

dentist office window:
the jack-‘o-lantern’s
toothless grin
— Elliot Nicely (Frogpond 36.1)
watching the work
swim away
the heron

— Jennifer Hambrick

the conference . . .
mom calls me to ask
how are you?

— Nikolay Grankin

after hours
we take work
to the bar

— Christina Sng

her childcare bills
outstrip her wages
summer thunder

— Marietta McGregor

recession —
my pension plans
down the drain

— Pasquale Asprea
the 405 commute  
she steers with her elbows —  
flossing
   — Marilyn Appl Walker

client call —  
someone’s mother cheers  
my daughter’s home run
   — Roberta Beary

climbing up  
the coconut tree —  
a little closer to sky
   — Pravat Kumar Padhy

coffee break  
the scowl of the boss  
so eloquent
   — Eufemia Griffo

I punch the badge —  
only twenty minutes  
for my son’s pool lesson
   — Elisa Allo
nine to five
average work week
the see-saw
— Paul Geiger

coffee break
the swirls in
my mandala
— Billy Antonio

tipping point
work folders fall over
my family photo
— Debbi Antebi

switching
into night mode
firefly
— Brendon Kent

a nugget in
this lode
somewhere
— Elaine McCoy
heartfelt balance
after all these years
not invisible yet
— Goran Gatalica

late again —
“writing haiku”
not an option
— Marion Clarke

lunch time yoga
at the work station I straighten
the productivity chart
— Madhuri Pillai

piano tone restored
workplace stress
— MR QUIPTY

home again
after a week on the road
plum blossoms
— Deborah P Kolodji, (Close to the Wind, 2013)
get out in a hurry —
in my work bag
a nappy

— Maria Laura Valente
Haiku in the Workplace: Retirement

The topic for this week’s contest was retirement. Many of the entries were melancholic, but our winning poem was chosen for its empathy.

bridleless
the old racehorse gallops
when he wants
Andrew Shimield, England

Our guest judge Graham High, author and president of the British Haiku Society, notes: “The stark opening word ‘bridleless’, conjures up a person thrown on their own resources to fill the time.”

The first runner up is:

08.02am
he misses the train
and his old colleagues
Frances Trosborg, England

New Poems

retired; now —
in winter even the birds
forget to sing
— Ernest P. Santiago
retirement
through faded curtains
falling leaves
  — Rachel Sutcliffe

at the senior center . . .
he rocks
on the dance floor
  — Charlotte Digregorio

equally alike
the days are moving forward —
time for haiku
  — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

retirement
fresh out
of excuses
  — Michael Henry Lee

retirement card
all the people
whose names you never knew
  — Jennifer Hambrick
too poor to quit
I find myself retraining
life coach
— Karen Harvey

stately bonsai
from desk to kitchen
home at last
— Lynette Tan

despite these mayflies
are having the time of their lives
counting the days
— Mark Gilbert

retirement . . .
how many cherry petals
in my hair
— Diana Teneva

sleeping in
not sleeping in
retirement
— Johnny Baranski
retirement party
the cake knife slices
through my name
— Joe McKeon (Failed Haiku 1.3)

long-awaited retirement
my daughter phones me to ask
if I can babysit
— Christina Sng

my golden years
more gray
than black and white
— Mary P. Myers

amid laughter
her promise to read
all of Dickens
— Marietta McGregor

well-deserved rest
an old alarm clock is still
near the bed
— Nikolay Grankin
last day . . .
the spiteful boss
fakes kind words
   — Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

last year
to retirement
calculating benefits
   — Mohammad Azim Khan

chase —
retirement bounces
always farther
   — Maria Teresa Sisti

winter dawn —
his wristwatch only marks
free hours
   — Maria Laura Valente

honey-do list
#9 — a terraced
garden-scape
   — Jan Benson
granddaughter with office bag my half-way smile
   — Pravat Kumar Padhy

nowhere to be today
same can be said
for this red azalea
   — Ron Scully

after two months
retirement becomes
tiring
   — Amy Losak

last working day
amid applause
worry line
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

a lifetime
of pushing pen
how do I smell the roses . . .
   — Madhuri Pillai
* 

retired teacher
on vacation dreams
smiles of his pupils
    — Elisa Allo

* 

retirement party
the urge to put on my
comfortable shoes
    — Brendon Kent

* 

retired
playing solo chess
before dinner
    — Eufemia Griffo

* 

heat wave
the old dog takes refuge
under the shady tree
    — Olivier Schopfer

* 

newly retired
I make a to-do list
for my hobbies
    — Debbi Antebi
* 

sema la neve
sui fiori del miscanthus —
è solo luce

the snow
on the miscanthus —
it’s just light
    — Disingrini Severa

* 

even longer
walks in the park
at anytime
    — MR QUIPTY

* 

to leave the trail
and pack it in . . .
see ya later!
    — Michael Stinson

* 

high heels Goodwill
pantyhose in the trash
ransomed toes wiggle
    — Trilla Pando
* 

Last day at work  
already someone has taken  
the stapler from my desk  
— Alexis Rotella  

* 

retirement —  
new ideas for the young drifter  
in his novel  
— Steve Smolak  

* 

old tailor —  
stitching dark matter  
into stars  
— Roberta Beary  

* 

insight —  
a dazzling sun beam crosses  
my therapy office  
— Lucia Fontana  

* 

retirement party  
his watery eyes  
in the end  
— Pasquale Asprea
Haiku in the Workplace: The Commute

It’s not the commute that bothers us. That same track, under circumstances of excursion or dalliance, would bring us anticipation and joy. It’s the energy- and time-sapping black hole of the workday that awaits us that give the commute its particular tenor. And, being human, we have our ways of projecting this onto everything else. But the commute does give us time to consider our situation, as here:

Please mind the gap
between what you expected
and what you’ve got
— William Stelle

And it does give us time (if we’re not driving, and sometimes even if we are) to look around us to see how our fellow humans are coping, as here:

station crowds:
the netball player
threading her way
— David Jacobs

Nevertheless, it is the sameness that is the most telling, and most depressing, thing we associate with the commute:

from the morning mist
the train lumbers into view
same as yesterday
— William Mist

This deadening of the soul that nearly all of you attribute to your commute has little to recommend it, but a few of you did manage to find a bit of compensation. My third choice was able to find (admittedly slight) humor in his or her situation:
Motorway to work
I curse while contemplating
the road less travelled
— Evan Flaschen, England

At least the poet was able to recognize that s/he was at least one of the agents in his/her own sorry predicament, that there were other options, and that had s/he chosen another of them, s/he might now actually be moving at speed instead of bumper to bumper on the M1. And is that an allusion to Robert Frost, or just common cultural property? The author of my second choice perhaps has dalliance on his or her mind:

Grey sky, autumn drizzle
Grey cars on grey pavement —
A blue-eyed passerby
— Bradley Byington, England

Blue isn’t the greatest contrast to grey—in fact, it might be barely distinguishable—but in the context it comes as a shock. At the very least there is something there to arrest the eye. And a passerby—someone going, presumably, in the other direction. What does she know that I don’t? And I want to find out.

Still, these are private compensations. My top winner manages a magnanimous and communal “we”:

Monday morning
we share
each other’s rain
— Lynne Rees, England

This could be read as a grouse, as nothing more than a cheeky way of saying “Monday morning — and it’s raining too.” But the words contain more: the poet chooses not to be isolated in that rain, but to share it, and when we all share it, it is no longer the elements against us, but rather the elements uniting us in a common lot and a common fate. What a wonderful thing to find in the rain of a Monday morning! But enough of that — get to work . . .
New Poems

on a bus
the calming effect
of pine trees
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

CLUNK CLUNK LUCKily
I always wake up
on the same stretch
— Mark Gilbert

*

rush hour traffic
coming to a halt;
winter sunset
— Johnny Baranski

*

4 AM
nodding off during my commute
into the city
— Devin Harrison

*

daily train ride —
every time the sky
a bit different
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo
commuter train . . .
the clickety-clack
of foreign tongues
— Charlotte Digregorio, *(Modern Haiku 39.2, 2008)*

* 

afternoon rush
poplar seeds drifting
through exhaust fumes
— Polona Oblak

* 

morning commute
a leaf takes a ride
on the wipers
— Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

the drive to work
crows circling
overhead
— Jennifer Hambrick

* 

carpooling
his aftershave rubs off
on me
— Shloka Shankar
*  

dreaming  
I missed my bus stop  
I missed my bus stop  
  — Christina Sng

*  

farm life  
the morning commute  
to breakfast  
  — Michael Henry Lee

*  

in the distance  
a shimmering line of buses  
stuck in place . . .  
  — Amy Losak

*  

to and fro  
on the same bridge  
a new starry sky  
  — Lucia Fontana

*  

river crossing  
best part of my morning commute  
sometimes my day  
  — Jere Kittle
platform five
some brief greeting
some yawns
   — Margherita Petriccione

morning darkness
at the bus stop -
snow twinkling
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams (Stardust Haiku 1)

rush out of work
even my shadow
is a suit
   — Tom Sacramona

night shift . . .
on the car bonnet
a thud of a kangaroo
   — Samantha Sirimanne

7 am train —
a man in a suit falls asleep
on my shoulder
   — Marina Bellini
morning train
the familiar faces of people
whose lives I know nothing of
— Olivier Schopfer

sunrise
almost obscured
along my path
— Timothy J. Dickey

sitting —
befor and after work
haiku and sudoku
— Angiola Inglese

rear-view mirror
a brief hurried look
at the past
— Neha R. Krishna

train commuter . . .
outside a dirty window
enchanting dawns
— Maria Laura Valente
on the commuter
working to catch-up
crossword
    — Paul Geiger

#38 bus to town
a roach escapes
her straw purse
    — Jan Benson

crowded train
nothing to hold onto
    — Lori Zajkowski

virtual commute
to the website supermarket
whiteout
    — Martin Gottlieb Cohen

on the same track
the same train —
never on time
    — Maria Teresa Sisti
sunny morning  
in a crowded train  
a ladybug  
— Nikolay Grankin

outbound train  
social networking  
by shoulder  
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

briefcase:  
a heavier book  
every morning  
— Elisa Allo

evening commuters  
an arm stretches out  
for alms  
— Madhuri Pillai (A Hundred Gourds)

daily run  
on the train window  
I write your name  
— Eufemia Griffo
* 

automatic  
home to work to home  
transmission  
— Michael Stinson  

* 

evening commute  
I salvage the remains  
of the day  
— Debbi Antebi  

* 

daily commute —  
my wife’s adapted office  
full of souvenirs  
— Goran Gatalica  

* 

the 405 commute  
the beachboy steers with his knees  
juggling  
— Marilyn Appl Walker  

* 

driving into dawn  
egrets fly between  
my lesson plans  
— Sandi Pray
from here to there
I lose my train of thought
late again
— Peggy Bilbro

* 

5 am commute . . .
wave at the stone dinosaur
one of my landmarks
— kris kondo

* 

Keys coffee at the door
hour trip’s roughest part
walk to car
— Trilla Pando

* 

line of cars
at the drive-through coffee shack
muffin tops
— Deborah P Kolodji

* 

from the bedroom
to my office in PJs
working from home
— Karen Harvey
a sea of faces
waving through portholes . . .
school bus
— Brendon Kent

local train —
my gaze at her
every morning
— Pasquale Asprea

one-way ticket
no road leading back
to being young again
— Christine L. Villa

copper coins
to pay the ferryman
last commute
— Marietta McGregor

And I hope you don’t mind if I add my own small daily commute here.
The emotional range of the submissions to this week's haiku challenge was incredibly broad, from the cheeky to the traumatic, but with not much in between. The idea of “accident” is already loaded (and, to some ways of thinking, arguable), but when conflated with “workplace” entirely new ley lines of culpability come into play. Most of us feel that the professional environment in which we spend our most public hours is, and ought to be, generally safe, but of course we have been made to feel that this is far less true than it once was, due to various school rampages, terrorist activities and co-workers “going postal.” In response to these circumstances, our poets chose either to inculcate the mock heroic, or else the darkly tragic. Most of the former would hardly qualify as “accidents”: “night shift: empty bins / dust desks, hoover, drop hole punch – / paper moon blizzard” is a good example. This enlargement of the mundane through fake seriousness has a longstanding literary tradition, though it is not often seen in haiku. Another example of this ilk is “My coffee / Like crime scene blood / Flows around me” which is effectively terse. Of the latter, “the glass ceiling / crashed upon / her up-turned head” surely is intended to be read as allegory, yet in haiku we cannot dismiss the possibility of it representing actuality, making this a gruesome little morality tale. And “yellow black bars / commemorate the union of / forklift and inspector” takes a darkly comic look at what must have been a grisly and horrific day at the warehouse. My third choice this week is from the first camp:

```
draft email, hit send
cc whole floor with love
for new girlfriend x
[Sarah Leavesley]
```

explicates the easy humiliation to be had with misdirected communications. It is a workplace accident of the most benign sort. The poem, though a bit stiff with its language, manages to retain a droll self-effacement, and may actually endear the bungler to the rest of the office.
My other two selections are firmly from the darker end of the spectrum, capturing as they do specific human responses to trauma. My second choice is

    silence on site
    after the ambulance
goess
    [Andrew Shimeld]

It might seem an obvious observation, but that’s really the point: the poet notices the manifestation of an absence, the negative space created by this unexpected event. This is a telling moment, told economically, and with a nice formal touch in reserving the final line for the simple verb. It would rate higher except that, considered within the context of the history of the genre, poems on this topic have been written before and as well or better, lowering its impact just a bit below our winner.

Slightly subtler, and I believe more chilling, is my top selection, which might have served as the opening haiku in a sequence that ended with the previous one.

    a scream
    instinctively strangers
    move as one
    [Andy Coleman]

That we are a herd animal is not in doubt, but we insist on our individuality, in dress, in manner, in personality. But given a signal that circumvents our thought processes, we access a deeper and more primitive set of responses. A scream cuts directly to the limbic system, and we move our hooves and form a circle from a directive hardwired into us long before we left the savannah. The poet, without overplaying his hand, notes this species drama, and helps us recognize it, and ourselves, in a mere seven words.
Coffee spilt on my skirt —
all day long smelling
of cappuccino
— Anna Maria Domburg -Sancristoforo

*

painfully lifting
more than his weight
old ant
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

from just warming my chair
to the hot seat
he discovers my tweets
— Charlotte Digregorio

*

car crash
extracted a dead
from hearse
— Antonio Mangiameli

*

cursing the boss
your silence replies
‘He’s behind you’
— Rachel Sutcliffe
after the last typhoon
all the windmills and more ranches
put to good use again
   — Vasile Moldovan

fourth and one
the injured player
is whisked away
   — Michael Henry Lee

one box lower
than a teacher’s back
new textbooks
   — Sandi Pray

No work, no pay
my monthly budget
barks at me.
   — Purush Ravela

landslide —
on a father’s coffin
sand of Sahara
   — Marina Bellini
office fires —
tossed cigarette ignites
the wastebasket
 — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

lost in thought . . .
I give an inspiring lecture
to the wrong class
 — Maria Laura Valente

28 days
without a meltdown
silver star
 — Mark Gilbert

the sparrow
in the cat’s mouth
fraying nest
 — Jennifer Hambrick

paper cut
a smear underlines
the bottom line
 — Lamart Cooper
the shatter
of spinning rotors
dim day sirens
    — Jan Benson

blister domes
on a sand dune
java splatter
    — Christina Sng

big trouble —
birthday cake
carbonized
    — Maria Teresa Sisti

Frozen fingers
in an unsold bouquet
of the mobile roses seller
    — Nazarena Rampini

falling down
my son’s face
the last image
    — Eufemia Griffo
multiple deadlines —
wiping up the coffee
on the keyboard
   — Amy Losak

* 

tennis elbow
no longer
on the ball
   — Olivier Schopfer

* 

on the boots
cement powder —
emergency room
   — Margherita Petriccione

* 

lost man days for them for me lost limbs
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

* 

stormy day
the office boy checks
the glass windows
   — Pravat Kumar Padhy
late from work
a hovering honeybee
between the couple
— Aparna Pathak

* 

top of the ladder
she bumps into
a glass ceiling
— Debbie Antebi

* 

no workman’s comp
nor forms to fill —
paper cut
— Michael Stinson

* 

blackout
the patient talks
as by daylight
— Lucia Fontana

* 

free coffee runs into my shoe
— MR QUIPTY
head in the clouds —  
the helmet rolled down the stairs  
— Elisa Allo

all these years  
my father going to work in slip-resistant shoes  
— Goran Gatalica

a b c d e —  
a kindergarten darling wets her pants  
— Marilyn Appl Walker

shoulder sprain —  
perfect circle on the blackboard  
— Angiola Inglese

coffee spill on the office table news from home  
— Brendon Kent
night raid . . .
I stumble over
a flower pot
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

spilt coffee
on client’s document
boss’ expletive under his breath
— Madhuri Pillai

spilt coffee on
my computer . . .
not completed task
— Diana Teneva

those days when they dangled
from girders over the city
New York snapshot
— Marietta McGregor

reach in the
desk drawer for bandaids
another paper cut
— Paul Geiger
* 
cantiere aperto —
un corpo sull’asfalto
tra i passanti

yard open —
a body on the asphalt
among passers-by
   — Angela Giordano

* 
First presentation
she speaks firmly they giggle
blue green mismatched shoes
   — Trilla Pando

* 
22 years since
your workplace accident
caring for you
   — Karen Harvey

* 
her cubicle
filled with roses
new safety rules
   — Deborah P Kolodji
coffee spill . . .
eavesdropping on
some office gossip
— Christine L. Villa
Haiku in the Workplace: Work Travel

The pain of business travel was evident in your many excellent responses to this week’s challenge. For some it arose from disorientation most manifest in the sameness of place:

Conference room
Anywhere
Nowhere

[Evans D. Flaschen]

For others from the sense of separation from others:

Together we are
Yet collectively alone
On the Central Line

[Frederik van der Zeeuw]

And for yet others from some telling detail that most suggested they were far from home:

my coat sleeve
swaying from the luggage hold
drowsy moon

[Paul Chambers]

Some were even able to find a bit of wry humor in their circumstance:

airport meeting—
the growing tension
of compression socks

[Lew Watts]
Such humor nicely counterbalances any possibility of taking the work too seriously. My third selection also deflates any sense of self-importance:

airport arrivals—
my misspelt name
among balloons
[Lew Watts]

This is not merely humor, however. There is an ache of homesickness in recognizing that the public gaiety and not-quite-professional hospitality of the meet-and-greet is just a facade, a means of making you feel as though you are welcome, when in fact you are just another client, just another payday.

My second choice is nimbly self-reflexive, and opens a host of questions:

aloft he dreams
he no longer dreams
of flying
[Andy Coleman]

It’s impossible to tell how the author feels about this situation, but the matter is really intended to redound upon the reader. We know the author is flying, so he is not yet to the point where the dream has taken him. But the reader can inhabit both the “real” situation and the “dream” situation simultaneously. Is there sadness there due to the loss of ambition? Relief? Dread? The poem allows the reader to fill in the blanks with her own affect, personalizing it. A very great achievement in nine words.

Finally, travel can sometimes make us aware of what we most value, as in my top selection:

slow descent—
this sudden urge to share
life stories
[Lew Watts]
We know the statistics, we know flying is safe, and yet we also know that the many tons of steel that now encase us is currently falling to the earth. Our certainty of mortality lies in direct proportion to the protraction of the descent. What might have been for us an insular flight becomes, at the last moment, an opportunity to find, even among strangers, a common humanity. This assertion of what matters most to us is triggered by a moment’s anxiety, suggesting such things lie much nearer to the surface than we normally allow, and perfectly caught in this small gem.

New Poems

traveling
at night to work
a fruit bat
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

*

take off
I watch the office block
shrink
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

*

a kiss to the son —
every morning by train
between strangers
   — Angela Giordano
fear of flying —
the travel agent
dreams of palms
  — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

first business trip
documents not lunch
in my briefcase
  — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

home at last —
my long-legged travel companion
goes unmentioned . . .
  — Maria Laura Valenta

calculating mileage
the distance
between us
  — Jennifer Hambrick

jell-o shots
the closing session
i can’t remember
  — Sandi Pray
airport shuttle
a heel or two
eases out of loafers
— Lamart Cooper

the merry-go-round
of out-of-town talks . . .
a different hotel’s ballpoint
— Marietta McGregor

base to base
   helicopter flight
with open door
— Paul Geiger

dad abroad —
my postcard collection
growing
— Angiola Inglese

all-conference reception
a tiny lizard
darts and hides
— Timothy J. Dickey
having missed my train
someone will pay
for another beer
    — Mark Gilbert

who knows —
why a “zero” discount
on my ticket
    — Maria Teresa Sisti

driver’s chatter
    of fines and Moulin Rouge —
the moon rises
    — Margherita Petriccione

work travel
hand baggage lighter
by weight
    — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi Sambang

Cold in hotel —
the teddy bear little son
in your briefcase
    — Nazarena Rampini
striding the airport
wearing a fit bit
Odysseus 2.0
    — Jan Benson

another trip —
I blow out the candles
all alone
    — Elisa Allo

work travel
a love note
before leaving
    — Eufemia Griffo

work travel
in the hotel mini-fridge
guilty pleasures
    — Debbi Antebi

flight delayed
business meeting on skype
at airport lounge
    — Neha R. Krishna
hotel room
to keep me company
a chocolate on my pillow
   — Olivier Schopfer

* 

best vacation
in years
Helsinki work trip
   — Christina Sng

* 

door to door
peddling the existence
of God
   — Michael Henry Lee

* 

night flight
another city another conference
how I miss my dog
   — Madhuri Pillai

* 

morning haze
over Los Angeles
departing planes
   — Deborah P Kolodji
back from work
spring frogs
in counterpoint
    — Lucia Fontana

conference in Las Vegas
she knits yet another
pair of baby shoes
    — Marina Bellini

landed New Delhi
luggage on to Shanghai
new sari
    — Trilla Pando

the best of beers
and falling in love . . .
expenses paid
    — Michael Stinson

morning commute
he reads Getting Published
I dream out the window
    — Sonam Chhoki
car crash —
a body extracted
from the hearse
— Antonio Mangiameli

travels light
pen and pencil in pocket
poet at work
— Karen Harvey

A two star hotel
my boss
penny-wise
— Pasquale Asprea

Panamanian heat
my workshop begins
with reggae-ton
— Terry Ann Carter
Haiku in the Workplace:  
The Answering Machine

My three winners, as usual, meet the requirements of the theme, and also offer something a bit more. My third place winner has a lovely nostalgic tone:

even at Christmas
when I see your email
I long for Christmas
Andrew Coleman

This is an homage to Basho’s great and famous poem

Even in Kyoto —
hearing the cuckoo’s cry —
I long for Kyoto.

and I would have scored it higher had it been entirely original to the poet. In second place I have chosen the truly Scrooge-ish

please understand
your message will not matter
in January
Andrew Coleman

So harsh, but is it not really honest? Can it not be construed a kindness to lay the truth before the caller? In the name of the season, of course. My top choice is a wonderful bit of misdirection:

there is no room
in the in-box
Andrew Coleman
True kindness: the caller need not leave a message (which, as we already know, will be insignificant by the time it would have been returned), and need not expect a reply. We are all released from our duties to simply partake of the season. All neatly suggested by passing reference to one of the foundational stories of the season. Nicely played.

**New Poems**

phoning in
my resignation
the answerphone full
— Rachel Sutcliffe

* *

another late night
between mugs of coffee
I leave messages
— Sonam Chhoki

* *

Segreteria —
una voce allegra
copre il mio pianto

Greeting message —
a smiling voice
covers my tears
— Monica Federico
Just the same message
again and again —
I seek my inner zen
   — Anna Maria Domburg

answering machine
the new office clerk
a know-it-all
   — Johnny Baranski

heavy traffic
the red flashing light
of my answerphone
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

prioritizing
my impossible day
answering machine
   — Devin Harrison

grocery list
in the middle of meeting
my wife's call
   — Neha R. Krishna
“Leave a message after the beep” . . .
I yell at the boss,
disguising my voice
    — Maria Laura Valente

*  

for those who know
who knows the fantastic
a reminder
    — Antonio Mangiameli

*  

press one . . . press two . . .
lost in an endless
phone maze
    — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

*  

fast asleep . . .
message at midnight
a late check-in
    — Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

*  

solar eclipse
the answering machine
cuts off before i
    — Jennifer Hambrick
hospice
the machine assures me that
my call is important
    — Michael Henry Lee

“voice mailbox full”
again, the value
of deep breathing
    — Sandi Pray

graveyard shift . . .
press “1” if you would like to talk
to a human being
    — Mark Gilbert

capturing the moon
...................letting it go
to answerphone
    — Brendon Kent

always there
for my convenience
your tinny voice
    — Marietta McGregor
* 

after the beep —
the silence
I scramble to fill
  — Debbi Antebi

* 

that “dulcet” tone
fighting the impulse
to end the call
  — Sonam Chhoki

* 

answering machine
in the background
the rain sound
  — Eufemia Griffo

* 

answering machine
between your words . . .
bird sounds
  — Valorie Woerdehoff

* 

newtons cradle . . .
his pitch again
on the answering machine
  — Steve Smolak
singing along
again with the musak
answering machine
   — Christina Sng

the only message
kept on the machine —
your goodbye
   — Angela Giordano

answering machine
a therapy session available
on saturday night
   — Lucia Fontana

Mozart's notes —
impatiently I wait
for a click
   — Maria Theresa Sisti

your call is important
the message repeats
the rhythmic tap of my fingers
   — Madhuri Pillai
estate in ufficio —  
il dialetto del mio paese  
nella segreteria telefonica

summer in the office —  
the dialect of her country  
in a voice mail  
— Margherita Petriccione

voice mail -  
so the metallic sound  
of your voice  
— Angiola Inglese

no message  
on my answering machine  
rising fog  
— Olivier Schopfer (*Failed Haiku* 1.9, 2016)

phoning in sick  
my voice on the answerphone  
‘after the tone please . . .’  
— Karen Harvey
On hold —
A minute of Vivaldi’s Spring
dreaming
— Nazarena Rampini

Friday evening —
my answering machine jammed
with tasks from my boss
— Diana Teneva

answering machine —
among antiques
in my son’s smart phone
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

Valentine’s day:
my boss will speak only
to a metallic voice
— Elisa Allo

recognizing my ex-wife
on the answering machine
among strangers
— Goran Gatalica
Monday morning
lift the receiver for callbacks . . . silence
click
   — Paul Geiger

*

I am away
from my phone right now —
or not
   — Michel Stinson

*

curse —
but held back before
the “beep” signal

Imprecazioni —
ma trattenute prima
del segnale “beep”
   — Lucia Cardillo

*
Your poetical responses to this week’s challenge suggest that for the most part you regard your mentors with a good deal more fondness than your bosses.

a coach takes you there —
a mentor shows you how
to read maps
 [David Dayson]

a mentor never
tells you where to go —
but shows the way
 [David Dayson]

There was an occasional wry or cheeky response

a mentor
enables you to think —
inside the box
 [David Dayson]

but most were quite adulatory. Homage is characteristically a fulsome response, and makes for difficult poetic material. We gain perhaps a bit more appreciation for those Greek and Latin odists whose fame resides on just such compositions. For us, the consequence has been a somewhat slender range of response, as evidenced in our selections. All our shortlisted poems are somewhat more prosaic than poetic, more a listing of attributes than a courting of allusions. Nevertheless, they are not without their salient points.
Our third place selection considers the term itself, and compares it with its manifestation:
my ‘mentors’: the word
prefigures their rocklike stance,
that distant skyline

[Sarah Leavesley]

Is this hyperbole intended as praise, or is there a trace of snark to be found here? Perhaps the quotation marks are the indicators of intent. If you were this poet’s ‘mentor’ would you feel honored? I’m not sure, and that, I think, is the poem’s greatest attribute.

My two co-winner both extend metaphors to honor their personal Nestors:

    a mentor
    knows the ropes —
    untangles knots

[David Dayson]

    sticky business —
    lubricated by the words
    of a mentor

[David Dayson]

It would not surprise me to learn these poems come from the same pen, they are so much of a piece. They employ identical strategies—the use of a stock phrase turned by the invocation of the mentor, who offers a solution appropriate to that phrase. In both instances the mentor comes to the rescue to solve a problem that is generalized, and calms the situation in the process. Both are unequivocally flattering, both are lean in language, both offer the same relationship to the master.

Who are you mentoring? How will they write about you? Remember that we are still reading Pindar 2500 years later . . .
New Poems

mentoring
at work
the lead goose
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

sudden aging . . .
a young colleague asks me
“Be my mentor!”
— Maria Laura Valente

*

training day
learning just how
the boss likes his coffee
— Rachel Sutcliffe

*

avoiding eye contact
in the next urinal
my mentor
— Mark Gilbert
leadership lecture
reading through the summers
of the mentor’s mind
— Willie Bongcaron

orientation
a room full of bobble heads
sets in motion
— Michael Henry Lee

the boss’s lunch
she shows me the tricks
first things first
— Sandi Pray

he resigned
I try to catch up . . . finish filling
his empty shoes
— Paul Geiger

shop floor
a copy of Dickens
by each locker
— Lamart Cooper
conference room —
a portrait of the painter
glances at everyone
    — Pravat Kumar Padhy

morning
skies, striped in pink
his reminder to my eyes
    — Timothy J. Dickey

new employee
I put on
my motherly face
    — Marina Bellini

Osho’s poems
the master’s wise words
on my pillow
    — Eufemia Griffo

reflecting pool
her blue suit
and her mentor’s
    — Jennifer Hambrick
mentor
amid lies and truth
gut instinct

mentore
fra bugie e verità
istinto viscerale
   — Lucia Fontana

* 

alito pesante —
devo imparare
molto in fretta

bad breath —
I have to learn
very quickly
   — Angiola Inglese

* 

Crane’s shadow and mine
expand
on Brooklyn Bridge
   — Anna Yin
*  

observing  
my mentor shout  
the real lessons  
— Christina Sng

*  

office orchid  
I secure the growing spike  
to a bamboo stake  
— Olivier Schopfer

*  

the boss tells her  
she needs more mentoring  
happy hour  
— Gregory Longenecker

*  

her high heels  
and friendly smile  
a hit with the rookie journos  
— Madhuri Pillai

*  

general hospital:  
psychology tutor  
is a clinical case  
— Elisa Allo
the paring
of stone fruit
hinged amity
    — Jan Benson

office whirlwind —
my mentor 20 years
younger than me
    — Diana Teneva

the mentor —
instinct to escape
in the legs
    — Margherita Petriccione

path breaking foot prints
behind my son
i clean my glasses
    — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

for a long time
an essay consigliere —
my husband
    — Angela Giordano
mentor
don’t make me laugh
office tormentor
   — Karen Harvey

*

bookshop owner
how I owe what
I have come to know
   — Ron Scully

*

haiku critiques
unsparingly . . .
trusted friend
   — Marietta McGregor

*

A four-leaf clover
in the lawn of clover
Rare luck

Un quadrifoglio
nel prato di trifoglio
Rara fortuna
   — Lucia Cardillo

*
Haiku in the Workplace: Interns & Trainees

After the apparent gravity displayed toward mentors last week, poets seemed more than ready this week to let loose. Your targets were the hapless interns and trainees who populate your offices. Nearly all of you found this situation laden with humor, not to say opportunity. These are the poems that seemed to me to offer the greatest amusement and empathy.

A plentiful source of mirth for many arose from the poet putting him or herself in the place of the poor trainee:

trainee architect
sees the boring grey building
it’s not lego now
[Kate Stallard]

the trainee pilot
all the instruments go blank
he’s not in the sim
[Kate Stallard]

or else imagining potential pitfalls:

penistone scunthorpe
for trainee crossword setters
could be interesting
[Kate Stallard]

and yes, this works on this side of the pond as well.

A few offered sage advice:
trainee editor
perhaps you were born instead
to be a baber
    [Kate Stallard]

cub reporters
push harder, progress slower
than press release pile
    [Sarah Leavesley]

The occasional poem explored the process of the trainee’s adventure:

    just enough mistakes
    trainer and trainee reflect —
    to make it worthwhile
    [David Dayson]

    or its culmination
    well pruned —
    a budding trainee
    flourishes
    [David Dayson]

But in the end what really matters to the trainee is the attainment of the kinds of
skills s/he will need for a productive career. Surely that’s what has been realized in
my top choice:

    accounting intern
    learns lists, numbers and sums,
    ordering coffees
    [Sarah Leavesley]

I wish you inspiration . . . and kindness.
mispronouncing
the new boss’ name
nettle soup
    — Kimberly Esser

*

over and over . . .
again the fledgling goes right
back out of the nest
    — Ernesto P. Santiago

*

my office,
an adventure
between right and wrong
    — Antonio Mangiameli

*

golf with the boss . . .
my intern
overshadows me
    — Charlotte Digregorio
* 

work experience
mother shows him
how to iron a shirt
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

the intern
coffee is all
she’ll ever get
   — Michael Henry Lee

* 

shadowing me
the intern
picks up bad habits
   — Mark Gilbert

* 

out of his depth
the apprentice talks
of perfection
   — Robert Kingston

* 

student teaching —
mistaken for thirteen
at twenty-two
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams
* 

a red apple — mother’s note in the new boy’s lunchbox 
   — Brendon Kent

* 

technical support 
someone left the machine running
   — Willie Bongcaron

* 

intern
   for life — it all starts at birth
   — Paul Geiger

* 

new intern
   weighing my words
   for the first time
   — Shloka Shankar

* 

one-on-one
   he cancels his date night
   — Poornima Laxmeshwar
intern
putting the CEO
on hold
— Jan Benson

*

name on a tag
still, the Head of Department
calls me something else
— Sonam Chhoki

*

trainee . . .
thrown at the deep end
I learn to swim
— Madhuri Pillai

*

revolving door —
the intern comes in
my time goes out
— Jennifer Hambrick

*

surgical intern —
he stitches back
my secrets
— Tanmoy Das Lala
* first day of work
  a flight of butterflies
  in my belly
  — Eufemia Griffo

* internship season —
  a sigh of relief
  for the accounting department
  — Maria Laura Valente

* tiger cub —
  the joy of playing
  with deer
  — Pravat Kumar Padhy

* first day of training:
  briefcase and tailleur
  to appear older
  — Elisa Allo

* hard nuts —
  a chick watches the hen
  cracking grains
  — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi
grasping the last wrung
on the corporate ladder —
new intern
— Terri L. French

staff meeting . . .
on the windowsill a sparrow
with a twig in its beak
— Olivier Schopfer, Presence 56

first steps
in the study
of the “devil’s advocate”
— Angiola Inglese

Orientation:
1. I have my doubts
2. TBD
— Judt Shrode

teaching her
how to play chess
but not how to win
— Christina Sng
first day
smiles over cubicle walls
along the parade route
— Gail Oare

her first day
I show her
she shows me
— Elizabeth Moura

mosquitoes —
too many trainees
without rules
— Maria Teresa Sisti

all-day drizzle
the constant buzz
of an intern’s phone
— Debbi Antebi

patient late
in each origami fold
training patience
— Lucia Fontana
orientamento —
il mondo del lavoro
in uno stage

orientation —
the world of work
is one big internship
    — Angela Giordano

Stage su stage
S’allunga il curriculum
senza lavoro

longer and longer
putting off work —
the interns
    — Lucia Cardillo

*
Haiku in the Workplace: Lost in Translation

Haiku is generally not at its best when describing complicated human interaction. That is more the provenance of senryu, a related genre that often explores the darker side of the human creature. Senryu is unconcerned with the niceties that elevate haiku to art: the relationship to season, the somewhat restricted tradition of content, the juxtaposition of images, the telling and at the same time subtle cut — and consequent silence — between them. It is much more likely to be employed to make a comment on our fellow (wo)man’s habits, beliefs, behavior, or bank account. And humans are rarely more complicated, and at the same time, exposed, as when they are encountering a language or culture not their own. So “lost in translation” seems a quintessential opportunity for senryu.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the fact that these little poems are primarily image-based. Flat statement is still not the end goal — we have prose for that. The best senryu, like haiku, will be imagistic, and will rely upon the reader to see clearly in his or her mind’s eye the scenario the author has presented, with the highlighted peccadillo in the greatest relief. So finding the detail that most supports the point being made — rather than simply making the point — and exploiting it remains the best option for the writer of senryu, similar, for example, to the way a caricaturist might work.

The vast majority of the submissions this week simply stated their points, so they were, in fact, prose statement rejiggered to fit some rough conception of what haiku (or senryu) are supposed to look like. Here’s an example (please bear in mind that we are not intending to ridicule anyone — we are all still learning — but that sometimes seeing something concrete is worth a thousand descriptions of the same thing):

only so far —
ironic understatement
does not travel well
[David Dayson]

The poet here makes his point—in fact, he simply states it in the last two lines. So
where does the poetry of this come in? Well, it doesn’t. It would have to arrive from the first line, and how that line relates to the rest. But in fact the first line is only a quantifier: it’s not an actual image, nor does it supply an actual scene we might imagine. It simply says “there’s a limit” — to what, we find out only later in the prosy capper. So we might say this is exactly what we are not trying to do.

