



We Sing You, Jimmy Sky

Deirdre Dore

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I am Reading James Schuyler's Hymn to Life

Aloud one page a night, to my own one, my mister,
my grumpy bastard. Nine pages, nine days
and though poetry is not his thing he acquiesces.
The groaning starts immediately at *strangulated hernia*
and persists until *tonsils on a chest of drawers*
and he squawks, *enough!* Thank God for thunderclouds, big
lusty lions that scuttle the coercive heat, all growl
no rain. A canoe bangs over my mister's weir,
fiberglass scrapes and paints a boulder lurid & green,
bird sounds. The Kettle River purls

as I roll Hymn to Life into a baton to swat
at wasps swarming a big fat roast meat dinner.
Our guests didn't show and we're alone,
summery and deathlike; July is not
usually this ideal.

Blue John

My brother-in-law was raised on a Montana farm, and after the cows
teats were pulled, pail filled and cream skimmed off for butter, the 6 kids
were fed the milk. I could say force-fed because they hated it,
sour with dudgeon for the cream they craved they called it blue john.
And that's how day two's morning sky freshens,
with the colour of thin milk.

At 5 AM while the clumsy world sleeps,
I spot three deer below the weir in the rushes;
a doe and her big twins, bright as buffed oak.
They are not crossing the river so much as weaving and circling
in and through, presenting a minut or a sarabande,
a separating and coming together again
that makes a pattern only they know the steps to.
The doe lifts her head every few moments
to scan for trouble, some scent or sound that doesn't belong

and perhaps she senses that I'm watching
through my mister's binos, the ones he hunts with.
But I hold no rifle now and the bob and dip
of their heads feels as close as breath.

That evening we get through the whole second page:
trees - blue jays - a woman collects June roses.

Each year the same but different. My mister settles in with this.
I'm thinking of the river and its sameness and difference,
not year to year, but moment to moment.

The dog steps on a frog sleeping under the tea towel
dropped on the patio last night.
Every night the groggies, every morning the new resolve.
This dichotomy between evening and morning,
the plans we make large as houses.

The Ordinariness of Midday

My grumpy bastard shouts and growls while I vow
never again, the river runs over dots and blocks of rocks
& we squabble in a heavy canoe; as usual we've waited
too long and bump along the bottom
paddling against a wind, the sky fills
once again with black threat

till we settle and maneuver, pull up on a sandy cove
in front of a deep hole where only one deer has tracked.
Sandpipers chirp from the opposite bank
& we snatch our clothes off

not for sex but to dive, and swim. In big childish letters
my own one scratches into the sand, DEE'S BARE BAR.

None of morning's sober resolves, nor evening's
extravagant plans are about. It is midday.
Midday is the doing.

That evening, page 3 of a Hymn to Life in hand, we juggle *gravestones*
and *periwinkles* against our own obdurate thirst. Thirst wins.

I mix a gin and tonic with a splash of vermouth,
my mister's got some rum & coke thing going.

He says, *I'm sorry honey that page you can throw out the window*
3 is just a lot of bullshit and filler.

Bullshit and filler. Hmmmm. So far page 2 is winning.

Like the Eliot reference thrown in helter skelter.
And suddenly I realize this is Schuyler's response to the Wasteland.
Cruel April and all that talk of where they've been. Hell and damnation
and I want to yell cheater cheater corny cheater
which is really funny seeing as I'm riffing off Hymn to Life which
is riffing off Wasteland and why not go directly to the source?

Ospreys patrol the river. Sometimes one will grab a fish
too big to haul up & out of the water,
claws caught he'll be dragged down
& under to drown
though personally speaking I have never seen it.

*What's happening! Your reading is deteriorating!
You gotta keep up the pace! What are you doing?!*

I'm paddling in the river, just lazy criss-crossing the kayak
back and forth against the current
looking for the submerged golf balls we shot, my dog
swimming after me from one side to the other,
her wide-as-golf-ball-eyes pinned on me.
He's making rock pile habitats for the fish,
everything he does is measurable.
The neighbour appears on the riverbank
stumbling about the rocks, old and tragic
in shorts and sneakers, his wife is ill.
My mister tells him about his toothache, the tooth that
was pulled, old man says I knew this guy
had an infection in his tooth
it traveled down his body and ate all the cartilage in his eyes,
two weeks later he was dead! And I see instead of knees
I've written eyes.

Later back at our Hymn my grouchy mister shouts
*Start at the Lincoln Memorial line and go from there!
I'm waiting!*

His whiskey hiatus is over.
As long as we're critiquing, I say, I'd like to critique you as an
audience & I give you minus ten for being obnoxious & rude.
The blackbird won't stop squawking.

We drove up into the wasteland yesterday
yes I said wasteland
it's the fresh logging scars and scrubby pine
and rutted road makes me say it,
looking for huckleberries.
We found the bushes but barren, the dozen berries
rattling around in the plastic tub. I ate them, no pie.
But along the way 2 separate beautiful does,
appeared, lit from inside & glowing.
And the lake, NeverTouch, immaculate
virginal, dark, blind. The lake is an eye
like a river is a wing. Someone has built
an effigy, no I mean cross, a memorial on the little island.
Cement and plaster of Paris and plastic flowers.
He wants to pull it down, it is defacing the island,
but I stop him.
The ride home is slow going & I fall asleep.
The day feels wasted, hot and buttery.

