

Classic Poetry Series

**Delmore Schwartz**  
**- poems -**

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# Delmore Schwartz(8 December 1913 - 11 July 1966)

Delmore Schwartz was born December 8, 1913, in Brooklyn to Romanian immigrant parents. Their marriage however failed and this affected him all his life.

## <b>Biography</b>

In spite of his unhappy and unsettled childhood though he was was a gifted and intellectual young student. He enrolled early at Columbia University, and also studied at the University of Wisconsin, eventually receiving his bachelor's degree in 1935 in philosophy from New York University.

In 1936 he won the Bowdoin Prize in the Humanities for his essay Poetry as Imitation. In 1937 his short story In Dreams Begin Responsibilities was published in Partisan Review a left wing following year his first book-length work, also titled In Dreams Begin Responsibilities was published and received much praise.

He never finished his advanced degree in philosophy at Harvard, but was hired as the Briggs-Copeland Lecturer, and later given an Assistant Professorship.

In 1947 Schwartz ended his twelve-year association with Harvard and returned to New York City. His book of short stories The World is a Wedding was published the following year. Time compared Schwartz to Stendhal and Anton Chekhov. By this same time his work was widely anthologized. He was publishing critical essays on other important literary figures and cultural topics, and was the poetry editor at Partisan Review, and later also at New Republic.

He took on a number of teaching positions at Bennington College, Kenyon College, Princeton University, the writer's colony Yaddo, and at Syracuse University.

In 1960 Schwartz became the youngest poet ever to win the Bollingen Prize. His friend Saul Bellow wrote a semi-fictional memoir about Schwartz called Humboldt's Gift, which won the Pulitzer Prize.

In the summer of 1966 Schwartz checked into the Times Squares hotel, to focus on his writing. He worked continuously but on July 11 he had a heart attack in the lobby of the hotel.

## <b>Tributes</b>

One of the earliest well-known tributes to Schwartz came from Schwartz's friend, fellow poet <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/robert-lowell/">Robert Lowell</a>, who published the poem "To Delmore Schwartz" in 1959 (while Schwartz was still alive) in the book *Life Studies*. In it Lowell reminisces about the time that the two poets lived together in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1946, writing that they were "underseas fellows, nobly mad,/ we talked away our friends."

One year following Schwartz's death, in 1967, his former student at Syracuse University, the rock musician <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/lou-reed/">Lou Reed</a>, dedicated his song "European Son" to Schwartz (although the lyrics themselves made no direct reference to Schwartz).

Then, in 1968, Schwartz's friend and peer, fellow poet, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/john-berryman/">John Berryman</a>, dedicated his book *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* "to the sacred memory of Delmore Schwartz," including 12 elegiac poems about Schwartz in the book. In "Dream Song #149," Berryman wrote of Schwartz,

In the brightness of his promise,  
unstained, I saw him thro' the mist of the actual  
blazing with insight, warm with gossip  
thro' all our Harvard years  
when both of us were just becoming known  
I got him out of a police-station once, in Washington, the world is tref  
and grief too astray for tears.

The most ambitious literary tribute to Schwartz came in 1975 when Saul Bellow, a one-time protege of Schwartz's, published his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Humboldt's Gift* which was based on his relationship with Schwartz. Although the character of Von Humboldt Fleischer is Bellow's portrait of Schwartz during Schwartz's declining years, the book is actually a testament to Schwartz's lasting artistic influence on Bellow.

Lou Reed's 1982 album *The Blue Mask* included his second Schwartz homage with the song "My House". This song is much more of a tribute to Schwartz than the above-mentioned "European Son" in that the lyrics of "My House" are about Reed's relationship with Schwartz. In the song, Reed writes that Schwartz "was the first great man that I ever met".

## <b>Cultural References</b>

Scott Spencer uses the final six lines of Schwartz's poem "I Am a Book I Neither Wrote nor Read" as an epigraph for his National Book Award nominated novel, *Endless Love*. The words "endless love" are the final two words of that poem.

In the film *Star Trek Generations*, the villain Tolian Soran quotes Schwartz's poem "Calmly We Walk Through This April Day", telling Picard, "Time is the fire in which we burn."

In 1996, Donald Margulies wrote the play *Collected Stories*, in which the aging writer and teacher Ruth Steiner (a fictional character) recounts a great affair that she had in her youth with Delmore Schwartz in Greenwich Village (during the period of time when Schwartz was in declining health from alcoholism and mental illness) to her young student, Lisa. Lisa then controversially uses the affair revelation as the basis for a successful novel. The play was produced twice off-Broadway and once on Broadway.

# A Dream Of Whitman Paraphrased, Recognized And Made More Vivid By Renoir

Twenty-eight naked young women bathed by the shore  
Or near the bank of a woodland lake  
Twenty-eight girls and all of them comely  
Worthy of Mack Sennett's camera and Florenz Ziegfield's  
Foolish Follies.

They splashed and swam with the wondrous unconsciousness  
Of their youth and beauty  
In the full spontaneity and summer of the fishes of  
awareness  
Heightened, intensified and softened  
By the soft and the silk of the waters  
Blooded made ready by the energy set afire by the  
nakedness of the body,

Electrified: deified: undenied.

A young man of thirty years beholds them from a distance.  
He lives in the dungeon of ten million dollars.  
He is rich, handsome and empty standing behind the linen curtains  
Beholding them.  
Which girl does he think most desirable, most beautiful?  
They are all equally beautiful and desirable from the gold distance.  
For if poverty darkens discrimination and makes  
perception too vivid,  
The gold of wealth is also a form of blindness.  
For has not a Frenchman said, Although this is America...

What he has said is not entirely relevant,  
That a naked woman is a proof of the existence of God.

Where is he going?  
Is he going to be among them to splash and to laugh with them?  
They did not see him although he saw them and was there among them.  
He saw them as he would not have seen them had they been conscious  
Of him or conscious of men in complete depravation:  
This is his enchantment and impoverishment

As he possesses them in gaze only.

. . .He felt the wood secrecy, he knew the June softness  
The warmth surrounding him crackled  
Held in by the mansard roof mansion  
He glimpsed the shadowy light on last year's brittle leaves fallen,  
Looked over and overlooked, glimpsed by the fall of death,  
Winter's mourning and the May's renewal.

Delmore Schwartz

# A Young Child And His Pregnant Mother

At four years Nature is mountainous,  
Mysterious, and submarine. Even

A city child knows this, hearing the subway's  
Rumor underground. Between the grate,

Dropping his penny, he learned out all loss,  
The irretrievable cent of fate,

And now this newest of the mysteries,  
Confronts his honest and his studious eyes----

His mother much too fat and absentminded,  
Gazing past his face, careless of him,

His fume, his charm, his bedtime, and warm milk,  
As soon the night will be too dark, the spring

Too late, desire strange, and time too fast,  
This estrangement is a gradual thing

(His mother once so svelte, so often sick!  
Towering father did this: what a trick!)

Explained to cautiously, containing fear,  
Another being's being, becoming dear:

All men are enemies: thus even brothers  
Can separate each other from their mothers!

No better example than this unborn brother  
Shall teach him of his exile from his mother,

Measured by his distance from the sky,  
Spoken in two vowels,  
I am I.

Delmore Schwartz

# Albert Einstein To Archibald Macleish

I should have been a plumber fixing drains.  
And mending pure white bathtubs for the great Diogenes  
(who scorned all lies, all liars, and all tyrannies),

And then, perhaps, he would bestow on me -- majesty!  
(O modesty aside, forgive my fallen pride, O hidden  
    majesty,  
The lamp, the lantern, the lucid light he sought for

All too often -- sick humanity!)

Delmore Schwartz



# All Night, All Night

"I have been one acquainted with the night" - Robert Frost

Rode in the train all night, in the sick light. A bird  
Flew parallel with a singular will. In daydream's moods and  
attitudes

The other passengers slumped, dozed, slept, read,  
Waiting, and waiting for place to be displaced  
On the exact track of safety or the rack of accident.

Looked out at the night, unable to distinguish  
Lights in the towns of passage from the yellow lights  
Numb on the ceiling. And the bird flew parallel and still  
As the train shot forth the straight line of its whistle,  
Forward on the taut tracks, piercing empty, familiar --

The bored center of this vision and condition looked and  
looked  
Down through the slick pages of the magazine (seeking  
The seen and the unseen) and his gaze fell down the well  
Of the great darkness under the slick glitter,  
And he was only one among eight million riders and  
readers.

And all the while under his empty smile the shaking drum  
Of the long determined passage passed through him  
By his body mimicked and echoed. And then the train  
Like a suddenly storming rain, began to rush and thresh--  
The silent or passive night, pressing and impressing  
The patients' foreheads with a tightening-like image  
Of the rushing engine proceeded by a shaft of light  
Piercing the dark, changing and transforming the silence  
Into a violence of foam, sound, smoke and succession.

A bored child went to get a cup of water,  
And crushed the cup because the water too was  
Boring and merely boredom's struggle.  
The child, returning, looked over the shoulder  
Of a man reading until he annoyed the shoulder.

A fat woman yawned and felt the liquid drops  
Drip down the fleece of many dinners.

And the bird flew parallel and parallel flew  
The black pencil lines of telephone posts, crucified,  
At regular intervals, post after post  
Of thrice crossed, blue-belled, anonymous trees.

And then the bird cried as if to all of us:

O your life, your lonely life  
What have you ever done with it,  
And done with the great gift of consciousness?  
What will you ever do with your life before death's  
knife  
Provides the answer ultimate and appropriate?

As I for my part felt in my heart as one who falls,  
Falls in a parachute, falls endlessly, and feel the vast  
Draft of the abyss sucking him down and down,  
An endlessly helplessly falling and appalled clown:

This is the way that night passes by, this  
Is the overnight endless trip to the famous unfathomable  
abyss.

Delmore Schwartz

# America, America!

I am a poet of the Hudson River and the heights above it,  
the lights, the stars, and the bridges  
I am also by self-appointment the laureate of the Atlantic  
-of the peoples' hearts, crossing it  
to new America.

I am burdened with the truck and chimera, hope,  
acquired in the sweating sick-excited passage  
in steerage, strange and estranged  
Hence I must descry and describe the kingdom of emotion.

For I am a poet of the kindergarten (in the city)  
and the cemetery (in the city)  
And rapture and ragtime and also the secret city in the  
heart and mind  
This is the song of the natural city self in the 20th century.