Here’s a second example that goes halfway:

    mind the gap —
    where truth stumbles
    between cultures
    [David Dayson]

Here we have an image to begin with — even if it’s a cliché, at least we might imagine entering or leaving the Tube. But what follows doesn’t complete the poetic scene — that is, it doesn’t follow through with a consonant image that might resonate with that first phrase. Instead, we are given a bromide about “truth.” At least the poet has truth stumbling, which fits the mode of the first image. But it is still a work that resides primarily in prose mind, making a point rather than revealing one.

Compare that with the following:

    Seine boat cruise —
    the steward asks in French
    what translation we need
    Sonam Chhoki

See how the poet manages this experience: 1) we have a clear setting (and having a Bhutanese poet place the poem in France and then publish it in the US makes it understood to be “foreign”); 2) the following image is the human interaction, and points to the human foible — the idea that everyone will understand in French how to choose the correct language for their tour. Is it great art? No, it’s a humorous moment, quickly sketched. But the manner in which it is sketched, allowing the images to convey the content, rather than stating the content in so many words, is exactly the way the genre works. This (and every) week’s winners are considered in just this way, so I offer this brief triptych of poems for your consideration as you go forward.
Third place this week goes to this homely moment:

dyslexic line-dance;
black script un-sequenced —
till spell-check re-jigs

[Sarah Leavesley]

The “translation” here is done by a machine, and in fact in this instance clarifies rather than obscures. It’s an electronic “before and after” comparison that we’ve all experienced. The humor is in the unprepossessing mess we’ve made on the screen — and the clunky manner of expressing it — redeemed as if by magic by some coder’s effective use of algorithms. Life can be so mysterious . . .

In second place I offer

a soufflé —
when hard boiled words
was all I wanted

[David Dayson]

The poet begins with a clear image that connotes a specific process. The metaphor of “hard boiled words” responds to that first image, and conflates it with the “real” subject of the poem: translation. Rather than the firm and identifiable boiled egg, with clean outlines and certain shape, the poet is the recipient of something less identifiable, more altered — but possibly also a good bit tastier.

Our top choice is the poignant

Je suis Charlie: so
easy to confuse I am
with I follow

[Sarah Leavesley]

French for “I am” is je suis. French for “I follow” is . . . je suis. Given the consequences meted by some to what they find to be heterodox belief, a simple lingual isotope such as this could result in torture or death. The poet has skillfully seized the
catchphrase from the recent horrific event and used it as his or her first image — an entire mindspace arrives. It resonates with the potential calamity a simple overlap in diction might create. A startling and telling poem of much power.

New Poems

office joke
her wherewithal
to move on
  — Betty Shropshire

*

mockingbird
he accepts all the compliments
for her solution
  — Gail Oare

*

call center agent
not enough time to encode
her transcriptions
  — Willie Bongcaron

*

lost property dept.
I search for what
the boss is saying
  — Rachel Sutcliffe
dolphinately; lost . . .
between me and the boss
this ear cupping
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

lost in translation
raising her eyebrows
one slightly higher
   — Michael Henry Lee

passing a memo
down the line
Chinese whispers
   — Marietta McGregor

another language —
hoping my words
find their way
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

unfinished canoe below the quarter moon hut Mālama Honua
   — Martin Gottlieb Cohen
wading pool
the intern says she’ll research it
then asks her phone
   — Jennifer Hambrick

bits and bytes
my computer speaks
from the heart
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

thought I was dying
a fever of one-hundred . . .
it was Fahrenheit
   — Maria Bartolotta

skylark’s song
the mayor’s speech
fades away
   — Cezar Ciobika

interpreting . . .
something always lost
immigration hotline
   — Samantha Sirimanne Hyde
googled for a word full of twinkling stars
— Pravat Kumar Padhy

Hindi to English
addressing “you” for youths
as well as for elders
— Aparna Pathak

“Break a leg!” —
the Italian transfer
crosses himself
— Maria Laura Valente

bad translation
the first minister’s name
front-page
— Eufemia Griffo

tech webinar
cloud talk above
pre-millennial’s head
— Lamart Cooper
on-shore job
missing the slang
taught by mother
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

meeting in German:
the notebook
stays blank
— Elisa Allo

market price
the difference between monnaie
and money
— Olivier Schopfer

Gestures and smiles
in different languages
at the front office
— Nazarena Rampini

bring us coffee honey
message delivered
no sugar
— Peggy Bilbro
* 

in German then English  
the pilot  
gives us first the good news  
— Mark Gilbert

* 

lost in translation —  
another editor floats  
in strange mud  
— Goran Gatalica

* 

imagining sarcasm  
where non intended  
my lengthy explanation  
— Madhuri Pillai

* 

at checkout  
your bill must be correct  
the computer says  
— Paul Geiger

* 

after gesticulating for a day  
we find a common language  
in code  
— Christina Sng
lunch break —
the sentences to translate
think of the bathroom
    — Angela Giordano

lost in translation —
I re-read the pages
of my palm
    — Tanmoy Das Lala

displaced —
a houseboat and the moon
floating together
    — Lucia Fontana

change of venue —
my parrot
no longer speaks
    — Angiola Inglese

reactions
to reactions
“reply all”
    — Michael Stinson
office banter
the silence after
my joke
    — Debbi Antebi

raised eyebrows
the greeting
I thought I said
    — Brendon Kent

trying to figure
your mouthed words over our desk
the boss’s shadow
    — Karen Harvey

“thanks” to google
it loses its smile —
my senryu

google translate
perde il suo sorriso
il mio senryu
    — Lucia Cardillo

*
Haiku in the Workplace: March Equinox

Several poems this week are interesting for what they can teach about trying a bit too hard. The topic perhaps lends itself to this phenomenon: while the equinox is a real and demonstrable thing, it’s difficult for most of us to actually experience the equality of light and dark. So the equinox as felt is as much an abstraction as a real event, and your treatment of it suggests exactly that. Of the fair number of poems that used the conceit of a midpoint pause, this was, I felt, the most clever:

In Galápagos
the turtles
pause

[Evan Flaschen]

This is what we call a “desk-ku,” one obviously not written en plein air but imagined. There’s nothing wrong with desk-ku, but usually the author is trying harder to disguise that fact. No need here, just enjoy the surreality of it all — hoary ancient creatures with cultural status on their home island very close to the equator (where the equinox is virtually indistinguishable from any other day) pausing — in the mind of the poet.
When your inspiration was derived from observation, your content became more generally centered on the overall shifting of season: weather and birds and flowers.

Spring chill —
on the homeless
even lice shiver

[David Dayson]

Does this seem a desk-ku to you? Do you think it the result of close observation, or rather of thinking about a situation, and then manufacturing a poem about it? Is it even possible for lice to shiver? To my mind, this is clearly an attempt to channel the reader’s response in a certain direction, rather than allowing the truth of the reality
speak for itself. It shows the difference between what the writer wishes to say, and what there is to be said. That’s not to say that a writer cannot say what s/he wishes in haiku, only that the images under scrutiny must be chosen with care or they will not support it.

Similarly, all these poems seem to me to be striving after effect —

```
first Spring walk —
the hunchback’s stick
a little shorter
    [David Dayson]

Spring sadness —
arms full of daffodils
this too will pass
    [David Dayson]

Spring couriers —
counting back swallows
as they return
    [David Dayson]
```

Each of these seems to me to have some small betrayal, some exaggerated reach, some compromise with the actual in an attempt at pathos, or gravitas, or some other emotion. They all have the fingerprints of the poet on them. We can appreciate the author’s point, but as poems they are too caught up with making that point in time to become timeless. It’s nearly impossible to serve two masters in such a small poem (or truly, in any poem), and featuring my truth will make it more difficult for the truth to out. My top choice this week also has traces of desk-ku, but combines it with what seems to be actual observation:

```
Spring clouds —
there in the same place
as last year
    [David Dayson]
```
It seems unlikely the clouds are in exactly the same place this year as last, but saying they are is very suggestive. It conjures the cyclical nature of the season without announcing it in so many words. There is also a bit of drear in it, a foreboding that another poet voiced by saying “April is the cruelest month.” And at the same time it is likely an accurate bit of reportage: weather patterns depend on geographical features as much as anything, and the “there” there is likely to recreate its patterns. This poem has a classical feel to it — like something Buson might have expressed — without being overly imitative. And the poem is allowed to say what it has to say, without overt authorial interference. So this one has a bit of everything, and in just the right balance to make the whole feel quite satisfying. And, as balance is the theme of the day, nicely weighed.

New Poems

single-handedly
welcoming the strengthening sun
a sad work desk
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

ducks during lunch hour
so close
to breaking even
— Mark Gilbert

*

twenty March —
this morning’s lesson is
Earth’s axis tilt
— Angiola Inglese
spring solstice
the Easter bunny
hard at work
— Rachel Sutcliffe

*

vernal un-equinox
the pay greater than
my beginner’s skills
— Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

*

spring equinox
snow finally gone from
the boss’s heart
— Paul Geiger

*

carpe diem —
I surrender to spring
today
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

*

the night
leaves me in awe . . .
Dama de noche
— Willie Bongcaron
spring equinox
Miss March in
tall clover
   — Michael Henry Lee

where daylight lengthens
evening retreats
spring too between us
   — Ron Scully

with longer days
the work day feels shorter
creeping buttercups
   — Devin Harrison

Digital download
Light and darkness
on one document
   — Benedetta Cardone

equinox moon
the roll call of ancestors
in the oracle’s song
   — Sonam Chhoki
March equinox
on the coffee break
red ants
—— Martin Gottlieb Cohen

spring equinox
better half brings home
scent of jasmine
—— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

equinox sun
i linger with the bees
by a blackthorn hedge
—— Polona Oblak

post-verbal dispute
the room
in equal halves
—— Anthony Rabang

spring equinox
she marks her holiday
in red
—— Andy McLellan
* 

spring sunshine  
behind bars  
zoo animals  
— Olivier Schopfer  

* 

on the desk  
begin to bloom  
some daisies  
— Eufemia Griffo  

* 

school garden . . .  
children with teacher  
portray Spring  
— Elisa Allo  

* 

equinox —  
a revolution  
around the sun  
— Angela Giordano  

* 

office astrologer  
checking the charts  
March equinox  
— Christina Sng
march equinox —
for working days and nights
equal salary
   — Goran Gatalica

march equinox
I take a cardigan
just in case . . .
   — Madhuri Pillai

aequa nox —
silently daisies bloom
in the janitress’ hair
   — Maria Laura Valente

Shunbun no hi
clearing weeds
from my cousin’s grave
   — Lucia Fontana

night recedes
into the spring
a minimal promotion
   — Timothy J. Dickey
the new sun —
the snowman’s nose
falls
    — Antonio Mangiameli

* 

vernal equinox
orchids blooming
on my screensaver
    — Debbi Antebi

* 

early sunlight
reclaiming the lost hour
i skip the monday meeting
    — Jennifer Hambrick

* 

we leave the intern
with the new fax machine
March equinox
    — Lee Nash

* 

the boss prefers
to keep us in the dark
march equinox
    — Michael Stinson
red rose on her desk
secret admirer revealed
March Equinox
    — Karen Harvey

swallows in the sky —
again in the office air conditioner
their nest

Rondini in cielo —
nel condizionatore
di nuovo i nidi
    — Lucia Cardillo

*
Haiku in the Workplace:  
The Boss’s Spouse

No one, it seems, has a good word to say about the boss’s (often recent) spouse. She (and it is invariably she) is given to all the clichés — and writing about clichés generally is no more rewarding than writing with them. The consequence is a series of poems like this:

Hermes, Hermes, Hermes  
Handbags  
and glad rags  
[Sebastian Powell]

The offerings, thus, are not long on poetic nuance, but there are a couple redeeming moments worth mentioning. There is the moment of literary allusion:

Nothing like the sun,  
Her eyes gloat — she’s got him now!  
What a ball breaker  
[Greg Skeen]

Perhaps the Bard had just such a circumstance in mind. And there is the moment of the groaning pun:

remarried —  
a new lease  
of wife  
[David Dayson]

This is not to encourage more of the same, simply to point out that humans do engage in this sort of thing. To illustrate that the same material may be mined without resorting to such plebeian tastes, my third choice this week is:
a new model —
how long is the lease
we all wonder
[David Dayson]

Another oft-seen theme is based on the Platonic conception of souls destined for one another, skewed by a whiff of modern romantic ideology:

to stifled nods —
the boss presents
their better half
[David Dayson]

We get the point — our natural responses are held in check as this ritual drama is enacted. And as in any ritual, we know just who the protagonists are — the hero, the villain, and the god that must be appeased. My clear favorite this week doesn’t exempt itself from this dependence on cliché, but rises above it through its use of the multiple meanings — what is usually termed “resonance” in haiku — inherent in its most significant words:

too much mascara
false lashes, Louboutin heels;
marketing.
[Claire Leavey]

The build-up is much as we have seen before, but the deadpan clincher of a third line can refer to the efforts of those manufacturers to shill their goods, or the succumbing to such practices by people within the culture, or, most tellingly, the employment of such commercial means to achieve the coup that is landing “the boss.” But of course we ourselves are all above that sort of thing.
orange blossoms —
the smiling face
of a young girl
— Antonio Mangiameli

*  

“Yes ma’am!” —
How quickly the boss stands
at attention
— Maria Laura Valente

*  

unreasonably demanding
the boss whose wife
is due next month
— Polona Oblak (Prune Juice, 2011)

*  

dinner party —
the boss’s wife
is bossy
— Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

*  

snow day
the boss’s spouse shoots
the shit
— Roberta Beary
**TGIF . . .**
the marching order
of the boss's wife
    — Willie Bongcaron

**married; to work . . .**
like a fine wine she often ends
his sentence
    — Ernesto P. Santiago

**working together**
the chain of command
inverted after hours
    — Rachel Sutcliffe

**wielding the knife**
the boss's wife
for a change
    — Mark Gilbert

**new secretary**
the boss's wife checks her out
green-eyed monster
    — Karen Harvey
the boss’s wife
framed on his desk
forever bride
— Sonam Chhoki

*  

our boss’s wife
the sweat equity in
a million dollar smile
— Michael Henry Lee

*  

he’s in DC
she’s in New York . . .
diamonds are trumps
— Marietta McGregor

*  

Chanel No 5 —
the wife’s boss walks
into the office
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

*  

mild sospetto —
calls at all hours
the boss’s partner
— Angela Giordano
saying I love
his wife’s winter stew
faux silk flowers
    — Christine Villa

will-o’-the-wisp
he never brings his wife
to the office parties
    — Jennifer Hambrick

the boss’s wife
sashays across the room
a primrose path
    — Michael Stinson

wife’s
on the telephone —
meeting adjourned
    — Anthony Rabang

urban legend
the never-seen
boss’s spouse
    — Christina Sng
* 

spring fling
the boss’s spouse
dances barefoot
—— Marilyn Walker

* 

for lunch
Trattoria da mustache —
the chef’s wife
—— Margherita Petriccione

* 

he gives himself
the “special person status”
boss’s spouse
—— Madhuri Pillai

* 

her voice on his phone
across the room we hear
today’s directive
—— Gail Oare

* 

St. Patrick’s day —
the boss’s bride
away with the fairies
—— Elisa Allo
* 

boss’s wife
on the wedding photo
spider web
   — Eufemia Griffo

* 

his wife
so much smaller
than imagined
   — Peggy Bilbro

* 

her victory garden
grown with their company
from the ground up
   — Ron Scully

* 

the boss’s
official day off
marital law
   — MR QUIPTY

* 

the boss’s spouse
defends her higher career
to the workers
   — Goran Gatalica
secretly hoping
the boss’s wife
wears the pants
— Olivier Schopfer

responsibilities
always dressed
to the nines
— Paul Geiger

silver anniversary
her wall clock ticks louder
and louder
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

to hear the hired hand
talk about horses . . .
the boss’s wife
— Chad Lee Robinson

funeral
the flower umbrella
of the boss’s wife
— Cezar Ciobika
* supermoon the boss introduces his husband
   — Lee Nash

* Good morning! She told me to leave on my answering machine
   — Benedetta Cardone

* half moon the face my boss puts on for his wife
   — Debbi Antebi

*
Haiku in the Workplace: 
The Vocation

Most of us are happier with a task. Doing something, especially something useful or creative, is nearly always better than not, until it ceases to be, and then if we can afford it we retire or try something else. Even better is when that something coincides with our own sweet spot, when we would do what we’re doing for nothing, because it’s what we’re called to do. If you’re lucky enough to be one of those who have arrived at such a place, congratulations. If not, perhaps you can write about it . . . As usual, a great number of your submissions took the form of descriptions of the topic, which can make for pithy encomiums but do not often rise to poetry. Some, like this one, acknowledge the challenge taken up by those in what seem to others to be thankless jobs:

elderly care
most noble vocation —
day in day in
[David Dayson]

This effort, while highly appreciative, could have been made a better poem if is had striven for a more natural diction. Still, the useful turn of the clichéd phrase in the third line places it on this list.
Several others suffered from this same “tarzan-speak,” presumably to accommodate the syllable count. Here is one of the better attempts:

C.F.O. orders
all figures into rows, counts
spreadsheets in his sleep
[Sarah Leavesley]

My third selection this week features a natural image, which was rare for this topic:
out of yearning —
a blackbird rediscovers
his calling
[David Dayson]

The pun in this case seems to work, or at least does not exist simply for its own sake. In second place we enter the realm of human need:

a zealot’s mission
to show us the error —
of his ways
[David Dayson]

A televangelist, perhaps, or at least a recovered apostate who now believes his mission is to save others from what he learned through direct experience. But surely that’s the only way we really learn anything, so such a ministry is really just a form of entertainment.
My top choice is the obverse:

shared vocation —
priest and psychiatrist
suspend judgement
[David Dayson]

Here the poet depicts a belief in the efficacy of one’s mission regardless of audience. The observation of the similarity of roles of priest and psychiatrist is hardly new, but to yoke them in the name of vocation — or, as we framed it at the outset, something we would do for nothing because we’re called to do it — deepens our understanding of the motivations at work. And given that such figures are our culture’s “sin-eaters,” that they are exposed to the range of human foible without recourse to “talking it out” themselves, makes their shared vocation as noble it is necessary.
precarious ad vitam —
how strong
is my vocation?
   — Maria Laura Valente

*  

donated to the poor
the job
her parents wanted
   — Andy McLellan

*  

I am what I am
eight to twelve hours
of being single
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

*  

retirement
finally he finds
his true vocation
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

*  

Vocational Rehab
a life’s work spills from
two cardboard boxes
   — Michael Henry Lee
“And keep your nose clean”
he told me
wiping his nose.
— Mark Gilbert

PhD
in international relations
still lives with mom
— Paul Geiger

Red Cross nurse
scrambles amidst the rubble
shaky dextrose
— Willie Bongcaron

mother dying . . .
a priest blesses
the hospice team
— Roberta Beary

100 kilos of rice
balanced above his grin
I work in Mumbai!
— Richard Goldberg
crocerossine —
on the front of the war
by vocation
    — Angela Giordano

the vocation
of his dreams . . .
sleeping in
    — Michael Stinson

traipsing from
one interview to another
my vocation
    — Devin Harrison

winter sun —
between telling fortunes
the healer picks lice
    — Sonam Chhoki (Presence 45, 2011)

missed elevator
i answer
another call
    — Jennifer Hambrick
vocation
lost patients
show me the way

vocazione
pazienti sperduti
mi indicano la via
   — Lucia Fontana

*  

who I am
after motherhood
crickets
   — Christina Sng

*  

airplane pilot
dreaming of flying
as a child
   — Eufemia Griffo

*  

retired . . .
the barber finally exposes
his paintings
   — Elisa Allo
gold-digger
she stopped smoking
Camel though . . .
   — Adrian Bouter

still elusive
her byline
on the front page
   — Madhuri Pillai

middlescence
the new vocation
and the divorce
   — Lee Nash

circus chimp
dressed in a suit . . .
do you still long for the forest?
   — Olivier Schopfer

after hours
in the silence I hear
my calling
   — Debbi Antebi
vocation —
worker by day
jazz musician by night

vocazione —
di giorno operaio
di notte musicista jazz
   — Lucia Cardillo

* 

potter’s wheel
the clock on his wall
stops clicking
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

* 

seeking employment
   vocational advisor . . .
needs a new challenge
   — Karen Harvey

* 

on the bank a brood-hen
watches the ducklings’ swim —
vocation of mother
   — Vasile Moldovan

*
Haiku in the Workplace: Auto-Correct (or Spelchek)

This is an issue which has affected me personally — type my name into a word doc and see what it recommends as an alternative (see below if you’re too lazy to try this yourself). Such a mechanical slip might easily have altered the vectors of my life, compromised my career, and impinged on my freedom, all thanks to the zeal of Microsoft et al. to ease my responsibility to spell my own name correctly. Vorsprung durch technik indeed.

Now that I am in recovery I am amused by it all, and pleased that others are finding similar enjoyment. For instance, I stole that last phrase from Audi and from the following poem:

A life now spent  
correcting auto correct —  
Vorsprung durch technik  
[Noble Francis]

Yes, such is our time that a name or a process outside of the commonplace now must be managed: with a life given over to correcting the corrections. Such time lost, such energy wasted. The only sane response is . . . humor. And there are two chief strategies to arriving at this humor — we can revel in the absurdities foisted upon us, as in my third choice:

winter departs —  
last year’s errors  
snopaked out  
[David Dayson]

I love the verb “to snopake,” — so much unexplored potential — and plan to make it part of my general vocabulary. The other chief strategy is to create the absurdity for ourselves, as in my second choice for this week:
There is certain satisfaction to making up one’s own algorithm, to overlaying a skewed sense of logic onto something that clamors to express its own. While this particular deconstruction seems unlikely to me, even by Microsoft’s standards, there was good sport at its making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged. But lucky are they who can rise above others’ foibles, who can extract meaning from the seeming randomness and noise. My top choice this week converts the quirks of serendipity to a stentorian imperative:

> to triumph
> autocorrect tells me —
> try oomph
> [David Dayson]

Norman Vincent Peale would be proud. Now I must get utterly snopaked — “Kacian” suggests, to our algorithm overlords, “cocaine.” Until next week . . .

**New Poems**

amartophobia —
how obsessively I check
each word
— Maria Laura Valente
mangled; my English . . .
the Cupertino effect
the Cupertino effect
— Ernesto P. Santiago

making out
I’m someone I’m not
spell check
— Rachel Sutcliffe

Dear John
the typos no one
accounted for
— Michael Henry Lee

dust bowl
in vain i seek the vineyard
where the gripes of wrath are stored
— Jennifer Hambrick

I meant
superb not subpar
dame autocorrect
— Christina Sng
autocorrect
she reminds him of her name again
— Andy McLellan

grammar nazi
I become my own nemesis
— Shloka Shankar

boss’s minutes
my surname spelt as “Ceremony”
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

rough draft . . .
one misspelled word
too many
— Willie Bongcaron

message online —
my reply is impostible
— Angela Giordano
breaking the spell . . .
he calls his new girlfriend
by his ex’s name
   — Olivier Schopfer

luckily the punchline
didn’t make sense
after auto-correct
   — Mark Gilbert

unforgivable mistake
dismissal of the Director
on national television
   — Eufemia Griffo

autocorrect —
too many the errors
I can’t erase
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo Domburg

work email
my gender
autocorrects
   — Roberta Beary
submission . . .
my tale rejected
too many typos
— Elisa Allo

proofreader
Spelchek checks
Czech check
— Paul Geiger

auto correct
not what I had in mind
still it persists . . .
— Madhuri Pillai

“Thanks” to T9
Mary’s “FIGLIO”
becomes her “FOGLIO”

grazie al T9
i miei auguri al “figlio” di Mary
diventano al “foglio”
— Lucia Cardillo
Important document —
The last name of the Boss
has blossomed . . .
— Nazarena Rampini

divorce papers
installing a free
Auto-Correct
— Cezar Ciobika

bip...bip...bip...
my software
is mad
— Antonio Mangiameli

from past and future
to present tense
auto-correct
— Michael Stinson

I’ll have you know I mean
every auto-corrected word
I say
— Lee Nash
I’ll find
my own spelling errors thanks . . .
spellchick
— Karen Harvey

Echo in November
I have the same paperwork
in March
— Benedetta Cardone

spellcheck
honoring my writing skills
my first-grade teacher
— Devin Harrison
The relinquishing of self to a larger entity and purpose may indeed be noble, far-sighted, practical, philanthropic, and a host of other things, even all at once, but that doesn’t mean it’s always a pleasure. Judging by the bulk of your responses, your meetings are much like mine. Often they are full of sound and fury, signifying nothing:

Crisis talks,
Management decision,
Tea urn repaired.
[Stuart Brown]

Or else they are much ado about nothing:

a team of kites
in untuned harmony . . .
play the wind
[David Dayson]

What else to do but seek solace in humor?

lunch time meeting —
strategy and tactics
then just desserts
[David Dayson]

My third choice was based primarily on the resourcefulness of the participants:

alert attendees
hang on every word —
buzzword bingo
[Stuart Brown]
Now that’s creative teamwork! The poet also gets the reader to hang on every word, then delivers the punchline with perfect timing. Bingo!

My second choice this week rides primarily on a delicious portmanteau word:

```
tiresome meeting —
lifted up by endolphins
at a water fountain
[David Dayson]
```

We too are lifted by such an auspicious concatenation, just what we need after the juice-sapping of the weekly accounting.

My top choice this week captures the essence of haiku very neatly:

```
Office gathering
Laid bare under neon lights
Empty pizza box
[Greg Skeen]
```

Haiku most often find their resonance in the most mundane places, and what is more mundane than an empty pizza box? Yet the whole story is here: the office “gathering” which is a nice euphemism for working late; the paltry and unimaginative rewards (not even crusts left over, and box? not even boxes?; and the gaudy but probably modest work environment. And despite this meagre picture, a sense of team — a collective of individuals willing to sacrifice to a common aim — emerges, without ever having been caught in the spotlight. Nicely observed.

### New Poems

```
self employed —
the most efficient team meeting
ever
— Maria Laura Valente
```
the committee — disagreeing on how to agree
— Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

controlling any other business the chair
— Ernesto P. Santiago

team meeting outdoor the hawk cuckoo repeatedly calls “who’s in the cowshed?”
— Sonam Chhoki

team meeting finally we agree to disagree
— Rachel Sutcliffe

early team meeting — writing a haiku to stay awake
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo
lingering fog
i pretend to take notes
at a boring meeting
   — Polona Oblak

* 

team building exercise
cubicle dwellers
in a mud wrestling pit
   — Terri French

* 

team meeting
at the end I ask
about the acronyms
   — Nicholas Klacsanzky

* 

peer review —
crested cockatoos crash
the faculty meeting
   — Julie Thorndyke

* 

team meeting —
all hands in
the box of donuts
   — Chad Lee Robinson
yellow legal pad . . .
all the good ideas
in a wastebasket
   — Shloka Shankar

* 

team meeting
the mantra takes on
a life of its own
   — Michael Henry Lee

* 

team briefing
doodling
doodling
miles away
   — Mark Gilbert

* 

team meeting the sand trap’s raised lip service
   — Betty Shropshire

* 

adjacent

pigeons gather
on the factory roof
   — Andy McLellan
communications team meeting
under the table
we text jokes
    — Peggy Bilbro

breakfast team meeting
the important topics discussed
only after coffee
    — Christina Sng

rogue wave —
the day there’s really a team
at the team meeting
    — Jennifer Hambrick

team meeting —
under the table
her foot his leg
    — Adrian Bouter

new recruits
the resource guy has a way
with words
    — Willie Bongcaron
the jay’s shadow descends
and a junco jumps
team meeting
    — Michael Stinson

bickering
like birds —
the new team
    — Angela Giordano

team meeting
the silence back
in a bee’s flight
    — Lucia Fontana

song of distant magpies
I drift
through the meeting
    — Timothy J. Dickey

team meeting . . .
get a ‘take away’ or not
on the way home
    — Madhuri Pillai
meeting . . .
I draw daisies
among my notes

riunione . . .
disegno margherite
tra i miei appunti
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

team Meeting
on my schedule
wish list
— Eufemia Griffo

* 

transgenic seed
sheep grazing —
food meeting
— Antonio Mangiameli

* 

ad hoc —
team aware of everything
but no schedule
— Goran Gatalica
* 

the I in team
she shares my idea
as her own
— Debbi Antebi

* 

brainstorming . . .
too original ideas
Principal waves them off
— Elisa Allo

* 

too many paths
we stray off
the way home
— Olivier Schopfer

* 

the team meeting
in the lawyer’s office
dea snoring
— Marta Chocilowska

* 

the team meets
ten engineers
eleven opinions
— Paul Geiger
team meeting
the squabble
of magpies
— Christine L. Villa
Haiku in the Workplace: 
Maternity / Paternity Leave

The poems submitted this week find their common reference in the time taken away from work to celebrate the arrival of a new member of the family. The time-frame for these poems is generally within a few weeks after the event, when some of the elation is wearing off, and the challenges of the new situation are becoming manifest. Some poets clung, as you might expect, to that elation:

no one can praise  
the new baby’s photos —  
enough  
[David Dayson]

And some embraced the new reality:

Nappies hang drying  
I’m looking forward to work  
And a longed-for rest!  
[Greg Skeen]

Most, however, were prompted by the eventual return to the workplace, where things were the same:

the desk and boss  
as you left them:  
wooden-toned  
[Sarah Leavesley]

Or else were different:
more headaches
than at home, and without
the painkillers
[Sarah Leavesley]

But no matter the stimulus, it was the poets themselves, rather than the work to which they were returning, that had changed. My third choice this week neatly captures this newly-divided mind.

return to work —
for the new parent
teething problems
[David Dayson]

The poet conflates the issues of the office or workplace with those at home, in the language of the latter, in this case through an aptly chosen metaphor of a minor matter that causes oversized responses at the time. Teething is painful, and often quite loud, but it is transient and ultimately insignificant, just a phase we have to work through. Returning to work after time away might well have the same rawness to it, but we usually know we will get through it. My second choice comes from a poet just emerging from the euphoric haze of the happy event, and coming to realize what the passing of time outside the work routine has meant:

five days without sleep;
your inbox now the mother
of all nightmares
[Sarah Leavesley]

Couching this in terms of nightmare — an element from which even parents cannot protect their children, or even themselves — nicely collates the two worlds of the poet, which is further embellished with the felicitous choice of idiom. While we have been away, tending to the new situation, work has gone on, we have been outside the loop, and now it returns with a cumulative power. We might well have wondered, in this interlude, about our own status: have we been missed? Have we become
expendable? Such fears are what drive my top choice this week:

still in demand —
breasts ache with yearning
for her baby

[David Dayson]

As with the other selections, the crossover from the home environment to the workplace is handled deftly. The assurance that we are needed is fulfilling, but there is an ambiguity to this poem that fills it with tension. Whence does this demand issue? Is it from the workplace? From the baby? If the former, then the physical tug on a mother’s body against the regimen of work is disorienting, running counter to what must seem now to be of prime importance. If the latter, is the mother simply rationalizing the fact that work is simply no longer central to her life? It can be no simple matter to order these conflicting demands on our attention and sense of value, with no simple means of resolving them, either. The poet, by identifying her fraught circumstances, has brought that yearning to all of us as well.

**New Poems**

maternity leave —
my new bossy boss
is so cute!

— Maria Laura Valente

*

paternity leave . . .
in the hands of other staff
an esteemed career

— Ernesto P. Santiago
new job
on call
for the next 18 years
— Rachel Sutcliffe

blooming womb —
a young mother
reveals the breast
— Doris Pascolo

interviewing
the maternity cover
after work
— Mark Gilbert

paternity leave
the boss appears
on “Maury”
— Johnny Baranski

six weeks off . . .
at first it sounded
like a holiday
— Marietta McGregor
newborn son
cherished by his father
work can wait
― Kristjaan Panneman

extended leave
a yuppy finds a name
in the baby ads
― Willie Bongcaron

with only
moments to spare
maternity leave
― Michael Henry Lee

paternity leave
he downloads
the labor and delivery app
― Sonam Chhoki

maternity leave —
her organizer fills
with feed times
― Andy McLellan
still birth . . .
the maternity leave
she wished she had taken
   — Celestine Nudanu

paternity leave
my gaze for the known
in a bar
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

coloring
outside
the
dashes
new daddy
   — Roberta Beary

expecting a co-worker —
a lunch-time
baby shower
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams
night shift —
a lullaby to his son
on her cell phone
    — Angela Giordano

paternity leave
the father-to-be has
sympathy pregnancy
    — Angelee Deodhar

maternity leave
sharp learning curve
on a new job
    — Christina Sng

wisely arriving
on a holiday, our baby
must know my boss
    — Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy

maternity leave
true labor
begins
    — Olivier Schopfer
* 

paternity leave
lessons from the nurse
how not to hold the baby
— Madhuri Pillai

* 

Spring Market . . .
a dad wrapped
in a baby sling
— Elisa Allo

* 

maternity leave —
her old workflow
washes her colleagues away
— Jennifer Hambrick

* 

maternity leave —
self-employed wife
still breastfeeding
— Goran Gatalica

* 

first week back
fatherhood
backs his voice
— Ron Scully
Maternity
between feeds and diapers
office on the line

In maternità
Tra poppate e cambi
l’ufficio chiama
— Lucia Cardillo

emotionally
detached from work
cressing her tummy
— Anthony Rabang

lullaby . . .
crooning words of love
before the lunch break
— Eufemia Griffo

paternity leave
our son arrives
on my day off
— Michael Stinson
* 

the last chocolates
on her first day of leave
pink spring clouds
    — Adrian Bouter

* 

returning manager
humming lullabies . . .
paternity leave
    — Karen Harvey

* 

small company
boss wears many hats
minding a new baby
    — Paul Geiger

* 

midnight feedings
day tv, afternoon naps
dreams of back at work
    — Trilla Pando

* 

maternity leave
the never-ending job
with sons
    — Lucia Fontana
You know who you are. You are either the person who can write this straight up:

an expat’s worry —
how does one find
reliable servants
[David Dayson]

or this ironically:

only an expat
knows what it is —
to be British
[David Dayson]

Or vice versa. The days of Empire are over, and though nearly everyone thinks that’s a good thing, it may not be unanimous:

while ex-pats play
Gilbert and Sullivan —
the sun sets
[David Dayson]

Fewer things evoke nostalgia with more insistence than the country we left behind, and nostalgia is rarely the road to great art (there are exceptions, of course). Instead, we are often diverted by our sense of personal loss and lack. So it was with the bulk of the submissions for this topic — heartfelt, to be sure, but also a bit maudlin and po’-faced. Nevertheless, a few of our poets have managed a broader perspective. I think the sharp language of this one, for instance, raises its level by a great deal:
Airport Patriot
Memories of the ‘Auld Sod’
In a streaked pint glass.
  [Kate Corr]

And the metaphor maintained throughout this poem doubles back nicely on the poet:

  exotic expat —
  siamese cat transmogrified
  into familiar pet
  [David Dayson]

(though for my taste dropping the last word would have made this poem even better, while also coming closer to syllable-count rectitude).

My third choice this week is quietly sardonic:

  the diplomat retires —
  a career of pleasantness
  behind him
  [David Dayson]

We presume this person, who has made a career of tact, will now move on to a more honest expression of his or her thoughts and feelings. Surely “pleasantness” is meant to be treacherously loaded, past and present.

Second choice is this charming vignette:

  the only one
  who takes tea weaker than me —
  and always says please
  [Sarah Leavesley]

What makes this poet long for the homeland is not the flag, or the food, or the roistering politics, but rather being in the presence to one who embodies the kinds
of cultural politesse and humility that is so hard to find in the brassy world. We have all bemoaned the loss of civility in contemporary life. This poet has found a small way to celebrate it where it still exists.

My top choice this week alludes to one of the best-known of Basho’s haiku (summer grass — / all that remains / of warriors’ dreams, translation Barnhill):

```
all passion spent —
Heaven’s River stretches
over soldiers’ graves
[David Dayson]
```

Though not strictly an ex-pat haiku, this poem does conjure the idea that these soldiers, buried in a foreign land, are forever disunited from their homeland. The first line comes to be seen as an arch commentary on the human condition — we all arrive at such a point, whether it be early through the tribulations of war, or late, by our natural course. Is the presence of the Milky Way (in traditional Japanese poetry styled “Heaven’s River”) a comfort here? Can it matter to those buried beneath? Or is it only to those remaining that it offers the comfort of familiarity?

