

Before There was Before: Poems by Wendy Drexler (Iris Press) \$16.

Review by Doug Holder

I am not surprised that poet Wendy Drexler is a cavity-nest monitor for the Massachusetts Audubon Society. I am not quite sure what that is, but I imagine she spends a lot of time in nature—watching and observing—all fodder for this wonderfully observed collection “ Before There was Before.”

Drexler has a number of poetry collections to her credit and has been published in top shelf journals such as, Barrow Street, Salamander, Ibbetson Street and others. She uses the props of nature, the nuances of relationships, the very origins of the universe, as the basis for her work. But this not some vague, conceptual work. Drexler personalizes the poetry, and as a result she makes the poem relevant to readers of all sensibilities.

In her poem, “The Elephants,” Drexler observes a group of these animals as they wrap themselves in their deceased mother’s bones. This is a poem that Balanchine himself could of put to dance,

“ This is their poetry, their grief.

*Slowly they sway
their gentle stamens of their trunks.*

*One wraps her trunk around
her mother’s skull.*

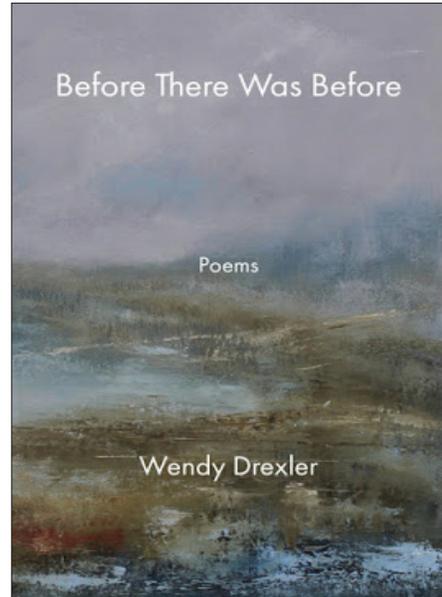
*One combs his mother’s pelvis
with the sole of his foot.*

*The cheeks of the elephants are matted
with red grass and stained with tears.*

*The elephants flap the ruffled flowers
of their ears.*

*They have found her bones.
There’s nothing left but bones.”*

And Drexler does not have to be situated in some pastoral scene to appreciate beauty. In fact in her poem “ Light 48 on the Storrow Drive Underpass” she praises a banal light fixture in a tunnel on Storrow Drive in Boston. She puts her microscope to it and the poem radiates its life to the reader, as evidenced in this passage:



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*"Praise the beam of light that slices
through the late afternoon traffic.*

*And the faint scatter of that light
on the roadbed graded to a gradual bend.*

Praise the gradual bend.

*And praise the worker who climbed up
the catwalk at 4 a.m. to tape
the stencil, R48 in rusty red ,..."*

And the book is beautifully presented. The cover painting is by Tanya Hayes Lee . She presents a misty, primal landscape—our beginnings, our endings—the light—the dark—all encapsulated in this fine collection.