It is true but only partly true that a city is a "tyranny of  
numbers"  
(This is the chant of the urban metropolitan and  
metaphysical self  
After the first two World Wars of the 20th century)

--- This is the city self, looking from window to lighted  
window  
When the squares and checks of faintly yellow light  
Shine at night, upon a huge dim board and slab-like tombs,  
Hiding many lives. It is the city consciousness  
Which sees and says: more: more and more: always more.

Delmore Schwartz

# Apollo Musagete, Poetry, And The Leader Of The Muses

Nothing is given which is not taken.

Little or nothing is taken which is not freely desired,  
freely, truly and fully.

"You would not seek me if you had not found me": this is  
true of all that is supremely desired and admired...

"An enigma is an animal," said the hurried, harried  
schoolboy:

And a horse divided against itself cannot stand;

And a moron is a man who believes in having too many  
wives: what harm is there in that?

O the endless fecundity of poetry is equaled  
By its endless inexhaustible freshness, as in the discovery  
of America and of poetry.

Hence it is clear that the truth is not strait and narrow but infinite:  
All roads lead to Rome and to poetry  
and to poem, sweet poem  
and from, away and towards are the same typography.

Hence the poet must be, in a way, stupid and naive and a  
little child;

Unless ye be as a little child ye cannot enter the kingdom  
of poetry.

Hence the poet must be able to become a tiger like Blake; a  
carousel like Rilke.

Hence he must be all things to be free, for all impersonations  
a doormat and a monument  
to all situations possible or actual

The cuckold, the cuckoo, the conqueror, and the coxcomb.

It is to him in the zoo that the zoo cries out and the hyena:  
"Hello, take off your hat, king of the beasts, and be seated,  
Mr. Bones."

And hence the poet must seek to be essentially anonymous.  
He must die a little death each morning.  
He must swallow his toad and study his vomit  
as Baudelaire studied la charogne of Jeanne Duval.

The poet must be or become both Keats and Renoir and  
Keats as Renoir.  
Mozart as Figaro and Edgar Allan Poe as Ophelia, stoned  
out of her mind  
drowning in the river called forever river and ever...

Keats as Mimi, Camille, and an aging gourmet.  
He must also refuse the favors of the unattainable lady  
(As Baudelaire refused Madame Sabatier when the fair  
blonde summoned him,

For Jeanne Duval was enough and more than enough,  
although she cuckolded him  
With errand boys, servants, waiters; reality was Jeanne Duval.  
Had he permitted Madame Sabatier to teach the poet a greater whiteness,  
His devotion and conception of the divinity of Beauty  
would have suffered an absolute diminution.)

The poet must be both Casanova and St. Anthony,

He must be Adonis, Nero, Hippolytus, Heathcliff, and  
Phaedre,  
Genghis Kahn, Genghis Cohen, and Gordon Martini  
Dandy Ghandi and St. Francis,

Professor Tenure, and Dizzy the dean and Disraeli of Death.

He would have worn the horns of existence upon his head,  
He would have perceived them regarding the looking-glass,  
He would have needed them the way a moose needs a hatrack;  
Above his heavy head and in his loaded eyes, black and scorched,

He would have seen the meaning of the hat-rack, above the glass  
Looking in the dark foyer.

For the poet must become nothing but poetry,  
He must be nothing but a poem when he is writing  
Until he is absent-minded as the dead are  
Forgetful as the nymphs of Lethe and a lobotomy...  
("the fat weed that rots on Lethe wharf").

Delmore Schwartz

# Archaic Bust Of Apollo

(After Rilke)

We cannot know the indescribable face  
Where the eyes like apples ripened. Even so,  
His torso has a candelabra's glow,  
His gaze, contained as in a mirror's grace,

Shines within it. Otherwise his breast  
Would not be dazzling. Nor would you recognize  
The smile that moves along his curving thighs,  
There where love's strength is caught within its nest.

This stone would not be broken, but intact  
Beneath the shoulders' flowing cataract,  
Nor would it glisten like a stallion's hide,

Brimming with radiance from every side  
As a star sparkles. Now it is dawn once more.  
All places scrutinize you. You must be reborn.

Delmore Schwartz

## At This Moment Of Time

Some who are uncertain compel me. They fear  
The Ace of Spades. They fear  
Loves offered suddenly, turning from the mantelpiece,  
Sweet with decision. And they distrust  
The fireworks by the lakeside, first the sput,  
Then the colored lights, rising.  
Tentative, hesitant, doubtful, they consume  
Greedily Caesar at the prow returning,  
Locked in the stone of his act and office.  
While the brass band brightly bursts over the water  
They stand in the crowd lining the shore  
Aware of the water beneath Him. They know it. Their eyes  
Are haunted by water

Disturb me, compel me. It is not true  
That "no man is happy," but that is not  
The sense which guides you. If we are  
Unfinished (we are, unless hope is a bad dream),  
You are exact. You tug my sleeve  
Before I speak, with a shadow's friendship,  
And I remember that we who move  
Are moved by clouds that darken midnight.

Delmore Schwartz



# Baudelaire

When I fall asleep, and even during sleep,  
I hear, quite distinctly, voices speaking  
Whole phrases, commonplace and trivial,  
Having no relation to my affairs.

Dear Mother, is any time left to us  
In which to be happy? My debts are immense.  
My bank account is subject to the court's judgment.  
I know nothing. I cannot know anything.  
I have lost the ability to make an effort.  
But now as before my love for you increases.  
You are always armed to stone me, always:  
It is true. It dates from childhood.

For the first time in my long life  
I am almost happy. The book, almost finished,  
Almost seems good. It will endure, a monument  
To my obsessions, my hatred, my disgust.

Debts and inquietude persist and weaken me.  
Satan glides before me, saying sweetly:  
"Rest for a day! You can rest and play today.  
Tonight you will work." When night comes,  
My mind, terrified by the arrears,  
Bored by sadness, paralyzed by impotence,  
Promises: "Tomorrow: I will tomorrow."  
Tomorrow the same comedy enacts itself  
With the same resolution, the same weakness.

I am sick of this life of furnished rooms.  
I am sick of having colds and headaches:  
You know my strange life. Every day brings  
Its quota of wrath. You little know  
A poet's life, dear Mother: I must write poems,  
The most fatiguing of occupations.

I am sad this morning. Do not reproach me.  
I write from a café near the post office,  
Amid the click of billiard balls, the clatter of dishes,  
The pounding of my heart. I have been asked to write  
"A History of Caricature." I have been asked to write  
"A History of Sculpture." Shall I write a history  
Of the caricatures of the sculptures of you in my heart?

Although it costs you countless agony,  
Although you cannot believe it necessary,  
And doubt that the sum is accurate,  
Please send me money enough for at least three weeks.

Delmore Schwartz

# By Circumstances Fed

By circumstances fed  
Which divide attention  
Among the living and the dead,  
Under the blooms of the blossoming sun,  
The gaze which is a tower towers  
Day and night, hour by hour,  
Critical of all and of one,  
Dissatisfied with every flower  
With all that's been done or undone,  
Converting every feature  
Into its own and unknown nature;  
So, once in the drugstore,  
Amid all the poppy, salve and ointment,  
I suddenly saw, estranged there,  
Beyond all disappointment,  
My own face in the mirror.

Delmore Schwartz



What am I now that I was then?  
May memory restore again and again  
The smallest color of the smallest day:  
Time is the school in which we learn,  
Time is the fire in which we burn.

Delmore Schwartz



# Concerning The Synthetic Unity Of Apperception

"Trash, trash!" the king my uncle said,  
"The spirit's smoke and weak as smoke ascends.  
"Sit in the sun and not among the dead,  
"Eat oranges! Pish tosh! the car attends.

"All ghosts came back. they do not like it there,  
"No silky water and no big brown bear,

"No beer and no siestas up above."  
"Uncle," I said, "I'm lonely. What is love?"

This drove him quite insane. Now he must knit  
Time and apperception, bit by tiny bit.

Delmore Schwartz

# Dogs Are Shakespearean, Children Are Strangers

Dogs are Shakespearean, children are strangers.  
Let Freud and Wordsworth discuss the child,  
Angels and Platonists shall judge the dog,  
The running dog, who paused, distending nostrils,  
Then barked and wailed; the boy who pinched his sister,  
The little girl who sang the song from Twelfth Night,  
As if she understood the wind and rain,  
The dog who moaned, hearing the violins in concert.  
—O I am sad when I see dogs or children!  
For they are strangers, they are Shakespearean.

Tell us, Freud, can it be that lovely children  
Have merely ugly dreams of natural functions?  
And you, too, Wordsworth, are children truly  
Clouded with glory, learned in dark Nature?  
The dog in humble inquiry along the ground,  
The child who credits dreams and fears the dark,  
Know more and less than you: they know full well  
Nor dream nor childhood answer questions well:  
You too are strangers, children are Shakespearean.

Regard the child, regard the animal,  
Welcome strangers, but study daily things,  
Knowing that heaven and hell surround us,  
But this, this which we say before we're sorry,  
This which we live behind our unseen faces,  
Is neither dream, nor childhood, neither  
Myth, nor landscape, final, nor finished,  
For we are incomplete and know no future,  
And we are howling or dancing out our souls  
In beating syllables before the curtain:  
We are Shakespearean, we are strangers.

Delmore Schwartz



# Far Rockaway

"the cure of souls." Henry James

The radiant soda of the seashore fashions  
Fun, foam and freedom. The sea laves  
The Shaven sand. And the light sways forward  
On self-destroying waves.

The rigor of the weekday is cast aside with shoes,  
With business suits and traffic's motion;  
The lolling man lies with the passionate sun,  
Or is drunken in the ocean.

A socialist health take should of the adult,  
He is stripped of his class in the bathing-suit,  
He returns to the children digging at summer,  
A melon-like fruit.

O glittering and rocking and bursting and blue  
-Eternities of sea and sky shadow no pleasure:  
Time unheard moves and the heart of man is eaten  
Consummately at leisure.

The novelist tangential on the boardwalk overhead  
Seeks his cure of souls in his own anxious gaze.  
"Here," he says, "With whom?" he asks, "This?" he questions,  
"What tedium, what blaze?"

"What satisfaction, fruit? What transit, heaven?  
Criminal? justified? arrived at what June?"  
That nervous conscience amid the concessions  
Is haunting, haunted moon.

Delmore Schwartz

# Father And Son

Father:

On these occasions, the feelings surprise,  
Spontaneous as rain, and they compel  
Explicitness, embarrassed eyes——

Son:

Father, you're not Polonius, you're reticent,  
But sure. I can already tell  
The unctious and falsetto of the sentiment  
Which gratifies the facile mouth, but springs  
From no felt, had, and wholly known things.