**New Poems**

Visitors flood park
vigil stance given for its . . .
fallen Patriot
   — Katherine Stella

*

‘Singapore Sling’
the Ex-pat’s preference
at their annual meet
   — Angelee Deodhar
expatriate
or immigrant
my job description for his
— Celestine Nudanu

*

lost and found
in the lives of others
an expatriate
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

working abroad —
my mother’s weekly shipping
of homemade pasta
— Maria Laura Valente

*

martial law
the foreign boss brings back
the expats
— Marta Chocilowska

*

snakeskin
i find myself
in your shoes
— Betty Shropshire
In Scotland
everyone’s a cricket fan
once England lose
— Mark Gilbert

refugees seek safety —
in the eyes
only one flag
— Doris Pascolo

the perfect excuse
for not taking work home
ex-pat assignment
— Rachel Sutcliffe

the call to prayer
turns even the skeptic’s
mind toward God
— Alison Zak

the ex-pat
fell
pushed?
— Paul Geiger
living large
the different protocols
the different bars
   — Devin Harrison

airport lounge
the porter never loses
his asian twang
   — Willie Bongcaron

foreign posting —
the familiarity
of my pen
   — Andy McLellan

the ex-boss
a bon voyage party
after the fact
   — Michael Henry Lee

long journey . . .
among my old fingers
time goes fast
   — Eufemia Griffo
ex-pats dilemma —
how many cheek kisses
this time?
   — Anna Maria Domburg

expat
learning to drive
on the “wrong side”
   — Sonam Chhoki

expat life
a fish left in
unknown waters
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

job appointment
the expatriate locked behind
second language
   — Adjei Agyei-Baah

Expatriate
Everything has the flavor
Of nostalgia
   — Angela Giordano
Switzerland . . .
half of my heart lives
beyond the Alps
— Elisa Allo

young ex-pat . . .
feelings and smiles
on skype tonight

giovane ex-pat . . .
emozioni e sorrisi
su skype a sera
— Lucia Cardillo

apart from her cooking
her accent . . .
merci beaucoup
— Madhuri Pillai

ex-pat
uprooting himself
for her
— Lucia Fontana
our new expat boss
gingerly takes a bite
local delights
  — Christina Sng

foreign correspondent
already on his fifth gin
and third wife
  — Marietta McGregor

lunch debate
marmite
versus vegemite
  — Olivier Schopfer

le hameau rural
before liquidation
we employ them all
  — Lee Nash

foreign wind
the bird shed old feathers
to join the flock
  — Anthony Rabang
immigration —
in hands of our workers
a skilled work visa
— Goran Gatalica

we envy his life
amid wild tales he admits
hamburger hunger
— Trilla Pando

seeking one’s own kind
getting away from it all
for more of the same
— Karen Harvey
Spring has a decided effect on the species. Our pulses race, our hearts throb, our minds are befuddled, we are easily distracted from all things but the one, the only, reason for being. I am speaking, of course, of poetry. This being the case, spring is a very good excuse to remind ourselves that the craft of poetry is just as — nay, even more — important than its content. Moby Dick, after all, is just a gruesome tale of a whale hunt. It’s the telling of it that makes it literature.

So let’s see how some of our poets, inflamed by the season, have managed to hew to the formalities of the genre. It’s all very well to say that the only thing that matters is what you have to say, but some of us have been at this for nearly half a year now, and it’s a good thing to take stock to see if we are in charge of our poems, or they of us. Leaving aside technical debates (syllable counts, season and cutting words, etc.), we are likely to discover the most consistent problems encountered in the poems of those who are relatively new to the genre is “telling too much.” A poem such as this

leaving and
returning in the light
daily bliss
[David Pilling]

starts well, but then gives away the game in the third line, telling the emotion rather than allowing a second image to do the work. This is exactly the challenge of haiku: to pair images to speak for you, rather than you speaking for yourselves. Imagine the possibilities this poem offers: leaving and returning in the light! Just to suggest a few things that come to mind: “the night nurse”; or “morning glories”; or “the newborn”! Each of these makes an entirely different poem, but of course that’s the point — the poem isn’t there to tell you how I feel, but to ask you to consider one sensation — the coming and going of the light (the lengthening of the days being only one of many possible readings) — with another (which may be some natural entity, but can include a complete flight of fantasy, such as the last suggestion).

Another example:
Isn’t the third line already contained in the first two? If the poet had simply written

top button undone
a sandwich in the park
thoughts of summer start
[David Pilling]

would we not have said to ourselves “ah, the beginning of the warm season, and all that entails.” Add to this that we would have found it ourselves, and our satisfaction with the poem is enhanced many times over.

Another common problem is that we as poets don’t entirely trust the reader to gather our meanings. So we overreach, on the one hand,

   Her two ankles bare
   By the Twinings Selection
   The sandal scandal
   [Imara Csoti]

or else we might equivocate:

   apricot blossom —
   can fluorescent lights
   have a fragrant halo
   [David Dayson]

Imagine if the poet had simply offered

   apricot blossoms —
   the fragrant halo
   of fluorescent light
Would we have followed him there? I would have, gladly. He doesn’t need to ask my permission, as his own version seems to do. Compare these with my selections for the week. My third prize this week is for

```
spring sorrow —
to find a whole day
lost at work
   [David Dayson]
```

We make our way in the world by selling our hours, and this is never more painful than during the time of burgeoning, as the poet clearly evokes. “Spring sorrow” is a trope — a kigo — from classical Japanese haiku, which the poet has nicely updated here. My second choice is actually three choices, all with the same shared moment:

```
in consolation —
spring sunset treads on papers
fanned across my desk
   [David Dayson]

Erigenia;
natural daylight let in,
on spreadsheet magic
   [Noble Francis]

we start to slant blinds —
against the rush of files,
trickles of sunshine
   [Sarah Leavesley]
```

The renewed awareness of a strengthening and invigorating sun is one of the most important experiences of spring, and, not surprisingly, many poets wrote on this subject. It is instructive to see how these three poets differ in their approach, and what effect these differences have on their poems. In the first, a proviso is stated in
the opening line. While this has the effect of preparing our mindspace for the mild irony that is to follow, it also limits the range of our response, telling us, in effect, what the discovery was for the poet. Thus, effective, but not expansive.

The second begins with a natural image, and not just any natural image, but the specific flower associated in the UK with early spring, so this already contains season and nature contexts. The second line provides “natural daylight” to inform us that the poet has had to make do with the alternative, presumably for some time, and the third jokes on the fact that this doesn’t quite release him from his reality — he’s still in the office, doing his job — but at least now it’s in a slightly better environment. The poet, like the erigenia, is the better for a glimpse of the return of the natural world, even if life is pretty much the same.

The third, and the best of these to my mind, begins with an action that connotes the season — the waxing power of the sun is noted and accommodated. As with the other two poems, the office setting is still the context, and the invasion of that context by natural forces is the “plot.” In this instance, however, the poet, while still providing a clear visual image of what he has encountered, manages to convey the experience 1) more directly (the sunlight neither “treads” nor evokes “magic” but is simply sunshine), 2) in language that is suggestive of the latent and growing power of the sun (“trickles” against the “rush”), while 3) allowing readers to come to the wealth of associations in their own way (neither as “consolation” nor as “magic”). The result is nicely restrained, and as a consequence, more expansive.

My top winner this week is this bit of serendipity:

```
skyscrapers drift —
their moorings loosened
by spring clouds
[David Dayson]
```

Our cognitive faculties may explain this to us after the fact, but it is not facts that compel here, rather the charming illusion of our gravity-bound world sprung loose by the float of clouds, not only in the sky but in the windows of those buildings that rear up among them. “Drift” is exactly right, there is seemingly no purpose to this motion, in contrast to the precision of such architecture in the rational city. This seems a particularly apt denotation of spring, when our own leaden thoughts,
grown recalcitrant in winter, loosen in the new warmth and light, allowing us who have drudged so long to float free as well. Thanks to the poet who sends us up into the clouds on such a fine day.

**New Poems**

Spring affair  
the Secretary’s hat  
in pink polka dots  
—— Celestine Nudanu

*  

buried in research  
for publication’s cold deadline  
Crocuses break through  
—— Barbara Fay Wiese

*  

spring in the office —  
a butterfly lands  
on the flower dress  
—— Doris Pascolo

*  

spring clean  
a new broom  
for the dead wood  
—— Mark Gilbert
Now; aimlessly . . .
wandering around the office
a caddis fly
— Ernesto P. Santiago

Decluttering
a cloudless screen saver
for the virtual desktop
— Sonam Chhoki

Coffee break —
two red strawberries
in my bag
— Maria Teresa Sisti

Cubical frenzy
rolls donuts and fresh coffee
early bird gets worm
— Katherine Stella

Workplace tulips working overtime too
— Roberta Beary
* 

At the window
The scent of peaches
Wants to go out
    — Angela Giordano

* 

winter is gone
summer will come —
I’m here anytime
    — Antonio Mangiameli

* 

window desk
a warm breeze shuffling
my papers
    — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

spring
fresh cut flowers in our
receptionist’s
    — Michael Henry Lee

* 

building site
work stopped
bird’s nest
    — Mike Gallagher
springtime in the office
buying devil's ivy
for the boss
— Angelee Deodhar

a touch of lemon
in her answering machine
rain or shine
— Willie Bongcaron

Spring rain
clouding the windows —
this temptation of office affair
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

cherry blossom
the drones buzzing back and forth
office workers
— Rebecca Harvey

e-mail out
spring clearance sale
gloves half price
— Karen Harvey
spring report —
a remarkable increase
in sneezes
    — Maria Laura Valente

Van Gogh’s sunflowers . . .
It’s already spring
in my office
    — Eufemia Griffo

springtime
the business dress code
suspended
    — Marta Chocilowska

pansies near the printer
. . . tapis roulant
before the salad
    — Elisa Allo

first grade sunshine
not enough jars
for the handpicked posies
    — Marilyn Appl Walker
spring moon
her appraisal rating
star-studded
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

at the employee entrance
catching some rays
desk plants
   — Gail Oare

indifferent
to the lunch crowd’s indifference
gymnastic pigeon
   — Amy Losak

shareholders meeting —
full of rain
the spring clouds
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

springtime
in with march madness
out with the office softball game
   — Jennifer Hambrick
a vase on the desk
flower heads nod
toward the window
   — Paul Geiger

*  
springtime
the anticipated arrival
of a new secretary
   — Mohammad Azim Khan

*  
springtime in the office —
my wife is sacrificing style
for comfort
   — Goran Gatalica

*  
mud flats —
beyond my office window
wild nasturtium
   — Arvinder Kaur

*  
coffee break . . .
from the desk to the window
to gaze at the sun
   — Madhuri Pillai
office windows —
the blue of the sky is light
on the roofs

dalle finestre —
è leggero sui tetti
il blu del cielo

— Lucia Cardillo

*  

office in spring-time
the flower on her desk
a real one now . . .

— Adrian Bouter

*  

office meeting
my turn to respond
to the blackbird’s call

— Debbi Antebi

*  

the canteen
suddenly full of skin
spring peace

— Lee Nash
folding
another white paper
work desk blossoms
   — Anthony Rabang

irises
on a coworker’s desk
quarter end
   — Deborah P Kolodji

spring flowers
the infighting moves
out of doors
   — Devin Harrison
The first batch of submissions this week seem of decidedly poorer quality than our usual, and I wonder why this might be. One possible reason is that the poems came from sources other than the usual group of submitters who have been refining their poetic skills over the past half year and more by reading and contributing to this column. These have the look and feel, for the most part, of being by people making their first attempts at haiku, and who know primarily that haiku is “anything I want to say in 5-7-5 syllables.” As a consequence, much of the nuance and layering that many of you have begun to bring to your haiku is absent here, making quality selections that much harder to find.

Something about them does arrest me, however. I note that they are extremely similar to the (in)famous “Big Blue Haiku” that first made their way around the internet in the 1980s. These poems, which sought to combine a description of the small (but occasionally fraught) moments of the computer programmer’s life with the identity offered by a formal (if misinformed) rigor, had a short run as pop culture memes. At the time they were posted anonymously, but we have come to identify some of the poets involved, primarily through a contest held toward the end of the phenomenon’s run. A couple of the better examples:

Three things are certain:
Death, taxes, and lost data.
Guess which has occurred.
    David Dixon

I’m sorry, there’s — um —
insufficient — what’s-it-called?
The term eludes me . . .
    Owen Mathews
Windows NT crashed.
I am the Blue Screen of Death.
No one hears your screams.
Peter Rothman

These poems were written by engineers, and there is attached to them a certain dweeby jouissance. It is this similarity I note in my selections from the first category, titled The Man from IT. Many offerings were simply descriptive lists, and though occasionally astute or clever, offered none of the imagistic interplay that is the hallmark of good haiku. There was some fun character painting, however, such as:

Smartphone in pocket
licensed to make a killing
Bond of the laptop.
[Helen Buckingham]

and there was a single most common reaction to his visit:

nimble fingers dance
advises turn on and off again
I feel stupid now
[B Bickerton]

and not a universal reverence for his efforts:

the IT guru with
a mantra, fake panacea;
shut down and restart.
[Noble Francis]

My third selection approaches the haiku norm a bit more by being primarily concerned with images. What a chilling vision the poet limns —
The servers are beasts.
Computers are how we breathe.
He oversees it all.
[Belinda O'Shea]

Here the coder is cast as the Other, a slide-rule Pluto overseeing a dark underworld largely of his own making and certainly of his own maintaining. As usual, this reveals more about the mind of the poet than the subject of his brief portrait. What fearful symmetry she finds in this modern tyger! And the middle line is truly, and frighteningly, dystopic.

My second choice sees the coder in a more benign light:

I dreamt binary
love songs, the IT man who
knows — we're one or none
[Samantha Symonds]

romanticizing his obsession with zeroes and ones into a fleeting dream, a haiku that might have been written by Philip K. Dick. Even so, there’s a mathematical tweak in the third line that is unsettlingly inhuman, and which nicely catches the darker side of this kind of vision. My top prize

a cursor appears
moving across the screen to
show he has arrived
[David Osman]

has a deceptively light feel to it on the surface, but houses a much darker sense. The poet’s computer, ostensibly in need of repair, has been taken over remotely by the IT operative. Surely this is a good thing — the computer will be “fixed.” But only after the fact do we apprehend that what has in fact happened is the complete surrender of autonomy — we do call them personal computers, after all — to forces we do not comprehend (or else we'd be fixing it ourselves). Once he has arrived, this process will never be reversed, and it will never get simpler — and he has arrived.
The best of these to my mind, then, have called upon science fiction for their impact, but, chillingly, this is not fiction but rather the daily reality of the mind that cannot see into the mysterious world of coding — that is, for most of us.

**New Poems**

server down —
the tech guy pushes
my buttons
    — Roberta Beary

* 

Ada Byron Lovelace —
the first woman who
whisperered to computers
    — Doris Pascolo

* 

how small she is
who once more debugs
the office compiler
    — Sonam Chhoki

* 

IT support
helping me through
my clouds
    — Rachel Sutcliffe
the head of I.T.
on the fourth floor of
a three story office
— Michael Henry Lee

the man from IT...
broadly consumed
a crop of infos
— Ernesto P. Santiago

a shared glance
the IT guy
knows everything
— Mark Gilbert

brandish marketing
technology mastering...
fabulous geek squad
— Katherine Stella

IT man
the spy
who loves me
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
the IT sybil:
“try turning it off
and on again”
— Maria Laura Valente

incommunicado . . .
not really, it’s the guy
from sys admin
— Marietta McGregor

IT technician
the trouble he takes
photoshopping
— Willie Bongcaron

foggy morning
the IT man talks
mumbo-jumbo
— Celestine Nudanu

girlfriend from IT —
she advises him to upgrade
his newest necktie
— Marta Chocilowska
IT installing software —
chances for doom
at 99 percent
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

lost in translation
I nod sagely as
he explains UNIX
   — Andy McLellan

at the plant nursery
debugging the computers
hoverflies
   — Devin Harrison

I share grandma’s name
with a stranger
security check
   — Peggy Bilbro

FAQ
?NFRU
IT—R—
   — Mike Gallagher
my husband opines
on IT at dinner:
I think of a haiku
   — Elisa Allo

bug search
a spider’s web
on the screen
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

over the phone
step by step
he leads me on
   — Madhuri Pillai

Woman technician
It will be more interesting
information
   — Angela Giordano
planning a holidays site
the scent of the sea
brings me away
— Eufemia Griffo

error . . .
this computer stop working —
recurrent nightmare

errore . . .
questo pc ti abbandona —
incubo ricorrente
— Lucia Cardillo

expert
advice
reboot
— Marion Clarke

heat lightning
the IT guy scans
my 0s and 1s
— Jennifer Hambrick
Easter morning —
light breaks forth onto
a dead monitor
— Timothy J. Dickey

Botticelli’s Venus
through daily crisis
rebirth
— Lucia Fontana

painting my nails
waiting for the man
from IT
— Karen Harvey

the IT guy
sees me and scoots
left at the station
— Michael Stinson

dead monitor
the blank stare
of the IT man
— Billy Antonio
solar eclipse —
somewhere in the IT man’s head
always a generator
— Adrian Bouter

flu season
the IT specialist cleans
my infected computer
— Olivier Schopfer

surprise surprise — a woman
the new grandmaster
of the It department
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

pardon my ESL
but I cannot translate
broken Fortran
— Ron Scully

jobs justified —
another change
in the website
— Paul Geiger
dense fog
the woman from IT changes
her cover photo
— Cezar Ciobika

my cursor
under his control
dormant mouse
— Lee Nash

Downing the face
drowning on screen pages
today’s IT world
— Purush Ravela
Haiku in the Workplace:  
The Personal Performance Review

This week’s topic was something more intimate for most of us — the Personal Performance Review. So much of our self-image is potentially caught up in these often casual, even random, evaluations, and so much can feel out of our control. Where the impact of the poems concerning the IT man resided primarily in the logical conclusions of their images, here the primary affect is directly emotional. Some poets addressed the process itself, urging, for instance, compassion:

    temper the steel —
    for nine circle our labours
    my friend: ‘et tu...’
    [Tina Two]

And some viewed the potential outcomes in the most general terms:

    To love and be loved,
    Is the most beautiful form
    Of self destruction
    [Emily Hall]

But these fall more into the realm of apothegm. Similarly, personal reportage such as

    A nervous moment
    until the first words are said.
    Praise, but small bonus!
    [David Osman]

or
Yearly pantomime
As hope seeks best of career —
But, it’s behind you!
[Paul Lee]

have a certain charm and verisimilitude, even if they lack the usual perquisites of haiku. The three poems I have selected as top winners all seek to use images to some degree to convey their import. My third choice uses a somewhat common image as its payoff, but receives an extra boost from its comparison:

Stifling heat betrays
Missed deadlines thwart advancement
Cold tea in my cup
[Gregory Skeen]

The heat is perhaps actual, but it is certainly psychological, which is the more telling in the event. The aggregate of fears finds its unsatisfying synthesis in that cold cup of tea, which also suggests a lack of activity in late afternoons in future, a foreboding which cannot brighten the poet’s mind. The language, in striving to meet the syllable requirement, is clunky, which works against this poem to a degree. I would have rated it higher if it had been a bit more felicitous.

My second offering

I chose the hard route
But should have chosen easy
can I start again?
[Scott Evans]

posits the (admittedly rather usual) concept of “the path” as its means of coping with the experience. The charm of the poem resides entirely in its wistful third line. The poet knows this is impossible, but the very act of asking somehow lessens the fear of the potentialities. We take this as a sign that this person will cope with the situation — be it though willful naïveté or simple stalwart innocence.

My top prize goes to this sad vignette:
missed targets
he suddenly regrets
Sunday night darts
[Marion Clarke]

This poem works as a haiku ought — it allows the images to release the potentialities of the poem, rather than providing commentary and conclusions. The opening line certainly admits to the topic at hand, but also opens to other possibilities, and of course neatly redounds in the third. The language is spare — no padding is added in an attempt to realize an outmoded notion of syllable count. The third line is not predictable from the first two, and yet, once received, seems inevitable. And of course the pathos of the content — the imagining that realizing one’s career goals might only be possible through foregoing even the slightest of personal pleasures — is delivered in their starkest terms, without commentary, and so is all the more devastating for that. All in 8 words. Nicely done.

New Poems

my stretched arms —
one sandwich
divided in two
— Doris Pascolo

*

bulleted out
all aspects of the job speaking
for itself
— Ernesto P. Santiago
evaluation
notable performance sheet . . .
rendered by employers
— Katherine Stella

PPR form
restocking my drawer
with scrap paper
— Rachel Sutcliffe

performance review
folding my pink slip in
the shape of a swan
— Michael Henry Lee

peeling tree bark
she hides her spotted hands
in the interview
— Amy Losak

Total black out
The job performance evaluation
is based now on empathy
— Stefano Riondato
sinking lower
the ten-slot ranking
quarterly review
    — Willie Bongcaron

paper trail
the many ways
he says “satisfactory”
    — Gail Oare

IT guy smiles
he read my love letters
aha!
    — Judith Hishikawa

performance reviews
someone at the door
to check ID
    — Gary Eaton

performance review
the table’s polished veneer
is pear-shaped
    — Mark Gilbert
reflecting on my past twelve months . . .
a kaleidoscope’s
changing colors
    — Olivier Schopfer

self appraisal —
filling the columns
with stars
    — Arvinder Kaur

performance review
the song and dance
of higher management
    — Terri L. French

cadono le prime foglie . . .
il sorriso degli studenti
è il metro dell’insegnante

first leaves fall . . .
a student’s smile is
the teacher’s ruler
    — Elisa Allo
* 

trying to do
too much before work
“Don’t be late again”
— Debbie Feller

* 

performance review
the paper airplane
doesn’t fly either
— Garry Eaton

* 

appraisal
my boss measures
unreal me
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

* 

appraisal —
praising myself within the confines
of my conscience
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

* 

look inside yourself . . .
the first step to becoming better
— Eufemia Griffo
perfectionist . . .
collateral effects
gastritis and stress

perfezionista . . .
effetti collaterali
stress e gastrite
  — Lucia Cardillo

work satisfaction . . .
he mumbles while closing
the cookie jar
  — Adrian Bouter

the boss
weighing me up
resets the scales
  — Mike Gallagher

over and above
the call of duty —
the boss’s son
  — Paul Geiger
in the middle of
a performance review
soliloquy
    — Anthony Rabang

self-appraisal
how the clouds
keep on changing
    — Billy Antonio

yearly review —
a garbage truck outside
the office window
    — Brendon Kent

that promotion . . .
a little further
than envisaged
    — Madhuri Pillai

all night work . . .
the final self-appraisal
in three lines
    — Marta Chocilowska
key performance indicator
one too many beers
downed at lunchtime
— Marietta McGregor

appraisal time —
playing hide-and-seek
with my self-confidence
— Maria Laura Valente

annual appraisal
in the “not quite there” tone
a touch of school report
— Sonam Chhoki

performance review
the manager’s T-shirt says
“you suck”
— Garry Eaton

personal review
my professional failings
never looked so good
— Lee Nash
Performance
The artistic impression
Which characterizes me

Prestazioni
L'impronta artistica
che mi caratterizza
— Angela Giordano

performance review
i award myself
an oscar
— Karen Harvey

whisky breath
a kiss from the boss
sealing my performance
— Celestine Nudanu

it goes well
the Personal Performance Review
— her see-through blouse
— Angelee Deodhar
Haiku in the Workplace: Bring Your Child to Work Day

Ah, children. It’s not enough that they are burdened with our poor modeling of adult behavior at home — no, we must also display it at work, so they will have an idea of what to avoid when they grow up. But they probably won’t . . .
Most of our poets found that the children behaved admirably — indeed, inspirationally — in the work space —

in the midst
of office turmoil the calm —
focus of a child
[David Dayson]

had a decidedly bracing effect —

icy colleagues —
thaw as children flood
into the office
[David Dayson]

and were missed instantly once having left —

keyboards rattle
tunelessly after children leave —
with their music
[David Dayson]

The effect they have had will probably fade, but in the short term must be deemed positive —
Typing nonsense, lost
pens, spinning on chairs –
that’s just my boss!

[Sarah Leavesley]

The best of these, in my view, takes place just a bit later —

next day at school —
show and tell a memory
stick from the office

[David Dayson]

This poem neatly confounds our expectations. What threatens to wallow in
generalities actually morphs into a useful metaphor, recounting a planned outcome,
and possibly — it’s hard to be sure — a pilferage. This is created by the poet’s adroit
management of form — breaking the term “memory stick” in the middle and
sharing it between two lines, we are led to the brink of platitude (ah, the memories!)
only to be rescued by the specifics of the event. The third line is often the “tell” in
haiku, when the scene or sense is suddenly shifted to reveal the unexpected that is
somehow even more obvious than the expected. The poet here plays us, and we,
childlike in our trusts and innocence, are grateful.

New Poems

demanding a burger . . .
the boss wears ponytails

— Willie Bongcaron

*

spending a day
in the life of my father
a worker ant

— Ernesto P. Santiago
daughters in the office —
on fogged windows
“we love you Mom”
  — Doris Pascolo

* 

the children’s questions —
why can’t I
conceive?
  — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

lawfirm desk
a daughter finds
her photo
  — Roberta Beary

* 

bring-your-child-to-work day —
the childless woman
calls in sick
  — Jennifer Hambrick

* 

A bit shy
my son shakes hands with an elder
In the nursing home
  — Kristjaan Panneman
Je-Khen-po briefing  
the toddler helps herself  
to the fruit offerings  
— Sonam Chhoki

Je-Khen-po: Chief Abbot of the Monastic Body

babycare in the workplace —  
nappy change  
on headmaster’s desk  
— Maria Laura Valente

identical ties and frowns dad and sons on Bring Your Child to Work Day  
— Angelee Deodhar

lecture hall —  
among unknown students  
my daughter’s face  
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

kids to work day  
everyone using  
their outside voice  
— Michael Henry Lee
seismic shift
a first grader straightens up
the stacks on my desk
— Gail Oare

my child protégé
accompanies me to work
retirement plan
— Karen Harvey

‘once upon a time’
we illustrate sales figures
with unicorns
— Andy McLellan

childhood memories
dropping my pants
in front of daddy’s workers
— Celestine Nudanu

business meeting . . .
my child next to me
can you tell me a story, mom?
— Eufemia Griffo
Inquiry reproduction
who what when where why?
take kid to work day
— Katherine Stella

kids invade my office . . .
all those trapped
in child labor
— Olivier Schopfer

my request
to bring my dog
rejected . . .
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

bringing her son
to work
for therapy
— Danny Blackwell

whacking the rattle
at the keyboard . . .
one of those days
— Mark Gilbert
* 

kindergarten on strike —
mascot for a day
in mom’s classroom

sciopero al nido —
mascotte per un giorno
nella classe di mamma
   — Elisa Alla

* 

showing a condo —
my young daughter
points out a roach
   — Marilyn Appl Walker

* 

He smiles his son
in the workplace
The new playground

Sorride il figlio
sul posto di lavoro
Il nuovo parco giochi
   — Angela Giordano
son at work day
loyalty check
by my boss
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

the surgeon’s daughter
playing with his scalpel
bloody cheek
— Mike Gallagher

my child in office —
the sketch of his hand
for me on a post-it

mio figlio in ufficio
disegna la sua mano
per me su un post-it
— Lucia Cardillo

nanny’s day off
a buzz of the spinning top
at the team meeting
— Marta Chocilowska
staff meeting
all eyes on
the boss’s child
   — Billy Antonio

* 

like last year
she mentions her miscarriage
on this day at work . . .
   — Adrian Bouter

* 

day at dad’s work
dad drives the backhoe
through a knothole
   — Paul Geiger

* 

eight year old’s questions
the boss
scratches his head
   — Madhuri Pillai

* 

brought them to work
the machines start to whirr
a child’s mind
   — Rebecca Harvey
bottom three shelves
rearranged by rainbow largely
books my daughter’s read
   — Ron Scully

* 

child-friendly office
fur-baby snores and farts
under her desk
   — Marietta McGregor

* 

a time with kid at workplace
he calls my boss
grandma
   — Adjei Agyei-Baah

* 

boardroom
with my cape and mask on
visitors enter without notice
   — Anthony Rabang

*
Haiku in the Workplace: 
First Day at the New Job

One of the tropes of haiku is that it engages “beginner’s mind.” This is a state wherein we are completely receptive to whatever happens, alert to change, free from judgment, and lacking anticipation. We are right here, right now, and we embrace it. Which, as we all know, is fine when you are in a completely comfortable and confident state, or the exact opposite state one find’s one’s self in when beginning a new job. Here we know that a steep learning curve lies just ahead of us, that our ability to traverse this climb will determine if we’re allowed to continue, and that we will need to assimilate our new routine and environment as quickly as possible in order to fit in. The stress of these challenges is enormous, and yet there is much to recommend such a move. We do indeed become hyperalert, and the possibilities of newness are refreshing and very often pay dividends within and without the workplace. We meet new people, travel new routes, and test our skills in ways we’ve never tried. And maybe, if we’re lucky, we get paid well.

Many of our poets chose to explain just these sorts of things in their work, rather than treat them as the context out of which their poems arose. This one, for instance, is so pointed that it hardly needs to be placed in the context of this survey:

New kid on the block
Keeping low so not to be
New neck on the block
[Mike Franklin]

Fitting in is a particularly recurrent theme, and, to judge from your submissions, the source of most consternation. This one is perhaps the most specific:

Tightening at the neck:
no one else
was wearing a tie.
[Collin Dardis]
Then there were the minor inconveniences that accompany newness, as in this vignette:

Knocking at the glass,
she wondered when
her ID card would arrive.

[Collin Dardis]

And of course the indoctrination process always offers its challenges:

work induction —
gently anaesthetised
by training videos

[David Dayson]

Occasionally for some a shift of routine can trigger to something darker:

At their desks
no one noticed him
breaking the water cooler.

[Collin Dardis]

Your submissions also offered a nice “teaching moment.” Compare if you would these two poems:

first day —
so many introductions
all forgotten

[David Dayson]

Anna, Claire, Greg, Matt,
Pete, Sam, Simon, Sue, Tim, Tom,
Will, Will, Anna . . .

[Sarah Leavesley]
The subject matter is identical, and each approach has its own felicities. In the former, the first line opens the poem to multiple contexts — school, work, the playground, a wedding or a funeral — but later tells us the consequence, leaving little for the reader to do other than affirm. The second approach is much more specific in what it offers, and the repeated names are tantalizing — are there really 2 Wills, 2 Annas, or is the poet getting confused? Which also underscores the challenge of getting the lay of the land. However, in this form the poem gains much by being discovered within the context of poems written to this subject. Encountering it on its own, a reader might have a great deal more difficulty understanding that it purports to be more than a list, and in fact is a commentary on the rigors of introductions. Both these approaches have their merits, as well as their challenges.

My top three this week all offer some literary attribute which distinguishes them from the rest. My third choice offers an original coinage:

```
first day at work —
with a flutter of newrosis
butterflies settle
[David Dayson]
```

A word that describes a “disorder as a result of newness” seems missing from our current stock for describing the modern condition, and is a welcome addition. And of course the butterflies are both actual and literal.

My second selection

```
recruited —
well suited a career
rebooted
[David Dayson]
```

employs rhyme, which is rarely encountered in haiku, since in such a short form such an effect might easily overwhelm other features. Here, however, I feel the rhyme suggestively reinforces the content — the recurrence of the same “oo” sound creates a mood (sorry) of repetition — another place with other people, but the same job. The suit may have changed, and I may have been sought out, but it is to
familiar territory I will be moving.  
The best of the current crop, however, I felt to be

    a chameleon
    brightens with the move —
    to a new branch
    [David Dayson]

On my first reading I felt the third line might be a bit of a wasted opportunity — of course the chameleon changes when it moves to a new place. But I decided that the neat metonymy actually enhanced the overall effect, and anchored the poem to the specifics of the poet. Additionally, this poem is the most characteristic of traditional haiku of these noted, relying upon image to convey the import of the poem without recourse to explanation, interjection or imposition. That is, it features poetry mind rather than prose mind, a transformation more challenging to make than any a chameleon might undertake. Well done.

New Poems

braille characters —
gazing at the world
with someone else’s eyes
    — Stefano Riondato

*

the new girl —
everybody calls me
by a different name
    — Maria Laura Valente
first day
someone else’s post-its
in my cubicle
   — Mark Gilbert

summer job
amazed at the proby’s
disarming PR
   — Willie Bongcaron

work-from-home
the need to impress
slightly greater
   — Shloka Shankar

new job
the secretary’s face
at my too tight suit
   — Celestine Nudanu

first coffee break —
I am the only one
drinking green tea
   — Angelee Deodhar
new job
the exchange
of tampons
— Roberta Beary

* 

the rookie . . .
in and out of the office
a fruit fly
— Ernesto P. Santiago

* 

first day at the new job —
an important challenge
“on tiptoe”
— Doris Pascolo

* 

morning rumbling
butterflies dance in stomach
first day on new job
— Katherine Stella

* 

a rookie mistake
her first and last day
on any job
— Michael Henry Lee
induction day
learning
all the exits
— Brendon Kent

first day on the job
how my face shines
in new shoes
— Rachel Sutcliffe

first day
tapping my instinct
to guide me
— Angelo Ancheta

new job . . .
I feel just like Alice
in front of the queen
— Eufemia Griffo

“smile!”
says my boss
through gritted teeth
— Debbie Feller
new girl
her skirt already
too short
— Jessica Latham

first day at work
someone else’s family
in my top desk drawer
— Terri French

first job
the boss’s blue eyes
smile at me
— Marta Chocilowska

shooting star
my new office down
one of these halls
— Gail Oare

on meeting new cohorts
I turn myself inside
out
— Devin Harrison
new job . . .
with a smile my husband
went to the wrong office
    — Elisa Allo

* 

on time
for the new job
my mismatched socks
    — Billy Antonio

* 

dawn —
the job ushers me
into adulthood
    — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

* 

starting a new job
my first day
of kindergarten
    — Olivier Schopfer

* 

New city
First day on the job
Among perfect strangers
    — Angela Giordano
first day at the new job —  
a rubber spider 
in the desk drawer  
      — Chad Lee Robinson

new job . . .  
I slide into the drawer 
mother’s photograph  
      — Madhuri Pillai

I sign their contract  
for a key to the bathroom  
gauge of commitment  
      — Michael Stinson

new job  
a meerkat  
reads the landscape  
      — Jennifer Hambrick

first day  
all I can think about  
is my daughter  
      — Christina Sng
stethoscope, pager
key to the morphine cabinet
her first round
   — Lee Nash

size matters —
on introducing it’s the boots
that got most attention . . .
   — Adrian Bouter

semi-retired . . .
I welcome with a smile
new hires

quasi in pensione
accolgo con un sorriso
i nuovi assunti
   — Lucia Cardillo

hiding my nerves
the loud squeak
of new shoes
   — Andy McLellan
tiny green stem,
a weed shoots up after rain.
I greet new colleagues
    — Timothy J. Dickey

first day
knowing winks —
at my brown bag
    — Paul Geiger

first day at the new job
a declining graph:
enthusiasm over time
    — Anthony Rabang

insomnia —
a last night
before the first day
    — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

first day at work
my tea-making skills
an asset
    — Karen Harvey
* 
maiden flight
the gull’s wings through
sea of clouds
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi
*

* 
first day at work
my undercover boss
turn up as waitress
   — Adjei Agyei-Baah
*
The only office retreats I have observed were extremely modest affairs, conducted in slightly shabby, if remote, locations in the presence of a mere handful of participants. There were usually exercises, communal meals, a slate of objectives, and a central metaphor or slogan that was intended to tie the whole event together. Still, it was usually pretty tame stuff, not too much of a stretch for anyone, and certainly grounded in the realities of the corporate ethos. I was rather shocked, then, when met with the scale of mythos the concept of retreat evoked in at least one poet:

Canute calming tides  
to still blue; dream of islands  
surviving brute waves  
[Sarah Leavesley]

The following effort, tongue firmly in cheek (if far far away) is more in line with my own expectations:

the office retreats —  
to boldly go where everyone  
has gone before  
[David Dayson]

And of course we do not change our spots, as this poet notes:

we retreat to find —  
our hidden Tigger instead  
just inner Eeyore  
[David Dayson]

What we are here we will be there. And:
we retreat to find
our common humanity —
in a budget hotel
[David Dayson]

The circumstances will not matter, so why break the bank? Cynical, perhaps, but probably canny as well.
The interest for most of the submissions this week were along these lines: either musing on the point(lessness) of such a practice, or else evoking the humor inherent in changing venues to discover new ways of thinking or being, and finding largely the same things. None of the poems really rose to the challenge of art, and certainly not to the classical exactions which haiku demand: a pairing of image which are allowed to carry the emotional freight; a cut or caesura to provide the gap which the energy of the images sparks across; a seasonal word that ties events to the natural sequencing of the year. Haiku is nearly always best performed in familiar surroundings, in the discussion of everyday experiences and actions. It’s what surprises us in the quotidian that makes for the best haiku. Perhaps shifting location and routine is not ideal for its practice.
Nevertheless, I have picked out a couple of poems that seem to me a cut above the rest, for one reason or another. For instance, my third choice seems a homely homily on human behavior, true enough of most of us most of the time:

we retreat to complain —
poor quality coffee but
drank it all the same
[David Dayson]

We may aspire to more, but we need what we need, now, and pretty much take it as it is when we can.
Of course the hope is that we will be changed by the experience, that it will alter our reality and make us more capacious, more creative. An awareness of the process as it occurs might help:
Pulses change, time slows;  
each unwatched hour away brings  
ninety new emails.  
[Sarah Leavesley]

Or perhaps it will just put us in mind of our usual selves. We know we need to let go, to let the newness not just surround, but enter, us. My top choice this week is on board with this idea:

warm up exercises  
we imagine a hat to wear —  
but I just ate mine  
[David Dayson]

Does this exempt him? Or does it free him from all constraints? Only the poet knows, and he’s not saying. Perhaps it is his story that will be the central metaphor for next year’s retreat . . .

