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‘Europe is the greatest thing in North America’: Delmore Schwartz’s ‘International Consciousness’

Alexander Herbert Runchman

A Thesis submitted to the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

February 2012

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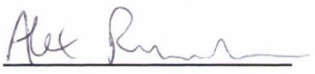

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ALEXANDER HERBERT RUNCHMAN

'Europe is the Greatest Thing in North America': Delmore Schwartz's 'International Consciousness'

Delmore Schwartz was the most committed of Europhiles, a writer whose sensibility often seems more European than American, even whilst his idiom and immediate frame of reference are distinctively American. He was preoccupied, at all stages of his career, by what it meant to live in America and to be an American in the middle of the twentieth century, but his understanding of this is always nuanced by his sensitivity to a European heritage that was both literary and – as the son of Jewish immigrants – personal. His enquiries into the nature of the American Dream, and the ways in which it differs from the actuality of life in the United States, are informed by an awareness of his nation's relation to the rest of the world.

This thesis investigates Schwartz's writing about alienation, the city, and the artist's role in society, taking as its organising principle a concept which the poet termed 'international consciousness' and which informs everything he wrote – not least his critically neglected *magnum opus*, *Genesis: Book One* and his underrated later poetry. I also consider the ways in which Schwartz's works respond to, and move away from, those of modernist mentors – particularly T. S. Eliot – arguing that his explorations of selfhood serve as a prompt to other poets of his generation. As well as close reading and suggesting new approaches to many of Schwartz's poems, I address his fiction and consider his cultural criticism within the milieu of the New York intellectuals, maintaining that Schwartz is a writer who, shortly before his centenary, is ripe for a long overdue rediscovery.

SUMMARY

My introduction considers the way in which Schwartz interprets the American Dream in a seminal essay about Ernest Hemingway, suggesting this as a framework within which to consider Schwartz's work in general. I then offer a critical overview, refuting James Atlas's simplistic presentation of Schwartz as a 'confessional' poet, delineating my own literary principles, and going on to argue that an appreciation of Schwartz's dream logic is a fruitful way into analysing his method of composition.

Chapter 1 addresses the relations between American and European culture that so preoccupied Schwartz. I argue that his engagement with the interplay between the two cultures (not that they are ever wholly distinct) is part of a larger concept which he referred to as 'international consciousness' and which has its origins, for Schwartz, in the writing of Eliot and Joyce. I define this concept and consider its application in three important early works. I then turn my attention to *Genesis: Book I*, arguing for its central position within Schwartz's oeuvre, and analysing the role played by its chorus of ghost-commentators.

My second chapter is about alienation and homelessness. A discussion of the 1941 essay 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry' establishes Schwartz's sense of the modern poet's detachment from his society. An analysis of the hybrid form of *Genesis* reveals that Schwartz's concerns with the composite nature of identity are apparent even in his form, whilst considerations of his Jewish background and of broader questions regarding race – as addressed in the story, 'A Bitter Farce' – establish the particular difficulties he encountered as a Jewish writer within an often anti-Semitic culture. The chapter concludes with further discussion of *Genesis* and of the story 'America! America!', looking at the ways in which immigrant characters mis-imagine how their lives will be in America, and at Schwartz's use of the Atlantic Ocean as a symbol for separation.

Chapter 3 analyses Schwartz's writing about New York City. This chapter sets Schwartz's city poems and stories alongside Oswald Spengler's notion of the 'world-city' and in the context of some of Walter Benjamin's writings about Baudelaire's Paris. I discuss the ways in which Schwartz portrays city crowds and buildings, and probe the importance of the subway to him. This leads into a consideration of the importance that screens and mirrors have for Schwartz as surfaces that are ever-present in the city and that continually affect the way in which we perceive the world

around us. An analysis of the poem 'America, America!' follows, addressing how the individual might be able to conceive of the entire city. The chapter then draws out the connections that Schwartz suggests between ancient Rome and the modern city of New York. It concludes by examining Schwartz's attitudes towards love and sex within an urban context.

Chapter 4 explores the tensions between societal engagement and societal withdrawal in Schwartz's work, focusing in particular on his transitional volume, *Vaudeville for a Princess*, and his statements, in letters and essays, on the Second World War and on American culture in the immediate aftermath of the War. *Vaudeville for a Princess*, I argue, is uneasily poised between purely literary concerns – and particularly the stymieing effects of over-influence by mentors such as Eliot – and matters of wider social import. Schwartz's poetry of the period is marked by survivor's guilt. He never resolves the question of the artist's responsibility to his society at such times, but his attempts to answer this question animate the volume. I compare Schwartz's comments on the War with the more robust arguments of Dwight MacDonald. Finally, the chapter examines the more hopeful outlook of some of Schwartz's post-War cultural criticism.

Chapter 5 re-evaluates Schwartz's often maligned later poems. Many of these, on first reading, appear to be straightforward, if abstract, nature poems. However, in positing a vision in which death always heralds rebirth, they endorse a hope for America which Schwartz longed to embrace in the decades after the War. The discovery of America becomes a key trope, illustrating the good that can arise from error. This chapter addresses Schwartz's engagement with American history, and the style, symbols, and ideology of his later poetry. Schwartz, I note, increasingly aligns himself with Whitman but never wholly abandons his early modernist mentors. 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine' is considered as a poem that exemplifies Schwartz's late philosophy. I discuss the poem's possible sources, and conclude the chapter with analyses of some of Schwartz's final, unfinished poems.

Finally, my conclusion reflects upon Schwartz's legacy and reiterates his sense of the relationship between Europe and the American culture that he both suffers and celebrates.

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patient and understanding. She has also read every word and is my most astute critic. I acknowledge, with love and admiration, that this would be a far lesser work without her.

ABBREVIATIONS

When referring to poems that first appeared in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* and which are reprinted in *Summer Knowledge*, I generally use the *Summer Knowledge* text since that book is now much more widely available.

Similarly, where possible, I use James Atlas's *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories* to refer to those stories from the now out-of-print *The World Is A Wedding* that Atlas reprints. When discussing 'The Statues', I refer to *Screeno: Stories and Poems*, for the same reason.

The following abbreviations are used throughout this thesis:

In Dreams Begin Responsibilities – *IDBR*
Genesis – *G*
The World Is A Wedding, and Other Stories – *WW*
Vaudeville for a Princess, and Other Poems – *V*
Selected Poems (1938-1958): Summer Knowledge – *SK*
Last & Lost Poems – *LL*
Screeno: Stories and Poems – *Screeno*
Selected Essays of Delmore Schwartz – *Essays*
Letters of Delmore Schwartz – *Letters*
Portrait of Delmore: Journals and Notes of Delmore Schwartz: 1939-1959 – *Portrait*
Delmore Schwartz and James Laughlin: Selected Letters – *DS & JL Letters*
Eliot, T. S., *The Complete Poems and Plays* – Eliot, *CPP*

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INTRODUCTION

The American Dream and Schwartz's Critical Reception

Schwartz's American Dream

> I have been an announcer, bouncer, denouncer, pronouncer, and pollster: the underlying unity of purpose in these dispersed occupations and preoccupations has been my infinite interest in – to be brief – the American Dream.[1]

These words are spoken by one Mr Singer on behalf of disk jockey Orville Wright, Jnr. in one of Delmore Schwartz's most bizarre later works, 'Kilroy's Carnival: A Poetic Prologue for TV', dated 1958. Given that he is named after one of the first men to fly – someone whose achievement epitomised the fulfilment of individual aspiration whilst also conferring universal benefit – Wright, Jnr. could hardly fail to be interested in the American Dream. In his distinctly modern job, he is a successor to the original Orville Wright.[2] His profession similarly enables him to overcome the constraints of time and space, and he can communicate instantaneously with people in other states and even countries. As a TV DJ, he also challenges the usual distinctions between two kinds of media. The opening stage direction insists that 'nothing is seen' (*LL*, p. 85), subverting the assumption that TV is a visual mechanism, although the fact that the piece is written 'for TV' indicates that the blank performance is nonetheless to be watched rather than listened to passively. Wright, Jnr. himself is initially anonymous, and his voice emanates from darkness, from no particular place, in a way that is dreamlike. There is no clarity, either, regarding when this 'poetic prologue' is taking place, or even what it is prologue to. We learn at the start that it is midnight of 'Night One', but that is all, and the show appears to be never-ending. As another voice (which is possibly that of Wright, Jnr. parodying himself, but possibly that of someone else) explains, 'I am conducting an interminable filibuster against the death of the heart in the little death of each day' (p. 94). It is a pronouncement that could also be used to describe Schwartz's own achievement in wide-ranging poems,

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[1] Delmore Schwartz, *Last & Lost Poems*, ed. by Robert Phillips, revised edn (New York: New Directions, 1989), p. 97. Subsequent references to poems in this book are interpolated in the text.
[2] Hugh Kenner (a critic who was notably hostile towards Schwartz) posits the Wright brothers' 1903 powered flight as one of the possible beginnings of modernism in America. See *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. xii.

stories, and essays which are similarly unified by his 'infinite interest' in the American Dream.

Schwartz's DJ – with his 'dispersed' preoccupations (some of them ephemeral and some of them metaphysical), his ambiguous identity, and his freedom from attachment to any specific time or location – can be understood to be a spokesman for what Schwartz termed 'international consciousness'. This is a concept that emphasises 'the extent to which the fate of the individual is inseparable from what is happening in the whole world.'[3] It also stresses the individual's relation to history, both personal and international. But 'international consciousness' is also, for Schwartz, about trying to transcend selfhood and the limitations of one's immediate environment and historical period so as to establish universal truths. There are often tensions in Schwartz's work between the starkly self-exploratory, investigations of personal identity that are grounded in the material world, and a less easily defined feeling for the numinous: one of the implicit principles of 'international consciousness' is that one must acquire self-knowledge before one can acquire universal knowledge, even though it is universal knowledge that is most valuable. These tensions animate Schwartz's oeuvre. The notion of 'international consciousness' is intricately connected to his conflicting ideas about America and about the dream of America that proved so seductive to immigrants of his parents' generation, and that has helped to define a uniquely American ethos from the nation's beginnings to the present day. This thesis will re-evaluate Schwartz's works in relation to such ideas.

In a 1955 essay on the fiction of Ernest Hemingway, Schwartz undertakes his most sustained discussion of the American Dream, arguing that Hemingway is its 'moral historian'. 'Hollywood has popularized and vulgarized the American Dream so widely', Schwartz explains, 'that its true character and dignity has become somewhat obscured.'[4] This alerts us to the difficulty of delineating precisely what this widely-accepted but much-disputed abstraction really is. Typically, we associate the American Dream with the belief that any individual can prosper in America regardless of background – 'the noble sentiment', as Schwartz puts it elsewhere, 'That every

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[3] 'The Vocation of The Poet in the Modern World', in *Selected Essays of Delmore Schwartz*, ed. by Donald A. Dike and David H. Zucker (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 14-23 (p. 20).

[4] 'The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway: Moral Historian of the American Dream', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 255-273 (p. 271).

poor boy can be president.'[5] This is the belief that James Truslow Adams appears to have had in mind when he coined the term in 1933, writing of 'that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all of our citizens of every rank which is the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world', and going on to insist that 'That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of the ordinary American to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it.'[6]

Schwartz frequently suggests, however, that the American Dream is more complicated than this. He points out that it 'is formulated in the American Constitution as every human being's inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' ('The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway', p. 271). If we accept this, there are nonetheless further distinctions to be made. The pursuit of happiness does not mean that one will attain happiness. A dream may turn into a nightmare, or it may never come true. And, if it does come true, its fulfilment may yet turn out to be underwhelming. Furthermore, if belief in the American Dream is an inherent characteristic of what it is to be American, there may nonetheless be many Americans who do not even realise that they are invested in it. 'The American Dream', Schwartz insists, 'is believed by many human beings who [...] are unaware of their belief or convinced that they have awakened from it. The fact [...] that disillusion is inseparable from illusion and despair from hope, is disregarded' (p. 271). Thus, somebody who has given up on the possibility of becoming president, or of making their own way in the world, might still believe in the dream even if it can no longer come true for them. 'Hemingway's most desperate and unhappy characters', in common with 'many more sanguine human beings', Schwartz contends, 'have converted the legal right to life, liberty and happiness into attitudes, emotions, an organized way of life which believes not only in the pursuit but the certainty of happiness' (p. 271). For anyone with such a belief disappointment is inevitable for the simple reasons that happiness is never, in reality, certain, and that, even if one does achieve it, it is unlikely to last. Thus the American Dream is 'a source of illusion and hope'; all the same, it is one by which people structure their lives, and as such it is 'primary' and 'important' (p. 271).

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[5] Delmore Schwartz, *Vaudeville for A Princess* (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 56. Subsequent references to poems in this book are interpolated in the text.

[6] James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1933), p. v.

The American Dream, then, signifies for Schwartz the full range of individual and shared emotions that are consequent upon striving for ideals but knowing disappointment. It also incorporates the ways in which one tries to overcome or cope with such setbacks. In reality, the American Dream guarantees no security, as Schwartz goes on to illustrate:

> every American of Hemingway's generation has known the most exalted expectations and the most desperate disasters. Living through the First World War, the great era of prosperity, the crash, the long depression, the Second World War, and a new era of prosperity, he has been subjected to the American Dream's giddy, unpredictable, magical, tragic, and fabulous juggernaut.
>
> ('The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway', p. 272)

Consequently, one is more likely to experience anxiety than stability, and this awareness is everywhere suggested by the preoccupations – with money and fame, belonging and alienation, and success and failure – that recur throughout Schwartz's writing. The conclusion of his essay on Hemingway may be especially resonant when read alongside the poems Schwartz wrote in the mid to late 1950s that explicitly address the need to reconcile one's hopes with one's actual experiences. However, it equally illuminates his earliest published works which, under the title *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, also consider the relation of the dreams by which we sustain a sense of ourselves to the quotidian world in which we live.

The American Dream, Schwartz rhapsodises, is 'the greatest of human dreams'. It is

> the beginning of heartbreaking hope and despair; its promise is the cause of overwhelming ambition and overwhelming anxiety: the anxiety and the hope make courage an obsession and an endless necessity in the face of endless fear and insecurity: but the dream, the hope, the anxiety, and the courage began with the discovery of America.
>
> ('The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway', p. 273)

Arguably, it began even earlier than that. Schwartz sometimes portrays Columbus as the first American dreamer, but he was living out a dream that others had had before him. Although it was not fulfilled in the way that he had expected, Columbus's dream would seem to have been justified by his discovery, which gave the dream a definition that it had not previously had. It also gave rise to new responsibilities, not just for Columbus but for those who came after him. It is the relationship of such responsibilities to the dreams that generated them which obsessed Schwartz throughout his life and work.

Schwartz's Critical Reception

Like Orville Wright, Jnr., Schwartz was a man of 'dispersed occupations'. 'I have been employed as a teacher of English composition, English literature, American literature, and creative writing at eight universities,' he explained in 1958. 'I have also been a lecturer, the editor of a literary review, the poetry editor and film critic of a weekly periodical, [and] the literary consultant for a philanthropic foundation.'[7] Primarily, however, he was a writer: a poet, short story writer, essayist, writer of verse plays, reviewer, and letter writer. In all of these fields he was accomplished; as a poet, writer of prose fiction, and essayist, he was pioneering, not only creating outstanding works in their own right but also exerting a much greater influence over later writers than has hitherto been acknowledged. His various literary endeavours are unified by a common interest in what it means to live in America and to be an American in the middle of the twentieth century; to suffer the hopes and disappointments of following the American Dream.

In the years since his death in 1966, Schwartz's work has suffered a critical neglect that it does not deserve. This is despite the best efforts of Robert Phillips, the poet's literary executor, to ensure that as much of his writing as possible is available in print. Phillips has overseen the publication of letters, 'bagatelles', plays and, most importantly, poems uncollected or unpublished during Schwartz's lifetime.[8] Other important posthumous publications include Donald A. Dike and David Zucker's selection of Schwartz's essays (1970), which testifies to his versatility and perceptiveness as a critic; *What Is To Be Given: Selected Poems* (1976), the only British selection of Schwartz's poetry, introduced by Douglas Dunn; *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories* (1978), James Atlas's edition of Schwartz's most representative fiction (mostly taken from the now out-of-print *The World Is A Wedding* [1948]); and, most recently, *Screeno: Stories and Poems* (2005), a selection

[7] Delmore Schwartz, 'The Present State of Poetry', in *Selected Essays,* pp. 30-50 (p. 38).
[8] The collections edited by Phillips are *Last and Lost Poems*; *Letters of Delmore Schwartz* (Princeton, N.J: Ontario review Press, 1984); *The Ego is Always at the Wheel: Bagatelles* (New York: New Directions, 1986); *Delmore Schwartz and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993); and *Shenandoah and Other Verse Plays* (BOA Editions Ltd, 2000). Subsequent references to these books are interpolated in the text.

introduced by Cynthia Ozick.[9] Schwartz's journals have also been edited and published by Elizabeth Pollet, his second wife: *Portrait of Delmore* (1986) offers the reader an intriguing, if harrowing, insight into the writer's mind and creative process.[10]

Students of Schwartz's writing are fortunate that such an abundance of initially uncollected work has been published. All the same, as Phillips himself admits, their publication is of limited value given that Schwartz's poetry is currently so little read – and 'it is as a *poet*', Phillips maintains, 'that Schwartz makes his greatest claim on posterity'.[11] The chief purpose of publishing letters, journals, essays and plays as well, he suggests, is to keep 'the coals of public interest glowing, so to speak, until they can be stoked by some future critic who will return to the poetry and newly assess it'.[12] There is no doubt that Schwartz himself esteemed poetry above the other arts he practised. However, it is crucial to consider Schwartz's achievements in poetry and in prose (both fictional and discursive) in relation to each other and to acknowledge that he often challenges the distinctions between the two. The letters, and especially the essays, also have more than the incidental value that Phillips grants them here, attesting as they do to Schwartz's overwhelmingly literary sensibility, brimming with delicate and acute insights, and vividly revealing aspects of both his public and private personae. The degree to which they inform, and are informed by, the poetry, however, would be lost on any reader not already familiar with the poetry, and the fact remains that in the eighteen years since the last of these publications the coals of public (and of academic) interest have, if anything, cooled even further. Such indifference is most clearly attested to by the fact that *Genesis: Book One*, a work at the centre of Schwartz's oeuvre and one crucial to a persuasive reassessment, remains virtually unobtainable: published in 1943, it has never been reprinted.

One gauge of Schwartz's neglect is his minimal representation in recent anthologies of American poetry and literature. Phillips observes his merely token

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[9] See *What is to be Given: Selected Poems by Delmore Schwartz* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976); *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, ed. by James Atlas (New York: New Directions, 1978); *The World Is A Wedding: and Other Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1948); and *Screeno: Stories & Poems* (New York: New Directions, 2004). Subsequent references to these books are interpolated in the text.

[10] *Portrait of Delmore: Journals and Notes of Delmore Schwartz: 1939 – 1959*, ed. by Elizabeth Pollet (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986). Subsequent references to this book are interpolated in the text.

[11] Robert Phillips, 'Introduction' in *The Ego Is Always at the Wheel*, pp. ix-xii (p. xii) (Phillips's emphasis).

[12] Phillips, p. xii.

presence in Richard Ellmann's *New Oxford Book of American Verse* and his total exclusion from Helen Vendler's *Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. Since then, there has been no place for him either in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, or Cary Nelson's *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, to mention only those that most purport to be comprehensive.[13] There are, however, important exceptions. David Lehman's *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* includes 'Far Rockaway' (one of John Ashbery's favourites), 'All Clowns are Masked And All Personae' and 'Pleasure', the first of five prose interludes from 'Coriolanus and His Mother'.[14] These are enterprising choices, and Lehman's inclusion of 'Pleasure' represents an implicit claim for the poetic quality of Schwartz's prose. Harold Bloom and Jesse Zuba's selection of Schwartz's 'At A Solemn Musick' for their anthology of *American Religious Poems* (2006) is also bold, conferring value on one of Schwartz's rhapsodic late poems and inviting readers to place Schwartz within a larger American tradition that until now his critics have largely overlooked.[15] Bloom also finds space for 'The First Night of Fall and Falling Rain' in *Till I End My Song: A Gathering of Last Poems*.[16]

There is still a chance, then, that the discerning anthology reader might be persuaded to seek Schwartz's work out further, but the overall neglect remains. There have been just three book-length studies of Schwartz's writing – Richard McDougall's *Delmore Schwartz* (1974), Robert Deutsch's *The Poetry of Delmore Schwartz* (published posthumously in 2003, some twenty years after Deutsch's death), and Edward Ford's indiscriminating paean, *A Re-evaluation of the works of American Writer Delmore Schwartz, 1913-1966* (2003).[17] Although all contain some attributes by which to recommend them, none, ultimately, serves Schwartz well. McDougall and

---

[13] See *New Oxford Book of American Verse*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (New York: OUP, 1976); *Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. by Helen Vendler (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985); Baym, Nina, et al, ed., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 7th edn, ed. by Nina Baym et al (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007); *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 5th edn, ed. by Paul Lauter et al (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); and *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, ed. by Cary Nelson (New York: OUP, 2000).

[14] Lehman, David, ed., *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* (New York: OUP, 2006), pp. 592-596. See also *The Best American Poetry 2000*, ed. by Rita Dove (New York: Scribner Poetry, 2000), pp. 271 and 284 for Ashbery and Lehman's nominations of 'Far Rockaway' and 'Coriolanus and His Mother' as being amongst the fifteen best American poems of the twentieth century.

[15] *American Religious Poems*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Jesse Zuba (New York: Library of America, 2006), p. 327.

[16] *Till I End My Song: A Gathering of Last Poems*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Harper, 2010).

[17] Richard McDougall, *Delmore Schwartz* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974); Robert H. Deutsch, *The Poetry of Delmore Schwartz* (Potsdam, N.Y.: Wallace Stevens Society Press, 2003); and Edward Ford, *A Re-evaluation of the works of American Writer Delmore Schwartz, 1913-1966* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellor Press, 2005).

Deutsch offer sound but cautious readings of the major works; in their efforts to offer chronological overviews, however, some of their readings of individual poems are merely cursory and their overall arguments loose. Each underplays the thematic and stylistic unity of Schwartz's work, emphasising instead their conviction that the quality of his writing declined. Ford, conversely, argues wholeheartedly in favour of the later verse, claiming that the new poems in *Summer Knowledge* show 'a mature poet who has at last thrown off the shackles of his early Eliot imitations to forge his own unique style'.[18] Ford regularly undermines his own arguments, however, and though his book is fascinating as an example of the admiration Schwartz has inspired in one reader, it is deeply flawed as a work of criticism. The author's over-identification of himself with his subject the main problem: 'I have learned from you, Delmore, that I am not alone, that it is normal for obsessive geniuses to be at odds with their age, and that the poetry is worth the price that we pay to produce it' (Ford, p. 5). Ford's occasional insights – into the importance for Schwartz of the French symbolists, for example, or into how 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon By The Seine' might be read as a later companion piece to 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' – are overshadowed by his critical eccentricities. He discusses 'Coriolanus and His Mother' without once mentioning Shakespeare, and accuses Ashbery, the most avant-garde of American poets and one who admires Schwartz, of being a conservative critic who '[does] not understand modern poetry' (p. 99). Ultimately, Ford's 'reassessment' reinforces the image of Schwartz as derailed genius more potently than anything else that has been written about him.

These monographs aside, the extent of criticism published on Schwartz has been limited to occasional journal articles or chapters in books that consider mid-twentieth century American poetry more generally. Bruce Bawer recognises Schwartz as the prototype of the middle generation poet who struggled to break away from the influence of modernist masters he initially revered.[19] Bawer writes compellingly about T. S. Eliot's importance to Schwartz, but his Freudian readings – which posit Eliot as a surrogate father figure and insist upon Schwartz's latent homosexuality – tend to overlook the craft of Schwartz's work, not to mention other aspects of it that cannot be accounted for by psychological speculation. Adam Kirsch devotes a chapter to

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[18] Ford, p. 99.

[19] Bruce Bawer, *The Middle Generation: The Lives and Poetry of Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman and Robert Lowell* (Hamden, Conn: Shoe String, 1986).

Schwartz in *The Wounded Surgeon: Confession and Transformation in Six American Poets*, and makes a welcome case for *Genesis*, but his study is prone to over-generalisation.[20] Although Kirsch raises a number of pressing questions, such as the importance of Marx and Freud to Schwartz, few of these are explored in sufficient detail. Questions of style and tone become subsidiary to Kirsch's overall argument that for Schwartz and his contemporaries poetry-writing was a kind of therapy.

Lila Lee Valenti's 'The Apprenticeship of Delmore Schwartz' was the first article to draw extensively upon archive materials.[21] It considers drafts of early sonnets, including ones that would become 'The Beautiful American Word, Sure'. Valenti is principally concerned with the process of Schwartz's writing, but, whilst her insights into the style of his unpublished juvenilia are illuminating enough, she never makes a real case for his overall importance. Given the growing neglect, even then, of Schwartz's mature work, Valenti's focus (in contrast to Bawer's and Kirsch's) is too narrow to reveal the uniqueness of Schwartz's work.

Jim Keller's recent reappraisal of Schwartz, in his essay 'Delmore Schwartz's Strange Times', is more sophisticated. Treating the life and the work together, Keller begins by painting Schwartz as 'by turns one whose time had come too early and one whose time has not yet come'.[22] He goes on to delineate how Schwartz's poetry vacillates between two oppositional stances towards time, one suggested by Heidegger which imagines how the 'future will provide increasing clarity about the past' and by which 'being is definitively future directed', and the other suggested by Walter Benjamin whereby 'the anticipation of what is new in the future is realized only though remembering a past that has been suppressed' – in other words, 'a past-directed account of temporality' (Keller, p. 156). Modernist consciousness of time, Keller suggests, goes some way towards reconciling these tendencies 'by rendering the present as an authentic moment seamlessly unified by both tradition and innovation' (p. 157). Schwartz's poetry, however, continually exposes 'the struggle to contain these opposed impulses' (p. 157). He was both forward and backward looking, and 'poetically perceived and lived the irreconcilable tasks of writing both a rhapsodic remembrance and a founding epic' (p. 157). Keller refers to 'the

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[20] Adam Kirsch, *The Wounded Surgeon: Confession and Transformation in Six American Poets* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

[21] Lila Lee Valenti, 'The Apprenticeship of Delmore Schwartz' in *Twentieth Century Literature* 20.3 (July 1974), 201-216.

[22] Jim Keller, 'Delmore Schwartz's Strange Times' in. *Reading The Middle Generation Anew*, ed. by Eric Haralson (Iowa City; University of Iowa, 2006), pp. 153-82 (p. 153).

contradictory experiences that emerge in Schwartz's poetry' as 'shattered' (backward-looking) time and 'accretive' (forward-looking) time (p. 158), and his discussion provides a valuable context for a consideration of Schwartz's concept of 'international consciousness'. However, Keller's claims also need to be set alongside a greater appreciation of Schwartz's formal and aesthetic practices.

Since 1968, sixteen doctoral and MA theses have been completed on Schwartz in the United States and Canada, many of them considering him alongside other writers. The most pertinent of these to the present study is Scott Richardson's *Exile From the Actual: Delmore Schwartz and the Difficult Inheritance of T. S. Eliot.* Richardson assesses exile as a trope for Schwartz and rehearses the poet's sometimes admiring and sometimes critical views of Eliot, suggesting that in late career 'he attempted to remain Eliot's stylistic disciple while shaking off his mentor's ideas.'[23] Although Richardson's arguments are generally sound, his failure to discuss *Vaudeville for a Princess* at all – the volume in which Schwartz's attempts to break away from Eliot's influence are most apparent – is symptomatic of the dissertation's weaknesses. R. W. E. Nelson's *Self-Reflections and Repetitions: A Study of the Writings of Delmore Schwartz*, the only UK thesis written on Schwartz, meanwhile emphasises the centrality of the figure of Narcissus for Schwartz, examining moments of self-consciousness in his work.[24] Nelson's thesis is suggestive, but ultimately more descriptive than it is analytical.

Despite his current neglect, few poets can have enjoyed more favourable responses from the leading critics and poets of their day than Schwartz did on the publication of his first collection, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, in 1938. Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Mark Van Doren all considered it a triumph. Tate described Schwartz's style as 'the only genuine innovation we've had since Pound and Eliot came upon the scene twenty-five years ago', as well as praising his 'wholly new feeling for language' and use of 'a new metrical system of great subtlety and originality.[25] Eliot himself took notice, and Wallace Stevens was one of the first to proffer his congratulations. Although Schwartz never again achieved such acclaim, he remained a figure of enormous literary authority throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

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[23] Scott Richardson, *Exile From the Actual: Delmore Schwartz and the Difficult Inheritance of T. S. Eliot* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1997), p. 14.
[24] Richard William Eric Nelson, *Self-Reflections and Repetitions: A Study of the Writings of Delmore Schwartz* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1994).
[25] Cited in *DS & JL Letters*, p. 47.

Why, then, has he suffered such a reversal of critical fortune, his literary reputation surpassed by those of peers and successors who once regarded him as a mentor?

One reason is that Schwartz's critics have tended to consider the different facets of his art only in isolation, and often from limiting perspectives. To scholars of Jewish literature he is noteworthy almost exclusively for his fiction, whilst to admirers of middle generation poetry he has become a footnote to discussions of other poets with whom he was associated, particularly John Berryman and Robert Lowell. Furthermore, only a small proportion of his total output has been addressed at any length. Of the stories, only 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', written in 1935 when Schwartz was twenty-one, and 'America! America!' have received extensive critical scrutiny. They are fine and influential pieces; but Schwartz's other stories, including those in *Successful Love and Other Stories* – which have been almost entirely ignored and which extend the scope of his social satire and his probing of ethical and philosophical problems – also deserve attention.[26] Similarly, the consensus that his first collection of poetry is also his best has been so universally accepted that few critics have deemed it worthwhile to reappraise the later poems at all. Even that collection is now only noted for one or two once popular anthology pieces, most notably 'The Heavy Bear Who Goes With Me' and 'In The Naked Bed, In Plato's Cave' – again, fine poems, but not Schwartz's only fine poems. The essays, which arguably represent Schwartz's most consistent achievement, and to which any serious literary scholar of the '40s and '50s would have paid close attention when they were first published in *Partisan Review*, *The Kenyon Review* and *The Southern Review*, amongst others, have also been almost entirely forgotten.

Aside from the overall neglect, an important feature of Schwartz's creative method that is lost as a consequence of considering his work in different mediums in isolation is the extent to which the poems, stories and essays inform each other. As with Eliot, Schwartz's essays often elucidate the principles according to which he wrote his poetry, albeit sometimes more obliquely than Eliot's. For instance, 'international consciousness' is proposed in a personal letter, explored publicly in a number of essays, and given creative life in *Genesis* and other poems and stories. The recent New Directions bibelot publication of *Screeno: Stories and Poems* is the first posthumous edition of Schwartz's work to present his fiction and poetry alongside

[26] *Successful Love, and Other Stories* (New York: Corinth Books, 1961).

each other. Cynthia Ozick, in her introduction, proposes the artificial distinction that the poems are 'Delmorean', strange and exotic, and the stories 'Schwartzian', plain and to the point. Her conclusion, however, is that 'In the end the stories are seen to be, bone for bone, blood for blood, of the same Delmorean germ plasm as the poems'.[27] Lehman would no doubt support this contention: he proposes that Schwartz's true genius lies in his fiction but contends that he could not have written such fiction had he not also been a poet.[28] There is no way of proving such a claim, but the fact that Schwartz himself included prose in each of the books of poetry published in his lifetime suggests that he practised the two disciplines alongside each other and did not regard them separately, whatever their surface differences.

In his prefatory note to *Genesis*, Schwartz explains that his aim is to seek 'to regain for Poetry the width of reference of prose without losing what the Symbolists discovered'.[29] This aspect of his poetry has troubled some critics whose understanding of what poetry ought to be is rigid. Deutsch's monograph is limited by his decision to exclude any discussion whatsoever of Schwartz's fiction 'since it is not poetry'.[30] Later, he remarks that Schwartz's late poetry is 'a peculiar poetry, very close to discussion, to discourse, to prose. He is talking too much *about* his subject; he is not rendering it excellently enough' (Deutsch, p. 115). Deutsch gives no reason, however, for why poetry should not be close to discussion or prose; and not rendering one's subject excellently enough would be just as detrimental to a prose piece as to a poem. If Deutsch means to suggest, as Ashbery has claimed, that Schwartz's poetry is sometimes ponderous, then that is not in itself a question of form.[31]

McDougall also struggles to determine what may or may not pass as poetry. His chief objection is to Schwartz's habit of discoursing philosophically in verse. In *Genesis*, McDougall argues, Schwartz 'more often than not betrays the spirit of poetry by using blank verse in iambic pentameter for highly intellectualized arguments, some of which, perhaps, he would have been reluctant to state so baldly in prose.'[32] But this is to ignore the entire dramatic context of *Genesis*: the blank verse is spoken by a chorus of ghosts who, if they are not quite fully formed characters, are at least

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[27] Cynthia Ozick, 'Introduction', in *Screeno*, pp. 7-16 (p. 15).
[28] David Lehman, 'Delmore, Delmore: A Mournful Cheer', in *The Line Forms Here* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 65-81 (p. 68).
[29] 'To The Reader', in *Genesis*, pp. vii-ix (p. ix).
[30] Deutsch, p. 27.
[31] See John Ashbery, 'Schubert's Unfinished: David Schubert' in *Selected Prose* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), pp. 176-177 (p. 176).
[32] McDougall, p. 48.

something more than mouthpieces for Schwartz's own philosophical concerns. They are also subjected to a good deal of irony and their 'intellectualized arguments' cannot, therefore, be taken too seriously. For Schwartz, the aesthetic was primary, but this does not exclude the possibility of poetry also being philosophical: Stevens, the most aesthetic *and* most philosophical of poets, is an obvious case in point. There is also the fact that exegesis is itself a central concern of much of Schwartz's poetry – particularly 'Coriolanus and His Mother' and *Genesis*. McDougall's 'spirit of poetry', which conjures up a vague and predominantly Romantic concept of poetry as necessarily mellifluous and grounded in comforting metaphors, does not allow for the degree of self-referentiality that characterises not only much of Schwartz's poetry but also that of many of his contemporaries.

The crucial point is to recognise that Schwartz's writing cannot be made to conform to any particular dictum defining conventions or even specific genres. This is as true of his fiction as of his poetry. Bonnie Lyons has pointed out, for example, that his stories tend to defy the conventions of his time of revolving around a single crisis and of leading to a clear resolution.[33] For Schwartz, the act of storytelling itself, and the exploration of his characters' identities, matter more. He was too interested in defying categorisation and blurring distinctions to make tenable a straightforward assessment of his oeuvre according to external predetermined principles. His writing demands to be read on its own terms.

Benjamin Schreier has forcefully put the case against reading Schwartz from over-determined perspectives, pointing out that the pitfalls of over-determination are themselves explored in much of Schwartz's writing. A professor in Jewish Studies, Schreier argues in particular that Schwartz needs to be unbound from the 'representative relationship to Jewishness' that has too often been seen as 'the only possible referent for "his generation's" cultural production'.[34] Schwartz's reception, Schreier points out, has been stymied by its entanglement in 'an array of robust historical associations and determinants that individually and in combination lay powerful claim to his significance' (Schreier, p. 514). Just as limiting as the historical impulse that insists on relating his work to exclusively Jewish experience are the biographical impulse to interpret his work in relation to his much publicised personal

[33] Bonnie Lyons, 'Delmore Schwartz and the Whole Truth', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 14 (1977), 259-264 (p. 259).
[34] Benjamin Schreier, 'Jew Historicism: Delmore Schwartz and Overdetermination', *Prooftexts*, 27.3 (2007), 500-530 (p. 514).

difficulties and the political impulse that seeks Trotskyite leanings in all that he wrote, refusing to extricate his own political scepticism from the more emphatic views represented by *Partisan Review*. 'Surely', Schreier notes,

> if we can read Hawthorne or James without necessarily consigning them to a white Protestant ghetto, we can read Schwartz without necessarily consigning him to a Jewish one; nothing keeps us from teaching Schwartz in twentieth-century or post-1865 American literature surveys, for example, outside the "Jewish" rubric.
> (p. 525)

This ought to be obvious. Schwartz moved in many circles and had many interests. It should not be surprising, then, that his work eludes easy categorisation. When he writes about Jewish experience, it tends to be in the wider context of American experience; when he writes about American experience, it is almost always in the knowledge that this is contingent upon America's relationship to the rest of the world and to the past.

If Schwartz's Jewish heritage were all, he would presumably never have had any readership that was not, itself, Jewish, a point suggested by Lyons when she contests Robert Flint's celebration of Schwartz as a 'historian' whose stories provide 'the definitive portrait of the Jewish middle class in New York during the depression.'[35] Had Schwartz been solely a historian, Lyons argues, 'his stories would now have only the interest of social documents or the appeal of nostalgia: a written scrapbook of dated pictures.'[36] She wrote this in 1977: they would have even less significance now. Schwartz in fact achieved something quite different to what Flint valued. Accurate and believable though the settings of his stories undoubtedly are, his craft transforms them from mere social documentation into satirical, philosophical, and aesthetic pieces addressing concerns – such as alienation and the conflict between generations – which, though they might have been especially pertinent to Jewish immigrant families in 1930s New York, are also universal. The question of Schwartz's identity as a Jewish writer is further complicated when one takes into account that as a young man he had considered converting to Catholicism and that when he writes about questions of belief the perspective is as often Christian as Jewish.

There is also a general supposition that Schwartz was very much of his era and that his work has become less important with time – a view that sees Schwartz not so

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[35] Robert W. Flint, 'The Stories of Delmore Schwartz', *Commentary*, 33 (1962), 336-339 (p. 336).
[36] Lyons, p. 259.

much as historian as historical figure. Deutsch argues that Schwartz's work often seems dated because he always writes with a long focus: 'there is a distance between Schwartz and his object at all times, and these poles [are] much further apart than is the custom today.'[37] This makes Schwartz's perspective in his writing seem more uniform than it actually is. In several poems, Schwartz shows himself to be adept at changing focus, panning out, for example, from the narrow view of the Czar's children at play in 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' to a vision of the world spinning aimlessly, or, in *Genesis*, from the intimate childhood experiences of Hershey Green to the worldwide perspective of the ghost commentators. It is a technique borrowed from cinema that helps to lend wider significance to closely observed scenes and it undermines Deutsch's contention that Schwartz's focus is unchanging. There *is* sometimes nostalgia in Schwartz's work, but this is usually offset by his stylistic and technical innovations.

Even at the height of his success, however, dissenters such as Louise Bogan accused Schwartz of merely appropriating the characteristic features of high modernism, writing poems that were overly allusive and arch in tone.[38] However, this ignores the fact that allusion is integral to Schwartz's method of writing rather than being a lazy affectation. Furthermore, there is a case to be made for Schwartz being ahead of his time as a writer who anticipated many of the critical debates that have arisen in recent years concerning identity, nationality and the role of literature within society. His international perspective, for example, anticipates recent transnational, and especially transatlantic, scholarship. Today, an observation Schwartz made in 1958 might be taken for granted: 'English literature no longer exists as an independent entity. Whether the poet is reading, writing or teaching, the text is a text in comparative literature.'[39] It is a conviction that was probably held by American writers such as Whitman and Melville long before Schwartz ever articulated it thus, and for present-day critics such as Wai Chee Dimock, whose notions of 'Deep Time' and of American literature as 'world literature' have become influential, such a contention would be beyond dispute.[40] Nonetheless, in 1958 it represented an advance on the still

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[37] Deutsch, p. 10

[38] Louise Bogan, 'Young Modern' in *Nation*, 148 (25 March 1939).

[39] 'The Present State of Poetry', p. 48.

[40] See Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), and especially her 'Introduction', pp. 1-6.

pervasive New Criticism and it was one of Schwartz's particular achievements to reconcile such a view with a continued belief in the autonomy of individual texts.

The most damaging of the over-determined perspectives from which Schwartz's work has been considered is the biographical one. The circumstances of his chaotic and unhappy life have overshadowed his literary achievement. James Atlas's *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of An American Poet*, published in 1977, is thorough in charting the parabola of Schwartz's fortunes, and one cannot blame Atlas for giving the facts about a life that had already acquired mythic status years before his biography appeared.[41] After all, as Schwartz himself recognised, the increased interest of the public in the poetry world at mid-century was 'an interest in the poet, far more than an interest in poetry itself'.[42] Atlas tells of Schwartz's early rise to literary fame; the acclaim he won from critics; and the cultural influence he exerted when he became an editor of *Partisan Review*. He is unsparing, as a biographer should be, in his account of Schwartz's two failed marriages; his decline in critical reputation; and his increasing dependence upon alcohol and the amphetamine-based drugs and sleeping pills prescribed to him for insomnia. Coupled with an already-established tendency towards manic mood swings, these addictions prompted paranoid delusions which ultimately led Schwartz to distrust almost everybody to whom he had once been close. He died alone, aged 52, of a heart attack in a seedy New York hotel. His body was not identified for three days.

Atlas does not sensationalise any of this: that is simply what happened. He presents a rounded portrait of a complex and troubled character in a biography that is scrupulously researched. However, as Lehman has noted, it is lacking as a critical literary biography, offering only perfunctory readings of even Schwartz's major works and therefore doing little to encourage the reader to return to them.[43] It is evident also that, despite his book's subtitle, Atlas generally prefers Schwartz's fiction to his verse. Furthermore, in asserting that 'confession was the medium best suited to [Schwartz's] compulsive self-investigations', Atlas buys into a kind of critical branding that for a long time blighted the reception of Lowell and Berryman amongst others.[44] In the last twenty years or so, critics – notably Steven Gould Axelrod and

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[41] James Atlas, *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1977).
[42] 'The Present State Of Poetry', p. 43.
[43] Lehman, 'Delmore, Delmore' p. 74.
[44] Atlas, p. 137.

Thomas Travisano – have challenged the notion of 'confessional' poetry, arguing, amongst other things, that the term denies the artistry of the poet and suggests a desire for absolution that may not necessarily be present. Within academic circles, though not necessarily amongst more general readers, the term has been largely discredited, although none of the alternatives so far proposed for discussing the middle generation has yet become established. In the absence of any substantial critical work on Schwartz in this time period, the term still needs, in his case, to be contested. [45]

Schwartz was adept at creating personae and at using distancing devices that make the idea of bald confession particularly problematic: it is probable that Lowell and Berryman learned from his example. It should also be apparent that, although one of his most important reactions against his modernist mentors, with their doctrine of impersonality, was to reinstate the self at the centre of his poetry, Schwartz was primarily interested in the self in relation to its immediate society, its historical context, and the world at large rather than as an isolated subject for narcissistic contemplation. It has largely been forgotten, too, that when M. L. Rosenthal first coined the term 'confessional' to describe Lowell's *Life Studies* in 1959 – some time, incidentally, after Schwartz had stopped translating episodes from his own life into poetry and was, instead, composing more abstract verse – he intended it to mean something much broader than it has subsequently come to suggest. Rosenthal conceived of the confessional poet as a kind of spokesman on behalf of his society.[46] If Schwartz is confessional at all it is in this broader sense. Nonetheless, the term is still limiting, failing to take into account the philosophical and psychological

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[45] See Steven Gould Axelrod, *Robert Lowell: Life and Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) and Thomas J. Travisano, *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell, Berryman and the Making of a Postmodern Aesthetic* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 1999). Travisano argues for reading the poetry of Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell and Berryman not as 'confessional' but as 'an ongoing exploration of selfhood in a postmodern world' (p. 67), allowing readers to approach their poems without the kind of preconceptions that the term 'confessional' invites. 'Their particular postmodern aesthetic', Travisano claims, 'concerns itself principally with exploring the vicissitudes and displacements of the individual human self [...] dramatizing that individual's problems of knowledge, identity, traumatic loss, and repressed or otherwise unresolved feelings of isolation, confusion, anger or grief' (p. 9). Travisano is impelled to label his quartet 'postmodern' partly for historical reasons – most of their mature works were published after World War Two – and partly on account of 'their shared determination to bypass or unmake modernism's impersonal aesthetic' (p. 9). He concedes that postmodernism has had many lines of development, some of which, like modernism, promote impersonality. However, he sees the shift to the personal as the most important distinction between the poets he discusses and their mentors. Travisano's 'self-exploratory' and 'postmodern' paradigms can be applied to Schwartz too, and although he omits Schwartz from his study, Travisano accepts that many of his conclusions 'readily extend to Schwartz's work at its best' (p. 21). In fact, as shall be seen, Schwartz was attempting to 'address the problem of selfhood in the postmodern world' many years before his better-remembered contemporaries.

[46] See M. L. Rosenthal, *The Modern Poets: A Critical Introduction* (New York: OUP, 1960).

impetuses behind much of Schwartz's writing, his belief in taking an international perspective, and his consciousness that all individuals have to contend with forces beyond their own control that could hardly be their fault – such as when and where they were born, what political decisions made on the other side of the world years before their birth turn out to affect their lives, and even what name they are given. Even Schwartz's most inward-looking poetry is more exploratory than it is starkly revealing.

It might be argued that Schwartz himself considered his poetry, at times, to be confessional. Why else would he write lines such as 'Face yourself, constantly go back / To what you were, your own history' (*SK*, p. 31); 'see my shocking nakedness' (p. 45), or 'give the poor boy the power / To speak his naked heart' (*G*, p. 207)? Why else do mirrors, in which the poet is compelled to face his own reflection, recur so often if not as symbols of the kind of self-scrutiny he attempts in his poems? These contentions are easy to refute. All of the lines just quoted are spoken within dramatic contexts. A distance is thereby created between the poet and his speakers. Even at his most apparently candid, Schwartz tends to use elaborate affective postures: he is just as interested in the masks and costumes that people wear to conceal their identities as he is in revelation. The mirror symbolism is also more complex than has just been suggested, as will become apparent later in this study. Of course Schwartz was interested in the ways in which people present themselves to each other, and in self-recognition. But, just as painting a self-portrait does not mean that one must recreate every facial feature with photographic accuracy, writing about one's self does not require one to bare one's soul entirely or to reveal one's every secret.

Deutsch offers a pathological reading of Schwartz's oeuvre that also needs to be challenged. He argues that Schwartz's interest in 'defensive masking' and his tendency to create 'personae within personae, masks within masks' is attributable to his chronic distrust of everything, a distrust that had its origins in his unhappy childhood and that ultimately, in Deutsch's view, 'revealed a deteriorating poetry' in which the poet was left with nothing to affirm but affirmation.[47] This argument is too easily dismissive of Schwartz's 'distrust', and too dependent upon Schwartz's biography for explanation. There is no question that Schwartz is sceptical, but this can be regarded as an uneasily accepted form of Keatsian 'negative capability' common to

[47] Deutsch, p. 10.

many twentieth-century poets, not just an individual trait: Stevens, for example, favoured images of 'fluttering things' and Elizabeth Bishop has also been noted, by Susan McCabe, for her 'cultivated uncertainty'.[48] In fact, Schwartz's kind of questioning – his insistence on viewing everything from as many perspectives as possible, on framing his frames and on still doubting his conclusions – is arguably one of the few unifying characteristics of the ongoing literary trend that has its origins in his generation and that we refer to as 'postmodernism'. It is far from just a personal trait.

In his 'Note to the Reader' at the beginning of *Genesis*, Schwartz adopts a pre-emptively dismissive attitude towards those intent upon extracting biographical details.

> Since the narrative is a mixture throughout of invention and memory, and since I cannot signify the shifts between invention and memory, it is an obvious stupidity and misuse to take any sentence as the truth about any particular human being. I hope that there is in this work some truth about all human beings.
>
> (*G*, p. ix)

In this respect he also anticipates the concerns of Lowell and Berryman. *Genesis*, he suggests, is a life study, a study of life in general and not just of an individual life. It is something more than an 'autobiography-in-verse'.[49]

It is also worth stressing that Schwartz himself never wrote publicly about the sensational elements of his adult life that are best known. In fact, when his personal life was most catastrophic his writing was furthest from his biographical self. All the same, it should not, perhaps, be surprising that his story should have appealed to so many as the myth of a troubled genius, misunderstood and tormented by the society in which he lived, nor that he should have been regarded as an exemplar of a whole generation of unhappy poets. But, as readers of the poetry of Berryman and Sylvia Plath – to name just two of Schwartz's contemporaries – will be aware, too great an interest in the life, even when that life is in part the subject of the writing, can detract the critic from making unbiased artistic judgements. In the cases of Berryman and Plath, readers have often been at fault for reading too many biographical details into their work; in Schwartz's case the work has too often simply not been read at all.

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[48] *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Grant F. Scott, rev. edn (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 60; Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), p. 14; and Susan McCabe, *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 36.

[49] John Berryman, *Collected Poems, 1937-1971*, ed. by Charles Thornbury (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 201.

Berryman himself, in his elegiac *Dream Songs* to Schwartz, contributed to the myth of his friend's self-destructive genius. So too did another former friend, Saul Bellow, for whom Schwartz inspired the fictional poet Von Humboldt Fleisher in *Humboldt's Gift*. Both writers present Schwartz as a precocious writer who failed to fulfil his potential, perpetuating the image of the *poète maudit* but doing little to resuscitate the writing. Bellow's narrator, Charlie Citrine, speaks with occasional reverence of Humboldt: he was 'an avant-garde writer, the first of a new generation'; he was a pioneer in the use of the word 'sensibility'; and his early ballads were 'pure, musical, witty, radiant, humane' – even Platonic, evoking an original state of perfection.[50] But the enduring image is of Humboldt reeling off into insanity. He 'passionately lived out the theme of Success', Citrine remarks. 'Naturally he died a Failure' (Bellow, p. 6). Berryman, for his part, presents Delmore 'out of his mind', besieged by the failure of his 'administration'. 'I'd bleed to say his lovely work improved', Berryman laments, 'but it is not so'.[51] Lowell sounds the same note:

> Your dream had humor, then its genius thickened,
> you grew thick and helpless, your lines were variants,
> unlike and alike, Delmore – your name, Schwartz,
> one vowel bedevilled by seven consonants...[52]

Here, the portrayal of Schwartz as 'thick and helpless' – stupid, physically unfit, and incapable, overwhelmed by his own name and identity – makes him seem especially pathetic, although the slur against Schwartz's habit of revisiting the same concerns in slightly varied lines is incautious given Lowell's own compulsion to revise in mid to late career.

Berryman and Bellow in particular had lived under the shadow of Schwartz's early success and one could be forgiven for feeling that their memorials, dwelling as they do upon the pitiful figure Schwartz became in his final years, are double-edged. There is genuine pathos, however, in what they write, and genuine admiration, too, for Schwartz's early poetry. Elsewhere, Berryman maintained that Schwartz was 'the most underrated poet of the twentieth century', although he also added that 'The later work is *absolutely* no good'.[53] Phillips and Douglas Dunn, amongst others, have

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[50] Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 1, 2, 11.
[51] John Berryman, *The Dream Songs* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 174, 170, 169.
[52] Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 533.
[53] Cited by Douglas Dunn in 'Introduction' in *What Is To Be Given*, pp. vii-xix (p. xvi) (Berryman's emphasis).

shown that a case can be made for some of the later poetry, but at a time when even Schwartz's acknowledged masterpieces are hardly read they have had little impact.

To refer to the 'myth' of Schwartz's decline is not to deny that during the last twenty years or so of his life Schwartz became increasingly mentally ill. This is incontrovertible: his journals, in which he obsessively tots up the number of drinks he has had each day and how many Dexedrine and sleeping pills he has swallowed, confirm his desperate state of mind. But there were periods of clarity, even towards the end of his life, in which Schwartz was able to write effectively. Whilst little of Schwartz's later work has been in line with prevailing critical tastes, Chapter 5 will illustrate that there is method, an overarching ideology, and conscious craftsmanship in many of his late works, experimental pieces that defy conventional critical expectations. Schwartz also continued to publish insightful critical essays into the '60s, indicating that his literary sensibility did not diminish, regardless of his other troubles. It cannot be denied that Schwartz's writing, like that of almost any great writer, *is* often uneven in quality; but such unevenness may be born just as well of an intellectual daring that is not content to settle into a mastered idiom, and that is continually seeking new modes of expression, as it is of a decline in artistic talent. There remain enough successes amongst the later works to suggest that Schwartz did not simply lose his poetic power, and even those poems – early and late – which do not seem fully realised nonetheless reveal an elegant artisan and a rigorous intellect. This is easily overlooked if one insists upon reading Schwartz's work solely in terms of his biography.

