

of stepping on his dead wife's comb, although she was still very much alive.

Poem after poem called to mind *A Year's Speculations on Haiku* by Robert Spiess, and the speculation for February fourth: "... those haiku that intimate a point of transition, the moment of transformation, yes!"

For example, after reading the collection, this poem and its, 'yes,' kept returning to me:

the first to go not going there

The collection works so well because it is not a one-trick pony. There is warmth in it, the kind that took me to my role as a father and made me stop reading for a moment or two to gratefully remember those bitter-sweet days.

still winter's night
knowing them all
by their weight on the stairs

This is a fine collection, and reading it may have you asking, what do my poems say? What does this season of my life tell? What are the moments that read your life?

No Heroic Measures, by Roland Packer (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2024). 130 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-958408-41-4. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by George Swede

Fellow Canadian Roland Packer engages the reader's imagination right away with the title of his collection, *No Heroic Measures*. It's puzzling until one realizes that Packer is referring to heroic couplets and

their measures of iambic pentameter common to epic and mock-epic poetry. By doing so, he is poking fun at both the grand epic and at the more humble haiku. The result is irony and humor, both of which are found aplenty in this collection like this subtle one-liner from which the title comes:

so soft the snow no heroic measures

And, these two that poke gentle fun at religious beliefs:

finger puppets ...	a new date
my daughter asks me	for the Rapture
<i>What's a soul?</i>	fireflies

The humor can also come from the more bawdy part of the spectrum:

now hiring
all positions
strip club

To write about sex in a fresh manner is not easy, especially with a short form such as haiku, but Packer does so with this rueful piece:

graffito love
on the overpass
morning after

He is equally effective in dealing with long-standing relationships:

yours, mine
till the house is sold
the rain still ours

Haiku about nature that don't read like countless others are tough to compose, but Packer finds a way:

the span
of a summer's day
daddy-long legs

mist at dawn
from the other side
a loon's call

As do so many haiku collections, this one also includes a few prose statements in the guise of haiku:

a clown's smile
in the small-town parade
painted on

half-light a dinghy adrift

Nevertheless, readers are going to be unconcerned about a few lapses of judgement because *No Heroic Measures* is too full of the real thing.

What sets Packer apart from most other excellent haiku poets are his explorations of the form his words can take beyond the typical horizontal layout of one-to-three lines:

to
tem
y
our
s
tor
y
be
come
s
mine

The verticality of this haiku seems natural because the word “totem” strongly suggests “totem poles” that are used to tell the history, culture and ancestry of a group of people. Packer's leap of imagination occurs when he turns an expected totemic tale into one of a blissful union of two persons.

As must have become clear by now, Packer is an adventurous poet who reveals his moments of realization in unusual ways that expand the

reader's interest. In the next example, he stretches a one-liner across two facing pages while at the same time compressing the spaces between the words:

morningsuntheopenarms

ofacrossingguard

With these two changes in structure, the crossing guard's grand "safe-to-go" gesture is doubly magnified into a heart-warming experience for the reader.

This book contains ninety-six poems arranged into eight sections of twelve each. Those that involve optically interesting manipulations of form total twenty-nine and a number of these appear in each section. Most of the visuals are recognizable as haiku, like the two above. But a few look to be more comfortable in a collection of concrete poetry. Nevertheless, *No Heroic Measures* will be a welcome addition to the list of books that push the boundaries of the English-language haiku.