New Poems

team building retreats  
the distinctive behaviors  
of foraging bees  
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*  

meditation —  
in my mind  
only the sound of silence  
— Doris Pascolo
group getaway —
looking for a midnight snack
I meet the boss
— Angelee Deodhar

* 

team building
on the office retreat
our raft sinks
— Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

bursting mims
coastal office retrieval . . .
bearing no bosses
— Katherine Stella

* 

first office retreat —
finally I see the faces
behind the masks
— Maria Laura Valente

* 

office retreat
I reconsider
my drink limit
— Tiffany Shaw-Diaz
*  
brownie points  
I try to beat myself  
at snooker  
        — Mark Gilbert  
*  
the office retreat  
our conversation revolves  
around the weather  
        — Michael Henry Lee  
*  
office retreat  
a whiteboard  
full of unicorns  
        — Jennifer Hambrick  
*  
team building  
the bold move to start  
from scratch  
        — Willie Bongcaron  
*  
a pillar of plastic  
instead of insurance —  
workplace trophy  
        — Nicholas Klacsanzky
office retreat
finally bonding on the approach
to the flying fox
    — Marietta McGregor

* 

office snake
hangs about the yoga group
playing the long game
    — Martha Magenta

* 

picnic table
discovering the person
opposite you
    — Danny Blackwell

* 

office retreat
discussing the boss’ girlfriend
next door
    — Celestine Nudanu

* 

office retreat
brings a new perspective
boss in his swim trunks
    — Andy McLellan
* 

staff retreat
in the sunshine
our bright ideas
— Olivier Schopfer

*

his pile of memos
i rescind my order
back to my farm
— Radhamani Sarma

*

office retreat
deeper and deeper in the lawn
spike heels
— Marta Chocilowska

*

corporate retreat —
the boss unleashes
her boxer
— Roberta Beary

*

changes . . .
door closes
on my old life
— Eufemia Griffo
at staff retreat
we do the hokey-pokey
to turn ourselves around
   — Michael Stinson

*

office retreat
at the cocktail hour
I embellish my story
   — Madhuri Pillai

*

sales retreat
the same old business casual
with a new wrinkle
   — Gail Oare

*

depth dive talk
in the company
lone wolves
   — Angelo Ancheta

*

a scavenger hunt
for team building —
what about losers?
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo
emptying medical studio
. . . can the Rorschach test
predict my future?
— Elisa Allo

* 

to forget
telephone and clock —
owner of my time
dimenticare
telefono e orologio . . .
padrona del mio tempo
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

vetoed for the theme
of our office retreat
murder mystery
— Lee Nash

* 

at the retreat
dragonfly wings in morning sun —
koi pond shimmers
— Paul Geiger
company retreat
I rediscover my passion
for the boss’s wife
— Cezar Ciobika

moon-filled lake . . .
our boss changes into
his soft voice
— Brendon Kent

retreat
we come out
of our shells
— Debbi Antebi

team building —
the jack-of-all-trades
emerging
— Anthony Rabang

staff retreat
the tipsy manager
gestures me to chamber
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
withdrawing
into my shell to think, write
tortoise
    — Karen Harvey

out of the office —
even the boss today
looks like one of us

fuori dall’ufficio —
anche il capo quest’oggi
sembra uno di noi
    — Angela Giordano

turn
of a ceiling fan
planning retreat
    — Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff

liquor and laughter
loosening tongues and manners
by the hour
    — Mercy Ikuri
My brief stints as a boss do give me some insight into how difficult the position can be — if you are troubled by conscience. If not, then anything (I say) goes. Your submissions made apparent that most of your bosses are untroubled. This, however, serves more as a detriment and distraction to your poetic musings than an opportunity. Egotism and willfulness make for easy targets, primarily through satire and caricature, and neither of these techniques lends itself amiably to haiku, though they are the very stuff of senryu. So we should consider all of the following to fall into this latter category.

The most unusual poem submitted for this topic was

off stage —
a piano tuner
enjoys success
[David Dayson]

and though it doesn’t exactly fit the description, it’s a good enough poem that I wanted to make sure it received some attention. More typical of your responses is

an ideal boss —
ascends but transcends
their own self
[David Dayson]

I’m not sure this entirely works (“ascends their own self?”; and if that is too fanciful a reading, then “ascends” what?) but we take the point. This poem falls more into the line of an apophthegm, and the sentiment it expresses probably stands for nearly all of our respondents, and a good many other laborers as well.

My third choice this week is
My generation’s
ideal boss must be
me, Me, ME!
[Sarah Leavesley]

A bit of self-parody always lightens our mood. This poet has taken the opportunity to spoof himself, the notion of the boss, and his entire generation, all in one swell foop! Nicely played.
My second choice casts a colder eye on the role:

my boss is perfect:
right stance, right rules, right until
the new chief arrives
[Sarah Leavesley]

I first read this poem to mean that the boss’s boss had been replaced, and that the boss now was experiencing the same upheaval that the workers undergo on a more regular basis. In this reading, the boss, who has perfected a way of being that the poet extols, is forced to change, with who knows what consequences for the workers. But upon second and third consideration, I think it is the boss himself who has been exchanged. The poem then is more a cautionary tale that not all is as it seems, and that even the most exemplary of leaders is merely a cog in a machine, whose purposes is veiled, and who is easily replaced.
My top choice this week draws on literature and folk tale:

the best boss knows —
it’s Pinocchio’s honesty
with Cyrano’s flair
[David Dayson]

The homely pun (“the best boss nose”) leads us into a quick study of character as exemplified by two well-known tellers of “truths.” I’m not sure everyone would agree with the poet’s opinion, but calling into play the range of possibilities a boss has at her disposal does highlight one of the nuanced responsibilities of leadership. How
much do we tell, and to whom? And how to couch it within the needs and goals of the larger enterprise? Her employees, however, are at a disadvantage: it’s unlikely the boss has such an easy “tell” as either of these characters, so knowing what to believe is all the more challenging. It’s probably best to presume none of what we’re told is true, to a greater or lesser extent. For the rest, we must rely upon the value of “flair” . . .

**New Poems**

birthday wishes —
a precious book
on my desk
   — Doris Pascolo

*

the ideal boss —
George Clooney
who else?
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

*

efficiently
working the job on demand
a sharp blade
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

*

what! an ideal boss?
read the inscription
the boss is never wrong!
   — Celestine Nudanu
my perfect boss
smiles at me
through the mirror
— Maria Laura Valente

making my coffee just the way I like it
the ideal boss
— Angelee Deodhar

self-employed
the boss hands me
a cash bonus
— Roberta Beary

hardly in his seat
does not bother
latecomers
— S. Radhamani Sarma

another stress-filled day
my boss talks me off the ledge
again
— Amy Losak
planting seeds . . .
my garden in spring
the ideal boss
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

nothing works!
my perfect boss can tame
the shrew in me
   — Marta Chociłowska

the ideal boss
in the corridor between
my two bosses
   — Mark Gilbert

the ideal boss
goes and gets us
all fired
   — Michael Henry Lee

Taking a break
My boss and I take a walk
To the grand cafe
   — Kristjaan Panneman
ideal boss —
he/she sees my work
and my face
— Maria Teresa Sisti

Cocked glasses
Soiled tie and trousers
Yup . . . the ideal boss
— Katherine Stella

Head well
who also knows how to listen
Is it just an ideal?

Dirige bene
chi sa anche ascoltare
E’ solo un ideale?
— Angela Giordano

I have a dream . . .
a charismatic and brave leader
like Martin Luther King
— Eufemia Griffo
ideal boss
the smooth talker
even if ticking off
— Madhuri Pillai

company culture
the ideal boss climbs
through “snakes and ladders”
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

an ideal boss —
the mirages i chased
all along
— Arvinder Kaur

tebreak al fresco!
the new boss
adding sweetener
— Brendon Kent

snipping the micro
out of management
a new bloom
— Devin Harrison
the ideal is real:  
my two adorable  
little bosses  
   — Elisa Allo

the perfect boss  
balancing sticks  
with carrots  
   — Olivier Schopfer

mantra for a boss  
hear no evil . . . see no evil . . .  
speak no evil  
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

indulgent, kind, caring  
unsparing in her praise  
sadly, not my boss  
   — Marietta McGregor

Captain Kirk  
who would not follow you  
boldly, for benefits  
   — Ron Scully
Boss planner —
important job appointments
and birthdays
— Nazarena Rampini

what a difference
a diacritic makes
the ideal boss
— Lee Nash

not there tomorrow
but you guys know exactly
what should be done, right?!
— Adrian Bouter

hot desking —
the boss’s squash kit
goes home with him
— Martha Magenta

at the end
of the rainbow —
the ideal boss
— Debbi Antebi
the ideal boss:
admitting his errors . . .
sometimes

capo ideale:
ammettendo gli errori …
solo una volta
    — Lucia Cardillo

* *

tough but
oh, so gentle
his fresh carnation
    — Paul Geiger

* *

branches shelter
the sprouted acorns;
we grow together
    — Timothy J. Dickey

* *

night patrol
a firefly flickers
then moves on
    — Jennifer Hambrick
teacher’s bus
my boss hands me
just picked persimmons
  — Carmen Sterba

field error
the boss’ tap
on the shoulder
  — Willie Bongcaron
Haiku in the Workplace: Working Late

Have we created our own cachet? Spawned our own celebrities? It seems unlikely that our little haiku exercise should have an outsized effect on your lives, but consider this:

A haiku? Again?
Dayson and Leavesley gone home?
At last a haiku!
[David Pilling]

Our poet has measured the competition, and apparently is willing to put in the long hours required to reach the top. Long hours are not unfamiliar to all our participants this week, nor are the potential consequences:

working late —
the sun sets on
their marriage
[David Dayson]

spring sorrow —
to find a whole day
lost at work
[David Dayson]

the alarm sounds loud
I was meant to be there
Oh I still am
[David Pilling]

All of these poems feature loss as the primary consequence of working late: loss of relationship, of time, even of our sense of place in space. So why do we do it? Of
course, for some of us, simply because something needs to get done, and we are the ones to do it.

with the stroke
of midnight a project —
is put to bed
[David Dayson]

But there is more to it than that. Some of us like the emotion that accompanies such effort, a sense of meeting a challenge, beating a deadline, being the one others can count on in a pinch. There is a kind of quiet heroism to such behavior, even if from outside it appears more compulsive (or even the consequence of poor planning) than brave.

My three top selections are so close in terms of quality and achievement that I offer them as a group, so they may all claim to be best of the week. The first comes with the onset of the evening:

9pm at work:
I drink in the sky’s rosé,
then strong black coffee
[Sarah Leavesly]

The neat segue from figurative to literal drinking, and the sharp contrast between colors and effects, make for an attractive moment, captured in strong, direct images and language.

The second rears up midway through our ordeal:

flickering
into the small hours
my nervous tic
[Alan Summers]

This tic is endearing in its way, as it summons the frailty of the species even as it registers a greater than normal effort. The poet uses the haiku form skillfully, leaving
the subject of the poem ambiguous. Is it light (the most expected referent) that is flickering, or else the poet’s will or energy or desire, or even the tic itself? The poem doesn’t insist on any particular reading.

Concluding our trilogy at the end of the quest, we have this:

an all-nighter —
the day begins and ends
with sunrise
[David Dayson]

The poet has completed the challenge (though we can’t be sure he has also completed the project), and a new day begins, which is marked by a homely truth. But is it? In fact the day has begun long before, according to clock time. But the demands of the ordeal have stripped away from the poet any hindrance to his intuition. The day does begin with the sunrise, regardless of what clocks and conventions say, and the poet affirms it: not “my” but “the” day begins and ends here. It is an old wisdom, from before the days of clocks and offices, when an all-nighter would have been the night’s watch, and failure might have meant a great deal more than whether or not a deadline was met.

Congratulations to all our poets for the extra hours they have put in to bring haiku into their lives. And if that means a certain notoriety for some, well, that’s just another price they’ll have to pay.

New Poems

working late
with the boss
the moon winks at me
— Celestine Nudanu
graveyard shift —  
ghosts of bosses past  
haunt me  
— Angelee Deodhar

* 

wide awake  
working late hours  
this bullfrog  
— Ernesto P. Santiago

* 

working late  
the wife emails her  
divorce request  
— Michael Henry Lee

* 

working late  
another sun rises into  
the sunset  
— Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

working late —  
step by step  
I draw my path  
— Doris Pascolo
cancellation text
reservations abolished
working late . . . OMG
— Katherine Stella

late in the office
the customer is viewing
the city skyline
— Marta Chocilowska

working late
the cat
at the taco shack
— Danny Blackwell

work dinner
behind blue shutters
a child waits
— Roberta Beary

working late
spectacles woke me up
on the same table
— S. Radhamani
so many stars —
a yellow lamp
on my desk
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

office lights
at midnight the owl asks
who
— Gail Oare

crescent moon . . .
the night owl’s shadow
sharper than mine
— Brendon Kent

overtime duty
i say “sleep now” to my kids
over the phone
— Willie Bongcaron

working late again
the supper her kids
leave her
— Pat Davis
night workers . . .
their eyes meet
in the fog
— Eufemia Griffo

unloading . . .
the passage of time
after six
— Angelo Ancheta

working late
because I want to
solitary bee
— Mark Gilbert

neighborhood rumor —
the sugar mummy who drops me
every night
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

“pavor nocturnus”
mom works late
and beyond
— Elisa Allo
late shift
I test
the office echo
   — Lee Nash

*  

a nod from the guard
last passenger snaps
shut her briefcase
   — Marietta McGregor

*  

working late . . .
a cup of coffee
by the cleaning lady
   — Madhuri Pillai

*  

full moon
an overnight nurse
says a prayer
   — Tiffany Shaw-Diaz

*  

midnight
the shining LCD
makes jack a dull boy
   — Jennifer Hambrick
Time to close
a furious customer
speaks to a colleague
    — Benjamin Opoku Aryeh

outside my office window
the constellation of
traffic lights
    — Jessica Malone Latham

deadline day dinner
perusing the menu
on the snack machine
    — Andy McLellan

Crisis time
Even the extraordinary one
Is a source of income

Tempo di crisi
Anche lo straordinario
è fonte di reddito
    — Angela Giordano
* 

working late  
husband in the kitchen  
with my apron

“Resto in ufficio!”  
Mio marito in cucina  
col mio grembiule  
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

office overtime  
first one to fall asleep  
the coffeemaker  
— Anthony Rabang

* 

last train home  
my reflection  
stowaway  
— Olivier Schopfer (*Modern Haiku 47.1*)

* 

working late  
in the lite of my fridge  
everything is brighter  
— Laughing Waters
2 am wake-up call —
my computer programs
have crashed
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

outside my office
even the birds stop singing
at sundown
   — Timothy J. Dickey

working late tonight —
cold shadows
at the window
   — Maria Teresa Sisti

foggy night ride
the lights are visible
across the cemetery
   — Carmen Sterba

working late
my boss keeps me
in the dark
   — Cezar Ciobika
End of a project —
my husband in the coach
starting snoaring
    — Monica Federico
I am surprised that so few poets responded to this week’s challenge. I would have thought the topic would have invited particularly welcome feelings about this whole enterprise of haiku in the workplace, and that we would have been inundated with success stories. Perhaps such emotion is better savored privately, or that much more difficult to limn in words. Whatever the reason, we had relatively few offerings this time round.

Consequently, we have fewer poems to share with you, so I thought we might take the opportunity to discuss a couple fine points that we’ve not mentioned in previous columns.

Typically, haiku do not employ certain of the traditional devices and techniques commonly associated with verse. For instance, you will hear it said that haiku eschews metaphor. This is somewhat ironic on its own terms, as a haiku is itself a metaphor. But this is to the point: employing a metaphor within a metaphor does create a kind of infinite regress, which can mitigate some of the effect of the poem. Of course this may be exactly the effect you want, so we ought never say never. But such poems do remain relatively rare.

That appears to be what is happening, for instance, in this poem:

slowly climbing free
of last year’s dead leaves:
forget-me-not stars
[Sarah Leavesley]

I researched the phrase “forget-me-not stars” and found 1) the names of actors who appeared in a 2009 film titled Forget Me Not; and 2) registered names for a family of purebred whippets. So I am forced to conclude that either the poet is suggesting that actual stars are emerging from last year’s dead leaves (highly unlikely), or else s/he is employing “star” metaphorically, as a substitute for the flower (not exact, but possible). Even if we are inclined to grant license for such a phrasing, notice the path our minds must travel to arrive at a not entirely comfortable reading of the poem.
Can this be the poet’s intent? To what end? These are legitimate questions, since at least part of what we appreciate in any writing is the ability of the author to direct our minds to the end goal or state. When instead we are left to roam on our own, then alternative readings — distractions — may indeed turn up, and the overall satisfaction derived from the work is lessened. Had the poet not reached for metaphor here — had she written “forget-me-not-blossoms,” or, even more simply, “forget-me-nots” — we would not be distracted from the sense of the poem in any way. It may well be impossible to control every nuance of language at all times, even in such a short offering as a haiku, but surely we cannot have been intended to be considering whippet names here. This is part of the challenge introducing metaphor within metaphor can bring.

Here’s an instance where metaphor within metaphor works rather better:

```
centuries pass —
the unseen hand
of the forester
[David Dayson]
```

This poem uses a technique called metonymy, wherein a part of a whole stands for the entirety, in this instance “hand” for the forester, but in fact what is intended is “handiwork.” This poem is clear to imagine, and the metaphor within the haiku does not distract us to arcane considerations of other matters. Still this poem must be regarded as “not quite” for a couple reasons.

The problem chiefly resides in what the poem actually, rather than metaphorically, says. Of course the “hand” of the forester is unseen (it would be rather ghastly were it otherwise). But “hand,” as we noted above, actually means “handiwork,” and if that handiwork is unseen, then what is this poem about? You can’t have the forester’s work both noted and unobserved at the same time. Since the poet is mentioning it, he must have noticed it. Suggesting otherwise is a device used to make the reader recognize the particular acuity of the poet’s observations, not the lack of evidence of the forester’s art. So, pleasing though the poem may seem in its execution, it actually falters conceptually.

Haiku are famously short, and the consequence of this is that every word, every nuance, every technique, is that much more obviously on display. It is no small feat
to compose them so that they do not distract the reader from the desired object of attention. Basho, the patron saint of classical Japanese haiku, once suggested that a life in which a poet crafts 10 perfect haiku is not a life lived in vain. We might take this further — even a single perfect haiku is an achievement that few will realize. Here, then, are the poems I feel most satisfy the thematic requirements for the week, and at the same time offer the best level of technical achievement. They are nearly identical, technically, with only their content giving them variety (which makes me consider that they may all have been written by the same hand (ah, metonymy again). As a result, I offer all three as this week's top choices.

(off stage —
  a piano tuner's
  silent joy
      [David Dayson]

closing the script
  a theatre prompter leaves —
  her lines unspoken
      [David Dayson]

the long sighs
  of a safety officer —
  doing nothing
      [David Dayson]

The first of these, offered a couple weeks ago in a different context, is a pleasing sketch from the life of one subordinate but crucial to the success of artistic enterprise. The piano tuner will never be noticed in the fanfare and triumph of the concert, but a failure to do his work, precisely and in time, will be noticed by everyone. The fact that no one will need to know his name tonight is its own reward. Likewise in the second instance, a nearly identical situation transferred from concert hall to the theatre. The presumption here is that the prompter has done her job so well that she has rendered herself unnecessary — exactly the circumstance she would most desire.)
The third of these is slightly different, in that success here doesn’t resolve into joy, but ennui. The perfection of the task in hand, in all these poems, leads to inaction. It is the work that has been done prior to the event that is being rewarded, and in each poem this work is assumed, which makes for taut tellings of the consequence. This compression of narrative to the telling tableaux is very well handled. These are each excellent efforts, and, in considering the theme of a job well done, are themselves jobs well done. Nice work!

**New Poems**

a job well done
no fingerprints, witnesses
or trace of the body
    — Michael Henry Lee

*  

in a job
well done — the feeding
buzz
    — Ernesto P. Santiago

*  

still working
for the teacher’s gold stars
my inner child
    — Rachel Sutcliffe
a job well done . . .
completed task with a lot of
self performance
— Katherine Stella

job well done party —
the blindfolded boss strikes
a piñata again
— Angelee Deodhar

a well done job —
old values
for excellent results
— Doris Pascolo

his cash bonus
her good job award
pdf
— Roberta Beary

making the deadline
the hole punch
my celebration
— Mark Gilbert
year-end bonus —
the CEO’s compliment
to the workforce
    — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

*

recovered data —
the boss is giving me
a pat on the back
    — Marta Chocilowska

*

winter sun
my job blows
hot and cold
    — Celestine Nudanu

*

Michelangelo’s Pieta
the master’s hands
sculpt the eternity
    — Eufemia Griffo

*

a beautiful day
the weddingplanner smiles
and leans back
    — Kristjaan Panneman
well done!
company staff salute
the Barista’s efforts
   — Paul Geiger

home after work
gold stars
from her five-year-old son
   — Anthony Rabang

congratulations . . .
the pressure mounting
from the top
   — Angelo Ancheta

straightness of the bean rows —
a simple nod
from my father
   — Chad Lee Robinson

straight line       roofer’s smile
   — Peggy Bilbro
* beadwork
the wisdom of checking
every detail
  — Willie Bongcaron

* tearoom drinks
someone else now
holding the baby
  — Marietta McGregor

* painted apartment —
morning sun shines
on the new walls
  — Tomislav Maretic

* painted sunset
pausing to admire
our project at deadline
  — Gail Oare

* so many “Congrats!” —
my name in all caps
on their black list
  — Maria Laura Valente
applications thin
all were selected
a job well done.
— S. Radhamani

Little value
at work well done
Bitter bitterness
Poco valore
al lavoro ben fatto
Affogo l’amarezza
— Angela Giordano

aiming
for a breakthrough
glass ceiling
— Martha Magenta

a perfect poem —
and now nothing more
to say
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo
a job well done
once again the boss
hogs the credit
— Madhuri Pillai

a job well done —
only a shoulder pat
and a wooden trophy
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

the young boss’s approval
a thumbs up
emoji
— Pat Davis

one year after . . .
slowly rewinding
Dad’s gold watch
— Mark E. Brager

office boy
in the project well done team
for his inputs
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi
two words: well done!
the expression on his face
speaks volumes
        — Adrian Bouter

*  
school year ends:
finding out your students
suddenly grown up
        — Elisa Allo

*  
supermoon
finally done
with the project
        — Olivier Schopfer

*  
an insect
plays dead
for a living
        — Danny Blackwell

*  
at last
_Ulysses_
opened
        — Mike Gallagher
after
letting my wife know
she’s the boss
― Cezar Ciobika

sliced cucumber
so able to split up the time
deserved by people
― Lucia Fontana

tweaked
to perfection . . .
time for home
― Karen Harvey
Haiku in the Workplace:
The Broken Air Conditioner

One of the ways we determine that a writer is masterful is in the way he or she controls the possible interpretations of his or her assemblage of words. Over the course of long works — novels, say, or epic poems — a certain amount of license is permitted, to help the author carry the momentum forward (though in the very best of these works, we might feel that there is not even a single unwarranted word). In the reduced compass of haiku, however, there can be no looseness. Every word will be scrutinized, every combination of words tested, every possible nuance or accident duly noted. If a poet cannot assemble half-a-dozen or so words without misstepping, we might feel, then he or she is not worthy of our attention.

But of course it is not so simple as that. Language is slippery, and it is exactly this slipperiness that makes poetry possible. In a world of exact one-to-one correspondence, we would indeed have command of the facts, but we would surrender the stuff that makes the facts matter. The good news is that we don’t seem to be in any danger of this happening any time soon.

In light of these comments, then, I offer the following:

Fritz
My unwelcome lover
Get off

[Patti VanderKooy]

These six words open themselves to several immediate interpretations without our even really trying. Is this a good thing or a bad? If we note that the poem is lively, is it not our own imaginations that is the source of that liveliness? Does the poet intend all these interpretations? We have no way of knowing, but since the various readings that come to mind do not necessarily reinforce each other, I would be inclined to think not. So what has been accomplished here?

Further, the poet has an advantage not generally available to haiku poets: the poem was written within the context of a themed challenge, so a reader would know that at least one of the intended readings must have to do with a broken air conditioner,
or the consequences of one. Certainly knowing this poem exists in such a context alters at least one of my possible readings. In a way this is a violation of the spirit of haiku — sort of like adding a fourth line. This is one of the reasons why haiku very rarely include titles.
This is not intended to disparage the poem, which entertained me for some time. It is simply to suggest the ways in which your words will be considered when you offer them publicly. It is one thing to divert one’s self — in such instances, anything goes, and the only criterion is that one is pleased with it. But as soon as we endeavor to make communications of these poems, additional elements come into play, and managing those elements is a challenge we all shall face.
Several poets used this opportunity to address larger issues, in particular global warming. Making a haiku topical and still having it work poetically can be tricky, as doing so asks the poem to serve two masters, which usually elevates one at the expense of the other. Two in this vein slightly more successful than most:

```
global warming turns  
us from office denizens —  
to world citizens
    [David Dayson]
```

```
a heat wave sows  
the seeds of doubt about —  
global warming
    [David Dayson]
```

In both instances there is no doubt about the political content being master, and the poetry suffers (indeed, they are merely statements) but the enlargement of mind in the one instance, and the humor and ambiguity in the other, make them worth noting. One other worth mentioning falls into the ekphrastic tradition:

```
overheated
my brain warps
like a painting
    [Ernesto Santiago]
```
The poet conjures an image that relies upon the cultural knowledge of the reader, and so might easily be missed. But if I’m correct that he intends Dalí’s “The Persistence of Memory” then this is a fun, and telling, offering. My three winners this week, as usual, offer something more. My third choice may surprise:

air con gone
our temperaments become —
mediterranean

[David Dayson]

Is this a disparagement of certain cultures? Undoubtedly it may be taken so, and perhaps will be in some quarters. However, it is also certainly a kind of insight for the poet, in the terms the poet can process and communicate. Taken in that light, one might find here a solidarity of spirit rather than a parody or criticism, and it is in this light I offer it for your consideration.

My second prize uses the event as a trigger for memory:

turn on the fans —
daydreams of childhood
ice cream vans

[David Dayson]

This is handled with much dexterity and charm. With the air conditioner working we are insulated from our environment. When it breaks, however, we are reduced to moving the air about with fans, and that warmer, moister sensation calls up recollections for the poet of the days when cooling refreshment came not in an electric box but in the form of a frozen treat from a traveling vendor. The movement from the more abstract image of the daydreams (“childhood”) to the specific (“ice cream vans”) is deft, and the simple rhyme, unusual in haiku, is suggestive of a child’s perspective and phrasing, suitable to the content of this poem. This might easily have been the top winner.

However, this week my first prize goes to a homelier reality:
briefing
on the broken air condition(er)
dead fly
[Ernesto Santiago]

The poem I received offered “broken air condition” so I have taken the liberty of presuming the poet (or subsequent typist) intended “broken air conditioner,” and it was on the basis of this adjustment that I evaluated the poem. It is difficult to state exactly the relationship between the fly and the state of the machine, but its effect strikes me as forceful and inevitable. The poet does not say the broken air conditioner (or rather the resulting atmosphere in the conference room) has killed the fly, he merely records the two circumstances and allows them to speak to one another. This is the best practice of haiku, where the reader bridges the gap for himself. There is a dark humor to be found in this comparison, too, between the (presumably live) attendees of the briefing and the dead fly. Is it a suggestion of what is to come if the situation prevails? This is kept in play in a neat technical way, as well, by making the middle phrase a hinge line, which may relate to either the first or the third line. A very strong effort in several ways, and a worthy top winner. Here’s hoping you are all staying cool.

New Poems

blistering heat . . .
how much he misses
his old ACU
    — Willie Bongcaron

*

heated seminar
dripping on the participants
the CEO’s words
    — Celestine Nudanu
a broken promise —
sweat
on an upper lip
   — Mark Gilbert

broken air con
endless moaning
from the battery fan
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

clouds lobotomy
cut with pure incisions
play misty for me
   — Katherine Stella

broken; the air . . .
also on the fritz
this tape deck
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

no air conditioning —
I dot the i
with a drop of make-up
   — Maria Laura Valente
starlight room —
a multitude of stars
on the ceiling
— Doris Pascolo

broken air
the sweat shop
closes early
— Michael Henry Lee

heat in the office!
in the air conditioning
the lizard’s brood
— Marta Chocilowska

AC failure
our reserved boss
warming up
— Angelo Ancheta

blown fuse — neither the boss nor the AC working
— Angelee Deodhar
on the ceiling
a gray caterpillar . . .
ducting needs repair
   — Enrique Garrovillo

heatstroke at work
the college nurse plies
tiny ice bags
   — Carmen Sterba

air conditioner problem
trying hard
to keep my cool
   — Olivier Schopfer

July heat wave
the office AC starts
an early retirement
   — Tiffany Shaw-Diaz

air conditioner out
they shed their
disguises
   — Pat Davis
volunteering
to run all errands
no A/C
    — Debbie Feller

not a breath
sails droop on
the Sargasso sea
    — Paul Geiger

Broken air conditioner
The summer enters slowly
from the window
    — Stefano Riondato

broken air con
her short skirt
raises the temperature
    — Andy McLellan

still no A/C
a sheet of paper shivers
under an oscillating fan
    — Gail Oare
without air conditioning . . .
wishing for the cold
of the North Pole
— Eufemia Griffo

the broken AC —
sound of a fly buzzing
along the hallway
— Tomislav Maretic

busted ac —
the deadbeat file spawns
10 paper fans
— Roberta Beary

broken air conditioner —
everything slow-motion
. . . except the flies
condizionatore rotto —
ogni cosa rallenta
. . . tranne le mosche
— Lucia Cardillo
we call it a day . . .
home early
before the kids
—— Madhuri Pillai

hot blows
mocking at this
junk now
—— S. Radhamani

coffee popsicle:
even thoughts melt
on the keyboard
—— Elisa Allo

broken a/c —
what the math
boils down to
—— Chad Lee Robinson

AC broken
the class writes snow poems
in tree shade
—— Marilyn Walker
office air conditioner
management’s other
broken promise
— Marietta McGregor

commuting —
defective air-conditioner
on a new bus
— Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

Air conditioner off —
From my grandmother’s fan
fresh memories
— Nazarena Rampini

office room —
not even a thread of air
that moves my hair

stanza d’ufficio —
nemmeno un filo d’aria
che muove i miei capelli
— Angela Giordano
the muggy atmosphere . . .
she blames it on her
menopause
    — Adrian Bouter

freon stains
down the tenement walls . . .
a night of long sirens
    — Mark E. Brager

broken
air conditioner
not tonight
    — Lee Nash

broken AC
I steal the neighbor’s fan
while they’re out
    — Susan Burch

so much depends upon
a working air conditioner
three-toed sloth
    — Jennifer Hambrick
just a fan
a drop tumbles
along my back . . .

solo un ventaglio
una goccia mi rotola
lungo la schiena . . .
  — Lucia Fontana

* 

the Board chooses
to ignore climate change
limit switches tripping
  — Devin Harrison

* 

summer air
an iced coffee from
a secret admirer
  — Anthony Rabang

* 

heated discussion
with the maintenance man
broken air con
  — Karen Harvey
broken office air conditioner
the comfort of dressing
casual to work
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

* 

searing heat
folding a fan from
the test paper
— Cezar Ciobika

*
Haiku in the Workplace:
Getting Fired

Studies suggest that the three greatest stressors we are likely to experience in our usual lives are loss of a loved one, moving, and job change. They are all the more keenly felt when abrupt and not of our own choosing. In these instances we undergo the processes of grief, which unfold over a duration and in an order that is particular to us individually. It seems fitting, then, that this week’s submissions ranged across the spectrum of responses to grief, in a variety of personal styles.

The loss of love, through death, divorce, or other calamity, is the stock-in-trade of post-Renaissance literature, most especially the novel. Removal from one’s home environment figures high in the mix as well. But loss of a job? There have been relatively few explorations of this theme in artistic terms (though How Green Was My Valley and On the Waterfront are notable exceptions). So we are largely on our own when we consider it.

According to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, the journey through grief includes at least these stages, in some order: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I use this as a plausible schema for considering the following poems on the basis of their psychological verity, and leaving aside their technical merits as haiku.

Denial, though most obviously evident in the immediacy of the moment when we become aware of our circumstance

ignominious —
a long word for a short walk
with security
[David Dayson]

can linger, and even re-erupt at a later stage.

my wife hugs me
the shock recedes
it returns
[Evans Flaschen]
When it appears the situation is unalterable, and not just some mistake, anger generally sets in:

fired —
a person of my
calibre
[David Dayson]

It’s interesting how often we defuse our direct emotion with humor, which must work for us as a kind of pressure regulator, and allow us to cope without resorting to extremes (and of course we read of the exploits of those without a proper regulator on a daily basis in the newspapers). When our anger has cooled to some degree, we often try to cut a deal, usually with ourselves, about how to view the situation

being fired —
hardened by the kiln
of adversity
[David Dayson]

and what we might do about it:

every exit can
be a better entrance —
somewhere else
[David Dayson]

But after some time we generally recognize our powerlessness, which gives way to a general gloom:

leaving no trace
except his browser —
history
[David Dayson]
Seemingly it is only after we’ve reached a level of despondency that we can reassess the new circumstance:

I cast my bait
the fish compete
it’s Thursday

[ Evan Flaschen ]

Is this a better situation? It is if we deem it so. That seems to be the central truth to managing our relations with the outside world.

These poems are, on the whole, not successful as haiku, which have technical and literary elements to consider. We can decide for ourselves how much this matters, but as this is a haiku column, I do feel the need to offer that perspective. But even if these fall short of the highest literary achievement in formal ways, they remain heartfelt expressions of deep personal pain and recovery, and as such are worthy of our consideration. The loss of love, or the fact of being uprooted from one’s home, may offer the Muse more fertile opportunity for artistic response. But the loss of our life’s work, at which we spend more of our waking lives than any other activity, can be just as affecting, and without a compensatory literature where we might find kinship and solace. I wish your days of employ to be long, happy, and ended on your terms.