Schuyler hid a surprise for us amongst the rain,
wind and periwinkles, just after the Lincoln Memorial,
my own one says read it again, that bit about the stroking.
I do. Do you know this bit?

The cat's ridged skull, her lifted thighs,
& the word he's waiting for
finally *fuck*ed.

Okay, he says, *I didn't hear that, it's absolutely*

better than I thought it was

and on the strength of the stroking of the cat's skull
or the thighs
he now ranks page 4 as number one.

A roving of fog crosses the river & when we get to the cabin
the dogs growling and hip-checking each
other along the way, we find the place
so warm against the chill
of this summer day that I am overcome
with longing for what will be gone.
The log jam that forced a sandy beach to form
amongst the rocks downstream, how many years did
we swim there? He burned the jam & it's all rock now.
Even the children, even the friends.

The river gave it up so freely, then
before we could grab & hold tight took it away.
At the cabin I find a recipe for wrinkles-
fresh butter, essence of turpentine & mastic.

The Fifth Page is Missing

Folded up somewhere in a pocket wet or blurred it doesn't matter, he ranked it high though, the highest yet but how much will be remembered?

It echoed something & I want to find it because I have already asked does a measurable life have more value? I mean output, simple tasks on a daily basis:

4 feet of rock work

6 cedar planks milled

3 terraces boxed in those same cedar planks

My horse's belly is crusty with bug bites and she lifts her lips in a grin when I scratch her, then groans, orgasmic when I ride her bareback into the river.

A spray of mulleins in bloom straight as gate posts grow on the trail. My mare bites the tops off and eats them.

I need to outfit my saddlebags: water, sesame seed snaps, pliers, pad, pencil, hoof pick.

Here is my name in Greek:

Δαρδαρέ

I'm slow and dumb today because we went to the neighbour's last night and round the fire drank wine & the thing I remember was

the moon poised above the giant yellow pine in a corny stunning display the pine pointing it up like a black arrow in the dusky sky & then the very next moment it shifted and me and Alec were the only ones who stared & he's 4.

It's time to close the windows against the heat & here is the page, saying Rock Creek & bison & quarrelling & shampoo & something about time & water & just yesterday we drove to Rock Creek & I shampooed my hair in olive oil and egg & vinegar & lemon juice & today it looks dirty & no we didn't quarrel about when to leave, my intractable mate merely beeped.

There is no point, we are not hungry enough to make one. 2 boxes of fruit are left on the doorstep from the man who prowls the valley with men in woodsy camo who come to hunt and kill; apricots & green peaches for cougar & bear.

Doldrums

She doesn't have many years left and she wants them to be happy ones.

Who gets to decide?

Just don't ask us to move you again, her son, my own one,

my clear one tells her.

I was vulnerable then, people were making my decisions.

She's booked an overnight at the Fontainebleu
Assisted Living & again the tears.

Page 6 is relegated down to the bottom of the pile
based on some blather about daffodil blooms being no big deal,
we disagree & for once agree
but I am distracted, a teary message left by my daughter
& now there is no answer.

The hummingbirds buzz the gladiolas that are just beginning to bud
and yesterday a kingbird. Mother-in-law's pared down now,
the piano, the brass tables, the 1999 Buick Lucerne
all gone.

Try to be patient with me. We try.

My father in NY remembers when Robert Moses tried
to build a bridge from
Oyster Bay to Rye, all the infrastructure, bypass,
highways were in place - I *could have visited Bubby every day*

he said, *every day*. Would that have kept his brother alive?
Would his death have been more bearable?

Phone calls. My mother gets stuck in a parking lot
conversation with Helen. Ilsa dead, Samuel dead,
cancer & heartbreak. Shy or boozing it's always there.

Coeur de Lion.

We sit on the rocks by the river & drink beer.

My neighbour is young and brown and blonde.
I have nothing to say to that. It's always been such.
The kids go by on tubes, unchaperoned, the youngest
only three and all the rapids ahead, the low
slung branches, the rocks. It's good haying weather.
Everything else feels
like waiting. Alpha beta gamma delta,

Carson translates fragments of Sappho,
girl, sweetvoiced

but the facing Greek surely says *Parthenon adyfaron*.

*That girl in a paper crown, brown
the way she wanted to shake that baby
who snatched it off but
sank to her knees instead too abject*

*to object, her eyes I've never seen anything
so beautiful. Dreams mock summer
with Nazis & rifles hidden under coverlets.
No escape. A woman
in a baseball cap walks her black
poodle on a leash. Everything else runs free.*

NO GO

No hot tub. No whiskey. No hymn.
Baseball.

Look at this honey, they got 2 games on side by side

I dunno but the pitcher's lousy.

The secrets of page 7 stay unrevealed.
I suspect it will be more of the same:
weather, weed & flower, Washington DC
& death. What hymn to life can eschew death?
I paddled the kayak upriver in the afternoon.
Portaged it over the shoals, nothing Palm Beach about it.

