



## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

line made visible in its column down the page as it describes the people in line. By the end the speaker realizes that she must be her “own second cup / of coffee, strong,” shoring herself in strikingly concise language.

The keen eye behind the poems sees, in “Sunday Morning Bowling League,” that “No matter what happened yesterday / or what might come in the night / they take their strikes, their spares, / seriously, anchored in camaraderie— / high-fives, the slapping of shoulders, / *nice ball*” as if the league has replaced family, and the supportive banter among its members becomes a prescription for caring about and living with one another. Drexler homes in with great compassion on a contemporary tendency of secular morality to replace that of church-Sunday. And in the poem, “Deluxe Town Diner,” a sense of possibility and of salvation comes across with humor in the ever present staples of a diner: “Refuge of the Dream—Gulden’s / spicy brown on Hebrew National, / honey bear, bottle of Tabasco, / cartel of napkins, ... polyglot Reubens and Rachels, Cobb salad, / democratic potpies. ... Deep in our duct- / taped booth, we are sated.”

A long poem in eighteen parts, “Gas Stations, Drive-ins, The Bright Motels” makes up the entire middle section of the book. It is written in the voice of a child of divorce, and is moving in its ability to relay the child’s anguish in direct childlike language: “When / I play, I play alone: separate / into families my trading cards— / horses from flowers from birds.” “Daddy is generous with his ladle / of small talk.” With a life of shuttling between a new home and Mommy’s boyfriends, and visits with Daddy at his home or in motels, the child must “pretend Mommy and Daddy / are married again, and I’m in / the orphanage” waiting to be chosen by her parents as if to affirm that she was ever wanted. And in the concluding part she must “trace [her]self back into being.” With great deft, Drexler makes us feel the tragedy of how early in life this urge to re-imagine one’s place in the world becomes an imperative.

The title poem, part of a series from “Hopper Landscapes,” is in the last section of the collection. Written in the voice of the woman in the painting it speaks of “hills that gather into loaves” as if they are a form of sustenance for her. She laments: “To be the one. To be the only one, / my wrists shapely and disconsolate. / My fingers grip the bedrail hard. / I console myself with light detached / from the empty wall.” Always the desire to be *somebody* to *someone*, tinged with the angst of a return to isolation, shown with the solid shapes and deep tones of Hopper.

There are poems here of assertion as well as longing. In “Sun In An Empty Room,” the speaker implores, “Don’t call it *empty*, call it *waiting*, / if you are.” In “Riding Bareback,” “I let loose the reins, lean forward, // grip his withers, the cord of his warm neck, //

whisper into his chestnut ear, *Keep going. // Finish what you’ve started!*” Words, both urgent and wise intended as well for the rider, and for us. Poems about lovers, husbands, and children abound here, affirming perseverance, and written with lyric control in this affecting collection.