New Poems

getting fired —
hairdresser appointment
a new hairstyle

— Doris Pascolo
paper cut
nobody’s fault
just one of those things
— Mark Gilbert

again; the beating . . .
if working long enough
around the bush
— Ernesto P. Santiago

getting fired
the boss unfriends me
on Facebook
— Rachel Sutcliffe

coming to a dog fight
It’s not very nice to bite . . .
the hand that feeds you
— Katherine Stella

fired —
at last i wake
on time
— Roberta Beary
end of contract
enjoying freedom again —
dancing naked
— Kristjaan Panneman

* 

getting fired
just in time
for the weekend
— Michael Henry Lee

* 

fired without notice . . .
so many years
in a box
— Maria Laura Valente

* 

laid off
all the hours she gets
back
— Amy Losak

* 

just as the day
weaves him a rainbow
black butterfly
— Willie Bongcaron
fired —
how autumn arrives
through my pocket
   — Arvinder Kaur

let go
the long weekend
becomes even longer
   — Andy McLellan

morning thoughts —
eggshells begin to crack
on the boiling pot
   — Anthony Rabang

almost fired
meeting with the VP
I hear she has my back
   — Carmen Sterba

first snow —
my broom i must
bid adieu
   — Enrique Garrovillo
Just a sms
to let me go
I already hate my cellphone

Solo un sms
per farmi licenziare
Già odio il cellulare
       — Angela Giordano

* 

board room
display of score card
on pink slip
         — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

* 

fallen apple
under the tree the incessant
buzzing of bees
         — Gail Oare

* 

No more job
Tightening the work shoes
in order to stay fit
         — Stefano Riondato
unemployment line
everyone
looks like me
   — Pat Davis

* 

no sweetness here
clearing my desk
to clear my name
   — Celestine Nudanu

* 

fired
in the distance
the wail of a siren
   — Olivier Schopfer

* 

even though
unbidden
freedom
   — Peggy Bilbro

* 

by the chief’s door —
the secretary avoids
eye contact with me
   — Marta Chociłowska
* 

straitjacketed —
for ever so long, the relief
of getting fired
— Angelee Deodhar

* 

verbal tirade
for passing bundles beneath
the table
— Radhamani Sarma

* 

getting fired
shock . . . a closed door
full in the face
licenziamento
shock . . . una porta chiusa
in piena faccia
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

Too many cold calls
The boss
up in flames
— Stephan Massi
last call —  
the graveyard shift toasts 
their pink slips  
— Mark E. Brager

behind closed doors 
the downsizing that drops me 
back on the street  
— Devin Harrison

cleaning my desk 
the outlines of a novel 
I had dreamt of  
— Madhuri Pillai

burnt supper 
the letter that he 
opened last . . .  
— Adrian Bouter

fired . . . 
only speck of dust 
on the desk  
— Eufemia Griffo
sorry to let you go
says the boss —
till the end a hypocrite
        — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

getting fired —
I descend down the stairs
of her castle
        — Tomislav Maretic

smile and lie
planning to quit anyway
grab my ivy — go
        — Trilla Pando

social services —
sacked for sexist jokes
on the toilet wall
        — Martha Magenta

discharmed
I load again
my staple gun
        — Cezar Ciobika
fired . . .
the King is dead
long live the King
— Elisa Allo

* 

bartender
at the last chance saloon
verbal warning
— Mike Gallagher

* 

terminated late
the last hire is a bird
without feathers
— Ron Scully

* 

getting fired
the Greek Island bookmarks
on her PC
— Marietta McGregor

* 

fired . . .
the alarm clock awakes
libido
— Lucia Fontana
letter of dismissal
the essence of breathing in
and breathing out
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

sweaty palms
I choose not to shake
his hand goodbye
— Jessica Malone Latham

getting fired
by the future
president
— Danny Blackwell

*
“Hell is . . . other people,” Jean-Paul Sartre opined in his 1944 drama Huis Clos (No Exit), and of course he was right. Those of us who work in close proximity with other members of the species know how maddening they can be to be with — unlike ourselves. Sartre didn’t do it, but he could have set his play in an elevator, though the overtness of the metaphor might have worked against his intention. Nevertheless, an elevator is one of a very few places where nearly anyone can step into our space and befoul us with their styles and conversations and aromas and so on, without our having some recourse. All we can do is bear it until we arrive at his floor, or ours. So it came as no surprise to me that one of you wrote

a lift ascends
to heaven but first the hell —
of other people
[David Dayson]

Isn’t it true that we wouldn’t appreciate the sweet things of life without their contrasting opposites also being possible?
Most of this week’s submissions fall into this same general pattern, but in more specific detail. It’s apparent no one likes the lift, but only a few can avoid it:

over the lift’s limit —
the slimmest leave
to climb stairs
[David Dayson]

This seems to me an excellent example of natural selection.
By far the number one complaint is the one you thought it would be:
wind passed —
on so many levels
wrong in a lift
[David Dayson]

There were many iterations of this poem, with not so subtle variation, in this week’s submissions. This one, with its punning and faux finger-wagging, was the most fun. The second most common complaint is probably also to be expected:

lift origami —
folding inwards to remain
untouched
[David Dayson]

Though I find this metaphor a bit stretched in making its point, it nevertheless does so, and is worth our noticing. The author of my third choice for this week faces a different sort of crisis, one more personal and challenging:

so far to go —
in a glass-fronted lift
with vertigo
[David Dayson]

The “so far to go” may be a single floor, but facing even a modest ascent with such an affliction can be completely paralyzing, so this small poem is outsized in personal success for its overcoming that which might disable us. Second place goes to this poem:

the last person
barging into a lift —
touches us all
[David Dayson]
I can’t be certain that the poet intends a second reading here, but it doesn’t matter, the words permit it. We are often irritated by someone arriving late and having the door held for him, slowing us all down, and such feelings are escalated (sorry) if that person proves to be loud or obstreperous or inconsiderate or smelly or some combination of these things. And the last minute clambering in certainly shifts us all, which makes the poet’s point — even if the latecomer doesn’t physically barge into us, the Brownian motion caused by his arrival is certain to jostle us all. But it’s also possible to read the poem in the light of fellow-feeling — perhaps this last arrival is late, out of breath, disheveled from his dash. We can find common ground with him, and identify with his consternation.
Well, it’s possible . . .
My top winner this week neatly captures one of the most common situations we encounter in our elevator lives:

lift doors open —
a conversation ends
in mid-sentence
[David Dayson]

Much of social life is made up of “ins” and “outs” and few things make it more certain that we are among the “outs” than the cessation of a conversation. The unspoken words hang palpably in the air, and we know we have caused this interruption. For most of us, this piques our interest — were they speaking of something I should know about in my office? Were they talking about me? But of course pursuing it is out of the question. We all crave access, but if you have to ask . . .
Of course not every trip on the elevator needs be so paralyzing or distasteful. We can always discuss the weather . . .
elevator rules
I fail to follow
with giggles
    — Alan Summers

*

elevator —
My boss and his mistress
flushed cheeks
    — Doris Pascolo

*

walking in,
pressing the button —
selfie time?
    — Ernesto P Santiago

*

four corners
we forget
the middle ground
    — Betty Shropshire

*

third world symptom
navigating my wheelchair
up all those flights
    — Celestine Nudanu
express elevator
the boss and i exchange
nongreetings
    — Roberta Beary

*

elevator silence
trapped between floors
with the boss
    — Rachel Sutcliffe

*

the rhythm of
passing floors — higher and higher
embarrassment
    — Maria Laura Valente

*

patrons aboard
riding maximum capacity
there she blows
    — Katherine Stella

*

inside
a full-packed elevator
his silent fart
    — Willie Bongcaron
elevator tutorials —
learning to embrace
fart and fragrance
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

secret love . . .
I watch him on the elevator
with lowered eyes
— Eufemia Griffo

keep to the right
or left of the corridor . . .
foreign conference
— Karen Harvey

small talk the contents of his cycling shorts
— Mark Gilbert

full elevator
the cell phone calls
no one takes
— Pat Davis
claustrophobia   trapped in a lift with the couple in Kamasutra mode
   — Angelee Deodhar

holding my breath
in a crowded metal cube
mixed smells
   — Marta Chocilowska

embarrassed, packed
tight in the elevator —
we all look elsewhere

Forte imbarazzo
ristretti in ascensore
Ognuno guarda altrove
   — Angela Giordano

beads of sweat
waiting to get unstuck
in the college elevator
   — Carmen Sterba
doors sliding shut
the wonderful world
of lift music
— Olivier Schopfer

the lift emptying
at everyone’s wrong floor
her spritz of Poison!
— Marietta McGregor

sudden chill
doors open
to a stranger
— Tiffany Shaw-Diaz

crowded elevator
going up
we all look down
— Andy McLellan

suffocation
some have already
gone up
— S. Radhamani
*)

glaring
the weight limit alarms
as I step in
    — Enrique Garrovillo

*)

asthma attack —
perfumes and aftershave
fill the lift
    — Martha Magenta

*)

new-hire jitters . . .
in a stuck elevator
with the CEO
    — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

*)

rising office elevator
she excuses her way
to the open door
    — Gail Oare

*)

going down
sandwiched . . .
a rumble in my tummy
    — Madhuri Pillai
team meeting . . .
my boss and I in the lift
testing side walls
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

crowded elevator
I imagine watching the sea
from the window
   — Elisa Allo

reality bites
he had between ground and nine
to catch my eye
   — Lee Nash

a couple takes a selfie
in the elevator — I try to be
out of sight
   — Tomislav Maretic

elevator peep show
doors open on me
and the run up my tights
   — Jennifer Hambrick
alone with my ex
an awkward silence
in the elevator
— Arvinder Kaur

* 

elevator ride
my boss’s wife ask me
to push the button
— Cezar Ciobika

* 

The comfort zone
somewhere among the shoes
crowded elevator
— Stefano Riondato

* 

lips almost touching
the elevator door
opens
— Anthony Rabang

* 

my eyes in yours —
nowhere else to go
but downstairs
— Ana Drobot
It would seem a great many of us subscribe to the theory that much of the pleasure to be had in an activity lies in its anticipation, to judge from the preponderance of poems on the subject. Some said as much in just so many words:

holiday plans —
buoyed up in a sea
of anticipation
[David Dayson]

but even when not named outright, it was pretty clear how the promise of time away affects us:

with far-off stare —
a holiday state of mind
already there
[David Dayson]

and of course what might predict pleasure might also predict its impediments:

You, Road Warrior.
Racked up frequent flyer points.
Now try to use them.
[Alexa Mahnken]

Even if you do manage to get away, whither goest thou?

Car trip with the kids
to visit Mother-in-Law.
Is it Monday yet?
[Alexa Mahnken]
So planning for the summer getaway is not an unalloyed pleasure. Witness my third choice this week

On vacation but  
the out of office message  
doesn’t mean a thing.  
[Alexa Mahnken]

It’s bad enough that this year it’s a staycation, but to be back in the office during it is just sad. Surely you have a mother-in-law who misses you? On the other hand, my second choice takes solace in the expectation:

office deadlines —  
the heat of the moment cooled  
by vacation plans  
[David Dayson]

We all know we work harder before leaving for a vacation, and inevitably we will return to a pile of work that will cause us to work harder after as well. This nicely turned poem soothes our concerns about such things. Of course we will be burdened in these usual ways, but this cooling before the fact is worth a great deal. My top winner mines the same ore:

from my desk —  
flights of imagination  
leaving daily  
[David Dayson]

It is surprising what a great relief even a small bit of mental withdrawal can afford us, and how necessary it can seem. The cheeky borrowing of the airline advertising phrase “leaving daily” perfectly suits this poem, and whisks us to destinations limited only by our imaginations.

I write this on the verge of a little travel myself — to London. That which you seek to escape, I seek to explore. Needless to say, I’m looking forward to it . . .
summer vacation
an excel spreadsheet
outlines each detail
— Michael Henry Lee

more work
taking days away
then more work
— Paul Millar

revoked vacations —
a wastebasket filled
with travel brochures
— Maria Laura Valente

no summer plans —
also a vacation
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

in control of
my summer vacation plans
a snoozing pooch
— Ernesto P Santiago
summer tryst
planning the vacation
with my boss’s wife
— Celestine Nudanu

destination bounded
aqua velvety kisses with . . .
ssoft breeze swaying
— Katherine Stella

holiday season
I go where
the overtime’s best
— Rachel Sutcliffe

summer vacation
working only
9 to 5
— Amy Losak

summer vacay —
boss he giveth &
he taketh away
— Roberta Beary
mapping out
the next vacation plan
office meeting
     — Willie Bongcaron

she holds the fort
while her boss goes to Maui . . .
the embezzler
     — Michael H Lester

the vacation began
all according to plan
except that the plane
was still in Milan
     — Mark Gilbert

my mind set
the killer whale
folded in the bag
     — Enrique Garrovillo

For the holidays
i bought a hat
Smiles from colleagues
     — Angela Giordano
finally summer vacation . . .
walking barefoot
above the hills
— Eufemia Griffo

*  
lackadaisical boss . . .
his vocation
a vacation
— Charlotte Digregorio

*  
summer vacation plans —
disturbing my daydream
a phone call
— Ana Drobot

*  
candlelit dinner
it’s so far until next summer
he says
— Kerstin Park

*  
everybody’s off to France
we buy a ticket for
Paris Can Wait
— Marietta McGregor
beach holiday —
my daughter’s faith
in sand castles
— Arvinder Kaur

vacation
the seamless blend
of days and dreams
— Pat Davis

meeting after meeting —
puddle jumping across
a squandered summer
— Gail Oare

mapping on the wall
the tour is over
father proclaims
— S. Radhamani

high seas vacation
worldly cares gone
beyond three miles
— Paul Geiger
bush camping . . .
I tell the boss
it’s doctor’s orders
— Madhuri Pillai

* 

come summer
the call of the breeze
on my priority
— Angelo Ancheta

* 

vacation brochure
the adventurous route
up to the decision
— Adrian Bouter

* 

Escape Tours
come with us to visit
the world’s zoos
— Jan Dobb

* 

meeting in July
dreaming of golden beaches
with open eyes
— Elisa Allo
* 

eclipse
  viewing
  in
  Oregon
PTO
request
denied
— Deborah P Kolodji

* 

already on the road —
our summer vacation plans
left at home
— Tomislav Maretic

* 

lunch al desko
talking up my summer
staycation
— Lee Nash

* 

airport strike
we hit the road
to the coast
— Martha Magenta
offshore
scanning the horizon
jellyfish glow
— Anthony Rabang

summer vacation —
all the relatives coming
to our beach house
— Angela Deodhar

Two suitcases
not nearly as heavy
as parting resentments
— Stephan Massi

kismet holiday
that me leaving Italy
will never be back
— Lucia Fontana

counting down the days . . .
I spice up my screen life
with a sunny wallpaper
— Olivier Schopfer
autumn equinox —
my plans fly to the southern hemisphere
   — Marta Chocilowska

skipping stones
across the slate bay
brother always won
   — Ron Scully

sandals, book, hat, phone
get away from it all
oop! phone no-go
   — Trilla Pando

checking
out of office message
oil level
   — Mike Gallagher

revealing
the lost office calendar . . .
my leave inked in
   — Karen Harvey
spreading his
vacation days over the year
newly hired
— Devin Harrison

summer vacation
my second thoughts
on delegation
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

kismet holiday
we avoid talking about
the end
— Steven Smolak

vacation plans
ruined again —
Aunt Flo
— Susan Burch

It doesn’t matter
what I plan for vacation
perseids
— Cezar Ciobika
dream vacation
hanging at the tip of
an unpaid bonus
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
Haiku in the Workplace: Eating at Your Desk

We have spent some of our time in this column asking the question what exactly is a haiku, and we’ve arrived at some far-flung responses. This has been perfect training for the following:

Elegant artistry of one hand sandwich eating,  
juggling of crisps and paper clips with audience holding their breath  
when your other hand catches the open bottle just before it pours its contents over the paperwork

[Odnrej Rob]

So what do you think? Is this haiku? We can certainly say that it doesn’t look like haiku. Yes, it appears in three lines, but that’s about it in terms of any normative approach to the genre. It flaunts its excesses (so far as haiku is concerned): the last line alone contains 26 syllables. But by now we should also be asking more incisive questions about what makes a haiku. The questions we are now prepared to ask include things like is this a comparison, implied or expressed, between two images? Do the images so compared constitute a moment, of awareness if not of time? Is there a caesura between the images? While not all haiku will have all of these features, it would be a very rare haiku that had none of them. And the present example really has none. It is not so much a comparison of images as a descriptive account of a cinematic performance. We enjoy the description, but I’d much rather see Peter Sellers do it. Maybe not so much Adam Sandler.

So, unless we subscribe to the “anything I call a haiku is a haiku” school of thought (and there is one), we probably have to conclude this does not really qualify. If we must name it, perhaps “vignette” or “anecdote” or “tableau” is more appropriate. Nevertheless, we find it here, submitted (in earnest?) to a haiku column, which at least provides us with the opportunity to stretch our formalist legs, so to speak. And stretching out legs is about all we get to do in meeting the content demands for this week’s challenge. What cruel version of capitalism is at work when people can’t
even have a decent interval for lunch, but must instead remain actively engaged in production while seeking their necessary sustenance? It seems inhuman, monstrous, outrageous (hang on a bit here while I wash down the last of my sandwich). That’s better. Where was I?
Oh, yes, eating at my desk. Most of you found humor in the situation (we are resilient creatures, are we not?). And curiously, most of you had more empathy for the plight of your keyboards than for yourselves.

Best from M&S
Many crumbs in the keyboard
Dinner out tonight
[Robert Bewell]

This cannot be a good sign. What is worse is the seeming willingness with which you accept your plight:

Half an hour of
victuals for my sustenance;
a swift diversion
[Noble Francis]

or use it as an excuse for self-discipline:

hara hachi bu —
eighty percent full
will have to do
[David Dayson]

or might even consider the break an intrusion on work itself:

mandated break time
the silence munching
of my keyboard
[Ernesto Santiago]
Happily (or unhappily?), some of you did find some savor in the situation:

*scent of saffron*
while I open my suitcase
people walk by
[Ernesto Santiago]

*illicit bliss —*
hidden in the top drawer
M&S sandwich
[David Dayson]

My third choice this week calls upon metaphor to find respite in the moment:

*bento box —*
its bite-sized symmetry
time-out from chaos
[David Dayson]

Our second place poem conflates work materials and food materials, input and input, to good effect:

*Keyboard, egg and cress:*
eschewing mindfulness,
I consume data
[David Stephenson]

And my top selection for the week deftly conjures up the habitual deferment of conscious lunching presumably for some reward, but that reward cannot be the life better lived — a sad, sad poem:
his desk —
a palimpsest of
takeaways
[David Dayson]

Bon appetit!

New Poems

engrossed
with the monthly target
eating in place
— Willie Bongcaron

*

annoying
coworkers eating at my desk
the vinegar flies
— Ernest P. Santiago

*

fast desk lunch —
sushi bento and
Best of Japan on YouTube
— Maria Laura Valente
rustle of paper —
the fried egg sandwich aroma
gags cube mates
— Angelee Deodhar

stench of sauerkraut from his desk to mine
— Roberta Beary

desk lunch
the salad that much greener
under the fluorescents
— Jennifer Hambrick

daily planner
lunches remnants
a bugs life
— Katherine Stella

too busy today
lunch while taking care
of grandma
— Kristjaan Panneman
Jim enjoys kimchi
and hard-boiled eggs at his desk . . .
tough luck — he’s the boss
   — Michael H. Lester

working lunch
chewing
my pencil
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

desk mates —
the candy bar
and a diet pop
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

quick lunch . . .
imagine spaghetti
Sunday
   — Eufemia Griffo

the bitter taste
of radish on my tongue
makes me question everything
   — Mark Gilbert
at my desk —
lines of red & yellow
sales figures . . . or mustard & ketchup?
   — Paul Millar

Falafel at lunch —
sorting the beans out
while the script runs
   — Monica Federico

eating at your desk
rehearse monthly budget
Swallow loss
   — S. Radhamani

overtime dinner
the roaches
have a field day
   — Celestine Nudanu

sandwiched between
half-written papers
a cheese baguette
   — Andy McLellan
* 

production secrets
a bag of Cheetos in the top
left hand drawer
    — Michael Henry Lee

* 

lights off
the odor of
salted sun-dried fish
    — Enrique Garrovillo

* 

lunch break
at our desks
syncopated burps
    — Martin Cohen

* 

the bitten apple
next to my touch screen
lost paradise
    — Eva Limbach

* 

cake crumbs
dropping on my desk
a sparrow
    — Marta Chociłowska
lunch at my desk —
breadcrumbs and words
in every bite
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

working lunch
one bite at a time
all afternoon
   — Pat Davis

the smell of tuna . . .
I open the window
to let in the fumes
   — Madhuri Pillai

Ants in a row
on my desk
I have to travel
   — Angela Giordano

one eye on the screen
and one on my sandwich . . .
short chew break
   — Adrian Bouter
eating alone
at my desk —
nut allergy
   — Susan Burch

sandwiched
between urgent calls . . .
her working lunch
   — Karen Harvey

office lunch —
her finger prints
in turmeric
   — Arvinder Kaur

no food
or drinks policy . . .
rumbling thunder
   — Martha Magenta

turning
my keyboard over
all you can eat
   — Olivier Schopfer
lunch after a patient
absorbed by the past
I digest it
   — Lucia Fontana

a time slot
for multitasking
lunch at desk
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

finding the way through
a forest of paperwork
tuna sandwich crumbs
   — Peggy Bilbro

lunch
at the conference room
flies join the meeting
   — Anthony Rabang

spelt salad . . .
among the keyboard keys
small oil spots
   — Elisa Allo
sound of chewing —
both hands
on the keyboard
   — Tomislav Maretic

* 

dark moon
emphasizing our future sales
that drop of mayo
   — Gail Oare

* 

jalapeno pepper
in the p folder
past due 90 days
   — Ron Scully

* 

lunch time
my boss chews on
his fingernails
   — Cezar Ciobika

* 

latex gloves
for his sandwiches
laboratory lunch
   — Marietta McGregor
spring breeze
depositing the scent of my food
in my boss’s office
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

*
As one who has spent much of the last quarter-century working from home, I am aware of the many plusses and minuses that come with the terrain. The boss may be a miscreant, but at least I know where he is, and I can produce work on my own schedule, which often includes the middle of the night and weekends. On the other hand, there are no office pools or shared lunches, and I pay for my own water cooler. Is it ideal? Well, hardly that, but pretty good for someone of the right temperament. What did our poets make of the topic?

For some, such an opportunity was, predictably, a lark:

* illicit pleasure —
  an extra two hours in bed
  working from home  
  [David Dayson]

and for some, license:

* work at home —
  I open my suitcase
  to moth flies  
  [Ernesto Santiago]

and for some, even an excursion into empathy:

* working from home
  through the eyes of a child
  his simplified world  
  [Ernesto Santiago]

On the whole, however, it did not amount to an opportunity for commingling with the Muse, and the poems on this topic were, for the most part, lacking. My choices,
therefore, are offered tepidly. My third choice, for instance, tells rather than shows us the beauty he describes:

No commute to work —  
How beautiful to dream  
whilst awake  
[Noble Francis]

while my second choice baffles with construction, which I take to simulate the mindspace of the poet, but could just as easily be, simply, cleverness (though pleasing to those of us who like a good conundrum):

not at work —  
at home at work but  
not at home  
[David Dayson]

Still, I felt these had enough more to recommend them to put them on the short list. The noticing of the waking dream is perhaps something easily missed in the office, where we are more likely to be interrupted, and likewise, noting the odd consciousness of being both “on the clock” and “out of the office” carries its own freight. And so I select them here.

The only poem I feel I can wholly endorse, and my top choice, is cheeky, and suggestive of time well spent — whether or not the job got completed:

tell-tale tan —  
back to work after working  
from home  
[David Dayson]

The first line sets a clear image in the reader’s mind. I like the way the middle line creates its own synopsis of the time period. In a themed collection as this is, the repetition of “back to work” might make this seem too much, but as a stand-alone poem, where it would have to suggest its own context, this works admirably, is
carefully crafted, catchy, and even leaves a little frisson for the third line. Nicely crafted, and enough to make us all look forward to our next assignment — at home.

**New Poems**

**home office**
the dog interrupts
my daydream
   — Roberta Beary

* 

**between cups of tea**
and the washing
I reply to the boss
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

**working from home**
casual Fridays in
my birthday suit
   — Michael Henry Lee

* 

**working from home . . .**
Madame Butterfly’s high notes
keep me awake
   — Eufemia Griffo
home works
on my credit reports
a gaping cat
— Ernesto P. Santiago

* 

Between video calls
an icy beer
And the perfume of you
— Angela Giordano

* 

home office
my paperweight
preens her fur
— Amy Losak

* 

neighbours’ mower
dog, cat, kids, phone, TV, fridge . . .
goodbye that deadline
— Marietta McGregor

* 

working from home
my broadband internet
doesn’t cooperate
— Willie Bongcaron
working from home
the joy of a kitchen
nearby
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

*

teleconference call
my presentation forgotten
I breast feed the baby
— Angelee Deodhar

*

home office Skype —
wardrobe malfunction
and a bad hair day
— Mark Gilbert

*

a tiny nap
in my home-based office
the weary tomcat
— Eva Limbach

*

the big cat saunters in
another impromptu meeting
working from home
— Gail Oare
wet morning
spreading over the worksheets
a bowl of soup
— Celestine Nudanu

* 

working from home
productivity measured
in empty teacups
— Andy McLellan

* 

ISP slowing
deadlines approaching
confidence escalates
— Katherine Stella

* 

video conference —
in my suit and tie
and boxers
— Enrique Garrovillo

* 

divide loyalty
from kitchen to computer
pain-lit bonanza
— S. Radhamani
denial of service attack telecommuters stuck in traffic
   — Michael Lester

deadline day
the lunch soup
was too thin
   — Kerstin Park

working from home
on a tropical island . . .
daydream
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

babysitting
spreadsheets
still in my pyjamas
   — Paul Millar

working from home
a quick detour
for haiku submissions
   — Madhuri Pillai
* 

this heat!  
telecommuting in  
my underwear  
  — Johnny Baranski  

* 

working from home —  
I miss the morning line  
at the coffee machine  
  — Marta Chocilowska  

* 

winter break  
correcting student diaries  
with a purple pen  
  — Carmen Sterba  

* 

unread messages  
a house sparrow flutters  
by my computer  
  — Timothy J. Dickey  

* 

Cheese samich  
He cut the crusts  
Off my workload  
  — Erin Castaldi
working from home
I catch myself talking
to no one
— Pat Davis

working at home —
the employee switches
his roles
— Tomislav Maretic

work assignment
at home my laptop
purrrrrr
— Paul Geiger

hard day
for the freelance writer
a prayer to Saint Bede
— Lee Nash

cartoonist . . .
the hardest work is
to keep children away
— Elisa Allo
* 

working from home —  
I can’t be in the office 
but I’m not even at home

lavoro da casa —  
non posso essere in ufficio 
ma neanche a casa  
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

work from home  
too old  
for homework  
— Olivier Schopfer

* 

career at home  
prolonging the life  
of my engine  
— Cezar Ciobika

* 

home office attire  
i wear a bathrobe  
to the board meeting  
— Jennifer Hambrick
eastern Phoebe’s
nervous anapest
itemized on my dime
— Ron Scully

conference call
in the midst of bickering
a barking dog
— Devin Harrison

coffee in bed
finishing the last lesson
at sunrise
— Frank J. Tassone

*
Haiku in the Workplace:
Kindness from a Colleague

Relying on the kindness of strangers is a hard way to go. That’s what we have family for. But what of the middle ground, those people who are peripheral to but regularly present in our lives, our colleagues and fellow-travelers? What is it we can expect from them?

humankind —
how else do we want
to be defined
[David Dayson]

Given the rather reduced number of submissions on this topic, apparently not much. Perhaps the workplace, which can be a breeding ground for competition between employees, makes us wary of being too familiar.

A tissue to dry my eyes
I cowardly pretend not to know
That she is taking my job
[Samuel Sibony]

Either that, or the everyday kindnesses found in the office are usually too small, too subtle, too private to lend themselves to good evocation. But not always:

Puff-eyed, desked, I dozed.
Passing, you slipped your sweater
beneath my mute head.
[Leaf Arbuthnot]

Still, we are reluctant to grant all our trust in such circumstances, knowing that several elements are in play.
Flowers for my birthday
Even my wife had forgotten
Then she asks for a raise
[Samuel Sibony]

And so we find ourselves second-guessing such gestures, not wishing to be misled, or guilty of misreading the signs.

Crying after my review
How sweet of her to bring a cuppa
Buy why no milk?
[Samuel Sibony]

At least there is a hint of humor here. The bulk of this week’s submissions were homiletic quintessences, applied at large, and as such, not very much in the spirit of haiku, which work best as particular instances keenly perceived. My three selections illustrate this: the sharper the evocation, the higher the prize.

through
the help of a workmate —
warm smile
[Ernesto Santiago]

My third choice conjures a general scene — it merely suggests the assistance of someone only slightly known, not a named person, but a “workmate”. Though slight, the poem does have something extra to recommend it. The first line, simply “through”, can be read at least two ways: most obviously as the preposition to the phrase that comprises the first two lines. But by having it stand alone, the poet also intimates “completion” which also suggests that the help was essential to that completion. In other words, not just accessory to the work, but essential. The “warm smile” could be from the persona of the poem, but also from the workmate, and most likely, both, and so becomes a shared success and gesture, boding, perhaps, a closer connection in future. Most of this is hinted, admittedly, but even if unintentional, the words make it possible, and we should trust the words.
pressure sores —
a weight lightened
by kindness
[David Dayson]

My second selection relies less on ambiguity, but is not altogether bereft of it. Though not stated, it is not difficult to visualize this setting: a nursing home, perhaps, or at least a bedroom of someone who is not greatly mobile. The kindness of an attending nurse or worker is most likely palpable, the turning of someone who cannot turn him or herself, and though such an act may be done for remuneration, that fact does not lessen its kindly aspect. And the language suggests that the act is appreciated on both the physical and symbolic planes. One could argue that a specific mention of the act would make for a better poem than the generic “kindness” (the same could be said of the previous poem’s “help”). This is why the following, so simple in its unfolding, is my top selection.

in the night rain
someone’s umbrella
over someone
[Ernesto Santiago]

This quiet poem, seen at a distance and conveyed objectively, nevertheless perfectly captures the concept of kindness without ever having to say the word. It is the embodiment of the virtue, rather than its explanation. Its cinematic presentation is easily visualized, and the fact that the people involved are “someone” and “someone” universalizes the moment without resorting to abstraction. And the fact that the poet notices it in such a context suggests that he knows a kindness when he sees one, even in its subtlest evocation. Nicely done.
New Poems

share price sinking —
we hand out
life jackets
— Mark Gilbert

*

comforting
a dying co-worker
a good dog
— Ernest P. Santiago

*

flat tire . . .
the boss’s secretary
punches me in
— Michael H. Lester

*

model plane —
my coworker tells me
we are reaching far
— Ana Drobot

*

Marketing woes soon
flip out over media
swarming with thumbs up
— Catherine Gates
rumbling stomach
my co worker offers
his half eaten biscuit
— Rachel Sutcliffe

integrity sowed
beyond life’s stepping stones
gratitude welcomed
— Katherine Stella

demoted
a condolence card
from my replacement
— Michael Henry Lee

smiling
he loans me his science book . . .
grumpy senior colleague
— Marina Bellini

On my birthday —
found a plant on my desk
and a chocolate cake
— Monica Federico
price offers —
among emails
writing a haiku

oferte de preț —
printre emailuri
scriind un haiku
— Florin Golban

a bouquet of roses
from my boss
I’d rather have the thorns
— Celestine Nudanu

heated discussion
his nodding smile
slows the pace
— Pat Davis

a card with a poem . . .
a colleague remembers
mother’s death anniversary
— Madhuri Pillai
translation work
our dog tries to grasp the sense
of my growling
   — Eleonore Nickolay

first bell
my para-pro brings me
fresh apple cake
   — Marilyn Appl Walker

So gallant —
a new colleague
takes me home

Cosi galante
questo nuovo collega
Mi riaccompagna a casa
   — Angela Giordano

getting a clue for
bugging mystery on time
unasked
   — S. Radhamani
presentation day
she passes me
her smile
— Andy McLellan

break in the hearing —
the barrister brings coffee
to the jury-box
— Marta Chociłowska

my desk neighbor . . .
one of Issa’s poems
his unexpected gift
— Eufemia Griffo

kindness
in showing me the ropes
one more time
— Erin Castaldi

sprained wrist
my workmate
lends a hand
— Mike Gallagher
revving the engine . . .
from an online colleague
a thumbs-up
   — Angelo Ancheta

understanding
she needs the cash
office amway
   — Marietta McGregor

forgotten lunch
the colleague offers
half of her bento
   — Elisa Allo

working day . . . a smile from the cubicle next door
   — Paul Millar

chilly night
our cigarettes glow
at the bus stop
   — Anthony Rabang
our boss stopped
the spreading rumor
with a kind smile
— Tomislav Maretic

dead of winter
your flowers breathe
new life into the office
— Olivier Schopfer

covering her back
while she goes out for a smoke
data-entry clerk
— Devin Harrison

near retirement
my colleague can fix
our Royal Typewriter
— Paul Geiger

colleague at a loss
every day filling
her candy jar
— Cezar Ciobika
tending my bruises
a chat with the lawyer
our boss
— Karen Harvey

young co-worker
the gentleness
of a good listener
— Carmen Sterba

back at work
hugs from a colleague
i don’t know
— Roberta Beary

sendoff . . .
shaking off
a Judas kiss
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

back in the office
a colleague has made
my cactus bloom
— Eleonore Nickolay
Haiku in the Workplace: The Conference Call

It seems impossible that we once traveled those hundreds — nay, thousands — of miles just to get a nod and a handshake. All those air miles and hotels and bars, that enormous carbon footprint, just to sell a few pots and reinforce our status as homo economicus. Now, from the comfort of our own offices, all we need do is click a button or two and we GoToMeeting. But we might gather from some of our submissions this week that this is not an entirely happy development. Some of us miss the travel and (especially) the expense account. More than that, something of the personal has been lost.

with unfelt trust —
an electronic handshake
seals the deal
[David Dayson]

But there is no doubting that there are some perquisites to be had with our modern approach:

occasional interjection
invisible to others so
gaming on iPad
[Lbnorris]

even if it still contains its share of banalities:

conference call —
salutations it is not
raining here also
[David Dayson]
Still, that electronic distance is not always such a bad thing:

```
face to face
not as nice
as his voice
[Marion Clarke]
```

My three top selections this week all have to do with our relationship with the new travel. Its relative distance and anonymity can spark an unexpected freedom, as in my third choice:

```
Skype hype —
we discover our hidden
TV personalities
[David Dayson]
```

This willingness to expose ourselves to strangers in a way that we are most reluctant to do with our friends and family is one of the most interesting phenomena of the internet age, and there’s no reason why it shouldn’t be carried forth in our business dealings as well. The poet neatly observes and encapsulates our weakness for self-indulgence here, where “the stage” magnifies everything, and we take full advantage. My second prize may seem as much paradigm as poem:

```
breaking up —
the conference stalls
sadly pixelated
[David Dayson]
```

We know this is likely only a temporary situation, but there is yet something disheartening and at the same time seemingly inevitable about it. Such an event supplies a visual analog (and we are such visual creatures) for the fraught aspect of human communications, and this analog may be the very best thing that computers do for us. Technically, it is useful to the poet to hold the pixelation until the third line. This makes us curious about how the first two lines work together
— how are we to read, especially, that first line (which phrasing is often used for personal relationship); and in what way does such a personal matter intersect with a “conference”? The visual cue clarifies.
This is a neat means of suggesting one of our many ways of relating to machines, but it is what we attempt to secret, from machines as well as humans, that take my top prize this week:

\[
\text{a deal seems done} \\
\text{but the camera missed —} \\
\text{an off screen shrug} \\
[\text{David Dayson}]
\]

Not even the ubiquitous internet captures everything, and it is here that the personal element in business dealings is most vividly exploited. That shrug would never have been overlooked in person, of course, but would it even have been made? Is this relationship heading for doom? The poem is ambiguous, and opens a host of questions about the nature of impersonal interaction, which seems the quintessence of this week’s issue. It’s possible the poet didn’t intend to imply all this — and possible he did — but the words, in any event, allow us to muse on what it is we have gained and lost in our “real time” connections across the room and around the world.
Even though this is my top selection, this doesn’t mean I don’t think it could be better. For instance, I don’t really like the punctuation here. The em-dash seems to break the poem just as it was gaining momentum. Perhaps it would be put to better use after the first line, thus:

\[
\text{a deal seems done —} \\
\text{but the camera misses} \\
\text{the off-screen shrug}
\]

And in such short poems as haiku, small details such as the selection of an article or the placement of punctuation can matter greatly. This poem carries the day with its openness to possibility, but it’s possible even for the best work, occasionally, to be brought to a point with a little extra attention.
intently listening
to a conference call —
dolphin or whale?
 — Ernesto P. Santiago

* 

unmuted —
wife’s tirade
halts the meeting
 — Enrique Garrovillo

* 

conference call
outside the window
birds on a wire
 — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

at the end
of the conference call
fireflies
 — Roberta Beary

* 

the conference call
if they could
see me now
 — Michael Henry Lee
boss on vacation!
waiting for the conference call
the team agog
— Marta Chocilowska

convenient asset
In the conference call . . .
good ears
— Katherine Stella

full moon
the whole time
conference call
— Wilfredo Bongcaron

conference call —
the scent of coffee
comes in-between us
— Ana Drobot

round robin . . . everyone speaks together
— Paul Millar
roll call
the one time I heard input
from everyone
— Pat Davis

I speak in delegation
My body language
Betrays my thoughts
Parlo in delega
Il linguaggio del corpo
tradisce i pensieri
— Angela Giordano

conference call
a heated discussion
on climate change
— Eufemia Griffo

I sleep through
the teleseminar —
on Sleep Disorders
— Angelee Deodhar
conference call
my suggestions already
thirty seconds old
— Andy McLellan

conference call
my daughter draws a gasp
her naked bum
— Celestine Nudanu

bad connection
with the suppliers — the crinkle
of a Ruffles bag
— Michael H. Lester

one person sizzles
during the conference call
haiku society officers
— Carmen Sterba

too many bosses
around the oval table —
no decision yet
— S. Radhamani
conference call
in no uncertain terms
the dog’s input
 — Madhuri Pillai

“is the biggest
go
on here?”
 — Debbie Feller

muffled laughter . . .
the heavy breathing
of the boss’s Labrador
 — Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

already tomorrow
i hear myself
saying yes
 — Kerstin Park

conference call
to clear some problems
I file my nails
 — Peggy Bilbro
* 

distant crows
the static of another
conference call
   — Gail Oare

* 
singing in the wires
an earworm takes over
her conference call
   — Marietta McGregor

* 
conference call
on the screen the big boss
with a big fly on his nose
   — Eleonore Nickolay

* 
three hour t-con
shared objectives
soaked in sweat
   — Mark Gilbert

* 
autumn leaves
how easily skype
lets go
   — Jennifer Hambrick
* phone conference
  standing out from the crowd
  a sexy voice
  — Olivier Schopfer

* head office
downgrading our job descriptions . . .
conference call
  — Martha Magenta

* stealing attention
from my fidget spinner
conference call
  — Angelo Ancheta

* end of concall
i review
my body language skills
  — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

* conference call —
the cat claims
my sun patch
  — Arvinder Kaur
* 

the conference call —  
I have no need  
to check my look  

teleconferenza —  
non ho bisogno di controllare  
il mio aspetto  
    — Lucia Cardillo

*  

Nixing the conference call  
for once in my life  
an eclipse  
    — Stephan Massi

*  

videoconference —  
colleagues on other continents  
in similar suits  
    — Tomislav Maretic

*  

riding . . .  
my colleague's voice  
surprises me uphill  
    — Elisa Allo
pinching myself
to stay awake, overseas
conference call
— Karen Harvey

can you hear me now?
the boss’s secretary
patches him in
— Erin Castaldi

early morning
not many survive the call
unscathed
— Mike Gallagher

just there to take notes
no one really needs to know
fly on the wall
— Trilla Pando

conference call
interrupted by the sounds
of a barking dog
— Cezar Ciobika
staff retreat —
wind down with
group gossip
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
Haiku in the Workplace:
After Failure

Have you ever noticed how anyone ever quoted on the subject of failure is anything but? This is not to say that Thomas Edison and Winston Churchill and Coco Chanel have never failed, but it is not their failures they are known for. So they hardly qualify as experts. Why do we never hear from John C. Turmel (look him up) or the 1962 New York Mets? Actually the Mets’ redoubtable manager, Casey Stengel, was quite quotable, and once offered this small gem on the topic: “Without losers, where would the winners be?” Where indeed.