Father:

You must let me tell you what you fear  
When you wake up from sleep, still drunk with sleep:  
You are afraid of time and its slow drip,  
Like melting ice, like smoke upon the air  
In February's glittering sunny day.  
Your guilt is nameless, because its name is time,  
Because its name is death. But you can stop  
Time as it dribbles from you, drop by drop.

Son:

But I thought time was full of promises,  
Even as now, the emotion of going away——

Father:

That is the first of all its menaces,  
The lure of a future different from today;  
All of us always are turning away  
To the cinema and Asia. All of us go  
To one indeterminate nothing.

Son:

Must it be so?  
I question the sentiment you give to me,  
As premature, not to be given, learned alone  
When experience shrinks upon the chilling bone.  
I would be sudden now and rash in joy,

As if I lived forever, the future my toy.  
Time is a dancing fire at twenty-one,  
Singing and shouting and drinking to the sun,  
Powerful at the wheel of a motor-car,  
Not thinking of death which is foreign and far.

Father:

If time flowed from your will and were a feast  
I would be wrong to question your zest.  
But each age betrays the same weak shape.  
Each moment is dying. You will try to escape  
From melting time and your dissipating soul  
By hiding your head in a warm and dark hole.  
See the evasions which so many don,  
To flee the guilt of time they become one,  
That is, the one number among masses,  
The one anonymous in the audience,  
The one expressionless in the subway,  
In the subway evening among so many faces,  
The one who reads the daily newspaper,  
Separate from actor and act, a member  
Of public opinion, never involved.  
Integrated in the reverie of a fine cigar,  
Fleeing to childhood at the symphony concert,  
Buying sleep at the drugstore, grandeur  
At the band concert, Hawaii  
On the screen, and everywhere a specious splendor:  
One, when he is sad, has something to eat,  
An ice cream soda, a toasted sandwich,  
Or has his teeth fixed, but can always retreat  
From the actual pain, and dream of the rich.  
This is what one does, what one becomes  
Because one is afraid to be alone,  
Each with his own death in the lonely room.  
But there is a stay. You can stop  
Time as it dribbles from you, drop by drop.

Son:

Now I am afraid. What is there to be known?

Father:

Guilt, guilt of time, nameless guilt.

Grasp firmly your fear, thus grasping your self,  
Your actual will. Stand in mastery,  
Keeping time in you, its terrifying mystery.  
Face yourself, constantly go back  
To what you were, your own history.  
You are always in debt. Do not forget  
The dream postponed which would not quickly get  
Pleasure immediate as drink, but takes  
The travail of building, patience with means.  
See the wart on your face and on your friend's face,  
On your friend's face and indeed on your own face.  
The loveliest woman sweats, the animal stains  
The ideal which is with us like the sky ...

Son:

Because of that, some laugh, and others cry.

Father:

Do not look past and turn away your face.  
You cannot depart and take another name,  
Nor go to sleep with lies. Always the same,  
Always the same self from the ashes of sleep  
Returns with its memories, always, always,  
The phoenix with eight hundred thousand memories!

Son:

What must I do that is most difficult?

Father:

You must meet your death face to face,  
You must, like one in an old play,  
Decide, once for all, your heart's place.  
Love, power, and fame stand on an absolute  
Under the formless night and the brilliant day,  
The searching violin, the piercing flute.  
Absolute! Venus and Caesar fade at that edge,  
Hanging from the fiftieth-story ledge,  
Or diminished in bed when the nurse presses  
Her sickening unguents and her cold compresses.  
When the news is certain, surpassing fear,  
You touch the wound, the priceless, the most dear.  
There in death's shadow, you comprehend

The irreducible wish, world without end.

Son:

I begin to understand the reason for evasion,  
I cannot partake of your difficult vision.

Father:

Begin to understand the first decision.  
Hamlet is the example; only dying  
Did he take up his manhood, the dead's burden,  
Done with evasion, done with sighing,  
Done with revery.  
Decide that you are dying  
Because time is in you, ineluctable  
As shadow, named by no syllable.  
Act in that shadow, as if death were now:  
Your own self acts then, then you know.

Son:

My father has taught me to be serious.

Father:

Be guilty of yourself in the full looking-glass.

Delmore Schwartz

# Faust In Old Age

"Poet and veteran of childhood, look!  
See in me the obscene, for you have love,

For you have hatred, you, you must be judge,  
Deliver judgement, Delmore Schwartz.

Well-known wishes have been to war,  
The vicious mouth has chewed the vine.

The patient crab beneath the shirt  
Has charmed such interests as Indies meant.

For I have walked within and seen each sea,  
The fish that flies, the broken burning bird,

Born again, beginning again, my breast!  
Purple with persons like a tragic play.

For I have flown the cloud and fallen down,  
Plucked Venus, sneering at her moan.

I took the train that takes away remorse;  
I cast down every king like Socrates.

I knocked each nut to find the meat;  
A worm was there and not a mint.

Metaphysicians could have told me this,  
But each learns for himself, as in the kiss.

Polonius I poked, not him  
To whom aspires spire and hymn,

Who succors children and the very poor;  
I pierced the pompous Premier, not Jesus Christ,

I picked Polonius and Moby Dick,  
the ego bloomed into an octopus.

Now come I to the exhausted West at last;  
I know my vanity, my nothingness,

now I float will-less in despair's dead sea,  
Every man my enemy.

Spontaneous, I have too much to say,  
And what I say will no one not old see:

If we could love one another, it would be well.  
But as it is, I am sorry for the whole world, myself  
apart. My heart is full of memory and desire, and in  
its last nervousness, there is pity for those I have  
touched, but only hatred and contempt for myself."

Delmore Schwartz

# For The One Who Would Not Take His Life In His Hands

Athlete, virtuoso,  
Training for happiness,  
Bend arm and knee, and seek  
The body's sharp distress,  
For pain is pleasure's cost,  
Denial is route  
To speech before the millions  
Or personal with the flute.

The ape and great Achilles,  
Heavy with their fate,  
Batter doors down, strike  
Small children at the gate,  
Driven by love to this,  
As knock-kneed Hegel said,  
To seek with a sword their peace,  
That the child may be taken away  
From the hurly-burly and fed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, said  
The curious Socrates,  
I have asked, What is this life  
But a childermass,  
As Abraham recognized,  
A working with the knife  
At animal, maid and stone  
Until we have cut down  
All but the soul alone:  
Through hate we guard our love,  
And its distinction's known.

Delmore Schwartz



# For The One Who Would Take Man's Life In His Hands

Tiger Christ unsheathed his sword,  
Threw it down, became a lamb.  
Swift spat upon the species, but  
Took two women to his heart.  
Samson who was strong as death  
Paid his strength to kiss a slut.  
Othello that stiff warrior  
Was broken by a woman's heart.  
Troy burned for a sea-tax, also for  
Possession of a charming whore.  
What do all examples show?  
What must the finished murderer know?

You cannot sit on bayonets,  
Nor can you eat among the dead.  
When all are killed, you are alone,  
A vacuum comes where hate has fed.  
Murder's fruit is silent stone,  
The gun increases poverty.  
With what do these examples shine?  
The soldier turned to girls and wine.  
Love is the tact of every good,  
The only warmth, the only peace.

"What have I said?" asked Socrates.  
"Affirmed extremes, cried yes and no,  
Taken all parts, denied myself,  
Praised the caress, extolled the blow,  
Soldier and lover quite deranged  
Until their motions are exchanged.  
-What do all examples show?  
What can any actor know?  
The contradiction in every act,  
The infinite task of the human heart."

Delmore Schwartz

# From The Graveyard By The Sea

(After Valery)

This hushed surface where the doves parade  
Amid the pines vibrates, amid the graves;  
Here the noon's justice unites all fires when  
The sea aspires forever to begin again and again.  
O what a gratification comes after long meditation  
O satisfaction, after long meditation or ratiocination  
Upon the calm of the gods  
Upon the divine serenity, in luxurious contemplation!

What pure toil of perfect lightning enwombs, consumes,  
Each various manifold jewel of imperceptible foam,  
And how profound a peace appears to be begotten and  
begun  
When upon the abyss the sunlight seems to pause,  
The pure effects of an eternal cause:  
Time itself sparkles, to dream and to know are one....

Delmore Schwartz

# From: A King Of Kings, A King Among The Kings

Come, let us rejoice in James Joyce, in the greatness of this poet,  
king, and king of poets  
For he is our poor dead king, he is the monarch and Caesar of English,  
he is the veritable King of the King's English

The English of the life of the city,  
and the English of music;

Let them rejoice because he rejoiced and was joyous;  
For his joy was superior, it was supreme, for it was accomplished  
After the suffering of much evil, the evil of the torment of pride,  
By the overcoming of disgust and despair by means of the confrontation of  
them  
By the enduring of nausea, the supporting of exile, the drawing from  
the silence of exile, the pure arias of the  
hidden music of all things, all beings.  
For the joy of Joyce was earned by the sweat of the bow of his mind  
by the tears of the agony of his heart;  
hence it was gained, mastered, and conquered,  
(hence it was not a gift and freely given,  
a mercy often granted to masters,  
as if they miraculous were natural -)  
For he earned his joy and ours by the domination of evil by  
confrontation and the exorcism of language  
in all its powers of imitation and  
imagination and radiance and delight....

Delmore Schwartz

# In The Naked Bed, In Plato's Cave

In the naked bed, in Plato's cave,  
Reflected headlights slowly slid the wall,  
Carpenters hammered under the shaded window,  
Wind troubled the window curtains all night long,  
A fleet of trucks strained uphill, grinding,  
Their freights covered, as usual.  
The ceiling lightened again, the slanting diagram  
Slid slowly forth.

                  Hearing the milkman's clop,  
his striving up the stair, the bottle's chink,  
I rose from bed, lit a cigarette,  
And walked to the window. The stony street  
Displayed the stillness in which buildings stand,  
The street-lamp's vigil and the horse's patience.  
The winter sky's pure capital  
Turned me back to bed with exhausted eyes.

Strangeness grew in the motionless air. The loose  
Film grayed. Shaking wagons, hooves' waterfalls,  
Sounded far off, increasing, louder and nearer.  
A car coughed, starting. Morning softly  
Melting the air, lifted the half-covered chair  
From underseas, kindled the looking-glass,  
Distinguished the dresser and the white wall.  
The bird called tentatively, whistled, called,  
Bubbled and whistled, so! Perplexed, still wet  
With sleep, affectionate, hungry and cold. So, so,  
O son of man, the ignorant night, the travail  
Of early morning, the mystery of the beginning  
Again and again,  
                  while history is unforgiven.