The fact that not even Schwartz's life is much remembered nowadays – he tends to be known, if at all, for having taught the rock star Lou Reed at Syracuse University – presents the present-day critic with an opportunity to re-evaluate his works without being excessively blinkered by biographical details. It has already been stressed that Schwartz's writing eludes easy categorisation. It would therefore be unwise to try to claim it for a specific critical theory. Nor would this be in the spirit of his own critical essays. As Philip Rahv put it, Schwartz was 'far too sophisticated intellectually and too much at home with conceptual matters to turn himself into an exponent of any given "exclusive" method'.[54] In his imaginative and critical writing alike, Schwartz was preoccupied with the limitations of individual perspectives and

[54] Philip Rahv, 'Delmore Schwartz: The Paradox of Precocity', *The New York Review Of Books*, 20 May 1971, pp. 19-22 (p. 19).

advocated the need to employ as many different ones as possible. For this reason, rather than insisting upon a single theoretical approach, it makes most sense to pursue the course advocated by Eliot in his editorial for *The Criterion* of July 1923. Schwartz cites Eliot admiringly in an essay reflecting upon the achievement of his journal: 'It is the function of the literary review' (and, by association, the responsibility of the editor or critic)

> to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature, and at the same time to exhibit the relations of literature not to 'life' as something contrasted with literature, but to all other activities, which, together with literature, are components of life.[55]

In Schwartz's case, the relations of his literary writing to 'all other activities, which, together with literature, are components of life' have not yet been adequately exhibited. This study aspires to exhibit them by addressing the works on their own terms; not imposing any external ideology upon them, but pursuing any fruitful avenues that arise.

Schwartz himself, in turns sceptical and enthusiastic about the New Criticism favoured by many of his contemporaries, tended to seek out a broad overview and to emphasise the representative qualities of a writer's work. Donald A. Dike has argued that the main inclination of Schwartz's criticism is to be judicial and that, 'unlike the majority of his contemporaries [...], he chose a route which requires engagement with ongoing cultural events, an interaction with the present outside world, and equally requires appraisal, not only of the ongoing but also, because it is still vital, of the past.'[56] The truth of this is evident from reading any of Schwartz's essays or reviews, and, as Dike points out, his habit of identifying 'a poet's *characteristic* excellencies and defects' by comparing 'only a few lyrics' owes much to Coleridge.[57] This dissertation strives to be as attentive as Schwartz's own criticism was to the cultural and historical contexts in which he wrote. It will also, however, contain more extended close readings of some of the works than Schwartz himself would have indulged. Few of his poems have hitherto been subjected to such scrutiny, which, it is hoped, will reveal why many of them deserve to be regarded as some of the richest poems of their time.

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[55] 'The Criterion, 1922-1939', *Kenyon Review*, 1 (Autumn 1939), 437-449 (p. 440).
[56] Donald A. Dike, 'A Case For Judgment: The Literary Criticism of Delmore Schwartz', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 24.4 (Winter 1978), 492-509 (p. 493).
[57] Dike, p. 498 (Dike's emphasis).

Dream, Nightmare and Insomnia

Schwartz's writing may resist categorisation, but it is salutary nonetheless to seek an 'underlying unity of purpose'. The writer's infinite interest in America, and specifically in the American Dream, is the most important of these: his nationality was an imaginative stimulus for all that Schwartz wrote. Atlas recognises as much in subtitling his biography *The Life of an American Poet*, implying that no English or European poet could have lived such a life or written such poems. From his first published story, set in a movie theatre and centred on a Coney Island courtship scene; through the unfinished *Genesis*, with its depiction of a Brooklyn childhood and its references to great American businessmen (J. P. Morgan, Ingersoll, Barnum), politicians and baseball stars; to the late poems in which Columbus's accidental discovery of America becomes a trope for optimism, America is much more than just a context for Schwartz. He engages regularly with versions of American history and with earlier American literature. He is obsessed with American idiom and its relation to British English, pointing out to an English reader, for example, that 'Coriolanus and His Mother', when spoken 'in American' is 'far from Shakespeare' with an elision 'much different (much more minute in speaking) than the traditional one' (*Letters*, p. 64). And the idiom of Hollywood infiltrates many of his later stories. Even his all-important notion of 'international consciousness', though by its very definition international, is peculiarly American, reflecting as it does both the cosmopolitan identity of America's population in the twentieth-century and the ever-increasing importance of its political and cultural role in the world at large. These are all concerns that will be taken up further in the chapters that follow.

Overall, then, the idea of America, along with its actuality, and along with his consciousness of the disparity between the two, prompted Schwartz to contemplative investigations of identity, nationality and the relations of literature to society and to the world in general. Handled unskilfully, this could have amounted to little more than systematic social commentary in verse, short story or essay form. It is evident, however, that, although there is always a strong social dimension to Schwartz's work, his value is much greater as an artist than as a social analyst. The American stimulus prompts figurations of an inner life that draws upon the outer for its existence.

As the American Dream is at the heart of everything that Schwartz wrote, it is necessary to elucidate briefly how he thought about dreams more generally. For Schwartz, a dream is never just a dream – he holds the dream world in far too high esteem for this to be the case. He often blurs the distinction between sleeping dreams and hopeful daydreams. So the title 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', for example, refers both to the aspirational dreams of the father – for whom actualities always 'somehow fall short' – and to the literal dream of the son, learning his own responsibilities through watching his parents' courtship in a cinema, itself a locus that invites viewers to lose themselves, for a few hours, in a collective dream.[58] (In another story, 'The Heights of Joy', Schwartz describes the 'hypnotized darkness of the motion picture cathedral'.)[59] Schwartz once remarked, alluding to Joyce, that History was a nightmare in which he was trying to get a good night's sleep: flippant though this comment may have been, it does gesture towards the importance of dream for Schwartz both as the subject of his thought and in defining the way in which he thought.[60] His creative work is characterised by the kinds of associative link and the uncertainties and hazy distinctions that are also present in waking life but which are accentuated in dreams. The late poems, in particular, can be read as dreamscapes, but this does not mean that they depict scenes any less real than the concrete ones with which we are more familiar. Their reality is of the mind rather than external.

Insomnia, rather than nightmare, is the consequence of the anxiety and restlessness that ensue from investing in the American Dream but being unable to realise it. It is a state in which it is impossible to dream. Schwartz is explicit about this, stating in his essay on Hemingway that 'the dream becomes insomnia when it is not fulfilled'.[61] The more nightmarish situation (as in 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities') is to have one's dreams fulfilled only to find that one is still not happy or, worse, that this fulfilment leads to despair. But fulfilled or not, happy or otherwise, the existence of the dream, and its overwhelming significance, cannot be ignored or considered any less real than external truths that can be more clearly expressed. This is an area in which Freud's influence is felt; and Schwartz was just one of the American writers of his generation who regularly underwent

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[58] 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, p. 4.
[59] 'The Heights of Joy' in *Screeno*, pp. 63-88 (p. 63).
[60] Atlas, p. 302. The allusion is to Stephen Dedalus's 'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake' in the Nestor section of *Ulysses*.
[61] 'The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway', p. 271.

psychoanalysis. But, as in Berryman's *Dream Songs*, engagement with dreams (of all kinds) is no mere prompt to psychological self-analysis but rather the starting point for a whole way of thinking.

Schwartz's dream logic is one of the aspects that transforms his writing from the leadenly literal into something more transcendental. It is also, arguably, a trait which is accentuated in American writers. Of contemporaneous English poets, only Auden, who relocated to New York City in 1939, was as absorbed in Freud as American poets. Furthermore, a propensity to dream might be accentuated in the United States of America in the twentieth century because of the fact that the very idea of the nation was strong enough to lure millions of Europeans across the Atlantic in pursuit of better lives. Even today, the success of America as a nation depends, to some extent, on a common belief in the American Dream and a willingness amongst individuals to reconcile their personal dreams of prosperity to this greater ideal. Schwartz's imaginative responses to such dreams and their consequences are the primary focus of this study.

CHAPTER 1

'the greatest thing in America': Europe, the individual, and 'international consciousness'

'International consciousness': 'the only point of view from which I can see my subject'

In the summer of 1943, in the midst of World War II, Schwartz wrote to his publisher, James Laughlin, embracing Laughlin's proposal that they set up a magazine together. It should be titled *New Europe*, Schwartz suggested, and it should be based upon the hypothesis 'that Europe is through, but that something has to be done to carry on the greatness of European culture.'[1] Its articles would carry out a 'large-scale attack on popular culture' and would attempt to 'overcome the gulf between popular culture and advance guard culture' by taking seriously 'Hollywood, Broadway, popular novels, comic strips, *NY Times* editorials and poems, the prose of *Time*, and the photos of *Life*' (*DS & JL Letters*, p. 215). The whole project would be founded upon the assumption that 'Europe is the greatest thing in America [...] but the next greatest thing in America is Hollywood; and between these two large-scale cultural factors, the future of culture lies' (p. 215). Ultimately, Schwartz implies, establishing the new magazine would constitute a stage in enabling America to become the sanctuary of Western civilisation.

New Europe, like many of Schwartz's schemes, never came to anything, and Europe recovered after the War more quickly than Schwartz had anticipated. We should not underestimate, however, how great a source of anxiety the devastation of Europe – along with the very real possibility that it might *not* recover culturally – must have been for such a committed Europhile. Nor should we trivialise Schwartz's belief that America had not only a chance, but also a responsibility, of ensuring that over two thousand years of cultural progression did not come to an abrupt halt. It might seem melodramatic now to say that Europe was 'through', but this was a belief about which Schwartz was surely earnest. His manifesto for *New Europe* is also worth taking seriously because it epitomises his lifelong preoccupation with the relation of American culture to European culture. This is a concern common to many American writers of Schwartz's generation: poets such as Berryman and Lowell, for example,

[1] *Delmore Schwartz and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, p. 214.

who similarly sought to reconcile apparently opposing American and European influences, and, a little later, Ashbery and Frank O'Hara whose reading of Russian and French Symbolist poetry complemented their distinctly American idioms. Another eminent figure – and a friend of Schwartz's – the critic F. O. Matthiessen, spent six months in Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1948, lecturing on American Literature to European students, and taking the opportunity of being in Europe to think dispassionately about some of the things it meant to be an American at the time. His seminars in Europe had a diplomatic as well as an educative purpose, bringing together students from different European countries and aspiring to repair damaged international relations. In the opening speech to his seminar at Salzburg, Matthiessen endorsed Schwartz's view of Europe as the greatest thing in North America and noted his own fascination 'with the interplay of thought and expression between America and Europe' in the writers that he taught.[2] Schwartz, unlike Matthiessen, Berryman, Lowell, and Ashbery, never visited Europe, but his interest in European intellectual life was nonetheless immense.[3] As the son of immigrant Russian-Romanian Jews, born in Brooklyn in 1913, he remained acutely conscious of his personal as well as his cultural heritage – and of the awkward, but also sometimes felicitous, juxtaposition of these alongside a related but independent American tradition into which he had also been born.

The relation between American and European culture (not that they can be regarded as entirely distinct) is a key aspect of a much larger concept which Schwartz referred to as 'international consciousness' and which informed almost everything that he wrote, not least *Genesis: Book I*, his unfinished *magnum opus* about immigrant experience, cultural assimilation and personal development, published in 1943. Writing to his friend, Robert Hivnor, in 1940, he explained,

> My main problem right along has been to get the kind of structure which would make reasonable and articulate and symmetrical the kind of international consciousness which keeps growing bigger all the time in the world – in such strange plants as the radio and the newspaper – and which is the only point of view from which I can see my subject. If you remember my poem about the children of the Czar and myself, you'll see the beginning of what I am trying to do. But the point worth communicating is that when I make progress or get the illusion of progress, it's always by means of some invention in the form.[4]

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[2] F. O. Matthiessen, *From The Heart Of Europe* (New York: OUP, 1948), pp. 14, 24.
[3] Schwartz had been due to take up a University position at the Free University in Berlin in 1957. However, the collapse of his marriage and a mental breakdown prevented him from doing so.
[4] *Letters*, p. 101.

Although Schwartz never offered a precise definition of 'international consciousness', it essentially amounts to an awareness of one's position in the whole world, in relation to others, in relation to both temporally and physically distant events, and in relation to one's surroundings. Schwartz repeatedly stresses that it is impossible for anyone – not just poets – to overlook the internationality of modern experience, but this does not mean that 'international consciousness' is ever-present or readily available to all. It is a state of mind to which one must aspire: sometimes one will be unable to see beyond the burdens and limitations of one's immediate experiences, and, at such moments, one will feel a sense of isolation or alienation, a sense that one's life has no bearing in relation to anyone else's. On other occasions, a feeling for how international modern life is will serve only to intensify alienation, exposing one's personal insignificance within a universal scheme and in relation to the immense scope of history. Jim Keller recognises Schwartz's aspiration towards 'international consciousness', but describes it in slightly different terms, when he argues that 'Schwartz was guided by an epic sensibility to rewrite history within a bold new Eliotic structure, one that he increasingly despaired of ever finding.' It is a sensibility that makes him strive to transform personal history 'into epochal history.' [5]

The 'consciousness' matters as much as the internationality. Implicitly, if 'international consciousness' is to be fully realised, one's thought must become all-encompassing, and if one is to become conscious of all things one must also aspire to see beyond them as concrete entities. In his later poetry especially, Schwartz strives to express universal truths that are not grounded in the material facts of everyday existence but which are no less 'international' for being abstract. It is in this respect that Schwartz can sometimes be read within a tradition of Emersonian transcendentalism.

This chapter will illustrate more precisely what Schwartz meant by 'international consciousness', and will evaluate some of the means by which he tried to make it 'reasonable and articulate and symmetrical' in his poetry. It will address the concept's origins, for Schwartz, in the writings of T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, drawing upon judgments made in his own essays. This will be followed by analyses of some of Schwartz's earliest creative investigations of 'international consciousness': 'Pleasure' from 'Coriolanus and His Mother'; 'The Commencement Day Address';

[5] Keller, p. 158.

and the remarkable 'The Ballad of The Children of The Czar'. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of *Genesis: Book One*. This is the story of Hershey Green, an adolescent insomniac who 'is not remarkable / In the great city [of New York], circa 1930' (*G*, p. 3) and whose experiences of family conflict, of the anxiety and excitement of living in the modern city, and of growing up in a world shaped by international forces make him a broadly representative figure. I will pay particular attention to the role played by the poem's chorus of ghost commentators in emphasising the universal qualities of Hershey's experiences. Although it is incomplete – two subsequent books were drafted but never finalised or published – *Genesis* is one of the most important and far-sighted long American poems of the mid-twentieth century. It remains Schwartz's most sustained dramatisation of 'international consciousness' and, more specifically, of Europe's greatness in America.

Schwartz's European influences

Before turning to *Genesis*, it will be valuable to consider further Schwartz's relation to his time and to his society, and particularly some of his earlier engagements with the classical European culture inherited by all Western writers, European and American, whether or not they choose to celebrate it. Schwartz writes in *Genesis* of 'the idea of America which shone all over Europe' (*G*, p. 17). For him, as a writer, the position often seems to be reversed: it is the idea of Europe that shines over America.[6] The interplay of the two continents was central to his own family history, and this intensified his preoccupations with European culture and the international character of American identity. However, there is little nostalgia in his work for the customs of European life, and in *Genesis* and many of the stories in *The World Is A Wedding* he satirises immigrant characters who fail to adapt fully to living in America. Schwartz's own state of being caught between two cultures, however, is something that he often exploits to positive effect in his poetry. This can be illustrated by addressing some instances of allusion and some of the ways in which Schwartz grants an American timbre to the European sources which influenced him so greatly. It will then be

[6] George Steiner's 2005 lecture, *The Idea of Europe*, demonstrates that such an idea existed throughout the twentieth century, evoking both Europe's extraordinary classical heritage and its more recent ruination (Steiner, George, *The Idea of Europe* [Tilburg: Nexus Institute, 2004]).

possible to establish some principles about Schwartz as both reader and craftsman, and to suggest how and why he became so committed to the idea of 'international consciousness'.

It is impossible to overlook Schwartz's absolute immersion in Western thought and letters. Plato, Aristotle, and Dante; Kant, Kierkegaard and Bergson; the Gospel writers, Shakespeare and Blake; Baudelaire, the French symbolists, and Dostoyevsky are all presences in Schwartz's writing. After Schwartz's death, the philosopher Sidney Hook, who taught Schwartz at Harvard and remained an acquaintance thereafter, remembered how his student, as a young man, had 'tended to denigrate American culture and literature at the same time that he glorified European life and letters' – the kind of attitude that is suggested in Schwartz's letter to Laughlin when he writes about launching an 'attack' against popular culture.[7] Schwartz was more sympathetic towards popular culture, which he identified as being predominantly American, than these examples would immediately suggest. He was an avid movie-goer and, between 1955 and 1957, a film critic for *The New Republic*. He loved baseball, drew inspiration from vaudeville and, later in his life, devoured paperback bestsellers. All the same, there can be little doubt about how much more greatly he admired European culture and especially literature, particularly in the early stages of his writing life. Echoes of Yeats, Rilke, and Kafka can be heard throughout *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*. Schwartz also revered James, Pound, and Eliot, American modernists who had relocated to Europe and, in James and Eliot's cases, relinquished their American citizenship to become British. 'One can scarcely doubt that [James] lived in Europe', Schwartz writes in his best-known essay 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry', 'because the divorce between culture and the rest of life, although it had begun, had by no means reached the point which was unavoidable in America.'[8] The serious European writer in the early twentieth century, he felt, could still command a sympathetic, receptive audience whilst the American writer, contending with a society more intent upon material rather than cultural advances, could not. Schwartz's idealisation of Europe thus derives from his perception of its relative resistance to modernisation and the demands of a mass audience.

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[7] Sidney Hook, 'Imaginary Enemies, Real Terror', *The American Scholar*, 47.3 (Summer 1978), 406-412 (p. 407).

[8] 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 3-13 (p. 8).

This is not to say that Schwartz disregarded, or wanted to disregard, the society in which he lived, however far removed from it he felt himself to be. Far from it: as he explains in 'Rimbaud in Our Time', 'The age in which one exists is the air which one breathes', even if one finds that air repugnant.[9] It is a central principle of 'international consciousness' that the individual cannot begin to understand himself if he does not also try to understand the society in which he lives and its historical context. Schwartz was writing during an enormously transitional period in terms of literary history (as writers sought to extend or challenge the tenets of modernism), world events, and especially American-European relations. His publishing career only spanned a little more than two decades, but that period included the immediate post-depression pre-Second World War years during which America's domestic concerns dominated politically over international relations; the years of the War itself and its immediate aftermath; and the beginnings of the Cold War, an era of great anxiety in America but also one of economic recovery, consolidation, and the emergence of the liberal society. In this time, America – and the world at large – changed so immensely that Schwartz himself may have experienced a change of attitudes equivalent to that encountered by his parents on leaving the Old World and arriving in America. Schwartz's writing, at all stages of his life, acknowledges these social and political developments, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly – but he does not allow them to overwhelm the purely literary value of his work.

'International consciousness', then, amounts to something more than a straightforward acceptance that, in the twentieth century, it was necessary to take a worldwide perspective of matters political, cultural and literary. Were it simply this, the works of Schwartz and other writers with a similar sense of the international might seem little more than poetic statements of foreign policy. 'International consciousness' is, rather, an ever-present imaginative tendency, a way of thinking that seeks out connections between ideas and facts that might seem unconnected and that looks to draw universal truths from personal experience. One of Schwartz's contentions is that 'international consciousness' is unavoidable in the modern world; although, as a writer, he strove to express such consciousness in a heightened manner, he recognised that everyone is, in some respect, aware that all of their choices are conditioned by historical and worldwide events: 'he who chooses chooses what is

[9] 'Rimbaud in Our Time' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 53-57 (p. 53).

given' (*SK*, p. 65). If, much of the time, this way of thinking would seem to highlight the insignificance of the individual, then Schwartz also recognises the individual's primacy in being the only one able to perceive the world around him: one can only be certain of one's own perceptions. Equally, Schwartz acknowledges that individuals can and do influence world events, some dramatically, although the ways in which they can exert such influence are, again, limited by circumstance. These are ideas that will be borne out further later in the chapter.

To the advocate of 'international consciousness' it is evident that, primary though one's commitment to culture may be, this cannot be dissociated from wider social, political and economic concerns. R. P. Blackmur insisted that it was a 'heresy' to believe that 'the arts and learning can be divorced from the power and resources of society without danger to both' – but this is precisely what he felt American society had tried to do in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by 'setting up cultural capitals separate from political and economic capitals'.[10] Schwartz's own poetry – and especially *Genesis* – attempts to reunite cultural concerns with political and economic ones, and to 'get back to the center of the community' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 13).

The presence of Auden, a poet who took society – the society of 'present-day England'– as one of his dominant subjects, looms large in Schwartz's early poetry. [11] For a time, Laughlin even publicised the young poet as 'the American Auden', an epithet which at once grants high esteem but also implies indebtedness. The comment suggests more about Schwartz's tone and formal but unconstrained early style than it does about his subject matter: it does not necessarily imply a belief that Schwartz's subject was present-day America, although the American context is certainly evident throughout *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* and becomes even more of a focus in the works of the 1940s. The American inflexions that help to make Schwartz's early style, whilst derivative of Auden's, distinct from it, further indicate that Schwartz's perspective on England and on Europe is an unmistakably American one. It is worth noting, too, that the period of Auden's greatest influence upon Schwartz predates that monumental figure's assumption of American citizenship in 1945, a move that reverses James and Eliot's earlier transatlantic migrations but which Schwartz was

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[10] R. P. Blackmur, 'The American Literary Expatriate (1944)' in *The Lion and The Honeycomb: Essays in Solicitude and Critique* (London: Methuen, 1956), pp. 61-78 (p. 67).
[11] 'The Two Audens', *Selected Essays*, pp. 143-152 (p. 143).

adamant amounted to something altogether different. Whilst Eliot and James nurtured their genius in Europe, Schwartz felt that Auden's genius, which, in his view, depended 'upon England, upon the English scene, upon perceptions and emotions inspired by being English' had become infected in America by a kind of 'tourist slanginess' which was 'far from being the kind of colloquial actuality' which Schwartz had so admired in Auden's earlier poetry.[12]

Schwartz's commitment to a European literary tradition – if not his ability as an accurate translator of French – can be further adduced by the publication of his translation of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* in 1939, the year following the success of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*. Despite its inaccuracies, *A Season in Hell* is an important acknowledgement of a late nineteenth-century poet whose sensitivity to the inadequacy of the social order into which he had been born, and its failure to satisfy the 'human need for a whole view of life', Schwartz believed to be incomparable.[13] Rimbaud's combination of verse and prose is a feature of Schwartz's own poetry collections, and, importantly, the relative looseness of the translation anticipates later endeavours such as Lowell's *Imitations* of 1962, a book of 'translations' that makes no claims of literal accuracy. Lowell did not know any Russian when translating Pasternak, for example, and insisted instead that he had 'tried to write live English and to do what [his] authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America.'[14] This may not have been Schwartz's aim, exactly, when writing his own translation; however, one does often have the sense that the writer of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* was a poet whose sensibility was European but whose idiom and frame of immediate reference was American.

As well as Rimbaud, the French symbolists Mallarmé, Apollinaire and Verlaine also influenced Schwartz greatly, a point recognised by Edward Ford in his otherwise haphazard re-evaluation of Schwartz's work. Ford argues that many of Schwartz's poems read like palimpsests, responses to, or over-writings of, earlier poems.[15] This is perhaps too strong, but he is right to acknowledge Schwartz's allusive propensity and to recognise that these allusions are rarely conventional gestures of homage paid to respected elders. Louise Bogan believed that this *was* the

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[12] *W. H. Auden: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Routledge, 1983; repr. 1997), pp. 368-371 (p. 371).
[13] 'Rimbaud in Our Time', p. 57.
[14] Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, p. 175.
[15] Ford, p. 2.

case, but her criticism overlooks Schwartz's subtle adaptations of the phrases and images he steals and how he often employs them in contexts quite different to the ones from which they were originally taken.[16] The title *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, for example, is an alteration of Yeats's 'In dreams begins responsibility', the epigraph to his 1914 collection *Responsibilities*.[17] As a title, this succinctly acknowledges the tension between pursuing one's desires freely and being weighed down by social (and historical) obligations which is so central to Schwartz's writing; even unaltered, its appropriateness for both the short story and the poetry collection to which it is attached would be evident. However, Schwartz's pluralisation transforms the phrase, turning an abstract overriding idea of 'responsibility' into multiple 'responsibilities': in the story these include, for the parents, arising from their dream of prosperous marriage, 'two children whose characters are monstrous'; and, for the dreamer himself, the responsibility not to get hysterical about his unhappy childhood.[18] The idea of several individual 'responsibilities' is more tangible than the general concept, particularly to those caught up in the modern American city life Schwartz so frequently depicts. Furthermore, the adjustment makes the allusion to Yeats two-fold: Schwartz alludes both to the epigraph and to the title of the 1914 collection, suggesting a desire to acknowledge Yeats for much more than providing him with a memorable title.[19]

Ford points out, convincingly, that Schwartz's best-known poem, 'The Heavy Bear Who Goes With Me', probably has its origins in a line from Apollinaire's 'La Tzigane', published in *Alcools* in 1913: 'l'amour lourd comme un ours privé'.[20] Ford doesn't point out, however, the way in which Schwartz, once again, transforms his source: *his* heavy bear, far from being a simile for love, is an obstruction to love and a rival even for the beloved, stretching as it does 'to embrace the very dear / With whom I would walk without him near' (*SK*, p. 74). These lines of yearning, with their

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[16] See Atlas, p. 131. 'Steals' is the apt word here and distinguishes Schwartz, according to T. S. Eliot's distinction that 'immature poets imitate' but 'mature poets steal' (Eliot, 'Philip Massinger' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 3rd ed. 1951, repr. 1999), pp. 205-220 [p. 206]) from merely competent writers. Like Lowell later, he manages to make other writers' expressions seem authentically his own.

[17] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume One: The Poems*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983; 2nd ed., 1991), p. 100.

[18] 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', p. 6.

[19] Ford suggests that Yeats took his epigraph, attributed only to an 'Old Play', from Blake, but gives no reference to support this (Ford, p. 2). Richard J. Finneran believes that 'it might well have been written by Yeats [himself], possibly with the assistance of Ezra Pound' (Yeats, p. 636).

[20] Ford, p. 2.

note of late-Victorian sentimentality, contrast starkly to the poem's predominantly unpolished bear-influenced colloquial tone: it is as though the howling bear, as well as corrupting the speaker's love, also forestalls his attempts at achieving an aesthetic purity of speech. The speaker's sensibility seems European, whilst his alter ego, the bear, with his love of 'candy', his bulging 'pants', and his football-kicking and scrimmages is indisputably American and exerts the stronger influence.

The most ambitious example of Schwartz transforming a source is 'Coriolanus and His Mother', a kind of meta-performance of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in which the poet watches the play alongside the ghosts of four great European thinkers – Aristotle, Beethoven, Marx and Freud – each of whom comments on the action and proposes his own interpretation of Coriolanus's character.[21] To borrow the spectral Aristotle's assessment of Coriolanus himself, the work 'breaks down the categories' (*SK*, p. 109): it is neither straightforwardly poem, verse play, nor literary criticism, though it contains elements of each. It is also distinctive for the vaudevillian prose passages between the acts, purportedly spoken by the poet himself who, identifying with Caius Marcius, all of a sudden finds that he is on stage as well. The whole work, despite having Shakespeare's play at its centre and despite the presence of the European eminences, sounds unmistakably American. Schwartz once remarked, lightly but seriously, that 'Shakespeare and the great depression of 1929-1937' had been his greatest influences as a writer; this is borne out here in the implicit invitation to conflate Shakespeare's version of Imperial Rome with the twentieth-century United States.[22]

Schwartz's retelling of the action is loyal to Shakespeare. The work is indubitably concerned with Coriolanus as an individual, but its chief interests are in the nature of interpretation and the role of the observer, not in the story in and of itself. It is in this respect that it is most innovative and in which it most importantly anticipates *Genesis*, an uncategorisable poem with its own audience of supernatural commentators. If there were any doubt that 'Coriolanus and His Mother' is primarily concerned with interpretation, Schwartz's self-referential joke in a later story, 'New Year's Eve', would resolve the matter: we learn that Shenandoah Fish, a version of Schwartz himself, has recently written 'a satirical dialogue between Freud and Marx

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[21] Beethoven is comparatively silent, only bursting into an occasional 'Bomb! Bomb! Bomb!' when the orchestra plays between scenes.

[22] 'Views of a Second Violinist: Some Answers to Questions about Writing Poetry', in *Selected Essays* (pp. 24-29), p. 25.

in which Freud comes to agree that capitalism is organized anal eroticism when Marx agrees in return that the oedipus complex is an oppression rooted in the ownership of the means of reproduction.'[23] Freud, Marx, and Aristotle are the animating presences in Schwartz's work, whilst Coriolanus remains very much the character that Shakespeare had presented over three hundred years earlier.

Schwartz's contention to Julian Symons that 'Coriolanus and His Mother', when spoken in American, is 'far from Shakespeare' can be supported by a brief comparison of the two texts.[24] It is not just a question of how the lines are spoken but also of vocabulary. Take, for example, Marcius's first speech. In Shakespeare's play he addresses the protesting citizens thus: 'What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, / That rubbing the poor itch of your opinion / Make yourselves scabs?'[25] Schwartz's rendering does away entirely with the conceit: 'You stink!... You scum!' (*SK*, p. 83). True, this loses much, negating, for example, how Shakespeare has Marcius draw further upon the Platonic metaphor just used by Menenius, in an attempt to placate the crowd, of the state as a body that can only function if every organ is healthy. However, Schwartz's version is also far more direct, much more the language of a Hollywood tough, and it is, in fact, precise: 'scum' here does not just casually mean 'worthless individuals' but also 'the lowest class of the population of a place' (*OED*, 3.a). Elsewhere, Schwartz has Coriolanus declare outright his sense of superiority following his triumph at Corioli and the acquisition of his new name; at the equivalent stage in Shakespeare's play this is only deduced by the reactions of others. 'I am fucked / By every craven knight vicarious there' (p. 97), Schwartz's Coriolanus exclaims, the uncharacteristic obscenity gaining further impact given what Freud's ghost has already observed about the Roman's squeamishness regarding sex and his repressed desire for his mother. Such moments may seem incongruous, but serve to draw out the twentieth-century intellectual context in which such an interpretation, coloured by psychoanalytical thought, is given. It is not so much the case that Schwartz was trying to do what Shakespeare might have done had he written his play in 1938 and in America, but rather that he was trying to imagine how it might have been experienced by some of Western civilisation's most important figures had they

[23] 'New Year's Eve', in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, pp. 94-114 (p. 95).
[24] *Letters*, p. 64.
[25] William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* (1608), ed. by G. R. Hibbard (London: Penguin, 1967), I.1.162-4.

watched the play in 1938 and in America.[26]

These examples illustrate how Schwartz's reading of his European forbears affected his understanding of what it means to be American. It would be misleading, certainly, not to acknowledge that Schwartz also alludes similarly, and often, to American writers. In 'Prothalamion', for example, he writes 'Summon the children eating ice cream... / Summon the florist! And the tobacconist!' (*SK*, p. 46, 48). In so doing, he also summons Wallace Stevens – like Schwartz, a poet whose sympathies often lay with Europe but who never left America – who called for flowers and tobacco (in the form of 'big cigars') in 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream'.[27] In Stevens's poem, however, they were required at a wake, not a marriage. In a fantasy of possible wedding guests, Schwartz manages to evoke a scene of death and it is this that renders the allusion far from conventional. 'I am my father's father' (*SK*, p. 4) in 'The Ballad of The Children of The Czar' is taken from Hart Crane's 'You are your father's father' in 'The River'; although this, in its turn, has a European source in Wordsworth's 'The child is the father of the man'.[28] Allusion, be it to European or American poetry, is fundamental to Schwartz's poetic method, as it would be to Berryman, Lowell, and other poets of his generation too; but the striking thing about Schwartz's European allusions is the extent to which they illuminate his American identity. His sources are transformed, though not diminished, by being appropriated into the American context: Shakespeare's Roman statesman enables Schwartz to understand better the ambitious American egotist – 'O in New York / His swollen heart would find true properties!' (*SK*, p. 111) – and becomes a rich psychoanalytical case; Apollinaire's line prompts a poem, suggestive in so many respects, that is suggestive of the impossibility for the modern American poet of writing in a high European style; and, adapted by Schwartz and applied to his own writing, Yeats's epigraph comes to evoke dreams that collectively constitute the American Dream.

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[26] Freud died in September 1939: he was still alive when Schwartz presented him as a ghost. Schwartz is less interested in his ghosts as spectres, however, than as mediums through which ideas that survived the thinkers who thought them can be expressed. In this respect, presenting the ghost of someone still living but nearing the end of his life, and as unquestionably influential as Freud, seems less incongruous than it otherwise might. For Freud to attend a production of *Coriolanus* in America in 1938 would have been impossible – as it would, more obviously, have been for any of the other ghosts: he fled from Vienna to London that year and was suffering from oral cancer. For Schwartz, the fact that all of his ghosts lived in a different continent to himself is nearly as important as them having lived in different eras.

[27] Stevens, p. 50.

[28] Hart Crane, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. by Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), p. 44; William Wordsworth, 'My heart leaps up when I behold', *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 246.

Schwartz once wrote of Stevens that 'his intimate relationship with his own generation in Europe did not diminish but rather intensified the way in which he was a purely American poet'.[29] The same is true of Schwartz's own relationships with his own and previous generations in Europe.

International Heroes: Eliot, Joyce and Yeats

There can be little doubt, then, that despite also appreciating such classic American writers as Whitman, Emerson, and Melville, Schwartz tended to look across the Atlantic for his mentors; and there can be little doubt either that, despite this, one of his central subjects, especially in the 1940s, is the nature of American identity. Schwartz's understanding of America is reliant upon his understanding of Europe. The United States in the twentieth century, his writing often suggests, can only be considered in relation to the continent that initially colonised them and whose influence remains pervasive, culturally, economically, and politically. A literarily independent America would not have interested Schwartz, and he would have regarded any refusal to listen, or respond, to 'the courtly muses of Europe' as a denial of both the nation's heritage and its role in an increasingly international world.[30] More to the point, he would have thought this impossible. From his relational perspective of history, the slightest past event always has some kind of effect upon the present: even to react against the past – *especially* to react against it – is to enter into a relationship with it. The independence of the United States can only be appreciated in relation to their earlier colonisation. In literary terms, although a writer in America may perceive of himself as part of a specifically American tradition, he is also writing within a much larger tradition that goes back at least as far as the Ancient Greeks, regardless of his stance towards all the other writers within that tradition as well. Ideas such as these are the foundation of 'international consciousness'.

For Schwartz, Eliot was the exemplary international poet. In a 1945 essay entitled 'T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', Schwartz argues that 'Eliot's work is important in relation to the fact that experience has become international', adding,

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[29] 'Wallace Stevens: An Appreciation' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 192-196 (p. 194).
[30] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The American Scholar (1837)' in *Selected Essays*, ed. by Larzer Ziff (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 83-105 (p. 104).

> we are able to understand the character of our lives only when we are aware of all history, of the philosophy of history, of primitive peoples, and the Russian Revolution, of ancient Egypt and the unconscious mind.[31]

A few inferences can be drawn from this. One is that, even though such holistic awareness is literally impossible, any advance in self-knowledge is valuable, even if it ultimately falls short of total knowledge. Another is that whilst we can assume that such international forces have always existed, they seem only to have become widely felt in an era of travel, media, increased psychological insight and the kinds of technological advance (like the radio) that make time and distance seem to contract. 'The reader of T. S. Eliot', Schwartz notes, 'by turning the dials of his radio can hear the capitals of the world, London, Vienna, Athens, Alexandria, Jerusalem' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 120). Much earlier readers, interested though they may also have been in events in these cities, could not have had such direct or immediate access to them. Transnational critics such as Wai Chee Dimock and Colleen Glenney Boggs have illustrated the international perspectives of earlier American writers, most notably Whitman and Melville: the international perspective is not, itself, something new.[32] What is new, however, is the extent to which such internationality is accentuated by new media and technology and the extent to which it directly informs the lives of everyone, not just those who consciously seek it out.

Eliot himself had famously written of 'the historical sense', which 'involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence' and which

> compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[33]

Schwartz endorsed this view, recognising that Eliot's 'historical sense' has a geographical as well as a temporal dimension: this is emphasised when he goes on to admire Eliot's expression of the 'width and the height and the depth of modern life' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 121). Although he defies in *Genesis* Eliot's equally renowned insistence on the need for impersonality in poetry, Schwartz's poem, by making its protagonist a representative figure, nonetheless seeks to extend

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[31] 'T. S. Eliot as the International Hero' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 120-128 (p. 123).
[32] See, for example, Dimock's introduction to *Through Other Continents*, pp. 1-6. See also Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Transnationalism and American Literature: Literary Translation 1773-1892* (London: Routledge, 2007), and particularly the second endnote to her 'Introduction', in which Boggs differentiates between historical and contemporary definitions of 'transnationalism' (p. 151).
[33] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 13-22 (p. 14).

and to develop Eliot's historical sense.

The international, 'pan-historical' nature of experience is also a recurring subject in Schwartz's essays from the 1940s onwards. A late, largely equivocal, essay on Pound, for instance, notes that the *Cantos* at their best create

> the sense that all history is relevant to any moment of history, and the profound belief that the entire past, at any moment and in any place, is capable of illuminating the present and the whole nature of historical experience.[34]

At their weakest, however, the *Cantos* too often read, Schwartz argues, like 'Pound's discursive monologue about his own *personal* experience of history' and it is a serious failing that he appeared never to have asked himself 'what would have happened to Western civilization, America, modern literature and his own poetry, if Germany had won the Second World War' ('Ezra Pound and History, p. 113, Schwartz's emphasis) – as Schwartz evidently had when he told Laughlin of his fears that Europe was through. Innovative though Pound was in propounding a poetic informed by 'international consciousness', Schwartz considered Eliot more successful and consistent.

Eliot apart, Joyce was the writer whose articulation of 'international consciousness' Schwartz most admired. Joyce read the New York *Herald Tribune* whilst in Paris and Zurich and, like Eliot's readers, he owned a short wave radio through which he could hear the capitals of the world. This explains, Schwartz argues, how echoes of American radio comedy and Yiddish humour make their way into *Finnegans Wake*, a book which

> exhibits in the smallest detail and in the entire scope of the work the internationality of the modern poet, his involvement in all history, and his consciousness of the impingement of any foreign language from Hebrew to Esperanto upon the poet's use of the English language.[35]

By 1958, Schwartz suggested that such a 'clear and explicit consciousness of the international span of experience, and a pan-historical sense of culture, art, and literature' had become commonplace in writing even though it 'did not and indeed could not exist in the past.'[36] If we acknowledge, as Hugh Kenner does, that the whole modernist movement was 'by tacit definition international', it is nonetheless important to recognise just how ahead-of-their-time Eliot and Joyce's expressions of this

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[34] 'Ezra Pound and History', in *Selected Essays* pp. 113-119 (p. 116).
[35] 'The Vocation of The Poet', p. 22.
[36] 'The Present State of Poetry', p. 48.

consciousness were in the first decades of the twentieth century.[37] The expatriate Eliot – 'were it not for T. S. Eliot', Schwartz once quipped, 'America to British literati would be virtually indistinguishable from Australia'[38] – met with resistance from other American modernist poets, and most conspicuously William Carlos Williams. Williams championed colloquial over overtly literary language and celebrated the local over the international. Eliot's poetry contains colloquialisms too, but the difference is that Williams consciously distanced himself from the Western canon and sought to forge a specifically American idiom whereas Eliot sought to encompass multiple registers and fashioned a style that was highly allusive. Kenner notes Williams's contention that *The Waste Land* was, in fact, backward-looking: he thought that it 'invaded and availed itself of the British literary tradition, an alien tradition, to exploit for itself that tradition's vast prestige' (Kenner, p. 66). He did not believe that Eliot had succeeded in creating something new in itself.

Despite Schwartz's comments in 1958, there remain today divisions between poets with local and international perspectives: 'international consciousness', even now, at the height of globalisation, is not quite the given for poets that Schwartz thought it had become. True, it has recently been argued – by Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, amongst others – that localism is just another facet of internationalism, its opposite but also an obvious corollary: as the bewildering scope of international experience becomes more and more evident, it is perhaps natural to try to make sense of one's immediate environment rather than attempt to grasp an enormity that will always be elusive.[39] But the opposition nonetheless brings to the fore differences in poetic ideology. By 1943, when *Genesis* was published, Eliot had long since assumed the authority of a cultural 'dictator', but there remained an (unstated) expectation for American poets to choose sides, to involve themselves in what Berryman termed 'the politics of praise'.[40] In this light Schwartz's advocacy of 'international consciousness' can be seen as a statement of allegiance. He admired Williams but struggled to comprehend that poet's resistance to intellectuality and to

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[37] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, p. 66.
[38] 'Instructed of Much Mortality: A Note on the Poetry of John Crowe Ransom', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 173-181 (p. 174).
[39] Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, 'Introduction: What is Transatlantic Literary Studies?' in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 1-17 (p. 3).
[40] John Berryman, 'Desire Is a World By Night' in *Collected Poems, 1937-1971*. See also P. Coleman, '"The Politics of Praise": John Berryman's Engagement with W. B. Yeats', *Etudes Irlandaises*, 28.2 (2003), pp. 11-27.

Western tradition. Schwartz found the international outlook of Eliot, Pound (when fully historically-engaged) and Joyce more fruitful, and felt that this could enhance, rather than contradict, an assertion of poetic nationality, as in the case of Stevens considered earlier.

It is probable that Schwartz would have agreed with Berryman's claim in 1950 that it was better for Americans to 'see themselves as part of an *English* tradition' rather than a separate, smaller, American tradition; although Schwartz's later work in particular shows his acceptance of the fact that he ultimately belonged to *both*.[41] The only reason Berryman felt American poets had had to assert the value and *national* character of contemporary verse earlier in the century was due to an insecurity, well overcome by mid-century, about the quality of American poetry. True though this may have been, the '30s and '40s had also seen influential reappraisals of earlier American writers that established the autonomy of a distinctly American tradition, the landmark work being Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in The Age of Emerson and Whitman*. Whilst this does not deny European influences (one can hardly speak of a 'renaissance' without evoking fifteenth-century Italy), it does suggest how the preoccupations of Hawthorne and Melville, for example, diverge from those of their European forbears. Matthiessen's study was the most important of many that made it possible to refer to *American* Literature as something in its own right. For Schwartz, however, perhaps the simplest and most important reason for Americans to see themselves as part of a European tradition was that their country, and especially New York, their greatest city and the one he knew best, was largely inhabited by Europeans.

An apparent contradiction needs to be addressed here. In taking New York City almost exclusively as the locale for his writing, Schwartz too exhibits a kind of localism, albeit in a cosmopolitan rather than provincial setting. He does not deny this; in a review of Faulkner, for example, although he writes perceptively about the importance of the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, he feels obliged to say something of 'the immense distance between the region of the critic and that of the author'.[42] American critics, he also confesses, will struggle to grasp all of the political connotations of Yeats's poetry because they are not Irish. To write fairly

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[41] *Dream Song: The Life Of John Berryman*, Paul Mariani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p. 228.
[42] 'The Fiction of William Faulkner' in *Essays*, pp. 274-289 (p. 283).

about Yeats, 'one must understand, knowing that one cannot feel, what names like Parnell, O'Leary, Pearse and Connally [sic.] mean to the Irish nationalists' ('An Unwritten Book', p. 88). If this is problematic, however, Schwartz is also alert to how difficult it would be for an Irish critic to write an unprejudiced critique of Yeats without being blinkered by 'many native feelings about Ireland'.[43] Some degree of distance may be advantageous insofar as it allows one to take a wider perspective.

Schwartz's essay on Yeats is insistent in the way in which it probes the relation of the local to the international. Schwartz points out that although Yeats himself aimed to express the universal, his poetry was contingent upon the historical moment and upon happenings that would not, initially, appear to have had much effect upon his native Ireland: 'from the beginning of his career to the very end, what happened in the Europe of his time penetrated his whole being as a poet, despite his sincere serious belief that he was writing, for the most part, sub specie aeternitatis' ('An Unwritten Book', p. 84). What happened in Europe mattered to Yeats, not only because of its possible effect on the fate of Ireland, but also because of his personal interest in the symbolist movement that was taking place in Paris and because of the fact that his books were published in England. It is not just a political or personal question, however. The change in Yeats's style, Schwartz contends, is attributable to 'the character and changes in European civilization'; and this is also the source of the transformation from 'the pre-Raphaelites to Picasso, from Debussy to Stravinsky, from Swinburne, Symons and Dowson, to the Imagists, Pound and Eliot' (p. 86). This is such a complex shift, Schwartz explains, that it can perhaps only be understood 'from an angel's point of view' (p. 85) – the point of view towards which 'international consciousness' must always aspire, even if it can never be attained.

Yeats himself may not have been this conscious of how importantly Europe influenced his writing. It would seem 'on the surface', Schwartz suggests,

> that when Yeats looked at Europe and at history, he could see only his own face or the faces of his friends or what was already in his mind. But we soon see that the being of all the things which concerned Yeats was bound up with what was happening in Europe, and that as Yeats follows what interests him, in his poems and in his autobiographies, he is following, in his own way, the effect of Europe upon his own life.
>
> ('An Unwritten Book', pp. 86-87)

[43] 'An Unwritten Book' in *Essays*, pp. 81-101 (p. 82).

Thus, poetry that initially seems to be concerned with only a very particular political situation turns out to have much wider resonance. The most important aspect of this, for Schwartz, is that 'the history has become poetry in that the particular event signifies a typical kind of event' (p. 88). The principle of making the particular stand for the typical is one that Schwartz himself espouses, especially in *Genesis*, which he was writing at the time that he published this essay.

Schwartz does not regard Yeats as an international poet to the same extent as Eliot, who (like Joyce) is concerned not just with Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but 'with the whole world and all history' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 122). Schwartz dwells, for example, upon the internationality of the names Mr Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tournquist and Fraülein von Kulp in 'Gerontion'.[44] Elsewhere, he gives as an early example of Eliot's internationality the poem in French entitled 'Mélange Adultère De Tout' which – despite being a version of a poem by Corbière – he regards as 'quasi-autobiographical' (p. 121). Schwartz sets alongside the place names mentioned in this poem – many of them exotic – names and events that he regards as actual '*presences*' in Eliot's poetry, including St Louis, Paris, Oxford, the two World Wars and the Munich Pact (p. 121, Schwartz's italics). These references, along with his historical and literary allusions, all contribute, Schwartz says, to Eliot's status as a poet who 'illuminates [...] the ages': they are not mere 'exhibition[s] of learning or reading' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 122). Of Schwartz's own poems, only 'Will You Perhaps Consent To Be' – which imagines the 'mind's continuing and unreleasing wind' lusting for 'Paris, Crete and Pergamus' before departing for 'Paris and Chicago, / Judea, San Francisco, the Midi' and, finally, 'Norway' (*SK*, p. 64) – is as wide-ranging in its geographical references as Eliot's poetry. In Schwartz's poem, these places also seem to be constructions of the mind rather than actual locations: the poem exhibits consciousness of the international, even if this is not grounded in actual experience.

Schwartz contrasts Eliot and James by suggesting that Eliot was truly international whilst James was primarily 'concerned with the American in Europe' and might thus be better described as a 'transatlantic' writer.[45] Schwartz, for the most

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[44] 'The Vocation of the Poet' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 14-23 (p. 21).

[45] Transatlanticism is a critical concept that has flourished in recent years amongst theorists for whom post-colonial models have become inadequate. As I have argued in my 'Introduction', overriding

part, is preoccupied with the European in America: his scope is closer, then, to James's than to Eliot's. However, Eliot's example looms largest for Schwartz, and, even if he rarely achieves the same degree of 'international consciousness' in his own work, Eliot is the mentor he most strives to emulate.

This does not take into account, however, Schwartz's chief advance on Eliot's position: his consideration of the international as perceived by, and in relation to, the individual whose entire existence is conditioned by events distant in both time and location. Eliot determined to leave personality out of poetry: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.'[46] Schwartz's poetry often suggests, however, that to attempt to escape personality entirely is to falsify experience: he felt that for events or impressions to acquire the fullest possible significance one must acknowledge the centrality of the person who perceives them. Apperception – essentially the mind's ability to *interpret* what it perceives – is as important to Schwartz as the perception itself. To use an analogy, appropriate to Schwartz's own interests, one cannot go to the cinema and deny the existence of the screen: it is necessary, and always there, and the movie would seem quite different (and probably unwatchable) if projected onto another surface – although if the movie is sufficiently absorbing one might hardly register the screen's existence. Something similar is true of personality: it is always there, and it always colours perception, but most of the time it is unnoticed. For Schwartz, to escape from personality would not be to achieve perfect objectivity, as Eliot may have desired, or a kind of transcendence, but rather to lose all ability to find meaning in one's experiences or in the world.

Eliot follows his stricture on what poetry is and is not with a telling sentence: 'But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things' ('Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 21). The *desire* to escape personality and emotions is something that Schwartz *does* recognise, and he often dramatises the attempts of individuals sensitive to their own identities to effect such an escape. For the child in 'The Ballet of the Fifth Year', for example, the purely aesthetic grace of skating is, 'the best escape to know' (*SK*, p. 59), whilst the

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theoretical stances are of limited usefulness in discussion of Schwartz: he is simply not the kind of writer who can be claimed for one theory or another. Seeing as he wrote about transatlantic immigration, however, and sought explicitly to define himself as a poet of the Atlantic, it is obvious enough that the complex interplay of influences in both directions across the Atlantic, all of which come under the broad general term 'transatlanticism', were of the utmost interest to him.

[46] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 21.

first of the 'Poems in Imitation of the Fugue' (whose secondary meaning of flight from one's own identity, is as present here as its primary one, the musical form) begins 'All of us always turning away for solace' (p.53): we long to avoid the necessity of confronting ourselves. 'You will try to escape / From melting time and your dissipating soul', the father warns in 'Father and Son', going on to list some of the evasions which 'so many don' (p. 30) because each 'is afraid to be alone, / Each with his own death in the lonely room' (p. 31). The nobler course, he tells his son, is to 'Face yourself, constantly go back / To what you were, your own history' (p. 31) and 'Be guilty of yourself in the full looking-glass' (p. 33). The same principle is expressed at the end of the first of the between-the-acts performances in 'Coriolanus and His Mother': 'Let us require of ourselves the strength and power to view ourselves and the heart of man *with* disgust' (p. 95, Schwartz's emphasis). Flight is also an important trope in *Genesis*, and if there is a moral to the poem it is that it is nobler to confront what might be unattractive about one's personality than to try to run away from it. 'How difficult to flee identity!' (*G*, p. 14), one of the ghost-commentators remarks; and if such a thing is to be possible at all, Schwartz implies, it could only be after the most intense self-scrutiny.

The individual in the world: 'Pleasure', 'The Commencement Day Address' and 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar'

Sensitivity to the burden of personality is central to Schwartz's particular conception of 'international consciousness'. It merits discussion here because of Schwartz's desire, – to quote Keller – 'to transform personal introspection into a broader cultural consciousness' (Keller, p. 158). It was only possible for Schwartz to 'break' with the past, Keller argues, 'through his efforts to reclaim it in the irreconcilable terms of personal remembrance and future-orientated self-creation' (p. 158).

One of the most revelatory passages is in 'Pleasure', from 'Coriolanus and His Mother', ostensibly spoken by the poet himself, but in role and consciously performing; one must be wary of attributing the thoughts discussed in the piece directly to Schwartz himself. Nonetheless, the discourse, which at times is almost a chatty philosophical treatise, quite clearly presents some of the important questions about individuality that are present throughout Schwartz's oeuvre. 'The individual

requires our focused gaze', he remarks, immediately setting the individual in relation to his audience.

> He is the greatest subject, natural and artificial. Then there is his mother, his wife, his child, all his fathers, all his children. What an enormous crowd it may become! And the audience is already so complex, so full of foreigners.
>
> (*SK*, p. 93)

The individual is the greatest subject, perhaps, because he is the one that we each know best but is also too complex to be summed up definitively. He is 'natural' because we are each born as separate, individuated beings and 'artificial' because personality is, to a large extent, a social construct, established part-consciously and part-unconsciously in response to our particular environments and circumstances. It is for this reason that, however focused our gaze, we cannot exclude consideration too of all of the individual's relations, past and future, each of whom invites us to regard the individual from new perspectives and thus reveals new insights. Future generations – the children mentioned here – matter because, as Eliot contended, the present alters the past as much as the past alters the present. The individual is thus also the greatest subject because he contains so many other subjects and can be considered from so many different angles. The foreigners in the audience here are, specifically, Aristotle, Beethoven, Freud and Marx, the European ghosts; but the implication is that *everyone*, being different, is a foreigner to the individual, with alien customs and their own personal preoccupations. It is also suggested that we are continually observing each other and continually being observed.

There is, evidently, a strong philosophical imperative behind Schwartz's considerations of the individual in the world. To do justice to the philosophy upon which he draws will not be possible here. However, the following passage makes explicit some of the hypotheses with which Schwartz was grappling.