The majority of submissions were again more aphoristic than imagistic, which might get you points in some venues, but not here. Haiku are at their best when they are image-based, and when their language does not tell the reader what to think or feel, and when the result does not appear as a bit of potted philosophy. We can appreciate the pithy expression of circumstance in such nuggets as

I never knew how
High I had soared until
I was shot down
[Samuel Sibony]

but we can’t really accord it much artistic merit. Similarly, while the following makes for a fine allegory (which at least is a poetical mode), it is intended to be just that: an existential bromide for general application, and not the kind of extended comparison of specific images that marks achievement in our genre:

from the ashes
of last year’s gorse fire —
heather flourishes
[David Dayson]

Of these little homilies, this one, that might be taken directly from a “haiku” self-help (self-helpku?) book, most appealed to me, though I don’t doubt it’s an idiosyncratic
choice. At least it has humor to recommend it:

fail forward —
banana skins propel
us to success
[David Dayson]

My three choices this week, as usual, rely more upon their images to do the work for them than merely rhetorical devices, but the linguistic presentation still matters to a very great extent. Consider how in my third choice the truncated third line leads us directly to a moment of attention:

for us no more
than a far-off splash —
but for Icarus
[David Dayson]

This poem is an example of ekphrasis — a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art — as it references the famous Bruegel painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus. In the painting, Icarus’s demise is but one small feature in a painting bustling with enterprise, agriculture and natural interest. The poet, too, minimizes the impact of the fall from the skies in the first two lines, but shifts our attention back to the drama in the third. The poem, then, features the imminent death, whereas the painting makes a point that death is simply one character in the drama. The poem, then, seems more caught up with the “story” than the painting. I would have liked an ellipsis at the end of line three, as without it there is some slight uncertainty on how to read the line.

My second choice conjures the different ends of the task that lies ahead, the energy of first coming to terms, and the potential harsh reality of failing at last:

Out of a job
Bring out the rolodex
Bring out the begging bowl
[Samuel Sibony]
The mock-heightening of the situation can’t fail to lighten the moment, but what grounds it are the completely different yet equally real possibilities those images evoke. The diction — “bring out, bring out” — formalizes the poem and enhances the humor (and may also remind readers of a certain age of Monty Python’s “bring out your dead” from Monty Python and the Holy Grail). There is a certain bracing quality to phrasing the challenge in this way, a “making public” that challenges the new job seeker, and his willingness to see both extremes mixes humility in with that humor.

My top choice offers two sharply etched images which create an instant drama:

end of rope
the clutching hands
opted to pray
[Ernesto Santiago]

The first line is fraught with danger, whether we be holding on to or suspended from it. We gather from the last two lines that this rope end has now eluded those hands, leaving them free for other gestures. Is the gesture chosen appropriate to the opportunity? Is there a better choice? The poet doesn’t attempt to answer these questions, but instead allows the reader to pose them to herself. Depending on our orientation we might find great comfort, or great futility, in that choice. But the poem doesn’t resolve the situation, and in truth, no matter how we have responded, there is still the matter of what actually happened to those hands after the poem concludes. Neatly constructed and profoundly provocative, in 9 words, putting Teilhard de Chardin (look him up) to shame. Good luck with the job search.

New Poems

finally
on the fourth try . . .
blind audition
    — Willie Bongcaron
quarterly results
the leaping frog
misses the lily pad
— Gail Oare

bad day at work
going home
to momma’s kitchen
— Rachel Sutcliffe

swallow’s flight
finally
my resilience
— Lucia Fontana

after failure . . .
convincing help
from an old frog
— Ernesto P. Santiago

ice cream tub
i triple scoop
my workday
— Roberta Beary
after failure
pick up the broken pieces . . .
toss in cesspool
— Katherine Stella

* 

team risk-taker
reaping the rewards
of failure
— Enrique Garrovillo

* 

Cheshire cat
lapping up my dismissal
for breakfast
— Celestine Nudanu

* 

big account lost —
the bottled water order
cut in half
— Michael H. Lester

* 

after failure . . .
the fuzzy solace
in a bottle of wine
— Madhuri Pillai
the morning after
dreaming
the deal hasn’t died
— Mark Gilbert

* 

after failure . . .
packing up my dreams
in an old box
— Eufemia Griffo

* 

Black Monday
in front of a closed bank
clenched hands
— Marta Chocilowska

* 

among former colleagues
in a bar we speak
of the old days
Tra ex colleghi
Ritrovarsi dentro un bar
ricordando i vecchi tempi
— Angela Giordano
* 
sister defeat
leading me on to dais
above me spider
— S. Radhamani

* 
the losing captain
drinks from the victory cup
champagne vinegar
— Mike Gallagher

* 
feeling like a failure . . .
the quietness
of falling snow
— Olivier Schopfer

* 
rounds of sake —
finally i get over
the rejection letter
— Arvinder Kaur

* 
crumpled paper crane
I reshape my values
and goals
— Martha Magenta
digesting failure —
in my black coffee
a dash of brandy
   — Debbi Antebi

music festival
listening to the silence
of her fired son
   — Eleonore Nickolay

moving on
after losing the best deal
early bird
   — Angelo Ancheta

soul searching
last thought
on its timing
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

like a child
learning to walk . . .
fall and then get up
   — Elisa Allo
after failure
the see-saw
again
— Pat Davis

lost contract
a drop in pressure
in the boardroom
— Lee Nash

after failure . . .
awaiting the return
of optimism
— Tomislav Maretic

after failure —
I win the lottery
in my dreams
— Ana Drobot

two fingers left
no chance of failing
this time
— Marietta McGregor
* 

after failure
longer wait time
in the loo
— Alegria Imperial

* 

after failure
changing my approach
to my boss’s wife
— Cezar Ciobika

* 

store closing
how the shelves yellowed
the lights drained
— Ron Scully

* 

blown mission
a hole on the shoulder
where the gold leaves were
— Michael Henry Lee

* 

after failure
the ego boss covers
his shame with a shade
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
failure
after failure . . . even if
it takes forever
— Willie Bongcaron
The philosopher Bertrand Russell completed his magnum opus, Principia Mathematica, at the age of 31. He lived to be 98, but remarked late in his life that he was never again able to concentrate for any length of time as he had been forced to do during its composition. Russell and his peers may have considered this simply a kind of character flaw, but today we recognize it for what it was: burnout. Russell was wise never to have forced the issue, since it’s not simply a matter of will. Or rather, if one makes it such a matter, it is never done without serious and adverse consequences, such as emotional exhaustion, absenteeism, personal deterioration, family deterioration, and depersonalization. Instead, Russell was able to function perfectly well for his long and estimable career without ever revisiting the severe constriction that burnout imposes upon us. He went on to play significant roles in public life as a logician, mathematician, historian, writer, social critic and political activist, and even won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950. Not bad for a burnout. This topic, which may figure more in the securing of our livelihood than literary prizes for most of us, seemed for some reason to elicit a flurry of metaphors from our respondents. Metaphors are unusual in haiku for the simple reason that the haiku is itself a metaphor, and nesting one within another challenges the mind to know how to parse its sense. Consider a poem such as this:

a hedgehog
rolls into a prickly fist —
hiding its softness
[David Dayson]

We have “fist” as a metaphor for a hedgehog, whose action in turn is to be taken as a metaphor for burnout, with a further metaphorical explanation added in the third line. It seems like too much. This is also an example of a poet not trusting his readers sufficiently — we can all surmise why a hedgehog rolls into a ball, so the third line simply pads the given image instead of offering a second, contrasting image, which might provide the opportunity for the poem to deliver more. Just off the top of my
head, things like “exam week” or “tax day” or “pregnancy test result” or “crossword error” seem suggestive, and of course there is the overwhelming temptation to say something about one’s boss.

But this was far from the only one. Here’s one that offers (to use a clichéd metaphor) a silver lining:

```
heather glows
from the ashes —
of a gorse fire
[David Dayson]
```

and this one resides in the silver lining itself:

```
equanimity —
in that calm zone between
rust out and burn out
[David Dayson]
```

However, I don’t wish to dismiss metaphor-driven poems out of hand. Take, for example, this one:

```
hairline cracks
of compassion fatigue —
time to be grounded
[David Dayson]
```

This is quite clever in the making, I think, and the manner in which it extends its conceit through to the third line, culminating in a “remedy,” is deft. The parallel metaphor of metal fatigue is followed through exactly and nothing is wasted. While not expressly in haiku mode, it nonetheless does everything its author hoped it would do, and is a success for that.

My top prizes, however, all reach beyond cleverness, to consider the consequences of burnout, rather than describing the state itself. If we trust the reader to supply what burnout is and looks like, then this strategy of looking into what follows offers
greater depth and interest. For instance, my third choice:

asking why
paper flutters
in an e-mail world
[David Pilling]

conjures for me a truly despondent state, in which the sufferer has been reduced nearly to inanity, or worse, metaphysics. The poem also reminds me of the dark spaces occupied by such books as Philip K. Dick’s Do Robots Dream of Electric Sheep?, a place where the mind is adrift and left to its own devices to find its bearings. This also has a wonderfully slick rhythm, each line expanding by a syllable, and building in momentum and also finality with each of its single syllable words in the ultimate line. It has the feel and catchiness of a jingle, not so simple a thing as it may seem. My second selection

paperwork left
on the train
to the coast
[Marion Clarke]

is a hinge poem, where the middle line relates to both first and last lines, but differently in each case. The lack of punctuation creates the ambiguity, which is then played out in telling fashion. Is it that the paperwork has been left behind because the poet has taken the train to the coast, and, presumably, a holiday away from such paperwork? Or is it that the paperwork has been unintentionally forgotten on the way to a business meeting on the coast? Or perhaps it was not unintentional at all, but instead some passive-aggressive ploy to force a reaction — by the boss, by the client, within herself? And is the playing out of these options rather a consideration of options for someone in the throes of burnout? What’s the worst than can happen? And should that happen on the coast, am I the better for it or no?

Holding the reader in suspense is a sure way for one’s poem to get more attention. It seems we like a bit of mystery. Here the poet has the advantage of what we might term a “fourth line.” The poem was written, and consequently read, in the context of
a theme. So the reader has already in her mind the idea of burnout that grants the poem its extra bite. Without it, the poem works the same, and is still pleasing, but a bit less incisive, and for this reason it has topped out here as second-best. My top choice this week is a bit of masterful craft:

lagging behind
the snooze button
over and over

[Ernesto Santiago]

succinctly catches the immediate tension of the situation — fatigued, the poet need the extra rest, but taking the extra rest, he falls farther behind. And his remedy, a couple extra minutes of sleep, can never be enough to rebalance his system, so is as futile as seemingly necessary. And the fact that this is “over and over” points out that this is a feedback loop, that there really is no way out of it without breaking the system. What a nightmare! At least the poet has recognized it, which is difficult enough to do.

Repetition can be very effective in haiku — with so few words at one’s disposal, the special emphasis that a repeated word brings to a poem nearly always stops the reader — and so this third line is an effective literary device, and of course a tellingly human one. Solving this problem will take objectivity and resolve — or else acceptance, so the poet can go on to be a logician, or mathematician, or historian, or writer, or social critic, or political activist, or even some combination of these or other things. The bar has been set high. Sweet dreams!

New Poems

feeling burnt out
on behalf of others
a companion dog

— Ernesto P. Santiago
too tired to sleep . . .
the half moon’s descent
through thinning leaves
   — Polona Oblak

*  
onfire night
Guy Fawkes and I
both burnt out
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

*  

never saw it coming
the stroke that ended
his career
   — Celestine Nudanu

*  

after work tryst
here too he just goes
through the motions
   — Roberta Beary

*  

home from work
he searches my face
for a smile
   — Pat Davis
sideways skid
pumping the brakes between
night clouds
   — Gail Oare

pink slip
our debate switching
to the household budget
   — Anna Yin

the old GI doc . . .
he can’t stomach one more
leaky gasket
   — Michael H. Lester

raking the embers
of my former self
burnout
   — Madhuri Pillai

driving to the office
I wonder if this road
could lead me to Rome
   — Maria Tomczak
supernova —
the office star
gets a boost
— Martha Magenta

out of order
sitting on the toilet
crying again
— Elizabeth Moura

lunch bell
a leaning tower
of coffee cups
— Enrique Garrovillo

burn out
the formality of happy hour
after work
— Michael Henry Lee

after the burn out
time to turn the music up
and . . . just dance
— Katherine Stella
I no longer accept
this imposed work
Consult my analyst
    — Angela Giordano

burning
this candle at both ends
meltdown
    — Karen Harvey

Hamlet's burnout and mine to be or not to be
    — Angelee Deodhar

touch switch
the desk lamp
won't turn off
    — Olivier Schopfer

four-day work week
i see myself
staring at the wall
    — Willie Bongcaron
my rumpled shirt
don’t give a shit
no more
— Mark Gilbert

burnout syndrome —
not pausing for air
the barking dog
— Ana Drobot

a broken butterfly
over the nettles
development talk
— Kerstin Park

this dark image
In the restroom mirror
one last cigarette
— Marietta McGregor

after all she with
her unfinished novel
flat on the bed
— S. Radhamani
burnout —
a cup of green tea
quenches the stress
   — Elisa Allo

* 

daily task
wishing it were
EOD Friday
   — Angelo Ancheta

* 

interview
moving down a rung
in questioning tears
   — Erin Castaldi

* 

work stress
running out of
the best days
   — Eufemia Griffo

* 

About to unfold:
the moonflower
the switchblade
   — Stephan Massi
work work work . . .
in a japanese daily
suicides again
    — Marta Chocilowska

burnout treatment —
coming back at work with
the sunburned face
    — Tomislav Maretic

spinning head —
too many bits
to deal with
    — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

exhaustion
first out of the starting stalls
the racehorse put to grass
    — Lee Nash

Thoughtstorm
looking for
a reset button
    — Stefano Riondato
the burnt coffee他睡觉不管 — dark days— Jessica Malone Latham

overwhelmed blaming my muse for writer’s block— Cezar Ciobika

grounded worker bee the parched sizzle of the coffee pot— Jennifer Hambrick

major tournament kings and jacks look alike at the forty fifth board— Paul Geiger

storm-cracked branches in old heaps of wreckage; my office, again— Timothy J. Dickey
burnout
smiley emoji a face
I once owned
— Alegria Imperial

unfinished day
agreed to defer
fixing targets
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi
It’s grim reality week at the Financial Times. Each of the dystopias that our submitters have presented would have been science fiction a quarter of a century ago, but they are science fact today. And though we know enough to realize that the machine age is upon us, we don’t know enough to win the day. This is going to get worse before it gets better. If it gets better.

We won’t be able to say we didn’t know what was at stake:

the past looms large —
all our wars lost to machines
woven in history
[David Dayson]

We simply weren’t well-prepared:

the IT Consultant —
flummoxed by a dishwasher
baffled by a Hoover
[David Dayson]

We were baited — mocked, even:

I only do what
a programmer instructs —
the computer tells me
[David Dayson]

Until we had to take matters into our own hands:
She wouldn’t let me be,  
She had it coming:  
Siri’s dead

[Samuel Sibony]

But even such efforts, we know, will never be enough:

The luddites are dead.  
You can’t destroy a Cloud  
like bones and a will

[Samuel Sibony]

Each of my top three this week finds a moment of personal horror in the impersonality of an interaction, brought to you by a server near you. In my third selection,

an algorithm  
will see you now —  
for a wikinosaur

[David Dayson]

the poet is offered a series of trends as a proxy in lieu of the personal touch of a physician. The program may or may not actually be a better predictor — that’s the unnerving thing about these matters. But we can be sure the computer will not deduce things based on its years of experience of feeling the skin, observing the sclera, noting the breath — in other words, on the poet himself. Of course, doctors, now harried to supply data to the machines, have less time to do these things as well. Let’s hope what he has is normative!
It’s bad enough having to cope with machines all day, but how unnerving is it to wonder after one’s own affect? My second prize this week goes to

on the phone today —  
would I have passed  
the Turing test

[David Dayson]
This may be as much a comment on the nature of the poet's daily conversation — is this telemarketing, say? — as on his own spirit. But the fact that he must ask such a question means he is already deeply aware of feeling dehumanized, and even knows whereby he is being judged. At least we can be sure that only a human could wonder such a thing.

My top selection conjures a date in history (May 1997) that already feels like so long ago:

```
we all became
a little blue when —
Deep Blue won
[David Dayson]
```

There was hope so long as we could claim some area of cognition in which we were superior. Kasparov was our champion — our champion — and surely he could outwit an array of binary switches. And then, of course, he didn’t. The species received a colossal blow to its ego, and there was no turning back. The poet puns nicely on the name of the new chess champion, developed by IBM, but it goes deeper than that. We all became a little blue, the poem says, and of course that means we felt a bit glum by being moved down a peg in the universe. But it also means we all took on a bit of a blue aspect, too, all became affected by the computer that dethroned homo sapiens as the best chess playing entities. This is a deeper truth, since now Deep Blue and its ubiquitous relatives have become inseparable from our lives. And just as its victory diminished us just a little bit, it also certified its own worthiness. We may come to rue it some day, but for now, at least, we all remain a little blue, and for the most part seem glad for it.

There are computer programs for generating haiku. Though they produce the occasional plausible poem, none of these programs has yet passed the Kacian Test for a batch of, say, 5 poems, but humans can easily simulate the kinds of haiku computers produce. Turn off your electronic devices and write your next haiku by hand. Let’s see a machine do that . . .
no contest . . .
a machine does the job
with minutes to spare
   — Willie Bongcaron

*

unmindful of time
in the field among flowers
a broken machine
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

*

lost in the woods
with no hope of being found
even in this techy age
   — Celestine Nudanu

*

prove you’re human . . .
hugging and kissing
my laptop
   — Maria Laura Valente

*

alexa . . .
where have you been
all my life
   — Michael Henry Lee
meeting announcement —
email reaching workers
eight feet away
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

thread creation error
if only we spoke
the same language
   — Anna Maris

costco to coffee
me — all in a pact of
soft grinding
   — S. Radhamani

that Friday feeling
only the network
slower than me
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

a night shift
the pc checkmates my king
much too fast
   — Marta Chociłowska
Friday traffic
the gas gauge
on empty
— Gail Oare

captcha —
the computer asks
if i am human
— Arvinder Kaur

reaching the summit
a robot
tries to sell me something
— Mark Gilbert

man vs machine
technology vs mythology . . .
God. I hate science
— Katherine Stella

a loose screw
I say no to my Apple
being twice bitten
— Alan Summers
frozen lightning
my mood jammed
in the copier
— Jennifer Hambrick

on/off —
the relationship with
his computer
— Ana Drobot

that moment of reckoning
watson wins
jeopardy
— Pat Davis

retrenched . . .
my journey home
in a driverless bus
— Madhuri Pillai

all creation
a tenuous string
of ones and zeroes
— Michael H. Lester
* 
a misplaced wrench and he’s out the door
— Debbie Feller

* 
thank you this urge to connect with a checkout machine
— Jan Dobb

* 
new desktop — the musical sound clips of my old typewriter
— Pravat Kumar Padhy

* 
excited — a direct confrontation with a P.C. intelligence
— Angela Giordano

* 
bedroom pigeons pecking at my midnight with a cursor
— Alegria Imperial
tax preparation
deadline missed
broken abacus
    — Paul Geiger

robot expo —
actions speak louder
than words
    — Hifsa Ashraf

cleaners out
I shift chairs
for the Robovac
    — Marietta McGregor

power cut
in the post room
a pencil sharpener
    — Mike Gallagher

even in his absence
a clamor in the wash —
his two cents
    — Martha Magenta
assembly line
an old song
breaks the silence
    — Eufemia Griffo

* 

cobots
the need to reprogram
my brain
    — Maria Tomczak

* 

all of her
this rugged
ceramic bowl
    — Enrique Garrovillo

* 

one machine doing
the work of so many
a lone worker
    — Karen Harvey

* 

man v. machine . . .
no, malware is just —
man v. man
    — Tomislav Maretic
down the rabbit hole . . .
assigned to learn
new software
   — Elizabeth Moura

man v machine —
haiku written in pencil
on a piece of paper

uomo e macchina
haiku scritti a matita
su pezzi di carta
   — Lucia Cardillo

unseen manager
emails like folded paper planes
flying between us
   — Carmen Sterba

a metal slug
in the vending machine
free snacks
   — Lee Nash
* 

a supercomputer . . .
will it be the last invention
of humanity?
   — Elisa Allo

* 

software update
another opportunity
to lose contacts
   — Erin Castaldi

* 

Broken Xerox
my ink-stained hands pull
out torn paper
   — Frank J. Tassone

* 

singularity —
the equation describing love
explodes
   — Stefano Riondato

* 

to my boss
after discharge:
“T’ll be back”
   — Cezar Ciobika
on his retirement
he had no hands
to receive his award
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
Haiku in the Workplace: Sick Day

There was less poetry in our submissions for this topic, but decidedly more glee. Sickness — real, imagined or feigned — apparently brings out our punniest humor. Perhaps it’s the giddy sense of release of taking a day off from work, or even the thought of doing so. Or is it possible that a day spent within the confines of our own abodes, paying attention to the demands of our bodies, is so delicious that it more than compensates for the inconvenience of ailing? All our correspondents, it is good to report, are suffering from only the mildest of impingements, and these, in the main, are self-inflicted:

the morning after —
if only there was a pill
to treat regret

[David Dayson]

and for most the remedy seems ready to hand:

Overbearing boss
Drowning in pointless admin
Retail therapy!

[Nicholas Robinson]

As mentioned, a bout of indisposition does not seem to dull one’s propensity for punning:

man flu —
into the duvet’s
nest

[David Dayson]

And while there is the occasional moment of existential angst:
one day
cannot cure
this sickness
    [Evan Flaschen]

for the most part our maladies are of a more manageable nature:

    Monday morning blues —
    waiting to be treated for
    password amnesia
    [David Dayson]

My third choice this week explores the calculated nature of illness:

    following up
    on work’s master plan
    fake cough
    [Ernesto Santiago]

Surely after work well done it would be churlish for a boss to deny time away because of illness, ostensibly brought on by the demands of the workload. Our poet is sly and understands human nature. And now we know his name . . .
In second place we have a canny recognition of the will playing against the odds, whatever the cost:

    extra authentic —
    that stomach bug
    briskly followed
    [Ernesto Santiago]

Though not quite the stuff of epics, the poet decided the risk was worth the taking, and now that the worst case scenario has ensued, at least gets a poem out of the bargain. There have been worse deals struck in the quest for adventure. Our top winner this week takes the prize primarily for bravado:
Hole in one
On a sick day
Isn’t it ironic?
[Samuel Sibony]

The understated self-awareness of the last line feels the perfect tenor after the casual admission of playing hooky of the opening pair. This persona knows no shame, and the poem’s tone neatly captures it, while managing to brag at his skill and manifest his confidence in the security he feels in his position, all while charming us. We all know a person (or many) like this, and probably envy him. Nicely played! I admit these are all a long ways from Shiki’s

gallons of phlegm
even the gourd water
couldn’t clear it up

but then again he was on his deathbed with tuberculosis (gourd water was the specific for treating respiratory ailments at the time in Japan — be grateful for modern medicine), so it is understandable if he had a grimmer outlook. In any case, a small illness can make us grateful for our usual well-being, and that is well worth celebrating. Take care!

New Poems

. . . methodically
lowers the boss’ blood pressure
a little white lie
— Ernesto P. Santiago
sick day
preparing CV for
morrow’s interview
   — S. Radhamani

* 

on the sofa
with Kleenex and tea
unexpected leisure
   — Peggy Bilbro

* 

sick days ski trip
back to work
with a broken leg
   — Marilyn Walker

* 

half wakefulness —
mother’s moist palm
on my forehead
   — Arvinder Kaur

* 

sick note —
the fresh cleaned windows
of my neighbour
   — Eva Limbach
* 

a little flu —
brainstorming program
avoided

— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

* 

at the golf course
the boss too . . .
sick day

— Madhuri Pillai

* 

blue Monday . . .
several practice coughs
before she calls in

— Michael H. Lester

* 

appointment day
the doctor
off sick

— Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

opening Skype
from home I follow the work —
a boiling tea and spray

— Angela Giordano
mercury rising
the boss calls again
about another crisis
— Gail Oare

rain on the window pane —
feeling guilty
for no reason
— Mark Gilbert

headache day
her Melbourne Cup hat
on the TV news
— Jan Dobb

homebound . . .
despite the migraine
a spring in my step
— Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

sick day
I answer emails
in my pajamas
— Amy Losak
* 

I’m a fugitive 
under covers 
sick day  
    — Michael Stinson

* 

this time  
it is for real . . . 
downed with flu  
    — Willie Bongcaron

* 

rapid current flow  
engulfs all in passages 
channels to outlet  
    — Katherine Stella

* 

after party night —  
only the cleaning crew  
gets no sick day  
    — Marta Chocilowska

* 

urgently; called in . . .  
on the manager’s good side  
a memory loss  
    — Ernesto P. Santiago
calling in sick
my doctor tells me
I need to retire
    — Elizabeth Moura

perfect attendance
his first year
on the job
    — Pat Davis

long day and night —
a photo of the oysters
in my phone
    — Kerstin Park

chicken pox . . .
my colleagues avoid
even my phone calls
    — Ana Drobot

Calling Sunday for a sick day Monday the season opener
Sox tickets in hand
    — Stephan Massi
sick day . . .
i make a rainbow
with my pills
― Hifsa Ashraf

sick leave —
finally I complete
my haiku collection
― Tomislav Maretic

long illness
watching fall
the first autumn leaves
― Eufemia Griffo

thermometer shards
the mercury makes itself
whole again
― Anthony Rabang

back-to-back Oprah
tell me, is a sick day
worth it?
― Marietta McGregor
found
at a rummage sale
the one who called in sick
   — Chad Lee Robinson

paid sick days
count against paternity
congratulations
   — Ron Scully

Sick Day
for all the employees
the boss's funeral
   — Cezar Ciobika

a sudden need
to catch up with me
mental health day
   — Devin Harrison

sick day
a deadline raptor
splitting my being
   — Alegria Imperial
sick day —
ignoring the alarm clock
to remain asleep

in malattia —
ignorando la sveglia
restare a letto
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

high fever . . .
even this haiku
smells of ginger
— Elisa Allo

* 

sick day
the consoling song of
the blackbird
— Eleonore Nickolay

* 

lovesick
I take days off
to avoid the new boss
— Celestine Nudanu
crashing waves —
muffling the speaker
on my sick day call
— Maureen Gorman

sick day —
I miss the THF deadline
of workplace haiku
— Angelee Deodhar
Haiku in the Workplace: Looking Out the Office Window

Relax! Even the most intense of us needs to ease up on that grip once in a while. If we don’t, we lose our abilities to focus, and our accuracy and productivity suffers. We need a break once in a while from the tensions of the task, and, frankly, from ourselves. Thank the gods, then, or AFGD, for the office window. Besides being structurally sound, thermodynamically efficient, and architecturally attractive, windows also release us from our own focus and release us out into the world. That glance out the window is sorbet to our minds, refreshing us, relaxing us, and, perhaps most importantly, reminding us that there is a world out there that cares little about our current crises. So take a deep breath and look outside on the rest of the world, mindful that they are probably looking out their windows right now and wishing they were you. Our submitters were about equally divided on how they viewed the window: from inside or out. For many, the special array of massed windows reflecting a composite scene was compelling:

    each window
    captures an Autumn sunset —
    one frame at a time
    [David Dayson]

    or within
    Autumn muted
    from behind a window —
    dry leaves rustle
    [David Dayson]

but one poet was able to conjure both views:

    Tied to the office.
    Going up or down? I’m like
    The window cleaner.
    [Jeremy Ison]
And of course you don’t always get what you want:

Finally promoted
To a window seat, facing
A brick wall
    [Samuel Sibony]

But if you try sometime you find what you need:

migrating geese
fly over my office window —
gilded by sunset
    [David Dayson]

or need:
myriad views —
all from the same office
all different
    [David Dayson]

or need:
A burning desire to jump
In the raging forgiving river
But the window is locked
    [Samuel Sibony]

My third place selection this week uses the omniscient viewpoint of the office window to contrast the behaviors of two different species:

ways of a wren
sorting out the day —
the late employees
    [Alan Summers]
It would be anthropomorphizing to make too much of this likeness, but the poet
doesn’t do that. He merely points to the two groups and let’s the reader decide how
far to push the comparison. But it’s sufficiently close to make us look a second time,
as a good poem will do.
A similar strategy is employed in my second place winner, aided this time by interior
lighting:

caged by light —
late night office workers
flutter like moths
[David Dayson]

The delicacy of the images, and the slow motion effect imparted by seeing things at a
distance, make this a compelling poem. The light functions as the stimulant for both
creatures, human and insect, and their movements come to seem equally fragile,
equally compulsive.
My top prize this week goes to a completely different sort of poem:

on one leg
a slender crane in equipoise —
pirouettes
[David Dayson]

We have not seen much in the way of organic form in this column, but this is an
excellent example. Seen in silence from behind the office window, presumably on
high, the mechanical object takes on some of the outer aspects of its feathered namesake. Not merely pun nor word painting, the structure of the poem physically demonstrates not only the arrangement of the scene, but intimates its poise and grace as well. What a welcome relief from the stress and tedium of the office routine, expertly captured in words and form. Happy daydreams! and don’t let the boss catch you.

New Poems

stuck at the office —
the acrobatic antics
of a pigeon
— Amy Losak

* 

class test —
outside, a plastic bag
is dancing in the wind
— Maria Laura Valente

* 

occasionally
glancing at an open window
the touch typist
— Ernesto P. Santiago

* 

windowpane
the boss waves away
my daydreams
— Elizabeth Moura
a glass skyscraper
smiling from the outside
the window cleaner
— Marta Chocilowska

drift
of cherry blossom
the meeting runs over
— Mark Gilbert

two-man cubicle . . .
addicts in the alley
sharing a needle
— Michael H. Lester

amidst rolling hills
standing hind quarters
mighty black stallion
— Katherine Stella

a blooming rose
through a film darkly
office romance
— Celestine Nudanu
looking through them for a living window cleaner
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

busker outside my office window is he happier?
   — Pat Davis

little boxes an escaped balloon passes my tenth floor window
   — Jan Dobb

returning from the boss i let the window open
   — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

basement office — how blue the sky in a painted window
   — Arvinder Kaur
our office window
covered in plywood
after the storm
— Michael Henry Lee

* 

almost five
looking out
the office window
— Willie Bongcaron

* 

on the bench
a couple of lovers —
I am anxious about nostalgia
— Angela Giordano

* 

no work coming in
the dog & i view the world
beyond the window
— Roberta Beary

* 

motivational meeting
I follow the rising arc
of starlings
— Peggy Bilbro
* 

still hovering . . .
day moon
looking in
  — Madhuri Pillai
*

* 

spreadsheets
slices of leaves
through the blinds
  — Agnes Eva Savich
*

* 

looking out the office window  faces  petals on a wet black bough
  — Angelee Deodhar
*

* 

rain on the window
no longer transparent
the flight of a dove
  — Stefano Riondato
*

* 

tense confrontation —
a giant seagull stares
back at me
  — Martha Magenta
ongoing rain
it all comes down
to this moment
— Devin Harrison

prison window
the softness of the wings
of a butterfly
— Pravat Kumar Padhy

unopened lunch box
from the office window a view
of a ration shop queue
— S. Radhamani

strategic window . . .
the bald head boss
eyeing the entryway
— Mohammad Azim Khan

the view
from my office window
office windows
— Olivier Schopfer
reflecting pool
through the office window
another office window
  — Jennifer Hambrick

*  
a crash scene
from the office window
colouring rain
  — Brendon Kent

*  
basement window
a live show
of scissor legs
  — Alegria Imperial

*  
Across the lot
Same car
Different mates
  — Erin Castaldi

*  
November trees
migrating birds
stole this heart
  — Adrian Bouter
out of the office window
the rust in the green —
autumn day

dalla finestra
ruggine negli alberi —
giorno d’autunno
— Lucia Cardillo

office windows
the melancholic notes
of a street musician
— Eufemia Griffo

looking out
the office window
clouds pass by
— Michael Stinson

boss’s eyrie
over his shoulder the view
I’ll never have
— Marietta McGregor
*  
rest my eyes . . .
beyond the lake
snowy Alps
— Elisa Allo

*  
office view —
vertigo looking down
Alain Robert going up
— Lee Nash

*  
on one white cloud
from the seventeenth floor
swallows gliding
— Mike Gallagher

*  
declaration of war! —
children still playing
in the courtyards
— Tomislav Maretic

*  
lunch break at work
through the window smell
of fresh cut grass
— Cezar Ciobika
stained window
a faded reflection
of a spreadsheet
   — Frank J. Tassone

handed a pink slip
outside
blossoms fluttering down
   — Lori Zajkowski

the Bronte sisters
and I saw over-trimmed
Heather, and stomped off
   — Carmen Sterba

leaves falling
turning away to gather
notes from my desk
   — Karen Harvey

through the window
yellow brick wall
ants are busy
   — Christine Eales
clouds —
the gray area between
real and fake news
   — Anthony Rabang

out the office window
imagining the expletives
as a car splashes him
   — Sonam Chhoki

a view from office window
a rising smoke
from the kebab seller
   — Adjei Agyei-Baah
Haiku in the Workplace:  
Dawn in the Office

It would appear many of our respondents slept through this one, and who could blame them? Dawn in the office somehow doesn’t have the same ring to it as dawn on the beach, or dawn over Kilimanjaro. Still, it’s not entirely without its own rewards, as those who were awake to experience them reveal. Dawn is often a time when we take stock of our situation, often with brutal honesty:

Another dawn at the desk  
Wasting my youth modeling  
accounts for The Man  
[Samuel Sibony]

And there are times when that honesty surprises even ourselves:

Christmas party gone awry  
Lying at dawn on the floor with . . .  
Rob from accounts?  
[Samuel Sibony]

Once we’ve taken whatever steps are necessary to get us acclimatized (read: coffee), we might be able to appreciate dawn’s resplendent beauty:

pixelated dawn —  
sunrise trembles through  
falling leaves  
[David Dayson]

And take stock of the subtle effects that later in the day we’ll be too focused on our tasks to notice:
dawn’s skyscrapers
touch their long shadows —
then draw apart
[David Dayson]

And once the coffee has fully kicked in, we might even appreciate those who have come to this dawn the hard way:

at their busiest —
dawn’s silent workers close
a transatlantic deal
[David Dayson]

But of course nothing begins without something ending. My third choice this week is full of rue:

ended at dawn
the excel spreadsheet
of extra overtime
[Ernesto Santiago]

Using dawn to mark the end, rather than the beginning, of the situation is certainly not novel, but is nicely turned here. It’s bad enough to be up at this hour, but to be earning only the usual wage seems harsh.

My top two prizes both note the subtle shifts in light we find in the early hours. In second place is this “aesthetically pleasing” poem:

the fluorescent light
aesthetically pleasing
when dawn is still dark
[Ernesto Santiago]

Fluorescent is rarely anyone’s favorite, and especially when compared to natural light, not to say, dawn light. But there is a time, before the sun is up yet the sky is
lightening, when the soft shadows and cool tones of fluorescent can be especially easy on the eye. Especially if one has been up all night . . .

My top prize offers a similar realization, but in an altogether different register:

```
dawn breaks the cheap hue of desk light
[Ernesto Santiago]
```

The harsher tone works especially well in this instance. The poet sketches the situation with minimal words, but we can imagine it clearly: the persona of the poem is working at his desk, and has likely been doing so through the night. The attention is broken, not by the unnatural light of the desk lamp, to which he has become accustomed, but by the effulgent rays of the sun. How tawdry, in contrast, do these artificial beams seem? And, by extension, we call into question the merits of an enterprise that might keep us up through the night by dint of such illumination. The poet’s choice of casting this in one line is also felicitous: the two actions of the verb “break” (dawn “breaks”, but it also “breaks the cheap hue”) are in this way overlaid, and the ambiguity this presents contributes to the somewhat rattled awareness of the persona. A deft technical touch to set off a keenly observed psychological as well as natural moment.

With luck, you’ll never be asked to write about “dawn in the office” again, and so your efforts at research can cease. Sweet dreams!