Delmore Schwartz

# In The Slight Ripple, The Mind Perceives The Heart

In the slight ripple, the fishes dart  
Like fingers, centrifugal, like wishes  
Wanton. And pleasures rise

as the eyes fall

Through the lucid water. The small pebble,  
The clear clay bottom, the white shell  
Are apparent, though superficial.

Who would ask more of the August afternoon?

Who would dig mines and follow shadows?

"I would," answers bored Heart, "Lounger, rise"

(Underlip trembling, face white with stony anger),

"The old error, the thought of sitting still,

"The senses drinking, by the summer river,

"On the tended lawn, below the traffic,

"As if time would pause,

and afternoon stay.

"No, night comes soon,

"With its cold mountains, with desolation,

unless Love build its city."

Delmore Schwartz

# Late Autumn In Venice

(After Rilke)

The city floats no longer like a bait  
To hook the nimble darting summer days.  
The glazed and brittle palaces pulsate and radiate  
And glitter. Summer's garden sways,  
A heap of marionettes hanging down and dangled,  
Leaves tired, torn, turned upside down and strangled:  
Until from forest depths, from bony leafless trees  
A will wakens: the admiral, lolling long at ease,  
Has been commanded, overnight -- suddenly --:  
In the first dawn, all galleys put to sea!  
Waking then in autumn chill, amid the harbor medley,  
The fragrance of pitch, pennants aloft, the butt  
Of oars, all sails unfurled, the fleet  
Awaits the great wind, radiant and deadly.

Delmore Schwartz

# Love And Marilyn Monroe

(after Spillane)

Let us be aware of the true dark gods  
Acknowledging the cache of the crotch  
The primitive pure and powerful pink and grey  
    private sensitivities  
Wincing, marvelous in their sweetness, whence rises  
    the future.

Therefore let us praise Miss Marilyn Monroe.  
She has a noble attitude marked by pride and candor  
She takes a noble pride in the female nature and torso  
She articulates her pride with directness and exuberance  
She is honest in her delight in womanhood and manhood.  
She is not a great lady, she is more than a lady,  
She continues the tradition of Dolly Madison and Clara  
Bow  
When she says, "any woman who claims she does not like  
    to be grabbed is a liar!"  
Whether true or false, this colossal remark  
    states a dazzling intention...

It might be the birth of a new Venus among us  
It atones at the very least for such as Carrie Nation  
For Miss Monroe will never be a blue nose,  
    and perhaps we may hope  
That there will be fewer blue noses because  
    she has flourished --  
Long may she flourish in self-delight and the joy  
    of womanhood.  
A nation haunted by Puritanism owes her homage and  
gratitude.

Let us praise, to say it again, her spiritual pride  
And admire one who delights in what she has and is  
(Who says also: "A woman is like a motor car:  
    She needs a good body."  
And: "I sun bathe in the nude, because I want

to be blonde all over.")

This is spiritual piety and physical ebullience  
This is vivid glory, spiritual and physical,  
Of Miss Marilyn Monroe.

Delmore Schwartz



# Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

I looked toward the movie, the common dream,  
The he and she in close-ups, nearer than life,  
And I accepted such things as they seem,

The easy poise, the absence of the knife,  
The near summer happily ever after,  
The understood question, the immediate strife,

Not dangerous, nor mortal, but the fadeout  
Enormously kissing amid warm laughter,  
As if such things were not always played out

By an ignorant arm, which crosses the dark  
And lights up a thin sheet with a shadow's mark.

Delmore Schwartz

# Narcissus

## THE MIND IS AN ANCIENT AND FAMOUS CAPITAL

The mind is a city like London,  
Smoky and populous: it is a capital  
Like Rome, ruined and eternal,  
Marked by the monuments which no one  
Now remembers. For the mind, like Rome, contains  
Catacombs, aqueducts, amphitheatres, palaces,  
Churches and equestrian statues, fallen, broken or soiled.  
The mind possesses and is possessed by all the ruins  
Of every haunted, hunted generation's celebration.

"Call us what you will: we are made such by love."  
We are such studs as dreams are made on, and  
Our little lives are ruled by the gods, by Pan,  
Piping of all, seeking to grasp or grasping  
All of the grapes; and by the bow-and-arrow god,  
Cupid, piercing the heart through, suddenly and forever.

Dusk we are, to dusk returning, after the burbing,  
After the gold fall, the fallen ash, the bronze,  
Scattered and rotten, after the white null statues which  
Are winter, sleep, and nothingness: when  
Will the houselights of the universe  
Light up and blaze?  
For it is not the sea  
Which murmurs in a shell,  
And it is not only heart, at harp o'clock,  
It is the dread terror of the uncontrollable  
Horses of the apocalypse, running in wild dread  
Toward Arcturus—and returning as suddenly ...

## THE FEAR AND DREAD OF THE MIND OF THE OTHERS

—The others were the despots of despair—

The river's freshness sailed from unknown sources—

... They snickered giggled, laughed aloud at last,  
They mocked and marvelled at the statue which was  
A caricature, as strained and stiff, and yet  
A statue of self-love!—since self-love was  
To them, truly my true love, how, then, was I a stillness of nervousness  
So nervous a caricature: did they suppose  
Self-love was unrequited, or betrayed?  
They thought I had fallen in love with my own face,  
And this belief became the night-like obstacle  
To understanding all my unbroken suffering,  
My studious self-regard, the pain of hope,  
The torment of possibility:  
How then could I have expected them to see me  
As I saw myself, within my gaze, or see  
That being thus seemed as a toad, a frog, a wen, a mole.  
Knowing their certainty that I was only  
A monument, a monster who had fallen in love  
With himself alone, how could I have  
Told them what was in me, within my heart, trembling and passionate  
Within the labyrinth and caves of my mind, which is  
Like every mind partly or wholly hidden from itself?  
The words for what is in my heart and in my mind  
Do not exist. But I must seek and search to find  
Amid the vines and orchards of the vivid world of day  
Approximate images, imaginary parallels  
For what is my heart and dark within my mind:  
Comparisons and mere metaphors: for all  
Of them are substitutes, both counterfeit and vague:  
They are, at most, deceptive resemblances,  
False in their very likeness, like the sons  
Who are alike and kin and more unlike and false  
Because they seem the father's very self: but each one is  
—Although begotten by the same forbears—himself,  
The unique self, each one is unique, like every other one,  
And everything, older or younger, nevertheless  
A passionate nonesuch who has before has been.  
Do you hear, do you see? Do you understand me now, and how

The words for what is my heart do not exist?

THE RIVER WAS THE EMBLEM OF ALL BEAUTY: ALL

...

The river was the abundant belly of beauty itself  
The river was the dream space where I walked,  
The river was itself and yet it was—flowing and freshening—  
A self anew, another self, or self renewed  
At every tick of eternity, and by each glint of light  
Mounting or sparkling, descending to shade and black  
—Had I but told them my heart, told how it was  
Taunted at noon and pacified at dusk, at starfall midnight  
Strong in hope once more, ever in eagerness  
Jumping like joy, would they have heard? How could they?  
How, when what they knew was, like the grass,  
Simple and certain, known through the truth of touch, another form and fountain  
of falsehood's fecundity—  
Gazing upon their faces as they gazed  
Could they have seen my faces as whores who are  
Holy and deified as priestesses of hope  
—the sacred virgins of futurity—  
Promising dear divinity precisely because  
They were disfigured ducks who might become  
And be, and ever beloved, white swans, noble and beautiful.  
Could they have seen how my faces were  
Bonfires of worship and vigil, blazes of adoration and hope  
—Surely they would have laughed again, renewed their scorn,  
Giggled and snickered, cruel. Surely have said  
This is the puerile mania of the obsessed,  
The living logic of the lunatic:  
I was the statue of their merriment,  
Dead and a death, Pharoah and monster forsaken and lost.

...

My faces were my apes: my apes became  
Performers in the Sundays of their parks,  
Buffoons or clowns in the farce or comedy  
When they took pleasure in knowing that they were not like me.

...

I waited like obsession in solitude:  
The sun's white terror tore and roared at me,  
The moonlight, almond white, at night,  
Whether awake or sleeping, arrested me  
And sang, softly, haunted, unlike the sun  
But as the sun. Withheld from me or took away  
Despair or peace, making me once more  
With thought of what had never been before——

Delmore Schwartz

# News Of The Gold World Of May

News of the Gold World of May in Holland Michigan:

"Wooden shoes will clatter again  
on freshly scrubbed streets--"

The tulip will arise and reign again from awnings and  
windows

of all colors and forms  
its vine, verve and valentine curves

upon the city streets, the public grounds  
and private lawns  
(wherever it is conceivable  
that a bulb might take root  
and the two lips, softly curved, come up  
possessed by the skilled love and will of a ballerina.)

The citizens will dance in folk dances.

They will thump, they will pump,  
thudding and shoving  
elbow and thigh,  
bumping and laughing, like barrels and bells.

Vast fields of tulips in full bloom,  
the reproduction of a miniature Dutch village,  
part of a gigantic flower show.

Delmore Schwartz

# Now He Knows All There Is To Know. Now He Is Acquainted With The Day And Night

(Robert Frost, 1875-1963)

Whose wood this is I think I know:  
He made it sacred long ago:  
He will expect me, far or near  
To watch that wood immense with snow.

That famous horse must feel great fear  
Now that his noble rider's no longer here:  
He gives his harness bells to rhyme  
--Perhaps he will be back, in time?

All woulds were promises he kept  
Throughout the night when others slept:  
Now that he knows all that he did not know,  
His wood is holy, and full of snow,  
and all the beauty he made holy long long ago  
In Boston, London, Washington,  
And once by the Pacific and once in Moscow:  
    and now, and now  
    upon the fabulous blue river ever  
    or singing from a great white bough

And wherever America is, now as before,  
    and now as long, long ago  
He sleeps and wakes forever more!

"O what a metaphysical victory  
The first day and night of death must be!"