> "The individual is the only verifiable actuality, the individual, his experience from moment to moment." So said one in French at about the same time as Lev Davidovich, better known as Trotzky, justly remarked that "The individual – is an abstraction!" He is right and yet you know and so do I... that we cannot regard the warm identity beneath our faces as being no more than an abstraction.
>
> (*SK*, p. 93)[47]

[47] The first quotation is unattributed. It is possible that it comes from Bergson or Valèry – both writers whose work Schwartz knew well – but it has not been possible to confirm this. The view itself would seem to be derived from Descartes. Schwartz favours the unconventional spelling 'Trotzky' over the more usual 'Trotsky'. This is one of the many accepted transliterations of the name, however, and I use Schwartz's spelling in the discussion that follows.

The two views appear to be in absolute opposition, yet Schwartz credits them both. The individual's ever-changing experience from moment to moment is the only means available to him of interpreting his world. He is the only verifiable actuality because he alone can know the truth of his own perceptions. Nobody else can, and he, in turn, cannot know the truth of anybody else's. And yet, because individuality is not something concrete that can be clearly defined, proven, or even expressed, it *is* an abstraction. Schwartz's pontification here brings to the fore one of the animating impulses of his whole oeuvre, the conflict between instinct, or sensibility, and the intellect. Intellectually, one has to agree with Trotzky that the self *is* an abstraction. And yet, every living person, however conscious they may be of the facts that they have no significance whatsoever in isolation and that they are merely one amongst the many, also has a strong sense of the ways in which they are unique and not simply generic products of their society, although this may not appear to be the case from an entirely detached world-wide perspective. If the individual is an abstraction then it is an abstraction without which we cannot live meaningfully.

Schwartz goes on to stress further the paradoxical nature of existence, this time alluding to Heidegger's thesis of *Dasein* or 'being-in-the-world':

> Man is always *in* the world, yes! inconceivable apart from being surrounded by a greater whole than himself. And yet he is at the same time himself and in and by himself and by traveling here and there may separate himself from any particular interior in which he finds himself. There is a thought which will take a considerable amount of chewing and then you will only have to spit it out again.
> (*SK*, p. 93)

The flippant conclusion here is a warning that it would be unwise to over-intellectualise all this. It is paradoxical, yes, and complex, but the fact is that most of us manage to lead our lives in the world as ourselves, and in and by ourselves, without succumbing to existential despair. 'Traveling here and there' brings to mind again Schwartz's fascination with flight: we may never be able entirely to escape our personalities, but by travelling we can change our immediate society and thereby redefine our lives, shifting the contexts and parameters against which they are judged. Schwartz's poetry and many of his stories present individuals imbued with the impulse to escape, very much in the world and subject to its forces, but also intent upon proving their individual agency. Schwartz offers no explicit answers to the difficult question of the relation between the individual and the universal, but he consistently explores this question in enterprising ways.

Some aspects of 'international consciousness' and the question of the individual's own influence over history are explored by Dr Isaac Duspenser, who delivers 'The Commencement Day Address' in the story of that title, the first Schwartz wrote. Duspenser, whose own name suggests a heritage both Jewish and French, unsettles his American listeners by introducing the remark 'All men are my fathers!' as a joke before going on in absolute seriousness: 'Think now! Each of you carries in his heavy breast a stupendous weight, the generations of men!'[48] Duspenser, like Schwartz in 'Pleasure', suggests that to understand the individual one has to understand all of his forbears – and that, to each of us, our heritage is a great burden. He goes on to consider the discovery of America, outlining two contrary positions. The first attributes progress and discovery primarily to individual agency: 'Thus it is said that everything which exists was first an idea in some intellect: the discovery of America was an idea in the mind of Columbus' ('The Commencement Day Address', p. 118). This view is, for the most part, Bergsonian.[49] Central to it is the recognition that the *potential* for something to happen must exist before such an event can actually occur: Columbus could not have discovered America if he had not been intent upon discovering something, despite the fact that he did not discover what he expected. Equally – and obviously – America needed to exist before it could be discovered.

Duspenser's other argument is essentially Marxist:

> History is ruled by the different ways in which goods are made... how, by whom, and for whom... this structure is said to be the prime mover of History. Thus the discovery of America took place because a trade route to the Indies was required.
> ('The Commencement Day Address', p. 118)

Duspenser concludes that both versions are right 'in a way'. The present may be determined by social factors in the past, but this does not preclude the possibility of individuals exerting some kind of influence themselves. The professor's final position is that 'History moves towards whatever is supposed, by the heart of man from time to time, to be gold' (p. 120), whether this be something material or a kind of fulfilment that is less easily defined. The immigration of millions of European settlers at the end of the nineteenth century occurred for just this reason; dissatisfied with their lives in

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[48] 'The Commencement Day Address' in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, pp. 115-125 (p. 117).

[49] Bertrand Russell summarises Bergson's philosophy as follows: 'Bergson maintains that evolution is truly *creative*, like the work of an artist. An impulse to action, an undefined want, exists beforehand, but until the want is satisfied it is impossible to know the nature of what will satisfy it' (Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1961), p. 757 (Russell's italics).

Europe, they sought the promise of wealth and a more fulfilled existence in America. But we might also note here the observation of one of the ghost-commentators in *Genesis* that at the same time as the first immigrants were leaving Europe for America, Henry James and Henry Adams were making the reverse journey, seeking a different kind of gold. History does not move in one direction only.

Typically, Schwartz does not allow the reader to accept Duspenser's proclamations unquestioningly. One audience member dismisses them as 'half-truth', 'commonplaces' and 'melodramatic courses' ('The Commencement Day Address', p. 121). By the end, Duspenser's performance has become so histrionic that the President summons the campus police to take him away and the historian's daughter apologises, explaining that her father is ill and scarcely responsible for what he says. Nonetheless, this suggests as much about the conventional attitudes of the audience as it does about Duspenser's radicalism. For much of the story the narrator appears to be in sympathy with him, and his views are close to those often evident in Schwartz's poetry. Duspenser's insistence that we are all 'half the serf of the time and place in which [we] live, which is History' (p. 122) is implicit throughout *Genesis* and tallies with the view expressed in 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' that 'History has no ruth / for the individual' (*SK*, p. 22).

Schwartz identified this poem as the first in which he had attempted to articulate his 'international consciousness'. Narrated in terse unrhymed two-lined stanzas and in loose trimeter, the poem is remarkable for its economy. Its six sections juxtapose the experience of the Czar's children of losing their ball with one of Schwartz's own early experiences of loss – that of knocking a baked potato (roughly the shape of a mini American football) from his highchair as a two-year old. The scenes initially appear unrelated: the child Schwartz, in Brooklyn, is six thousand miles away from the apparent idyll in Moscow that turns out to be anything but. The switches of focus lend a cinematic effect: the poem cuts from the Czar's children to Schwartz to a view so panoramic that it shows the world from afar 'Spinning in its spotlight darkness' (*SK*, p. 23). The reader is invited to note connections that are never spelled out.

The beginning is deceptive in its simplicity.

The children of the Czar

Played with a bouncing ball

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

(*SK*, p. 21)

We learn in the second section that it is 1916. The children, referred to throughout the poem simply as 'Brother' and 'Sister', are the children of Czar Nicholas II and it is less than a year before their father's forced abdication in March 1917.[50] World War I is raging, Russia has already lost Poland, and Nicholas himself is unsuccessfully leading his country's armies. The children in the garden seem innocently unaware of all this. They are also unaware that it will be a mere two years before their own deaths, alongside their parents, at the hands of a firing squad on July 17th 1918 – the Czar's children were tried alongside their father and punished for his sins, or at least for his unpopularity.

Such knowledge, never explicitly stated by Schwartz, immediately lends the poem an ominous tone. The 'bouncing ball' can be seen in this light as a kind of time bomb and the children as toying with their own fates. Tossed 'back and forth' though it is, the ball has a will of its own: 'It fell among the flowerbeds / Or fled to the north gate' (*SK*, p. 21). We know, and the children do not, that it would be well for them to flee too, and that they will soon be evicted from the Edenic garden in any case. There is something ominous, also, about the 'bald white' daylight moon hanging in the Western sky. Daylight moons are not unusual, but this one, positioned towards Europe and the War, and reminding the children of 'Papa's face' and the reader of the explosive ball, seems to acquire the ill-auguring significance of an astrological omen. The section ends with Sister 'Hurling the white ball forth', and the increased vigour of her action, just after mentioning Papa, suggests a possible escalation in emotion: perhaps she does have a sense of the fate towards which her father is leading her.

The rapid encroachment of this fate is further suggested in the fourth section in which brother and sister bounce 'The bounding, unbroken ball' (*SK*, p. 22). Not only does 'unbroken' indicate that the ball *will* break; it also raises the question of how a ball *can* break. For it to become punctured and deflated is easily imaginable: for it to

[50] Czar Nicholas had four daughters and a son. One could be precise, then, in saying that 'Brother' in Schwartz's poem must be Tsarevitch Aleksey, born in 1904. Schwartz would have known that the Tsarevitch was a haemophiliac, and therefore especially vulnerable; but it is the fates of the children rather than their specific identities that most matter here.

break would be something altogether more catastrophic. The 'shattering sun' falls 'like swords' upon the children's play: this evokes the sword of Damocles and a continual fear of disaster, as well as reversing the usually positive connotations of the sun as a symbol. The children's play becomes more and more antagonistic as they pinch and kick each other and concludes in screaming and howling as the ball evades their will.

Across the Atlantic, another figure who will play a major role in twentieth-century history, Franklin D. Roosevelt, is already a model American (an 'Arrow Collar ad') but not yet a political force. The two year old Schwartz, oblivious to the world around him, is 'irrational'. It becomes clear that, despite the geographical distance, Nicholas II's legacy belongs to Schwartz as well as to the citizens of Russia: 'my grandfather coughed in your army' (*SK*, p. 21).[51] The children in the poem are not only Nicholas II's actual children but also, more generally, the Slavic people who owe their origins – and their displacement and suffering – to Czarist Russia. With the death of the literal children, it is the children of the nation (including Schwartz's coughing grandfather and, later, Schwartz himself) who must 'carry [their] fathers on [their] back' (p. 22). Even leaving for America, 'To become a king himself' (p. 22), the grandfather cannot negate his origins.

The poem's international scope is already well-established by the end of the second section. In the third, universal ideas are drawn from the scenes already presented. As mentioned previously, 'I am my father's father' (*SK*, p. 22) is taken from Hart Crane. The sense is enigmatic, but the line essentially suggests that as his son 'I' make my father somebody new. He only becomes my father when 'I' am born; therefore 'I' am responsible for altering his identity and thus for fathering his new self. The following line, 'You are your children's guilt', has the ring of judgement. Your children inherit your guilt; they can't escape history and they feel guilty on your behalf. The children of Czar Nicholas II are guilty simply of being his children, and are executed for it; but *all* children are similarly conditioned by the actions of their fathers and forefathers, even if their punishments are not so severe. Later in the poem, Schwartz writes 'The past is inevitable'. Inevitability usually assumes a future: if an event is inevitable it is because something occurred in the past to cause it. Thus, it

[51] This line could invite a slightly misleading biographical reading. Schwartz's grandfather, like Noah Green in *Genesis*, in fact served under Nicholas I, Nicholas II's grandfather. 'Your' here refers to Russia and not specifically to Czar Nicholas II.

seems paradoxical for the past itself to be inevitable. However, the sense here is that the past is unavoidable. No matter what one does, one cannot escape its influence, even if it only becomes inevitable once it has occurred. Events now in the past may not have been inevitable when they were in the future. The temporal reversal implicit here is similar to that suggested by fathering one's own father.

The rest of the section enforces the impossibility of escaping the past. Throughout his oeuvre, and especially in *Genesis*, Schwartz often grants commonplace occurrences significance by making them emblematic of historical events (or by suggesting that historical events are emblematic of *them*). For example, when Hershey Green recalls being sent out of the kindergarten classroom for kicking a boy who had kicked him first, he declares, 'Exiled, humiliated, persecuted, Coriolanus, Joseph, and Caesar, the child resumes history, each enacts all that has been' (*G*, p. 101). The rejection of these figures by their own people, and their subsequent exile, is re-enacted in microcosm in Hershey's kindergarten. Similarly, Hershey's mother, when she publicly denounces her husband for dining with a whore in the poem's climactic final episode, is presented as a modern American version of both Medea and Clytemnestra (*G*, p. 205). In 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar', Aeneas is the representative mythological/historical figure. He literally carried his elderly father, Anchises, on his back as he fled from Troy and becomes a prototype of all sons unable fully to escape the claims of family. Also, as a forefather of Rome and the empire that would dominate Western culture after the disintegration of the Greek civilisation from which he fled, Aeneas's significance is especially resonant for a writer whose grandfather left Europe to seek prosperity in America.

> 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.
>
> (*SK*, p. 22)

The child is *unable* to be innocent, given his heritage. The rocking horse in the nursery is as deceptive in its apparent harmlessness as the wooden horse left by the Greeks outside the walls of Troy. Later in the poem we learn that 'The innocent are overtaken, / They are not innocent' (p. 23) – once again, the poem presents us with an

apparent contradiction, although the truth of this is clear when we consider that the Czar's children, however innocent they may have been of the particular crimes for which their father was tried, were not given an 'innocent' verdict. There are shades of meaning: in the lines just quoted, the first use of 'innocent' is nuanced towards 'pure' or 'uncorrupted', whilst the second is a sinister contrast to the legal judgement 'not guilty': they are 'not innocent'. Given history's ruthlessness, Schwartz suggests, innocence simply cannot survive – and this is perhaps one of the reasons, elsewhere, for his advocating self-scrutiny and disparaging the kind of innocence that could also be termed naivety, so that one can discover the ways in which one is 'not innocent' and attempt to come to terms with one's heritage.

In the poem's fifth section, Schwartz turns to metaphysical speculation. 'The ground on which the ball bounces / Is another bouncing ball' (*SK*, p. 23). The ball, to borrow Cynthia Ozick's assessment, has swollen 'hugely, balefully [...] into the round earth itself.'[52] Will it, too, eventually break – or expend itself (it is currently 'unspent')? 'The wheeling, whirling world / Makes no will glad' (*SK*, p. 23): bouncing and spinning as well, its course, like our unavoidable fates, seems distressingly arbitrary, beyond any human control. It is too big for the children's hands and for anybody's hands. The transition from 'wheeling' into 'whirling' into 'world' and finally into 'will', the vowel sounds growing ever shorter, itself enacts a hapless ball-like bouncing brought to a thudding stop by 'glad'; a similar effect is achieved at the end of the poem in the alliterative bouncing from 'will' to 'ball' to 'uncontrollable' to 'wall' and finally to 'will' again. The children's ball rolls under the iron gate and evades their will: who knows where the world, a mere 'purposeless Thing' that is 'chasing itself' will lead us? It can hardly escape the reader's attention that whilst the children are fighting over their bouncing ball, apparently civilised nations are simultaneously fighting, just as trivially, perhaps, over their metaphorical ball, the world.

The poem was probably written in 1937; it is October of this year that is referred to at the start of the final section, with the poet looking back on the past, both personal and international. The international picture in 1937 was as ominous for the Western World as it was for the Czar's children in 1916. World War II, although it did not begin for a further two years, was becoming less and less likely to be avoided. The

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[52] Ozick, 'Introduction' in *Screeno*, pp. 7-16 (p.10).

Nazis were in power in Germany and the Xino-Japanese war was already underway: there was good reason for supposing the world, a mere star, tragic, even though the greatest tragedy was still in the future. In this final section personal and international are drawn together. The child Schwartz's baked potato is his 'buttered world' (*SK*, p. 24). This is a sentimental image, but one that recognises how, for a two-year old, the immediate present – and, in this case, the task of eating – overwhelms everything: his innocence is evinced by his lack of a wider perspective. However, when the potato falls, pitilessly, purposelessly, like the world itself, the child begins to howl and is thus identified with 'Brother', the Tzarevitch, howling in the garden at the loss of his ball. It is hardly surprising, given what has gone before, that the poet should conclude

> overtaken by terror
>
> Thinking of my father's fathers
> And of my own will.
>
> (*SK*, p. 24)

The poem is largely about the past, but this final word, 'will', although it is never used in the poem as a verb, always implies futurity. The poem's final note is one of fear about how improbably the poet will be able to enforce his own will but also, more pertinently, about what kind of heritage his own generation is likely to pass on. What past, the poem invites us to ask, will be inevitable for future generations?

Genesis: ghost commentators and 'remote causes of action'

The central anxiety of 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar', then, is about how history, both personal and international (neither of which can be dissociated from the other), cannot be altered. However hard we try to control our own fates, they will always be conditioned by those around us, whose own fates will also have been conditioned by those around them. All of those who have lived before us affect our own identities; so, too, do those who will live after us, those who will inherit the world that we leave. The fate of the individual is thus inextricable from the fate of the wider world. This is a truth that is also borne out time and time again in *Genesis*.

Hershey Green, the adolescent protagonist of Schwartz's most ambitious work, narrates his family history to an audience of ghosts who, rather than trying to put him to sleep with a bedtime story, keep him awake, insisting that they 'won't go home till morning' (*G*, p. 6). Hershey describes his parents' and grandparents'

immigration and his own New York childhood in what Schwartz described as 'Biblical prose', whilst the ghosts comment on each episode – like a Greek chorus – in blank verse. At times of heightened emotion, such as when he protests about having to recount past details that are painful to him, Hershey too speaks in verse; and towards the end of the book, the ghosts comment on how he is beginning to sound more and more like they do.

Genesis is the least read of all Schwartz's poems. Even the (contestably) critically-panned later poems are available in a modern edition; *Genesis* is not. William Logan's summary dismissal – 'who, except at gunpoint would reread Delmore Schwartz's autobiographical epic, *Genesis, Book One* (Book One!)' – is indicative of the modern reader's apathy to a poem that Schwartz himself boasted would 'obsess the nation'.[53] '[I] fear that it is so good', he raved to Laughlin, 'that no one will believe that I, mere I, am author, but rather a team of inspired poets' (*Delmore Schwartz and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, p. 147). To Berryman he reported: 'Every time I read or see the long poem as a whole, my hair stands on end at my own daring or shamelessness or whatever quality of character moves me to do what I am doing!' (*Letters*, p. 91). Granted, such swaggering is hardly attractive, and it has to be set against Schwartz's at times equally pervasive reservations about the poem; he wondered to R. P. Blackmur, for example, whether he might be 'publishing a blunder 261 pages long' (*Letters*, p. 124).[54] The generally lukewarm reception, despite Schwartz's best efforts to have it reviewed by critics he knew would be sympathetic, would seem to have confirmed these fears. There is an irony, too, in the fact that the reception of a book so concerned with uncontrollable international forces, or 'deities', should itself have become subject to them. 'This is no doubt the worst time of all to publish such a work, the war being what it is,' Schwartz conceded in September 1942. 'But I must get free of it…' (*DS & JL Letters*, p. 178). Even if it had been more favourably reviewed, it is questionable whether *Genesis* would have gained much of a readership at such a time of international crisis.[55]

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[53] William Logan, 'On Reviewing Hart Crane', *Poetry*, 193.1(2008), pp. 53-59 (p. 55); *DS & JL Letters*, p. 89.

[54] Blackmur's review ('Commentary by Ghosts', *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1943), pp. 467-471) is generally positive, though cautious. Schwartz, he says, has given the 'maximum possible poetic response' to his subject matter.

[55] Works by major modernists including Eliot, Stevens, Williams, and Moore were published in America between 1941 and 1945. Louis Zukofsky, Karl Shapiro and Muriel Rukeyser also brought out collections during the period, whilst e. e. cummings notably published nothing for 15 years after 1935. Eliot in particular sold well during the war years, but this was unusual. For young poets such as

However, Schwartz *was* justified in thinking his poem radical, sophisticated and ambitious beyond the scope of any typical individual writer. His boasts become more palatable when one realises that the position of the individual, the 'mere I', within a whole society of other ambitious 'mere Is' is, in fact, one of the poem's central considerations: it insistently probes the individual's personal development in relation to an international community and far-reaching historical events. What is more, *Genesis* really does broach new poetic territory in its bold reinstatement of the self at its centre; in its use of Freudian psychology and contrasting interpretative perspectives; and in the challenges it makes to distinctions of form and genre. It also offers a compelling picture of early twentieth-century America – and specifically of 'Europe's last capital' (*G*, p. 5) , New York City – addressing how the individual negotiates his heritage and culture, and anticipating many of the debates that are current about national identity today. The poem is also notable for the scope of its references, ranging from Ancient Greek philosophy to the films of Chaplin and D. W. Griffith. This attests to Schwartz's attempts to negotiate what he regarded as the two largest-scale cultural factors of his time – Europe and Hollywood. All of these aspects of the poem require fresh analysis. *Genesis* is a diverse, sprawling, often untidy work; but it is also a probing investigation into how the individual sustains a sense of identity in the modern world and a bold experiment in poetic form.

One of the functions of the ghosts in the poem is to draw out the universal aspects of Hershey's story, just as the ghosts in 'Coriolanus and His Mother' assess the wider significance of that Roman hero's rise and fall. Schwartz's use of ghost commentators, however, appears to have troubled readers, Laughlin included. Schwartz took pains to justify it. 'Dante wrote the best poem ever written *by using the dead as voices*' (*DS and JL Letters*, p. 159, Schwartz's italics), he argued. Perhaps more pertinently, however, Schwartz also pointed out that such a device was necessary in a poem intended to reflect the full range of modern international experience:

> this story-succeeded-by-commentary is one of the profoundest most deeply-rooted and most accepted experiences in modern life: The newspaper story-editorial, the play-and-review-of-the-play, the travel film with voice as commentator are all primordial examples of what is going to be an inevitable literary form (inevitable because the life we live forces it upon us).
>
> (p. 159)

Schwartz, who were published by small presses, the conditions for publishing were unfavourable. 1000 copies of *Genesis* were printed, but the book went largely unnoticed.

In the modern world, he insists – the world presented in the poem – it is inadequate to interpret any experience from a single point of view. Being dead and having largely escaped their own personalities, the ghosts can offer a sufficiently detached and, at times, ironic exegesis of Hershey's story, recognising its universality and adopting Freudian, Marxist and other perspectives to guide him towards greater self-knowledge.

Most importantly, according to Schwartz they

> can trace and understand the remote causes of action which are hidden from the young man himself. And these causes – historical, social, cultural, and psychological – are the "divinities" of our day, acting upon our free will as fatefully as ever did the gods of the ancient world.
>
> (*DS & JL Letters*, p. 191)

These 'divinities' are several, but those most frequently identified in the poem are Europe, America, Israel, 'Capitalismus', 'Sexhood', the First World War, the 'family divinity' and the 'school divinity'. Whilst Schwartz acknowledges that choices do occur in individual lives, *Genesis*, like 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' and other of his earlier lyric poems, laments that these choices are limited by uncontrollable circumstances. Hershey, like all individuals, has no influence over his nationality, gender, class, or even, ultimately, personality; the ghosts recognise that it is only as a consequence of a series of impulsive decisions (and various other factors) made long before his conception that Hershey ends up being born to sparring Jewish parents in early twentieth-century America. He can do little more than negotiate how best to live with what he inherits.

Perhaps the most vivid example in *Genesis* of how the course of one's life might be entirely contingent upon chance events can be seen in the role played by Bismarck and Disraeli (two individuals who, exceptionally, *are* able to influence the course of history) in determining the fate of Hershey's paternal grandfather, Noah Green. Green's first attempt at forging a new life – by divorcing his wife and running away from Czar Nicholas I's army – is thwarted when his wife learns he is to remarry and follows him; events that could not have occurred had the Congress of Berlin not annulled Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish war, causing Green's comrades, who witnessed his flight, to return home earlier than expected and tell his wife everything. Had the two history-influencing world leaders not intervened – encouraged by Queen Victoria herself, as one of the ghosts points out – Green's initial flight would much

more probably have been successful, and Hershey, consequently, would never have been born. This is just one instance of how his existence depends upon both social factors and the actions of particular individuals across the world many years in the past.

The first part of *Genesis*, which recounts the immigration of Hershey's grandparents and their children, is the most plot-driven part of the book. Thereafter, the story becomes more episodic, Hershey focusing upon specific moments from his childhood rather than covering vast historical spans as before. On a first reading of the poem, it is the story itself that most holds the attention – despite what one of the ghosts says about how it

> does not 'grip the interest,' compel
> The mind for 'what comes next' because
> It lacks beginning, lacks an end, and has no plot
> But Life itself, weird, wasteful, wild, without limit—
>
> (*G*, p. 183)

It 'grips the interest' for other reasons: for its investigation of character, heritage, and a particular social period in American history; for its episodic narrative and its representative qualities; and for the 'Biblical prose' in which it is told. None of Schwartz's stories are heavily reliant upon plot and these lines could be taken as a jibe against readers and critics who consider plot to be the be-all and end-all of fiction. Hershey's story, without the artifice of a tidy plot, may be truer to life as we actually experience or remember it.

If the story is compelling, however, it becomes apparent with rereading that – as in 'Coriolanus and his Mother' – the interpretation of the story is as crucial as its actual content. R. P. Blackmur, in the review Schwartz solicited, is perceptive. *Genesis*, he says,

> is a story of what is sublimated. What the chorus of presences say would avail nothing without the story, just as the story would have no direction and no final meaning without the activating powers of the chorus [...] The immediate significance of the story absorbs [... but] the final significance transpires exactly in what the presences of the dead bring from the story into voice.[56]

Representative comments of the ghosts include 'How clear and typical is that man's mind!' (*G*, p. 124), spoken of Jack Green, Hershey's father; 'what themes return! What deities' (p. 140); and 'how small these souls / Seen from our point of view' (p.

[56] R. P. Blackmur, 'Commentary by Ghosts', p. 469.

167). The 'presences' also guide Hershey (and the reader) towards understanding the symbolic significance of the story. For example, one of them, considering the fraternal relationship between Jack and Albert Green, notes how 'Existence spreads itself and therefore each / Relationship is like a limb stretched far' (p. 37): the brothers, even when separated, are always a part of each other's lives. Elsewhere, in a contemplative cadenza that recalls both Schwartz's discussion of individuality in 'Coriolanus and His Mother' and the fear of the world's arbitrariness expressed in 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar', one of the ghosts wonders whether a life can only be assessed in terms of the sum of its parts:

> Perhaps the sum alone decides the life,
> And all the souls that are perhaps are spun
> Just like the roulette wheel or turning globe...
> Perhaps the all decides and nothing less...
> I know that maybe God has purposes
> Stranger than any dream and wholly just,
> But now in ignorant death this is a thought
> My mind can utter but cannot believe
>
> (pp. 54-55)

He is no seer: a definitive answer to the question of what life really is proves beyond him. But this is a more detached contemplation than Hershey himself would be capable of at this stage in his story.

The ghosts also speculate on Hershey's fixation with snow and, as a chorus, establish occasional refrains and recurring motifs. Amongst the most conspicuous of these are '*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas!*' (p. 14 and others) ('He is happy who knows the causes of things!') and variations upon 'Light is the heroine of every picture' (p. 142 and others). On a number of occasions they posit the idea that every son is Orestes (p. 148 and others), compelled to avenge himself against his mother on behalf of his father and bearing his parents' guilt. Another image that recurs, evoking fear of what is to come, is that of a man hanging precariously from the fifty-fifth floor of a building over a city street, as in the iconic scene from Harold Lloyd's 1923 film, *Safety Last!* in which the hero hangs from the hands of a clock (p. 43 and others).

As well as drawing out symbolic significances, the ghosts also sometimes, conversely, affirm the actuality of apparent symbols, such as when one exclaims 'John Bull and Uncle Sam are not cartoons / But heavy actual bullies boxing through us!' (*G*, p. 97). On another occasion, they tease Hershey for being unable to distinguish

sign from reality. Referring to his observation of editorial cartoons in Hearst newspapers, one of the ghosts laughs at how

> the growing fusing boy
> Inhaled them credulous as any savage
> Unable to distinguish symbol from thing…
>
> (p. 189)

These interactions between Hershey and his interlocutors amount to more than dry presentation followed by elucidation. Hershey shows that he knows how to captivate his audience and then leave them in suspense when, early in the poem, having reached the point of Jack and Albert Green's immigration to America, a ghost asks 'what nextness to these boys—' (p. 19) only for Hershey to ignore him and shift his focus to the Newmans. At times, the tone is bantering and there are hints throughout the poem that the ghosts should not simply be taken as sober authorities. Hershey himself mocks them as 'junior Platos' (p. 163) and there is levity in such announcements by the ghosts as 'It's great to be dead, O, O, what fun!' (p. 183). This sounds like the start of a show tune, although it is later offset by the equally light-hearted admission that 'Being a ghost is not a picnic' (p. 201).

Unlike the ghost-commentators in 'Coriolanus and His Mother', those in *Genesis* are not identified. Schwartz does appear to have had specific identities in mind for them, however, despite the fact that their anonymity is an important factor in enabling them to remain unbiased and to take the 'world-wide view' (*G*, p. 66) in their assessment of Hershey's story. One of the ghosts even refers to the eternity of death as 'this Switzerland' (p. 55), implying that death has enabled them to be neutral in their judgements. Nonetheless, another declares 'Later we will unmask, singing our names!' (p. 99). Since the poem was never finished they never do, but there are hints of individuality throughout, and as late as August 1942, Schwartz had considered giving them definite names. 'This cuts out the big moment of unmasking at the end', he wrote to Laughlin, 'but one can't have everything' (*Letters*, p. 128). At the same time, he proposed that one of the dead would narrate the story, not Hershey. He must have changed his mind, however: a month later, *Genesis* was 'ready for the printer' (p. 130) and the published version contains none of these alterations.

The ghosts, even in death, are not wholly impartial, however; nor are they meant to be. They have not fully escaped their personalities. 'We mock with irony and sympathy, / Discuss, explain, listen and give our minds—' (*G*, p. 6) one of them

points out. Although they do, to an extent, educate Hershey in helping him to become more aware of his position in the world, they do not purport to offer him practical advice and they are largely there to be entertained at his expense. They revel in the fact that Hershey's story is 'endless'. After all, as one of them declares, 'We're dead forever, we have time to burn!' (p. 82).[57] They have no physical presence; instead they 'come like comic strips, speaking balloons' (p. 7). The analogy is helpful: their relation to Hershey's narrative is like that of the thought and speech bubbles in a cartoon that help to clarify a story whose main action is told through pictures. Later in the poem, one of them recalls that observing Life for the first time from the perspective of the dead was like reading a comic strip: at first the scenes seemed simplistic, until it became clear that the people observed were each, in their way, Everyman, just like the character of Jiggs in the *Bringing Up Father* cartoons popular at the time (p. 134). The ghosts also, at times, resemble an audience talking over a film or theatrical production. They admire the 'long range effects' (p. 14) in Hershey's narration of his grandfather's failed escape attempt, and later tell Hershey that they have witnessed many lives like his:

> We are the children
> Who stay all afternoon to see the pictures
> How many times! and with the same emotions!'
>
> (p. 118)

They cannot be persuaded to leave their celestial cinema.

One of them reminisces frequently about his lifetime love of wine; one laments how his birth was a mistake and that he continually felt his 'self's lack of necessity' (p. 149); and another, the Freudian amongst them, upsets Hershey with frequent sexual speculations including a twice-told anecdote about the child entering the parents' bedroom to find 'Mamma and Papa wrestling and moaning in bed' (p. 129). On only one occasion, however, is the specific identity of a ghost suggested and even that is enigmatic: 'Did I not flunk at Naples? Did I not fail / At the Staats-Oper?' (p. 159). The references to Naples and the Staats-Oper in Vienna hint that the speaker might be an opera singer, and possibly Enrico Caruso, the leading tenor of the Metropolitan Opera in New York from 1903 until 1920 who died in Naples in 1921 and who Hershey first hears on his aunt's victrola. The possibility this raises of the

[57] Although the ghosts are freed from time in death, their understanding of the world is still temporal. Time may no longer be 'the fire in which [they] burn' (*SK*, p. 66), but they still need to find a way to use it.

ghostly chorus being an operatic one is tantalising but ultimately inconclusive. Whatever Schwartz's intentions, Caruso might have appealed to him as a European practitioner of high culture who flourished in America.

Despite their lingering personal traits, the ghosts do succeed in emphasising the universality of Hershey's story. There is a telling moment when Hershey tells one of the ghosts that his interpretation is 'right in essence, if not in detail' (*G*, p. 27); Hershey is much more concerned about exact accuracy than the ghosts, who are content to seek out each episode's general implications. It should not be supposed, however, that Hershey entirely lacks the self-awareness to recognise the commonality of his experiences by himself. He is quite capable of setting his story in a wider context, even if it is then over to the ghosts to do most of the analysis. To give just one example, he follows an account of being abandoned by his mother outside a department store with a discussion of the community's relief at the announcement of the Armistice, prompting the ghosts to discuss how war is our inheritance from Cain and to contemplate the Oedipus complex (p. 108). It is also more often Hershey than the ghosts who identifies the ways in which he re-enacts the fates of historical and mythological figures at various points during the poem.

It is not simply the case, then, that Hershey is concerned with the personal whilst the ghosts dwell on the international; nor is it the case – as Adam Kirsch, the one present-day champion of the poem, has too straightforwardly suggested – that the personal is broadly represented for Schwartz by Freud and the international by Marx.[58] Narrator and chorus alike consider both personal and international experience; in fact, personal experience is a part of international experience, and it is an implicit claim of the poem that the two are not separable.

Given, then, the all-influencing quality of 'international consciousness', it becomes necessary to ask why the particular episodes narrated in *Genesis* are prioritised over others that might just as well have been chosen. Whilst it is logical for the story to begin with Hershey's grandparents, since they are the first generation of his family to emigrate, we are left in little doubt that this story could have begun infinitely far back. Had he known enough of the detail, for example, Hershey might have described Noah Green's early life as intricately as he narrates his own. The ghosts also make much of how Hershey's story is 'endless', and this makes the fact

[58] Kirsch, p. 203.

that the poem is unfinished less problematic than it might otherwise have been. Schwartz was highly conscious of the instability of such notions as beginning and ending: seen from the perspective of 'international consciousness' these become chiefly arbitrary and artificial. This point is emphasised by the fact that *Genesis*, contrary to the expectations raised by its title, begins so conspicuously *in medias res* (with an ellipsis, in mid-conversation) before the story proper gets underway: '"…. Me next to sleep, all that is left of Eden,"' (*G*, p. 3). While the reference to Eden here does evoke the Biblical account of man's origins – and, consequently, one of the many beginnings of Western civilisation – the context serves only to show how diminished any paradisiacal ideal has become. Sleep, a state of inertia and numbness, is a poor substitute and even this is denied Hershey. The idea of being 'next' to sleep suggests sequence, but as far as Eden is concerned, this is impossible: once Adam and Eve were dismissed there was no question of them, or anyone else, ever returning. There are five pages of preface before Hershey begins his narrative, and although his 'This is the beginning' does bring to mind the timeless 'In the beginning' of the Biblical *Genesis* and of *St John's Gospel*, we are aware that another point might equally have been chosen.

This is no doubt another of the reasons Schwartz presents *Genesis*, for the most part, as a representative story. The title alerts us to the fact that the poem has a mythic quality supposedly applicable to all people at all times just as clearly as it suggests that the story is one of beginnings. The poem is primarily representative of early twentieth-century immigrant experience but also of all experiences of cultural change, and the episodes which come to have most significance are the ones in which the individual is made aware of his position in the world. This would seem to be the determining factor in how the episodes of Hershey's life are chosen. Thus, as it is told, the birth of his brother, Roger, matters to Hershey not so much for the reasons of the family growing and of him having a new companion (he is, in fact, mostly indifferent towards his brother), but because it reveals to him that he is not, as he was coming to believe, the centre of the world, or even the exclusive subject of his parents' affections. Similarly, when Roger is later ill with scarlet fever, the memory is less important for Hershey because of any particular concern about his brother's health than it is because the image of the convalescent Roger waving to him, with their mother, from a high apartment window whilst he remains on the street below provides him with a metaphor for separation.

One episode to which Hershey gives particular attention is that in which, after Noah Newman's death, Leah Newman returns to Europe to visit her family and is given a French bond for her daughter, Eva, by her brother, Benjamin. Eva sells this bond so that she can afford an operation which enables her to become pregnant, even though she doubts that having a child would make her marriage any happier. Narrating this episode, Hershey's 'international consciousness' is more acute than that of some of the ghosts: 'The prosperity of Eastern European capitalism sent the French bond west', he explains. 'It went through Paris, the capital of Western culture, / And entered her marriage and entered her womb' (*G*, p. 65). One of the ghosts criticises Hershey for making so much of 'a minor nut', with another adding 'Surely he might have been born otherwise / And what has that to do with what he is?'(p. 66). Hershey himself sees it as critical, however, another example of the chance occurrences without which he could not have been born and which shape his understanding of himself. The seemingly superfluous reference to Paris is perhaps an attempt to emphasise his Western cultural heritage: it is hard to say that Paris actually played much of a role in enabling Hershey's birth, but it matters to him that the circumstances of his conception owed at least something to culture as well as to money. Some of the ghosts do concur with Hershey about the episode's importance. They observe that it has taken not one, but two Atlantic crossings to make his birth possible: 'Twice, twice! over Atlantic rides and raves / His thisness tiptoes on Might-Not-Have-Been!' (p. 66).[59] Individual existence is precarious.

The poem's representative quality is further suggested by some of the characters' names. They are types every bit as much as they are individuated characters, perhaps even more so: their personalities are inferred through quickly-sketched actions and are not developed to the extent that one would expect in a novel for example. It is no coincidence that Hershey's mother is called Eva, evoking the Bible's first mother, or that both grandfathers share the name of the original Biblical traveller, a name which, to one of the ghosts, 'suggests so much a boat on desperate seas' (p. 70). Their surnames help to define their identities too. Noah Newman, after a dispute with his brother-in-law boss, takes off for America to become a new man. Noah Green's surname carries similar associations of newness; green is the colour of

[59] Leah Newman in fact crosses the Atlantic *three* times since she returns to America again after visiting Europe.

spring and there are various puns on the name throughout the poem.[60] When his sons, more successfully re-enacting their father's original attempt to take his life into his own hands, run away to America and begin to make money, the family eventually follows them. However, whilst the Biblical Noah's old world was destroyed entirely, Hershey Green's ancestors cannot quite leave theirs behind: they 'bring Europe with them, more or less, / The greatest thing in North America!' (p. 33). In this context, however, it is not so much the great and defining artistic achievements of European civilisation that the immigrants bring – or the literary treasures discussed at the start of this chapter – as the parochial customs and age-old traditions that jar against the conspicuous modernity of America and continually betray their Old World heritage. Schwartz's portrayals of this disjunction between Old and New World customs for the child of immigrant parents, and the alienation that ensues, will be a primary focus of the next chapter.

[60] Green is also the colour of the light Jay Gatsby watches at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock in *The Great Gatsby*. During Fitzgerald's novel, It becomes representative of hope, of the American Dream. Nick Carraway reflects at the end that 'Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year receded before us' (F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ed. by Ruth Prigozy [Oxford, OUP, 1998], p. 144). This would not have been lost upon Schwartz.

CHAPTER 2

'this gulf and perversion... this separation': isolation, alienation and homelessness

'The Isolation of Modern Poetry'

'Some poets are fortunate', Schwartz remarks in his note 'To the Reader' at the beginning of *Genesis*:

> They live in an age when their beliefs and values are embodied in great institutions and in the way of life of many human beings. These authors do not have to bring in their beliefs and values from the outside; they have only to examine their experience with love in order to find particular beings and actions which are significant of their beliefs and values.
>
> ('To The Reader', *G*, p. vii)

Although he goes on to suggest that perhaps only the Gospel writers ever enjoyed this advantage to the utmost, Schwartz emphasises that the poet in 1943, writing at 'a time of much variety of belief' (p. viii), is especially unlikely to find his beliefs and values shared by his readers. 'Everyone has not only his own point of view, but his own view of Life. No author can assume a community of ideas and values between himself and his audience' (p. viii). This is, in part, a pre-emptive justification of using ghost commentators in his poem. They are characters removed from the central action, brought in 'to comment and to judge' (p. viii), and to guide readers towards the particular significance of what they read. They also show that many different interpretations might be equally valid. Dante, Schwartz points out, required guidance and commentary from Virgil in his *Inferno*; and Tiresias fulfils a similar role in Eliot's *The Waste Land.* These commentators are not merely dramatic devices, but also mediate between the poet and his unknown audience who, not necessarily sharing his own views, might otherwise have little sense of how to respond. Even by employing such commentators, the poet cannot wholly overcome his separation from the rest of society, and this is a situation that he must either embrace – by writing solely for himself, with no regard for an audience – or attempt to overcome – by trying to address society more broadly, but at the possible risk of his aesthetic integrity.

Schwartz most clearly expresses the ways in which he believed the modern poet and his work to be 'out of key'[1] with their time and surroundings in his 1941 essay 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry'. An understanding of the views he articulates here is fundamental to appreciating his own writing about alienation and exile, so this chapter begins by outlining the essay's central argument. This provides a context for an analysis of the form and style of *Genesis*, as well as the ensuing discussion about Schwartz's presentation of the Jew as a figure of alienation. A reading of the story 'A Bitter Farce' examines a specific example of the writer's complex engagement with questions of race, and the chapter concludes by addressing the kinds of alienation and isolation that Schwartz presents in *Genesis* and the story 'America! America!'

For Schwartz, the 'isolation' of modern poetry, rather than 'its difficulty, its famous obscurity', was its most salient characteristic (Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 3).[2] 'The modern poet', he suggests, 'has been very much affected by the condition and the circumstance that he has been separated from the whole life of society' (p. 5). This separation takes a number of forms. One is

> a break between intellect and sensibility; the intellect finds unreasonable what the sensibility and the imagination cannot help but accept because of centuries of imagining and feeling in terms of definite images of the world.
>
> (p. 5)

Of equal, if not greater, importance is the fact that the modern poet has been 'separated by poetry from the rest of society', a consequence, Schwartz argues, of 'the whole way of life of modern society' (p. 5). It is not so much the poet who is isolated, he claims, as 'poetry, culture, sensibility, [and] imagination' (p. 7) themselves.

The break between intellect and sensibility to which Schwartz refers evokes Eliot's discussion of the 'dissociation of sensibility' in 'The Metaphysical Poets'. Schwartz refutes Eliot's view in that essay that modern poetry must necessarily be difficult since it reflects the 'great variety and complexity' of modern civilisation.[3] This, Schwartz insists, is superficial, because

> the complexity of modern life, the disorder of the traffic on a business street or the variety of reference in the daily newspaper is far from being the same thing as the difficulties of syntax, tone, diction, metaphor, and allusion which face the reader in the modern poem.
>
> ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 4)

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[1] Pound, Ezra, *Selected Poems 1908-1969* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 98.
[2] By 'modern' poetry, Schwartz can be understood to mean *modernist* poetry.
[3] Eliot, T. S., 'The Metaphysical Poets (1921)' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 281-291 (p. 289).

One of the problems for the modern poet, he maintains, is that there is no such 'simple causal relationship' between the life around him and the poetry that he writes (p. 4). Despite this quibble, Schwartz is indebted to 'The Metaphysical Poets' when he discusses sensibility.[4] The central point of Eliot's essay is that for poets such as Donne, Marvell, Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw, thought and feeling were not distinct: 'their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought' ('The Metaphysical Poets', p. 286). This is not true, in general, of Romantic and Victorian poets. 'Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think', Eliot remarks, 'but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility' (p. 287). Schwartz does not take issue with any of this, but whereas Eliot regarded the 'dissociation of sensibility' principally as a question of style, attributing what he regarded as the disjunction between increasingly refined language and increasingly crude feeling in English poetry to the domineering influence of Milton and Dryden, Schwartz's discussion is more alert to broader historical factors. The break between intellect and sensibility, Schwartz argues, begins with 'the gradual destruction of [...] the traditional world picture of Western culture' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 5) presented by the Bible; by the time of Blake, this world picture and the one provided by the physical sciences are in overt conflict, and the rift has continued to widen since.[5]

In his essay on 'Poetry and Belief in Thomas Hardy', Schwartz considers Hardy as a poet who exemplifies this break between intellect and sensibility. Hardy's

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[4] The word 'sensibility' was of especial importance to Schwartz, as Bellow makes clear when he has Charlie Citrine describe Schwartz's alter ego, Humboldt, as 'a pioneer in the use of this word', adding, 'Sensibility later made it big' (*Humboldt's Gift*, p. 2).

[5] Schwartz's use of the phrase 'world picture' evokes Heidegger's lecture 'The Age of the World Picture', delivered in Germany on June 9th, 1938. Heidegger argues that the very concept of a 'world' picture is itself distinctively modern: he points out that the term 'world view', or *Weltanschauung*, only became current after the end of the eighteenth century. '[T]he fact that the world becomes picture at all', Heidegger argues, 'is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age' (Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt [New York: Harper & Row, 1977], pp. 115-154, [p. 130]). To 'represent', in the modern sense, says Heidegger, 'means to bring what is present at hand [...] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm' (p. 131). Having established the importance of man's sense of relatedness to the world he inhabits (which is implicit in Schwartz's conception of 'international consciousness'), Heidegger further asks 'Is it as an individual or as a community [...] that man will and ought to be the subject that in his modern essence he *already is*?' (pp. 132-133, Heidegger's emphasis). When Schwartz writes about the destruction of a traditional world picture, this is partly due to a communal loss of faith in that picture, but also due to man perceiving of himself only as an individual in solitary relation to his world. This is why a universal world picture might be replaced by numerous, conflicting world pictures.

sensibility was essentially Christian, Schwartz points out, but his intellect made it impossible for him to accept the Christian belief he had inherited. He holds the old view of life and the new one 'in a dialectical tension', succeeding best when he is able to convey this tension as a lived experience rather than merely stating it in verse.[6] When he manages to achieve this, the question of whether or not the reader shares Hardy's beliefs (or disbeliefs) becomes unimportant: it is the experience that matters – and, in Hardy's case, the particular experience of longing to believe in something he cannot, intellectually, be persuaded is true. In all of Hardy's poems, successful or not, it is this tension between intellect and sensibility that is most characteristic, and that determines each individual poem's effect.

Schwartz is particularly conscious of how late-nineteenth-century poets, writing at a time when evolutionary theory was challenging the most fundamental principles of Christian doctrine and exposing the insignificance of the individual in an infinite universe, must have endured this conflict between 'the very images which [they] viewed as the world, and the evolving and blank and empty universe of nineteenth century science' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 6). A poet such as Yeats, on learning of the immensity of the universe, must have 'felt a fundamental incongruity between his own sense of the importance of human lives and their physical smallness in the universe' – and it was in an attempt to 'restore dignity to both man and the universe', Schwartz maintains, that Yeats occupied himself for so long with theosophy and what Schwartz misleadingly describes as 'black magic' (p. 6). These pursuits enabled him to ignore the empirical findings of modern science, which were too bleak and of no use to him as a poet.

Of particular importance here is the emphasis Schwartz gives to *images* and to the difficulty of *imagining* a universe so starkly at odds with the traditional Christian one. For the poet, this difficulty in imagining is intensified: the philosopher and theologian are less perturbed by the physical smallness of the individual 'in an endless world' because they know 'that size is not a particularly important aspect of anything' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 6). The poet, however, who deals in images and who 'must see', cannot help but regard his condition in visual terms, seeing more keenly the incongruity between 'the importance man attributes to himself and his smallness against the background of the physical world of nineteenth century science' (p. 6).

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[6] 'Poetry and Belief in Thomas Hardy' in *Selected Poems*, pp. 58-71 (p. 60).

The long-established and 'definite' images of the world that humanity has become accustomed to seeing are not easily eradicated, even when proven to be inaccurate. It is perhaps harder to imagine the known and uncertain reality than the more hopeful, but illusory, world picture that had previously been accepted. As Schwartz puts it in 'Rimbaud in Our Time',

> Man cannot live without an interpretation of the whole of life which will tell him or seem to tell him what is good, what is right, what is important, and which will relate nature, man, man's economy, and man's art, so that they are not opposed in a conflict in which one or the other is abused and denied.[7]

However, no such interpretation can ever be definitive and, consequently, whatever one believes is likely to be at odds with life as one actually experiences it. Much of Schwartz's own poetry and fiction is concerned with the disparity between the ways in which we imagine our lives and the way they really are, the images we view 'as the world' and the entirely dissimilar world itself. The modern poet confronts an equivalent disparity: he depends upon images to define his sense of himself, even if these images are inaccurate and even though his society may not sanction them. Therefore he needs to find new images to replace those that have become discredited.

Schwartz's view of Yeats in 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry' is evidently informed by Edmund Wilson's discussion of the poet in *Axel's Castle*, his seminal 1931 study of literary modernism's origins in French symbolist poetry. In a 1942 overview of Wilson's work, Schwartz disputes the elder critic's presentation of Yeats as a late symbolist.[8] However, his own attitude echoes Wilson's certainty that Yeats was 'conscious from the start of an antagonism between the actual world of industry, politics and science, on the one hand, and the imaginative poetic life on the other' – an antagonism that the symbolists had been the first to feel so acutely.[9] In his chapter on Yeats, Wilson asks 'What *is* the consequence of living for beauty [...], of cultivating the imagination, the enjoyment of aesthetic sensations, as a supreme end in itself?'[10] 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry' is Schwartz's answer to that question: the consequence, he suggests, is that the modern poet distances himself from the actual world (although his work may still criticise it), and thus risks, in turn, being entirely ignored by it.

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[7] 'Rimbaud in Our Time', p. 57.
[8] 'The Writing of Edmund Wilson' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 360-373 (p. 362).
[9] Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (1931) (London: Collins, 1969), p. 39.
[10] Wilson, p. 34.

The poet also became isolated, Schwartz argues, because there was no place for cultivated man in an increasingly industrialised society and, as a result, culture 'fed upon itself' and was forced to create 'its own autonomous satisfactions, removing itself further all the time from any essential part in the organic life of society' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 7). Ultimately, he suggests, 'the modern poet has had nothing to do, no serious activity other than the cultivation of his own sensibility' (p. 10). Schwartz's use of the word 'cultivation' (which also picks up on Wilson) alerts us to the element of artifice involved in this process, and he associates the tendency with the aestheticism of Walter Pater and his doctrine of Art for Art's Sake – 'a doctrine which is meaningful only when viewed in the context [of...] a society which had no use and no need for Art, other than as a superfluous amusement or decoration' (p. 9).[11] The need to 'cultivate' sensibility also reinforces Eliot's view that sensibility had become increasingly 'dissociated': lacking any *instinctive* sensitivity to kinds of feeling, or to art, modern poets had to teach themselves by immersing themselves in other poetry and works of art, thereby distancing themselves further from society in general.

One consequence of poets cultivating their own sensibilities rather than engaging with society is 'a failure or an absence of narrative or dramatic writing in verse': these forms 'require a grasp of the lives of other men, and it is precisely these lives [...] that are outside the orbit of poetic style and poetic sensibility' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', pp. 8, 11). The isolated poet, Schwartz contends, 'can only write lyric poetry' (p. 11). The obscurity of modern poetry (which, despite disputing it as a *defining* characteristic, Schwartz does not deny) also arises from the poet's cultivation of his own sensibility. This causes his subject, method, and especially language to become 'more unique and special' (p. 11). Although Schwartz, as Atlas has noted, manages to critique 'the whole enterprise of Modernism' here, he also makes clear that such increased introspection and specialisation have not been wholly negative.[12] Despite its consequences for narrative and dramatic verse, and for the poet himself in relation to his society, the isolation of the poet in the modern period – 'the age which begins with Baudelaire' – 'increased the uses and powers of languages in the most

[11] Schwartz's preferred definition of symbolism further stresses this process of 'cultivation', an act of singularly self-conscious crafting. The movement, he says, 'was a prolonged cultivation of the power of language for its own sake which eventuated in an emphasis upon the connotative usages of language to an exclusion, varying from author to author, of the denotative usages' ('The Writing of Edmund Wilson', p. 362).

[12] Atlas, p. 159.

amazing and most valuable directions' (p. 12). Nonetheless, Schwartz concludes his essay by conceding that isolation 'haunts' modern poetry and that it is a state from which many poets 'have been trying to escape' (p. 13).