**New Poems**

```
all night stand . . .
ink flavoured sunrise
in my study
    — Maria Laura Valente
```
* 

early dawn —
in the office a set
of push-ups
   — Ernesto P. Santiago

* 

in between naps
brewed black coffee
waiting for the sun
   — Willie Bongcaron

* 

Acero rosso —
il ronzio dei pcs dai cubicals

Red maple —
PCs buzzing from the cubicles
   — Monica Federico

* 

nonstop work —
dawn splinters
the skylight
   — Roberta Beary
dawn at the office
waking up
on last night's paperwork
— Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

After the nightshift
The sky colors in the east
Getting some sleep
— Kristjaan Panneman

* 

dawn in the office
another mosquito in
my cup of coffee
— Billy Antonio

* 

pink dawn –
in front of the visa office
a line wakes up
— Marta Chocilowska

* 

whistleblowing
early in the office
a new employee
— Hifsa Ashraf
already burdened —
yesterday’s to-do list
creeps into dawn
   — Amy Losak

A two-eyed spider
s
p
i
n
s
intense web of lies
across new dawn and glass.
   — Linda Wolff

office affair . . .
she works the late night shift
he gets in at the crack
   — Michael H. Lester

inhaling . . .
a whiff of dawn
new management
   — Celestine Nudanu
first to arrive
flicks on the fluorescents
dawn in the office
    — Jan Dobb

*  

in morning silence
last night’s coffee
on the boss’s desk
    — Carol Jones

*  

dawn attendance . . .
the janitor moves freely
from room to room
    — Mohammad Azim Khan

*  

cabin fever
sunrise fills the space station
portal
    — Michael Henry Lee

*  

sun never sets
on their endless day
ICU staff
    — Ashoka Weerakkody
* 

rising again
my reflection on the coffee carafe
7 am in the office
   — Gail Oare

* 

meetings meetings
meetings about meetings
noticing the dawn
   — Mark Gilbert

* 

short notice — audit
and inspection — night-long stay
takes us to dawn
   — S. Radhamani

* 

dawn in the office
just enough candlepower . . .
to find the light switch
   — Katherine Stella

* 

dawn in office . . .
looking a swallow
migrate away
   — Eufemia Griffo
to her ‘goodnight’
I bid ‘good morning’
she from another time zone
— Madhuri Pillai

Coffee break at dawn —
Refreshing the screen
Refreshing me
— Erin Castaldi

a backlog of work —
they remained at the office
from dawn till dusk
— Rosa Maria di Salvatore

the dawn moon —
exchanging the key
at call center gate
— Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

still in the office —
the colors of dawn
on my report
— Angela Giordano
just enough
to lift my dark weight
dawn
— Alegria Imperial

* 

cleaners
leave the office
dawn
— Olivier Schopfer

* 

weakening dawn
the tulip on the windowsill
still blooming
— Matthew Markworth

* 

Silent office —
the shadow of a fan
on the letter of dismissal
— Julia Guzmán

* 

sleepless in bed
the silhouettes of post-it notes
on the desk
— Kerstin Park
empty office —
looking at pink clouds
the first coffee
— Elisa Allo

in the flick of a switch
the disappearance
of dawn
— Pat Davis

frosty meeting
a coffee machine
sets the agenda
— Martha Magenta

winter dawn
behind the office lights
the sun also rises
— Debbi Antebi

empty carpark
I follow last night’s snow prints
back to the office
— Lew Watts
* 

dawn
the tractor’s seat
warms up to me
— Chad Lee Robinson

* 

exciting perfume —
Dawn, the new coworker
moves through the office
— Adrian Bouter

* 

before dawn
a ghost library
reveals itself
— Carmen Sterba

* 

dawn break —
stirring the first sun rays
in jasmine tea
— Arvinder Kaur

* 

break of dawn —
my first cup of coffee
at the office
— Ana Drobot
overlooked
Dawn in the office
worker bees
    — Christine Eales

* 

dawn break —
I wash my night image
for an early arrival
    — Pravat Kumar Padhy

* 

dawn at the office
the window open
just a crack
    — Michael Stinson

* 

first light in the east —
flour and fresh bread
in his hands

rischiara ad est —
farina e pane fresco
tra le mani
    — Lucia Cardillo
* preparing party food
  at dawn in the office —
  cleaners and me
  — Tomislav Maretic

* office cleaner
  hoovering pennies at dawn
  night bus
  — Mike Gallagher

* foggy dawn
  facing another
  memory leak
  — Cezar Ciobika

* she warned him
  don’t come if home it’s late
  waking at his desk
  — Karen Harvey

* No dawn no sun
  Just a crow
  Rattling daybreak
  — Stephan Massi
cold dawn on the job  
the tea pot whistle wakes  
a turtle dove  
— Lucia Fontana

*  
dawn —  
my divorced boss sleeping  
in the bosom of his job  
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

*
It was a reminder of how removed I am from corporate culture to see how many of your responses this week were hopeful and affirmative. My typical response to someone or something moving into my space is suspicion, coupled with a stiff draught of passive-aggressive obstructionism. But the bulk of your efforts said something like

```
a pink paeony
with hybrid vigour —
blooms brightly
[David Dayson]
```

or this, which I take to have come from within the walls of this very publication [that is, the *Financial Times* of London]:

```
crisp paper
cherry blossom colour —
Spring freshness
[David Dayson]
```

To be sure, not all reactions fall into these optimistic, fortune cookie-type modes, but ranged, rather, from trusting

```
our skins meet
when we shake hands —
our minds meet later
[David Dayson]
```

through expectant
disoriented —
the sixth sense of etiquette
not quite there yet
[David Dayson]

to fearful

“Costs will be cut” and
The share price flies, but
Am I a cost?
[Samuel Sibony]

all the way to doubtful

Red, white and blue Roses,
Same colours on the flag,
Different pattern, bitter taste.
[Katie Rollings]

and even to the vatic

One billion yuan later
Versailles lifted and delicately
Placed on Tiananmen Square.
[Eva Eljam]

and the outright hostile

Our Chinese owners are here,
Their predatory smiles
Eyeing my swivel chai
[Samuel Sibony]

to finally come to reside with the mildly hortatory
at the well —
do not throw out Buddha
with the spring water
[David Dayson]

and thus back to fortune cookie philosophy. (As a completely relevant aside, I take it on faith that everyone knows that fortune cookies are not a Chinese, but an American, invention, and that the style and content of the fortunes is an attempt to suggest wisdom handed down from an ancient culture, once from the Bible, now apparently from Californians channeling Confucius. No foreign powers who might thus “take over” are being maligned by calling attention to such “wisdom.”)

I am awarding only one prize this week, but do wish to note that someone has been studying up on contemporary haiku practice. We have had our first monoku (that is, a one-line haiku) submitted, and while it does not ideally utilize the form, it is at least welcome to see:

snails apace upon fresh green lettuces: devastation in their wake.
[Misha Patel]

My prize winner this week seems a bit drab at first glance, but is full of subtlety:

working both ways
at home and abroad
a foreign takeover
[Ernesto Santiago]

The poem is able to suggest, in very brief compass, that this transaction has wide-ranging implications on more than just the local front. A new alliance affects both parties, and that is easy to overlook as we consider its impact on ourselves and our routines, or even our livelihoods. The poem’s form works in the same manner that its content does — the phrase “at home and abroad” swings both ways, and can be uttered by either party involved. There is the suggestion that the takeover is happening on both shores, and that accommodations will need to be made in both places to make this new relationship work. A quiet effect, but not less effective for that — nicely gauged!
All right, time’s up, I need to go see how my FT stock is doing after the merger. Good luck to both sides.

New Poems

the deal is done . . .
Hank invites us to a game
next time we’re in Jersey
— Mark Gilbert

* 

gray sky —
teaching English
to my new boss
— Johnny Baranski

* 

monday
in my office mug
a spider spins
— Sheila Windsor

* 

foreign takeovers
the tender offer
of a firm handshake
— Ernesto P. Santiago
foreign takeover
the canteen’s new
continental range
    — Rachel Sutcliffe

overseas school —
new international curricula
for the same old bored pupils
    — Maria Laura Valente

foreign takeover
diversity multipanates
depleting dollar
    — Katherine Stella

what a strange bark
the new top-dog
from down under
    — Roberta Beary

subtle changes . . .
cucumber-flavored chips
in the vending machine
    — Michael H. Lester
a french consultant
cchecks the train stations . . .
hand-over day
     — Willie Bongcaron

sleek furniture
at no nonsense prices
meatballs for lunch
     — Karen Harvey

foreign takeover
in the restored casino
new business class
     — Marta Chocilowska

admin assistant
his parlour palm shadows
my space
     — sheila windsor

google translate
how to wish good morning
in the new boss's language
     — Madhuri Pillai
trilingual —  
whether or not  
to admit it  
— Pat Davis  

number 45  
steadily advancing  
the Kremlin’s interest  
— Michael Henry Lee  

a spider weaves its web  
in the doorway . . .  
foreign approach  
— Olivier Schopfer  

on the packed bus  
native tongue whispers meet  
head craning death stares  
— Lorraine Carey  

foreign takeover  
the extra cream  
on my coffee  
— Hifsa Ashraf
the old boss
alights from the same car
with a foreign wife
— Ashoka Weerakkody

third world hunger
the way the cookie crumbles
in our mouths
— Celestine Nudanu

foreign investors
taking what’s ours overseas
a cargo vessel
— Mike Gallagher

a new Dutch captain
the semi diesel engine
still goes TONK TONK
— Paul Geiger

ransomware demand
my office ренgay files
compromised
— Lew Watts
foreign takeover
our new CEO
is beamed down
    — Elizabeth Moura

* 

takeover —
how i wish i am
among the sold
    — Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

* 

overseas offer
my land, my home, my corner
adoration still
    — S. Radhamani

* 

foreign takeover
a fleck of paint
under my fingernail
    — Michael O’Brien

* 

new ownership team
enunciated English
brogue’s Scotch whisky
    — Ron Scully
on the desk —
eco-solid purchase
of African children

sulla scrivania —
l'acquisto eco-solidale
dei bambini africani
— Angela Giordano

foreign takeover
illegible name
of the new company
— Eufemia Griffo

takeover —
a job offer for
translators
— Adrian Bouter

foreign new boss
extensive note-taking
of body language
— Angelo Ancheta
merger proposal:
I’m thinking of
“death and taxes”
— Elisa Allo

* 

foreign takeover . . .
it’s urgent that I study better
the English language
acquisizione straniera . . .
è urgente che io ripassi
il mio inglese
— Lucia Cardillo

* 

foreign takeover —
on every desk
a white flag
— Ana Drobot

* 

noise in the roof
new wasps
invade the office
— Christine Eales
overseas takeovers —
too many strange ducks
in the pond

— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

* 

Kraft takeover —
the taste of Cadbury’s
now a little bitter

— Lee Nash

* 

missing vowels
my name
in Devanagari

— Alegria Imperial

* 

foreign takeover —
now the broom is left
in another corner

— Tomislav Maretic

* 

not knowing
how low to bow
foreign takeover

— Marietta McGregor
* 

low acquisition
my boss’s wife flirts
with protectionism
— Cezar Ciobika

* 

the frustration of
finding lost stuff
newly tidied desk
— Anthony Rabang

* 

pouring out
my last cup of coffee —
firm takeover
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

*
I’m listening to Steve Reich’s “Music for 18 Musicians” as I write this up, sipping a barolo (haiku, I find, pair nicely with something with body and opinion), smelling the bread I have baking for dinner, watching the cardinals and chickadees fight at the neighbor’s bird feeder.

a hamster running
on many wheels at one time
remains at the start
[Alexa Mahnken]

Ah, Grasshopper, thank you for your counsel. I would like to see the hamster that could run on many wheels at the same time, but I take the point. If only there might be some solution:

Hindu Gods
with so many arms —
if only
[David Dayson]

Perhaps this is what it means to be divine — or cursed. On the other hand (sorry), be grateful I am not this person:

text phone steering wheel
poetry takes a back seat
while I am driving
[Alexa Mahnken]

You might well ask what part of this poem I am not: the code violator of the first line, or the poetry denier of the second, to which I can only suggest, yes. We can’t help it — there’s so much to do. Those who study such things suggest that
our attention spans have shrunk to a mere 8 seconds, but while this is alarming, it measures only one direction: we are so much broader than we once were, and can juggle so effortlessly our many balls and knives — until, of course, we can’t. Before we get to the top prizes, I wish to point out two additional poems, the first for the shamelessness of a poet who cannot restrain himself (it had to be a male) from such a horrific groaner as

    the ultimate
    home multi-tasker —
    swiss army wife
    [David Dayson]

And yes, I suppose I am enabling him by giving him the attention he so desperately craves. And this second for a completely different reason:

    deadline looming
    I try not to mention
    the ‘m’ word
    [Marion Clarke]

I recognize that this is a themed challenge, and that “multitask” appears in the header this week, but such a poem as this invites many sorts of departures. I tried to imagine this poem outside of the confines of this column, and, while it is ultimately unsatisfying because the poet is not doing quite enough of the work, it does succeed in creating a kind of mental space where we can go to surprise others and ourselves, and that is not a bad thing to do from time to time, no matter the occasion. This week’s third prize goes to this neat metaphor:

    blended roles
    of a multi-tasker —
    such smoothies
    [David Dayson]
The throw-away of the final line reflects both the multitasker and her products, and is a casual compliment, which is perhaps the best kind. Second place goes to the seemingly unabashed perpetrator of this little mishap:

```
file deleted
I annoy two bosses
at once
[Marion Clarke]
```

The fun of this is, of course, that we know that the topic is multitasking, and we expect that the accidental deleting will be the result of doing such, and that the poem is therefore a short morality tale. But no, the multitasking is actually at one remove, is both neatly noted and succinctly stated, and is acknowledged in such a light tone that it would be hard to take the deleter to task. An excellent job security strategy.

This week’s top prize goes to this rueful self-realization:

```
multi-tasked
multiple outcomes —
only one income
[David Dayson]
```

We take the content point, of course, but notice the felicity of language here — how the ms stack up at the beginning, and with but a single one in the last line we feel a loss, quite in keeping with the tone and subject matter. And again, how the multiply-voiced os gather momentum toward the end, and how this round and various sound also catches a sense of the content. So not only was this poet writing his reality, he was listening to it as well.

And now, if you’ll pardon me, I need to get back to that barolo — some things deserve our full attention.
smoking a cigar
while updating reports
on the toilet
   — Ernesto P. Santigao

* 

the pc is hooked up
to the xerox machine too . . .
my private domain
   — Willie Bongcaron

* 

mulling over her words
while making a cup of tea —
enough tasks for now
   — Mark Gilbert

* 

the librarian
with the purple birthmark
rare book room
   — Garry Eaton

* 

multitasking wind and rain
   — Rachel Sutcliffe
no time to waste . . .
even on the commode
he writes haiku
    — Michael H. Lester

* 

taxi for sale
pay as you earn
push start
    — Ashoka Weerakkody

* 

correcting assignments —
I tell the homeless student
how to find free food
    — Carmen Sterba

* 

Taking care
While having a conversation
I wash an elder
    — Kristjaan Panneman

* 

the CEO
juggling up to five
women at a time
    — Michael Henry Lee
*  

stonehenge equinox  
praises of the sales manager amidst  
a circle of cell phones  
   — Gail Oare

*  

chatting on line —  
I answer the phone  
grinding the walnuts  
   — Angela Giordano

*  

between updates  
confirming the monks  
for ancestral offering  
   — Sonam Chhoki

*  

his break failure  
hitting tree while in car  
multitasking  
   — S. Radhamani

*  

multitasked —  
the boss calls his assistant  
a napoleon  
   — Marta Chocilowska
day moon
whirling around doing this
and that and that and
— Jennifer Hambrick

a cat has nine lives
so do I
in my new role
— Celestine Nudanu

multitasking
a gust of wind
scatters my papers
— Olivier Schopfer

I’m talking fast —
so multitasking
may be hard for you
— Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

multitasking
i do catharsis
in my dreams
— Hifsa Ashraf
multitasking
— Agnes Eva Savich

mind and body
engaged in a single task
fairy-tale wedding
— Karen Wibell

oncologist’s receptionist
while she multitasks
I wait
— Madhuri Pillai

failure to communicate
left hand to right hand
coffee-stained report
— Peggy Bilbro
starbucks . . .
I leave multitasking
to the vending machine
   — Martha Magenta

flow in Word
my lunch is starting the fire detectors
   — delete
   — Kerstin Park

conference call —
counting a colleague’s
facebook likes
   — Roberta Beary

splitting up hours . . .
below his desk some ants
around breadcrumbs
   — Adrian Bouter

unforgettable
e-mails I’m answering to
forgotten lentils on fire
   — Lucia Fontana
multitasking
no problem
I am a robot
— Christine Eales

an angry chef
cooking up
a storm
— Mike Gallagher

downsizing
everything but output . . .
triage
— Pat Davis

multitasking —
stirring my coffee
with my pen
— Billy Antonio
heated discussion —
the boss squats a fly
in the meeting
   — Arvinder Kaur

job well done?
more assigned work
. . . unchanged salary

lavoro ben fatto?
più lavoro assegnato
. . . stesso stipendio
   — Lucia Cardillo

cooking and lulling
phoning and breastfeeding
who challenges a mom?
   — Elisa Allo

Juggling Monday’s
Trucking dispatch loads
Up in the air
   — Stephan Massi
leaves of many trees
heaped in a pile
the end of my day
— Timothy J. Dickey

ball juggling
dialing a call
while one on hold
— Srinivasra Rao Sambangi

hardware store . . .
the receptionist files
her nails
— Brendon Kent

order entry
she simultaneously
bobs to ear buds
— Ron Scully

back at work
the new mom on break
pumping breastmilk
— Marilyn Walker
multitasking seminar —
I learn what I did
as a mother
    — Lee Nash

* 

training the brain
to multitask . . . I go off
without shoes
    — Tomislav Maretic

* 

half of a brain
fully engaged
multitasking guru
    — Marietta McGregor

* 

jack of all trade
my cup overflowing
with sweat
    — Adjei Agyei-Baah

* 

in a bean bag
reshuffling my tasks
with a scarab
    — Alegria Imperial
multitasking —
      driving a new car
      and new business
          — Ana Drobot

*  
of course
  I can multitask I said
  crash and burn
      — Karen Harvey

*  
Summer time . . .
The sweat of the secretary
on the torn letters
    — Julia Guzmán

*
Haiku in the Workplace:  
In the Stationery Cupboard

Remember paper? Once upon a time entire storerooms (now called “offices”) were dedicated to processed rag and wood residue, and the various implements used to make impressions upon it. Even today there are remnants of such things, if your place of employ still has a printer or copier or fax machine about.
Remember faxes?
This week’s topic is a trip down memory lane for most of us, and that’s how most of you viewed it, often with a good deal of amusement. Some of you had fond memories of such places:

  a fleeting tryst —
  moves the world beneath
  a stationery cupboard
  [David Dayson]

though more likely:

  scent of honey
  in a stationery cupboard —
  where nothing happened
  [David Dayson]

Doth he protest too much? At least he retains a sense of scale, unlike this mock epic, with apologies to Blake:

  stationery cupboard —
  what immortal hand or eye
  framed your symmetry
  [David Dayson]
Somehow the movement from “tyger” to “stationery cupboard” seems a diminution in power.
My three prize winners this week all hold nostalgia in common, and should be regarded as equal firsts. The first of these treats the space as an anachronism:

arcane skills —
reporter’s note books
pencils and rubbers
[David Dayson]

And in fact this is not much different than visiting the cuneiform rooms in the British Museum. The chief virtue of the poem, then, is how it telescopes time for us. Next, we have a bit of irony:

trade secrets
in the file cabinet
dusty cobwebs
[Ernesto Santiago]

What was once the most important thing in the world is now visited only by spiders. Technically, the poem employs a hinged second line that unites the first and third lines all the more closely.
And finally, a personal accounting:

one last peek —
nothing but paperclips and
a hint of aftershave
[Marion Clarke]

The first line indicates an ending of some kind — perhaps the office is closing, perhaps the poet is leaving his position. The second line makes it apparent that not much of value is being left behind. The third line, however, suggests something more. Might it have been a tryst? Or simply some sign of life where now there is none? The small bit of intrigue that is conjured here doesn’t amount to much, however, since
the clause is still modifying “nothing.” This is a fair amount of emptiness for three lines to convey.
And so I whoosh these comments back to you via electrons. Perhaps some day we will be nostalgic for this mode of communication, once we are all wet-wired and telepathy is the norm. But will all our trysts then be virtual?

New Poems

a shriveled rose
tucked in the note book
keepsake from my boss
— Celestine Nudanu

*  

half-formed words
the bane of proving:
“I’m not a robot”
– Sonam Chhoki

*  

law firm letterhead
names of the living
outnumbered
— Roberta Beary

*  

meditating
on the stationery cupboard
an office rat
— Ernesto P. Santiago
the clerk’s cupboard —
is it going to be
at the feng shui’s north?
— Willie Bongcaron

feminist leaflets —
in the stationery cupboard
the mistress copy
— Martha Magenta

day of dismissal
among the stationery
top leader award
— Marta Chocilowska

half-formed words
the bane of proving:
“I’m not a robot”
— Sonam Chhoki

stealing from the company
I take one pack of Post-its®
of every color
— Mark Gilbert
a pair of mittens
under the pending files —
mother’s workplace
      — Arviner Kaur

*  
cupboard door ajar
rat pops out with powdered
papers
      — S. Radhamani

*  
supply room . . .
he said
she said
      — Michael Henry Lee

*  
new supply closet . . .
what stationery
now includes
      — Pat Davis

*  
easily accessible
the stationery cupboard
out of stock
      — Hifsa Ashraf
supply room —
dimly-lit kisses
of an office affair
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

special pencils
to clear errors
and an amulet
   — Angela Giordano

budget cuts . . .
in the stationery cupboard
only red pens
   — Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

Drawn Buddha
the tip of an eraser
totally black
   — Julia Guzmán

stacked stationery cupboard
stuck on the door
the road map
   — Madhuri Pillai
turning five again
that back-to-school scent
of the stationery cupboard
   — Marietta McGregor

first day of school
the stationery cupboard’s
scent of new beginnings
   — Karen Wibell

ream of copy paper
multipurpose
snowflakes, swan
   — Ron Scully

in the stationery closet
the stacked
receptionist
   — Chad Lee Robinson

stock on the shelves reminding of tasks
   — Adrian Bouter
adults play
hide-and-seek
in the big cupboard
— Christine Eales

finding pens
in the stationery closet
losing buttons
— Erin Castaldi

Hallowe’en
looking for a notebook
with pumpkins
— Elisa Allo

bottle of red wine
found among typing ribbons
tasted better
— Ashoka Weerakkody

stationery cupboard
I used to know
how to write in cursive
— Olivier Schopfer
open cupboard
a paper crane lost
between pencils and pens
— Eufemia Griffo

stationery cupboard —
remembering which drawer
I hid my haiku in
— Tomislav Maretic

paper moon
another inventory of the supply room
by the office couple
— Gail Oare

old cupboard —
yellowed by time
unused registers
vecchio armadio —
ingialliti dal tempo
vecchi stampati
— Lucia Cardillo
office tension
one of us
the stationery thief
    — Lee Nash

*

in, the, stationery, cupboard, a, folded, paper, crane
    — Billy Antonio

*

inemuri
opening my stationery cupboard doors
I meet him again
    — Lucia Fontana

*

Sears catalog
In the stationary cupboard
crescent moon in the door
    — Paul Geiger

*

paying it forward
a few odds and ends you might
sometimes need at home
    — Devin Harrison
* 

l
el
t – a - n
j y s o
b s o t
e n p s e
a lime

— Deborah P Kolodji

* 

among stationery
a resignation draft
sadder than a love note
— Alegria Imperial

* 

computer mice in
the stationery cupboard
my chair squeaks
— Karen Harvey

* 

field mouse
new letterhead
with a watermark
— Jeff Hoagland
* 

stationery cupboard —
I daydream about
origami cranes
    — Ana Drobot

* 

in the stationery cabinet
scent as well classified
on shelves
    — Adjei Agyei-Baah

* 

scribbling with each pen
so many duds
this deluge rain
    — Tricia Knoll

* 

stationery cupboard
all the pens
we smuggle home
    — Rachel Sutcliffe

*
Haiku in the Workplace:
The New Boss

Change is good. It recharges the battery, refocuses our vision, gets us out of the old familiar. That’s especially welcome at this time of year, after the excitement of the holidays wanes and we return to our old routines. A cocktail of change — comprised, as it often is, of a shot of fear, another of uncertainty, blended with adrenaline and served neat — can be just the picker-upper we need to get through what’s left of the winter.

But a new boss — well, she’s a pitiable object, ripe for lampooning:

a new boss
with charismatic smile —
botoxed for a while
[David Dayson]

However much we might need her, fear her, possibly even like her, she is an adversary who bears watching:

replacement director
a new footfall
to be learned
[Marion Clarke]

It is worth our while to come to know the enemy:

employees
orientate to the new boss —
reading Sun Tzu
[David Dayson]

and to know that we are not the only ones confronting change:
rites of passage —
a new boss sacrifices
the old board
[David Dayson]

Still, this too is a passing fancy, and it’s only a matter of time

new boss
such excitement
until noon
[Marion Clarke]

before we return to the comfortable rut. So it’s not so much the newness we celebrate with the new boss as the time it takes to break him in to the old ways. My third choice this week knows this from the outset:

the new boss
invites us on a journey —
in a hot air balloon
[David Dayson]

The poet invites us on a journey as well, and the first two lines open to endless possibility, bounded only by imagination. The third line is a wonderfully apt prick in the metaphorical balloon — we’ve been here before. Second choice goes to this rendering of a completely modern malady:

adapting well
to the new manager
a cable bug
[Ernesto Santiago]

The ambiguity of this poem — is it the persona of the poem who is adapting well, or the cable bug? — seizes our attention, and its lack of resolution makes it hard to forget. This is not a strategy that works all the time — in fact, the vast majority
of such poems fail for just such uncertainty — but here, given the ambiguity of just what kind of bug a “cable bug” is, I think it strikes just the right note. And given the additional frisson that a cable bug, just as an office manager, is an entity wholly created by the workplace environment, one morphs neatly into the other, both minor nuisances that inflict a bit of surprise and pain but are for the most part harmless. This is the first time I’ve encountered “cable bug” in a haiku, so it also has the added value of novelty. My top selection is not a novelty, but rather an image that seems so familiar that we feel perhaps we could or should have written it:

swinging round
in his old chair
new boss
[Marion Clarke]

I chose it because of the perfection of its rendering — nothing wasted, nothing out of scale. There is fine energy in the poem — “swinging round” brings in action, and is so suggestive of characteristic gesture that we already feel we know this person. “his old chair” breaks two ways — the old boss’s chair (hence, the old regime), and the new occupant of the old chair (hence, the new). And the fine trochee of the third line — terse, to the point, just the opposite of the playful sweep of the gesture. Altogether, it is reminiscent of The Who and our personal experiences of just such moments. We know exactly where we are, and we know everything we need to know about just what sort of change has taken place. Nicely done. All right, enough lolligagging with your haiku, get back to work!

New Poems

boyz 2 men
suddenly silent
the new boss introduces herself
— Roberta Beary
new boss —
funny jokes
fake laughter
— Doris Pascolo

three years since the takeover
by the Irish powerhouse
yet to glimpse a leprechaun
— Mark Gilbert

due date
the imminent arrival
of a new boss
— Rachel Sutcliffe

it’s more than likely
heads will roll
arrival of the new boss
— Celestine Nudanu

ending up
with a new boss
the old boss
— Ernesto P. Santiago
the new boss . . .
some re-arrangements
in the office
    — Willie Bongcaron

all new artwork
in the corner office . . .
pink slips for lunch
    — Michael H. Lester

the new boss
fixing everything that
wasn’t broken
    — Michael Henry Lee

first CEO meeting
everyone’s year-long experience
at a glance
    — Stefano Riondato

first day on the job
the first blush
of a new blemish
    — Amy Losak
**meet and greet**
*the new boss in jeans*
*with creases*
— Pat Davis

**bruised ego**
*the new boss*
*half my age*
— Olivier Schopfer

**the new boss —**
*a scent of perfume*
*in all rooms*
— Angela Giordano

**his first day talk**
*incentive a month’s paid leave*
*best performer*
— S. Radhamani
the new boss arrives
to straighten the plant out
fur flyin’
— Marilyn Appl Walker

the new boss’s smile
a broken front tooth
ceases mine
— Marta Chocilowska

the new boss —
with a smile and a gaze
I’ll seduce him
— Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

boss new just as old the goals
— Adrian Bouter

new boss . . .
the voice precedes
his presence
— Madhuri Pillai
our desks
now face east —
new boss
— Arvinder Kaur

central expansion . . .
the new boss loosens
his belt
— Martha Magenta

high tech company
no one bothers
about the new boss
— Hifsa Ashraf

position of boss —
ONE advances
from the hopefuls
— Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

new boss
the water cooler’s
bubble burp
— Agnes Eva Savich
cicada chorus
in the shadow of the new boss
a sudden hush
— Karen Conrads Wibell

her oversized suit
our assistant principal’s
sudden promotion
— Frank J. Tassone

here he comes
please welcome new CEO
good old Chairman
— Ashoka Weerakkody

welcome party
baking two jam tarts
for let me notice
— Elisa Allo

the new boss
prepares himself reading
Machiavelli
— Tomislav Maretic
time for a change . . .
same old lines
from the new boss
    — Angelo Ancheta

*

cake at lunch
with the new manager
separate checks
    — Gail Oare

*

change
no one smiles
in the corridor
    — Christine Eales

*

breky with the new boss
buttered croissants edge out
plain bagels
    — Alegria Imperial

*

a clean sweep
the old boss’s sofa
disappearing
    — Mike Gallagher
new boss —
calling me in the morning
forgotten alarm on my phone
— Ana Drobot

Googling
the new boss’s name
one step ahead
— Karen Harvey

distant thunder
the profile pic
of my new boss
— Deborah P Kolodji

and finally, though not really a haiku, the new boss’ mantra:
we are the boss
we win the toss
and suffer no loss
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
Our respondents took this week’s topic in two distinct directions: the first, in honor of Hallowe’en, was replete with the ghosts and goblins associated with that occasion; but the second was directed more at the (actual or faux) everyday horrors of the workplace, often embodied by the authority figure. As a result, our selections bounce around in some unexpected directions. Are they the more chilling for the seeming disconnect? Or are they in truth all of a piece?

Let’s begin with a general invocation of the spirit:

    along the Thames —
    autumn’s shadows pass by
    wreathed in mist
    [David Dayson]

This mild poem gently hints at what is to come. The seemingly innocuous shadows are but gathering their strength:

    digital ghoul
    knocking on profiles —
    trick or tweet?
    [Kevin Millicheap]

Are electronic gremlins to blame for security breaches and malware irruptions? If they are, they have taken pains to cover their tracks:

    Search for “office ghoul”.
    Get “502 Bad Gateway”;
    ghost in the machine?
    [Sarah Leavesley]

When we resort to low-tech methods, the results are still the same:
office Ouija
darts between “yes” and “no”, but
always spells bad news
   [Sarah Leavesley]

And how do these gremlins manifest themselves in real terms?

   The boss calls us in.
   We all leave pale-faced,
   spooked by emptied chairs.
       [Sarah Leavesley]

We keep on in the face of it nevertheless, stiff upper lip and all that:

   the grim reaper
   stands in the wings smiling —
   at our gallows humour
       [David Dayson]

And some of us remain simply oblivious to the odium in the air:

   night shape —
   its breath low and deep. Shhh!
   the intern asleep
       [Kevin Millicheap]

It’s just that time of year, we tell ourselves, but of course we know better:

   All morning felt like
   a labyrinth without a
   possible way out
       [Karine Bernier-Lapointe]
My three top winners all conjure the uncanny, albeit in very different ways. In third place I offer this volte-face:

all of a sudden
the analytical boss
a laughing hyena
[Ernesto Santiago]

Has a malign spirit invaded his body? Or is it simply the sugar talking? Or merely some mask, and for what purpose?

Second prize goes to this aperçu:

long dead —
tobacco smoke haunts
her office
[David Dayson]

The dead are long with us. This neatly wrought moment of awareness captures an essence through our most primitive and exact sense, that of smell. Our eyes and ears may be fooled, but not our noses, and we know this ghost all too well.

My top prize goes to this truly sinister musing:

chilling the air —
the anniversary passes
of your future death
[David Dayson]

Whether a prophecy or something the poet will actually attend to himself, there is a frisson to be had by considering such a moment. The malign spirit it deeply alive in this conjuring, a kind of forbidden knowledge that resists easy analysis. A perfect mull for the season. Be careful out there!
end of the shift —
an apparently peaceful dusk
checking behind my shoulders
   — Doris Pascolo

* 

In the eyes
of the night guard
his day job
   — Roberta Beary

* 

minute to midnight
I burn incense to ward off
office evil
   — Celestine Nudanu

* 

graveyard shift
working with
the office ghost
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

office ghoul —
it can be harmless,
this gossip?
   — Ernesto P. Santiago
the office ghoul —  
the envy of gossips  
wears down like acid  
— Alessandra Delle Fratte

*  
tough negotiation . . .  
eating up my mind  
the cigar’s smoke  
— Hifsa Ashraf

*  
day of the dead  
business as usual  
in the mail room  
— Michael Henry Lee

*  
behind his hunched back  
they call him Lurch  
old photocopier  
— Jennnifer Hambrick

*  
office ghoul  
the curious crumbs  
on his tie  
— Pat Davis
unwanted attention
from the office ghoul —
I take the long way home
   — Martha Magenta

vinegar cocktail —
now she’s privy
to the salary schedule
   — Marilyn Appl Walker

in the office
ghouls and werewolves
occupy high positions
   — Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

a jackal
is about the offices —
the hunt begins
   — Angela Giordano

the chimes of the keys
on his belt a reminder
of the good times
   — Mark Gilbert
at the end of the aisle
her broomstick
chasing shredded files
— Tricia Knoll

white as a sheet
the IT guy goes
beyond the pale
— Michael H. Lester

vampire maid
his latest paperback love
night watcher
— Ashoka Weerakkody

people disappear
bones
in the bin
— Christine Eales

after sick leave
pile after pile pending files
ghastly
— S. Radhamani
dark night
my colleague’s eyes
my recurring nightmare
— Eufemia Griffo

cold sweat
the boss’s secretary
with stiletto nails
— Olivier Schopfer

the night shift
a gentle rustling
at the keyhole
— Marta Chocilowska

office ghoul . . .
from time to time
its droppings
— Madhuri Pillai

empty cubicle —
the blurred face in the
company photo
— Enrique Garrovillo
nobody knows
pallid lavender Visigoths
cover tele-sales
   — Ron Scully

sniggers follow
till the boss’s cabin —
the office ghoul
   — Arvinder Kaur

“Stranger Things” . . .
my ghosts follow me
in the office
   — Elisa Allo

priority turnaround —
she licks the seal of
a “get well” card
   — Gail Oare

night silence —
only one office window
is lit
   — Tomislav Maretic
boardroom portrait
mean-spirited in death
just as in life
— Karen Conrads Wibell

* 

Since blood-sucker Dan
was hired Personnel sick days increased tenfold
— Stephan Massi

* 

cold shiver
our office ghost
nothing like the dark web
— Lee Nash

* 

the office ghoul
hanging in the cupboard
a skeleton
— Mike Gallagher

* 

The office ghoul —
The wrong address
on the right side of the envelope
— Julia Guzmán
crescent moon
a crow’s caw
splitting the dark
    — Brendon Kent

office ghoul —
my every mistake
stored in memory
    — Ana Drobot

trolling for office sounds
I catch the ghoul’s
foul breath
    — Alegria Imperial

still with a watchful eye —
the founder’s picture
on office wall
    — Adjei Agyei-Baah
Praise has long been one of management’s most important tools. You don’t even have to mean it for it to work, and it costs nearly nothing. What’s not to like?

Machiavelli knew
praise is just a weapon —
in our armoury
[David Dayson]

Not only is praise cost-effective, it can also boost production.

a left hand pats
your back while the right one —
gives you more
[David Dayson]

The only negative to management’s use of praise is that it is easily seen through.

if only we could
turn the other cheek to —
backhanded praise
[David Dayson]

But, of course, that’s up to us, and if we’re susceptible to praise in the first place, enlightenment may come as something of a disappointment:

vanity’s bubble
pricked —
by faint praise
[David Dayson]
So it is the praise of peers we most value, as our colleagues know the true value of one’s work and character, charged as they are with the same challenges (and ownership):

Management’s soft soap
rinsed by clean waters of praise
from one’s good colleagues.
[John Lock]

My three choices this week all chronicle the discernment of the manipulative aspects of praise. They are all mordant, but in their very wit they suggest a resiliency that mere flattery will never breach. All reside firmly in the realm of senryu, that close cousin to haiku that focuses on the vagaries of human behavior, often with just this trenchant sense of humor.

My third choice is tellingly observant:

praising your bonus
a smile around their mouth —
but not the eyes
[David Dayson]

Specialists in facial characteristics (that is, human lie detectors) tell us that true smiles — smiles arising from actual pleasure and delight — involve the eye muscles, and that false smiles do not. Our poet is not deceived by the “hail fellow well met” attitude of his colleagues, suspecting perhaps a deeper and more basic emotion: envy.