Delmore Schwartz

# O Love, Sweet Animal

O Love, dark animal,  
With your strangeness go  
Like any freak or clown:  
Appease tee child in her  
Because she is alone  
Many years ago  
Terrified by a look  
Which was not meant for her.  
Brush your heavy fur  
Against her, long and slow  
Stare at her like a book,  
Her interests being such  
No one can look too much.  
Tell her how you know  
Nothing can be taken  
Which has not been given:  
For you time is forgiven:  
Informed by hell and heaven  
You are not mistaken

Delmore Schwartz



# Occasional Poems

## I Christmas Poem for Nancy

Noel, Noel  
We live and we die  
Between heaven and hell  
Between the earth and the sky  
And all shall be well  
And all shall be unwell  
And once again! all shall once again!  
    All shall be well  
By the ringing and the swinging  
    of the great beautiful holiday bell  
Of Noel! Noel!

## II Salute Valentine

I'll drink to thee only with my eyes  
When two are three and four,  
And guzzle reality's rise and cries  
And praise the truth beyond surmise  
When small shots shout: More! More! More! More!

## III Rabbi to Preach

Rabbi Robert Raaba will preach  
    on "An Eye for an Eye"  
        (an I for an I?)  
(Two weeks from this week: "On the Sacred Would")  
At Temple Sholem on Lake Shore Drive  
- Pavel Slavensky will chant the liturgical responses  
And William Leon, having now thirteen years  
    will thank his parents that he exists  
To celebrate his birthday of manhood, his chocolate  
Bar Mitzvah, his yum-yum kippered herring, his Russian  
Corona.

Delmore Schwartz

# Out Of The Watercolored Window, When You Look

When from the watercolored window idly you look  
Each is but and clear to see, not steep:  
So does the neat print in an actual book  
Marching as if to true conclusion, reap  
The illimitable blue immensely overhead,  
The night of the living and the day of the dead.

I drive in an auto all night long to reach  
The apple which has sewed the sunlight up:  
My simple self is nothing but the speech  
Pleading for the overflow of that great cup,  
The darkened body, the mind still as a frieze:  
All else is merely means as complex as disease!

Delmore Schwartz

## Parlez-Vous Francais?

Caesar, the amplifier voice, announces  
Crime and reparation. In the barber shop  
Recumbent men attend, while absently  
The barber doffs the naked face with cream.  
Caesar proposes, Caesar promises  
Pride, justice, and the sun  
Brilliant and strong on everyone,  
Speeding one hundred miles an hour across the land:  
Caesar declares the will. The barber firmly  
Planes the stubble with a steady hand,  
While all in barber chairs reclining,  
In wet white faces, fully understand  
Good and evil, who is Gentile, weakness and command.

And now who enters quietly? Who is this one  
Shy, pale, and quite abstracted? Who is he?  
It is the writer merely, with a three-day beard,  
His tiredness not evident. He wears no tie.  
And now he hears his enemy and trembles,  
Resolving, speaks: "Ecoutez! La plupart des hommes  
Vivent des vies de desespoir silencieux,  
Victimes des intentions innombrables. Et ca  
Cet homme sait bien. Les mots de cette voix sont  
Des songes et des mensonges. Il prend choix,  
Il prend la volonte, il porte la fin d'ete.  
La guerre. Ecoutez-moi! Il porte la mort."  
He stands there speaking and they laugh to hear  
Rage and excitement from the foreigner.

Delmore Schwartz

# Philology Recapitulates Ontology, Poetry Is Ontology

Faithful to your commandments, o consciousness, o

Holy bird of words soaring ever whether to nothingness or  
to inconceivable fulfillment slowly:

And still I follow you, awkward as that dandy of ontology  
and as awkward as his albatross and as

another dandy of ontology before him, another shepherd  
and watchdog of being, the one who

Talked forever of forever as if forever of having been  
and being an ancient mariner,

Hesitant forever as if forever were the albatross

Hung round his neck by the seven seas of the seven muses,

and with as little conclusion, since being never concludes,

Studying the sibilance and the splashing of the seas and of  
seeing and of being's infinite seas,

Staring at the ever-blue and the far small stars and  
the faint white endless curtain of the  
twinkling play's endless seasons.

Delmore Schwartz

# Phoenix Lyrics

I

If nature is life, nature is death:  
It is winter as it is spring:  
Confusion is variety, variety  
And confusion in everything  
Make experience the true conclusion  
Of all desire and opulence,  
All satisfaction and poverty.

II

When a hundred years had passed nature seemed to man  
a clock  
Another century sank away and nature seemed a jungle  
in a rock  
And now that nature has become a ticking and hidden  
bomb how we must mock  
Newton, Democritus, the Deity  
The heart's ingenuity and the mind's infinite  
uncontrollable  
insatiable curiosity.

III

Purple black cloud at sunset: it is late August  
and the light begins to look cold, and as we look,  
listen and look, we hear the first drums of autumn.

Delmore Schwartz

# Poem (Faithful To Your Commands, O Consciousness)

Poem Faithful to your commands, o consciousness, o

Beating wings, I studied

the roses and the muses of reality,

the deceptions and the deceptive elation of the redness of the growing morning,

and all the greened and thomed variety of the vines of error, which begin by promising

Everything and more than everything, and then suddenly,

At the height of noon seem to rise to the peak or dune-like moon of no return

So that everything is or seems to have become nothing, or of no genuine importance:

And it is not that the departure of hope or its sleep has made it inconceivable

That anything should be or should have been important:

It is the belief that hope itself was not, from the beginning, before believing, the most important of all beliefs.

Delmore Schwartz

## Poem (In The Morning, When It Was Raining)

In the morning, when it was raining,  
Then the birds were hectic and loudy;  
Through all the reign is fall's entertaining;  
Their singing was erratic and full of disorder:  
They did not remember the summer blue  
Or the orange of June. They did not think at all  
Of the great red and bursting ball  
Of the kingly sun's terror and tempest, blazing,  
Once the slanting rain threw over all  
The colorless curtains of the ceaseless spontaneous fall.

Delmore Schwartz

## Poem (Old Man In The Crystal Morning After Snow)

Old man in the crystal morning after snow,  
Your throat swathed in a muffler, your bent  
Figure building the snow man which is meant  
For the grandchild's target,

do you know

This fat cartoon, his eyes pocked in with coal  
Nears you each time your breath smokes the air,  
Lewdly grinning out of a private nightmare?  
He is the white cold shadow of your soul.

You build his comic head, you place his comic hat;  
Old age is not so serious, and I  
By the window sad and watchful as a cat,  
Build to this poem of old age and of snow,  
And weep: you are my snow man and I know  
I near you, you near him, all of us must die.

Delmore Schwartz



# Poem (Remember Midsummer: The Fragrance Of Box)

Remember midsummer: the fragrance of box, of white  
roses  
And of phlox. And upon a honeysuckle branch  
Three snails hanging with infinite delicacy  
-- Clinging like tendril, flake and thread, as self-tormented  
And self-delighted as any ballerina,  
just as in the orchard,  
Near the apple trees, in the over-grown grasses  
Drunken wasps clung to over-ripe pears  
Which had fallen: swollen and disfigured.  
For now it is wholly autumn: in the late  
Afternoon as I walked toward the ridge where the hills  
begin,  
There is a whir, a thrashing in the bush, and a startled  
pheasant, flying out and up,  
Suddenly astonished me, breaking the waking dream.

Last night  
Snatches of sleep, streaked by dreams and half dreams  
- So that, aloft in the dim sky, for almost an hour,  
A sausage balloon - chalk-white and lifeless looking--  
floated motionless  
Until, at midnight, I went to New Bedlam and saw what I  
feared  
the most - I heard nothing, but it  
had all happened several times elsewhere.

Now, in the cold glittering morning, shining at the  
window,  
The pears hang, yellowed and over-ripe, sodden brown in  
erratic places, all bunched and dangling,  
Like a small choir of bagpipes, silent and waiting. And I  
rise now,  
Go to the window and gaze at the fallen or falling country  
-- And see! -- the fields are pencilled light brown  
or are the dark brownness of the last autumn  
-- So much has shrunk to straight brown lines, thin as  
the  
bare thin trees,

Save where the cornstalks, white bones of the lost forever dead,  
Shrivelled and fallen, but shrill-voiced when the wind  
    whistles,  
Are scattered like the long abandoned hopes and ambitions  
Of an adolescence which, for a very long time, has been  
    merely  
A recurrent target and taunt of the inescapable mockery of  
    memory.

Delmore Schwartz

## Poem (You, My Photographer, You, Most Aware)

You, my photographer, you, most aware,  
Who climbed to the bridge when the iceberg struck,  
Climbed with your camera when the ship's hull broke,  
And lighted your flashes and, standing passionate there,  
Wound the camera in the sudden burst's flare,  
Shot the screaming women, and turned and took  
Pictures of the iceberg (as the ship's deck shook)  
Dreaming like the moon in the night's black air!

You, tiptoe on the rail to film a child!  
The nude old woman swimming in the sea  
Looked up from the dark water to watch you there;  
Below, near the ballroom where the band still toiled,  
The frightened, in their lifebelts, watched you bitterly -  
You hypocrite! My brother! We are a pair!

Delmore Schwartz

# Prothalamion

"little soul, little flirting,  
    little perverse one  
        where are you off to now?  
little wan one, firm one  
    little exposed one...  
        and never make fun of me again."

Now I must betray myself.  
The feast of bondage and unity is near,  
And none engaged in that great piety  
When each bows to the other, kneels, and takes  
Hand in hand, glance and glance, care and care,  
None may wear masks or enigmatic clothes,  
For weakness blinds the wounded face enough.  
In sense, see my shocking nakedness.

I gave a girl an apple when five years old,  
Saying, Will you be sorry when I am gone?  
Ravenous for such courtesies, my name  
Is fed like a raving fire, insatiate still.  
But do not be afraid.  
For I forget myself. I do indeed  
Before each genuine beauty, and I will  
Forget myself before your unknown heart.

I will forget the speech my mother made  
In a restaurant, trapping my father there  
At dinner with his whore. Her spoken rage  
Struck down the child of seven years  
With shame for all three, with pity for  
The helpless harried waiter, with anger for  
The diners gazing, avid, and contempt  
And great disgust for every human being.  
I will remember this. My mother's rhetoric  
Has charmed my various tongue, but now I know  
Love's metric seeks a rhyme more pure and sure.

For thus it is that I betray myself,

Passing the terror of childhood at second hand  
Through nervous, learned fingertips.  
At thirteen when a little girl died,  
I walked for three weeks neither alive nor dead,  
And could not understand and still cannot  
The adult blind to the nearness of the dead,  
Or carefully ignorant of their own death.  
--This sense could shadow all the time's curving fruits,  
But we will taste of them the whole night long,  
Forgetting no twelfth night, no fete of June,  
But in the daylight knowing our nothingness.