What could the poet in 1941 do about such a heritage of isolation? Wilson, a decade earlier, offers two possibilities. One is to follow the way of Axel (the eponymous protagonist of a dramatic poem by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam) and remain isolated – to shut oneself up 'in one's private world, cultivating one's private fantasies' and 'ultimately mistaking one's chimeras for realities.'[13] The other alternative is to choose the way of Rimbaud and to try 'to leave the twentieth century behind – to find the good life in some country where modern manufacturing methods and modern democratic institutions do not present any problems to the artist because they haven't yet arrived' (Wilson, p. 227). Although this seems, initially, a more international, socially-engaged position, it, too, is isolating – and Rimbaud entirely forsook literature soon after pursuing this aim. Wilson concludes that neither course is wholly viable, suggesting instead that 'we may see Naturalism and Symbolism combine to provide us with a vision of human life and its universe, richer, more subtle, more complex and more complete than any man has yet known' (p. 232). Both courses, Axel's and Rimbaud's, hold some appeal for Schwartz, and his work is often concerned with how to reconcile such contrary impulses. Equally, a desire to unite Naturalism and Symbolism is apparent in his simultaneous attraction to narrative and to the purely aesthetic. However, he more commonly sets these tendencies against each other, holding them in equilibrium, than he actively combines them.

R. W. E. Nelson has questioned whether the factors Schwartz discusses in 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry' equally affect prose writers, further remarking that objections to Schwartz's argument are 'suggested by the evidence of his own creative writing' (in both verse and prose).[14] By this reckoning, Schwartz's entire literary career can be read as an effort by the poet to escape his sense of detachment from society and his confinement to a particular kind of lyric verse. *Genesis*, for example, although it contains many lyrical passages, is anything but a straightforward lyric poem. Its setting of Hershey Green's story alongside the commentary of the ghosts reveals strong narrative and dramatic aspirations. Adam Kirsch goes so far as to claim that 'Schwartz never really attempted to write great lyric poetry', citing the 'Isolation

[13] Wilson, p. 227.
[14] Nelson, pp. 48-49.

of Modern Poetry' as evidence of the poet's 'principled discontent with the idea of lyric poetry that he inherited'.[15] Kirsch sees *Genesis* as epitomising Schwartz's 'renunciation of the rich, obscure, musically perfect language of Symbolist poetry'.[16] This is to overlook some of the passages spoken by the ghosts, however, that *are* self-consciously lyrical and musical – lines such as 'Because the dance could not be danced alone' (*G*, p. 24) or

> The leaping porpoises serenely somersaulting,
> The leaping salmon, the tarpon struggling,
> fighting like Samson!
>
> (p. 36)

It is also to neglect the second part of this statement of intent from Schwartz's preface 'To the Reader': 'I should also like to think that I am one more of the poets who seek to regain for Poetry the width of reference of prose *without losing what the Symbolists discovered*' (p. ix, my emphasis). This indicates a desire to redefine lyric poetry, to broaden its scope and to seek out new possibilities, but not, as Kirsch implies, an outright rejection of the genre.[17] Putting the problem slightly differently, Schwartz later explains that

> it is natural that [the modern poet] should want to write as directly and clearly as Yeats and Frost at their best [...]. On the other hand, he is bound to be drawn toward an emulation of the marvellous refinements in the uses and powers of language which have occurred since the symbolists appeared.[18]

The poet is likely to want to combine the lyrical and the naturalistic. *Genesis* is written in such a spirit of compromise: Schwartz attempts to include lyric verse within a larger scheme. This becomes important when considered in relation to the cultural and familial compromises regularly enacted within the work.

Nonetheless, the self-contained lyric is evidently inadequate for Schwartz's purposes in *Genesis*. To a large extent, the poem's content – broadly, the early development of the inner life of one individual within the world in which he lives –

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[15] Kirsch, pp. 199, 200.
[16] Kirsch, p. 201.
[17] *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* usefully reminds readers of the lyric's origins in musical expression. 'In its modern meaning', James William Johnson suggests, 'a lyric is a type of poetry which is mechanically representative of a musical architecture and which is thematically representational of the poet's sensibility as evidenced in a fusion of conception and image.' Since the Renaissance, it has become something more than 'simply a poem written to be sung', but traces of its musicality remain. Schwartz's 'Poems In Imitation of The Fugue' are his most self-consciously lyrical works, but almost all of his works imply 'a musical architecture', including *Genesis*, in which the ghosts are often referred to as 'singers' (James William Johnson, 'Lyric' in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[18] 'Views of a Second Violinist', p. 27.

dictates the poem's overall form. The narrative is more expansive than a traditional lyric poem can allow, and the acts of telling and of interpretation need to be distinguished by different formal methods. Simply by presenting a protagonist whose experiences tend to be universal (even if he, himself, frequently feels isolated), and by focusing closely on immigrant life in early-twentieth-century New York, Schwartz shows a high degree of societal engagement. The straightforward lyric, 'the genre of isolation', is too introspective to deal adequately with this.[19] And yet, the more engaged Schwartz is, the greater the sense of concomitant isolation also seems to be. Stephen Hahn has written of 'the paradox that the modern self participates most in the collective life of the time through its isolation', and this is a condition that Schwartz frequently articulates.[20] This kind of isolation is accentuated by 'international consciousness': the more alert one is to the international, the more aware one must also be of one's individual insignificance. As Schwartz put it in 'T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', the international poet must be 'cosmopolitan and expatriated': 'To be international is to be a citizen of the world and thus a citizen of no particular city.'[21] It is through considering the individual in the context of all the multifarious factors that make him who he is that Schwartz most searchingly scrutinises the individual's isolation and the burden of his heritage in an international society.

'The miraculous character of daily life and ordinary speech': the form and style of Genesis

Genesis is a poem that deals with dialectical oppositions. It examines what it means to be both American and European; how success always brings with it the risk of failure; how attempting to escape can sometimes reinforce one's sense of entrapment; and what happens to dreams when they are confronted by responsibilities. The poem is intricately concerned with how identity, in the modern world, tends to be composite, containing contradictory tendencies. There is an analogy for such composite identity in the poem's very form. As Blackmur noted, Hershey's story requires the ghosts' commentary to save it from triviality. It is also clear that the chorus would be

[19] Kirsch, p. 201.
[20] Stephen Hahn, 'The Isolation of Delmore Schwartz', *Columbia Literary Columns*, 40.1 (November, 1990), 24. Cited in Schreier, p. 512.
[21] 'T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 122, 127.

meaningless divorced from Hershey's story – as meaningless as Hershey's Jewishness would seem if it were not considered in the context of his Americanness, and vice versa. The Biblical prose and the blank verse are equally characteristic of *Genesis*: neither dominates the other. At points during the poem's composition, Schwartz had considered 'mak[ing] all of it prose' or 'mak[ing] the narrative blank verse'; some early drafts are entirely in prose (*Portrait*, p. 26). However, the introduction of the ghosts, and the need to distinguish them from Hershey, leads Schwartz to investigate the stylistic and formal differences between the narrative and its interpretation.

The combination of forms suggests the meeting of different cultures. In the broadest of terms, the Biblical prose might suggest the Hebrew Bible of Jewish tradition whilst blank verse has, since Elizabethan times, been the predominant form for poetic composition in English. More important than this, however, is simply the fact that there are two distinct modes of composition which are brought together to create a cogent whole. The Biblical prose is an open form that allows for episodic storytelling and quickly-sketched scenes (even if the pace of the narration itself is generally slow). The blank verse is stricter, but remains expansive enough to accommodate the ruminative contributions of the ghosts: the form dictates, more or less, the length of each line but not of each section.[22] However, the distinctions between the two forms, though clear, are not rigid. At the beginning of the poem, and on a few other occasions thereafter, an unnamed narrator uses the same blank verse as the ghosts to describe the setting, and, as the poem progresses, Hershey himself occasionally speaks in blank verse, 'in his voice their voices echoing' (*G*, p. 95). Hershey's prose also contains such usual verse features as enjambement, alliteration, and poetic inversions, as in the following examples: 'he sneered at it, sneered / With the cynicism of one who suspects all because he knows himself' (p. 62); 'his widening wakening gaze' (p. 157); and 'A street of suspicion he walked from that day forward' (*G*, p. 189).

Equally, for all their loftiness, the ghostly interjections are as conversational as they are rhetorical or, in any polished sense, poetic. Their speech is full of phatic

[22] In 'T. S. Eliot's Voice and his Voices', Schwartz advocates speaking of 'open and closed versification' rather than of free or formal verse, going on to argue that open versification, of the kind often favoured by Eliot, 'includes all the closed forms of versification and the older open forms exemplified in the Bible, Whitman, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams, without being committed to any particular one at any time' (p. 142). Schwartz's own practice in *Genesis* is slightly different since the open versification (the Biblical prose) and the primarily closed (the blank verse) are clearly distinct from each other, despite the occasional blurring. The Biblical prose does not 'include' the blank verse but complements it, and operates alongside it.

phrases such as 'Ha! Ha!' (*G*, p. 58) and 'O God! O God!' (p. 124); they address Hershey informally as 'young man' (p. 97) and 'New York boy' and regularly implore him to 'go on' with his story (pp. 124, 163, 170). Many of their meditations fade out with an ellipsis or conclude with a dash, suggesting interruption. Some of their comments (like the poem itself) start with an ellipsis as well, suggesting thought before speech, and there are numerous ellipses within their speeches too. The consequent lack of fluency that this creates seems naturalistic and spontaneous, and is at odds with the formal nature of the blank verse the ghosts employ.

In his 'Note to the Reader', Schwartz insists that he has

> no wish to emulate Swinburne, but rather the "morbid pedestrianism" of such poets as Donne and Hardy, Webster and Wordsworth. The diction of this deliberate flatness – and the heavy accent and the slowness – is an effort to declare the miraculous character of daily life and ordinary speech.
>
> (*G*, p. ix)

Despite the precedents that he gives, however, Schwartz also felt that his method was innovative: 'a new meter will come of this deliberate flatness' he proposed in his journal on January 31st, 1942 (*Portrait*, p. 25). At his most confident, he bragged to Laughlin that *Genesis* would 'start a new school of writing to be called "Post-Symbolism"' (*DS & JL Letters*, p. 117), and although he never explicitly defined the tenets of such a school, his ambition 'to regain for Poetry the width of reference of prose without losing what the Symbolists discovered' (*G*, p. ix) (the kind of writing that Wilson perhaps had in mind when he predicted the combining of naturalism and symbolism) might be a plausible manifesto. This suggests a keenness to discover, as Schwartz believed Eliot had done, 'the hidden, or latent, seed or light of the poetic in prose words; which is to say, in words commonly supposed to be too unpoetic to be used in poetry.'[23] For Eliot, 'etherised', 'tedious argument', and 'insidious intent' are such words.[24] In *Genesis*, Schwartz goes so far as to include 'tactlessness', 'indigestion', 'prosecution' and 'the payment of ten thousand dollars in the proper quarters' (*G*, pp. 92-93) in a single passage. These are words and phrases one might more commonly expect to find in a work of prose fiction, but they are granted poetic value by virtue of their context and by the fact that they occur in passages characterised by anaphora and an accumulation of clauses, common features of

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[23] 'T. S. Eliot's Voice and his Voices', *Selected Essays*, pp. 129-142 (p. 130).
[24] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 13. Subsequent references to this book are interpolated in the text.

Schwartz's open versification. Hershey's Biblical prose is well-suited to revealing the poetic quality of prose words since it is a form that is neither wholly verse nor wholly prose. It absorbs both typical verse and prose features. The blank verse, meanwhile, accommodates philosophical abstract terms and idiomatic exclamations that in an earlier period might have seemed outside the scope of poetry.

The 'new meter' Schwartz sought needed to be free enough to carry a breadth of subject matter but also tight enough to allow for occasional lyric intensity. In his journal he exhorted himself to 'seek for the flat five-foot statement which is full of energy and drama [...] And seek irony, the ironic-colloquial and the ecstatic-exclamatory!' (*Portrait*, p. 27). Schwartz's conviction that verse can be at once tonally flat *and* dramatically engaging, simply colloquial *and* ecstatic is fundamental to his method in *Genesis*. How successfully Schwartz achieves his aim of emulating speech or discursive prose whilst also achieving a heightened aesthetic or dramatic style can best be illustrated by close analysis of representative passages of blank verse and Biblical prose.

One of the first significant events of Hershey's infancy is the death of his uncle, Rupert. This moves the ghosts to extended speculations, of which the following lines are just a sample.

"Death. Death. All flesh is grass, no more:
Nature is treacherous as quicksand, Life
May be as quickly torn as tissue paper!
All flesh is mere confetti, falling down
Joyously at the Mardi Gras!"
"Or snow,
The cool flakes quickly stained in city streets—"
"This child
Was rocked by Death, rocked by a man to die,
Uncle, young man of promise, hero,
Such as the famous fiction of the age
Brings forth to be the flower of the page—"

"Next to examples of mortality
As under the tall buildings and long billboards
Of the great city next to the Hudson River
This childhood howls, eats, and misunderstands!"

"We are as water spilt upon the ground.
Stay. Look. Cannot be gathered up again—"

"Twinly the bird flies off, snatching the air:
His wings know well Being's contingency—"

"The death of young men, like the death of Keats,
Terrifies many easy rationalists,
Gnostics and rabbis everywhere—"
"A light!
The spirit is a light, a sparkling star
So quickly clouded over in the sky!"

(*G*, pp. 73-74)

On the page, this blank verse is more immediately recognizable as poetry than Hershey's narrative, if only for the simple reasons that the lines do not extend to the edge of the page and that there are stanza breaks. There is also a preponderance of alliteration and assonance, notably, in the first stanza, on /f/ sounds and the voiceless /θ/ of 'death', and on the short /e/ sound in 'death', 'flesh' and 'confetti'. At the end of the passage, the /sp/ and /t/ sounds of the penultimate line are overridden by the fricatives of the last. The first stanza ends with a regular rhyming couplet – an occasional characteristic of the ghosts' verse – whilst the prosaic description of 'tall buildings and long billboards' is rendered poetic by internal rhyme and phrasal mirroring. The passage also typifies the ghosts' penchant for parallelism, a feature associated with ancient Hebrew writing and poetry based in oral traditions which Whitman first introduced into American poetry.

All this, along with the ghosts' attempts to find metaphors and similes that give universal bearing to the individual death, suggests a lyric tendency and reveals conscious crafting. The register, however, despite the exclamations, is generally muted. The first of these lines, with its strongly stressed monosyllables, epitomises Schwartz's 'flat five-foot statement': '**Death**. **Death**. All **flesh** is **grass**, no **more**'. The caesurae after each utterance of 'Death' are pronounced enough to substitute for the weak syllables that would be necessary for a regular line of iambic pentameter, and the emphases upon 'Death' are made even stronger by the contrast with 'Life', strongly stressed at the end of the next line. The tendency of the ghosts to deal in such broad and abstract terms draws attention to their gently pompous gravity.

The suggestion that flesh is as ephemeral as grass, with its nod to Whitman, is commonplace. So too are many of the other comparisons: it is hardly original to compare the fragility of life to tissue paper or snow, or the spirit to a star. What is striking, though, is the refusal of the ghosts to settle upon a single summative statement, and the similes are often ambivalent in their connotations. That flesh is mere confetti – an idea seemingly suggested by the previous comparison of Life to

tissue paper – initially seems wholly negative. It is surprising, then, when the speaker goes on in the next line to imagine it being thrown 'Joyously' at Mardi Gras celebrations, the trochaic first foot heightening this surprise. Confetti also evokes weddings, and we might be reminded of one of the ghost's earlier suggestions that all brides 'ought to be dressed in green', the colour of grass and a play on Hershey's surname, so as to suggest 'flowers to come' (*G*, p. 50) – flowers which, inevitably, will also eventually succumb to 'treacherous' Nature.

The description of the spirit as 'a light, a sparkling star' has similarly dual connotations. This would seem to be positive, but the line that follows, dwelling upon how easily such a star may be clouded over, challenges such an assumption. Schwartz's exploitation of the line endings, leading the reader into expecting one thing only to have this expectation undermined, is Miltonic. The ghosts' proliferation and extension of similes and metaphors also exemplifies their tendency to view every situation dispassionately and from multiple perspectives. Equally, by having them move so quickly from one comparison to another, Schwartz figures their minds in the processes of thinking and forming associations, rather than settling upon already reached conclusions.

Hershey's retrospective narrative engages much more closely with particulars, although he, too, seeks similes and abstract ideas to give universal meaning to his experiences. About three-quarters of the way through the poem, he describes the continued disquietude of the Green household. Jack and Eva Green are in the midst of one of many temporary separations when Jack sends his lawyer to ask Eva to sell the family home.

> All summer long, Eva Green held out, resisted every effort,
> Made by Jack Green and by his lawyer to persuade her to move from the red-brick house,
> But when September came, more money was due on the mortgage and Jack Green promised to come home, if she would move from the house,
> And sign the agreement, which permitted him to sell the house at a profit,
> And Eva Green consented, although she but half-believed Jack Green's promise to return,
> And Jack Green himself did not know what the truth was, for he was full of a tiredness of another evening lady.
> And thus on a warm and drizzling day in late September, the family moved from the red-brick house on the Parkway,
> Jack Green came for his family to drive them to their new home in his car or machine,
> And Hershey cried out because his kitten was being left behind, and both parents promised him that the moving van would bring the kitten,

And then, after driving through the autumn rain, they came to the cheap dark apartment hurriedly chosen by Jack Green,

Who felt that he had already spent too much money. Grandmother met them there, to help them unpack,

And when the moving van came, the kitten was not with the moving men,

And Hershey cried with great bitterness, depressed by the rainy day, and the dark apartment, and the loss of his pet,

And one more deception upon the part of his father and mother. And then after supper,

His father put on his coat, and his mother asked his father where he was going?

And his father said that he might as well stay out the week he had paid for at the hotel where he had been living,

And Eva Green saw and her mother saw and Hershey saw, trembling with disappointment, that he was lying,

But Eva Green kept silent, a self-control unknown to her, inspired by the indestructible hope that silence might help to bring him back,

And Hershey sat in his chair and rooted vainly

That his father would change his mind and come to live with them, and buy him toys,

And be the powerful presence moving Hershey as a king once moved his soldier boys,

And Hershey felt the presence in the darkened air of these relationships, the family divinity,

The great city, the America in which Jack Green made his way with his will,

He felt them as the sailor feels the rocking sea under him, vast and abysmal,
Endless and disappointing!

(*G*, pp. 154-155)

The passage moves from pedantic explanation to greater abstraction as Hershey contemplates what the events he describes reveal about his family relationships. The passage's four sentences occupy twenty-five lines, over half of which begin with 'And'. The anaphora accentuates the child's perspective and narrative style. Although the Hershey Green who narrates the story is himself only an adolescent, he often revisits the point of view of his younger self. This becomes especially apparent in the lines about his abandoned kitten and the moving van, which illustrate the chronologically episodic nature of *Genesis*: this is the first we hear about Hershey having a kitten, and by the end of the passage it has been forgotten again as he is once more overcome by the shadow of his parents' marital unhappiness.

This episode's first sentence spans six long lines in which Jack Green's name recurs four times, Eva Green's twice, and the word 'house' three times. Hershey's habit of referring to his parents by their full names distances himself from them. Except when in blank verse conversation with the ghosts, he also refers to himself in

the third person, and, whilst the ghosts occasionally refer (mockingly) to 'Mamma and Papa', Hershey himself never affects such intimacy. The repetitions emphasise the spondaic meter of Jack Green's name in particular, two strong stresses that slow the pace of the verse whenever they occur. Hershey's mother's name is only slightly less imposing, the second syllable of her first name so lightly stressed that 'Eva Green' becomes almost spondaic too. The repetitions of their full names makes Hershey's parents seem all the more formidable. Repetition is also a means of stressing the contrast between the grand-sounding 'red-brick house' (with its three strong consecutive beats) and the 'cheap dark apartment' to which the family moves.

Schwartz's reliance on heavy accents is apparent throughout the passage. Eva Green's defiance and Jack Green's persistence are registered in the thumping beats of the first two lines:

> All **sum**mer **long**, **Eva Green held out**, / re**sis**ted **ev**ery **eff**ort,
> **Made** by **Jack Green** and by his **law**yer / to per**suade** her to **move** from the **red-brick house**,

In the first of these lines there are three consecutive strong stresses followed by a pronounced caesura that cues in a reassertion of Eva Green's resistance. There is no narrative need for the subordinate clause except that it further underlines her refusal to succumb to her husband's will. Similarly, there is no real need to mention Jack Green's lawyer. It is a prosaic detail, but one that strengthens our sense of Jack Green's artillery. Such clausal accumulation is characteristic of Schwartz's poetry, not just in *Genesis* but also in earlier and later poems (and sometimes in his stories), which, on a first reading, might appear stylistically unrelated. Much of the impact of 'The Heavy Bear Who Goes With Me', for example, is achieved through its reformulations of the poem's title: 'The central ton of every place, / The hungry beating brutish one' (*SK*, p. 74). It is through the poem's abundance of descriptions like these that the dark, inescapable quality of the beast is fully realised. Similarly, Schwartz's tendency towards heavy stresses can be discerned in such an early work as 'In the Naked Bed, in Plato's Cave', a poem which, in its progression from concrete description to abstraction and seer-like proclamation, is structurally similar to the passage under consideration. In one typical line – 'A **fleet** of **trucks strained uphill**, **grind**ing' (*SK*, p. 25) – Schwartz creates a sense of sheer burden through the relentless piling-on of strongly accented syllables, the long vowel of 'strained' accentuating the impression of effort, and the heavy, late caesura offering minimal

respite before another resounding beat on the first syllable of 'grinding'. Although the form of *Genesis*'s Biblical prose is much more expansive than that of Schwartz's earlier verse, there are technical similarities.

Schwartz's Biblical prose can accommodate lighter stresses as well, however. When Hershey tells how, after supper, his father

> put on his coat, and his mother asked his father where he was going?
> And his father said that he might as well stay out the week he had paid for at the hotel where he had been living

the pace of the narrative is much quicker, imitating natural speech, and none of the stresses on the mostly monosyllabic words are heavy.[25] This quick pace sets up a contrast with the more lugubrious line that follows, with its three stresses on the word 'saw', mimicking the Green family's gradual realisation of Jack's actual intentions: 'And Eva Green saw and her mother saw and Hershey saw, trembling with disappointment, that he was lying'. The form is adaptable enough to carry a variety of tones, registers, and paces.

Perhaps even more striking than any of the verse features in the two passages just discussed, however, are the quirks of Schwartz's language. Irving Howe has celebrated Schwartz's voice as one that is 'at home with the speech of people not quite at home with English speech.'[26] Schwartz's prose style, he argues,

> seem[s] to be composed of several speech-layers: the sing-song, slightly pompous intonations of Jewish immigrants educated in night-schools, the self-conscious affectionate mockery of that speech by American-born sons, its abstraction into the jargon of city intellectuals, and finally the whole body of this language flattened into a prose of uneasiness, an anti-rhetoric.
>
> (Howe, p. xii)

The idiosyncrasies of Jewish immigrant speech are most explicitly acknowledged in the story 'America! America!' in which Schwartz italicises terms used colloquially by recent arrivals learning American English. When Shenandoah Fish's mother describes his father as going into the 'insurance *game*', Shenandoah is struck by his mother's 'fine memory for the speech other people used.'[27] This instance may not strike the twenty-first-century reader as especially unusual since the term, though still slangy,

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[25] Given that Hershey's mother's question is related indirectly, the question mark is unnecessary (as the comma at the end of the first sentence of the passage is also grammatically misleading). Schwartz's use of punctuation is casual throughout *Genesis*.

[26] Irving Howe, 'Foreword' to *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, pp. vii-xiii (p. ix).

[27] 'America! America!' in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, pp. 10-33 (p. 12). Schwartz's emphasis.

has become commonplace. Other examples abound, however, amongst them many that relate more directly to immigrant experience: the term '*greenhorn*', used of those recently off the ship (and alluded to in the Green family name); '*ship sisters*'; and '*gyp*', meaning a swindle, whose first recorded usage by the *OED* is in a book of criminal slang from 1914 ('America! America!', pp. 12, 26, 31. Schwartz's emphases). At other times, the pitch of Schwartz's writing becomes overtly satirical, such as in 'The World is a Wedding', which repeatedly shows up the excesses of city intellectual jargon. On showing a visiting theatre director one of his plays, for example, the central character, Rudyard Bell announces that 'in this scene [...] the ignorance and irony are such that I am supreme among the dramatists who write in the English tongue.'[28] He is seemingly unaware that he has implied not a character's ignorance but his own, or that by uttering such a sentence he has exposed his inability to adapt his use of 'the English tongue' to any audience less pompous than himself.

If Schwartz's prose is characterised by flatness, unease and anti-rhetoric, these traits are arguably even more pronounced in *Genesis*. Such grammatically unconventional statements as '[Albert Green] did not go forward as rapidly to wealth as Jack did' (*G*, p. 55) and 'Hershey was taken to begin to go to the foreign world each day' (*G*, p. 135) are common. They exemplify the sing-song intonations and uneasiness with language that Howe identifies. However, such expression establishes itself as the particular idiom of the poem: the oddness is easily overlooked on a first reading. As assuredly as any of his prose fiction, *Genesis* shows Schwartz to be at home with such awkward speech.

The curious language is a large part of what makes the passages just discussed poetic. The ghosts' description of the 'cool flakes [of snow] quickly stained in city streets' evokes a clear enough visual impression of dirty slush, but to describe snowflakes as 'cool' is strangely understated and 'stained' is a far less obvious choice of word than 'melted'. The conventional image of the snow is rendered peculiar, even surreal, and yet the image remains naturalistic. Another case of inimitable phrasing is Hershey's euphemistic description of his father as 'full of a tiredness of another evening lady'. He could hardly be less direct, but this creates a mysterious quality although we are never in any doubt as to what he actually means. Similarly, when Hershey describes Jack Green picking up his family 'in his car or his machine', the 'or

[28] 'The World Is a Wedding' in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories*, pp. 34-93 (p. 67).

his machine' is redundant except insofar as it suggests that 'car' is somehow inadequate as a name for whatever it is that Hershey's father drives.

Genesis is also, conspicuously, a poem for voices. Its emphasis throughout is on language as it is spoken rather than as it is written. Hershey is first introduced simply as 'the one who speaks' (*G*, p. 3) and the ghosts – who are 'bodiless' (p. 4) – can only be discerned by their voices. The first is heard

> As from a worn victrola record, needle
> Which skims and whirrs, a voice intoned
> As of a weak old man with foreign accent,
> Ironic, comic, flat and matter of fact,
> With alternation measured, artificial,
> moaned,
> And yet with such sympathy, *simpatico*
> as if
> A guardian angel sang!
>
> (p. 4)

The description of this voice reaffirms Schwartz's commitment to 'morbid pedestrianism' rather than the floridity of Swinburne. When another voice enters it is 'cracked and joyous' (p. 8): the voices are indistinct and muted, yet resonant. It seems likely from Schwartz's description of the first ghost's 'foreign accent' that he is Eastern European, foreign to the American Hershey despite his heritage. But nothing more precise than this is offered, vexing the question of how foreignness is to be identified in an international society. That the voices are also 'measured' and 'artificial' is an implicit acknowledgement that by speaking in verse at all their language cannot be regarded as completely without pretension, and Schwartz's insistence upon their 'ironic, comic' tone is a warning not to take their pronouncements as gospel.

From the outset, *Genesis* is concerned with listening. Hershey variously describes himself as a child who 'was always listening' (*G*, p. 112), who was 'listening and looking always' (p. 126), who 'had listened and looked [...] looked and listened' and who 'sat and listened' to his mother 'rehearsing' her marriage to her lawyer, a story he has heard many times before (p. 152). It is apt that the first ghostly voice should seem to emanate from a victrola since it was from his aunt's victrola that Hershey heard the voices of Galli-Curci and Caruso (but also Jolson) as they 'Soared, cried and pealed', giving him his first 'intuitions of the beauty of formal sound' (p. 117).

Eliot's example is, again, important to Schwartz in this respect. In 'T. S. Eliot's Voice and his Voices', Schwartz insists that although Eliot's poems contain many voices the more important point is that they are

> often dominated by a *listening* to other voices – the voices of other poets, in other centuries and countries; the voices of various human beings of differing classes and stations in society, a diversity of beliefs, values, habits of speech, and views of life.
> ('T. S. Eliot's Voice and his Voices', p. 135)

He goes on to argue that the act of listening is as important in Eliot's poetry as the voices themselves, suggesting that in 'Portrait of a Lady', for example, 'the distinction between listening and speaking is a concrete part of the poem itself' (p. 136): we miss its dramatic force if we ignore the gulf between what the lady says and how the protagonist responds. This is part of a method which Schwartz terms 'sibylline (or subliminal) listening' and which 'permits all other methods to be used freely and without predetermination': it instigates a kind of receptivity 'which opens itself to any and all kinds of material and subject matter' (p. 138). Perhaps the clearest example of Schwartz using such a method occurs in 'America! America!' in which Shenandoah develops his understanding of his relationship with his mother by listening to what she says about their neighbours, the Baumanns. But the very premise of *Genesis*, with the ghosts primarily as listeners, is similar too.

Cynthia Ozick has written of the 'relentlessly gradual return of aural culture, beginning with the telephone (a farewell to letter-writing), the radio, the motion picture, and the phonograph' and speeded up by the technology of the later twentieth century that has effectively 'restored us to the pre-literate status of face-to-face speech'.[29] She identifies 'the culture of mass literacy' as existing only between 1830 and 1930. Schwartz, writing in the 1930s and '40s, was acutely conscious of these technological advances, as is evident from his association of 'international consciousness' with the radio and from his obsession with cinema. His preoccupation with different voices, and with the acts of telling and of interpretation, is perhaps an acknowledgment that writing of a solely literary nature was no longer adequate to the society in which – and about which – he wrote. His writing is far from being entirely performative: it is necessary for the words to be seen on the page for them to have their full impact. Nonetheless, through its disembodied voices, Schwartz comes closer to suggesting the kind of correspondence that might occur over the telephone (which

[29] 'The Question of Our Speech: The Return to Aural Culture' in *Memory and Metaphor* (New York: Vintage, 1991) pp. 146-172 (p. 164).

he regarded, not entirely flippantly, as 'one of the most important things in life') than would be read in letters.[30] Schwartz himself was well aware of this, explaining to Robert Hivnor, 'I find that what I've been doing seems to be based upon the telephone, as "IDBR" on the movie' (*Letters*, p. 102). After all, the phone, the movie, the victrola, and the radio all have the ghostly effect of making those who are not physically there seem to be present.

Once all this has been considered, it is surprising that *Genesis* contains so little dialogue. We tend only to hear the voices of Hershey's parents and grandparents indirectly, as reported by Hershey. Their disputes are told, not dramatised. Except in its narrative register, we don't hear much of Hershey's own voice either, and it would be a just criticism of *Genesis* to argue that in his commitment to 'morbid pedestrianism' and making Hershey a representative figure, Schwartz neglects to individuate his protagonist's voice: although we acquire a great deal of factual knowledge about him, we come away from the poem with much less of a sense of Hershey as a character than we do of Berryman's Henry in *The Dream Songs* or of Lowell's self in *Life Studies*. Hershey also has as little physical presence as the ghosts, despite recounting such bodily embarrassments as wetting himself, being caught by his father lying on a girl's belly, and suffering the ignominy of another childhood friend seeing his 'secret parts between his pajama fold' (*G*, p. 196).

Nonetheless, *Genesis* does pioneer poetry as self-representation, and Schwartz shows an acute consciousness of the piece as performance (as does Hershey). The poem's premise allows for a further investigation of the type already undertaken in 'Coriolanus and his Mother' and the verse play 'Shenandoah' in which the protagonist finds himself simultaneously upon the stage and in the audience, watching his own life as a detached spectator. Hershey describes himself at kindergarten as 'already the actor and victim of what a constellation of emotions' (*G*, p. 101). As victim, he suggests that he has little control over what happens to him, but as actor he acknowledges the degree of self-fashioning in the way he presents himself. Such combined passivity and activity are Hershey's characteristic mode. One of the ghosts remarks that fame and audience begin at home (p. 19), a point repeatedly illustrated by Hershey in describing how he 'enacted' (p. 106) writing on his blackboard for visitors and relatives or delighted them with his first metaphor. He also learns,

[30] 'On the Telephone' in *The Ego is Always at the Wheel*, pp. 11-15 (p. 11).

however, to be *in* the audience at home, much like, later, the 'unseen and all-seeing' Lowell of *Life Studies* watches his family's development.[31] The episode in which Hershey listens from the stair as his mother's friend, Mrs Rinehart, exhorts Eva Green to whip him for revealing to labourers that she had formerly been a Ziegfeld Follies girl shows a distrust of performance. For Mrs Rinehart, despite the success that popular theatre has brought her, there is something shameful about performing professionally. His mother's impromptu performances are most shameful of all for Hershey, not least her denunciation of Jack Green in the roadhouse, the episode that brings *Book I* to its climax. All that afternoon, he relates, her 'monologue obsessed the afternoon' (*G*, p. 203) (and there is perhaps an implicit acknowledgement here that his own narrative is also an obsessed monologue, much more so than it is an actual conversation with the ghosts). Eva Green's oratory, one of the ghosts suggests, is what taught Hershey 'to cry aloud [his] life' (p. 207). Her 'oratory', another ghost chips in, 'will abide', making Hershey's 'being as a being-in-the-world' a 'profoundest theatre' (p. 207). Though Lowell and Berryman's later works more fully realise the dramatic potential inherent in telling one's life, it is inconceivable that they were not influenced by Schwartz's earlier example.

The Figure of the Jew

Hershey's regular feelings of alienation from his family and peers put him in a similar position to the modern isolated poet. In 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry', Schwartz cites Baudelaire's prose poem 'The Stranger', in which the stranger of the title rejects family, friends, country, and gold, proclaiming instead his love of Beauty and the clouds. Schwartz takes this as typifying the deepest feelings of the modern poet.

> He does feel that he is a stranger, an alien, an outsider; he finds himself without a father or mother, or he is separated from them by the opposition between his values as an artist and their values as respectable members of modern society.
>
> ('Isolation of Modern Poetry', p. 9)

Given Schwartz's position here, and throughout the essay, it follows that whenever he writes about alienation from one's family, one's homeland, or one's lovers, he also has in mind the role of the poet in the early-to-mid-twentieth-century. When Hershey, for example, is 'excluded' from his mother's bedroom on the birth of his brother, and

[31] Lowell, p. 166.

'exiled' to the living room where he is 'ignored and 'neglected' (*G*, p. 83); and when he is sent out of the kindergarten classroom, 'exiled, humiliated, [and] persecuted' (p. 101), he experiences something akin to the modern poet who knows that his forbears were once valued, but who is himself disregarded or criticised by his contemporaries.

In particular, an identification of the immigrant Jew with the unaccepted artist is often implicit. Lacking a nation of their own until 1948, the Jews were the most 'cosmopolitan and expatriated' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 122) of people, citizens of no particular city or even country, just like Schwartz's ideal international poet. In a 1951 essay on 'The Vocation of the Poet', in which he considers why Joyce may have identified himself with Jews in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Schwartz spells out the connection:

> the Jew is at once alienated and indestructible, he is an exile from his own country and an exile even from himself, yet he survives the annihilating fury of history. In the unpredictable and fearful future that awaits civilization, the poet must prepare to be alienated and indestructible.[32]

The examples just given from *Genesis* evoke the exile of the Jews from Egypt; but they also evoke, more concretely, the literal experience of Hershey's (and Schwartz's) parents' generation as they left Europe and tried to establish themselves in the sometimes hostile new society of America. The poet, metaphorically, faces a similar challenge.

Schwartz was by no means the only Jewish American poet to insist upon such a relation. More recently, John Hollander, for example, has stated that 'every true poet is in a kind of diaspora in his own language' – a comparison which Maeera Y. Schreiber has argued 'potentially leads to the problematic erasure of the specificity of Jewish poetic practice, as the Jew becomes but a trope for the universalized poet'.[33] With regard to Schwartz, this does seem to be the case. Biblical and generalised historical references aside, he shows relatively little interest in specifically Jewish culture, and when he does write about the traditions his ancestors upheld it is usually to satirise them – providing a cue for Bellow and Philip Roth, whose sense of heritage is just as strong and just as ambivalent. Although he was bar-mitzvah'd at thirteen, Schwartz's family was not religious, and he showed little interest in Hebrew School or in the American Jewish literary traditions that were developing around such writers as

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[32] 'The Vocation of the Poet', p. 23.

[33] Schreiber, Maeera Y., 'Jewish American Poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. by Michael P. Kramer and Hana Wirth-Nesher, p. 149-169 (p. 150).

Sholem Aleichem and Abraham Cahan. And while Schwartz may have been prominent in Jewish intellectual circles, he was cautious about identifying himself with other Jewish American poets. In a 1954 letter to Karl Shapiro he scoffs at his naïve belief, as a young man, that it was 'a wonderful advantage' for a poet 'to be a Jew and have a Jewish name' (*Letters*, p. 292), wondering how he ever managed to overlook the anti-Jewish sentiment in Eliot's poetry. Schwartz went on to claim 'spiritual kinship' with Shapiro, whom he felt was 'just as much an underground character' (p. 299) as he was himself, but he did not hesitate to distance himself from other Jewish poets, proclaiming, for example, his intense dislike of Muriel Rukeyser, 'both as a poet and as a person' (p.104). With the exception of *Genesis*, his own poetry, as he himself insisted, is relatively muted when it comes to what he called 'the Jewish problem'; although, as Atlas observes, it is 'implicit in the poems' very tone', and in their preoccupation with alienation.[34]

In terms of recent Jewish history, it is almost uniquely the transatlantic migrations at the end of the nineteenth century that stimulate Schwartz's imagination. 'I am now, I think, the poet of the Atlantic', he wrote to Laughlin on August 22nd, 1941; 'of the Atlantic migration, which made America' (*Letters*, p. 148). As will become increasingly apparent, the mass immigration is often paradigmatic in Schwartz's writing of other instances of upheaval or displacement, and the Atlantic is a metaphor for separation that he revisits throughout his oeuvre. Surprisingly, however, there is little mention of the concentration camps in Schwartz's post-World War II writing (although it is more often implicit than has hitherto been acknowledged, such as when he refers to the 'annihilating fury of history' in the passage quoted above). Nor does he make any reference to the formation of the modern State of Israel in 1948. There are compelling reasons why he may have chosen not to address these events, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, it is striking that non-Jewish writers such as Berryman sometimes show greater sympathy for the Jewish cause than Schwartz himself does. The protagonist of Berryman's story 'The Imaginary Jew' strongly identifies with Judaic practice, although by the end he feels guilty about assuming for himself a heritage to which he has no authentic claim. And in his unfinished sequence of poems, 'The Black Book', Berryman grapples with

[34] Atlas, p. 140.

the horrors of the Jewish genocide much more directly than Schwartz ever attempted.[35]

For Schwartz, however, his sense of alienation *from other Jews*, and from his own heritage, is just as acute as his sense of alienation from American society *on account of being a Jew*. It is perhaps even more so. Hershey is circumcised, making him 'even unto coitus fully a member of the people chosen for wandering and alienation' (*G*, p. 69), but he does not understand for a long time what his Jewish identity means. He does not realise that Jews and Germans are different (p. 90), an irony that would be impossible in a post-holocaust world, and when he is later taunted by other boys because he is a Jew, he is as confused as he is upset (p. 103).

In adult life, there is no doubt that Schwartz also endured 'the antagonism of the stranger' (*G*, p. 90), notably at Harvard where antipathy to Jews persisted well into the '40s and where he once received a note from a student saying 'FUCK THE JEWS'.[36] But, crucially, he felt that his being a poet made him just as much of a stranger, at times, as his being Jewish. Because of this, the anti-Semitic attitudes sometimes expressed by Pound and Eliot, two of the poets he most admired, were even more problematic for him than they have been for other readers. Schwartz was so affronted by Pound's claim, in *Introduction to Kulcher*, that 'race prejudice is red herring' that he wrote to him and tendered his 'resignation' as his disciple. 'A race cannot commit a moral act', he insisted.

> Only an individual can be moral or immoral. No generalization from a sum of particulars is possible, which will render a moral judgment. In a court of law, the criminal is always one individual, and when he is condemned, his whole family is not, qua family, condemned. This is not to deny, however, that there are such entities as races.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 68)

There is courage in such a belief in individual agency, and Schwartz – who was always acutely conscious of those traits he had inherited from his family – himself exercises just such individual agency here by refusing to accept the misguided convictions of a poet who had been one of his heroes. It is a mark of Schwartz's generosity as a critic – perhaps excessive generosity – that he later suggests that

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[35] See John Berryman, 'The Imaginary Jew' in *The Freedom of the Poet* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976), pp. 353-366 and 'The Black Book' in *Collected Poems, 1937-1972*, pp. 154-156.
[36] See Atlas, p. 162 and *DS & JL*, p. 212.

although some passages of the *Cantos* show that Pound is, 'at times, anti-Semitic, he is also, at other times, philo-Semitic'.[37]

Eliot's hostile references to Jews in 'Gerontion', 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' and 'The Idea of a Christian Society' discomfited Schwartz to a greater extent than Pound's, since Eliot was the poet he admired more. That Eliot should argue 'in the spring when Hitler came to power in Germany' that 'a large number of free-thinking Jews would be undesirable' in an ideal society creates a particularly unfavourable impression.[38] Nonetheless, Schwartz did not reject Eliot as he had rejected Pound. Anthony Julius has stated outright that Eliot's poems 'insult Jews' and that 'to ignore these insults is to misread the poems.'[39] Julius also argues that Schwartz is at fault for not criticising Eliot's anti-Semitism in any of his published essays, despite the fact that Schwartz's private correspondence reveals just how sensitive he was to it. Schwartz did not entirely ignore the insults, however, making clear in the drafts of his unpublished critical book on Eliot that he believed race prejudice of any kind to be 'an unspeakable abomination'.[40] He did, however, try to analyse how Eliot's views nuance his literary output. Racial prejudice is 'one of the barriers to understanding Eliot', he argues, but the prejudice cannot be discounted, and neither can it be used to damn the whole oeuvre.[41] However distasteful and immoral the attitude may be, Schwartz insists that, 'from the point of view of the criticism of poetry, we must recognize the poet is expressing a genuine and significant feeling'.[42] Furthermore, it is a feeling, he suggests, that is consistent with Eliot's eventual espousal of Anglo-Catholic royalism. Eliot's stance is therefore quite different to dismissing all race prejudice as 'red herring': race prejudice is of the utmost importance to him even though it leads him towards views that are repugnant.

Schwartz compares the way Eliot's anti-Semitism affects his poetry to a squint. 'If one squints, it is inevitable that one sees certain things in a given way,' he argues. Mann, Joyce, and Proust, whose circumstances were very different to Eliot's,

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[37] 'Ezra Pound and History', p. 119. The question of whether it is possible to be anti-Semitic some of the time but not all the time is a thorny one. Schwartz is evidently hopeful enough in this instance to believe that this could be the case, but he does not actually cite any of the apparently philo-Semitic passages to which he refers.

[38] Delmore Schwartz Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 6, Folder 359.

[39] Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2.

[40] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 359.

[41] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 359.

[42] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 359.

were able to present Jews in a much more sympathetic light.

> Since Proust was Jewish himself, since Joyce was Irish, and suffered his own kind of alienation, and since Mann suffered – and celebrated the alienation of the artist, there is a sympathy to be remarked which we cannot expect of James and Eliot; and this sympathy too must be considered as a possible squint and distortion.[43]

It is an obvious irony, however, given the connection made earlier between the immigrant Jew and the international poet, that the exemplary international poet, Eliot – at least some of the time – expressed views that were anti-Semitic. This does not lessen Schwartz's admiration of Eliot as a poet or literary critic, or his conviction that Eliot articulated better than anyone else what it means to be alienated in modern society, but it does complicate any straightforward analogies that might be made between the two. Perhaps, ultimately, Schwartz's commitment to poetry was greater than his commitment to his Jewishness: to reject Eliot would be to reject his own decision to become a poet, whereas being born a Jew had never been a matter of choice. Even later in his life, when his own poetry had broken away from the tenets of Eliotic modernism, Schwartz's admiration of the elder poet continued. Certainly, his casting of Eliot as a 'literary dictator' has its barb, and he disliked much of *Four Quartets* and especially *The Family Reunion*, but well into the '50s he was insisting that there is 'more and more' to admire in Eliot's poetry ('T. S. Eliot's Voice and His Voices', p. 129). Eliot's distasteful references to Jews offended Schwartz, but did not alter his respect for him as a poet and critic.

One of the ghosts in *Genesis* suggests that 'the basis of the art of poetry' is 'the hard identity felt in the bone' (*G*, p. 70). Although Schwartz expressed as strong a sense of alienation from his own family and Jewish culture as he did from the contemporary world he inhabited, his Jewishness was a part of his identity, almost a physical attribute, and it was critical in influencing the kind of poetry that he wrote. He could not have escaped it. But the Jewish values Schwartz inherited perhaps served him in a similar way to the Christian inheritance of Hardy: they conditioned his sensibility and his sense of himself, but they did not serve him intellectually, and his rejection of these values ultimately meant an alienating rejection of an integral part of his identity. Some of the characteristics of this alienation will become apparent in the following discussions of *Genesis* and the short story 'America! America!' It will first be useful, however, to examine some of Schwartz's broader engagements with the

[43] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 359.

question of race (and the relation that this has to the American Dream), in the story 'A Bitter Farce'.

'A Bitter Farce'

'A Bitter Farce' recounts the encounters of Shenandoah Fish as he teaches composition to a class of Navy students and a class of girls – as Schwartz himself had done – during the Second World War. It represents one of Schwartz's most probing considerations of race and of the status of the immigrant in mid-twentieth-century America. Faced with expressions of anti-Semitism from his students, both direct and indirect, Fish reflects upon his Jewish heritage and attempts to explain (to himself as well as to his students) that if America's glory was a consequence of the diversity of its races, then this was also one of the reasons why so many of its citizens 'feared that [they were] a stranger or [were] conscious of a fear of the stranger.'[44] The cosmopolitan nature of life in America also provokes social insecurity and a more acute sense of individual alienation.

The story also explores Fish's growing understanding that his interest in 'the ways to use the powerful English language' ('A Bitter Farce', p. 108) cannot be separated from wider societal concerns. As a teacher of largely reluctant students, his position is similar to that of the modern poet in relation to an uncomprehending public – and although it is not particularly fruitful to seek continuities between this story and others in which Fish is a character, we know from 'New Year's Eve' and 'America! America!' that Fish *is* also a poet. Time and again he regrets allowing himself to be sidetracked from teaching about 'choice of words, sentence structure, and clear thought' (p. 113) into discussions about the 'topics of the day' (p. 104). But he comes to accept, distinguishing himself from the kind of poet who is *only* concerned with cultivating his own sensibility, that 'language [is] involved in all things' (p. 108): the poet-teacher's responsibility is to show how it might be used directly and frankly. Fish, however, indulges in mere 'verbalism – ratiocination [...], just playing a game with facts and words' (p. 119), and this, as much as his uneasiness about his Jewish heritage, is a source of his anxiety and frustration at the end.

[44] 'A Bitter Farce' in *The World Is A Wedding*, pp. 104-121 (p. 114).

Fish's sense of his own racial identity is complicated when he is made to confront his own ambivalent attitude towards black Americans. When, following the Detroit race riots, he is asked his view on 'the Negro problem' (p. 105), he is unable to give a direct answer. The suggestion that he does make with regard to easing racial tension in the South would today seem inflammatory: the only solution, he proposes, is 'for the Negroes to depart from the South. Any other course would result in a resumption of the Civil War' (p. 105). Fish's lack of empathy with black Americans is evident: he can only consider the tensions in the South in theoretical and hypothetical terms, and he does not, as one might expect, make any connection here between exiling black Americans from the South and the fate of his own Jewish ancestors. Perhaps such a connection would be impossible, given the very different circumstances under which a majority of black Americans and Jews came to America – one race brought to America from Africa unwillingly, as slaves, and the other, at a much later historical moment, coming in search of prosperity and a better life.

Fish goes on to propose that a region might be selected in which 'a strict equality would be enforced', but he almost immediately dismisses the idea, admitting that 'equality cannot be dictated merely by signing a bill' (p. 105). And 'enforcing' equality would be self-defeating. By denying the possibility of such a 'strict equality', Fish also undermines the principles on which America's independence had been declared over a hundred and fifty years previously. The race riots, Fish implies, provide just one example of the ways in which man's equality is anything but 'self-evident'. To believe that all men *should* be treated equally and to believe that they actually *are* equal are quite different beliefs. The distinction is the same as that between believing in the pursuit of happiness as a legal right and believing in the guarantee of happiness, as Schwartz points out in his essay on Hemingway ('The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway', p. 271). Behind Fish's comments is probably an acknowledgement that he, as a Jew, is not treated equally either.

The question of the black American's position in society remains in the background of Fish's later discussion about America's 'universal' and 'pan-human culture' (p. 113), a discussion in which he is more personally invested because of his self-consciousness about being Jewish. This self-consciousness is heightened by an earlier discussion with a female student, Miss Lucy Eberhart, who suggests that even the best Jews are 'demanding, grasping, almost unscrupulous about the way they get what they want' (p. 111), and explains that for this reason she would prefer,

hypothetically, to marry 'a Chinaman [...] or a Negro' (p. 110). When Fish is himself asked, earlier in the story, whether or not he would marry a black woman, he is evasive; and although Miss Eberhart's response is more simplistic it is perhaps also more honest. She is open about her prejudices, whereas Fish's uncertainty regarding his attitude to black Americans reveals a confrontation between his intellectual and ethical position – that all men should be treated equally – and an instinctive, though hard to justify, distrust of those who are different, and who might therefore be competitors. Such prejudice, his own version of Eliot's 'squint' perhaps, is an inescapable part of his sensibility.

Fish's sensitivity about his racial identity is apparent in his response to Miss Eberhart's suggestion that the Chinese, America's allies in the War, tend to be friendly and intelligent (p. 111). The history of post-War American-Chinese relations makes this view seem naïve, and Fish cannot resist pointing out that 'on the Pacific Coast, the Chinese are disliked very much too, or were for a time, until the Exclusion Act was passed' (p. 112). This is a complex statement, as it amounts to a simultaneous assertion of difference and of identification. For the oppressed Jew in the East, it may be consoling to know that there is a different race that is equally subject to prejudice in the West. By referring to the Exclusion Act (or, more formally, the Johnson-Reed Act) of 1924, Fish gestures towards how unaccommodating to immigrants of all races America had become during the inter-war years, a fact that may account for the illiberal attitudes of some of his students. The historian Hugh Brogan has pointed out that between 1933 and 1941 tens of thousands of German Jews were refused immigration rights to the United States, a situation that reveals the country's blindness to the world situation at the time.[45] Fish does not discuss the consequences of this directly, but he is perhaps trying to suggest that the Jews suffered more because of the Exclusion Act than the Chinese.

The question of Jewish affinity with other races occurs relatively rarely in Schwartz's writing, but whenever it does, such a consciousness of a similarity of situation but difference in almost every other respect is also present.[46] In *Genesis*, when Hershey is taunted for being a Jew, it is his 'colored maid' (*G*, p. 90) who drives

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[45] Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of The United States Of America*, rev. edn. (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 554.

[46] It is striking that Schwartz appears to have remained oblivious to the Harlem Renaissance and emergent African-American literary traditions.

away his tormentors: she has perhaps suffered similarly before. Later, Hershey recalls how

> Al Jolson sang for them of going to the sunny South, where the Negro, the enslaved peasant, and Dixie, the defeated nation,
> Furnished for the immigrant Jewish genius metaphors for his maternal emotion
> (p. 117)

Jolson, the first successful Jewish crooner in America, often performed in blackface, and was influential in introducing African American music to a white audience. There is nostalgia, even sentimentality, in this account, but what is most remarkable is that, listening to Jolson, Hershey empathises with *both* the black slaves *and* with the Southerners defeated in the Civil War who would have owned them. Actual questions of nationality or ideology are less important to him than the fact of having been defeated or oppressed in one way or another.

The central episode in 'A Bitter Farce' is a discussion of an assigned essay by Louis Adamic, entitled 'Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island', on immigrant in America.[47] Adamic argues that 'the hope of the world... was [in America] just because of [its] diversity of peoples', and claims that this made possible 'a universal culture, a pan-human culture such as had never before existed on the globe'. This, he says, is 'the American Dream and the American Tradition' ('A Bitter Farce', p.113). Fish does not contradict this, but feels compelled to add that

> if America has always been the land of liberty, it has also been the land of the witch-hunt and the lynching party, the land of persecution and the land where everyone feared that he was a stranger or was conscious of a fear of the stranger.
> (p. 114)

The race riots would not occur if America 'were not also the land of liberty' (p. 114) because democracy, even if it is the fairest method of government, will always favour the majority and under-represent minorities. The rhetoric of the American Constitution, however, does not distinguish between minorities and the majority: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the right of all, meaning that those to whom they are denied have genuine grounds for protest. The problem that most preoccupies Schwartz, both here and elsewhere, is that the kind of democratic and capitalist society upon which the American Dream is based must necessarily be competitive. Such a society allows for the *possibility* of liberty and success, but, realistically, there

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[47] Adamic was best known for *Laughing In The Jungle: The Autobiography of An Immigrant In America* (1932).

will always be those whose possibility is greater and those whose possibility is lesser. The ideal of a universal pan-human culture is in fact at odds with the dream of individual success because success can only be measured in relation to others. Again, Schwartz is most explicit about the dilemma in his essay on Hemingway and the American Dream, pointing out that

> A society committed to the American Dream is one which creates perpetual social mobility but also one in which the individual must suffer perpetual insecurity of status as the price of being free of fixed status.
>
> ('The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway', p. 273)

Not all individuals can be equally successful or accepted, and, the fact that everyone has the opportunity to succeed means that they must also accept that they might fail.