When they sprinkled old Tom's ashes from the bridge
the Minister slipped and dropped the whole damn plastic bag
intact to float downstream high and white in all its self-
conscious radiance, a swan for the curious
and the tourists.

Lucky 7

lalalalala

Jesus.

Again the daffodils? Again the dandelions?
Which would not be so so bad if the drippy
nose hadn't surfaced - *this goes to the bottom*
of the heap, there's a whole pile at the bottom
of the heap, if it weren't for the larch tree -
we both roused for the larch
though 'greener than greenest grass'
was a bit much.

The seven samurai the seventh seal
7 pages, 1 1/2 to go
my hate fellow says can't you split the difference
& get this over with?

The morning is spent in a laky tourist
town, which used to survive on orchards
& vineyards alone, but now brags jet skis
& sundresses & sandals & RV parks.

We buy
white cherries, Rainier's, golden & streaked in red
soft fruit & softer girls
they overrun the place.

Here bounce tits galore, walking 'round town in a bikini -
Caucasian & hetero
East Indian, Portuguese & French Canadian.
Everyone banking, parading or picking fruit.

In the orchards, the apples are still coming,
hard as balls, cherries gone
& not one bookstore in town
not even one.

Are beautiful girls less treasured now?
There seem to be so many of them.
Where did the homely people go?
The messy & hairy ones, with big noses & knobbed hands.
The ones who've cracked & split
open & sealed time & again.

The wind blows through this place all winter
drives it back to the desert.
That is the covenant it keeps.

Promise

Chilled from the dunk, the swim, crabbing along
the bottom, *here it's shallow, here deep* then groggy
with wine and waiting we finally stuff it
all back into its wherewithal, the red pot
blackened on the stove, left over corn,
untouched chili, plastic chairs
dump the ice, feed the dogs & go home.
Jimmy Sky's poem waits & though my buddy balks I insist,
& promise that this will nearly end the Hymn
to Life. *And it's a rain thick pear tree childhood.*

The whole river bbq was a no-show,
oh you have too many friends my Princess
of the Hay, you with your moonshine Prince.
The river did its own thing never flagging,
a warp of snake scooping minnows,
flock of mergansers running before the tubers.

Once wet sweetly wet I
swore that I would not be disappointed
I'll be relieved
apricotoatmealcake venisonchili cornonthecob hotdogs
notwithstanding. We'll be eating it for a week.

The river never manipulates it floods & runs & dries & dams
rocks & shoals & osprey
feathers have muscles you don't know what loneliness and disappoint-
ment are yet
with youth on your side
keep it as you can

One remembers when it was otherwise, when youth
clung to us, that's the part that stings.
Another covenant that won't be denied.

Hey, I know the Greek *alpha beta*
wanna hear it?

Thought not.

But there is, as you know, something appealing
about being forgotten & left
to a river's devices.

Jimmy Sky

Sun gone, moon yet to come, a purgatory, dissonance
of ritual and routine. And there it is: the Japanese cherries
the dripping sun, the young trees, and god bless him
Washington DC again & a sinus headache.

Jesus *he must live there*, my bed-mate says, *who the hell cares about Washington DC?* And it's true who does?
But something touches me in a way
best left unexhumed.

*Okay so he rambled on and on about spring
but I still don't like it.*

The dead branches on the young pines by my garden
guarding the rhubarb & blueberries
they formed a latticework, a net, a veil of sticks
pokey & protective both
that was just right, & now they're gone.

Lollipop farm. For all his wildness my mister has suburban
sensibilities. It can't be helped. He must leave
his mark, tame it, the river, the woods. Illusion.
*In the corn water I pulled from the river and set to boil
squirmed a pinhead minnow,
my own one tried to save it and I didn't.
That needs to be told.*

Sweet companion, a nuthatch came at me yesterday; I was watering
the gladiolas spiking up into the heat, rose & white
washed out & dusty when she flew hard
straight into my hand, then swerved away
to perch on a branch. She stared at me then.

There was something in her eyes I never thought
I would see in a songbird's. Nearly rage
& she came at me again.

I left her then, and bowed, laughing, *forgive me.*

I've got Jimmy Sky's Hymn to Life rolled up, swatting
at wasps swarming the roast pork congealing
on the picnic table by the river, fat & sweet the meat & much more
than we can handle, the two of us, alone.

That man of mine berates me for lighting the inaugural
fire in his new bbq
with garbage paper, so I take off on my bicycle,
the sky is so much wider north of here, and there's the moon,
the one we left behind, half full. Our neighbours' fence is down,

for years like that, long strands of wire lie coiled in the weeds
springing & looping in menace, my dog pants
& races behind me to keep up.

A clarion call of donkey, then crow, animal sounds
and the cyclic crunch of wheels on gravel.
A spitting & autumn lands.



Deirdre Dore's poetry and plays have been published and/or produced in journals and on stages in the USA & Canada. Originally from New York, she now lives with her husband alongside a river in British Columbia where she catches horses, pursues an MFA in Creative Writing and works with trees.