Let Freud and Marx be wedding guests indeed!  
Let them mark out masks that face us there,  
For of all anguish, weakness, loss and failure,  
No form is cruel as self-deception, none  
Shows day-by-day a bad dream long lived  
And unbroken like the lies  
We tell each other because we are rich or poor.  
Though from the general guilt not free  
We can keep honor by being poor.

The waste, the evil, the abomination  
Is interrupted. the perfect stars persist  
Small in the guilty night,  
    and Mozart shows  
The irreducible incorruptible good  
Risen past birth and death, though he is dead.  
Hope, like a face reflected on the windowpane,  
Remote and dim, fosters a myth or dream,  
And in that dream, I speak, I summon all  
Who are our friends somehow and thus I say:

"Bid the jewellers come with monocles,  
Exclaiming, Pure! Intrinsic! Final!  
Summon the children eating ice cream  
To speak the chill thrill of immediacy.  
Call for the acrobats who tumble  
The ecstasy of the somersault.  
Bid the self-sufficient stars be piercing  
In the sublime and inexhaustible blue.

"Bring a mathematician, there is much to count,  
The unending continuum of my attention:  
Infinity will hurry his multiplied voice!  
Bring the poised impeccable diver,  
Summon the skater, precise in figure,  
He knows the peril of circumstance,  
The risk of movement and the hard ground.  
Summon the florist! And the tobacconist!  
All who have known a plant-like beauty:  
Summon the charming bird for ignorant song.

"You, Athena, with your tired beauty,  
Will you give me away? For you must come  
In a bathing suit with that white owl  
Whom, as I walk, I will hold in my hand.  
You too, Crusoe, to utter the emotion  
Of finding Friday, no longer alone;  
You too, Chaplin, muse of the curbstone,  
Mummer of hope, you understand!"

But this is fantastic and pitiful,  
And no one comes, none will, we are alone,  
And what is possible is my own voice,  
Speaking its wish, despite its lasting fear;  
Speaking of its hope, its promise and its fear,  
The voice drunk with itself and rapt in fear,  
Exaggeration, braggadocio,  
Rhetoric and hope, and always fear:

"For fifty-six or for a thousand years,  
I will live with you and be your friend,  
And what your body and what your spirit bears  
I will like my own body cure and tend.  
But you are heavy and my body's weight  
Is great and heavy: when I carry you  
I lift upon my back time like a fate  
Near as my heart, dark when I marry you.  
"The voice's promise is easy, and hope  
Is drunk, and wanton, and unwilling;  
In time's quicksilver, where our desires grope,  
The dream is warped or monstrously fulfilled,  
In this sense, listen, listen, and draw near:

Love is inexhaustible and full of fear."

This life is endless and my eyes are tired,  
So that, again and again, I touch a chair,  
Or go to the window, press my face  
Against it, hoping with substantial touch,  
Colorful sight, or turning things to gain once more  
The look of actuality, the certainty  
Of those who run down stairs and drive a car.  
Then let us be each other's truth, let us  
Affirm the other's self, and be  
The other's audience, the other's state,  
Each to the other his sonorous fame.

Now you will be afraid, when, waking up,  
Before familiar morning, by my mute side  
Wan and abandoned then, when, waking up,  
You see the lion or lamb upon my face  
Or see the daemon breathing heavily  
His sense of ignorance, his wish to die,  
For I am nothing because my circus self  
Divides its love a million times.

I am the octopus in love with God,  
For thus is my desire inconclusible,  
Until my mind, deranged in swimming tubes,  
Issues its own darkness, clutching seas  
---O God of my perfect ignorance,  
Bring the New Year to my only sister soon,  
Take from me strength and power to bless her head,  
Give her the magnitude of secular trust,  
Until she turns to me in her troubled sleep,  
Seeing me in my wish, free from self-wrongs.

Delmore Schwartz

# Saint, Revolutionist

Saint, revolutionist,  
God and sage know well,  
That there is a place  
Where that much-rung bell,  
The well-beloved body,  
And its sensitive face  
Must be sacrificed.

There is, it seems, in this  
A something meaningless,  
Hanging without support  
And yet too dear to touch,  
That life should seek its end  
Where no will can descend,  
Facing a gun to see  
Long actuality.

What is this that is  
The good of nothingness,  
The death of Socrates  
And that strange man on the cross  
Seeking out all loss?  
For men love life until  
It shames both face and will.

Neither in hell nor heaven  
Is the answer given,  
Both are a servant's pay:  
But they wish to know  
how far the will can go,  
Lest their infinite play  
And their desires be  
Shadow and mockery.

Delmore Schwartz



# Socrates Ghost Must Haunt Me Now

Socrates ghost must haunt me now,  
Notorious death has let him go,  
He comes to me with a clumsy bow,  
Saying in his disused voice,  
That I do not know I do not know,  
The mechanical whims of appetite  
Are all that I have of conscious choice,  
The butterfly caged in eclectic light  
Is my only day in the world's great night,  
Love is not love, it is a child  
Sucking his thumb and biting his lip,  
But grasp it all, there may be more!  
From the topless sky to the bottomless floor  
With the heavy head and the fingertip:  
All is not blind, obscene, and poor.  
Socrates stands by me stockstill,  
Teaching hope to my flickering will,  
Pointing to the sky's inexorable blue  
---Old Noumenon, come true, come true!

Delmore Schwartz



# Sonnet On Famous And Familiar Sonnets And Experiences

(With much help from Robert Good, William Shakespeare, John Milton, and little Catherine Schwartz)

Shall I compare her to a summer play?  
She is too clever, too devious, too subtle, too dark:  
Her lies are rare, but then she paves the way  
Beyond the summer's sway, within the jejune park  
Where all souls' aspiration to true nobility  
Obliges Statues in the Frieze of Death  
And when this pantomime and Panama of Panorama Fails,  
"I'll never speak to you agayne" -- or waste her panting breath.

When I but think of how her years are spent  
Deadening that one talent which -- for woman is --  
Death or paralysis, denied: nature's intent  
That each girl be a mother -- whether or not she is  
Or has become a lawful wife or bride  
-- O Alma Magna Mater, deathless the living death of pride.

Delmore Schwartz

# Sonnet Suggested By Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Paul Vakzy, James Joyce, Et Al.

Let me not, ever, to the marriage in Cana  
Of Galilee admit the slightest sentiment  
Of doubt about the astonishing and sustaining manna  
Of chance and choice to throw a shadow's element  
Of disbelief in truth -- Love is not love  
Nor is the love of love its truth in consciousness  
If it can be made hesitant by any crow or dove or  
    seeming angel or demon from above or from below  
Or made more than it is knows itself to be by the authority  
    of any ministry of love.

O no -- it is the choice of chances and the chancing of  
    all choice -- the wine  
which was the water may be sickening, unsatisfying or  
    sour  
A new barbiturate drawn from the fattest flower  
That prospers green on Lethe's shore. For every hour  
Denies or once again affirms the vow and the ultimate  
    tower  
Of aspiration which made Ulysses toil so far away from  
    home  
And then, for years, strive against every wanton desire,  
    sea and fire, to return across the.  
    ever-threatening seas  
A journey forever far beyond all the vivid eloquence  
    of every poet and all poetry.

Delmore Schwartz

## Sonnet: O City, City

To live between terms, to live where death  
has his loud picture in the subway ride,  
Being amid six million souls, their breath  
An empty song suppressed on every side,  
Where the sliding auto's catastrophe  
Is a gust past the curb, where numb and high  
The office building rises to its tyranny,  
Is our anguished diminution until we die.

Whence, if ever, shall come the actuality  
Of a voice speaking the mind's knowing,  
The sunlight bright on the green windowshade,  
And the self articulate, affectionate, and flowing,  
Ease, warmth, light, the utter showing,  
When in the white bed all things are made.

Delmore Schwartz

# Sonnet: The Ghosts Of James And Peirce In Harvard Yard

In memory of D. W. Prall

The ghosts of James and Peirce in Harvard Yard  
At star-pierced midnight, after the chapel bell  
(Episcopalian! palian! the ringing soared!)  
Stare at me now as if they wish me well.  
In the waking dream amid the trees which fall,  
Bar and bough of shadow, by my shadow crossed,  
They have not slept for long and they know all,  
Know time's exhaustion and the spirit's cost.

"We studied the radiant sun, the star's pure seed:  
Darkness is infinite! The blind can see  
Hatred's necessity and love's grave need  
Now that the poor are murdered across the sea,  
And you are ignorant, who hear the bell;  
Ignorant, you walk between heaven and hell."

Delmore Schwartz

# Spiders

Is the spider a monster in miniature?  
His web is a cruel stair, to be sure,  
Designed artfully, cunningly placed,  
A delicate trap, carefully spun  
To bind the fly (innocent or unaware)  
In a net as strong as a chain or a gun.

There are far more spiders than the man in the street  
supposes  
And the philosopher-king imagines, let alone knows!  
There are six hundred kinds of spiders and each one  
Differs in kind and in unkindness.  
In variety of behavior spiders are unrivalled:  
The fat garden spider sits motionless, amidst or at the heart  
Of the orb of its web: other kinds run,  
Scuttling across the floor, falling into bathtubs,  
Trapped in the path of its own wrath, by overconfidence  
drowned and undone.

Other kinds - more and more kinds under the stars and  
the sun -  
Are carnivores: all are relentless, ruthless  
Enemies of insects. Their methods of getting food  
Are unconventional, numerous, various and sometimes  
hilarious:  
Some spiders spin webs as beautiful  
As Japanese drawings, intricate as clocks, strong as rocks:  
Others construct traps which consist only  
Of two sticky and tricky threads. Yet this ambush is enough  
To bind and chain a crawling ant for long  
enough:  
The famished spider feels the vibration  
Which transforms patience into sensation and satiation.  
The handsome wolf spider moves suddenly freely and relies  
Upon lightning suddenness, stealth and surprise,  
Possessing accurate eyes, pouncing upon his victim with the  
speed of surmise.

Courtship is dangerous: there are just as many elaborate

and endless techniques and varieties  
As characterize the wooing of more analytic, more  
introspective beings: Sometimes the male  
Arrives with the gift of a freshly caught fly.  
Sometimes he ties down the female, when she is frail,  
With deft strokes and quick manoeuvres and threads of silk:  
But courtship and wooing, whatever their form, are  
informed  
By extreme caution, prudence, and calculation,  
For the female spider, lazier and fiercer than the male  
suitor,  
May make a meal of him if she does not feel in the same  
mood, or if her appetite  
Consumes her far more than the revelation of love's  
consummation.  
Here among spiders, as in the higher forms of nature,  
The male runs a terrifying risk when he goes seeking for  
the bounty of beautiful Alma Magna Mater:  
Yet clearly and truly he must seek and find his mate and  
match like every other living creature!