The discussion of Adamic's essay prompts one of Fish's students, an Irishman (and thus of immigrant stock himself) named Murphy, to declare that a lot of Jews are not 'all right' ('A Bitter Farce', p. 115). Fish points out to Murphy, a Catholic, that the Jews have been 'a commercial people... because that is all they were permitted to be by the decree of the Catholic Church'; and when Murphy goes on to suggest that the Jews are nonetheless 'traitors by inheritance,' (p. 116), Fish's response is an assertion that no moral decision can be predetermined by one's nationality or by one's parents. 'Can a moral act be inherited?' he asks. 'Can anyone be condemned to death as a murderer because his father is a murderer?' (p. 117). While the intended answer to these questions must be 'no', one has only to think back to 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' to find Schwartz anxiously addressing a case in which children really were condemned to death for their father's sins. These confident-sounding rhetorical questions in fact betray Fish's unease about those aspects of his own character that *are* inherited – not so much, perhaps, the fact of being Jewish, as the fact that so much of his character is determined simply by who his parents are and when and where he was born.

There is greater conviction in Fish's argument as he goes on, putting the case in a tone similar to Schwartz's 'resignation' letter to Pound:

> even if we grant that there are inherited patterns of behaviour, like inherited diseases and inherited features, no one can be sure in advance that any person, starting from the moment of his birth, is bound to have a certain kind of character [...] even if we grant a certain tendency to behave as one's parents, it is an abomination to condemn any man before he has committed a crime. And this is exactly what race prejudice does: it is a denial of the freedom of the will and of moral responsibility.
>
> ('A Bitter Farce', p. 117)

Taken alongside the anxieties expressed elsewhere in Schwartz's oeuvre regarding the extent to which personality is conditioned by one's family, one's nationality, and unalterable events in the past, this is a strong statement that free will is in fact possible for everyone. And yet, the very existence of such freedom of the will admits the possibility of acting immorally or of attempting to deny the free will of others.

Despite Fish's refusal to attribute present-day characteristics to past occurrences or genes, he admits to his students that he takes pride, 'but not personal pride' in his ancestors, who were 'scholars, prophets and students of God when most of Europe worshipped sticks and stones' (p. 118). This is clearly reasoned, but that he feels affronted by his students' attitudes is suggested by the barbed nature of some of his comments: 'it is not your fault if your forebears were barbarians grovelling and groping about for peat or something' (p. 118). Despite all that he has just said, he is impelled to mock his students' ancestors, and in this respect he appears to be as prejudiced as they are.

He goes on, affecting a shame that his own earlier argument would imply was illogical because entirely beyond his control, to explain that a great-grandmother of his was raped by a Mongolian and that he is therefore a 'mongrel Mongol'. However, he adds, 'it appears to be likely that the Mongolians are the ancestors of the American Indians, who are the only true natives of this country of ours, America' (p. 119). Fish concludes from this that he is, in fact, 'a hundred and fifty per cent American', turning the tables on the Irish Murphy and suggesting that he can 'go back where [he] came from' if he doesn't like the class of people in America (p. 119).

Fish admits to some of the students at the end of the class that much of what he has said is mere verbalism; however, it does enforce the point that hardly anybody living in America by the mid-twentieth century was indigenous. His reference to 'native Americans' recalls a moment in *Genesis* when the young Eva and Lilian Newman are made uneasy 'when confronted with native Americans' (*G*, p. 32). It is unlikely that they would have encountered many true Native Americans, however, since they had in fact become a much smaller minority than any of the immigrant populations. This has always been a discomforting fact of American history that needs to be addressed alongside Schwartz's wider considerations of what it is to be an American.

Fish's use of the word 'mongrel', with its offensive implications, has been used earlier in the story by Murphy, who says of the tensions between black and white in the South that 'the thoroughbred dogs will always fight with the mongrels' ('A Bitter Farce', p. 106). Fish makes it seem, however, that in being 'mongrel', miscegenated – or, as some critics have put it, 'hyphenated' – he is in fact purer in blood than any but true Native Americans.[48] He is able to use his superior ability at manipulating language and arguing from every conceivable point of view to make an untenable state (being 'a hundred and fifty per cent American') seem tenable. But when he returns home he remains subject to 'innumerable anxiety feelings which had their source in events which had occurred for the past five thousand years' (p. 121).

Implicitly, this is the source of the bitterness in the title: all of the ratiocination in front of his class has proved nothing and Fish remains just as uncertain about his own twentieth-century Jewish American identity as ever. He feels that he has managed to trivialise a topic of the utmost importance to him, doing little to engage directly with and thus challenge the prejudices of his students and, at the same time, little to improve their grammar. As in many of Schwartz's other works, evasion is a preoccupation of this story. Fish has evaded the draft, evaded frankness in his discussion of race, and evaded coming to any definite conclusions. Whilst scepticism of all views, a predominant Schwartz trait, is arguably the most intelligent approach to such issues, Fish cannot help but be irritated that nothing has been resolved by the end. Nonetheless, the story raises all of the questions that mattered most to Schwartz with regard to race, and simplifies none of them.

'The land of the old world failure and the new world success'

Fish's recognition that most people living in America are not, in the truest sense, American invites the question of what one has to do to earn the right to American nationality. Schwartz often considers what makes a *good* American. The implicit answer is that in America 'good' and 'successful' are synonymous and that self-belief, the very quality that Shenandoah Fish lacks, is more important than anything else. The word 'sure', we remember from an earlier poem, is 'beautiful' and 'American' (*SK*, p. 27): it suggests certainty. A gauge of this in *Genesis* is how Jack Green, full of

[48] See my discussion of the term 'hyphenated' below.

conviction, goes from job to job making money whilst his father, the unsuccessful fugitive, diminishes. Jack and his brother Albert initially set up a newspaper stall: the increased late-nineteenth-century demand for print media is just one indication of the increasingly international community. But when this endeavour has been exhausted, he is quick to move on. Albert suggests that Jack should become a policeman: he refuses, but the suggestion matters because it reveals Albert's sense that the newly arrived family should have a protective figure and that society should be ordered. Jack goes on to work as a streetcar conductor, an insurance salesman, and eventually a real estate trader, all of which are regarded, in the popular imagination, as typically American jobs. Hershey's last word on Noah Newman's death is 'Like a good American, he had left an insurance policy—' (*G*, p. 59) and one can imagine that Hershey learned from his father that this is what all good Americans do.

Chapter 1 concluded by noting the disjunction between Old and New World customs for the child of immigrant parents, and the difficulties the parents encounter in trying to prosper in modern America whilst also remaining committed to the traditions of their Fatherland. In *Genesis*, this disjunction is nowhere more evident than in Hershey Green's parents naming him after a quintessentially American chocolate brand as no true American ever would. Shenandoah Fish also has to live with an absurd mismatch of first name and surname, and bizarre names similarly afflict other Schwartz protagonists such as Faber Gottschalk, Cornelius Schmidt, and (in the drafts of Schwartz's unpublished *A Child's Universal History*) Bertholde Cannon.[49] These are all equivalents of Schwartz's own idiosyncratic name.

In *Genesis*, Hershey's naming prompts the ghosts to discuss the 'joke of individuality', comparing his misfortune at being so named to that of the one man amid a crowd of 70,000 who is 'made wet' by a pigeon (*G*, p. 70). In the verse play 'Shenandoah', which explicitly concerns the improbable naming of a child and the family dispute that ensues, the baby begins to howl at the precise moment that Mrs Fish decides to name him Shenandoah. In both works, it is emphasised that the child might have been named after its grandfather had it not been for superstition or family objection (it is a Jewish custom that a child should not be named after a living relative). But if Jewish tradition exerts a strong influence, so too does the idea of the new world, America, acting upon 'the foreigner whose foreign-ness / Names his son

[49] Berthold Schwartz, the inspiration for this name, is believed to have invented the cannon in the fourteenth century.

native.' The older Shenandoah Fish, who acts as chorus in the play, remarks, sounding distinctly ghostlike,

> How many world-wide causes work this room
> To bring about the person of your name:
> Europe! America! The fear of death!
> Belief and half-belief in Zion's world![50]

He also recalls a primitive tradition whereby a child is sometimes named 'by the event / Which happened near his birth', concluding that he might as well have been named 'The First World War' (p. 14). Absurd though this may sound, Fish's name already testifies to a particular historical moment in any case, that of the attempts by European immigrants to become American. It is also an imprint of how poorly his immigrant parents adapted their lives and understood their new country, a lifelong marker of his non-American heritage.

Irving S. Saposnik has remarked that such names draw attention to the 'hyphenated and marginal Jewish-American self' in Schwartz's protagonists.[51] In describing Jewish Americans as 'hyphenated', Saposnik is drawing upon a term that became widely used to describe immigrants of all ethnicities towards the end of the nineteenth century, and which Theodore Roosevelt used when he insisted that the country had no place for 'hyphenated' Americans. Roosevelt added that 'this is just as true of the man who puts "native" before the hyphen as of the man who puts German or Irish or English or French before the hyphen'; but his speech of October 15th 1915 goes on to make clear just how intolerant his government would be of those immigrants who could not change their allegiance entirely to America.[52]

> The men who do not become Americans *and nothing else* are hyphenated Americans; and there ought to be no room for them in this country. The man who calls himself an American and who yet shows by his actions that he is primarily the citizen of a foreign land, plays a thoroughly mischievous part in the life of our body politic. He has no place here; and the sooner he returns to the land to which he feels his real heart-allegiance, the better it will be for every good American.[53]

The speech apparently celebrates diversity, but demands homogeneity at the same time. It also overlooks a possibility that Schwartz often suggests in *Genesis* and his stories: that one's 'real heart-allegiance' might be to *both* the old country *and* the new

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[50] 'Shenandoah' in *Shenandoah and Other Verse Plays*, pp. 3-31 (p. 20).
[51] Irving S. Saposnik, 'Delmore Schwartz's America', *Studies In Short Fiction*, 19.2 (1982), 151-155 (p. 151).
[52] Theodore Roosevelt, 'Address to the Knights of Columbus in New York City', 15 October 1915, http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trquotes.html, accessed 10th January 2010.
[53] Ibid. My emphasis.

simultaneously. This situation is not unlike the one Hershey faces when his parents wake him up and ask him to choose between them. Such a clear-cut decision is impossible, and Hershey defers the choice by insisting instead on his need to use the bathroom (*G*, p. 110). Such a situation is likely to increase one's sense of personal alienation.

The term 'hyphenated' is now used regularly enough in critical circles, but it is misleading in that it implies that the immigrant has two *distinct* identities that are artificially welded together in the same way that a hyphen artificially links two otherwise unconnected words (not to mention the fact that the term is hardly less patronising than 'half-caste'). Since the Jewish American is both Jewish *and* American at the same time, the two cannot be regarded as being fundamentally separate whilst artificially attached in the way that the figure of the hyphen suggests. The Jewish American's perception of his or her Jewishness *depends* upon his or her perception of his Americanness, and vice versa. The two are entirely interrelated, one and the same. This complicates a sense of the ways in which the Jewish American might be isolated and alienated since one cannot just say that he or she is grappling with disparate parts of his or her identity. Through his characters' names, Schwartz is certainly exposing the disjunction of two cultures coming together in a way that is as comic as it is bitter; but *everyone,* regardless of culture, has a first name that suggests their individuality and a surname that indicates how they belong to a family or specific community. Consequently, every individual experiences some kind of disjunction in identity, regardless of ethnicity and status as a citizen.

Hershey Green's ancestors 'bring Europe with them, more or less, / The greatest thing in North America!' (*G*, p. 33) when they cross the Atlantic. Schwartz similarly remarks in 'Rimbaud in Our Time' that 'as one cannot change one's father and mother, so one cannot change one's nature of being a European. In running away, the European carries himself and Europe with him' (Rimbaud in Our Time', p. 53). One of the ways in which Hershey's relatives reveal their European background is through their attachment to the idea of kingship. Metaphors of kingship recur throughout *Genesis*. Hershey, for example, 'climb[s] the ego's tower, / A prince of the wide world, expecting to be a king!' (*G*, p. 106). Although one of his proudest moments as a child, is writing the name 'WOODROW WILSON' on a toy blackboard (p. 106), suggesting that he is learning patriotism as well as writing, and although he later imagines himself as 'a Giant star and also the President of the United States',

heralded by Sousa's '"The Stars and Stripes Forever"' (p. 181), he also regrets Germany's defeat in the First World War 'because it was the end of royalty's hierarchy' (p. 183). 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' recalls a grandfather leaving 'for America / To become a king himself' (*SK*, p. 4), and in *Genesis*, men like Jack Green bring with them from Europe '[t]he peasant's sense that land was the most important thing and the owner of land / A king!' (*G*, p. 78). This is a commonplace metaphor, but it is worth taking it literally for a moment. The immigrant's notion of kingship is likely to betray his European heritage in a nation that does not have a king and that originally defined itself against the very concept of monarchy. Furthermore, it should be remembered that, for all his prestige, a king is necessarily a great deal removed from the rest of society; and that, in any given nation, there can only ever be one at a time.

The dream of becoming a king oneself therefore excludes others: it is not a dream of communal success. Furthermore, with the acquisition of kingly status come the responsibilities and difficulties that a king must face. It is when he is most successful that Jack Green suffers most 'The insecurity kings must endure' (*G*, p. 146). Hershey explains how all of the immigrants 'prospered as a class, although some were failures for the irreducible reasons of persons' (p. 78). We recall that although Hershey's ancestors made their decisions to leave for America individually and impulsively, 'troops' of other immigrants also made much the same decisions at around the same time. Whatever hope there may be of a collective American Dream being fulfilled, there is no such possibility of millions of individual and competing dreams also all coming true.

This compounds the immigrant's sense of having a dissociated identity; they are separated not only from long-settled Americans but also from each other as a consequence of competition. This is further suggested in Hershey's description of America as 'the land of the refugee and of making a living, the land of the old world failure and the new world success' (*G*, p. 78). One does not stop being a refugee when one begins to make a living; although earning money is likely to improve one's quality of life and self-perception, it does not alter one's status. Equally though, being a refugee does not preclude one from being successful. For many immigrants, the transatlantic crossing is an opportunity as much as it is a flight, and it is these pioneering refugees – mavericks such as Albert and Jack Green – who are most likely to do well for themselves. All the same, we are reminded once again that the old

world and the new, failure and success co-exist in America. Jack Green's impetuosity, an asset in his various jobs, is disastrous for his family relationships.

It is also implied that unless the immigrants are able to relinquish the values they once held in Europe, the memory of past failure is likely to remain as keen as the joy of any present successes. A man's failures may still live in him even when he has begun to succeed: Noah Newman, for example, never overcomes the grudge he bears against Benjamin Harris, whose provocation prompted his exodus in the first place. 'The ideas of failure and success' are, according to Jacob Cohen in 'The World Is A Wedding', 'the two most important ideas in America'.[54] Success – specifically financial and social success – is all that can validate the upheaval of the transatlantic voyage, but in order to achieve it one must also risk failure and risk separating oneself from one's peers. In twentieth-century America, to be part of a prospering class is little consolation for the individual who is a failure.

The 'idea' of America: mis-imagining and displacement in *Genesis* and 'America! America!'

The tendency of Hershey Green's family to imagine themselves as royalty in America is an example of the immigrant mis-imagining what their new life will be like. As suggested earlier, a tendency to imagine one's life in a particular way when it in fact turns out to be very different is a source of particularly acute alienation for many of Schwartz's characters. *Genesis* is replete with such moments. Noah Green divorces his wife and flees the Czar's army because he is dissatisfied on account of his life not resembling 'the images of adolescence' (*G*, p. 8). Leah Harris initially resists the courtship of Noah Newman because he 'did not at all embody the ideas of romance she had seen in the novels she loved'; he, meanwhile, never stops regarding her as 'the difficult prize, [...] the image of his first glimpse' (p. 21). And later, Jack and Albert Green fall out because Albert offers Jack business advice once too often and Jack's 'idea of himself' – as self-reliant, with no need of help – is 'injured' (p. 55). Perhaps the most striking of the poem's misdirected acts of imagining is Eva Green's when she names Hershey. Hershey is the nickname (it is fine as a nickname) of her neighbour's chocolate-obsessed son, Harold, in whom 'she saw the image of what she

[54] 'The World is a Wedding', p. 83.

wanted her child to be' (p. 69). We learn little more about this Harold, but it soon becomes evident that Hershey is not at all like the delightful child after whom he was named. Unable to give her son her first choice of name, Eva projects another image upon him that perhaps imposes a capitalist, consumerist American identity as much as his circumcision determines his Jewishness.

The recurrent attention to idealised images and ideas in *Genesis* incites one of the ghosts to remark 'How images may dominate a life!' (*G*, p. 21), and the poem's opening scene has Hershey mistaking the light of an electric street lamp for snow and remarking to himself, '"How each view may be false!"' (p. 4) His hope for snow in May is unrealistic, but he is momentarily convinced enough to believe that what he sees really might be what he wants to see. Such moments suggest the importance of image-making for everybody, not just poets, and contribute towards making *Genesis* a poem of universal experience. Equally, each such act of individual imagining may contribute towards the creation of a myth on a larger-scale, such as the American Dream: it is, after all, 'the *idea* of America which shone all over Europe' (p. 17; my emphasis), and the dreams with which Schwartz is so often concerned also tend to be dominated by such images.

Schwartz's most explicit suggestion that the American Dream is about attachment to images comes in his story 'America! America!', in which Shenandoah Fish listens to his mother talking about friends of hers, the Baumanns. The Baumanns' circle of friends, disappointed in their expectations but unable to admit their disappointment, invest themselves in images of 'the wonders of America'.[55] They are awed by planes, elevators, and the new subway.

> When the toilet-bowl flushed like Niagara, when a suburban homeowner killed his wife and children, and when a Jew was made a member of Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet, the excited exclamation was:
>
> 'America! America!'
>
> The expectations of these human beings who had come in their youth to the new world had not been fulfilled in the least.
>
> ('America! America!', p. 22)

Sanitary progress finds its image in one of America's most impressive natural phenomena; the murder story is pure gossip, presumably made a topic for open discussion by a Hearst newspaper; and, for the Jewish immigrant, the political success of one of their people is both a stage towards more general acceptance by society as a

[55] 'America! America!', p. 21.

whole and a promise that they could succeed similarly. Schwartz makes the reader sceptical about this possibility, however, pointing out that these people 'had above all expected to be rich, and they had come [to America] with a very different image of what their new life was to be' (p.22). What is remarkable is that despite their own personal lack of fulfilment, these immigrants are able to find something 'more marvellous than fulfillment' (p.22) in the wonders, technological and social, of the new society, making these into the images which they 'view as' the new world. Although, intellectually, this is mere self-deception, devoting themselves to such images is what enables these people to endure.

In *Genesis*, Hershey makes clear that America, at the turn of the century, was far from being *just* a new and successful world, but Mrs Baumann in 'America! America!' is blinkered by her images of the new world and cannot understand, therefore, why her sons are unable, or disinclined, to make a living. 'In America everyone or almost everyone was successful. [She] had seen too many fools make out well to believe otherwise' (p. 24). It is beyond her imagination to think that they too might be fools – and greater ones than those making out well – or that they might have a different conception to her of what it is to be successful. Mrs Baumann's husband is successful as an insurance broker, but as the story progresses it becomes apparent that this success is relatively limited and that his only clients are other immigrants: he does not try to 'acquire new customers' (p. 14), and relies upon mere affability and loyalty to old world customs rather than upon the business acumen and ruthlessness that characterise the true late-nineteenth-century American money-makers. Shenandoah remembers that Baumann resembled the first J. P. Morgan in photographs (p. 13), but that is where the similarity ends. Baumann clings to his European and, by implication, old-fashioned ways, drinking his tea 'in the Russian style', for example, 'from a glass, not a cup: a cup was utterly out of the question' (p. 13). His pedantic tone, as much as the custom itself, shows how reluctant Baumann is to adapt to the new country's ways, and, in common with the Greens, he is fixated on monarchy, eagerly discussing 'the private lives of the kings and queens of Europe' (p. 13). He is, perhaps, a more refined version of Bellow's Father Herzog, who had also been a gentleman in Russia but who had failed in his various jobs since arriving in Canada, and who is remembered by his son as 'a father, a sacred being, a king.'[56] The

[56] Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (London: Penguin, 1996 [1964]), p. 147.

Baumanns' son, Sidney, is a far from sympathetic character, but he is perceptive in comparing his father to much richer men and pointing out missed opportunities. Amongst a people who value success so highly, it is not enough that Baumann himself feels successful if that view is not shared by the world at large or even by his own family. His Russian-style tea-drinking and his royal gossip make him seem anachronistic, an old world failure; and, above all, it alienates his sons who hold very different values.

Alienation, for Schwartz, usually means, generally, 'a state of estrangement in feeling or affection' (*OED* 1. a) but it also indicates at times, more specifically, the Marxist concept of *Entäusserung*: 'the notion that in modern capitalistic society man is estranged or alienated from what are properly his functions and creations and that instead of controlling them he is controlled by them' (*OED* 1.c). This meaning of alienation is most acute for characters such as Hershey and Shenandoah when they become conscious of those aspects of their identity over which they have no control. The nature of twentieth-century city life exacerbates this kind of alienation. At the beginning of 'America! America!', for example, Shenandoah perceives a 'great change' (p. 10) in the people he used to know. 'The depression had occurred to these human beings' (p.10): they have become the passive subjects of a force beyond individual control and, by referring to them as 'human beings' rather than 'people', regarding them not as individuals but as a species, Schwartz exposes the facelessness of Shenandoah's one-time acquaintances, denying them any trait to which the reader, or Shenandoah himself, might be able to relate. They are 'ashamed of what they had made or what had been made of their lives' (p. 10). The main implication here is that, however unavoidable a force the Depression may have been, they have failed to strive against it and make the best of difficult circumstances: it is this of which they are most ashamed. Shenandoah himself epitomises such resignation – despite the economic crisis, he is content to spend his mornings in dressing-gown and pyjamas listening to his mother's gossip, and although he does begin to feel uneasy about this he does nothing to change it.

Shenandoah's sense of estrangement from his peers is acute, but his sense of separation from his own family and other immigrant families, such as the Baumanns, is even more so. Listening to his mother, he 'felt that in every sense he was removed from them by thousands of miles, or by a generation, or by the Atlantic Ocean' (p. 19). The separation is both temporal and physical. There *is* a generation between

himself and Mr and Mrs Baumann, and the Atlantic Ocean metaphor is more than just that because the most crucial difference between his experience of America and that of his parents' generation is that they really did cross the Atlantic Ocean to seek a new life. We learn in the story's first sentence that Shenandoah has just returned from Paris: so he too has crossed the Atlantic, but for him the journey is not an upheaval. Living for a time in Paris is just what young American writers in the '30s do. We do not learn precisely how long he spent there, but we do know that the visit was temporary and that he expects to go back. The monumental aura of travel has diminished, and his visit to Paris even implies a degree of defiance: his parents risked everything to leave Europe and one of his first independent acts is to go back there. Nonetheless, later in the story Shenandoah recognises that, despite his contrary ideals, it would be false to judge his elders from his privileged position because 'nothing in his own experience was comparable to the great displacement of body and mind which their coming to America must have been' (p. 27). His own sense of displacement, whilst real enough, is more metaphorical than literal.

The Atlantic as an image for separation is suggested frequently in 'America! America!' Shenandoah observes that the children of his parents' generation have become 'full of contempt for every thing important to their parents' but initially feels that 'this gulf and perversion..., this separation' (p. 20) has little to do with his writing. On reflection, however, he comes to the conclusion that 'the separation, the contempt, and the gulf' might in fact be the centre or starting-point, compelling 'the innermost motion of the work to be flight, or criticism, or denial, or rejection' (p. 20) – all topics of the utmost importance for Schwartz himself. The repeated 'gulf' and 'separation' here evoke, without explicitly stating, the vast expanse of the Atlantic, something more than just a void but a tempestuous unpredictable entity in its own right. This being the case, 'flight' evokes the initial escape of immigration, and Shenandoah's 'criticism', 'denial' and 'rejection' of his parents' values is not unlike their own criticism, denial and rejection of the country they left (which, in the case of Mr Baumann, is not absolute). Shenandoah eventually comes to accept that 'His separation [from his parents and their generation] was actual enough, but there existed also an unbreakable unity' (p. 32). If the immigrants of his parents' generation brought Europe with them, more or less, then he, like Hershey and other Jewish sons, cannot help but bring his parents with him, more or less, wherever *he* goes.

Consequently, he, too, inherits indissoluble Old World traits despite being American, or American Jewish, not expatriate European.

The link between the first-generation immigrant's separation from their Fatherland and the children of these immigrants from their parents is spelt out by one of *Genesis*'s ghosts, who suggests to Hershey that in telling his story he is trying to escape, cathartically, the over-determining influence of his parents and thus to enact a symbolic transatlantic migration of his own:

> let then these lives so drive
> Your future life that you become, in truth,
> A colonist, by th'Atlantic voyage
> Of this long night taken away from them!
>
> (*G*, p. 94)

Hershey's response, however, is emphatic. 'I cannot go / Away! The mind is my own place, my world' (p. 94), he cries, echoing Milton's Satan who, despite his claim that the mind itself 'Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven' can do nothing to change his own nature.[57] The allusion aligns Hershey with Satan, the rebellious subject, reacting against the ultimate father figure, God. The Atlantic is not quite the gulf of Chaos through which Satan falls, but simply by inviting this as a frame of reference, Schwartz emphasises the ocean's immensity. He also stresses that even if Hershey could escape the overbearing influence of his parents, which endures across such gulfs, he would still have to live with himself.

The ghost's suggestion that Hershey is a 'colonist' is provocative. Unlike the immigrant, who does not continue to live under the government of his homeland, the colonist remains a subject of his own nation. Given the context of *Genesis*, the choice of word might seem careless. This is not necessarily the case, however. It is appropriate that the poem should occasionally gesture towards the first crossings of Puritan colonists, crossings which the modern immigrants repeat ('each enacts all that has been' [*G*, p. 101]). America's colonial past is alluded to on a number of occasions, sometimes explicitly, such as when one of the ghosts observes, in contemplation of America's role in the First World War, how 'The colony becomes a major nation—' (*G*, p. 78), and sometimes through association, such as in the instance quoted earlier when Hershey describes his mother and aunt feeling uneasy as children 'when confronted with native Americans' (*G*, p. 32), imagining them in the same situation as

[57] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler (Longman: London, 1971), p. 59.

the first colonists. The word raises questions about whether one can become a native – rather than just a legal citizen – by living in a place long enough. In terms of Hershey's hypothetical exodus from his parents, the colonist's experience is perhaps also a truer analogy than that of the immigrant since the child's character remains conditioned by his parents' even after he has become an adult. It suggests, too, the faint hope that Hershey might one day also be able to declare independence.

By evoking America's colonisation, Schwartz also suggests a perhaps surprising affinity between himself and the first Puritan settlers in America. Although he was a modern writer extraordinarily different in temperament and ideals to them, his anxious questioning of how far the modern divinities ('historical, social, cultural and psychological') determine one's fate indicates a similar obsession with questions of predestination and American exceptionalist ideology. Schwartz's insistence on the international nature of modern life would seem to go against any belief that America was in some respect exceptional, or that any one individual exerted influence alone. All the same, as this chapter has suggested, his sense of the individual remained keen and was even heightened by his sense of the international. The questions of who might be the chosen, successful ones in a modern, international and increasingly secular society, and of what examples might be drawn by the general population from the individual whose life is taken to be representative, are pressing concerns of *Genesis* and his stories in particular. And these concerns become even more acute when considered in the context of the thrillingly international and yet alienating modern metropolis of Schwartz's birth, New York City.

CHAPTER 3

'the only place for love': Schwartz and the city

'The immense alienation of metropolitan life'

In 'America! America!' the Baumann household becomes 'a kind of community center' for those 'human beings who [had] gone from the community life of the old country and foundered amid the immense alienation of metropolitan life' ('America! America!', p. 16). Throughout Schwartz's fiction and poetry alike, the city – specifically New York City, but usually New York as representative of *all* cities – is figured as the locus of the Depression and of the oppressive forces of 'Capitalismus'. It is 'hate-ridden' (*SK*, p. 74), a place where apartment-dwellers choose to 'mind [their] ignorant business' rather than face the embarrassment of calling upon sick co-residents they do not know (p. 37), and where anonymous, Hadean people in 'the subway rush' are 'Caught in an anger exact as a machine' (p. 38). Schwartz acknowledges that there are positive aspects to city-living as well, and he recognises that the corporate mentality, diverse immigrant population, and constant rush that can make New York so alienating also help to make it vibrant. However, the enduring impression one gets of the city in Schwartz's writing is as a place where sensitive intellectuals are ignored, where once-hopeful immigrants see their expectations disappointed, and where it is almost impossible to form intimate relationships.

This chapter will consider Schwartz's writing about the city, addressing his engagement with Oswald Spengler's theory of 'world-cities' in *The Decline of the West* and considering the city both in its physical actuality and, just as importantly, as an idea or state of mind. This discussion will also be informed by Walter Benjamin's essays 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' and 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'. Many of the tropes that Benjamin identifies in Baudelaire's poetry are inherited by Schwartz and transposed from Paris onto New York. Of particular importance in this regard are Baudelaire's concerns with the relation of the isolated individual to the big-city crowd and with the ways in which living in a city affects one's perception of oneself and of others. Schwartz is fascinated, above all, by the impersonality of travelling on the subway and by the ways in which one increasingly experiences the modern city indirectly, through images reflected or projected by

mirrors and screens. These are media which would seem to enable or, at the very least, enhance our vision, but at the same time they accentuate our inability to experience the things that they show firsthand. Such dually obstructive and illuminating means of experiencing city life are commonplace in Schwartz's writing. Observation implies some degree of removal from the thing observed, and it is partly for this reason that Schwartz's mirrors and screens tend to reinforce the individual's detachment from the community at large, strengthening a sense of alienation. Despite this, Schwartz strives for a purity of perception – which he describes as 'actuality' – whereby all the obstructions to direct experience are overcome and one can know things in their essence.

The final part of the chapter will appraise Schwartz's writing about love and sex in an urban context. He is, in many respects, a love poet, though more often a poet of disappointed love than of love fulfilled. One of the *Genesis* ghosts contends that 'the city is the only place for love' (*G*, p. 57), but Schwartz's overriding conviction is that 'the difficulty of making love, that is to say, of entering into the most intimate of relationships, is not the beginning but the consequence of the whole character of modern life' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 125). With this in mind, it is clear that Schwartz's ideas about the modern metropolis, and about love and sex, are directly related. Schwartz is often indirect and euphemistic about sex, and sometimes prurient, but he is also, on occasion, unexpectedly candid. He is immersed in Freudian psychoanalytical thinking, but his social satire is also marked, particularly in his short stories. And although he laments the fact that love, in the modern era, has become 'purely personal' (p. 126), rather than something that is in relation to the wider community, Schwartz never gives up on the hope that it might regain more universal meaning. He almost always manages to sustain the belief that alienation might, eventually, be conquered by love.

The 'world-city': Schwartz and Spengler

Schwartz was only thirteen when, in 1926, he read a review of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. The book had recently been translated into English and its influence on the aspiring writer was to be profound. Spengler's challenges to the idea of straightforward linear progress in history, and his attempts to understand 'world-history, the *world-as-history*', rather than history told simply from a Western-centric

perspective, may have informed Schwartz's conception of 'international consciousness' to as great an extent as Eliot's 'historical sense' did.[1] Even more importantly, however, Schwartz recalls how disturbed he was on first encountering the German historian's theories of the cyclical growth and decline of cultures and civilisations. Spengler, Schwartz explains,

> had a view of the whole of history, of the twentieth century and of the future, which was not only in direct contradiction to all that I knew or believed, but which, worst of all, excluded the possibility of genuine poetry or genuine creative activity during the twentieth century [...]. Western civilization had begun to decline [...]. For every civilization was mortal and its existence, like that of a human being, was subject to the same cycle of birth, growth, fruition, decline and death; or spring, summer, autumn and winter.
>
> According to Spengler [...], Western civilization had reached autumn.[2]

For Spengler, it is the emergence of 'world-cities' – cities 'that have absorbed into themselves the whole content of history' – that foretells the gradual decline of a civilisation (Spengler, p. 25). He speculates that 'the rise of New York to the position of world-city during the Civil War of 1861-5 may perhaps prove to have been the most pregnant event of the nineteenth century' – pregnant insofar as it seemed to mark 'the end of organic growth and the beginning of an inorganic and therefore unrestrained process of agglomerations' (p. 248). 'World-city' and 'province', he argues, are 'the two basic ideas of every civilization'; and Western civilisation had reached a point at which

> [i]n place of a world, there is a *city*, a *point*, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman [...]. The world-city means cosmopolitanism in place of 'home' ... To the world-city belongs not a folk but a mob.
>
> (p. 25)

Such an analysis concords with Schwartz's fears about there being a lack of universal world picture for his generation, not to mention his acute consciousness of immigrants as nomads, sacrificing their own traditions in an attempt to be accepted in the new international 'megalopolis'. Entrenched nationalism, the direct opposite of this, is not

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[1] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, ed. and abridged by Helmut Werner; English ed. by Arthur Helps, trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: OUP, 1991), p. 20. *The Decline of the West* was first published in German in two volumes in 1918 and 1922. It was first published in English in 1926 and 1928, and in a one-volume edition in 1932.

[2] Schwartz, 'Memoirs of a Metropolitan Child, Memoirs of a Giant Fan' in *The Ego is Always at the Wheel*, pp. 115-136 (pp. 120-121).

desirable either, as the rise of Nazism in Germany would demonstrate. Spengler is nonetheless convincing in suggesting that such a disparate, faithless way of living must have negative consequences for culture, at least as it has traditionally been understood.

'Worst of all', according to Schwartz, was Spengler's observation that

> the autumn and decline of Classical civilization had begun when most human beings lived in huge cities like Rome and were passionate about bread and circuses, instead of being farmers and participating in the Olympic games. The analogy between Roman circuses and major league baseball was incontestable and unbearable.
>
> ('Memoirs of a Metropolitan Child', p. 121)

The analogy between Rome and New York holds in spite of the widespread celebration of technological progress and individual endeavour epitomised by Charles Lindbergh's solo non-stop flight across the Atlantic in 1927, an event described in the *Genesis* drafts as 'The greatest feat of a solitary man / In the long records of the human race' and one that advances the earlier dream of the Wright brothers.[3] Schwartz often uses such examples to suggest the progress, rather than decline, of civilisation in modern times; but to Spengler, advances in aviation would be mere 'inorganic agglomerations' and not genuine contributions to culture. In any case, the accomplishments of individuals are relatively unimportant when the population at large are merely spectators. Even Hershey is notably indifferent to Lindbergh's achievement. The fate of his team, the Giants, captivates his imagination to a greater degree: to him, their collective effort is more admirable than Lindbergh's solitary success. Nonetheless, it is in an attempt to harness the optimism which Lindbergh prompted, and, in particular, to disprove Spengler, that Hershey devises his own ideal state, the 'True Republic'. This involves him dividing America into five regions, each named for its dominant characteristic: the region containing New York is to be called 'Metropolis'.[4] Hershey becomes obsessed with his vision, but never fully defines or articulates it, and duly concedes his debt to Spengler, even in opposition. 'I was inspired by Spengler's book', he explains to the ghosts. '[H]e was / Responsible as much as I for all—'.[5]

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[3] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 9, Folder 508, p. 363. (Where page numbers are included, they are cited in the notes, but in general they are written in by Schwartz himself and do not indicate that the pages appear in sequence within the folder.)
[4] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 9, Folder 503.
[5] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 9, Folder 508, p. 379.

A passage in Schwartz's journal for 1954, probably intended as part of a longer work involving a character named Jackson, also seeks an antidote to Spengler's determinist view of history.

> In the autumn of the city
> There can be no more a Keats, a Mozart
> neither a Pericles not an Alcibiades
> nor a Marlowe, a Plato, Sophocles
> only Octavius followed by Nero...
> the eagles of the Emperors only
> but not the eagles of the Muses
> Jackson is troubled and made anxious by Spengler's
> description
> and by his philosophy of history
> doom & destiny
>
> Only the courage, and innocence
> (in the carnival of time and the city)
> [...]
> The daring of the dream which
> the half-wakened
> enact, advancing
> Frees us from the body and burden
> of this death, this life

(*Portrait*, p. 471)

Here, the question is not so much one of how to contest, or find an alternative to, the inevitability of doom and destiny, but of how one might regard it in a different light. Committing oneself to courage and innocence, and daring to dream, will not forestall fate, but could enable one to see the progression of time as something to celebrate rather than as a burden. This is the case regardless of whether Spengler's speculations about the inevitable decline of civilisation are valid or not. Schwartz does not attempt, at any point, to challenge Spengler directly, but rather to focus attention away from the bleakness of his prognosis. In much of the poetry he wrote in the '50s, Schwartz establishes an ideological position that celebrates each moment and finds solace in the thought that regeneration follows decay. From such a perspective, it is possible to see beyond the immediate decline in culture that Spengler forecasts to a time when culture will flourish once again. But whatever attitude Schwartz came to hold later in his life, it is clear that during the late '30s and early '40s – the period in which he wrote *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, *Genesis*, and *The World is a Wedding* – Schwartz was

in broad agreement with Spengler's pessimistic analysis, however much he longed to refute it.[6]

'The heights and powers of the great city': crowds and buildings

Schwartz and Spengler alike recognise that the alienation, isolation and dissociation that the individual feels in the metropolis are caused, in part, by its physical attributes – the domineering buildings, the rush of traffic, and the sheer number of different people living in such proximity. A passage in *Genesis*, in which the neighbours knock on the radiator and shout from their windows for the Greens to make their crying baby shut up, illustrates the cramped nature of apartment block living. Hershey comments, ironically, that 'the unity of modern life is obvious' in 'these apartment house flats' (*G*, p. 72); but the neighbours' irritation makes clear just how disunited all the cohabitants really are.

Urban alienation, however, is the consequence not only of physical conditions, but also of a state of mind – what Schwartz calls in the poem 'America, America!' 'city consciousness' (*LL*, p. 4) – and Schwartz tends to write about the city as simultaneously physical environment and mental figuration.[7] At the end of the uncollected story, 'An Argument in 1934', for example, he describes how

> The two young men [Harry Morton and Noah Gottlieb] walked on up Fifth Avenue, oppressed on all sides by the heights and powers of the great city, the immense buildings above them, the hurrying racketing traffic before them and beside them, the fashionable stores at one side, and the crowd which flowed ignorantly by them.[8]

The city buildings are literally high, and they seem powerful because they are so huge, but they are also metonymic of forces such as fame, business, and industry which have no physical presence in themselves but which contribute to the city's identity. The traffic and fashionable stores similarly represent the wider hustle and commerce that characterise city life, whilst remaining actual things in and of themselves. The oppression the men feel, then, is partly caused by their environment, but it is also a reflection of their attitude towards that environment. This is especially apparent in the

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[6] Spengler himself refuses to cast his predictions in a wholly negative light. '[F]or a sound and vigorous generation that is filled with unlimited hopes,' he argues, 'I fail to see that it is any disadvantage to discover betimes that some of these hopes must come to nothing' (Spengler, p. 31).

[7] The poem's title immediately invites comparison with the story of almost the same name.

[8] 'An Argument in 1934', *Kenyon Review* 4.1 (Winter, 1942), pp. 62-74 (74).

nuances of the word 'ignorantly'. In one sense, the crowd really is ignorant, in that it is oblivious to the two young men, and ignores them. In another respect, the crowd is simply considered to be ignorant – uninformed and unlearned – because that is how the young men, who are self-appointed intellectuals, regard it. This impression is heightened by the allusion to Eliot's description of another 'world-city'. Harry and Noah see the crowd as 'flowing' because they know (and the 'ignorant' crowd members presumably do not) how 'A crowd flowed over London Bridge' in *The Waste Land*, with its inference that such a crowd has become more natural to the city than the actual river flowing under the bridge.[9] This knowledge sets them apart from the crowd, in their own minds at least, even though, to all intents and purposes, they must themselves be members of that same crowd. They only see the crowd as flowing 'by' them because they can find no affinity with the other anonymous people next to whom they are walking.

Schwartz's presentation of the crowd here accords with Benjamin's analysis of what the masses mean for Baudelaire, with a few differences. The masses do not stand, Benjamin says, 'for classes or any sort of collective; rather they are nothing but the amorphous crowd of passers-by, the people on the street.'[10] It is impossible to make the masses represent a class if one knows nothing of the individual identities that constitute such masses. Therefore, although they are a definite presence in the city, the masses can only be understood as nebulous, and perhaps even meaningless. Schwartz has a keen sense of what Engels describes as 'the brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each person in his private interest [which] becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together within a limited space.'[11] However, to sustain such a view requires a degree of detachment from the crowd which is increasingly difficult to achieve for anyone who also wishes to participate in city life. 'As for Baudelaire', Benjamin argues, 'the masses were anything but external to him; indeed, it is easy to trace in his works his defensive reaction to their attraction and allure' ('On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 322). By this reckoning, Baudelaire is too much a part of the crowd to be able to describe it dispassionately. 'The masses were an agitated veil', writes Benjamin, 'and Baudelaire

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[9] Eliot, *Collected Poems and Plays*, p. 62.
[10] Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938-1940, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (London: Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 313-355 (p. 320).
[11] Cited by Benjamin in 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 322.

views Paris through this veil' (p. 323). In other words, Baudelaire's perception of his city, Paris, is unavoidably coloured by his own position as a member of its amorphous crowds. He cannot remove himself from them even though, Benjamin insists, he is never able, either, 'to rid himself of a sense of their essentially inhuman character. He becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates from them. He becomes deeply involved with them, only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt' (p. 326).

It is this ambivalence towards the masses – a feeling of detachment from them coexisting alongside a feeling that one is implicated in everything that they do – that besets Schwartz's characters in 'An Argument in 1934' and that is one of his most important inheritances from Baudelaire. Schwartz vacillates between the elitist position of observing the crowd as if he were no part of it, and an uneasy awareness that there is no way to avoid being consumed by it. Consequently, his descriptions of the city are often external – depicting a concrete reality – and internal – projecting one's own feelings onto that reality – at the same time.

McDougall contends that in Schwartz's stories

> New York has an atmospheric rather than a physical presence, and its impersonality is heightened by the very absence of concrete detail [...]. Images of the metropolis appear, however, in some of Schwartz's poems, in which they symbolize the inescapable reality that opposes the imagination, idealism, and transcendence that compose the other half of the poet's world.[12]

It is true enough that Schwartz's fiction rarely makes reference to specific locales, but McDougall overlooks the fact that the city's physical existence matters just as much to Schwartz in his stories as in his poetry. It will also become apparent that to suggest a binary opposition between 'imagination, idealism, and transcendence' on the one hand, and 'inescapable reality' on the other, is to oversimplify Schwartz's understanding of the city and of 'city consciousness'. The city is real, but it may be imaginatively transfigured, and it may mean different things to different inhabitants.

It is perhaps worth remembering that, for Spengler, one gauge of cultural diminishment is entirely physical: a community's tendency to live one on top of the other in high-rise buildings rather than on a single level.[13] In 'An Argument in 1934', it is the mistake of the idealist, Bradley Brown, to insist that the world can only exist in the mind. 'It is as if the senses were stained-glass windows', he argues

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[12] McDougall, p. 43.
[13] Spengler, p. 26.

> and one only saw the light through the stained-glass windows of one's senses. What the light is beyond the stained-glass windows, you do not know. What a thing is, apart from the way you see it, you do not know, do you? How can you?
> ('An Argument in 1934', p. 69-70)

Whilst this may be true to an extent – we are all prey to our own limited and limiting perceptions – Bradley's refusal to believe in an objective, external reality is made to look foolish by Noah Gottlieb's rebuff: '"It is December in New York in 1934. The weather is cold and it is going to snow"' (p. 70). Even when he is given a bloody nose by a drunkard for bumping into the latter's girl at a pedestrian crossing – an accident which occurs merely because he is in the wrong place at the wrong time – Bradley remains in his own dream. This leads his companions to remark on how '"he will never wake up to this", [...] pointing to the great city moving about them in 1934' (p. 74). Schwartz, typically, does not allow us to discredit Bradley's view entirely, and his narrative makes us profoundly conscious of how difficult it is to experience the actuality of things, particularly in the impersonal and alienating context of a bustling city. But Schwartz is also conscious that the city as an autonomous presence needs to be respected.

The conclusion of 'The Commencement Day Address', like that of 'An Argument in 1934', suggests the difficulty inherent in reconciling one's perception of the city with its concrete actuality. One of the members of Dr. Duspenser's audience, who has been absorbed in the old man's bizarre speech, has 'a returning sense of the metropolitan city', which is regarded as a living being,

> narrow and tall on all sides, full of traffic, accident, commerce and adultery, of a thousand drugstores, apartment houses and theatres, its belly veined with black subways, its towers and bridges grand, numb, and without meaning.
> ('The Commencement Day Address', p. 125)

With its accumulation of nouns and short clauses, this passage presents a straightforward physical description of claustrophobic, skyscraper-lined streets. But Schwartz also invests the scene with human emotions. Towers and bridges are not sensate; their numbness merely reflects their effect upon the human observer. Their meaninglessness also has more to do with the observer's inability to find meaning in them than with the constructions themselves. In addition to this, the activity taking place in the city seems arbitrary. There is a touch of cynicism in setting 'adultery' alongside 'traffic', 'accident' and 'commerce', but more striking than this is the

facelessness of whoever may be engaged in these pursuits.[14] Here, as elsewhere in Schwartz's writing, anonymity is the greatest indication of the collapse of community feeling.

Schwartz recognises that one may temporarily be able to escape the kind of alienation endemic in city life. However, not even the summer resorts of Far Rockaway and Coney Island – city retreats that are nonetheless still parts of the city – offer respite for all, and what relief they do offer is short-lived. The 'lolling man' on the beach in 'Far Rockaway' casts aside the 'rigor of the weekday' and is 'stripped of his class in the bathing-suit', but 'Time unheard' continues to move, and the novelist in the poem (who is representative of the artist in general) remains separated from the seashore's leisure (*SK*, p. 34). He is 'nervous', 'anxious', and inquisitive, and knows that the 'socialist health' enjoyed by the bathers will last only until they dress again and the working week resumes (p. 34). It may be refreshing for the holidaymakers to lose their social identities for a time, but in so doing – as McDougall points out – they also lose their adulthood and their humanity.[15]

The seashore may be a natural environment, but it is cultivated rather than left to be wild, like Central Park which is described in *Genesis* as 'the great city park where Nature was framed, trimmed, and trained' (*G*, p. 72). This is highlighted in the opening lines of 'Far Rockaway' – 'The radiant soda of the seashore fashions / Fun, foam, and freedom' (*SK*, p. 34) – in which the alliteration suggests advertising speak, and 'radiant soda' is as much soda-pop as it is the spume and spray of the sea. Implicitly, the seashore itself has been fashioned (and is a fashionable place to be seen) quite as much as the soda 'fashions' fun, foam and freedom. This is further suggested by the description of the sand as 'shaven': sea and wind alone would be unlikely to create such a tidy effect. The poem's tight form, with its internal rhymes and resonances, and the consistently curtailed fourth line of each stanza, also highlights conscious crafting. Although the form never slackens, the novelist's uneasy questions in the last two stanzas disrupt the poem's fluency, much as his conscience – described as 'a haunting, haunted moon' – displaces the 'passionate sun' (p. 34) and disturbs the holiday mood.

For the mother of the city-dwelling narrator of 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', Coney Island is 'inferior'; for both parents, it is a disappointing

[14] 'Traffic' here, as in 'An Argument in 1934', suggests 'trade' as well as vehicular traffic.
[15] McDougall, p. 53.

location for a marriage proposal; and for the narrator himself, the glimpses it offers of nature – the sun and the ocean, as seen at one remove on the cinema screen – are 'terrible' and 'terrifying' ('In Dreams', p. 5). This is in keeping with the portrayals of nature in many of Schwartz's early poems: the 'shattering sun' which falls down 'Like swords' (*SK*, p. 22) on the Czar's children, and the ominously 'self-destroying' (p. 34) waves at Far Rockaway. Watching the events unfold makes the narrator 'feel like one who looks down on the avenue from the 50th story of a building' ('In Dreams', p. 5). This comparison, revisited on a number of occasions throughout Schwart's oeuvre, is especially resonant for the urban-dweller continually surrounded by such buildings of fifty storeys or more, and it captures both the speaker's sense of distance from the events he relates and his terrifying involvement: to get any closer would be fatal. This can be taken as an analogy for one's experience of the city as a whole: to know it in its full actuality would be too much to bear.

The Subway

The image of the city's belly 'veined with black subways' in 'The Commencement Day Address' recalls an earlier description in the same story of the city's 'ribs bound by deep, narrow rivers' ('The Commencement Day Address', p. 119), but is more grotesque. If the subways are veins, then the people that they transport must be the city's lifeblood. As Brutus says in 'Coriolanus and his Mother' – though in a more politically-charged context – 'the city is the people' (*SK*, p. 109). However, the blackness of the veins suggests something deathly, and on numerous occasions, Schwartz associates the subway with the underworld. It is the part of the city where people are most likely to seem anonymous or expressionless, like the damned souls in Dante's *Inferno*, ignoring one another whilst in transit.

In the parable-like story, 'The Statues', the subway is the site of an actual death: 'Faber Gottschalk jumped or fell in front of an onrushing subway train.'[16] Gottschalk is the New Yorker who is most profoundly affected when a wondrous snowfall creates strange statues that transform the city. The statues fascinate the citizens so much that they begin to act 'as if they were dreamstruck or abstracted or profoundly in love' ('The Statues', p. 90), still doing whatever they are expected to do

[16] 'The Statues' in *Screeno*, pp. 89-100 (p. 100). The story appears in *The World is a Wedding*, but since *Screeno* is now more easily available, this is the edition to which I refer.

but doing so 'in a new way, and with more concentration, with more devotion, and more efficiency' (p. 94). The populace's absolute indifference to Gottschalk's death, some time after the snow statues have been destroyed by rain, underlines just how temporary the 'new kind of *Burggeist*' (p. 100) had been. And whilst the statues were standing Gottschalk had always walked.[17]

By the time Schwartz wrote *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, there was already a growing tradition of poems that engaged seriously with the subway as a topic, as well as a body of writing addressing the ways in which modern modes of transportation might alter one's perceptions of one's environment. In 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', Benjamin refers to 'the subterranean shocks by which Baudelaire's poetry is shaken' ('On Some Motifs', p. 320). Although Baudelaire died decades before the opening of the Paris Métro, several poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal* anticipate the uneasy relation of the individual to the crowd, as well as the proximity to death occasioned by new technology, that the subway would accentuate and that is so prominent in much of Schwartz's writing. Towards the end of his essay, Benjamin cites Georg Simmel, saying

> Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of visual activity over aural activity. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in situations where they had to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another.
>
> (p. 341)

By such reasoning, the metropolitan alienation that obsesses Schwartz is intensified by the means by which one has to travel around the city. It also follows that such an experience would be heightened by a mode of transportation which also takes one underground and blinds one, for the duration of one's journey, to the presence of an exterior world. Looking without speaking means that it is a shock whenever one's gaze is met by another's. A stanza from Crane's 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' suggests just this kind of shock taking place, presumably, on a subway train. 'And yet', Crane imagines, employing Faustus's voice,

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[17] One of the few interpretations of 'The Statues' is a televised talk by Seventh Day Adventist Clifford Goldstein, available on Youtube. He argues that the story ends with 'a haunting yet important message', insisting that Gottschalk is doomed because he gives everything up for transitory beauty instead of seeking out a permanent good 'beyond himself'. This is an over-determined reading. Our sympathies are with Gottschalk throughout, who we are inclined to see as a martyr to an idealised vision of harmonious city-living that ought not to seem so improbable (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hZJ5o-3qNs; accessed 6 August 2010).

suppose some evening I forgot
The fare and transfer, yet got by that way
Without recall – lost yet poised in traffic.
Then I might find your eyes across an aisle,
Still flickering with those prefigurations –
Prodigal, yet uncontested now,
Half-riant before the jerky window frame.[18]

The precise meaning of these lines is oblique, but their attention to forgetfulness and getting by 'without recall' goes some way towards suggesting that the habitual nature of commuting dims one's consciousness of what one is actually doing and of one's surroundings. To 'find' someone's eyes across an aisle when one is oneself 'lost' causes a jolt: it is surprising, too, that these eyes are 'still flickering', not deadened, like those (we assume) of the forgetful, unrecalling speaker. Flickering, like 'half-riant', suggests only partial wakefulness, but it is enough to suggest that the scene is not wholly lifeless. Nonetheless, the stanza's tone is tentative. The window frame is 'jerky' – which is likely enough on an old subway train, but which also hints that the speaker's vista on the outside world might collapse at any moment and is not to be trusted.