Second prize this week goes to this terse nugget:

peer praising
the economy
of handshake
[Ernesto Santiago]

Is this cynical or simply realistic? It’s hard to say, but it seems quite true to life, either way. I like the economy of dispensing with the article we might expect before
the final noun, and also the parsimony of making that final noun singular. Nicely gauged.
Top winner this week is this piece of deflation, which leaves no doubt as to its cynicism:

    congratulations —
    you are reappointed
    to your old job
    [David Dayson]

One of the hallmarks of both haiku and senryu is its ability, in the three-line format, of providing a surprise (not always humorous) in the ultimate line. While “reappointed” shades us in its direction, the third line here is as unexpected as it seems inevitable once we’ve read it through. What is more demeaning than being congratulated for staying in the same place? And to be expected to suffer it with gladness? And yet the tone of the poem is jaunty, as though these slings and arrows will be insufficient to humiliate this person. That’s a testament to actual self-esteem, and that’s much better than any praise, even the praise of peers.

**New Poems**

kaffeeklatsch —
a colleague reheats
words of praise
    — Roberta Beary

* 

Rebecca’s apparel
the praise I deserve
lost in the seams
    — Celestine Nudanu
three-sixty feedback:  
Just a workplace synonym  
— for Stockholm Syndrome  
— Topher Dykes

*  
well done — and ahead of deadline too, snail  
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*  
before asking me  
to work his hours  
the co-worker’s praise  
— Rachel Sutcliffe

*  
congratulations —  
raising the glasses  
eyes full of admiration  
— Doris Pascolo

*  
got a pay rise!  
the eager praises of peers  
in the pub  
— Marta Chocilowska
roiling clouds
the pharmacopoeia
of each smile
   — Betty Shropshire

the bottle of merlot
more valued
than any phrase of praise
   — Mark Gilbert

wooden idol
sagging belly comic smile
unspoken praise
   — Ashoka Weerakkody

An envious peer
ironically says to me:
how good you are!
   — Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

unsigned notes of praise
the boss says
not me
   — Pat Davis
office meeting
someone’s imitating
my report
  — Willie Bongcaron

unexpected praise —
all peers consider it
my last day
  — Hifsa Ashraf

note of gratitude
her offer to relieve me
of one recess duty
  — Marilyn Appl Walker

collective praise
collective stab lurks somewhere
innocent victim
  — S. Radhamani

peer recognition
a colleague forgets
my name
  — Marion Clarke
*  

job well done  
scribbled in the dirt on  
my rear windshield  
— Michael Henry Lee  

*  

pub drinks  
the celebrations  
on office account  
— Madhuri Pillai  

*  

I leave the flock —  
face new challenges  
collecting praise  
— Angela Giordano  

*  

my birthday  
everyone cheers  
extexcept the boss  
— Christine Eales  

*  

with just a nod  
he praises my design  
Ta-da!  
— Shandon Land
praise the saw and the chair legs
   — Adrian Bouter

a colleague’s praise
then mom’s voice echoes
don’t get a big head
   — Peggy Bilbro

matrioske peers . . .
how many faces
I know never

come matrioske —
quanti volti ci sono
è da scoprire
   — Lucia Cardillo

peer approval
masks
cover masks
   — Olivier Schopfer
the praise of peers — 
now her self-image changes 
her appearance
  — Tomislav Maretic

* 

nonnegotiable 
letter of recommendation 
mispelings and typos
  — Ron Scully

* 

we give him a prize 
for making a splash — 
year of the frog
  — Martha Magenta

* 

while applauding my award 
his eyes call me 
bitch
  — Gail Oare

* 

praise of peers 
the flutter of poplar leaves 
in the breeze
  — Michael Stinson
retirement party
sincere words
for the best teacher
   — Carmen Sterba

sushi bar party
colleagues’ enthusiasm
is contagious
   — Elisa Allo

suck it up
he didn’t fire you
or ask you to take a knee
   — Tricia Knoll

employee of the month
   a lunch invitation
   at the avant-garde bar
in a borrowed dress
   the fish
   boot licker
hands on manager
   in the breakroom microwave
   as the crow flies
   — princess k
my colleague
praising me —
end of weekend
— Ana Drobot

midnight calm
one by one my cheer squad
turns home
— Alegria Imperial

he tells me I’m cute
I hint I’m from the fraud squad
keeping his distance
— Karen Harvey

the Oscar’s gleam
the applause of one’s peers
wordless
— Karen Conrads Wibell

end of year praisesong —
the chorus loudest at
the social loafers’ end
— Adjei Agyei-Baah
Haiku in the Workplace: Miscommunication

Perhaps I’m not making myself clear: the best haiku are not just jokes or aphorisms or whatever one might shoehorn into 17 syllables. Nevertheless, these tropes continue to dominate the submissions to this column. This week’s topic, “Miscommunication”, lends itself as an opportunity to address these continuing misconceptions.

So let’s be clear: all the poems you will read below are haiku, but, as with so much else, there are haiku and then there are haiku. That is, there are levels of accomplishment, and we’ve been at this long enough now to be making positive strides up that ladder. A useful analogy might be football — no, I mean football. (Just because I’m a Yank doesn’t mean I don’t know what football is.)

When you watch Chelsea or Liverpool (or, horrors, Barca) playing, you recognize that the level of performance is very high (well, usually). But when you watch a group of 5-year-olds stumbling around the pitch, passing to no one in particular (or no one at all), and drifting off into a self-stimulated daze, we don’t say “that’s not football”. We recognize it for what it is — a beginner’s level.

Most of the efforts we see here are beginner’s level haiku, which is fair — none, or nearly none, of you are professional haiku poets, and you have day jobs, so you are perhaps not cultivating these skills as quickly as you might should you devote most of your waking hours to it. Nonetheless, I’m challenging you to raise the level of your game, to move beyond beginner’s level haiku. Here are three basic things you can do right away that will improve your work:

1) Work in Images — rather than give us the abstract conceptualization, give us the image(s) that suggest it. In this poem

    communication —
    or where confabulation
    merely overlaps

    [David Dayson]

    can you visualize “communication”? Or even the overlap of confabulation? What do we see when we try? Do we visualize the same thing as the poet has in mind, or that
other readers do? This is the poet’s task, to let the reader see (or hear, or feel) the trigger for the insight. Imagery is our basic tool for this.

2) Avoid Generalities — the best haiku are about specific events, real or imagined, rather than abstractions. A poem like this

   blundering into the  
   komyunikeshon gyappu —  
   between cultures  
   [David Dayson]

   tells us the general situation, but a Premier League haiku would give us the specific incident where we recognized its truth.

3) Let the Poem Be About Itself, Not About You — there is a great temptation to appear witty and in control of the situation in everything we do and say, but the goal here is not to perform but to invite others into our experience. Jokes are fun but they are generally closed — our interest ends when they end. Good poetry opens — the reader or listener is rewarded for continuing to think on the words shared. So this is fun

   “Siri, Help me, I am shot!”  
   Did you mean:  
   “Hold me, I am hot!”?  
   [Samual Sibony]

   and maybe even an actual experience (though I doubt it), but ultimately is about the writer, not about the reader.

   By way of further example, here’s a missed opportunity:

   between words —  
   so much to be understood  
   from silence  
   [David Dayson]

   The first line is wonderful. It places us in the middle of a fraught, quite likely
personal, moment. There is a pause in the middle of communication — why? The reader wants to know. Is the speaker having second thoughts? Has he forgotten what he wished to say? What would cause him to do so? Or is he waiting for some kind of response?

Unfortunately this is followed, not by a clinching image, but rather by a platitude. What if the poet hadn’t tried to explain to us what silence might mean, but rather pointed us beyond the silence he had already conveyed with the first line? I hope the poet will reconsider this poem and let us all see what was significant enough in that moment that he wished to share it.

So, with these guidelines in mind, please consider the following poems, the best of this week’s submissions. See if you think they work in images, avoid generalities, and are about the poem rather than the poet. Do you think you could now improve them?

someone interprets
the things someone else assumes
spread like a virus
    [Ernesto Santiago]

okay is OK —
its many meanings
all korrect
    [David Dayson]

all I needed was
hard boiled words —
instead a soufflé
    [David Dayson]

linguistic baggage —
so many words packed tight
into small ideas
    [David Dayson]
when bad is so good
and really sick is awesome —
words mean whatever
    — [David Dayson]

a growing friendship
two photos on saturday
no response: the end.
    — [Monika Dunkel]

not saying no
with nuanced ambiguity —
a door left ajar
    — [David Dayson]

My top choice this week clears all three hurdles we’ve discussed:

    “Lol xxx”
    Lots of love or
    Laughing out loud?
    — [Samuel Sibony]

The image is that of a written or texted communication, and we can all see that clearly. The poem doesn’t generalize about this sort of communication, but provides a specific instance of it. And its humor is open-ended, and provides more than a laugh. We can enter the poem, and even place ourselves in the position of receiving and trying to parse such a communication. The poem grows deeper from such consideration. This poem has made no miscommunication, but has indeed raised itself well above entry level. Nicely played.
New Poems

in French Time
the lunch break
the park
    — Joseph Salvatore Aversano

*

treacherous path —
no way back from
“reply all”
    — Gail Oare

*

team meeting
one colleague
gets what I’m saying
    — Rachel Sutcliffe

*

1 a.m.
he tells us
I want it done today
    — Marita Gargiulo

*

misunderstanding
the misuse of mouth
to mouth
    — Ernesto P. Santiago
Looking for
a work
a word
a world
— Stefano Riondato

work etiquette . . .
everyone laugh louder
than the boss
— Hifsa Ashraf

communicative blackout —
a treasure for a few
the truths of all
— Alessandra Delle Fratte

serious problem —
the face-to-face
solution
— Angela Giordano

Christmas eve
the assembly instructions
lost in translation
— Michael Henry Lee
old memo
to self —
don’t look back
— Helen Buckingham

miscommunication —
no more with
those who matter
— Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

an own goal
by miscommunication
a defeat
— Marta Chocilowska

she says all the right things —
the pleasing click
of this ballpoint
— Mark Gilbert

blacked out
groping for trip switch
caught a nipple
— Ashoka Weerakkody
shoveled snow
trapped in a heap of apathy
my point
— Jennifer Hambrick

pins and needles
we rewrite the failed proposal
for no slip-ups
— Marilyn Appl Walker

how could you!
how could I what?
you know
— Shandon Land

foreign counterpart
another email
to decode the first
— Madhuri Pillai

text replacement
which one will manage
the iPhone or i?
— Kerstin Park
insurance payment
to his deceased wife
hurricane desk
— Nicole Tilde

snippet of gossip
the frustration of
pronouns
— Pat Davis

I said we check in
12 o’clock he calls —
next noon
— S. Radhamani

deep freeze —
my words taken
the wrong way
— Martha Magenta

all glitters ain’t gold
at the point of
open admiration . . .
— Adrian Bouter
what!
i want tickets for the opera
not for Oprah
   — Christine Eales

* 

in between the lines
the silence of the boss
over the union strike
   — Angelo Ancheta

* 

applications
filed alphabetically
openings chronological
   — Ron Scully

* 

sent unchecked
autocorrected text
deer in the headlights
   — Karen Conrads Wibell

* 

snow day —
the deadline depends on
who’s asking
   — Roberta Beary
misinterpretation
from one to another
with an interesting result
— Tomislav Maretic

sleepless night . . .
why are all emails
written in Cyrillic?
— Elisa Allo

sign language
the perfect time
to miss a point
— Willie Bongcaron

arrows in red, orange, green and blue
dry erase
before I understood
— Tricia Knoll

miscommunication
braless today
i was speechless
— Paul Geiger
the migrant recruit cringes
over work mates’ excitement
at the flea market
— Alegria Imperial

miscommunication —
translation means cheating
— Ana Drobot

sign language
the perfect time
to miss a point
— Willie Bongcaron

arrows in red, orange, green and blue
dry erase
before I understood
— Tricia Knoll

miscommunication —
of just a case of misinterpretation?
— Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristofooro
closed doors
I faithfully arrive
on a Japanese holiday
— Carmen Sterba

but I thought
he knew what I meant . . .
the great divide
— Karen Harvey

a cable line
of misinformation —
office rat
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

and a final admonishment:

From management:
Departmental memos mustn’t
be styled as haiku
— Topher Dykes
Haiku in the Workplace: Office Rivalry

Can this possibly be the case?

the whole office
composing haiku verse
where’s the prize?

[Jon Brooks]

If we have been the cause of even one office slowdown, one slacking off of productivity, one diversion from the task at hand, then I am profoundly — delighted. Has haiku become a rival of the spreadsheet and the memorandum for your attention? You should be warned — haiku can be a nasty habit to kick.

Rivalry is our topic du jour, especially those that arise in our working environments, though they need not have anything to do with work:

My lunches
destroyed hers until
she went super-blender

[Guy Masterson]

Rivalries challenge us to do more, better, faster. It can be argued they are the springboard to all advancement. It’s seemingly elemental, begins early, and isn’t limited to humans:

monkey business —
an alpha male bares
his teeth at a rival

[David Dayson]

It’s a display behavior, for the usual reasons:
A bragging right beyond
The monetary:
Kate from accounting
[Samuel Sibony]

though success in this department can lead to unexpected complications:

outshining
my mate
the undue stress
[Ernesto P. Santiago]

In fact, success in rivalry can be measured in a variety of ways:

A knife between my
Shoulder blades. I have taught
Him well
[Samuel Sibony]

My third choice this week continues the fight:

rival actuaries —
fight it out regressing
to the mean
[David Dayson]

We appreciate the double-entendre of the jargon, using it against itself. But we don’t expect this tableau to lead to actual fisticuffs, do we? A comic portrait in the mode of Daumier, but in words.
I have co-equals for second prize this week, as these two poems illustrate about the same level of enlightenment with about the same level of achievement:
in a parking lot
mens compare the size —
of their cars
[David Dayson]

head to head —
at a urinal mens compete
for the fastest stream
[David Dayson]

Isn’t this what we love about men? Perhaps “love” is the wrong word here, and perhaps “men” as well. In both instances we recognize primal male behavior at its most rudimentary. We might as well enjoy it, it’s not going away any time soon.
My top choice this week is something subtler, at least in the doing:

the space race —
counting floor tiles
in a rival’s office
[David Dayson]

The poet engages is a bit of misdirection: when we consider the first line, we imagine one of the species’ most elaborate and visionary enterprises. But we are quickly brought back down to earth. This is no fine thing we are privy to, but the covert accounting of small advantage. The poem takes us from the vast promise of the skies overhead to the space beneath our feet, creating a context of what the species is capable of, while keenly noting the specifics of what it is usually engaged in. A classic senryu, bigger than all the others and sure to attract a host of desirable mates. I’m sure you’ll all be pleased for the success of our winning poet. We in haiku are above petty rivalries. Aren’t we?
New Poems

shared workspace
he unpins her
award
— Roberta Beary

* 

battlefield —
among the office stationery
may the best man win
— Doris Pascolo

* 

bingo
my work-life balance
beats your bonus
— Mark Gilbert

* 

office rivalry
my co-worker’s Christmas tree
bigger than mine
— Rachel Sutcliffe

* 

secretary of state
whose non-fat sugar
to pass on?
— Betty Shropshire
ah! repeatedly, working against each other — rock-paper-scissors
— Ernesto P. Santiago

strained emotions . . . and then on the rival's desk an olive branch
— Marta Chocilowska

corner office — never wanted it, he says a little loud
— Ashish Narain

sugar coated poison . . . my transfer to the old office with a promotion
— Hifsa Ashraf

my Mercedes is bigger than yours and so is my office space
— Celestine Nudanu
in the office rivals
often create
unfounded rumors
   — Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

she calls me
passive-aggressive
my brows arch
   — Carmen Sterba

no memory, no wish
challenge to be tabula rasa
patient by patient
   — Lucia Fontana

raising his hand
“I will never agree ... “
so, he bursts coughing
   — Vladimir Devidé (sent by Tomislav Maretic)

looking it up . . .
the winner of the argument
becomes the loser
   — Tomislav Maretic
* first day ends
  she smiles at her
  competition
  — Pat Davis

* my check on piled files
  urgent summons for me
  during long leave
  — S. Radhamani

* coincidences:
  rivalry in the office
  rivalry in love
  — Angela Giordano

* a roomful of rivals
  for the prized location
  window desk
  — Madhuri Pillai

* patients in office
  infecting each other
  poison pen
  — Ashoka Weerakkody
glass ceiling —
she pulls the ladder up
after her
   — Martha Magenta

office wars
department heads
sharpen their wits
   — Karen Harvey

weekend the lone dune walk
   — Adrien Bouter

dress down day
at Prada
three piece suits
   — Paul Geiger

the knack to present
last for dramatic effect
office meeting
   — Willie Bongcaron
* 
in the boardroom
a clash of power-dresses
apple of the boss’s eye
— Angelo Ancheta

* 
knowing better
only your mouth
smiles
— Olivier Schopfer

* 
icy gazes . . .
competition overheats
the winter days
— Elisa Allo

* 
crack in the door
low voices
at midnight
— Christine Eales

* 
window seat
her big aspidistra
offputting
— Mike Gallagher
office shooting star
a swarm of mouth-to-mouth
dark tales begins
 — Alegria Imperial
There was much to like in your responses to the first Financial Times haiku challenge, especially good humor

Sorry I am late
For this once-in-a-lifetime
Opportunity
— David Lomer

sit up straight, look bright
follow your dreams, but also
ask about the pay
— Teresa Pham

resilience

seeking a new job
the smell of spring rain
on the wind
— Mel Goldberg

attentiveness to the moment

second interview —
beneath the desk her hands make
a church, a steeple
— Lynne Rees

and to both a sense of the past
sitting at my desk
I want to call
the man I once was
— Mel Goldberg

and the future

that stethoscope
around grandpa’s neck
the 5-year-old hears her future
— Robert Epstein

The poems I selected as this week’s winner and runners-up all tend toward a more image-driven technique (as in “seeking a new job” above) to convey their emotion (as opposed to a more narrative technique, as in “Sorry I am late” or “sit up straight”). My second runner-up is

There was a moment,
between the handshake and smile.
Long enough to judge.
Robert Milner, UK

This excellent moment of recognition is certainly familiar to most of us, and it is limned simply and economically. Had the third line not “explained” what the image had already told us, I would have been inclined to rate this even higher. My first runner-up is

a conversation —
trapped in the hush
by a water cooler
David Dayson, UK

Another fraught moment neatly caught. We all know those casual conversations can be the most telling — or the most boring. This one seems the former.
My winner for the first haiku challenge is

draft resumés
folded into origami
birds fly south
Valerie Nelson, Canada

There is much going on here in a very few words. We know the persona of the poem is meticulous — these are drafts that obviously didn’t fly (sorry). But folding them into origami indicates a rather specialized skill, and a constitution that needs more than the usual ways of dispelling the dissatisfactions of failed edits. So we have a glimpse of character as well as an interesting first image. We could take the third line as a joke — the result of tossing the origami birds towards the waste basket — and leave it there. But we might also take the phrase “birds fly south” literally, which adds another element altogether to the poem. This device — known as kigo in Japanese, and “season word” in English-language practice — fixes the poem in time (autumn), which brings into play the many emotional affects of the season, not to mention the suggestion that time is growing late for the job seeker as well. Now there is a poignancy and resonance to be found between the origami (birds?) and the actual birds which deepens the reader’s experience, and brings the moment into the realm of poetry. Nicely done.

Congratulations to all who submitted for challenging yourselves to stretch beyond your usual persona. And too bad haiku pays so poorly — several failed interviewees show promise for a new career. Keep writing!

New Poems

defining career
the aesthetic sense
of simple dress
— Ernest P. Santiago
peeling tree bark
she hides her spotted hands
in the interview
   — Amy Losak

happy hour
one question remains
to be answered
   — Michael Henry Lee

just when I thought
I’d got the job
my stomach rumbles
   — Rachel Sutcliffe

interview panel
two out of three
eye her legs
   — Marietta McGregor

all jet carrier
walk in interview
ground crew
   — Ashoka Weerakkody
between us, a cv —
the hiss of an avalanche
down the roof
— Marta Chocilowska

career woman?
always updates
and work twice as much
— Angela Giordano

loud thinking . . .
about my career path
in a traffic jam
— Hifsa Ashraf

nailing the interview
the pain
of ill-fitting shoes
— Mark Gilbert

interview callback —
human resources cannot
find my resume
— Valentina Ranaldi-Adams
* 

my face  
in the mirror practicing  
the winning smile  
— Peggy Bilbro  

* 

role-playing in action —  
the potential for tomorrow’s job  
goes on stage right now  
— Alessandra Delle Fratte  

* 

after the handshake  
the charm of the  
old school tie  
— Madhuri Pillai  

* 

why applying for this post?  
i like teaching for I can  
teach and preach  
— S. Radhamani  

* 

match point  
my answer to why  
this job matters  
— Pat Davis
he smiles when he says workload . . .
    — Adrian Bouter

her far-off voice
why I want this job
I don’t mention my surgery
    — Tricia Knoll

preparing for an interview —
I replace the strings
on my guitar
    — Tomislav Maretic

after the interview
the toothy grin
of the unzipped zipper
    — Jennifer Hambrick

my old boss
on the selection panel
a torn betting slip
    — Mike Gallagher
critical job interview . . .
through the open window
blackbird’s song
— Martha Magenta

* 

those eyes
and those legs
secret handshake
— Christine Eales

* 

leaving the interview
with a signed contract
eight months pregnant
— Marilyn Appl Walker

* 

third degree —
on the job training
at the police station
— Paul Geiger

* 

that moment when
the interview changes
into a conversation
— Olivier Schopfer
distracted by his blue eyes
she curls into dense sentences
fall interview
  — Alegria Imperial

big break
talk the talk
walk the walk
  — Erin Castaldi

interview —
getting into time lapse
our silence
  — Ana Drobot

career-defining interview
captured within the bracket of
“what defines a successful career?”
  — Adjei Agyei-Baah

decided
on the flip of a coin
job at the bookies
  — Karen Harvey
Haiku in the Workplace:
Anger Management

I’m going to say this calmly, and I don’t want to argue about it: none of the submissions for this week’s haiku column rose to the level of poetry. I know, I know. Sure, some were clever:

mismanaged dangers —
if frequent frequently will
anger Management
[Walter Miles]

And some offered useful advice:

staying calm at work
is preferable to weeks
completing crosswords
[Walter Miles]

Some were droll:

A pile of
Ripped stress balls
Lying by her chair
[Samuel Sibony]

Some were in the moment:

in — out
of anger management
this breath
[Ernesto P. Santiago]
And some managed to get outside of it:

Tonight, in the pub,
I will bitch and moan and scream.
Now, I’ll bite my tongue.

[Alex Bilmes]

But none moved beyond prose mind — the mind we use for our everyday transactions — to enter that elusive other mind, the mind of poetry. The closest we came, one could argue, was this:

garden of silence —
 time and space suspended
 by water lilies

[David Dayson]

But even this is more a bromide for the self-help crowd draped in the raiment of prettiness. We just didn’t get there this week. There’s no reason to get upset, sometimes this just happens. It’s not as though the Muse delivers on command, much as we like to think her at our beck and call. Next week will bring us somewhere else, somewhere perhaps where the Muse dwells, and you can negotiate at that point. In the meantime, breath deeply, count to seventeen (if you must) and take solace in wisdom:

The Sex Pistols said
Anger is an energy.
They didn’t have jobs.

[Alex Bilmes]
New Poems

counting to ten
punching
my calculator
— Mark Gilbert

*

it’s a jungle
in the highest office
roar of the boss
— Marietta McGregor

*

furious
running to the tenth floor
without panting
— Marta Chocilowska

*

almost twelve
the boss is just halfway
in his sermon
— Willie Bongcaron

*

salary freeze —
the tea kettle whistling
in the staff lounge
— Gail Oare
getting some help
more than I could handle
a loose tie
— Ernesto P. Santiago

keeping a distance
from my angry manager
a crow squawks
— Carmen Sterba

anger management . . .
playing hide & seek
with my boss
— Hifsa Ashraf

biting my tongue
I shred some more
of my anger
— Rachel Sutcliffe

layoff notice
the saucepan
boils over
— Amy Losak
attitude problem —
the boss’s response to those
who tell the truth
   — Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

* 

working lunch
biting the meat harder
argument
   — Ashoka Weerakkody

* 

anger management
embracing the emptiness
of profit and loss
   — Michael Henry Lee

* 

I sign up for a course
to manage my anger —
counting fingers
   — Angela Giordano

* 

since he is always angry
my colleague has been sent to attend
an anger management course
   — Rosa Maria Di Salvatore
storm clouds
dispersed by late afternoon
empty donut box
   — Peggy Bilbro

laughter therapy
he was easier to ignore
before
   — Pat Davis

Post-quarrel embrace
Sparks on a broken cell phone glass
   — Stefano Riondato

a lifetime later
that tone of voice, I’m told
unforgiven
   — Ron Scully

subsiding storm
the hardliner’s voice
tones down
   — Angelo Ancheta
angry . . .
a weekend work seminar
on anger management
   — Madhuri Pillai

*

closing the loan file
please come day after tomorrow
more auspicious
   — S. Radhamani

*

a deep breath
to cool my anger —
tonight tai chi lesson
   — Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

*

a sky blue and black
with both hands on the table
him dotting the i . . .
   — Adrian Bouter

*

fleck of spittle
on the tight mouth
he manages
   — Paul Geiger
* 

the boss gives me
a long look . . .
crack of the cattle prod
— Chad Lee Robinson

* 

not regretting
what I said
unpaid overtime
— Olivier Schopfer

* 

office empty
except for me
and a dead wasp
— Christine Eales

* 

Nervous tension —
watering the philodendron
I slowly breathe
— Nazarena Rampini

* 

angry silence —
the remains of a wasp
on the windowsill
— Martha Magenta
the way
she forgives me . . .
makes me madder!
— Tomislav Maretic

bullseye
perfectly controlled
barb
— Mike Gallagher

refreshed daily
the long end of a wound
from last year’s tussle
— Alegria Imperial

late for class
arguing over space
in the car park
— Karen Harvey

anger management —
a few more cups of coffee
on my desk
— Ana Drobot
just a glass of water to regulate my breath
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

*
Is it serendipitous that we’re having this conversation one week after our topic was “Anger Management”? Why are we having this conversation at all? Why did we ever?

It’s hard to remember the bad old days, even if they weren’t all that long ago, but I wonder how deep-seated our new-found egalitarianism runs. We Yanks have removed slavery as national policy more than a century and a half ago, but a recent poll of Donald Trump supporters (I know, I know . . .) found that fully 20 per cent felt the Emancipation Proclamation had been a “mistake.” Now it’s possible that many, or even most, of those respondents did not know what the Emancipation Proclamation stated (though it was defined in the poll question), but it is still alarming to recognize the shelf life of that sort of prejudice. And I wonder if it really can be all that much different in this other, newer emancipation.

To judge from your responses, at least those office folk who write haiku have acclimatized themselves to the new reality, seemingly without rancor, but the insistence of old metaphors was interesting:

kitchen politics —
cooking up schemes
knitting alliances
[David Dayson]

women blend roles
to multi-task with ease —
such smoothies
[David Dayson]

only women can
knit divided attention —
into harmony
[David Dayson]
This is intentional, of course, so I don’t mean to be casting aspersions, but does the retention of outmoded metaphor, even to make a point, help or hurt the cause? I really don’t know. At the same time, simply cross-referencing metaphors also seems to leave the question open:

women man up —
while men get down to
their feminine side
[David Dayson]

Again and again it was your metaphors that drove the topic, from both sides of the aisle:

Glass half full
Ceiling flaw
Shattered dreams
[Alex Killick]

women working
the touchy subject
of being a flower
[Ernesto P. Santiago]

The fact that the language is fraught is surely an indication that these issues are far from resolved, not just culturally, but personally. The main topic, after all, seemed to be aspiration:

an office

fully manned —
by women
[David Dayson]

and the main filter, role:
So in selecting my winners this week, I was guided less by poetic niceties and more by cultural acuity: what is our personal stake in this evolution of roles in the public sphere? My second prize seems a clear yawp from the seat of our emotions: the fear of rejection.

Life is contested enough, why make it even tougher? is the sentiment here. When women are allowed to compete, the competition effectively doubles (or will when women are allowed to compete everywhere). While it is possible to read this as a complaint, I see it as a cry out of the wilderness, in quite clever cover. It may not be pc, but it is honest, and honesty will be essential to working our way through this issue.

My top winner, more mantra than haiku, could easily be adopted as a slogan for a movement:

to work
to child
to be

The repetition of “to” in each instance renders each phrase an infinitive verb: that is, not an action word, but an idealization of an action — not the act of working, but the possibility of such an act. This mannerism causes the reader to take in the poem in the largest possible context, and to wonder why it is presented in such truncated
form. What about “to work”? Which contains, of course, its opposite, which is exactly the breadth of space the poem seeks to occupy in your mind. It is interesting to me that this is possible primarily in two spheres: the realm of the small, where haiku generally dwell, and the realm of the very large, where haiku resonate. Quite a feat for six words, and an open challenge, without resolution or judgment, on the larger issue of the relation between the sexes.

New Poems

office full of women
the inevitable
queue for the loos
— Rachel Sutcliffe

*

only men
at the office party
#metoo
— Johnny Baranski

*

carelessly leaning
against his office desk
her bike with basket
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

the sharp way he says my name
his half moon moves up and down
— Ashish Narain
women in the workplace for less  
— Michael Henry Lee

a brand new red lipstick  
I learn to be more assertive  
she’s half my age  
— Karoline Borelli

lunchtimes  
an education  
of salads  
— Mark Gilbert

my gf and I  
in the canteen  
a pair of buzzing lips  
— Willie Bongcaron

millennial workplace  
the boomer colors her gray  
more often  
— Amy Losak
office gossip —
the sharp sound of painted nails
on the keyboard
   — Arvinder Kaur

* 

she is my colleague
who loves going out on a mission
with male partners
   — Angela Giordano

* 

high heels’ click-clack —
wilted office plants
straighten up
   — Marta Chocilowska

* 

his compliment
carefully worded
the #MeToo era
   — Pat Davis

* 

long fingers
working the logic probe
mother board
   — Ashoka Weerakkody
often in the office
in the women’s drawers
lipstick and mascara
— Rosa Maria Di Salvatore

the cleaner
mopping the office floor
MeToo
— Mike Gallagher

office home duties
new boss's roster
for her male staff
— Madhuri Pillai

uniforms
any objection
to an out-of-order-miniskirt
— Stefano Riondato

some discuss saris
some women away from seats
more men’s rivalry
— S. Radhamani
women’s dress code . . .
sexual harassment
suits for the men
   — Martha Magenta

women behind the desk
talking about
the last rendez-vous
   — Elisa Allo

smooth running
the company
on Olympus
   — Paul Geiger

beyond tough language a line of smiles
   — Adrian Bouter

Aphrodite smiles
as she swishes round the room
flash of lightning
   — Christine Eales
Female colleague
she still looks good
in that color
— Peter Jastermsky

Her paycheck
next to his
three-quarter moon
— Jennifer Hambrick [Modern Haiku 48.2]

Cardinal sings
on an icy branch —
her fresh perspectives
— Timothy J. Dickey

She takes
another day off work
sick child
— Olivier Schopfer

Hard to be heard
Become hard to be heard
Red nails on keyboard
— Tricia Knoll
before she leaves for work
a toothpaste flavored kiss
    — David Oates

peonies
the petty cash tin’s
dismal rattle
    — Marietta McGregor

why oh why?
every female boss
has a big attitude
    — Carmen Sterba

chill air
she whooshes in with the scent
of blood moons
    — Alegria Imperial

autumn rain —
women’s wet umbrellas
in the office foyer
    — Tomislav Maretic
the longer queue for the bathroom fixing her mascara
— Karen Harvey

the boss baby comes to work in moccasin and leaves in stiletto heel
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

women in recruitment everyone is concerned about the dress code
— Hifsa Ashraf
A thing worth doing, in my opinion, must open up to the rest of the world. What is the point of a medical discovery, for instance, if it is confined to the lab? Or a mathematical breakthrough, if its implications aren’t brought to bear on the eleven dimensions of our universe? Haiku is no different. If the point of haiku is to follow a set of rules to generate a recognizable kind of product that fits comfortably within the realm of what it is known to be, then what we are doing is more akin to puzzle-solving than to poetry. And this is fine for those who seek entertainment or distraction. But for haiku to be worth doing, it must engage the rest of the world — it must seek to matter. If it succeeds, even occasionally, it becomes significant, a contribution. This is why I have remained engaged with it for four decades, and do not feel I have exhausted its resources.

For example, consider Lew Watts’s poem from our column on “Travel”:

slow descent —  
this sudden urge to share  
life stories

This assertion of a common humanity, triggered by a moment’s anxiety, unites us in a palpable way, and in so doing draws each of us closer to our own, and others’, stories. It is stories, more than work or geography or even blood, that bind us together.

In our year together we primarily limited our topics in this column to those incidents most closely associated with work and its environment, as was befitting this column’s initial impetus in a business newspaper. This remained our nominal focus, as this was the context in which we spent much of our conscious time, and many of its topics recurred for us, and occupied our energy and thought. But we also enlarged our outlook: specifically, we inquired how this context was changing, in what ways the newness of the outer world filtered into the ways we spent our time day to day. Some of these changes were gradual — how, for instance, did a fractious political atmosphere affect the way we did business, and with whom, and for what
(and changing) rewards? Some seemed abrupt, no matter how slowly they were put into play — when robots replace humans in any endeavor, for instance, it will never seem gradual to those replaced.

Some of the other issues we took up involved us all: how can we achieve a balance between the demands of work and the needs of the rest of our lives? That led us to consider what the relationship between work and personal happiness might be — to what degree do we need work to define us, to satisfy us, and at what point does work exhaust us and deprive us of the resources to discover that happiness within ourselves? How do we manage the mindspace we allot to work? Does it consume us? Are we defined by it? Or, rather, is it something extraneous to us that we tolerate only because it permits us to survive?

What about the work environment? Does the time spent getting to and from work count as work? Should we be compensated for it? Should we be permitted to work from home? How does this change our relationship to the job? To our private space? And what about the tribe that assembles in the name of our mutual employment — are they colleagues? Adversaries? Tools? What about the old-timers — are they sources of wisdom, or just in the way and using up resources? And the newcomers — are they the font of new ideas and energy, or just replacement parts for the time when we inevitably falter? And more, what about a collective mindspace that isn't shared by any of us, but is the product of some artificial intelligence — how will we respond when that becomes our normative experience?

Ultimately, all of this will devolve upon us — to our strength of character, our will, our vision. So our most enduring topic must remain the behavior of the species, in particular those in most immediate proximity — those with power over our actions, those over whom we have power, and ourselves. This is the true evergreen resource for our poetry, and for everything else we do. We fascinate ourselves, in large part because we are so unlike other animals, who are predictable, even when enigmatic. We, on the other hand, behave in ways that defy our own understanding, and once we think we have caught up, will defy again.

We considered, and will continue to consider, all this and more through haiku, which is certainly not the only tool at our disposal, but it is a capacious and flexible one, with its own challenges and resources, and enough to matter if we make it so. I have enjoyed your ponderings and your poetry as we have explored what we do with the bulk of our lives — work. Thank you, and keep working!
stealing a pencil
for my little boy
a haiku
— Mark Gilbert

*

posting a haiku
breaking the tedium
of another working day
— Rachel Sutcliffe

*

writing haiku —
even the moon
has a dayside
— Ernesto P. Santiago

*

work history
a collection of poems on
multi colored post its
— Michael Henry Lee

*

haiku eyes . . .
the secret weapon
of a writer
— Willie Bongcaron
The “I don’t know (I don’t care)” — silence
an intelligent answer
it seems
— Stefano Riondato

one theme
poly vocal rhythms
sound feel across the globe
— S. Radhamani

big emotions
in seventeen syllables —
haiku at will
— Angela Giordano

work stress
but then the frog
jumps in
— Roberta Beary

introspection —
one by one my thoughts
go online
— Arvinder Kaur
lightning
on my horizon
ionized ball point
— Ashoka Weerakkody

*  
catharsis . . .
needs more time
to write a fine haiku
— Hifsa Ashraf

*  
ginko walk
along the way
the world
— Kerstin Park

*  
thinking
outside the cubicle
haijin in the workplace
— Pat Davis

*  
we haiku here
because all of us
love haiku
— Rosa Maria Di Salvatore
healing . . . 
a moment frozen
in words and shared
— Madhuri Pillai

bitten nails a fragment of sky peeling off bark
— Betty Shropshire

black brush
and white paper
scent of this rose
— Christine Eales

awakening the world
out from daze and dream — haiku offering
— Adjei Agyei-Baah

Sunday evening
ritual submission
the least I could do
— Ron Scully
weekly challenge
super motivated
haiku team
— Olivier Schopfer

working lunch —
between bites
a poem emerges
— Peter Jastermsky

the understatement of the year: why haiku?
— Adrian Bouter

illuminating
the office gloom
haiku fairy
— Marietta McGregor

coffee break —
looking inadvertently
through the window
— Tomislav Maretic
and closing on a personal note:

I love
haiku workshops
and you, Jim
— Marta Chocilowska

Imagine that — our small gatherings of words inspiring love: what a wonderful world.

From October 2014 through April 2016 Haiku Foundation president Jim Kacian offered a column on haiku for the London Financial Times centered on the theme of work. Subsequently we shared these columns with the haiku community at large on The Haiku Foundation blog Troutswirl, along with an invitation to join in the fun. 52 of these columns ran throughout 2017, and are gathered here as the Haiku in the Workplace Archive.