

# When Delmore Schwartz Tells William Phillips that the Voices in his Head are Coming from the Top of the Empire State Building

*Amy Newman*

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When Delmore Schwartz tells William Phillips that the voices in his head  
are coming from the top of the Empire State Building,  
they look up toward the steeple rising 1,453 feet and 8 and 9/10 inches  
above New York, the flesh on their necks creasing.  
The pinnacle at building's top is a lightening rod,  
poking a delicate *so what* too close to the Farbissen Eye  
of Delmore's punishing, nagging, and abandoning God.  
Was that it, American poetry? Maybe that was it.  
Beneath the late 1950's fabric, their hearts strike repeatedly  
in their chests: relaxing, contracting, the A-OK American blood  
Dexamilled to a human shape, their Arrow shirts  
tapering up toward their unavoidable brains.  
Delmore's high, bright facade,  
that crèche of a face, cycles its paraffin features  
on his illuminated manuscript of a head.  
She grew large in the third month and could hide him no longer,  
She made a basket of bulrushes and placed him in it,  
by the softening riverbank. Who drew him out of the waters?  
*Take this child away*, he mutters, candling his eyes upward.  
The nation's hanging radio towers, wiring for infinities,  
O advanced wilderness!  
The ad for Dexedrine Sulfate reads: *New life for the living*  
beneath the photograph of men holding golf clubs of optimism,  
smoking cigarettes of well-being,  
their sadness pared to a Tom Thumb rage so slender,  
you can dissolve it under your tongue,  
and rinse it with the yes of Miltown, in your cycling veins,  
and rinse it again with Phenobarbital's yes,  
and you're golden, you're fatted calf, you're milk and honey.

## When Delmore Schwartz Looks out the Window of R.P. Blackmur's Princeton Office, Which Delmore's Using While Blackmur is Away

*Amy Newman*

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When Delmore Schwartz looks out the window of R. P. Blackmur's Princeton office,  
which Delmore's using while Blackmur is away  
a common pigeon lands on the sill. Separated by glass,  
on the outside, the pretty one, anxious and lost.  
The heart's ballistics panic the future.  
What's captivity? The mother cage in the brain,  
or the stingy heart, engine of the whole aerobic flight?  
What's paradise to the exile but the past,  
which was not paradise? The mother country  
blurred her complaints all over you, and there you are,  
in someone else's territory, with someone else's books,  
tapping cigarette ash into a Savarin can, the smoke  
wandering toward the window where a pigeon  
perches on tense, crimson feet.  
When Mary and Joseph fled into Egypt,  
they stopped to rest in an inhospitable,  
cheerless, cynical desert dark, a barren,  
fruitless dark. In such a dark (the cut-dead dark,  
the forsaken dark, the exile's unproductive dark)  
you need what they had, the baby god, warm as knish,  
bird-small, content, certain, unashamed of you,  
its candle power fluttering your bones, its tiny head  
iridescent with love and asking nothing.

# By the Time John Berryman Bails Delmore Schwartz Out of Jail after the National Poetry Festival in Washington DC, The Trees at Court Green Have Uttered Their Leaves All Over England

Amy Newman

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By the time John Berryman bails Delmore Schwartz out of jail  
after the National Poetry Festival in Washington, DC,  
the trees at Court Green have uttered their leaves  
all over England. Hughes' mistress calls,  
and Plath rips out the phone with one brisk tug.  
She had decorated for her mother's arrival,  
painting intricate, perfect flowers on the hive,  
while the bees agitate in perplexed sweetness.  
It had been a spring so terrifyingly lovely,  
the laburnum's armies of gold, the cherry's vicious red  
suffused, like a heart muscle sliced open for splendor.  
And why not study the beating thing, its chock-full,  
bouquet-of-roses fiction, emptying and refilling,  
its up-to-here nectars cycling?

After Berryman posts bail in Washington,  
a bewildered Delmore escapes him,  
propels his pinion gear madness into a cab,  
bright, mackereled fury on his kiosk of a head  
like bunting, waving, disheveling.  
*What's the best way to get there*, he asks the cabdriver,  
*the head or the heart?* From the cab's window,  
the change of seasons is almost pretty.  
The cherry trees, having lost lost their virgin pinks,  
are the fiery, pissed-off color of something all wised-up.