Crane – whom Allen Tate described as 'the poet of the complex urban civilization of his age: precision, abstraction, power' – is the most prominent of Schwartz's precursors to write about the subway.[19] In a line such as 'The subway yawns the quickest promise home' (Crane, p. 67), from 'The Tunnel', Crane captures the thought process of a modern city inhabitant at the point of deciding, tiredly, to take the subway. By intimating that the entrance is like a mouth, Crane imbues the underground system with a hint of threat. To travel by subway also means one has to 'swim the hiving swarms' (p. 67) and thus to risk being stung, even though the conceit equally hints at bee-like efficiency.

Schwartz's language is rarely as opulent as Crane's, but as a poet of a familiar but 'complex urban civilization' he is an obvious successor. He follows Crane's example by granting the subway metaphysical significance. Schwartz's 'Father and Son' – despite being anything but an Imagist poem – also recalls the most famous of subway poems, Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'. The father in Schwartz's dialogue describes anonymous, expressionless people 'in the subway [...] among so many faces' (*SK*, p. 31), conjuring up the faces in Pound's poem:

[18] Crane, p. 20.
[19] Allen Tate, 'Foreword' to *White Buildings*, in Crane, pp. 794-797 (p. 794).

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet black bough.[20]

The father explains that by immersing themselves 'among masses' (*SK*, p. 31), thereby concealing their individual identities, these people try to evade their knowledge of death, of the passage of time, and of their own solitariness. In so doing, they seem hardly to exist as individuals at all, and so they collectively form an apparition. Pound's use of the word 'apparition' is likely to have had particular plangency for a poet who peoples his work with so many ghosts. In another poem, 'A Young Child and His Pregnant Mother', something as conventional as a child dropping a penny between a grate is seen by Schwartz as an initiation into a world of loss. In the same poem, the subway comes to stand for what Schwartz describes as the 'submarine' qualities of Nature, its 'Rumor underground', (p. 43) suggesting the unconscious and aspects of life – such as desire, betrayal, and exile – that the child does not yet know about.

The ghostliness of the subway is further suggested in 'O City, City', 'where death / Has his loud picture in the subway ride' (*SK*, p. 52). It is possible, as McDougall notes, that this refers to actual 'garish advertisements as manifestations of spiritual emptiness.'[21] It also evokes the noise of an approaching train, an instrument of death for anyone – such as Gottschalk – who happens to fall in front of it. The image also seems to be haunted by an intricate conceit of Crane's: 'The phonographs of hades in the brain / Are tunnels that re-wind themselves' (Crane, p. 68). Crane's lines are tricky to unpick, although one might note that, visually, the tube of an Edison-era phonograph *is* tunnel-like, that 'phonographs of hades' suggest hellish sounds – like the sound of a train emerging from a tunnel – and that the tunnels 'in the brain' imply that the subway has become some kind of interior landscape as well as an actual city location. It is even possible that the proximity of 'phonographs' to 'photographs' suggested the synaesthesia that Schwartz draws out in 'loud picture'. This is just one example of Schwartz being as attuned to the aural as to the visual, undermining Simmel's claim that the visual dominates in the modern metropolis. It has to be conceded, however, that the sounds Schwartz describes tend to be more like background noise than music. The coughing, hammering, and whispered malicious

[20] Pound, p. 53.
[21] McDougall, p. 45.

gossip that we hear throughout *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* are the aural equivalents of blank gazes.

Elsewhere, in 'Tired and Unhappy, You Think of Houses', a girl's singing of 'That song of Gluck where Orpheus pleads with Death' is followed by a symbolic descent into Hades. The poem's speaker exhorts its addressee to 'turn your head / Where the underground is charged' and join 'the subway rush' (*SK*, p. 38). Whilst the girl's elders watch her and appreciate her song, the dreamer in the subway is (as in 'Father and Son') surrounded by people who are 'anonymous / In the audience'. He is no doubt anonymous himself, and his song (the poem itself) is unlikely to be heard over the sound of his fate being 'rung'.

Marjorie Perloff is critical of this poem, dismissing it as a failed attempt by Schwartz to imitate one of Eliot's 'Preludes'. Schwartz's adjectives, she argues, are bland, and his images 'often border on cliché, as when the predictably "orange" firelight predictably "leaps" and when, in line 10, "the coals fade and glow, rose and ashen".'[22] 'In other cases', she goes on, 'word choice seems inept: can snow really be said to fall in "white pieces"?' As a consequence of the flat language, she maintains, 'the state of mind ostensibly described remains something of a blur'. Perloff queries why the poem was 'written in complete sentences', and is troubled in particular by the way in which 'the "you" used throughout distance[s] the subject from Delmore Schwartz himself' (Perloff, p. 120). She doubts whether this distances the subject from Schwartz at all.

Some of Perloff's gripes are justified, but she fails to appreciate that the banality of the imagined domestic idyll is precisely the poem's point. 'Shake yourself! And break this / Banal dream!' (*SK*, p. 38), the poet cries two-thirds of the way through. In the poem's title and opening line, the figure addressed doesn't even *dream* of houses, only thinks of them: it seems that he is too exhausted and benumbed at this point even to be able to dream. In this light the description of snow as falling in 'white pieces' is not as absurd as Perloff supposes. A flake, after all, *is* simply a small, delicate piece. The subject can think of snow, but cannot romanticise the snow of which he thinks. Schwartz admired Eliot's ability to find the latent poetic quality of prose words, and this is a good example in itself: to talk of 'pieces' of snow requires the reader to adjust the way in which he or she visualises snow, but it is not at all

[22] Marjorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2002), p. 160.

inaccurate. Certainly, it contributes to an effect of vagueness, the blurry state of mind to which Perloff objects, but it cannot be taken for granted that, as she assumes, Schwartz is seeking an objective correlative for a very precise state of mind. The poem seems much more concerned with a figure who does not know his own mind, and who has been desensitised by the oppressive, alienating urban life that surrounds him. Finally, why Perloff should object to the poem being written in complete sentences is more puzzling. Modernism may have dwelt upon the fragmentary, but no dictum ever stated that a poem – even a poem about being overwhelmed by the modern condition – *must* be full of lacunae and ellipses.

The point at which the speaker of 'Tired and Unhappy, You Think of Houses' tells himself to turn his head 'Where the underground is charged' (*SK*, p. 38) – and thus, symbolically, towards Hades – is the point at which he begins to confront the actuality of metropolitan living rather than inhabiting a dream world. This is the turning point of the poem, and it echoes the moment at which Orpheus turns his head on the path back from Hades, losing Eurydice for good and having to confront the reality of a loss he thought that he might be about to reverse. There is nothing consolatory about turning toward the underground. It is 'charged' and therefore dangerous – 'charged' because it runs on electrical energy, but also because people are charged money to use it, and also an agent of fate. Once again, there is an analogy in one of Benjamin's descriptions of Baudelaire. 'At dangerous intersections', Benjamin writes, imagining the individual moving through city traffic, 'nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into a crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy' ('On Some Motifs', p. 328). Turning toward the underground, then, does not amount, in any sense, to 'turning away for solace' (*SK*, p. 63). But there is no true consolation in the 'banal dream' either. To experience the actuality of metropolitan life, one must accept the subway as necessary and unalterable. Its influence over modern life, like the continuous presence of death, cannot be denied.

Actuality: screens and mirrors

'Sonnet: O City, City', the last of the lyric poems in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, is Schwartz's most succinct expression of New York alienation.[23] Its octave dwells upon the deathliness of the subway, the suppression of the songs of 'six million souls', the 'sliding auto's catastrophe', and the 'tyranny' of the 'numb and high' office buildings (*SK*, p. 52). 'To live between terms' in such an environment, Schwartz proposes, 'Is our anguished diminution until we die' (p. 52). The poem's title suggests an apostrophic address, and seems to romanticise the city through its repetition. The poem itself, however, underlines the impossibility of maintaining such an attitude in the modern metropolis.

The poem responds to Wordsworth's 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802'. But whilst that poem praises London's deep calm, Schwartz's presents death's 'loud picture' in the depths of the New York subway. Wordsworth's 'Dull would he be of soul' is answered by Schwartz's 'six million souls' whose songs have been suppressed and whose numbness is reflected in the tyrannical office buildings – themselves a jarring contrast to Wordsworth's houses that 'seem asleep'.[24] Above all, whilst Wordsworth's sonnet celebrates clarity of vision, Schwartz's laments the impossibility of attaining actuality – that is, of experiencing things (to borrow from Stevens) 'as they are' rather than at a remove.[25]

Schwartz's sestet yearns for a cure:

> 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,
> Where in the white bed all things are made.
>
> (*SK*, p. 52)

'The actual', Schwartz explains in a drafted piece that praises the 'overwhelming actuality' of Eliot's poetry, 'is like a moist handshake, damp with nervousness or the body's heat'. Whilst the gloved handshake of an ambassador may also be actual 'one has encountered less of the reality of the person.'[26] It is in this respect that Schwartz regards Eliot's poetry as more actual than that of his contemporaries: he brings the reader closer to the essence of what he depicts, stripping away masks or obstructions.

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[23] An earlier version of the poem is spoken by the character May in Schwartz's play, 'Venus in the Back Room' (*Shenandoah and Other Verse Plays*, pp. 121-163 (p. 137).
[24] Wordsworth, p. 285.
[25] Stevens, p. 135.
[26] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 357.

However, the acknowledgement that there is a 'lesser', more muted and distant, kind of actuality (the gloved handshake) is important too, since this is the kind that most of us experience most of the time. In the city, where there are few 'type-true people, born of and grown on the soil', gloved handshakes (metaphorically speaking) are more common than sweaty ones. The difficulty in getting close to the actual that this suggests is further evidence of the dissociation – or, simply, diminishment – of sensibility, as well as of the fact that those in the city mob are increasingly guarded about revealing who they really are.

Paradoxically, however, the kind of actuality Schwartz longs for in 'O City, City' is idealised rather than earthly. The example of the moist handshake suggests that physicality is an important aspect of actuality, but in Schwartz's sonnet actuality is refined into 'ease', 'warmth', 'light' and abstract – even Platonic – notions of 'the mind's knowing' and the self's fluent expression. Actuality, in this instance, is something closer to purity of experience, the kind of transcendental state in which physical body, mind, and soul cannot be distinguished from each other. The poem's anxiety is about whether such a longed-for state can ever be achieved. Schwartz's wish for 'utter showing' is primarily a wish for transparency and complete honesty. The final line envisions the absolute intimacy of love (and love-making) in 'the white bed' where 'all things are made'; but, again, this hardly regards the physical. Elsewhere, Schwartz despairs at the impossibility of attaining such love, and – even more fearfully – concedes that such an idealised image might, in fact, be false.

Attaining perfect actuality would also mean being able to articulate one's actual thoughts and feelings rather than simply an insipid approximation in speech or writing. It is the 'self', not just one's words, that should be 'affectionate and flowing', fluent and unconstrained. Schwartz's consciousness of the inadequacy of language, its inability to express what most needs to be said, is part of Schwartz's modernist heritage. The sestet of 'O City, City' is lyrical and full of yearning, but in resorting to abstract terms Schwartz betrays the difficulty of achieving the actuality he so desires. In general, Schwartz accepts in his writing that to try to present the actual directly is futile. However, through his use of frames (and frames within frames) and contrasting perspectives, he compulsively engages with the barriers to the perception of the actual that are ever-present in twentieth-century city life.

At times, Schwartz's work suggests, it may be desirable to ignore the actual and to live only in one's mind, like Bradley Brown in 'An Argument in 1934'. The

apparent dangers of such a course have already been seen. However, even if Bradley is incorrect in the degree to which he insists that all our experiences are subjective, as if we viewed the world through stained-glass windows, Schwartz is ever alert to the fact that none of us can perceive anything at all except through the tincture of our own minds and senses. A poem such as 'Out of the Watercolored Window, When You Look', which imagines a window through which everything is 'clear to see' (*SK*, p. 36), also raises questions about how a window might condition the way that we see. The first line, 'When from the watercolored window idly you look' allows for the possibility that the addressee might be looking up from a watercolour painting *of* a window. How else, after all, can an actual window be described as 'watercolored' – unless, that is, it is the colour of water? Even so, the suggestion of painterly artifice cannot be escaped. It is striking, too, that even in Schwartz's vision of achieved actuality in 'O City, City' he imagines a veil in the form of a 'green windowshade' – a screen through which the outside world cannot clearly be discerned, however brightly the sunlight falls upon it.

To some extent, Schwartz recognises that the difficulty of experiencing actuality is something actual in itself. In 'All Clowns are Masked and All Personae', for example, he notes that 'All men are masked, / And we are clowns who think to choose our faces' (*SK*, p. 65). To conceal or disguise oneself may in fact be one's most natural, or actual, state, and may reveal oneself most. However, in 'Prothalamion', Schwartz insists that at the point of marriage 'None may wear masks or enigmatic clothes'. 'In this sense,' he goes on, 'see my shocking nakedness' (p. 45). It may be acceptable to prepare a face to meet most people, but no such disguise can be put on before the person one loves the most.

The difficulty of perceiving the actual brings to mind Plato's myth of 'The Cave'. In Schwartz's best-known city poem, 'In the Naked Bed, in Plato's Cave', Plato's metaphorical cave becomes a bedroom. The insomniac speaker only experiences the city through the reflections he sees on the walls of his room and the sounds he hears from outside the window. When the speaker looks out at the 'winter sky's pure capital' – which, here and elsewhere, broadly represents intuitive rather than sensory knowledge, an ultimate reality that defies logical explanation – it is too much for him to bear: he turns 'back to bed with exhausted eyes' (*SK*, p. 25). However, in contrast to Plato's analogy, Schwartz suggests that the speaker's sense-

bound experience inside his bedroom is actual enough too. In fact, it is hard to make a clear distinction between what is actual and what is not.

First of all, the description of the bed as 'naked', stripped down to its basic elements, evokes Plato's philosophy of forms, as though this were somehow the manifestation of the original 'idea' of a bed. The description is also, like the use of 'nakedness' in 'Prothalamion', sexually suggestive. It is clear enough, though, that nothing is being 'made' in this bed – unlike in the bed in 'O City, City', whose whiteness also suggests an originary state (although there are evidently sheets on it), but, additionally, bears connotations of purity and perfection.

The sense of the poem's actuality is also enhanced, rather than diminished, by the realisation that the speaker is not just a passive observer. As in the prose descriptions considered earlier, his own emotions influence what he perceives: wind 'troubles' the curtains, and trucks 'strain' and 'grind' uphill because these reflect his own sense of burden. Images are projected onto his wall, as if it were a cinema screen or a screen for shadow theatre; but he also projects his own feelings onto *them* (unless, that is, we are to see him as such a representative of modern urban life that his own emotions and those of the city automatically match one another). The observer, in any case, appears to be complicit in the creation of what he sees. This is not to deny that the headlights, trucks, and freights outside the window may have an external reality independent of the observer. It *is* to suggest, however, that he is responsible, at the very least, for how he perceives (and apperceives) them, giving them meaning and thereby making it possible for them to be thought of as actual.

The poem's ending also emphasises the universality of the speaker's experience. His sleepless night is emblematic of the human condition, and all of the concrete details accrued earlier in the poem are transcended:

> So, so
> O son of man, the ignorant night, the travail
> Of early morning, the mystery of beginning
> Again and again,
> while History is unforgiven.

(*SK*, p. 25)

The mystery and ignorance may remain, but the experience of the early morning, of beginning again, is no less true, no less real for that, and its truth is not only subjective.

The speaker of 'In the Naked Bed, In Plato's Cave' witnesses the activity outside his window at two removes at the very least: through the window and as shadows upon the wall. The narrator of 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' experiences his parents' engagement scene at three removes. First, there is the temporal distance: the scene takes place, he thinks, in 1909, but he watches it years later, on the eve of his twenty-first birthday. Then there is the fact that he can only know the scene as a film, a visual representation, on a screen – and, what is more, the quality is poor, the shots 'full of dots and rays' and the light bad ('In Dreams', p. 1). Finally, it is a 'silent picture', which adds a further degree of distancing. And at the end of the story we discover that the entire episode was a dream, not real at all.

However, for the narrator, the actuality of the scene, despite all the obstructions to immediate perception, is intense. The old lady who tells him 'this is only a movie, young man, only a movie' ('In Dreams', p. 5) is not invested in the film, and can therefore remain at a distance. But for the narrator, bringing his own emotions to the film, it is more actual than it seems to be for other audience members. The reader cannot know for certain whether the couple on the screen really are the narrator's parents, but it hardly matters, since this is who he imagines them to be. What he sees is real enough, to him, for it to make sense for him to shout his warning of the marriage's failure at the screen. For Laurence Goldstein, the Freudian implication in this story that 'the unconscious or dream life is the *true* life, and the external world is seemingly a fictive shadow, an artful simulation derived from the iconography of the artistic tradition [...] inverts the Platonic parable with a vengeance.'[27] In the world of the story, actuality itself might be something subjective.

Another of Schwartz's cinema stories, 'The Heights of Joy' – collected for the first time, posthumously, in *Screeno* – similarly demands that the reader question conventional distinctions between what is actual and what is imagined. The financier, Hugo Bauer, on marrying the European actress Magda Gehrhardt, quickly realises that he finds 'his wife as an image in a film far more exciting than the actuality he possesse[s] so near him.'[28] He becomes so jealous of everybody else who is able to watch her nude scenes that he attempts to buy up all of the extant reels of her film, 'The Heights of Joy', with a view to destroying them. This becomes an international

[27] Laurence Goldstein, *The American Poet at the Movies: A Critical History* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1994), p. 99.
[28] 'The Heights of Joy' in *Screeno*, pp. 63-88 (p. 75).

quest, taking him to the United States where it is particularly difficult to obtain the reels. When Bauer has cause to suspect his wife of an actual affair he finds that he is much less jealous than he was imagining that others could share his idolised image of her. The story ends with their separation and with Bauer delightedly watching the scenes again that had initially thrilled him so much. Whilst the obvious response to the story is to see Bauer as delusional, the story appears to vindicate his obsession. As far as he is concerned, Gehrhardt is more real on the screen than she is in person. For many, the American Dream – which reaches its apotheosis in Hollywood – is similarly more real than the actuality of American life, even if objective experience contradicts this belief.

Although 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' and 'The Heights of Joy' insist upon the reality of imagined, but possibly inaccurate, reproductions of objective actuality, Schwartz never loses sight of a physical, external world. The film in 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' forces the narrator to confront his family history directly, but it also exposes the fact that he can do nothing whatsoever to change it. The screen is an ambivalent image. It both enables the viewer to see what he would otherwise not have been able to see and at the same time exposes the fact that whatever is projected onto it is just a representation without any depth or physical existence. Images of windows and mirrors throughout Schwartz's work have a similar effect: the reflections they project often seem close and distant, substantial and ethereal all at once. Such images are especially important for Schwartz because he believed that the looking-glass could be taken as a metaphor for all art. 'Only by looking in a mirror', he writes in his 1936 Harvard essay 'Poetry as Imitation',

> can I know what my face 'looks like.' [...] Just in this way [...] we need some mirror to see our disguised emotions and motives and to see our feelings from the outside 'objectively' [...] That mirror is Art [...] The medium of each art is the looking-glass which by imitation shows us what we could not see in any other way.[29]

The mirror itself is objective, although the way in which one interprets what one sees in it may be entirely subjective. The gaze, Schwartz postulates in 'By Circumstances Fed', converts 'every feature / Into its own and unknown nature' (*SK*, p. 42). That is, we often manage to see things as familiar and strange at the same time. This poem

[29] Cited in McDougall, p. 20.

ends with the poet in the drugstore (a favourite city location of Schwartz's) catching sight of his reflection:

> I suddenly saw, estranged there,
> Beyond all disappointment,
> My own face in the mirror.
>
> (p. 42)

It is a moment of recognition, and therefore of self-identification, coupled with its opposite, estrangement, a realisation that the reflected image is simply that, an image, something outside of oneself that can never be fully known. The artifice of the mirror brings the viewer a greater sense of self-awareness but also a greater sense of alienation because it shows how he is separated even from his own image.[30]

Evidently, there is scope here for a Lacanian analysis of the role that mirrors play in Schwartz's work. Of more immediate import, however, is Benjamin's recognition of the ways in which a proliferation of reflective surfaces contributes to what Karl Gutzkow, whom he quotes, describes as the 'dazzling illusion', 'artificial expansion', and 'fantastic magnitude' of the modern city (epitomised, for him, by Paris).[31] Benjamin further notices the unexpected mirrors that one continually chances upon in Paris: 'the asphalt of its roadways smooth as glass, and at the entrance to all bistros glass partitions'.[32] This increases narcissism. 'Women look at themselves more than elsewhere', Benjamin claims, but the man, too,

> gains his image more quickly here than elsewhere and also sees himself merged with this, his image. Even the eyes of passersby are veiled mirrors, and over that wide bed of the Seine, over Paris, the sky is spread out like the crystal mirror hanging over the drab beds in brothels.[33]

The ubiquity of such mirrors creates a sense not only that everything one does can be observed, but also increases one's self-consciousness since one can also see everything that one does oneself. This experience is similar to that undergone by the speaker of 'Coriolanus and His Mother', Shenandoah Fish in 'Shenandoah' and Hershey in *Genesis*, who all find themselves both actors and audience members in

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[30] R. W. E. Nelson draws attention to how many of Schwartz's poems and stories – amongst them 'The Sin of Hamlet', 'The Track Meet' and 'All of the Fruits Had Fallen' – similarly climax with moments of self-recognition occasioned by accidental glimpses of oneself in a mirror. At such moments, Nelson argues, the individual becomes aware 'that man's essential condition is one of guilt and anxiety' (Nelson, p. 16).

[31] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: Belknap Press of Harvard Univeristy Press, 1999), p. 537.

[32] *The Arcades Project*, p. 537.

[33] *The Arcades Project*, p. 538.

performances of their own lives. It becomes impossible not to reflect upon one's own actions, and this is a possible reason why Narcissus becomes such an important figure for Schwartz later, even though he stops writing about the physical aspects of the city.

'A vast abstraction': conceiving the city

Given the extraordinary difficulty of distinguishing between the actuality of city life and one's own subjective interpretations, how does one begin to conceive of such a vast entity as the entire city? Returning to the belly image at the end of 'The Commencement Day Address' provides a useful starting point. It suggests that the city as a whole is a body, and brings to mind the allegory of the belly used by Menenius to placate the citizens in *Coriolanus*. Schwartz refers to this, rather dismissively, in 'Coriolanus and his Mother' as

> The old Platonic metaphor in which
> The state [...]
> Becomes an animal or organism
> Wherein each organ must deny itself
> That the great corpse may be well-fed.
>
> (*SK*, p. 82)[34]

The metaphor may be old, and it may be manipulated by Menenius to justify the actions of the Roman senate, but it is also useful to Schwartz insofar as it illustrates how the city is greater than each of its constituent parts. Schwartz is ever-conscious of the impossibility of any one inhabitant perceiving the city in its entirety. We can only know it through our own limited experiences, which are often confined to specific localities, even though we may have a sense of it as something much greater. Amongst so many millions, the entire city can only ever be imagined, never experienced.

A drafted passage from *Genesis* stresses how New York City is, to a large extent, a mental construct made up of many different neighbourhoods. It is

> a sum compounded by the mind,
> A vast abstraction, like a sick monarch
> who
> Rules without reason like an untrue god
> [...]
> It is a sum of living neighbourhoods;
> Each neighbourhood defines itself this way:

[34] See also *Coriolanus* I.i.54-127.

Is felt as being from Downtown removed
A certain distance,
subway, car, and bus
Count the relationship and no-one walks,
For walking distance *is* the neighbourhood—[35]

The 'sick monarch' and 'untrue god' similes suggest that the authority the city wields is more emblematic than actual, something that it is granted by submissive residents rather than something that it deserves in its own right. Such a view of neighbourhoods being defined by their distance from Downtown affirms the principles of 'international consciousness': each region can only be understood in relation to all others and to the city's centre.

'The overwhelming presence of the great city', as an idea as much as an actuality, is most explicitly discussed in a passage from 'The World is a Wedding'. Jacob Cohen, 'the conscience and noble critic' of Rudyard Bell's circle of unfulfilled intellectuals, tries to understand his position, and that of his friends, within a city that seems to have no place for them.

> [H]e thought of his friends as citizens of the city and of the city itself in which they lived and were lost.
>
> 'In New York,' he said to himself, [...] 'there are at least six million human beings and during holidays there are more than that number. But, in a way, these numbers hardly exist because they cannot be perceived (we all have four or five friends, more or less). No human being can take in such aggregation: all that we know is that there is always more and more. This is the moreness of which we are aware, no matter what we look upon. This moreness is the true being of the great city, so that, in a way, this city hardly exists. It certainly does not exist as does our family, our friends and our neighbourhood.'
>
> ('The World is a Wedding', p. 50)

The crux of the matter is how the individual can sustain a sense of himself in a metropolis so populous. If the city in its totality hardly exists to each individual, then it follows that each individual hardly exists to the millions of other individuals who, along with him, make the city what it is. The consequence is the anonymity which is such anathema to Schwartz, as well as a lack of total knowledge that makes it impossible to achieve fully 'international consciousness'. Parts of the city, and some

[35] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 246. I have followed the lineation as it appears in the manuscript.

of its inhabitants, can be perceived; but not the entirety. As a result, the city, despite its indisputable concrete existence, may be reduced to little more than an abstraction.[36]

Jacob Cohen's contemplations also provide the germ of the important poem, 'America, America!', dated 1954 but not published until long after Schwartz's death. In it, the poet attempts to ascertain exactly what kind of writer he is, and for whom he writes. The apparent confidence of the many assertions is misleading: they are reformulated again and again, betraying an element of uncertainty. The first, in which Schwartz announces that he is

> a poet of the Hudson River and the heights above it,
> the lights, the stars, and the bridges
>
> (*LL*, p. 4)

suggests that he may have conceived of himself specifically as a New York poet rather than as one who sings the whole of the United States. Often, one has the impression that New York City *is* America for Schwartz: it is certainly, as the point of arrival for the Eastern European immigrants who 'transformed the city' ('America! America!', p. 50), its most cosmopolitan city. It was also, for Schwartz – as it remains today – America's most representative city, its culture, architecture, ethnic diversity and financial influence manifesting popular conceptions of the American Dream to the rest of the nation and to the world at large.

As in the passage discussed earlier from 'An Argument in 1934', the 'heights' above the Hudson River can be supposed, quite literally, to be skyscrapers, but there is a metaphorical sense too: they are the heights of ambition that such buildings represent, and perhaps also the poetic heights towards which Schwartz himself aspires. 'Lights', 'stars' and 'bridges' similarly carry double meanings, appropriately so in a poem that seems continually to be looking in different directions – towards

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[36] The idea that the city does not exist in any unified sense beyond the imagination is one that would be increasingly taken up by thinkers in the decades that followed. Marshall McLuhan offers one of the most radical statements in his series of manifestos concerning new media, *Counterblast* (1954). He announces that

> **THE CITY** no longer exists, except as a cultural ghost for tourists. Any highway eatery with its TV set, newspaper, and magazine is as cosmopolitan as New York or Paris.
>
> The METROPOLIS today is a classroom; the ads are its teachers. The classroom is an obsolete detention home, a feudal dungeon.
>
> The metropolis is OBSOLETE.

(*Essential McLuhan*, ed. by Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone [Routledge: London, 1995], p. 210).

Europe and the past on the one hand, and towards America and the future on the other; towards abstract notions of selfhood (the heart and the mind), but also towards the physical reality of the modern metropolis. These 'lights' are more than just New York's renowned city lights; in later poems especially, light becomes representative for Schwartz of hope and mental lucidity, the kind of light that can only be attained by rising above, or transcending, the city's actual bustle. More mundanely, they also contain the 'faintly yellow' domestic light seen through windows at the end of the poem.

Meanwhile, Broadway movie stars shine as brightly as the stars in the sky, and whilst actual bridges – most notably the Brooklyn Bridge – join separate districts of the city, metaphorical bridges also unite peoples separated from each other by culture and race. Elsewhere, Schwartz writes about how 'The bridges laid across the river seem / Fire escapes!'[37] reminding the reader that bridges – like the 'grand domed' overland train stations where 'the self / Made for departure a new idiom' (*G*, p. 19) – also provide a route out of the city. If we are to concur with Jacob Cohen that each individual can only really take in his own neighbourhood, and with Schwartz's suggestion that urban regions, and blocks, are primarily defined by their distance from Downtown, then the importance of bridges and railway or subway lines, which connect the disparate areas, becomes all the more apparent. They are the concrete links that help to make the city something whole rather than an accretion of abstractly defined – and separate – regions. However, the very necessity of bridges, it could be argued, also serves to accentuate such separateness.

In announcing that he is a poet of the Hudson River, Schwartz claims to represent all of these facets of city life and, effectively, to be a poet of the American Dream. There is an escalation in the next assertion as he reaches for even grander heights.

> I am also by self-appointment the laureate of the Atlantic
> — of the peoples' hearts, crossing it
> to new America
>
> (*LL*, p. 4)

Schwartz moves from 'a' to 'the'; from one, presumably amongst many, to the only one. The Hudson River is a considerable expanse of water; the Atlantic Ocean, into which it flows, is unimaginably vaster. They matter to Schwartz less for what they are

[37] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 246.

in themselves than for what they represent. Unlike Lowell, say, who is genuinely in awe of the physical power of the Atlantic Ocean (even if it also has for him a symbolic significance), Schwartz is much more concerned with the human drama that ensues after the Ocean has been crossed. The American and European shores of the Atlantic are as distant culturally as they are physically: there may be bridges across the Hudson River, but there are none capable of spanning the Atlantic. It is the attempt to reconcile such disparate cultures that really captivates Schwartz, and he recognises that the transactions across the water may go both ways.

Schwartz's self-appointment as 'laureate of the Atlantic' aligns him with Whitman, who had described America as a 'teeming nation of nations.'[38] It also implies a belief that the immigrant population of his own time had not been adequately represented in poetry. Novelists and even film directors might have addressed twentieth-century immigrant experience – one thinks of Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, for example – but poets, at least in Schwartz's view, had not. And so Schwartz, assuming the identity of a first-generation immigrant, writes in 'America, America!' of being 'burdened with the truck and chimera, hope' ('truck' here meaning something akin to 'trade' or 'traffic'). 'Hope' is a burden because the immigrant always carries it with him but cannot afford for it to be disappointed – which, being a 'chimera', Schwartz suggests it almost certainly will be. He writes of 'the sweating sick-excited passage / in steerage', bringing to mind not just the crossing, the passage of the sea and a sense of being sick with excitement and anticipation, but also the cramped conditions and literal sea-sickness aboard. Like a bridge, a passage is a space primarily for transit, one that connects two other locations but where one would be unlikely to stop for very long. The poet, like the immigrants and like the passage itself, is 'strange and estranged', and one thinks of the French 'étranger', an association which illustrates just how hard it is for these new but still foreign American citizens to leave European influence behind them.

However, the city experience on arrival is as important to the laureate of the Atlantic as the crossing itself, if not more so, and Schwartz purports to be the poet of immigrant experience in the city to the greatest extent possible, from the kindergarten to the cemetery, and even of the 'secret city in the heart and mind' – a phrase that makes clear just how much the city is something internal and personal as much as it is

[38] Whitman, 'Preface 1855 – *Leaves of Grass*, First Edition' in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. by Michael Moon (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), pp. 616-636 (p. 616).

external and communal. Schwartz's subsequent claim that his poem is 'the song of the natural city self in the 20th century' is as Whitman-esque in tone as he gets, and it implies that, despite the alienation individuals so often experience in it, the city is no less natural – innate, consonant with the human condition – than the countryside, the traditional domain of nature. [39]

The poem acknowledges, but does not dwell upon, the alienation for the individual amongst the vast crowds, stating that 'It is true but only partly true that a city is a "tyranny of numbers".' In this respect, the poem's vision is more positive than that expressed in many of the earlier poems, and to view the city only as oppressive is inaccurate. Schwartz's attention to 'the city self' and 'the urban metropolitan and metaphysical self' reaffirms his conviction that the city is not simply a place but also a mental state. The poem's ending is transcendental in the manner of Emerson's contemplations of nature: in contemplating the lighted windows which, impressionistically, are reduced to squares and checks, and in thinking about the city's many hidden lives, one's sense of self diminishes, lost in a collective 'city consciousness / Which sees and says: more: more and more: always more'. Such a transcendental state is only possible, however, as a consequence of intense contemplation of the actual, substantial city. And, in that recurring echo – 'more: more and more: always more' – there can be heard the second syllable of Schwartz's own name, Delmore, a fact which evokes the presence of the individual, and his resistance to becoming completely anonymous, even when subsumed by something greater than himself.

Rome

For the most part, Schwartz's writing about the city specifically concerns New York. In 'Coriolanus and His Mother', however, the main location is Rome, and an analogy between the classical city and the modern one is often invited. However, writing about Rome grants Schwartz a distance that enables him to consider the city, and the kind of influence that it might have upon the individual, more dispassionately than when he writes about his own city.

[39] As a poet of the Hudson River, Schwartz noticeably emphasises the metropolis's most distinct *natural* feature. (Central Park is perhaps too *cultivated* and too specifically a Manhattan locale).

Much of the debate between the ghosts of Freud and Marx in 'Coriolanus and His Mother' concerns whether Coriolanus is more tied to his actual mother, Volumnia, or his symbolic mother, Rome. Volumnia herself claims at one point to *be* the city (and more): she 'says she is / The senators, the city, his [Coriolanus's] son [and] his wife': the narrator explains that 'she unites / All in one picture' (*SK*, p. 113). Marx later corroborates this view, claiming that 'one cannot / Discriminate Volumnia and Rome / in any sentence' (p. 138). In the prose passage 'Choose', which summarises Coriolanus's departure from Rome, the hero himself is unable to discern between his mother and his city. 'You cannot depart from me', she (whichever one she is) says, 'You are nothing apart from me, you do not exist without me. [...] I am your mother or Rome. I am Volumnia or Rome' (p. 124). The city and the individual merge into one another, and this is further affirmation of Schwartz's conviction that no individual can be understood except in the contexts of their family, their history, and their wider society. The 'or' is misleading since Coriolanus is grappling with both personal and more general societal anxieties: it is not a question of choosing between them but of choosing to accept or try to evade both. He belongs to both mothers, actual and symbolic, however distinct they may seem to be. For Schwartz's Freud, societal forces – such as trade and capitalism – have less to do with an individual's development than such personal matters as attachment to one's parent, but even he must accept that the two cannot be wholly dissociated.

When Coriolanus is exiled from the city – 'a beast, / A many-headed beast that butts him hence' (*SK*, p. 122) – he is rejected by his mother also. When he joins forces with the Volscians against Rome, he is also attacking Volumnia. When he finally succumbs to her pleading, and surrenders, it is partly because she has accused him of being 'no Roman' and therefore 'no son' (*SK*, p. 139). In the end, he sacrifices himself for the sake of his mother and his native city. He cannot exist without them. His penultimate words are 'I, I, I, / Alone I did it' (*SK*, p. 141), but even his vaunting individuality is unsustainable when severed from its attachments, and his repetition can be taken to suggest stuttering as much as triumphalism.

Coriolanus's exile from city and mother is the context within which the prose passage, 'There Was a City', is to be read. This immediately follows Caius Martius's departure from Rome at the end of Act 3, and, typically, resists straightforward interpretation. The title imbues the passage with a mythic quality, and it is hard not to detect an allusion to John Winthrop's reference to the first colonists as inhabiting 'a

city upon a hill'.[40] As in Duspenser's discussion of the discovery of America, various possibilities are given for the origins of this city. All are more mundane than Winthrop's vision of exceptional destiny, and all that anyone can agree is 'that the decision which brought the first one to this place to begin the city was his own desire' (*SK*, p. 117) – a conclusion similar to Duspenser's in his commencement day address.

The conflicting origin stories suggest that this is a city that is unsure of its traditions, whose citizens lack a universal world picture. They embrace industry – shipbuilding – over culture, and the nameless boy who judges the world around him is as isolated from his society as the early twentieth-century poet in New York. He does not, however, seem to suffer so acutely. Eventually, he meets an old sailor who argues 'that the people in the city were detained in a prison, the prison of the way in which each made his living' (*SK*, p. 119). He goes on to insist that

> conscious life was preoccupied and not free; the attitudes toward Nature were determined by the operation of instruments in the fields and on the water; the relationship between a man and his brother was determined by each one's function and no man's heart.
>
> (p. 119)

The old sailor's advice is for the boy to go to sea in order to 'seek among the rocking scenes of indeterminacy a certain freedom of feeling, also freedom from the ways of the city' (p. 119). The boy does this, although he recognises that even this action is influenced by the city, and that it may be little more than an 'evasion' or 'escape'. At the point of departure, he is in love (we are not told with what or whom), and this, for Deutsch, is the crucial difference between the boy and Coriolanus, who leaves Rome full of hate.[41] The boy subsequently discovers the means to transform the city's commerce and, therefore, 'its way of life'. However, his 'new center of feeling, though derived from the city, [makes] it necessary for him to murder the captain of the ship in order that he might proceed in the ways of his own origination' (p. 120). He has to destroy in order to create, in order to fulfil his new vision.

Like 'The Statues', the episode reads as an allegory or parable, but it is without moral, and its final implications are ambiguous. It does suggest, however, that the true artist must find a way to dissociate himself from the mentality he inherits if culture is to progress. The boy, as a pupil, observes the city assiduously, and learns its

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[40] John Winthrop, 'A Model of Christian Charity' in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 7th edn., ed. by Nina Baym et al (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), pp. 147-158 (p. 158).
[41] Deutsch, p. 38.

customs before rejecting them. His 'new center of feeling', though completely different, is still derived from his native city. However, unlike Coriolanus, he is able to detach himself from the ties of family and society, and thus he is able to effect a change, albeit a brutal one. Coriolanus, meanwhile, impelled by both attraction and revulsion towards city and mother, finds himself unable, after all, to destroy his old world and create a new one.

In 'The Mind Is an Ancient and Famous Capital' – the first of three extracts taken from the unfinished 'The Studies of Narcissus' and included in *Summer Knowledge* – Schwartz takes the ancient city as a metaphor for the mind. The passage begins

> 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.
>
> (*SK*, p. 226)

Schwartz presents a romantic picture of London and Rome here, cities he never visited, in a way that he rarely romanticises New York (although there are certainly passages in *Genesis* that drip with nostalgia, notably for 'the great street games' played in Brooklyn and for Hershey's first experience of watching the New York Giants compete at 'the great stadium, under the shadow of Coogan's Bluff' [*G*, p. 178]). The mind Schwartz depicts in 'The Mind Is an Ancient and Famous Capital' is a troubled one, grand but ruined, chockfull of vague thoughts and memories that are hard to discern clearly behind the other accumulated impressions that cloud one's perception. This mind is perhaps a communal one, something akin to Yeats's 'spiritus mundi', and, like ancient cities, carries within it relics not just of one's personal past but also of the pasts of every member of every previous generation. Such relics may have fallen into disrepair, and no one – consciously – remembers them; but they still affect the way in which the mind, or city, develops in the present. Schwartz brings together in this conceit all the connotations of the 'historical sense' and of 'international consciousness', a conviction that every moment is determined by everything that has ever happened anywhere in the world.

He goes on to posit how

> 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.
>
> (*SK*, p. 226)

Though 'fallen, broken or soiled', the grandeur inherent in this catalogue of different kinds of architecture cannot be overlooked. In fact, this passage raises the question of why ruins often appear grander than unblemished modern buildings. For Benjamin, 'to dwell means to leave traces': even though ancient Rome may only now exist through its ruins and through a mental impression of its former glory, evidence of its onetime grandeur will never be wholly lost.[42] Similarly, impressions that accumulate in the mind cannot be dispensed with once they have been created, even if it is impossible to reproduce them exactly as they were at the time that they were formed.

Benjamin further argues that

> Every epoch not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it [...] by cunning. With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.[43]

This is to suggest both the awakening of the present epoch to the fact that it has been dreaming and the awakening – that is, the bringing into being – of the subsequent epoch. The most important point is that each generation's achievements live on in each subsequent generation, even if they do so in a transformed or diminished state. In this respect, Benjamin's vision is more optimistic than Spengler's because it is progressive rather than simply cyclical. Rome is more than just an analogue for New York in Schwartz's writing because the ancient city actually continues to exist in the modern one and in the collective consciousness.

In a 1940 letter to Robert Hivnor, Schwartz suggests that the city – though not the 'world-city' – is the prime location for socially-engaged culture: 'It's the city-state, I think, the Athens and Florence, which generates great art with great social power; and probably that's because the national state tends to spread out its energy, while the city-state contracts and unifies it' (*Letters*, p. 103). The last such city-state, he suggests, was the Dublin of Yeats and Joyce – not independent and self-governed in the way that ancient Athens and Renaissance Florence were, but with its own cultural identity. Under this interpretation, there is also a case to be made for New

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[42] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1935)' in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 3-13 (p. 9).
[43] 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', p. 13.

York in the late '30s, '40s, and '50s as a kind of cultured city-state – and it was a city in which Schwartz, as an editor of *The Partisan Review* and an esteemed literary figure was himself culturally influential.

'unless Love build its city': the difficulty of making love

If the city generates great art and great social power, it is also, according to one of the *Genesis* ghosts, 'the only place for love'. He goes on:

> The transatlantic city of my birth
> Taught me this (never, however, enough):
> There at the stadium with the populace
> Roared my emotion which arose because
> Community rang and surrounded me! ...
>
> (*G*, p. 57)

'Love' here is linked to community-feeling, devotion to a common cause (in this case, baseball). It is an unusually celebratory moment for Schwartz, even given the parenthetical intimation that such moments of belonging are rare. Although, in a late poem, Schwartz praises love as 'the fullness of being' (*SK*, p. 154), he tends to be more preoccupied with how difficult such love is to achieve, and how it can often seem 'dangerous and complex.' [44] In particular, as a student of Freud, he is acutely conscious of sexual difficulty, to the extent that Atlas can quip, with some justification, that *Genesis* sometimes 'resembles a clinical case study more than a poem' (Atlas, p. 234). John Berryman, conversely, once told Schwartz that he was 'the greatest writer on sex of modern times' – to which Schwartz replied, 'It's the strength of non-participation.'[45] Schwartz also noted some time later, in 1953, that he knew 'how to be naïve about sex' – an asset for a writer, in his view, not a failing.[46] Berryman's claim is initially surprising, since Schwartz is far from being an erotic writer, and he is often euphemistic to the point of absurdity about the sexual act itself. However, Schwartz is insightful in suggesting that the difficulties inherent in forming reciprocal and intimate relationships might be a consequence, not only of early childhood traumas and the 'family romance', but also of societal attitudes – 'the whole character of modern life' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 125). His

[44] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 5, Folder 307, p. 1.
[45] Cited in John Haffenden, 'Review: Delmore Schwartz: The American Auden', *Journal of American Studies*, 14.1 (April, 1980), pp. 149-156 (p. 150).
[46] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 14, Folder 651.

writing on love and sex contributes directly to his writing about alienation and the city.

'Difficulty in love', Schwartz argues, 'is inseparable from the deracination and the alienation from which the international man suffers' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 126). This, he insists, is continually apparent in Eliot's poetry. When the community of family and village dissipates, love 'becomes purely personal':

> It is isolated from the past and the future, and since it is isolated from all other relationships, since it is no longer celebrated, evaluated, and given a status by the community, love does become merely copulation.
>
> (p. 126)

Such detachment from history (and from his *own* history) is the reason, Schwartz insists, why the protagonist of 'Gerontion' is unable to make love. He lives in a '*rented* house; which is to say, not the house where his forbears lived' (p. 126, Schwartz's emphasis). This, for Schwartz, is one of the most significant phrases in all of Eliot's work because it shows how nomadic modern man has become, separated from his past and from his heritage. 'International consciousness' cannot remedy this, since it only makes one more aware of how meaningless one's modern relationships have become; but not to be internationally conscious would be to remain ignorant of why relationships ought to have meaning in the first place.

Eliot's characters, Schwartz observes, 'when they make love either suffer from what the psychoanalysts have called "psychic impotence", or they make love so inadequately as to leave the lady hysterical or indifferent when the episode is over' ('T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', p. 125). This is the distinction between 'impotent and sensitive' types, like Prufrock, and characters such as Sweeney, who are 'potent and insensitive' (p. 125). One cares too much, the other cares too little, and all are unfulfilled. This needs to be borne in mind when considering the way in which Schwartz glosses the line 'Teach us to care and not to care' from 'Ash Wednesday' (a poem in which love is more *agape* than *eros*):

> Here the poet perceives and expresses with perfect economy the necessity of both love and indifference. For it is possible to love too much as it is possible to love too little; it is possible to care for the wrong thing and be indifferent to the right thing.[47]

[47] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 360.

The poem's main subject, Schwartz argues, is the mastery of human emotions, and the speaker's prayer is

> that he be capable of love and free of love, that he be free of the desire for change, and able, even amid the rocks of this life, to find his peace in God's will, and that he not be separated from all other beings, the worst form of all evil and pain.[48]

But Schwartz's own writing dwells upon how hard such lessons are to learn, and how rarely such prayers are answered.

It is as a consequence of caring too much that love is so often 'inexhaustible and full of fear' (*SK*, p. 48), as Schwartz announces in 'Prothalamion'. The fearfulness of love – and of sex in particular – is suggested in many of the poems from *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*. 'What Is To Be Given', for example, exemplifies Schwartz's concern throughout the book with how to reconcile reverential love and brute desire. 'What is to be given, / is spirit, yet animal' (p. 53), of the soul but also of the body (though 'spirit' here may also bear some of its sixteenth-century associations with semen). The speaker of this poem must be 'careful / Not to give too much'. He must hold back his sexual desire so as not to scare 'one so shy and fearful' (p. 53). He knows that 'it is possible to love too much', but there is also a danger here that, by withdrawing, he could end up loving too little. At some point, 'what is to be given' must be accepted if the relationship is to be fulfilled.

In 'At This Moment of Time', the poet is compelled by those who 'fear / Love offered suddenly' (*SK*, p. 26), whilst 'O Love, Sweet Animal' also acknowledges a woman's fear of intimacy years after being 'Terrified by a look / Which was not meant for her' (p. 28). In the first line, the title is modulated into 'O Love, *dark* animal' (my emphasis), underlining the connection between this animal and the 'The Heavy Bear Who Goes With Me' – an animal that is only 'sweet' insofar as he is honey-smeared and loves candy. The exhortation to 'Brush your heavy fur / Against her' raises a spectre of sexual aggression, and the further exhortation

> Tell her how you know
> Nothing can be taken
> Which has not been given
>
> (p. 28)

[48] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 360.

uneasily suggests that both parties must be complicit in any act of love if it is genuinely to be regarded as such. Or, as Schwartz maintains elsewhere, 'genuine love requires requited love' ('Ezra Pound and History', p. 117).

For the woman in 'O Love, Sweet Animal', love is far from 'the fullness of being': it is terrifying. In a prose extract titled 'The Confession', which, unusually for Schwartz, is written from a woman's perspective, the speaker is similarly frightened by sex. 'I like to eat', she says, 'but I don't like to make love [...] when I make love, I am afraid.'[49] That this is cast as a confession suggests the woman's apprehension that this must appear unnatural or wrong. The implication is that eating is preferable because even though it, too, may be a sensual experience, it is one without risk that does not require engaging with another person. In another fragment, a different woman, who is not afraid of making love, nonetheless admits that it was years before she ever actually enjoyed it rather than simply doing it 'for the hell of it'. 'I came', she exclaims, recalling the revelatory moment, 'really came, really really came [...] / I jazzed for three years before I knew the real thing'.[50]

This surprising piece is one of many that attests to Schwartz's perpetual hope that love and sex might one day live up to their hallowed ideals. We hardly need to be aware of Schwartz's own frustrated relationships to detect the urgency in his frequent acceptances that love in the modern world is rarely what it could be. 'The loveliest woman sweats, the animal stains the ideal' (*SK*, p. 31), the father warns in 'Father and Son'. It is a sentiment with a long literary heritage (its best known articulation is probably Swift's 'Celia, Celia, Celia shits'), but because Schwartz refuses to give up the ideal – just as immigrants refuse to give up their images of the American Dream – the disparity between reality and imagined perfection seems all the more disappointing.[51] Hershey's first experience of sex, with a Harlem prostitute, is a case in point. The experience is recounted in the flattest of 'morbidly pedestrian' tones:

> [She] took his penis and put it into her vagina and began to move her torso, groaning.
>
> Hershey was paralyzed. He felt as if he were regarding the whole scene from the outside. He tried to force himself by saying to himself,
>
> Here I am at last, I am actually having a woman, and touching her private parts! But he felt nothing.[52]

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[49] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 5, Folder 274.
[50] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 15, Folder 652.
[51] *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 530.
[52] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 9, Folder 503.

And yet, Schwartz's poetry is full of insistences that love (which, for Schwartz, includes, but should also be something more than, sex) 'is the tact of every good, / The only warmth, the only peace' (*SK*, p. 54), and that 'If we could love one another, it would be well' (p. 50). This last line is spoken by Faust in old age. He has 'Fucked Venus'and knows well that physical pleasures are short-lived.[53] It is not that love itself is inadequate: it is rather that we are incapable of overcoming our environments, and our self-interest, in order to attain it. As Schwartz laments in another poem, 'What an unheard of thing it is, in fine, / To love one another and equally be loved!' (*SK*, p. 69).

Marriage, the apparent fulfilment of love, tends to be portrayed especially bleakly by Schwartz. The family unit having already collapsed, it amounts to little more than two people bringing their alienation together. 'Prothalamion', with its language of betrayal, bondage, and self wrongs, along with its speaker's memory of his parents' failed marriage, is as hesitant a wedding-song as could be imagined. In its address to the beloved as 'sister', it is also coy about the nature of the relationship to be embarked upon. For the *Genesis* ghosts, marriage

> bares the body and betrays the mind,
> It soils the senses and it cripples hope
> Or brings banality to daily life!
>
> (*G*, p. 22)

This may be one ghost's embittered personal view, but it is also an appropriate description of Jack and Eva Green's marriage. When Eva screams on hearing of the death of her ex-husband she is, conspicuously, screaming not for lost love but for lost money. She

> felt passionate frustration to think that if she had not given Jack Green a divorce two years before,
> She would have been his widow, she would have received what Dinah [his new wife] was receiving, the same riches as Hershey and Roger!
> Thus it was, thus the Capitalismus divinity moved them![54]

She has become so infected by corporate mentality that she cannot think of anything except in terms of money, even (or especially) in a context that should be about love.

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[53] *IDBR* (1938), p. 129. In *Summer Knowledge*, this is weakly revised to 'Plucked'. Atlas notes how squeamish Schwartz was about sex and four-letter words (Atlas, pp. 62, 89).

[54] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 9, Folder 503, p. 458. As it turns out, due to malpractice on the part of Jack Green's lawyer, Hershey and Roger do not end up with much either.