Delmore Schwartz



# The Ballad Of The Children Of The Czar

1

The children of the Czar  
Played with a bouncing ball

In the May morning, in the Czar's garden,  
Tossing it back and forth.

It fell among the flowerbeds  
Or fled to the north gate.

A daylight moon hung up  
In the Western sky, bald white.

Like Papa's face, said Sister,  
Hurling the white ball forth.

2

While I ate a baked potato  
Six thousand miles apart,

In Brooklyn, in 1916,  
Aged two, irrational.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt  
Was an Arrow Collar ad.

O Nicholas! Alas! Alas!  
My grandfather coughed in your army,

Hid in a wine-stinking barrel,  
For three days in Bucharest

Then left for America  
To become a king himself.

3

I am my father's father,  
You are your children's guilt.

In history's pity and terror  
The child is Aeneas again;

Troy is in the nursery,  
The rocking horse is on fire.

Child labor! The child must carry  
His fathers on his back.

But seeing that so much is past  
And that history has no ruth

For the individual,  
Who drinks tea, who catches cold,

Let anger be general:  
I hate an abstract thing.

4

Brother and sister bounced  
The bounding, unbroken ball,

The shattering sun fell down  
Like swords upon their play,

Moving eastward among the stars  
Toward February and October.

But the Maywind brushed their cheeks  
Like a mother watching sleep,

And if for a moment they fight  
Over the bouncing ball

And sister pinches brother  
And brother kicks her shins,

Well! The heart of man is known:

It is a cactus bloom.

5

The ground on which the ball bounces  
Is another bouncing ball.

The wheeling, whirling world  
Makes no will glad.

Spinning in its spotlight darkness,  
It is too big for their hands.

A pitiless, purposeless Thing,  
Arbitrary, and unspent,

Made for no play, for no children,  
But chasing only itself.

The innocent are overtaken,  
They are not innocent.

They are their father's fathers,  
The past is inevitable.

6

Now, in another October  
Of this tragic star,

I see my second year,  
I eat my baked potato.

It is my buttered world,  
But, poked by my unlearned hand,

It falls from the highchair down  
And I begin to howl

And I see the ball roll under  
The iron gate which is locked.

Sister is screaming, brother is howling,  
The ball has evaded their will.

Even a bouncing ball  
Is uncontrollable,

And is under the garden wall.  
I am overtaken by terror

Thinking of my father's fathers,  
And of my own will.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Ballet Of The Fifth Year

Where the sea gulls sleep or indeed where they fly  
Is a place of different traffic. Although I  
Consider the fishing bay (where I see them dip and curve  
And purely glide) a place that weakens the nerve  
Of will, and closes my eyes, as they should not be  
(They should burn like the street-light all night quietly,  
So that whatever is present will be known to me),  
Nevertheless the gulls and the imagination  
Of where they sleep, which comes to creation  
In strict shape and color, from their dallying  
Their wings slowly, and suddenly rallying  
Over, up, down the arabesque of descent,  
Is an old act enacted, my fabulous intent  
When I skated, afraid of policemen, five years old,  
In the winter sunset, sorrowful and cold,  
Hardly attained to thought, but old enough to know  
Such grace, so self-contained, was the best escape to know.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Beautiful American Word, Sure

The beautiful American word, Sure,  
As I have come into a room, and touch  
The lamp's button, and the light blooms with such  
Certainty where the darkness loomed before,

As I care for what I do not know, and care  
Knowing for little she might not have been,  
And for how little she would be unseen,  
The intercourse of lives miraculous and dear.

Where the light is, and each thing clear,  
separate from all others, standing in its place,  
I drink the time and touch whatever's near,

And hope for day when the whole world has that face:  
For what assures her present every year?  
In dark accidents the mind's sufficient grace.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Choir And Music Of Solitude And Silence

Silence is a great blue bell  
Swinging and ringing, tinkling and singing,  
In measure's pleasure, and in the supple symmetry  
of the soaring of the immense intense wings  
glinting against

All the blue radiance above us and within us, hidden  
Save for the stars sparking, distant and unheard in their  
singing.

And this is the first meaning of the famous saying,  
The stars sang. They are the white birds of silence  
And the meaning of the difficult famous saying that the  
sons and daughters of morning sang,  
Meant and means that they were and they are the children  
of God and morning,  
Delighting in the lights of becoming and the houses of  
being,  
Taking pleasure in measure and excess, in listening as in  
seeing.

Love is the most difficult and dangerous form of courage.  
Courage is the most desperate, admirable and noble kind of  
love.

So that when the great blue bell of silence is stilled and  
stopped or broken  
By the babel and chaos of desire unrequited, irritated and  
frustrated,  
When the heart has opened and when the heart has spoken  
Not of the purity and symmetry of gratification, but action  
of insatiable distraction's dissatisfaction,

Then the heart says, in all its blindness and faltering  
emptiness:  
There is no God. Because I am hope. And hope must be  
fed.

And then the great blue bell of silence is deafened, dumbled,  
and has become the tomb of the living dead.





# The First Night Of Fall And Falling Rain

The common rain had come again  
Slanting and colorless, pale and anonymous,  
Fainting falling in the first evening  
Of the first perception of the actual fall,  
The long and late light had slowly gathered up  
A sooty wood of clouded sky, dim and distant more and  
more  
Until, at dusk, the very sense of selfhood waned,  
A weakening nothing halted, diminished or denied or set  
aside,  
Neither tea, nor, after an hour, whiskey,  
Ice and then a pleasant glow, a burning,  
And the first leaping wood fire  
Since a cold night in May, too long ago to be more than  
Merely a cold and vivid memory.  
Staring, empty, and without thought  
Beyond the rising mists of the emotion of causeless  
sadness,  
How suddenly all consciousness leaped in spontaneous  
gladness,  
Knowing without thinking how the falling rain (outside, all  
over)  
In slow sustained consistent vibration all over outside  
Tapping window, streaking roof,  
running down runnel and drain  
Waking a sense, once more, of all that lived outside of us,  
Beyond emotion, for beyond the swollen  
distorted shadows and lights  
Of the toy town and the vanity fair  
of waking consciousness!

Delmore Schwartz

# The Foggy, Foggy Blue

When I was a young man, I loved to write poems  
And I called a spade a spade  
And the only only thing that made me sing  
Was to lift the masks at the masquerade.  
I took them off my own face,  
I took them off others too  
And the only only wrong in all my song  
Was the view that I knew what was true.

Now I am older and tireder too  
And the tasks with the masks are quite trying.  
I'd gladly gladly stop if I only only knew  
A better way to keep from lying,  
And not get nervous and blue  
When I said something quite untrue:  
I looked all around and all over  
To find something else to do:  
I tried to be less romantic  
I tried to be less starry-eyed too:  
But I only got mixed up and frantic  
Forgetting what was false and what was true.

But tonight I am going to the masked ball,  
Because it has occurred to me  
That the masks are more true than the faces:  
—Perhaps this too is poetry?  
I no longer yearn to be naïve and stern  
And masked balls fascinate me:  
Now that I know that most falsehoods are true  
Perhaps I can join the charade?  
This is, at any rate, my new and true view:  
Let live and believe, I say.  
The only only thing is to believe in everything:  
It's more fun and safer that way!

Delmore Schwartz

# The Greatest Thing In North America

This is the greatest thing in North America:  
Europe is the greatest thing in North America!  
High in the sky, dark in the heart, and always there  
Among the natural powers of sunlight and of air,  
Changing, second by second, shifting and changing the  
light,  
Bring fresh rain to the stone of the library steps.

Under the famous names upon the pediment:  
Thales, Aristotle,  
Cicero, Augustine, Scotus, Galileo,  
Joseph, Odysseus, Hamlet, Columbus and Spinoza,  
Anna Karenina, Alyosha Karamazov, Sherlock Holmes.

And the last three also live upon the silver screen  
Three blocks away, in moonlight's artificial day,  
A double bill in the darkened palace whirled,  
And the veritable glittering light of the turning world's  
Burning mind and blazing imagination, showing, day by  
day  
And week after week the desires of the heart and mind  
Of all the living souls yearning everywhere  
From Canada to Panama, from Brooklyn to Paraguay,  
From Cuba to Vancouver, every afternoon and every night.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Heavy Bear Who Goes With Me

'the witness of the body' --Whitehead

The heavy bear who goes with me,  
A manifold honey to smear his face,  
Clumsy and lumbering here and there,  
The central ton of every place,  
The hungry beating brutish one  
In love with candy, anger, and sleep,  
Crazy factotum, dishevelling all,  
Climbs the building, kicks the football,  
Boxes his brother in the hate-ridden city.

Breathing at my side, that heavy animal,  
That heavy bear who sleeps with me,  
Howls in his sleep for a world of sugar,  
A sweetness intimate as the water's clasp,  
Howls in his sleep because the tight-rope  
Trembles and shows the darkness beneath.  
--The strutting show-off is terrified,  
Dressed in his dress-suit, bulging his pants,  
Trembles to think that his quivering meat  
Must finally wince to nothing at all.

That inescapable animal walks with me,  
Has followed me since the black womb held,  
Moves where I move, distorting my gesture,  
A caricature, a swollen shadow,  
A stupid clown of the spirit's motive,  
Perplexes and affronts with his own darkness,  
The secret life of belly and bone,  
Opaque, too near, my private, yet unknown,  
Stretches to embrace the very dear  
With whom I would walk without him near,  
Touches her grossly, although a word  
Would bare my heart and make me clear,  
Stumbles, flounders, and strives to be fed  
Dragging me with him in his mouthing care,  
Amid the hundred million of his kind,  
the scrimmage of appetite everywhere.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Journey Of A Poem Compared To All The Sad Variety Of Travel

A poem moves forward,  
Like the passages and percussions of trains in progress  
A pattern of recurrence, a hammer of repetitive occurrence

a slow less and less heard  
low thunder under all passengers

Steel sounds tripping and tripled and  
Grinding, revolving, gripping, turning, and returning  
as the flung carpet of the wide countryside spreads out on  
each side in billows

And in isolation, rolled out, white house, red barn, squat silo,  
Pasture, hill, meadow and woodland pasture  
And the striped poles step fast past the train windows  
Second after second takes snapshots, clicking,  
Into the dangled boxes of glinting windows  
Snapshots and selections, rejections, at angles, of shadows  
A small town: a shop's sign - GARAGE, and then white gates  
Where waiting cars wait with the unrest of trembling  
Breathing hard and idling, until the slow~descent  
Of the red cones of sunset: a dead march: a slow tread and heavy

Of the slowed horses of Apollo  
- Until the slowed horses of Apollo go over the horizon  
And all things are parked, slowly or willingly,  
into the customary or at random places.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Poet

The riches of the poet are equal to his poetry

His power is his left hand

It is idle weak and precious

His poverty is his wealth, a wealth which may destroy him

like Midas Because it is that laziness which is a form of impatience

And this he may be destroyed by the gold of the light

which never was

On land or sea.