Perhaps starkest of all, because most transparently expressed, is the assessment of Bertholde Cannon, the central character of Schwartz's unfinished novel, *A Child's Universal History*. Cannon is married, but his wife (who later leaves him) does not want to have a child. This leads him to reflect upon

> the marriages he knew of the boys and girls of his generation, many of whom now had children. Some had married because they were in the toils of a relationship that they had not understood they were slipping into, at least not at the start; and some had married because they wished to get work done, supposing that the stability of the married state would give them more time and energy for what they really wanted to accomplish in this life; and some had married in flight from the tyranny of the family life which had given them being; and some because they were in love, but these were very few in number and often enough the love turned into hatred or boredom, teased by the possibility of promiscuity. Yet marriage was a need and parenthood was a need, for otherwise some part of one's being lay idle and decayed like an unused muscle.[55]

Cannon tries to compensate for his lack of a child by spending time with his friends' children, particularly a boy named Jeremy Rose.[56] The stories he tells Jeremy, which are grounded in his own experience, make up the 'Universal History' of the novel's title. 'All stories', he tells Jeremy and his sister, 'are stories of love.'[57]

When Schwartz sent a manuscript of *A Child's Universal History* to *Atlantic Monthly* they responded by telling him 'We have been frankly baffled by the variety and quality of your work', adding that the novel 'has some very vivid and entertaining things in it, but it still seems to us in too amorphous and discontinuous a form to come to a sensible publishing judgment.'[58] This is a reasonable criticism, but it does not amount to an outright dismissal. The work *is* baffling, partly because of the faux naïf tone employed throughout, partly because, stylistically, it is so unlike Schwartz's previous writing or anything that his contemporaries were producing, and partly because of its curiously self-referential moments. The distance between Schwartz and his character is minimal here (although if it is to be regarded as autobiographical memoir rather than novel, it is highly selective and deliberately crafted), and, at one point, Cannon reads to the children 'about a boy named Hershey Green, for Hershey's childhood had been a significant one so far as any question of the education of

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[55] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 267.
[56] Jeremy is based upon Jeremy Dickson, the son of Schwartz's friends Wallace and Rose Dickson. He also appears, as Jeremiah Dickson, in 'The True-Blue American'.
[57] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 267.
[58] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, April 16th, 1959.

children was concerned.'[59] Cannon is struck by the fact that Hershey's story interests children so much even though it had been written for adults. In another chapter, Cannon reflects on how his cat, Oranges, 'had become his sister, his wife and his daughter.' He goes on to exclaim to himself 'People only have children because they can't have cats', reversing the expected surrogate relationship, but exposing the fact that it is easier for him to invest in a relationship with a cat and a young child than with another adult.[60]

For Schwartz, sex almost always implies reproduction. 'Choose love', he writes in 'All Clowns Are Masked and All *Personae*', 'for love is full of children' (*SK*, p. 65). Sex and the city tend to be inextricably linked for Schwartz for the simple reason that reproduction is the only means of creating a population and consequently a society. On numerous occasions, the *Genesis* ghosts refer euphemistically to sexual intercourse by making reference to the growth of populations, at one point, for example, describing it as 'The fête where privacies / Mix in the act which makes societies' (*G*, p. 88). This is coy, certainly, but it also neatly illustrates how the individual act may have very broad social implications. Elsewhere, discussing Jack Green's sensuality, one ghost remarks how he has 'a heavy gold watch, strangely heavy / (As is the soft sack where the city starts)' (p. 40). On one hand an unnecessarily oblique reference to the scrotum (or, possibly, the womb), this also alludes to Schwartz's ever-present subject, destiny. 'Heavy', a favourite word of Schwartz's, tends to be charged with a sense of fate as well as of physical burden, and, near the beginning of *Genesis*, Schwartz makes much of the weight of one body upon another during sex. When Noah Green flees, his wife, Hannah, realises that 'when she had borne his full weight upon her, in the laborious ecstasy which begins all things, even then he had borne in himself the idea of flight' (p. 12): in order to be born, one must first have been borne.

Through reproduction, then, 'Love build[s] its city', as Schwartz puts it in 'In the Slight Ripple, The Mind Perceives the Heart', creating a society to defy the 'desolation' of night (*SK*, p. 39). However, the *Genesis* ghosts, ever alert to 'what unhappiness grows from the groin' (*G*, p. 43), are less inclined to see reproduction as the antidote to alienation but rather as its cause. Birth, which necessarily entails physical separation from one's mother, is the beginning of isolation. To Freud's ghost

[59] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 267.
[60] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 263.

in 'Coriolanus and His Mother', Coriolanus's 'aloneness in the womb began, / Always unhappy apart from that tight cache' (*SK*, p. 86). Parents must bear the responsibility, the *Genesis* ghosts imply, of bringing children into an alienating world and burdening them with their heritage. One ghost ruminates on how

> the act of love compels
> True difficult heavy conclusions which
> Must be coerced or trapped or covered up,
> Stopped by the girl's hygiene for pleasure's sake,
> Or by the doctor's knife expressed. Or else,
> Love has a fecund will and two makes three,
> Love bears, augments and joins the polity,
> The dark act is confessed in a pair of twins,
> The heavy belly is where all begins!
>
> (*G*, p. 81)

He presents contrasting visions of reproduction stopped by contraception, douching or abortion, and of abundant propagation. The repetition of 'heavy' again stresses how fateful he regards each sexual encounter to be.

The possibility of preventing birth is one that Schwartz returns to often. One of the *Genesis* ghosts laments his 'self's lack of necessity', knowing that his birth was 'an accident' made by his parents' 'hurried joy':

> Father, once too impatient, would not wait
> While Mother turned aside and fixed the guard
> Against Love's true conclusion.
>
> (*G*, p. 149)

Yet, if birth is Love's 'true' conclusion, one has to ask how far this conception can really be regarded as a mistake. Schwartz never commits himself to a particular stance on birth control, but it obsesses many of his characters because it seems to be a means by which parents can, at least partly, direct fate and seek love without the risk of being burdened by children (despite the fact that Schwartz regularly presents the birth of children as a positive good). A draft of a poem called 'Love The Dark Victor Whom No One Evades' claims

> Now love and sensuality at last may be
> Cut from each other's self as by a knife,
>
> Now children may be chosen beings who
> Grow from the certainty of marriages.[61]

[61] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 240.

This poem is behind Edmund Kish's encomium to contraception in 'The World is A Wedding' (which caused Schwartz's book to be banned in Ireland in 1950).[62] Kish claims that contraceptives have 'purified' love, insisting that 'Love has been made to be just love and nothing else but love' ('The World Is a Wedding', p. 62). His compatriots, however, underwhelmed by his 'discovery', point out that contraception also facilitates adultery and promiscuity, as well as the fact that 'you still have to find someone to love who loves you' (p. 63). The episode is trenchantly satirical: a group of intellectuals debate love, and brag of their individual conquests, but none is remotely sure of what love really is. All the same, the ideal of love being purified and nothing but itself is not one that Schwartz is prepared to give up entirely, even if contraception is not, after all, the means of achieving this.

Another unfinished draft of a long novel, *An American Comedy* (in other drafts titled *An American Dream*) begins with some twenty pages of debate between two Catholic brothers, Thomas and Newman Cavanaugh, about contraception. Both brothers – Thomas, who is in favour, and Newman, who is not – employ a tone that is at once coy and exulting. Thomas pompously declares, for example, 'I believe with St. Thomas Aquinas [...] that the purpose of the act of love is concupiscence, the mutual joy of two human hearts, *ad majorem gloria dei*.'[63] The debate is inconclusive (although Thomas does succeed in getting Newman to admit that he himself has used 'rubbers', thus making his intellectual and ethical position seem hypocritical), but once again it matters to Schwartz because it is also, indirectly, a debate about what love could possibly mean for a modern society committed to self-interest and personal pleasure rather than family and community.

Psychoanalysis also threatens to reduce love to sexual inclination, mere instinct that is contingent upon one's earliest childhood experiences and has almost nothing to do with choice. Schwartz's anxiety about this comes across in 'Dogs Are Shakespearean, Children Are Strangers', when he demands:

> Tell us, Freud, can it be that lovely children
> Have merely ugly dreams of natural functions?
>
> (*SK*, p. 68)

Unease about childhood sexuality is also apparent in unpublished pieces such as 'The Children's Question' in which two young boys try to seek confirmation of where

[62] 'Many Books and Publications Banned', *Irish Times*, 30 December 1950, p. 4.
[63] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 5, Folder 267, p. 9.

babies come from, and are only finally convinced when they witness an obscene performance with test tubes and water by their more worldly classmates in the school science laboratory.[64] Elsewhere, the *Genesis* ghosts align sex and puberty with material culture when they discuss that quintessential petting site for American teenagers, the ice cream parlour. The ice cream is

> Held
> In pumps, of adolescence the great sweetness,
> The flavours, [...]
> The puff of whipped cream, cherry on the sundae,
> But most of all the soda's surged orgasm,
> Sucked through straws,
> A drained sound at the end.[65]

Every act has the potential to be sexualised.

Social factors may contribute to the development of sexuality in childhood, but to the adult they may inhibit the expression of sexuality. In a later fragment of *An American Dream* in which the brothers (now called the Brothers Kennedy, and referred to as 'arch-adulterers') are expected at a house-party, the conversation is entirely about sex. One character asks another, 'How do you feel able to be sure that you are not pan-sexual, as most human beings are, when you have not tried to find out and precisely because the conventions of society have intimidated you?'[66] As in 'The World Is a Wedding', Schwartz's satire is scathing. The character's use of the term 'pansexual' is pompous and jingoistic.[67] Nonetheless, the frequent notes in Schwartz's journal about the sexual mores of friends and contemporaries indicate that he was himself – vicariously – interested in all kinds of sexual encounter.[68]

For Bruce Bawer, such an episode would be ample evidence of Schwartz's repressed homosexuality. 'If we are to understand the Middle Generation poets', Bawer asserts,

> we must not fail to recognize the homosexual element in their psyches. If indeed they spent all their lives sublimating their natural sexual inclinations, that would go a long way toward explaining the powerful sense of alienation which they shared.[69]

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[64] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 267.
[65] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 9, Folder 508, p. 388.
[66] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 7, Folder 387.
[67] The *OED*'s first definition of 'pansexualism' is 'The view that the sex instinct plays a part in all human behaviour and is the chief or only source of motivation.'
[68] See, for example, *Portrait*, pp. 339-340.
[69] Bruce Bawer, *The Middle Generation: The Lives and Poetry of Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman and Robert Lowell* (Archon Books: Hamden, CT, 1986), p. 33.

Maybe so. But to read Schwartz's work (and that of his contemporaries) in terms of what can only be regarded as psychoanalytical speculation is reductive in the extreme. As this chapter and the last have shown, numerous varying factors contribute to the sense of alienation Schwartz expresses in his writing. The conditions of modern city life are such, he suggests, that regardless of sexual orientation, repressed or not, love is always difficult to find. There is also the fact that 'pansexuality' – which can also be taken broadly as a tendency towards all kinds of sexuality, 'not limited or inhibited in sexual choice with regards to gender or practice' ('pansexual', *OED*. 2) – may have some affinity with the 'pan-historical', the transnational and the international. The use of such a term certainly attributes importance to a totality of experience, suggesting that it may only be possible to understand one's own sexual orientation in relation to all other possible orientations. This relates Schwartz's attitude towards sexual experiences to his more general belief that all experience must be regarded as relative.

Schwartz's sensitivity to changing social attitudes about love and sex is registered in his late story, 'Successful Love'. The title refers to the title of what 'appeared to be a serious handbook on love and marriage.'[70] The love affair at the story's centre is the initiatory fling of a teenage girl, Susan Calhoun. Susan is 'obsessed by sex' ('Successful Love', p. 13), but she is far from reverential about it, and one of the things that is most successful about her relationship with Tony Boyd is that she can commit herself to it fully whilst it is ongoing, but is then able to move on quickly when he is sent away to the Korean war. She is able 'to care and not to care'. The story ends with her using lines from the book to chat up another young man.

The piece is less concerned, however, with youthful love than with the generational difference between father and daughter, and Roger Calhoun's recognition that post-War America is a new period in history. He does not criticise his daughter's relationship – and his wife positively encourages it – but it baffles and fascinates him. Paralyzed in his own youth 'by tormented shyness' ('Successful Love', p. 11), her casual approach is beyond his comprehension. Susan has numerous not-very-serious suitors before she embarks for art school in New York. Calhoun eavesdrops one evening as one of them remarks 'Golly, you have a beautiful pair of knockers!' – an exclamation which makes him reflect that 'Among the young men of his own

[70] 'Successful Love' in *Successful Love, and Other Stories*, pp. 3-36 (p. 27).

generation, purity of speech had been directly connected with morbidity of feeling' (p. 10). In other words, men of his generation did not express their sexual desire directly.

Atlas damns Schwartz's stories in *Successful Love and Other Stories* with faint praise, wondering how he managed to write about 'themes so alien to his own experience [...] as well as he did' (Atlas, p. 348). Their tone – like that of much of Schwartz's unpublished prose – is uneasily poised between satire and earnest, almost naive storytelling. Their style is also more direct than one would be led to expect from reading Schwartz's poetry. However, there is a clear progression from the narrative style of *Genesis*'s prose passages, and from the stories in *The World Is a Wedding*. The stories, as a collection, are united by a common preoccupation with miscommunication. There are flaws, but they deserve more than Atlas's half-page dismissal. Atlas's objection that Schwartz had no first-hand experience of his themes is alarming in its overall implications for imaginative literature – ought one really to write only about one's own experiences? In Schwartz's case, the stories in this collection are an important refutation of the criticism that he often did do just that.

In any case, Atlas underestimates how much Schwartz *did* glean from his own experience, and particularly from watching Hollywood movies. Much of the dialogue in *Successful Love and Other Stories* might seem overly affected to the advocate of realist fiction, but such a remark as 'Golly, you have a beautiful pair of knockers!' might not be out of place if uttered by an adolescent in a '50s film. Furthermore, Schwartz certainly had first-hand knowledge of belonging to a generation whose values were becoming outdated – or, more precisely, of being caught between generations and not being able to belong to either. Philip Larkin's 'High Windows' is a poem, written a decade later in an England far removed from Schwartz's America, that expresses anxieties similar to those that dominate 'Successful Love'. It is no accident that as well as having an uncomplicated attitude towards sex, Susan is also at absolute ease in the city – a true metropolitan à la Frank O'Hara rather than the uneasy city-dweller Schwartz.

Monroe Lawrence, the protagonist of 'A Colossal Fortune' (set in the less liberal social climate of 1935) fares worse than Susan Calhoun when it comes to sex. Monroe is an academic genius, but naïve when it comes to love. A hopelessly idealistic passion for one Kitty Deutsch, over whom he almost kills himself, astonishingly ends in marriage. However, Monroe's friends soon discover that the marriage has not been consummated. One of these friends, Sidney Prince feels

'implicated in Monroe's failure' to bring about 'the proper fulfilment of his part as a husband', and is further shocked by Monroe's explanation that his wife had had her hymen surgically removed so that he would not hurt her when he did consummate the marriage.[71] Sidney goes to lengths to tell Monroe what he ought to do, but when Monroe calls to inform him that 'the consummation had been not only quite fascinating but it had also been great fun' (p. 173) and to ask for advice on contraception, Sidney lets their friendship peter out. Amongst the story's many implications is the fact that there might be times when to have sex is itself a responsibility. More pressingly, the story anticipates the verdict of the character DeWitt Howe in the story that follows, 'The Hartford Innocents': 'nothing is as terrifying as innocence and that boundless idealism which is innocence's chief aspiration.'[72] '[C]ivilized society', Howe argues, 'could not exist for very long if most human beings were kept in a state of safety and security excluding all possible risk, hurt and harm' ('The Hartford Innocents', p. 235). This is especially true if one lives in the city.

It is illuminating to compare Schwartz's malaise about love and living in the city with a few lines from Frank O'Hara's 'Memorial Day 1950' that directly refer to Schwartz. O'Hara, a poet thirteen years Schwartz's junior, is far more content to accept things in their un-idealised actuality. He writes

> Our responsibilities did not begin
> in dreams, though they began in bed. Love is first of all
> a lesson in utility. I hear the sewage singing
> underneath my bright white toilet seat and know
> that somewhere sometime it will reach the sea:
> gulls and swordfishes will find it richer than a river.[73]
>
> (O'Hara, p. 7)

Robert Phillips is critical of O'Hara's apparent hostility to Schwartz here, defending Schwartz for never writing about the mechanics of sex and implying that O'Hara sullies the elder poet's work.[74] The fact is, however, that Schwartz *did* write about the mechanics of sex, and that he did so more explicitly than O'Hara does in 'Memorial Day 1950', even though such pieces tended to remain unpublished. In the *Genesis*

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[71] 'A Colossal Fortune' in *Successful Love*, pp. 118-181 (p. 166).
[72] 'The Hartford Innocents' in *Successful Love*, pp. 182-242 (p. 236).
[73] Frank O'Hara, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Donald Allen (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 17.
[74] Robert Phillips, 'Foreword' to *Last & Lost Poems*, pp. xi-xxiii (p. xxii).

drafts, for example, one of the ghosts recalls deliberately making a speech to shock his audience:

> The female private part before coitus
> Is liquefied by oils to rid its cave
> Of sour urine which might kill the seed
> Thrust with such bobbing joy to be the child!
> [...]
> — O Father of all hearts who liquefy
> The female private part to help the man
> Become the living thinking fusing man,
> I am amazed and awed![75]

Equally graphic is the visceral description by a character named John Dudley in *An American Dream* of his fiancée's 'most intimate flower' as being 'just like liver.' Dudley makes the mistake of telling his fiancée's brother this in a passage that revels in social embarrassment. He goes on to explain, in a misjudged attempt to rescue himself, 'that he liked liver, liver and onions were his favourite dish, better than steak and less expensive'.[76] If the passage is less about sex itself than the ways in which people talk and brag about it, it nonetheless exposes how over-romanticised Phillips's view of Schwartz's writing is. It remains true, however, that Schwartz's work admits discomfort about acknowledging such matters, whilst O'Hara is more matter-of-fact.

David Lehman rebuffs Phillips's criticism, drawing attention to O'Hara's relaxed tone and contentment with city-living in contrast to Schwartz's perpetual anxiety.[77] Neither Phillips nor Lehman recognises, however, that O'Hara's lines are not necessarily a rejection of Schwartz's vision, or even a rebellion. If anything, O'Hara takes a Schwartz-like impulse – to address what love might mean, and how it might be negotiated, in the middle of the twentieth century, in the city – and comes up with a more optimistic answer than Schwartz himself ever discovered. His lines suggest not so much a denial of dreams as a suggestion that they just aren't that important. Schwartz tries to seek the miraculous in everyday life; O'Hara does the same but finds it more easily, to the extent that he can imagine the sewage 'singing' (no suppressed songs here, where a locomotive may be 'more melodious / than a cello' [O'Hara, p. 18]), and imagines it providing riches for gulls and swordfishes. His tone may be conversational, but it is hard to read these lines as anything other than celebratory or to deny that O'Hara's 'bright white toilet seat' appears every bit as

[75] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 246.
[76] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 7, Folder 387.
[77] David Lehman, 'Delmore, Delmore', p. 78.

resplendent as Schwartz's 'white bed' where 'all things are made'. Also, although O'Hara's lines are frank about sex and bodily waste, there remains a smack of prurience about the first lines quoted, a knowing wink that invites the reader not just to note the reference but also to dwell upon what happens in bed.

The distinction is one of interpretation, or perspective. Schwartz and O'Hara lived in the same city, and died in the same year, but O'Hara, in his poetry, is able to live in the moment whilst Schwartz is always conscious of the burden of time. Both recognise the poetic potential in modern technology and industry, but whilst Schwartz finds it sad, suggesting alienation, O'Hara, most of the time, finds it joyous. Schwartz would probably not have been able to accept that Love is simply 'a lesson in utility'. For him, it is more than just functional, as is suggested in a characteristic note from 3 September 3rd 1946:

> In Freud, the notion of sexual gratification is inadequate. For then prostitution, perversion and onanism would be satisfactory.
>
> Will [Barrett] remarked that he should have said *love*.[78]

Or, as Bertholde Cannon concludes, following a reverie about Freud in a section of *A Child's Universal History* titled 'Master of Joy, Doctor of Light', 'what this country needs is love [...] there can never be too much love: how can there be love enough? There is not enough love in America.'[79] In its context, this idea is neither sentimental nor erotic, simply a deeply held belief. A plaintive note scrawled on hotel notepaper a little over a year before Schwartz's death suggests that sex is dispensable but love is not.

> After a time one really does get used to getting along without a girl and sex. No one could be more astonished than I am. And it is not only the getting older that makes this true, but a clearer sense of how little satisfaction, how much heartbreak it usually brings about. If I fell in love! But that's not likely at all – day by day, it grows less likely.[80]

The conspicuous thing is that such a realisation is really nothing new for Schwartz. In 'Coriolanus and His Mother', written twenty-seven years earlier, he had had his stage-self ruminate on 'the sexual act, which begins everything and ends nothing, and often, as everyone knows, produces as aftermath the most unutterable sadness' (*SK*, p. 116). Not that Schwartz's deep-set idealism – 'If I fell in love!' – is muted by this conviction. Even in a state of absolute resignation, one can still hope; and this sense

[78] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 14, Folder 631.
[79] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 263.
[80] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 17, Folder 717, dated 3.14.65.

increases in the poetry of the '50s that presents love more as a universal principle that binds the world together than as something that happens between people. It is perhaps no coincidence that very few of these poems are set in the city since Schwartz's city poems more commonly show Schwartz to be Eliot's successor as a poet of alienation and of the failure of love.

CHAPTER 4

'an innocent bystander': Schwartz's societal engagement and withdrawal

The public and the private in Schwartz's post-War writing

Schwartz's writing about the city, and his sensitivity to the individual's alienation within an international society, highlight a fundamental tension in his writing (and particularly in his poetry) between his use of a public voice and a private one. Schwartz attempts to reconcile a sense that the poet has a responsibility to address matters of national and international importance with an opposing impulse towards a more intimate and personal mode of expression. As has already been observed, 'international consciousness' requires due attention to be paid to both the individual *and* to his or her broader community. The difficulties of doing this, however, are manifold, and they are particularly accentuated in Schwartz's transitional collection *Vaudeville for a Princess, and Other Poems*.

Published in 1950, this volume's simultaneous involvement with public and private spheres is hinted at immediately by its dedication to Elizabeth Pollet, Schwartz's second wife, and by Schwartz's note stating that the first section was 'suggested by Princess Elizabeth's admiration of Danny Kaye' (*V*). Deutsch elucidates the 'elaborate pun': Pollet, he explains, is 'the poet's true princess' whilst Schwartz conceives of himself as a Danny Kaye-like clown, a 'heavy bear', in comparison to his beloved.[1] In the broadest of terms, *Vaudeville*'s first section (especially the prose pieces) can be taken as a public performance, an approximation of an actual vaudeville show upon the page. The second section – 'The True, The Good and The Beautiful' – with its eight dramatic monologues orated by an isolated philosopher-king figure, presents the public and the private in conflict, whilst the final section – 'The Early Morning Light' – adopts a much more intimate tone. The poems themselves, however, often suggest that the distinctions between public and private voices may be little more than superficial.

In this chapter, I consider Schwartz's dual tendencies towards societal engagement and societal withdrawal in his poems, essays and letters of the mid-to-late

[1] Deutsch, p. 102. Deutsch consistently misnames Schwartz's wife 'Elizabeth Follet'.

1940s and early 1950s. I evaluate *Vaudeville for a Princess*, admitting its uncertainties of tone but arguing for it as a further attempt by Schwartz to modify lyric poetry in the wake of modernism. As Bawer has pointed out, Schwartz's conflict with his modernist mentors – especially Eliot – is on full display in this volume: he remains indebted, but the pressure to write a different kind of poetry is everywhere apparent as highbrow allusions are undercut by instances of learning worn lightly, and as formal, philosophical, and sometimes ponderous lyric poems alternate with flippant and chatty prose 'bagatelles'.[2] On a number of occasions, Schwartz hints at his own 'anxiety of influence', at times seeming to anticipate – albeit in general rather than specific terms – Harold Bloom's revisionary theory of 1973.[3] However, extensive though its literary allusions are, the book also makes broad reference to extra-literary topics, reflecting the actual and immediate preoccupations of the society in which he lived, and elevating what might initially seem commonplace and superficial.

Plato's ideal philosopher-king, as described in *The Republic*, exemplifies the contemplative, withdrawn position for Schwartz. However, there is a paradox insofar as such a philosopher's isolated life is intended, ultimately, to enable him to acquire the kind of wisdom that will benefit society as a whole. He can never, therefore, be entirely disengaged. Schwartz's regular references to popular culture also suggest that he was as interested in those things that Plato might have dismissed as mere appearances – particular examples of beautiful things rather than beauty itself – as he was in understanding the concepts of truth, goodness, and beauty as universal essences, things in and of themselves that exist in an ideal state. In this respect, Schwartz's tergiversations from an interior world of contemplation to an external world of surface impressions (and back again) reflect not just an attraction to both worlds, but also an ongoing and unresolved philosophical debate.

In the poems written after the publication of *Vaudeville for a Princess* Schwartz generally avoids direct reference to the commercial world and to popular culture. The Platonic search for universal truths appears to triumph within a lyric mode that focuses upon nature and a dream life detached from quotidian concerns. This does not mean, however, that Schwartz abandoned either his social consciousness or his fascination with the popular. His essays are sometimes directly critical of what his friend and co-editor at *Partisan Review*, Dwight MacDonald,

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[2] Bawer, pp. 132-138.
[3] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, rev. edn (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

would later term the products of 'Masscult' and (just as bad) 'Midcult'.[4] At such times, they represent the 'attack' upon popular culture that Schwartz had proposed to Laughlin in 1942. However, just as often, and particularly later into the '50s, Schwartz freely admits his enjoyment of the movies and cheap paperbacks. (He had always enjoyed them, but previously he had only enjoyed them guiltily.) The late stories, whilst still addressing intellectual and philosophical concerns, assume a middlebrow rather than a highbrow audience.

It is important to recognise too that as an associate editor of *Partisan Review* and, later, poetry editor of *New Republic* (for which he also reviewed films), Schwartz was involved with publications which represented the radical left and which exerted considerable influence even though their readerships were comparatively small. He was never, however, as politically vocal or committed as his *Partisan Review* co-editors Philip Rahv, William Phillips, and MacDonald; and, according to Sidney Hook, he was 'quite unconvincing' as a realistic political analyst.[5] This is indisputable; nonetheless, it remains valuable to consider Schwartz's writing – and his much more convincing *cultural* criticism – within a milieu that included such prominent political commentators as MacDonald and Hannah Arendt. In particular, Schwartz's case prompts an examination of the challenges that journals like *Partisan Review* faced in choosing to publish writing solely on aesthetic merit whilst also striving to maintain a consistent political position.

The ensuing discussion of *Vaudeville for a Princess* will necessitate a consideration of some of Schwartz's responses to the Second World War, as expressed in his essays and letters of the time. His attempts to justify his role as an intellectual and writer at a time of war directly inform the anxious poems of 'The True, The Good, and the Beautiful'. However, Schwartz engages relatively little with the ethical and political implications of the war, insisting to MacDonald, in a letter of 5 October 1942, that 'no political position is possible for intellectuals at present' (*Letters*, p. 133). Such an attitude infuriated MacDonald, who opposed America's involvement in the war and whose own political essays, whether or not one agrees with his standpoint, vigorously probe the complex moral dilemmas arising from the worldwide crisis. MacDonald's critique of what he calls 'the responsibility of peoples'

[4] See Dwight MacDonald, 'Masscult & Midcult', reprinted in *The New York Intellectuals Reader*, edited by Neil Jumonville (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 205-222.
[5] Hook, p. 407.

– the (to his mind) false belief that an entire people can, collectively, be considered responsible for their nation's atrocities or acts of heroism – makes for an enlightening comparison with Schwartz's own conception of responsibility, as well as of 'international consciousness'.

Schwartz's reticence about the War and the holocaust brings to mind Theodor Adorno's famous statement of 1951 that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbarous'.[6] There is nothing in Schwartz's writing to suggest that he agreed with this: given that he continued to write lyric poetry, he presumably did not, but there is no reason, either, why he should have felt duty-bound to tackle the topic directly. However, like Adorno, he was clearly concerned with the question of how lyric poetry can truthfully engage with a society that is confronted with far more pressing humanitarian concerns than purely aesthetic art forms can adequately address. Schwartz does, in fact, write about wartime experience; it is, however, the experience of the non-participant and it is characterised by what he describes in 1958 as 'the guilt of the innocent bystander' ('The Present State of Poetry', p. 48). A century earlier, a war fought primarily on other continents would have had relatively little impact upon the non-combatant living in a country that was not itself occupied or under continual attack.[7] But, given the wholly international nature of mid-twentieth century experience (which was already apparent during the First World War but which became all the greater thereafter), the devastating outcomes of the Second World War are almost always implicit even when they are not directly stated. The indirect influence of the war is encapsulated by what Schwartz describes in 'New Year's Eve' as 'a post-Munich sensibility: complete hopelessness of perception and feeling' ('New Year's Eve', p. 113).

This chapter will attempt to tease out what kind of influence social conditions and international warfare had upon a writer whose sensibility tended towards the purely literary. Schwartz's claim that his greatest influences were 'Shakespeare and the depression of 1929-1937' ('Views of a Second Violinist', p. 25) shows how aware he was that his writing responds to both literary and social stimuli. But, as this chapter will suggest, the two are not always easily united.

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[6] Theodor Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 195-210 (p. 210).

[7] The attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, was the only attack made on American soil.

'And I will always stammer since he spoke': *Vaudeville for a Princess*

On publication the critical consensus was that the irreverent prose passages in *Vaudeville for a Princess* were more memorable than its verse, and that only 'Starlight like Intuition Pierced the Twelve' stood comparison with the best lyrics from *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*.[8] Schwartz himself admitted to Wallace Stevens that he was 'not particularly pleased with it' (*Letters*, p. 255), and only three of its poems were retained for *Summer Knowledge: Selected Poems*. Nonetheless, it is a crucial collection in terms of Schwartz's progression, via *Genesis*, from refined modernism to a more effusive, Whitmanian poetry of vision and hopefulness. The contradictions in Schwartz's outlook, the conflicts between his various poetic allegiances, and the strain of being unable to negotiate opposing international and isolationist stances, are all apparent throughout a collection that is characterised by skittish changes of emphasis.

Hugh Kenner's October 1951 *Poetry* review of *Vaudeville for a Princess* is the harshest that any book of Schwartz's ever received. Nonetheless, it provides a useful starting point for further consideration of the volume. 'The unbelievable badness of these poems is irrelevant to any criteria of technique', Kenner begins.

> Having come on stage without his trousers, [Schwartz] has chosen to play Danny Kaye instead of Hamlet. Divers uncertainties of tone are extrapolated into frantic prose monologues that, altering with the poems in Part II, are meant to suggest that a stylized systole and diastole is intended, that the maudlin self-abnegation of the verse is dramatically and delicately light-hearted: the clown's pathos, in fact.[9]

For Kenner, such a dramatic conceit falls flat. The prose interludes are simply 'very silly', whilst the verse 'recalls the gestures – but not the techniques – of *Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady*.'[10]

It is a brutal assessment, but Kenner is justified in being disquieted by the book's erratic tonal shifts and its ambivalent appropriation of words, lines and phrases not just from Eliot but also from Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Sir Edward Dyer. Several of the poems in the first section, and the first of the forty sonnets that constitute the third, take their titles or first lines from famous Elizabethan lyrics – Dyer's 'My Mind To Me A Kingdom Is', Feste's song from the end of *Twelfth Night* (a further instance of Schwartz playing the Fool), Marlowe's 'The Passionate

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[8] Rolfe Humphries, for example, wrote that Schwartz's poetry 'suffers its most severe criticism at the hands of the author's own prose [...] the verse tends to be solemn, owlish, abstract, tiresome, and, to my ear at least, entirely earless.' Quoted in MacDougall, p. 105.
[9] Hugh Kenner, 'Bearded Ladies & the Abundant Goat', *Poetry*, 79.1 (October, 1951), pp. 50-53 (50).
[10] Kenner, 'Bearded Ladies', p. 50.

Shepherd To His Love', and Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 73'. The homage Schwartz appears to pay to these poets is presumably what prompted William Van O'Connor, in a review that appeared alongside Kenner's, to assert that 'Schwartz's talent is minor Elizabethan, apparently lacking any great need for the magnificent or the grandiose. He is a Samuel Daniel of sorts or a Sir Edward Dyer.'[11] But Van O'Connor doesn't go any further in trying to explain the effect of Schwartz's apparent identification of himself with these Elizabethan precursors.

In addition to this, the book makes extensive use of epigraphs. A short passage from *The Symposium*, in which Socrates suggests that love is all he has ever talked about, introduces the whole volume, whilst Section I is headed by Swift's 'Vive la bagatelle' and Joyce's 'Imagine for my purpose that you are a squad of urchins' (from *Finnegans Wake*, which also provides the titles of three of the sonnets). Section III is prefaced by Fitzgerald's 'In the real dark night of the soul, it is always three o'clock in the morning', itself echoing St John of the Cross and preparing us for the fact that so many of the book's poems address a crisis of hope, if not of faith. McDougall laments what he sees as Schwartz's 'desperate habit of throwing allusions together in the hope of producing a poetic effect', and it is undoubtedly difficult to know what to make of all the volume's literary references.[12] Are they really allusions at all? An allusion is typically a covert or indirect reference to another work (*OED*, 4). This is true of some of the instances in *Vaudeville for a Princess*, but not of the examples just given, which amount to entirely direct and overt borrowings.[13]

The book's short, opening poem perhaps offers a clue as to how the volume should be read. Even if 'On A Sentence By Pascal' fails, ultimately, to leave a reader any the wiser, it is nonetheless a good example of the kind of problem that

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[11] William Van O'Connor, 'The Albatross Was Intended To Fly', *Poetry* 79. 1 (October, 1951), pp. 55-59 (55). This appears to be praise, but O'Connor goes on to describe Schwartz in terms that are hardly complimentary: 'He writes in an intelligent, school masterish idiom, shrewd and a little sententious. But [...] he is an extremely self-centered poet' (p. 55).

[12] McDougall, pp. 106, 111.

[13] Udo J. Hebel has argued that the relational quality of allusion is now more of a focus, in critical debate, than its implicitness or explicitness. Allusion, he argues, is 'an evocative manifestation of intertextual relationships' (Udo J. Hebel, 'Towards a Descriptive Poetics of Allusion' in *Intertextuality*, ed. by Heinrich F. Plett [New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991], pp. 135-164 [p. 135]). Michael H. Whitworth, however, maintains that 'literary allusion is very different from intertextuality' on the grounds that theorists of intertextuality are, 'explicitly or otherwise, concerned to deconstruct established hierarchies of text and canon, whilst theorists of allusion generally take those hierarchies as a given: without them, allusion would not function' (Michael H. Whitworth, *Reading Modernist Poetry* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], p. 85). Whitworth does concur, however, that direct quotation can be allusive if it summons up a reference or association implied by a string of familiar words. It is, however, less playful than more covert reference. Schwartz's allusions often seem concerned both with maintaining the canon and trying to challenge it.

characterises the whole first section and parts of what follows. '"True eloquence mocks eloquence"' (*V*, p. 3) it begins, lifting the sentence from Pascal's *Pensées*. Schwartz recognises that this statement is open to a wide range of interpretations, and admits as much through the rhetorical question that immediately follows: 'Did that Frenchman mean / That heroes are hilarious / And orators obscene?' (p. 3). However, the main implication is clear enough: that ornate and stylised speech is all artifice. Natural, unadorned utterance is preferable, and has a right to mock affected ostentation. This becomes clearer still in the first line of the second stanza – 'Eloquence laughs at rhetoric' (p. 3) – where 'rhetoric' carries overtones of insincerity. That rhetoric is 'ill at ease in Zion' may suggest Jewish self-consciousness, a sense that the Jewish writer cannot do anything other than speak truthfully (although this, too, is a reference, this time to *Amos* 6.1: 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion').

Schwartz appears to take Pascal's sentence as a cue to direct jibes at writers he apparently admired, beginning with the belittling reference to Pascal himself as 'that Frenchman' and then seeming to snicker at Eliot by seizing the word 'snickers' from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and using Prufrock's 'meticulous' / 'ridiculous' rhyme for his own final couplet.[14] The difficulty comes, however, in ascertaining how much of the poem is mockery and how much is reverence. Given Schwartz's identification of himself with Danny Kaye, it should be no surprise that he identifies himself also with Prufrock, who is 'not Prince Hamlet' but 'Almost, at times, the Fool' (Eliot, p. 16). Schwartz can hardly fail to have noted either – given his own uneasy sense of his poetic reputation post-*Genesis* – that Eliot's use of 'snicker' is preceded by 'I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker' (p. 15). And, perhaps most importantly, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is itself a poem that mocks eloquence through its 'come and go' / 'Michelangelo' (p. 13) rhyme and through its speaker's inability to say exactly what he means.

If Schwartz's poem is a paean to Eliot, then its praise is in shorthand. If it is a mockery, then it reads surprisingly earnestly. If, as Kenner believes, the allusions are no more than the feeble gestures of Prufrock, then perhaps Schwartz is suggesting that, after Prufrock, feeble gesturing is all that is possible. Eliot's poem is too good to suffer much from being mocked; therefore all that is possible is to mimic it weakly.

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[14] Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 16.

Whatever one concludes, Bawer's assessment that 'only the uneasy, restless disciple who is still a disciple in spite of himself, would write such a thing' is reasonable: it will always be said of the would-be modernist poet after Eliot that he is merely a shadow of his master.[15]

In 'Fun with the Famous, Stunned by the Stars', Schwartz admits to suffering from 'hero-worship', but goes on to portray a couple of so-called 'great poets' as trivial boors in company (*V*, p. 29). The exception is the other 'great poet', clearly identifiable as Eliot, whom he finds an excuse to avoid meeting: 'I did not really want to meet him. I admired him too much' (p. 31). Just in case the admiration should appear too devout, however, the passage ends with Schwartz and a drinking companion 'reciting to each other just like a barber shop quartet' lines from 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Service': '"In the beginning was the word,"/ Superfetation of τὸ ἓν –' (p. 33). The comedy of this is in claiming Eliot's recondite vocabulary, use of Greek, and theological engagement for a mere barstool singsong; but it is also a further concession by Schwartz that he is not himself T. S. Eliot, nor was meant to be. When his friend advises him to 'Stick to gin and regular meters' Schwartz's punning response is 'Give me enough hope and I'll hang myself' (p. 33). The episode illustrates that Schwartz was almost as enthralled by Eliot as a celebrity as he was by him as a poet and critic.

Schwartz's sense of the overbearing burden of influence, not just from Eliot but also from other writers, becomes the greater as the first section progresses. The prose pieces gleefully travesty and Americanise *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Don Giovanni*. Hamlet looks like he 'has slept for three nights in a railroad coach' and Gertrude sings him songs entitled 'My Old Kentucky Womb' and 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginity' (*V*, p. 15), whilst Shakespeare himself is described as a 'brilliant country boy' who wrote Broadway hits (p. 46). Nonetheless, the satire of these pieces is directed more at the ways in which mass culture treats high culture, and at the pomposity of some literary criticism, than at Shakespeare's plays or Mozart's opera themselves. Bawer also suggests that one of Schwartz's main objects here 'is to play off Eliot's highbrow prose style'.[16] In an essay written two years after the publication of *Vaudeville for a Princess*, Schwartz writes with sincere conviction of the dangers of cartoon versions of classics misrepresenting the originals, insisting that the adolescent reader 'should

[15] Bawer, p. 132.
[16] Bawer, p. 134.

not be cut off from the reality of great literature.'[17] There is little sense of Schwartz really attempting to undermine Shakespeare; as with 'Prufrock', it is implicit that *Hamlet* and *Othello* are unsurpassable works and that one might just as well therefore admit defeat and mock them in jaunty prose rather than try to emulate them. The other alternative, as suggested in 'The Masters of the Heart Touched The Unknown', is outright praise. That poem is effectively a roll call (but by no means a comprehensive one) of writers Schwartz admired, concluding with general statements about the sacrifices they made for their art. Such overt acknowledgement, however, ends up revealing very little about the more subtle ways in which writers such as Eliot influenced Schwartz's work.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that the poems that mimic Elizabethan works do not turn out to be the parodies that they initially look like becoming. They are, instead, rewritings without satirical design, though their emphases are generally quite different to those of the originals. If the prose pieces are the comic acts on the vaudeville programme, then these are the songs performed straight, cover versions of a sort – although Schwartz's choice of Elizabethan models teases the possibility that this is a further play on the name Elizabeth. Most of them slightly adapt the form of the original, 'I Did Not Know The Spoils of Joy' containing many more stanzas than Feste's song, for example, and Schwartz's 'The Passionate Shepherd To His Love' including additional couplets after each stanza, which are absent from Marlowe's poem. None of Schwartz's rewritings bears comparison with the poem to which it responds, the Marlowe piece probably suffering most from the abandonment of pastoral convention and the inclusion of such awkward couplets as 'With jokes that seem hilarious / About the self's pretentious Ows' (*V*, p. 27). However, Schwartz's choices often appear to be deliberately self-defeating, as if he were asking how the modern poet could possibly compete with such timeless works. Eliot believed that allusion could entice a change in – or at least a reinterpretation of – the work alluded to, as well as enriching the work that makes the allusion. Schwartz's poems, however, expose the limits of such a view, turning allusion into a device that becomes almost meaningless and conceding the impossibility of writing original works at such a late historical date.

[17] 'Masterpieces as Cartoons' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 418-430 (p. 428).

Schwartz's poems of this kind are not all without virtues, however. The most assured of them, 'The Winter Twilight, Glowing Black and Gold', fruitfully draws upon 'Sonnet 73', its blazing Christmas trees fusing the leafless, or nearly leafless, trees of Shakespeare's first quatrain with the glowing fire of his third, and the 'bare ruin'd choirs' of Shakespeare's poem countered by the 'hurrahing' of Schwartz's Easter choir (*V*, p. 67).[18] Schwartz's sonnet moves away from its source in its fractured sestet, revisiting a childhood memory of offering a girl an apple that is also recounted in 'Prothalamion' and *Genesis*. In describing his 'swollen heart' as 'Now boxed in the learning and music of art', however, Schwartz makes reference to the boxlike form of the sonnet and again evokes the choirs (and perhaps also the boxy choir stalls) of 'Sonnet 73'. The line suggests the poet's frustration at no longer being able to express himself without the artifice of form or without having to draw upon lessons learned from previous masters.

Its debt to Shakespeare aside, 'The Winter Twilight, Glowing Black and Gold' is important within Schwartz's oeuvre because it is one of his most succinct expressions of a preoccupation that dominates his later poems: that of annihilation followed by restoration, death followed by rebirth. The burning of Christmas trees symbolises the end of winter, an act of incineration that anticipates spring and Easter, the time of resurrection. Although Schwartz impairs himself immediately by inviting comparison with what has commonly been regarded as one of Shakespeare's very best sonnets, his references are not mere surface effects. They enable Schwartz to set forth a vision of his own, one that he would go on to explore more substantially in his later poems.[19]

Of all the poems in *Vaudeville for a Princess*, 'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced the Twelve' has justly received the most acclaim. Although it was written in 1943, presumably some time earlier than most of the volume's other poems, its position at the end of the first section (and, later, as the last poem in *Summer Knowledge*) means that it can be taken, to some extent, as a reflection upon the poems that precede it. Although it is primarily, as Schwartz himself put it, a dramatisation of 'attitudes which accept Christianity as a reality while at the same time dismissing the question of literal belief as, at most, irrelevant' (*Letters*, p. 367), it can also be read as a poem

[18] William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 73' in *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 527.

[19] Given Schwartz's increasing interest in death and resurrection at this time, it is perhaps also possible to interpret his rewritings here as destroying one poem in order to create a new one.

about the stymieing effects of over-influence. Christ's disciples are rendered impotent by their Saviour's excessively good, excessively forgiving, excessively eloquent example. Coming after poems crammed with short-circuited allusion, it is hard not to read such lines as '"And I will always stammer, since he spoke," / One, who had been most eloquent, said, stammering' (*V*, p. 49) ('stammering' here appropriately disrupting the rhythm) as anything other than self-referential. To use Bloom's terms, the 'ephebe', in awe of the 'strong precursor poet', feels the inferiority of his own voice even though he had once himself been 'most eloquent'. The disciples are unable to transform influence into originality as one of Bloom's 'strong' poets might have done; they can only lament their failure to emulate their master. Schwartz's own 'melancholy at his lack of priority' is analogous to this; and it is because this melancholy impels him to creativity that his poem can be described as an 'achieved anxiety'.[20]

Bloom's general thesis about disciple poets misreading, rebelling against, and, eventually, reconciling themselves to – or superseding – their masters illuminates a consideration of Schwartz's relation to Eliot and other precursors. However, analysing Schwartz's progression as a poet in specific relation to the six stages of influence that Bloom delineates is not especially fruitful. This is not because Schwartz is not a 'strong' enough poet, but because Bloom's model is too constrictive, proposing a kind of chronological development that cannot easily be applied to Schwartz. The poems in *Vaudeville for A Princess*, for example, would seem to correspond best with the stage that Bloom terms '*kenosis*', in which

> The later poet, apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems.
>
> (Bloom, p. 15)

However, there is also evidence of '*clinamen*', the first stage, a swerve away from the precursor, and of '*askesis*', the fifth stage, in which the later poet 'yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor' (p. 15). Perhaps the greatest problem with Bloom's thesis is that it is so general that it can be nearly impossible to identify to which stage any given poem belongs. Many of Schwartz's poems seem to conflate several of Bloom's

[20] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, pp. 10, 5, 96.

stages. It is therefore more helpful to probe Schwartz's particular sense of the 'anxiety of influence' by close reading of individual poems.

Anxiety about over-influence is written into 'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced the Twelve' throughout, beginning with its title. Starlight is self-generating: it comes from no other source than a star itself. It is like intuition – 'spiritual perception or immediate knowledge' (*OED*, 4), immediate sense apprehension (*OED*, 5), or, more generally, 'direct or immediate insight' (*OED*, 6) – because intuition similarly comes from no obvious source. Intuition is the antithesis of reasoned thought and the kind of knowledge reached through logical deduction based on the conclusions of others. It is thus an ideal for the would-be visionary poet moving towards what he would later call 'Summer Knowledge'. It is also, however, threatening for whoever is unable to access it themselves. Starlight 'pierced' the twelve: on the one hand, it inspired them; on the other, it wounded them. Piercing, in a poem that features wound-bearing disciples, evokes the nailing of Christ to the cross. Allied to starlight, however, it could also suggest the Star of Bethlehem, pointing needle-like to the place of Christ's birth. Symbolically, the Magi, in following the star, could be seen as following their intuition. Such opposing inferences are characteristic of a poem in which Christ's goodness is described as both 'awe' and 'abyss' (*V*, p. 48). The disciples are privileged to have witnessed it, but it only sets into relief their own shortcomings, prompting despair. To one who has seen what is truly awesome, 'the sea and sky no more are marvelous' (p. 47), and surprise is incomprehensible.

When the poem was first published, in *Kenyon Review* in 1944, its title was the same as its first line: 'The starlight's intuitions pierced the twelve'. The change is seemingly minor, but as in other Schwartz poems the slight shift from title to first line creates subtle effects. Starlight and intuition go from being general in the revised title to specific in the first line: '*The* starlight' and '*intuitions*', plural, implying that there are such things are individual intuitions – perhaps the ones that pique the disciples in distinct but similar ways – that combine to make up one singular and more abstract 'intuition' much as individual rays combine to create an overall impression of starlight. These intuitions also go from *resembling* the starlight to *belonging to* it: in other words, they do not belong to the disciples who cannot generate their own intuitions but can only experience them passively.

The disciples' proclamations make clear the various ways in which Christ's influence has paralysed them. Less directly, however, the poem also suggests a kind

of contagion through its aural effects. Every stanza except the second and last follows an *abcbdefe* rhyme scheme. The final word of every stanza except the last (which has a coda) is always 'it', always harshly rhymed with the final word of the sixth line. The sharp 't' sound is further emphasised by the fricative endings of many of the penultimate lines – 'spat', 'thought' and 'inadequate' – as well as by the words 'brittle' and 'glittering' in the first stanza and the repetition, throughout the poem, of 'no matter'. The note of bitterness that is indicated by the first disciple's spitting at the end of the first stanza pervades the whole poem.

In the first stanza, internal rhymes and assonance are exaggerated to the point at which the scene depicted, with its sparkling, tinkling and glittering, seems kitsch. 'Tune' is followed, in the space of two lines, by 'xylophone', 'vain' 'dune' and 'moon', whose vowel sound in turn prompts 'too', 'mood', 'ruled', 'useless', 'beauty' and 'do'. Such euphony is a Schwartz trademark. However, given the prominence of the moon in these lines – which, we are told, 'Arose too big' – these overabundant echoes could be taken as reflecting sublunary influence rather than simply expressing musicality for its own sake. The moon takes its light from the sun rather than having any of its own. What beauty it has, then, is a reflection of a greater beauty that cannot be looked at directly. To the disciples, the moon's beauty is therefore 'useless', overbearing and unsubtle but also inauthentic. They feel similarly towards Christ. His goodness is God's goodness at one remove, but even this is too much for them.

'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced The Twelve' stands out partly because, despite being acutely concerned with influence, it never allows its influences to become suffocating. Schwartz acknowledged that his writing of the poem was informed by reading Arnold, Hardy, Valéry and Stevens, as well as an annotated Victorian copy of the *New Testament*. The importance of each of these poets can be discerned in the attitudes and stance of the poem, but none of them is obtrusive. Schwartz notably does not acknowledge Eliot, whose Anglo-Catholic faith the poem appears to oppose. Eliot's presence is still felt, however, partly through this opposition and partly through echoes that are subtler than elsewhere. The tone of the disciples' speech, for example, recalls the tone of passages from 'Ash Wednesday'. 'Though all may be forgiven, never quite healed / The wound I bear as witness, standing by' (*V*, p. 47) one disciple exclaims, his cadences and sentence structure hinting at such lines as Eliot's 'For what is done, not to be done again / May the judgement not be too heavy

upon us'.[21] Even in the frustrated cry 'No matter what we do, he looks at it!' (p. 47), and its variations, there is a slight, but discernible, echo of 'Prufrock': 'I am no prophet – and here's no great matter'.[22] And when Schwartz has the ninth disciple ask 'Who now will ever sit / At ease in Zion at the Easter feast?' (p. 49) he is both referring back to his own allusion to *Amos* 6.1 in 'On A Sentence By Pascal' and evoking the discontent of Eliot's Magi who return to their Kingdoms after witnessing Christ's birth and find that they are 'no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation'.[23]

For Morton Seiff, Schwartz's Jewishness provides a context in which to read the poem. No Jewish poet, he remarks, can afford to surrender to Eliot's Anglo-Catholic aesthetic 'without fear of obliterating his own identity'.[24] 'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced the Twelve', he argues, is a poem of 'guilt-burden', revealing Schwartz's 'sensitivity to a remote "crime" [Christ's crucifixion] which is doubtfully ascribed to the Jews by legend and staunchly denied by reliable historians'.[25] Such a perspective on the poem cannot be dismissed, and is strengthened by the poem's indirect references to the crucifixion. All the same, it only relates directly to the seventh stanza in which the eighth and ninth disciples lament that though 'He gave forgiveness to us', 'The crime which was will be; and the least touch / Revives the memory' (*V*, p. 49). Even here, the lines can be read in a more general context without any loss to the poem. Given that Christ forgave *all* sins, there is no need to dwell upon one specific instance, particularly one that is questionable. The fact of forgiveness itself, though ostensibly a gift, is a burden because it comes with a sense of indebtedness that denies one's own independence. This is the case regardless of the gravity of the crime forgiven.

More importantly, 'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced the Twelve' engages with the questions Schwartz addresses in his essay on Hardy, in which he argues that Hardy was a poet whose sensibility was essentially Christian despite his inability to believe in a Christian God. Again, there is an analogy with the young poet who has become disillusioned with his former master. His loss of faith in Eliot, as it were, is clear from his review of *Four Quartets*, a poem he admired in part but much of which

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[21] Eliot, p. 90.
[22] Eliot, p. 15.
[23] Eliot, p. 104.
[24] Morton Seiff, 'Fallen David and Goliath America: The Battle Report of Delmore Schwartz', *Jewish Social Studies*, vo. 13, no. 4 (Oct., 1951), pp. 311-320 (315).
[25] Seiff, p. 315.

he felt was marred by Eliot's 'self-consciousness' and 'falsity of tone.'[26] 'If one hears a man *trying* to be modest, sincere, or frank', Schwartz writes, 'and if one hears the trying, rather than the modesty, sincerity, or frankness as such, one has an analogy for what is wrong with these passages both as language and as emotion.'[27] The disciple's belief that his master has started, in effect, to parody himself, is a gauge of the distance that has developed between them.