He may be drunken to death, draining the casks of excess

That extreme form of success.

He may suffer Narcissus' destiny

Unable to live except with the image which is infatuation

Love, blind, adoring, overflowing

Unable to respond to anything which does not bring love

quickly or immediately.

...The poet must be innocent and ignorant

But he cannot be innocent since stupidity is not his strong  
point

Therefore Cocteau said, "What would I not give

To have the poems of my youth withdrawn from  
existence?

I would give to Satan my immortal soul."

This metaphor is wrong, for it is his immortal soul which  
he wished to redeem,

Lifting it and sifting it, free and white, from the actuality of  
youth's banality, vulgarity,  
pomp and affectation of his early  
works of poetry.

So too in the same way a Famous American Poet

When fame at last had come to him sought out the fifty copies  
of his first book of poems which had been privately printed  
by himself at his own expense.

He succeeded in securing 48 of the 50 copies, burned them

And learned then how the last copies were extant,

As the law of the land required, stashed away in the national capital,  
at the Library of Congress.

Therefore he went to Washington, therefore he took out the last two

copies

Placed them in his pocket, planned to depart

Only to be halted and apprehended. Since he was the author,  
Since they were his books and his property he was reproached  
But forgiven. But the two copies were taken away from him  
Thus setting a national precedent.

For neither amnesty nor forgiveness is bestowed upon poets, poetry and poems,  
For William James, the lovable genius of Harvard  
spoke the terrifying truth: "Your friends may forget, God  
    may forgive you, But the brain cells record  
    your acts for the rest of eternity."

What a terrifying thing to say!

This is the endless doom, without remedy, of poetry.

This is also the joy everlasting of poetry.

Delmore Schwartz



# The Sin Of Hamlet

The horns in the harbor booming, vaguely,  
Fog, forgotten, yesterday, conclusion,  
Nostalgic, noising dim sorrow, calling  
To sleep is it? I think so, and childhood,  
Not the door opened and the stair descended,  
The voice answered, the choice announced, the  
Trigger touched in the sharp declaration!

And when it comes, escape is small; the door  
Creaks; the worms of fear spread veins; the furtive  
Fugitive, looking backward, sees his  
Ghost in the mirror, his shameful eyes, his mouth diseased.

Delmore Schwartz

# The Spring

(After Rilke)

Spring has returned! Everything has returned!  
The earth, just like a schoolgirl, memorizes  
Poems, so many poems. ... Look, she has learned  
So many famous poems, she has earned so many prizes!

Teacher was strict. We delighted in the white  
Of the old man's beard, bright like the snow's:  
Now we may ask which names are wrong, or right  
For "blue," for "apple," for "ripe." She knows, she knows!

Lucky earth, let out of school, now you must play  
Hide-and-peek with all the children every day:  
You must hide that we may seek you: we will! We will!

The happiest child will hold you. She knows all the things  
You taught her: the word for "hope," and for "believe,"  
Are still upon her tongue. She sings and sings and sings.

Delmore Schwartz

# The True-Blue American

Jeremiah Dickson was a true-blue American,  
For he was a little boy who understood America, for he felt that he must  
Think about everything; because that's all there is to think about,  
Knowing immediately the intimacy of truth and comedy,  
Knowing intuitively how a sense of humor was a necessity  
For one and for all who live in America. Thus, natively, and  
Naturally when on an April Sunday in an ice cream parlor Jeremiah  
Was requested to choose between a chocolate sundae and a banana split  
He answered unhesitatingly, having no need to think of it  
Being a true-blue American, determined to continue as he began:  
Rejecting the either-or of Kierkegaard, and many another European;  
Refusing to accept alternatives, refusing to believe the choice of between;  
Rejecting selection; denying dilemma; electing absolute affirmation: knowing  
in his breast  
The infinite and the gold  
Of the endless frontier, the deathless West.

"Both: I will have them both!" declared this true-blue American  
In Cambridge, Massachusetts, on an April Sunday, instructed  
By the great department stores, by the Five-and-Ten,  
Taught by Christmas, by the circus, by the vulgarity and grandeur of  
Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon,  
Tutored by the grandeur, vulgarity, and infinite appetite gratified and  
Shining in the darkness, of the light  
On Saturdays at the double bills of the moon pictures,  
The consummation of the advertisements of the imagination of the light  
Which is as it was—the infinite belief in infinite hope—of Columbus,  
Barnum, Edison, and Jeremiah Dickson.

Delmore Schwartz

# This Is A Poem I Wrote At Night, Before The Dawn

This is a poem I wrote before I died and was reborn:

- After the years of the apples ripening and the eagles  
soaring,  
After the festival here the small flowers gleamed like the  
first stars,  
And the horses cantered and romped away like the  
experience of skill; mastered and serene  
Power, grasped and governed by reins, lightly held by  
knowing hands.

The horses had cantered away, far enough away  
So that I saw the horses' heads farther and farther away  
And saw that they had reached the black horizon on the  
dusk of day  
And were or seemed black thunderheads, massy and  
ominous waves in the doomed sky:  
And it was then, for the first time, then that I said as I  
must always say  
All through living death of night:  
It is always darkness before delight!  
The long night is always the beginning of the vivid blossom of day.

Delmore Schwartz

# Tired And Unhappy, You Think Of Houses

Tired and unhappy, you think of houses  
Soft-carpeted and warm in the December evening,  
While snow's white pieces fall past the window,  
And the orange firelight leaps.

A young girl sings

That song of Gluck where Orpheus pleads with Death;  
Her elders watch, nodding their happiness  
To see time fresh again in her self-conscious eyes:  
The servants bring in the coffee, the children go to bed,  
Elder and younger yawn and go to bed,  
The coals fade and glow, rose and ashen,  
It is time to shake yourself! and break this  
Banal dream, and turn your head  
Where the underground is charged, where the weight  
Of the lean building is seen,  
Where close in the subway rush, anonymous  
In the audience, well-dressed or mean,  
So many surround you, ringing your fate,  
Caught in an anger exact as a machine!

Delmore Schwartz

# To Helen

(After Valery)

O Sea! ... 'Tis I, risen from death once more  
To hear the waves' harmonious roar  
And see the galleys, sharp, in dawn's great awe  
Raised from the dark by the rising and gold oar.

My fickle hands sufficed to summon kings  
Their salt beards amused my fingers, deft and pure.  
I wept. They sang of triumphs now obscure:  
And the first abyss flooded the hull as if with falling wings.

I hear the profound horns and trumpets of war  
Matching the rhythm, swinging of the flying oars:  
The galleys' chant enchains the foam of sound;  
And the gods, exalted at the heroic prow,  
E'en though the spit of spray insults each smiling brow,  
Beckon to me, with arms indulgent, frozen, sculptured,  
and dead long long ago.

Delmore Schwartz

# Two Lyrics From Kilroy's Carnival: A Masque

## I Aria

--Kiss me there where pride is glittering  
Kiss me where I am ripened and round fruit  
Kiss me wherever, however, I am supple, bare and flare  
(Let the bell be rung as long as I am young:  
    let ring and fly like a great bronze wing!)

--I'll kiss you wherever you think you are poor,  
Wherever you shudder, feeling striped or barred,  
Because you think you are bloodless, skinny or marred:  
    Until, until  
        your gaze has been stilled--  
Until you are shamed again no more!  
I'll kiss you until your body and soul  
    the mind in the body being fulfilled--  
Suspend their dread and civil war!"

## II Song

Under the yellow sea  
Who comes and looks with me  
For the daughters of music, the fountains of poetry?  
Both have soared forth from the unending waters  
Where all things still are seeds and far from flowers  
And since they remain chained to the sea's powers  
May wilt to nonentity or loll and arise to comedy  
Or thrown into mere accident through irrelevant incident  
Dissipate all identity ceaselessly fragmented by the ocean's  
    immense and intense, irresistible and insistent  
        action,  
Be scattered like the sand is, purposely and relentlessly,  
Living in the summer resorts of the dead endlessly.

Delmore Schwartz

# What Curious Dresses All Men Wear

What curious dresses all men wear!  
The walker you met in a brown study,  
The President smug in rotogravure,  
The mannequin, the bathing beauty.

The bubble-dancer, the deep-sea diver,  
The bureaucrat, the adulterer,  
Hide private parts which I disclose  
To those who know what a poem knows.

Delmore Schwartz



# What Is To Be Given

What is to be given,  
Is spirit, yet animal,  
Colored, like heaven,  
Blue, yellow, beautiful.

The blood is checkered by  
So many stains and wishes,  
Between it and the sky  
You could not choose, for riches.

Yet let me now be careful  
Not to give too much  
To one so shy and fearful  
For like a gun is touch.

Delmore Schwartz

# Words For A Trumpet Chorale Celebrating The Autumn

"The trumpet is a brilliant instrument." - Dietrich Buxtehude

Come and come forth and come up from the cup of  
Your dumbness, stunned and numb, come with  
The statues and believed in,  
Thinking this is nothing, deceived.

Come to the summer and sun,  
Come see upon that height, and that sum  
In the seedtime of the winter's absolute,  
How yearly the phoenix inhabits the fruit.  
Behold, above all, how the tall ball  
Called the body is but a drum, but a bell  
Summoning the soul  
To rise from the catacomb of sleep and fear  
To the blaze and death of summer,

Rising from the lithe forms of the pure  
Furs of the rising flames, slender and supple,  
Which are the consummation of the blaze of fall and of all.

Delmore Schwartz

# Yeats Died Saturday In France

Yeats died Saturday in France.  
Freedom from his animal  
Has come at last in alien Nice,  
His heart beat separate from his will:  
He knows at last the old abyss  
Which always faced his staring face.

No ability, no dignity  
Can fail him now who trained so long  
For the outrage of eternity,  
Teaching his heart to beat a song  
In which man's strict humanity,  
Erect as a soldier, became a tongue.

Delmore Schwartz