Schwartz possibly also had his own indebtedness to Eliot in mind when he reviewed Karl Shapiro's *Person, Place and Thing* in 1943. 'Most poets', Schwartz argued,

> begin by taking fire from other poets, and most poets end, sadly enough, in self-imitation. But between the time when the poet is an echoing novice and the time when he is a self-infatuated and tired master, there occurs, if the poet has genuine gifts, a period during which the borrowed or imitated style is gradually altered into something new and strange – as the glove is shaped by the hand, day by day – through the constant pressure of the poet's own and unique subject matter, his own experience.[28]

This probably tells us more about Schwartz's own progression as a poet than Shapiro's. In the poems of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, Schwartz took his Promethean fire not only from Eliot but also from Yeats, Stevens and Crane amongst many others. But in that volume he was already able to alter the borrowed style into something 'new and strange'. *Genesis* marks a further decisive step away from the position of 'echoing novice', although it, too, draws heavily upon modernist precursors, despite its radical surface differences. In *Vaudeville for a Princess*, however, a sense that the imitated style is starting to prevent the possibility of further gradual transformation coincides with a belief (however unfounded) that the principal master himself is becoming 'self-infatuated' and 'tired'. This accounts for Schwartz's greater antagonism towards Eliot in the volume, but also the sense that his attachment appears all the stronger at the moment of renunciation – a renunciation that is never, in fact completed. Schwartz's anxiety about Eliot's influence upon his work can be taken as a wholly literary concern. There are undoubtedly parallels to be drawn, if one takes a Freudian perspective, between this and the malaise about family inheritance that he explores in *Genesis*, but the former remains an issue solely in the

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[26] 'Anywhere Out of the World', *Nation*, July 24, 1943, pp. 102-3 (102).
[27] 'Anywhere Out of the World', p. 102.
[28] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 7, Folder 418. This passage is also cited by Scott Richardson in *Exile from the Actual*, p. 12.

realm of literature whilst the latter concerns society more generally. One of the ways in which Schwartz attempts to dissociate himself from Eliot is by drawing upon influences from outside literary and philosophical spheres. Eliot himself had engaged with the popular culture of jazz, the music hall and vaudeville itself, but Schwartz's gestures towards an emerging cult of celebrity in *Vaudeville for a Princess* are more overt.[29] The collection marks an accentuation of his ever-present fascination with the American Dream and the various ways in which it is manifested. Schwartz's obsession with the then Princess Elizabeth and with Kaye, coupled with his reveries of 'riding up Fifth Avenue under great snowstorms of ticker-tape, in a beautiful open limousine, cheered by admiring throngs' (*V*, p. 10), make it clear that he had a vivid imaginative life that was not of an exclusively literary bent. Later, he was able to claim, only partly in jest, that he had become 'a specialist on Marilyn Monroe!' (*Letters*, p. 308). But such excursions into the world of popular culture sit uneasily with the more solipsistic tendencies of his poetry, and this tension is rendered even more starkly in *Vaudeville for a Princess*'s middle section, a sequence of poems that also attempt to justify the poet's continued detachment when faced with the societal upheaval caused by war.

'The True, the Good, and the Beautiful'

Of *Vaudeville for a Princess*'s early lyric poems, Schwartz's take on Dyer's 'My Mynde to me a Kingdome is' most clearly anticipates the central conflict of the section titled 'The True, the Good, and the Beautiful'. It initially reads as a direct response to Dyer's poem. 'The mind' (as opposed to '*my* mind'), Schwartz begins, does not resemble a kingdom but 'a North Pole' (*V*, p. 7), uncivilised, isolated, but sublime. This only lasts, however, until the instinct for interpretation takes over: 'Until I see too much, in this / Resembling James' governess' (p. 7). By evoking the protagonist of *The Turn of the Screw*, Schwartz suggests a tendency to read too much into what one sees, a suspicion of everything and a failure simply to accept the 'glaring snows of consciousness' (p. 7) as they are. Thereafter, the poem sharply changes focus and indulges in a Dickinsonian conceit that sets 'The mind and self in Civil War' (p. 7), the mind reflecting a solitary, contemplative impulse (or the ego)

[29] See, for example, David Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) for an analysis of Eliot's engagement with popular culture.

and the self an instinctive, social proclivity (or the id). Dyer's poem is a celebration of the imagination, which he presents as self-sufficient, exclaiming 'Look what I lack my mynde supplies: / Lo, thus I triumph like a kynge, / Content with that my mynde doth bringe.'[30] Schwartz sees the attraction of such a stance, but cannot prevent historical actuality from intruding upon the mind's contented visions. His references to the American Civil War, whilst mostly superficial, bind his thoughts to a specific historical and national context and deny the possibility of allowing the mind to produce art simply for art's sake.

Schwartz's poem concludes with a magnification of scale, the mind going from resembling just the North Pole to resembling 'all creation' and being 'all things, in a way' (*V*, p. 8). This brings the poem's position closer to Dyer's again, the crucial difference being that the mind, as Schwartz presents it, is not simply *content* with everything, but actually *is* everything. This is problematic because such a mind must surely be indiscriminate, with little integrity of its own. And yet, it should not be surprising that a poet committed to 'international consciousness' – to seeking out the likenesses between things, places and occurrences that are seemingly unassociated – should reach such an impasse. The problem with finding resemblances everywhere is that it then becomes impossible to know anything simply as it is: metaphor and analogy may help to explain or clarify certain ideas or things, but they also take one further away from the idea or thing itself. Schwartz's search for universal Platonic truths seems to clash with his commitment to 'international consciousness', a way of thinking which highly esteems the particular despite ultimately seeking the broadest of spectra.

In 'The True, the Good, and the Beautiful', the mind and self are 'in Civil War' throughout. The speaker, a Platonic philosopher-king figure, attempts to justify his position as 'a *privileged character*' (Schwartz's italics) who has been 'excused / From the war' (*V*, p. 53). He insists upon the value of his contemplative study even at such a time of crisis, claiming that he has dedicated himself 'to poetry, / The true, the good, and the beautiful' (p. 53). He makes casual reference to symbols of American commercial culture whilst professing commitment instead to studying, more abstractly, 'the early morning light', and to teaching 'the boys and girls' (p. 55) about it. His attachment to the ephemera of the material world remains, however, suggesting

[30] ' My Mynde To Me A Kingdome Is', in *The writings in verse and prose of Sir Edward Dyer*, ed. by Alexander B. Grosart (Blackburn: Printed for private circulation, 1870-1872), p. 23.

that he has absorbed Williams's dictum about there being 'no ideas but in things' despite also striving to establish pure ideas that are not, in fact, dependent upon things.[31] The tensions between the two standpoints are never wholly resolved, and there is always the suggestion that it is only by concentrating intently upon material objects that one might be able to transcend them.

Schwartz's speaker's position is derived from the view expressed by Socrates in *The Republic*:

> Unless philosophers become kings in their cities, [...] or those now called kings and potentates legitimately and sufficiently come to love wisdom; unless political power and philosophy coincide in the same person [...] there can be no surcease from evil [...] for cities nor [...] for the human race. [...] [T]here is no other way to attain happiness, public or private.[32]

According to Socrates, only philosophers have the capability to be ideal rulers because only they can see the beautiful itself rather than simply beautiful things, and the just itself rather than simply just things. They see through and beyond things, rather than looking at things themselves. They are lovers of wisdom, of absolute and incontrovertible knowledge, rather than of judgment or opinion, which are contingent.[33] Those who cannot see 'what is most true' – those, that is, who are not philosophers – cannot 'establish conventional notions [...] about things beautiful and just and good' and they equally cannot 'guard and preserve what has been established'.[34] For this reason, Socrates suggests, they are not fit to rule. Whilst he concedes that the likelihood of the philosophical ruler he has in mind ever existing is extraordinarily remote, he insists that it is possible; and for Schwartz's speaker, the search for the true, the good and the beautiful, however hard to find, remains the most important of aspirations.

In claiming that to have a legitimate philosopher-king as ruler is the only way 'to attain happiness, *public or private*' (my emphasis), Socrates states the paradox that the philosopher's detachment from society is in fact for the good of society, for individuals and for communities alike. However, particularly in the poems entitled 'Some Present Things are Causes of True Fear' and 'Lunas are Tempting to Old Consciousness', Schwartz's speaker betrays a much greater attraction to the

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[31] 'A Sort of a Song' in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: Volume II, 1939-1962* (New York: New Directions), p. 56.
[32] Plato, *The Republic*, translated by R. E. Allen (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2006), p. 179.
[33] *The Republic*, pp. 188-189.
[34] *The Republic*, p. 191.

diversions of mid-twentieth-century society – to Tin Pan Alley, Hollywood, and Luna Parks – than he cares to admit elsewhere. Whilst this would be unproblematic for someone who claimed simply to be a contemporary poet without such a philosophical conception of what a poet ought to be, it does raise the question of how much of a philosopher – a lover of pure wisdom – this figure really is, and of how prepared he is to accept the self-enforced isolation that his position appears to demand. There is real bitterness in his complaint that he has been cut off 'From the normal pleasures of the citizen' as a consequence of studying 'the art which in / America wins silence like a wall' (*V*, p. 55). His qualification that he has 'prostituted' rather than 'dedicated' himself to poetry is similarly sour (p. 53).

Adorno, in 'Lyric Poetry and Society' (the 1957 essay in which he modifies his statement about the barbarism of writing poetry after the holocaust), also contributes to the ages-old debate on poetry's relationship to community by arguing that 'the meaning of a poem is not really the expression of individual experiences and stirrings of emotion. Rather, these become artistic only when, precisely because of their defined aesthetic form, they participate in the generality of things.'[35] This broadly means that, by refining experience and emotion into a poem, one is rendering them in such a way as to make it possible for an assumed audience to empathise. The experiences and emotions themselves have no meaning until they are put into form. There is always a danger, Adorno continues, of the lyric poem

> remaining stuck in the accidents of naked, isolated existence. The generality of the lyric poem's content is, nevertheless, essentially social in nature. Only he understands what the poem says who perceives in its solitude the voice of humanity; indeed, the loneliness of the lyric expression itself is latent in our individualistic and, ultimately, atomistic society – just as, by contrast, its general binding validity derives from the denseness of its individuation.[36]

Again there is a paradox in this: the successful lyric poem strikes a chord with its readers precisely because it is the expression of the poet's isolation from those readers, who are, in turn, isolated from the poet and from each other. The situation of Schwartz's speaker, therefore, would not resonate if there were not something sufficiently universal in the experiences of loneliness and disillusionment that he sets forth. Nonetheless, for him to acknowledge too overtly the ways in which he is similar

[35] Adorno, 'Lyric Poetry and Society' in *The Adorno Reader*, pp. 211-229 (213).
[36] Adorno, p. 213.

to his imagined audience would be to undermine his insistence upon the isolation that defines his sense of individual identity.

The poems appear, at first, to be public addresses and thus to engage directly with societal concerns. Five of them begin 'Dear Citizens', hinting at socialist sentiment. The address 'Dear' also invites the possibility of the poems being read as letters rather than speeches. The seemingly public purpose of the poems is undermined, however, when it is 'the silence', rather than any citizen, that responds. The dialogues take place in the mind rather than any actual public arena. Through the silence's reproaches and his own tentative remarks and questions, the speaker's self-doubt becomes apparent, and he fails, eventually, to make a convincing case for his position as poet, student, and teacher (the terms become almost interchangeable) whilst 'other boys' are 'slumped like sacks on desperate shores' (*V*, p. 55). However, the very tentativeness of his attempt to justify his detached way of living is, in its own way, compelling, even if his argument is not. And whilst this is as far removed as can be imagined from war poetry that commemorates active warfare, it merits consideration as poetry of survivor's guilt. The speaker is essentially an innocent bystander in, as Schwartz puts it elsewhere, 'a world in which an innocent bystander is continually faced by an overwhelming and inexhaustible threat' and in which 'there is often a feeling that to be an innocent bystander is in itself one form of guilt' ('The Present State of Poetry', p. 48).[37] One might recall again the disciple in 'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced The Twelve' who regrets the 'never quite healed' wound he bears 'as witness, standing by' (*V*, p. 47), and this particular kind of guilt might be intensified for the non-combatant American given that, with one exception, the Second World War was not fought on American soil. And, although Schwartz never acknowledges it, being an American Jew, and thus escaping the holocaust, can only have added to this feeling. In his desperation to justify his lack of involvement, it is as if Schwartz's speaker wanted to assert, following Milton, that 'They also serve who only stand and wait'; but, lacking any religious faith to support this opinion he cannot help but sound uncertain.[38]

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[37] In a 1946 letter to Jean Stafford, Schwartz playfully uses the language of combat to describe a fight between tomcats over his female cat, Oranges: 'I decided to desert and return and then a world war started and Oranges was the innocent bystander just about to lose not only her innocence but also her eyes' (*Letters*, p. 238). The levity of this does not undermine the seriousness of the main point.

[38] John Milton, 'Sonnet XVI' in *Complete Shorter Poems*, 2nd edn., ed. by John Carey (London: Longman, 1997), p. 333.

The doubts Schwartz's speaker suffers are of various kinds. Firstly, he questions the success of his philosophical endeavour, wondering what truth, if any, he has been able to attain: 'What starlight have I glimpsed for all my guilt?' (*V*, p. 53). Coming immediately after 'Starlight Like Intuition Pierced the Twelve', with its dramatisation of the sacrifices undergone by those who *have* witnessed starlight, it is possible to discern some resistance to achieving such a goal. This may be one reason why the speaker (like Schwartz himself) is more committed, instead, to studying the softer, less piercing 'morning light' (p. 53). True, the poem that follows – despite admitting that 'the true, the good, and the beautiful' are 'untouchable as a star' – concludes with a call to celebrate the fact that 'Plato's starlight glitters amid the shocking wars' (p. 54): however terrible events may be, the speaker insists, a core of universal truth, goodness and beauty remains. This is immediately dismissed, however, as 'empty rhetoric' (p. 55) by the silence at the start of the third poem, and, rather than answer this, the speaker again dwells upon his isolation.

Later in the sequence, there is similar ambivalence about starlight. In 'Some Present Things Are Causes Of True Fear', for example, the speaker tells his citizens not to be embittered 'Because the beau ideal once glittered for us' (*V*, p. 57). And, finally, near the end of the section's last poem, 'The Past's Great Power Overpowers Every Hour', the past is described as

> an obscene play
> [...] which senselessly recites in us,
> Obsessive as the whippoorwill,
> Like starlight on the pane, irrational,
> –Inspired by what? inspired by the blaze
> Of the true, the good, and the beautiful.
>
> (p. 63)

The connotations here are unclear: starlight is at once associated with obscenity and senselessness, but also with the blaze of truth, goodness and beauty. By this point, one can't help wondering whether 'the true, the good and the beautiful' ought to be spoken with an ironic sneer, but the evidence of the forty sonnets that follow under the heading 'The Early Morning Light', and the poetry that he would write afterwards, suggests that Schwartz – if not his speaker – did not abandon hope in these Platonic ideals, even if he could not rationalise why they were so important to him. [39]

[39] Faber Gottschalk, in 'The Statues', finds it similarly impossible to articulate a feeling in which he has conviction but which is essentially indefinable. In defending the snow statues against those who intend to remove them, he declares: 'To anything which is beautiful, to anything which is true, to anything

The speaker also doubts whether his efforts are in any way beneficial, asking 'What have I done which is a little good?' (*V*, p. 53). Perhaps he *is* devoted to art merely for its own sake, and not for the good of society – a possibility that is obliquely suggested in his description of poetry as 'old as the rocks' (p. 53), alluding to Pater's description of the *Mona Lisa* in *The Renaissance*, the central text of Aestheticism.[40] The society presented in the sequence is one for which the speaker appears to have considerable contempt, one that he would want to change. Although 'Some Present Things Are Causes Of True Fear' begins with a call *not* to jeer, it is hard to read such lines as 'Come, let us praise the noble lies which were / To justify the millions dead in war' (p. 56) as anything other than cynical. Initially, they seem grossly to simplify the causes of the Second World War, and to contribute to the uncomfortably snide tone of the sequence in general. On further consideration, however, it becomes apparent that the speaker's attitude towards his nation and its leaders is more complex. One notes, for example, that the silence has already dismissed the speaker's own commitment to poetry as 'a noble lie' (p. 54): he is perhaps as bad, then, as the politicians for whom he has so little respect, and over whom, despite being a would-be philosopher-king, he has no influence. However, the lines *can* also be taken in earnest: men, regrettably, *are* able to commit atrocities for reasons that are 'noble as Jesus Christ' (p. 56).

For all the poem's extravagant tonal shifts and ambiguities, there is little doubt that the speaker's call to 'praise the life in which we live' (*V*, p. 56) is sincerely meant. He sets the benefits of modern life against the atrocity of the war; and although describing the radio as 'poet laureate / To Heinz, Palmolive, Swift, and Chevrolet' (p. 57) sounds cynical, it equally underlines just how much choice is available to the modern American citizen. In one respect, despite the international horror, life has never been better. 'Who could want more?' (p. 57) the speaker asks at the end of the poem. This is a bold stance to take – and one that may have some truth in it – but it is undermined by the rhetorical question that precedes it: 'Do we not have, in fine, depression and war / Certain each generation?' (p. 57). This is a variation on the oft-stated Schwartz conviction that history is forever re-enacted. The answer may be 'yes', but the question remains naïve insofar as it ignores the unprecedented scale of

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which is good we are committed, though the commitment jeopardizes our lives' (*Screeno*, p. 98). However, like Christ's disciples, he pays for his glimpse of unspeakable beauty: after the statues melt, his quotidian life loses meaning and he dies ignominiously.

[40] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 80.

World War II and fails to take into account those aspects that distinguish it from previous conflicts: the use of technology to facilitate genocide, for example, or the nature of the precarious alliance of Britain and the United States with the Soviet Union. As political analysis, it is insubstantial, even if the poem's tonal uncertainties prove to be a vivid reflection of how difficult it is for the lyric poet to engage with an uninterested public.

The final poems in the sequence have much more to say about poetry and the role of the poet than they do about politics. In 'Disorder Overtakes Us All Day Long', a reader might cringe at the glib assertion that 'These politicians have an easy time, / They can say anything, they have no shame' (*V*, p. 60), but the comparison that follows – of the poet to someone struggling to complete a puzzle whilst 'Making the huge assumption that there is / A lucid picture which these fragments fit' (p. 60) – is an important comment about how Schwartz conceived of his art. This relates to the anxiety he expresses in 'The Isolation of Modern Poetry' about there no longer being any universal world picture, a fact that is set in stark relief by the reality of worldwide war. In his search for a unifying principle other than religion, Schwartz becomes increasingly reliant, in *Vaudeville for a Princess* and his later poetry, on the idea of hope – not just in the American Dream, but also in the actuality of American life. However, he is ever aware that this might simply be illusory. The critical point – the one that amounts almost to a manifesto – comes at the end of 'Disorder Overtakes Us All Day Long'. What if, the speaker wonders, there *is* no unifying picture, and poets just 'handled foolishly essential chaos?' The answer is that this hardly matters: 'What but with patient hope to try again?' (p. 61). Whether hope is real or not, foolish or well-founded, it is necessary. Schwartz (or his speaker) comes very close here to endorsing Stevens's conjecture that we cannot really believe in anything unless we can recognise it to be a fiction.[41] Such an attitude also accounts for why it is inadequate to see only the destructiveness of the war and not to see also the potential for peace, or Plato's glittering starlight.

To sustain such a belief in hope, however, is difficult. The final poem in the sequence concludes by asking 'What is our hope, except to tell the truth?' (*V*, p. 63) but what the truth itself might be is so unclear by this point that the issue remains unresolved. The penultimate poem, 'Most Things At Second Hand Through Gloves

[41] See 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' in Stevens, pp. 329-352, and Kenner, *A Homemade World*, p. 54.

We Touch', appears to celebrate truth-telling through its assertion that if we can 'lay bare our hearts' and 'take away the masks which hide us' (p. 62), we need not be estranged from each other. However, the speaker then goes on to say that 'We know our lives are lived by lies' (p. 62). Perhaps to admit this is to begin to resolve the problem. The poem ends, however, with outright theatrical posturing – that is affectedness, inauthenticity – as an 'arch-Shakespearean radical' recites how '*The true, the good, / And the beautiful have been struck down / Because of what they are*' (p. 62, Schwartz's italics). The question of what the truth may be is further complicated due to the fact that here, in the given context, what the actor says really does appear to be the case. If the question remains unresolved, the conclusion of the sequence does at least suggest why a philosopher-king – someone who will dedicate himself to discovering what the truth is – might be necessary for a society that seeks to sustain itself through hope.

The question of the overbearing burden of hope is also picked up in several of the sonnets that follow. They are mostly unmemorable and far less urgent in tone than the poems that go before, but in picking up on many of Schwartz's preoccupations from the first two sections – including his indebtedness to Elizabethan poets such as Sidney – they provide the book with thematic unity. In 'He Does To Others What He Wants Them To Do To Him', Schwartz contends that

> it is false and true to hope at all
> For gratitude and love. Yet who can cope
> With hope, no matter what cynicism shows
>
> (*V*, p. 81)

Hope may be true, false, or, paradoxically, both, and whilst it may be a means of salvation, it can also be hard to bear, whether disappointed or fulfilled. Another sonnet, 'Demons And Angels Sing Ever In The West', proposes that 'The present moment always is untrue!' and that 'light brings back old hope's ingenious lies' (p. 95). 'Cartoons Of Coming Shows Unseen Before', meanwhile, finds the poet at the movies, 'Sad about being sad', but able to lose himself for a while in versions of the American Dream – 'boy meets girl', 'poor young man may win the boss' daughter' – until the newsreel interrupts to show Churchill and Roosevelt nudging each other and playing 'Mah-jong or pat-a-cake with history' (p. 97). Like many of the earlier poems, this trivialises the particular politics of the moment in a way that seems more clumsy than considered. However, it is a further illustration of Schwartz's general sense that

the circumstances of most people's lives are predetermined by the random decisions of a powerful few. In the final poem in *Vaudeville For A Princess*, entitled 'Why Do You Write An Endless History?', the poet gives a frank answer to the question of why he so frequently looks in his heart and revisits past events. '"I think"', he explains,

> "I wish to understand
> The causes of each great and small event
>
> Chosen, or like thrown dice, an accident
> [...]
> For, as the light renews each incident,
> My friends are free of guilt or I am free
> Of self-accused responsibility."
>
> (p. 106)

In other words, revisiting these scenes makes it apparent that no individual – not the poet himself, nor his friends – can be held wholly accountable for what has happened. In every instance there are numerous unavoidable factors that condition the decisions that individuals make. Elsewhere in Schwartz's oeuvre, the relative lack of control that individuals have over their own destinies is a cause for alarm and dismay. Here, however, it is consolatory, releasing the individual from responsibility. Be that as it may, it can never be a total release: realising that one is never wholly responsible for any given occurrence does not free one of all responsibility, as the writer of 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' well knew. Nonetheless, this marks a development in Schwartz's thinking on the subject, and one that demands further consideration in light of Schwartz's private political views and in comparison with Dwight MacDonald's rather different idea of responsibility.

The Responsibility of Peoples

In discussing 'The True, The Good and The Beautiful' it is hard to overlook the parallels between the speaker's position and Schwartz's own, as a teacher of Naval cadets during the War. However, the speaker is not merely a mouthpiece for Schwartz's own views, which he expresses, often cagily, in letters and some of his essays. Even though his utterances on the War are characterised by a surprising limpness of argument (given how astute he tends to be when discussing literary or cultural matters), it remains important to address them – and to address them alongside the attitudes of more assured contemporaries. The difficulties that Schwartz

confronted in private correspondence are ones that he also tackled in stories and poems, and, for this reason, it is relevant to discuss attitudes and beliefs that might initially seem germane only to an assessment of his life.

As early as September 8 1939 Schwartz wrote to Robert Hivnor of

> the necessity that you keep yourself going and living as a writer, no matter what demands the new war and the entelechy of revolution make upon you. [...] The war's immense sensations may create all kinds of immediacies which tempt one to do something else; but one ought to remember that to live wholly in a crisis is like living wholly in the present moment, stupid and obscene.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 75)

Whilst there may be good sense in this essentially Platonic position – don't let yourself be distracted by the particular instance but attempt to appreciate, instead, the universals – it is also foolish to ignore altogether what is happening to one's world, especially when it involves such an immense upheaval as the War. Nonetheless, Schwartz was peculiarly resistant to engaging with the crisis. Contemporaries such as MacDonald voiced outspoken disapproval of America's involvement, and Lowell was imprisoned as a conscientious objector, whilst Randall Jarrell trained pilots and Karl Shapiro and Anthony Hecht served in the Pacific and Europe respectively, addressing their experiences in their poetry. Schwartz, meanwhile, who had avoided being drafted on account of various factors – a '"glandular" malady', Theodore Spencer's endorsement of his teaching post, and the pretence that he still had to support his estranged wife, Gertrude Buckman (*Letters*, p. 171) – simply insisted that he maintained no political or ideological standpoint.

To maintain no position is, however, in fact to maintain a very conspicuous position – one of passive resistance, a refusal to let the overwhelming changes occurring all around alter the way one lives one's life. On January 22 1942, some six weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the War, Schwartz wrote uneasily to Blackmur. 'I still feel ragged and unfinished about the war argument', he explained, before offering a crude hypothetical dilemma as analogy:

> M (a moral being) is captured by soldiers, and told that he must commit sodomy with P or with P1, if he wishes to keep his life. P is well-dressed, clean, kindly, cultivated, even charming; P1 is a filthy cruel Arab. What does M do? Does he not say with the Cumaean Sibyll, I wish to die? or the very least, I choose neither, I reject both?
>
> I admit that this is a vast over-simplification, but nevertheless it is a question which seems to me to commit one to denying the kind of argument based on the lesser evil, or the argument that there are only two alternatives. Is it not true

> that for the moral being a moral choice is always possible, and necessary, however unsuccessful it may be?'
>
> (*Letters*, p. 121)

The trouble is that the analogy is not only an over-simplification, but also a falsification of the situation, not least because, as Schwartz tells it, M's decision will affect only himself and whichever of the men he sodomises (if, that is, he chooses to save his life), rather than whole communities and nations as in the case of the War. The cleanliness or lack of cleanliness of the two men is largely irrelevant, as is the racial slur, and even the act itself. The analogy might illustrate how none of the possible responses is acceptable, but it emphatically does not show how abstaining from making a decision can be anything other than an admission of failure. For someone who was such an advocate of 'international consciousness', Schwartz's myopia here is surprising: he seems not to see that the real war cannot be addressed only as some abstract ethical puzzle.

Schwartz attempted another defence of 'why [he] did not write about the war', this time to MacDonald, in a letter of October 5, 1942. 'The initial assumption', he explains,

> is that no political position is possible for intellectuals at present. Second, the intellectuals must, as a necessary myth, conceive of themselves as a class, or rather a club, or at any rate, a group which, by the very nature of their profession, have a vested interest in truth, an interest which must be defended more than ever in wartime. [...] From the point of view of this vested interest in culture and truth, it is possible to proceed to a detailed and constant criticism of the war. [...] But the point of view is just as important as the particular targets, and ought to be stated in abstraction. That it is an abstraction is undeniable, but no more so than the professional standards of doctors. Since surgeons are not asked to throw overboard their activities in wartime, those who are doctors of the spirit ought to continue their professional engagements also.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 133)

This is more or less the argument of the speaker of 'The True, The Good and The Beautiful' when he says that he is a student of the morning light. The implication is that intellectuals alone are capable of searching for some objective standard from which it is possible to analyse and judge the war. Few would dispute the fact that truth and culture are important, and few would dispute the fact that a war should be the subject of serious debate about why it is being fought and the methods that are being used. Few would deny, either, that such a debate would probably have to be carried out by scholars or politicians who are not themselves active participants in the war – if

only because their detachment allows them an overview that is not available to those who are directly involved. All the same, Schwartz's stance sounds like a deliberate avoidance of the issue.

Criticism of intellectuals in wartime was something that Schwartz took personally. In August, 1943, he responded to an essay that William Carlos Williams had submitted to *Partisan Review* – 'A Fault of Learning', published that September. The elder poet had 'castigat[ed] intellectuals for attacking Stalinism at a time when Russia was [America's] military ally' (*Letters*, p. 188). Schwartz's instinct to question this stance was well-founded: one of the greatest ethical problems for the Allies was the fact that they needed military support from a regime ruled by a dictator no less genocidal than the one they were fighting. However, rather than address this issue, Schwartz sets about defending himself as an academic, first of all challenging Williams' implication that intellectuals, because some of them are prepared to question some of the tenets of democracy, 'prepare the way for totalitarianism' (p. 187). This 'is strange', Schwartz maintains, 'in view of what Hitler as a practical man did about intellectuals. It reminds me of the point of view that attributes the rise of Hitlerism to Wagner and Nietzsche' (p. 187). How could a thinker or composer, he implies, inspire a regime that would attempt to obliterate culture? Schwartz then outlines his own situation, using much the same argument that he had used to MacDonald. As a teacher, he says, 'I am a kind of dentist, as you are a doctor, and it is an honorable calling' (p. 189). The medical analogies are helpful insofar as they establish that a nation's cultural and linguistic well-being is as important as its physical health. Cultural health is not so easily measured or assessed as physical health, however. Nor is it possible without physical health, so it is not perhaps surprising that the latter should be prioritised in a time of crisis.

Schwartz's exchange with Williams is particularly interesting in the context of the establishment of the new *Partisan Review* in 1937. The original journal, founded in 1934, had been funded by the John Reed Club of New York, a branch of an organisation for American writers that was affiliated with Soviet Communism. However, when the Communist party shut down the club, *Partisan Review* was left without a sponsor, and publication ceased for over a year. As revelations of Stalin's tyranny emerged, the editors also revised their political standpoint. When publication resumed in December 1937 (with 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' as its lead story) it was overtly anti-Stalinist. The editors – Philip Rahv, William Philips, MacDonald,

Mary McCarthy, Clement Greenberg, and George L. K. Morris – avowed their 'responsibility to the revolutionary movement in general', but disclaimed 'obligation to any of its organized political expressions.'[42] As, principally, a journal of literature and culture, albeit one with a specific political leaning, the editors felt compelled to distinguish the literature from the politics, spelling out their 'conviction that literature in our period should be free of all factional dependence.'[43] They go on to explain that 'Conformity to a given social ideology or to a prescribed attitude or technique will not be asked of our writers. On the contrary, our pages will be open to any tendency which is relevant to literature in our time.'[44] It is this editorial principle that enabled them to publish writers with such divergent political views as Eliot and Williams, Hannah Arendt and Roy Campbell. It is also a principle which shows how MacDonald might be able to admire Schwartz's writing whilst disagreeing with his political views.

Schwartz was not, primarily, a political writer. As he himself recognised, 'political insight does not coincide with literary genius.'[45] Furthermore, he adds, if literature does engage with politics, and has serious political meanings, 'this is not at all the same kind of knowledge of political reality which is necessary at the ballot-box or when France has just been occupied and conquered by Germany' ('The Fabulous Example of André Gide', p. 249). In the same way, the literary pieces published in *Partisan Review*, even if they do have political meanings, are works of literature before they are documents advocating a particular political stance. They may be politically engaged, but that cannot be the sole – or even primary – basis on which they are judged. All the same, it is almost impossible to conceive of a literature that is not political in any way, and Schwartz's generally leftist attitudes and unease at America's role in the War tend to be apparent in his writing even when they are not explicitly stated.

In private correspondence Schwartz did not hesitate to make bold statements. At times he sounds obnoxious in his mockery, such as when he regales Blackmur with the story of how Milton Klonsky, on being summoned by the draft board 'blew his nose in the Stars and Stripes, Rimbaldian' and then 'wrote back that he was an artist,

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[42] 'Editorial Statement', *Partisan Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, December 1937. Reprinted in *The New York Intellectuals Reader*, edited by Neil Jumonville (Routledge: London, 2007), p. 60.
[43] 'Editorial Statement', p. 60.
[44] 'Editorial Statement', pp. 60-62.
[45] 'The Fabulous Example of André Gide' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 246-254 (p. 249).

he could not be disturbed on such short notice, he was in the middle of a poem' (*Letters*, p. 126). Schwartz's apparent delight in such petulance is hardly likely to win over supporters to the cause of poets in wartime. In another letter, Schwartz indulges his schadenfreude, telling Laughlin, 'the present war has very pleasant aspects. The death of generals, the stupidity of the British, Hess dropping down in Scotland, but above all, Darlan, greatest of politicians, for who before him ever changed sides three times in one war?' (p. 137). He scoffs at Roosevelt, whom he calls 'Friendly Frank', and complains to Laughlin that 'Now we will have a war until every Chinaman has to buy Gillette blades or lose his self-respect' (*DS & JL Letters*, p. 173). This is unreasonable: America did not enter the War cynically, seeing an opportunity for globalisation. Nor was the War fought merely with a view to preserving American ideals. It was fought because world freedom was threatened, regardless of what other consequences ensued. Nonetheless, this comment, crass as it is, is prescient insofar as it anticipates the clash of Communist and capitalist ideology that would follow almost as soon as the war ended.

On the topic of capitalism as one contributory factor to the War, Schwartz is often more authoritative than in his other statements. For example, he spells out to Blackmur – who, it seems, had a more optimistic view of American society as being rendered buoyant and unified by the War – his 'belief in critichood' (*Letters*, p. 135), the need to challenge societal norms. During the thirties, he points out, there were 'immense protests' against 'the New Deal's expenditure for playgrounds, swimming pools, schools, and [...] the support of the arts' (p. 135), to the extent that proposed projects were dropped. 'The war, however', he goes on, 'costs many times the cost of the positive things of the New Deal, and draws overwhelming support, not merely vocal support, but the support of heavy industry and organized labor, both thriving wonderfully on the needs of the war' (*Letters*, p. 135). He concludes by arguing that society must abandon the ownership of private property if it is to 'thrive on the creation of positive goods and not the instruments of warfare' (p. 135). Schwartz often insisted that he was not a Marxist, but his position here is far to the left. Regulated capitalism will not do, he suggests; it cannot *be* regulated. His wish for industry to be state-run without the possibility of private financial interest is unrealistic, and he knew it, but his sensitivity to the difficult truth that war creates employment and economic opportunity reveals a greater understanding of the complexity of the issues than is sometimes apparent elsewhere.

In a follow-up letter of October 30 1942, he elucidates further:

> It is not, I think, that private property is irresponsible, but that it must be irresponsible; the manufacturer must exploit his workers by holding down their wages in order to make a profit, or he will cease to be a manufacturer. He must shut down his plant when he is not making a profit. The wheat must be plowed under and the cotton must be destroyed, to keep up prices: it is in this sense that the New Deal's failure was inevitable. And then the whole thing must lead to depression and war.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 139)

Schwartz's dispute with the ownership of private property is that he sees it as relieving owners of moral obligation. For a business to prosper, its owner need have responsibility to no one but him or herself. If they put social responsibility ahead of their own needs, they will bankrupt themselves and the industry will fold. Capitalism is a competitive system by which there will always be a proportion of any given population that prospers and a proportion that does not. This is also the basis of the American Dream, as Schwartz often insisted: the opportunity for phenomenal success brings with it the possibility of failure. A committed capitalist would respond by saying that competition enables a fluid economy and diverse employment opportunities. When protected by democratic principles, this increases the quality of services, and of life itself, for all, even for those who do not succeed. For those who *do* succeed, there is then a need to sustain not only one's own wealth but also, to prevent revolution, the stability of society as a whole: 'in dreams begin responsibilities'. The fulfillment of personal goals increases one's obligations to others.

Part of the problem for Schwartz – who would have no qualms about later becoming a property owner himself – is that he cannot find a viable alternative to capitalism. 'I say all this', he tells Blackmur,

> at the same time that I suffer from the deadly fear that capitalism is immortal, for it survives the most exhausting crises and wars with matchless stamina, a stamina which, so far as I can make out, draws itself from the fact that the populace for the most part wants to be rich, every girl in the 5 & 10 believes in the long shot hope that, although she is not Barbara Hutton, she may marry a Rockefeller, as the silver screen reveals repeatedly. In this sense, I suppose that the root of the matter is a moral failure on the part of the whole populace.
>
> (*Letters*, pp. 139-140)

Despite Schwartz's levity here, his implicit condemnation of believing in such a 'long shot hope' is hypocritical. He wanted to be rich himself, and one of the most upsetting aspects of the War, for him, was that it meant that very few people would want to buy

his books. Schwartz seemed to anticipate that *Genesis* would not sell well, but by attributing this lack of commercial success to 'Capitalismus', an unavoidable social force, he avoids having to confront the possibilities that he had simply not written the book with a clear enough sense of what a popular audience might want (if, that is, he merely wanted to make money) or that he did not, in fact, intend it for such an audience in the first place (in which case hoping for financial gain was wishful thinking). Schwartz's further suggestion in the letter to Blackmur that the causes of the war itself may have had little to do with human agency is altogether more alarming. Only the War reduced the level of unemployment in the United States, he explains, and, in the same way, he contends that, 'given a highly industrialized country, Hitler had to go forward in one direction, there was necessity and not choice in front and back of him' (p. 139). In other words, Hitler acted as he did because circumstances forced him to; he cannot be held responsible for starting the War.

Careful distinctions need to be made here. To suggest that Hitler's actions alone caused the crisis would be to overlook many other contributory factors. But, equally, Schwartz's implication that he did what he did only out of necessity is distorted. It would be unfair to assume that this is Schwartz's final position on the issue. The question of the relation of individual responsibility to circumstantial forces is one that he revisits time after time, and the fact that he never reaches a definitive conclusion suggests that he recognised the question to be irresolvable. However, coupled with the wished-for abstention from personal responsibility in the final poem of *Vaudeville for a Princess*, it suggests that Schwartz's sense of history as essentially predetermined, allowing little opportunity for individuals to exercise their own free will or take control themselves, was growing ever-stronger.

MacDonald's take on the subject initially looks quite different to Schwartz's, but it is significant that he, too, was grappling with the same problems at about the same time. In a group of essays later collected under the title *The Responsibility of Peoples*, MacDonald objects to the contemporary tendency to think 'of peoples as responsible and individuals as irresponsible'– a tendency of which Schwartz is guilty in ascribing the endurance of capitalism to 'a moral failure on the part of the whole populace.'[46] MacDonald explains:

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[46] Dwight MacDonald, 'The Bomb' in *The Responsibility of Peoples and Other Essays in Political Criticism* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1957), pp. 103-115 (p. 113).

> As primitive man endowed natural forces with human animus, so modern man attributes to a nation or a people qualities of will and choice that belong in reality only to individuals. The reasons are the same in both cases: to reduce mysterious and uncontrollable forces to a level where they may be dealt with. The cave-dweller feels much more comfortable about a thunderstorm if he can explain it as the rage of someone like himself, only bigger, and the urban cave-dwellers of our time feel much better about war if they can think of the enemy nation as a person like themselves, only bigger, which can be collectively punched in the nose for the evil actions it collectively chooses to do. If the German people are not 'responsible' for 'their' nation's war crimes, the world becomes a complicated and terrifying place, in which un-understood social forces move men puppet-like to perform terrible acts, and in which guilt is at once universal and meaningless. Unhappily, the world is in fact such a place.[47]

A nation is, to use Benedict Anderson's term, an 'imagined community'.[48] Nations are no less real for that, but as largely abstract social constructs, decisions can only be made on their behalf by individuals who can be regarded as representatives. In this respect, MacDonald would have had absolutely no time for the argument that Hitler was not personally responsible for the atrocities he commanded, particularly if that responsibility were then attributed vaguely to 'Germany' instead.

However, MacDonald's views are not as divergent from Schwartz's as they initially seem to be. His 'un-understood social forces' sound very much like the social, cultural, historical and psychological 'divinities' that Schwartz identifies in *Genesis*. Both men agree that individuals are subject to conditions over which they have no control and which are not their fault. MacDonald describes the situation forcefully:

> Even at best – by which I mean in a smallish, integrated community like the ancient Greek city state – there is always a desperate struggle between what the individual wants and what happens to him as a result of living in a society. [...] And at worst – by which I mean the big-scale, industrial-bureaucratic societies in which the people of USA, USSR, and most of Europe toss and twist – there is not even a struggle: the individual 'citizen' (what a mockery!) has about the same chance of determining his own fate as a hog dangling by one foot from the conveyer belt of a Chicago packing plant.[49]

Another point on which Schwartz and MacDonald are in agreement is that one of the challenges in modern life is learning how to exercise whatever free will one might have within such constraints, and how to do so responsibly.

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[47] MacDonald, 'The Responsibility of Peoples' in *The Responsibility of Peoples*, pp. 9-45 (30-31).
[48] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]).
[49] MacDonald, 'The Germans – Three Years Later' in *The Responsibilities of Peoples*, pp. 71-75 (p. 71).

At times, such an effort seems especially futile. MacDonald cites the unignorable example of the atomic bomb. 'Insofar as there is any moral responsibility assignable for The Bomb', he argues, 'it rests with those scientists who developed it and those political and military leaders who employed it.' It certainly does not rest with the American people, most of whom 'did not even know what was being done in [their] name – let alone have the slightest possibility of stopping it'. Because of this, 'The Bomb becomes the most dramatic illustration to date of the fallacy of "The Responsibility of Peoples".'[50] And yet, MacDonald goes on,

> how can even those immediately concerned be held responsible? A general's function is to win wars, a president's or prime minister's to defend the interests of the ruling class he represents, a scientist's to extend the frontiers of knowledge; how can any of them, then, draw the line at the atom bomb, or indeed anywhere, regardless of their 'personal feelings'? [...] The social order is an impersonal mechanism, the war is an impersonal process, and they grind along automatically; if some of the human parts rebel at their function, they will be replaced by more amenable ones; and their rebellion will mean that they are simply thrust aside, without changing anything.[51]

It is at this point that MacDonald most forthrightly spells out his conviction. Individuals, he goes on, can nonetheless refuse to play a part in such a mechanism. Even if their individual actions do nothing immediately to curb the progression of international events, they can still follow their consciences, and if enough individuals act in this way it could be for the good of mankind. 'Today', he explains,

> the tendency is to think of peoples as responsible and individuals as irresponsible. The reverse of both these conceptions is the first condition of escaping the present decline to barbarism. The more each individual thinks and behaves as a whole Man (hence responsibly) rather than as a specialized part of some nation or profession (hence irresponsibly), the better hope for the future.[52]

With its echo of Emerson's conception of 'Man Thinking', this is, ideologically, admirable.[53] But, like Schwartz's example of the man choosing to die rather than commit sodomy, it still does not seem a realistic solution, as MacDonald himself would later confess. Writing in 1953, he concedes that his hope in a 'third camp' that might arise and, through peaceful revolution, overthrow the Nazis, seems like willful self-deception. 'The only historically real alternatives in 1939', he admits, 'were to back Hitler's armies, to back the Allies' armies, or to do nothing. But none of these

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[50] MacDonald, 'The Bomb', pp. 111-112.
[51] 'The Bomb', p. 112.
[52] 'The Bomb', p. 113.
[53] See Emerson, 'The American Scholar', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 83-105.

alternatives promised any great benefit for mankind, and the one that finally triumphed has led simply to the replacing of the Nazi threat by the Communist threat.'[54] It is a bleak, but truthful, assessment. It does not invalidate his stance on personal, rather than collective responsibility; fully accepting one's own obligations may still be the only means by which to live one's own life meaningfully. However, MacDonald acknowledges, this is extraordinarily difficult to do.

One gets a sense of Schwartz's overall agreement with MacDonald on this issue when he writes to Gertrude Buckman in November 1943 about his projected conclusion to *Genesis*. The ghosts (who now include Hershey's father) present the boy with a choice: 'if he forgives his parents and accepts his own guilt, then he can live. If he refuses the responsibility for what he is, then he must die, because that is a denial of the freedom of the will and the possibility of human goodness' (*Letters*, p. 200). The choice is to be left, he says, without resolution: readers will have to decide for themselves whether Hershey is strong enough to accept such responsibility. Schwartz's implication here is that if one concludes that everything is impersonal and predetermined one might as well stop trying to live responsibly. The *possibility* of human goodness, if not its actual fulfillment, is perhaps as much as we can hope for.

'Our Country and Our Culture': Schwartz's post-War criticism

If Schwartz's wartime opinions are sometimes underdeveloped or ill thought out, he tends to be a more perceptive critic of American life and culture in the 1950s. This was a time of post-War recovery and the emergence of the liberal society, but also one of renewed fear as tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States intensified, the Korean War broke out, and the possibility of nuclear conflict increased. The decade became one of personal turmoil for Schwartz too, but it had begun hopefully with his marriage to Elizabeth Pollet in 1949, their purchase of a New Jersey farmhouse, and the steady emergence of a new poetic vision. Professionally, Schwartz remained largely itinerant, but he maintained editorial roles at *Partisan Review* and *New Republic*, and his essays and reviews from these years are often insightful in their investigations into what it is like to face up to one's responsibilities in a much changed world. His insistence on the need for hope and

[54] 'I Choose the West', in *The Responsibility of Peoples*, pp. 121-125 (p. 125).

belief in the actuality of American life rather than just the chimera presented by the American Dream, becomes stronger and stronger. Much of Schwartz's criticism from the 1950s indicates how his poetic as well as his social vision was changing.

Writing in 1952, Schwartz remarked on how 'The present which confronts us in 1952 was inconceivable in 1935. We knew that it would be different, but we expected it to be a continuation and development, not a complete breach with the social consciousness which preoccupied intellectuals then' ('Our Country and Our Culture', *Essays*, p. 399).[55] Schwartz often traces these changes in social attitude by referring to Hollywood and the popular culture of 1950s America. 'The Grapes of Crisis', a survey essay published in *Partisan Review* in 1951, notes many of these changes already well under way. Happy endings are out of fashion in Hollywood, Schwartz observes, Daisy Miller has become cynical, and the language of psychiatry has infiltrated everyday speech. The social origins of the pervading sense of crisis, he explains, are 'the depression, the two World Wars, and the fear of a third war with Russia', but what is especially apparent is that the Allied victory in the Second World War, along with the evidence of economic revival, has done nothing to relieve the sense of foreboding. 'If one has expected pie or at least manna from the sky', Schwartz explains,

> the dropping of atom bombs becomes an apocalyptic transformation out of the blue. And if one expected to be rich and successful, two luxurious promises of the American Dream, one can hardly help but be terrified when riches and success bring greater conflict and unhappiness, instead of gratification and peace.[56]

To be disappointed is a possibility for which one can prepare. 'But to find that the overwhelming fulfillment of hope and desire leave one in disillusion or despair is one of the most demoralizing of experiences' ('The Grapes of Crisis', p. 382). The War, all this suggests, may have radically altered social attitudes, but there is a pervading sense that it achieved very little. For many, personal liberties are still denied.

Schwartz goes on:

> it was natural and naïve to suppose that the defeat of Hitler would end or reduce the infamy of racial discrimination, instead of intensifying it and bringing a greater consciousness and self-consciousness of it, so that, for example, New York Jews are accused by Jews elsewhere of being the cause of anti-Semitism.
>
> ('The Grapes of Crisis', p. 383)

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[55] 'Our Country and Our Culture' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 399-403 (p. 399).
[56] 'The Grapes of Crisis' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 377-385 (p. 382).

It was natural to suppose this in the same way that it was natural to assume that the atomic bomb, constituting such an appalling threat, would be an effective deterrent against future warfare. Although he characteristically avoids direct reference to the holocaust, Schwartz is suggesting here that one would expect the horror of the Nazi genocide to have shocked the world into greater racial tolerance. Instead, it appears to have reinforced general awareness of racial difference to the extent that it becomes overt where it might once have been latent, and that blame can be attributed to those with differing ideologies within the same ethnic or religious groups.

There are, however, some more reassuring, if not exactly positive, aspects to the post-War climate. One of the most important of these, for Schwartz, is the sense that America is gaining maturity as a nation, its people more prepared to face life as it is rather than live in dreams, and more prepared to accept their responsibilities. 'We can guess hopefully', he says, 'that perhaps Americans no longer want to be children and they no longer want to be told fairy tales: they are mature enough to want the confrontation of reality which tragedy provides' ('The Grapes of Crisis', p. 384). Sometimes it is cathartic to face up to the most dreadful of possibilities:

> In a period of depression, the image of a Utopia is welcome; but when civilization itself seems capable of destroying itself and when the end of the crisis does not seem likely tomorrow, it is a genuine relief and blessing to be able to contemplate images of the worst that may happen.
>
> (p. 384)

An important consequence of this, as far as Schwartz is concerned, is that it advances 'the conditions under which a serious literature can thrive', creating 'the possibility of a genuine tragic art' (p. 384), one that would be characterised by intelligence and courage.

It is by no means a universal condition, however, and when it comes to film, Schwartz is in turn impressed by surprisingly serious performances by big stars and dismayed by Hollywood's habit of trying 'to please everybody by providing everything.'[57] The viewing public, in general, he suggests, has a more grown up attitude towards its screen stars than in the pre-War years when it idolised Mary Pickford as 'the image of America's sweetheart [...] a child before puberty [...] presexual, asexual and even at times unbiological'.[58] The performances of Bing

[57] 'Some Movie Reviews: *The Court Jester* (1956)' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 455-458 (p. 457).
[58] 'Mary Pickford: The Little Girl in Curls', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 438-445 (p. 441).

Crosby and Grace Kelly in 'The Country Girl' are typical, for Schwartz, of Hollywood's less compromising attitude towards reality:

> When the most famous of crooners for more than a generation gives a genuine and sustained portrayal of fear and trembling and the sickness unto death; and when Grace Kelly sets aside what Alfred Hitchcock called her "sexual elegance" to play with equal conviction his exhausted, exacerbated, frozen-faced wife, something must be happening to Hollywood's feeling about stardom.[59]

Another uncompromisingly stark film is 'The Bridges at Toko-Ri', which uses deft camera work to capture the 'visual reality of modern warfare'. In this film, 'the blaze of visual meaning obliterates the story and dims all individuality' whilst the camera shows [...] freedom as subjugation, [...] strength as weakness'.[60]

Elsewhere, Schwartz's film reviews prompt further social and cultural criticism. His review of 'The Blackboard Jungle' – an early version of the kind of film in which an earnest teacher has to overcome the challenges posed by socially deprived and riotous students – dismisses the assumption that the disaffection of some of America's youth is an indictment of the nation's social attitudes.

> The sole cause of juvenile delinquency has been said to be democracy, liberation, mass culture, universal education, industrialism, agnosticism, human nature, psychoanalysis and the New Deal. When none of these frees the adult of responsibility, the children are blamed. This is precisely the same as saying that marriage is the chief cause of divorce, just as the belief that comic books are the chief cause of teen-age crime resembles nothing so much as the assertion that Proust was the cause of the fall of France.[61]

Meanwhile, he relates the revival of the Western in the mid-1950s to anxiety about the threat of nuclear war, arguing that when 'survival, happiness and the quality of life depend on uncontrollable and hidden powers' and when people seem 'helpless in the face of history', nothing 'could be more attractive than an epoch in the past when a gun was enough to keep a man alive and a horse sufficed to ride to destiny.'[62]

Schwartz tends to be open-minded when it comes to cinematic adaptations of novels, recognizing that they can sometimes complement and even enhance the experience of reading. Discussing 'The Man With the Golden Arm', a film based upon a novel by Nelson Alger, Schwartz admits that 'Some important quality is bound to be lost', but stresses that

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[59] 'The Country Girl', *New Republic*, April 4, 1955, p. 21.
[60] 'The Bridges at Toko-Ri', *New Republic*, March 14, 1955, pp. 28-9 (28).
[61] '*Underwater!* and *The Blackboard Jungle*', *Selected Essays*, pp. 461-465 (p. 465).
[62] 'The Badness of Most Recent Films (1955)', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 473-476 (p. 476).

> often enough something important is gained also: sometimes it is a heightened visual sense of the work of fiction; at other times it is a new awareness of the meaning of the written work. What happens at best is comparable to reading a critical essay about a great work of fiction [...] the entire process can be regarded as an extension of the art of translation.[63]

He does not see cinema as a threat to the reading of books, although he does elsewhere admit that post-War novelists have had a hard time competing 'with the sensational reality of the Second World War, the atomic bomb, and worldwide revolution.'[64] He also feels compelled to stress that the reader 'inhabits the interior of another being in a way which no other art makes possible' ('Novels and the News', p. 390).

Schwartz is more cautious about the relatively new phenomenon of television, however, recognising that it introduces into life a wholly new mode of experience, and that it will change the ways in which one watches movies. Schwartz is prescient when he speculates that the limit of the size of the TV 'plate' 'is probably the dimensions of the living room wall', but his prediction that TV would present 'a fatal blow to the magnetism of the screen star' has not proved to be true.[65] The 'most radical of all modifications', he suggests, 'and the most difficult to evaluate', is the fact that the filmgoer who starts to watch films on TV instead of on the big screen loses 'what must be called, for lack of a better phrase, that portion of his "escape from freedom" which he found when he saw a motion picture on the screen' ('Films and TV', p. 467). When characters in Schwartz's stories go to the cinema it is almost always to escape from the discontent of daily life: the movies are a 'refuge', a 'sanctuary' ('Screeno', p. 187), and part of the reason for this is that as soon as one is immersed in a film one is 'done with the anxiety of choice' ('Films and TV', p. 467). For the TV viewer, however,

> the escape from the continual daily pressure of freedom and choice not only has been annulled, but the alternatives of choice have increased. The result is that one may look at the same film on the screen as on the TV plate and yet have two experiences which differ because the viewer is continuously aware that he possesses the choice of other brave new worlds and can reach them by extending his hand and turning the dial.
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> (p. 467)

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[63] 'The Man With the Golden Arm', *New Republic*, Feb 6th, 1956, p. 22.
[64] 'Novels and the News', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 386-390 (p. 389).
[65] 'Films and TV (1955)' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 465-469 (p. 466).

Schwartz recognises here that choice does not always mean freedom and that it can mean increased anxiety and even stasis.

Schwartz's engagement with the popular cultural life of his society, and his cautious celebration of that life, is epitomised in a late essay, left unpublished during his lifetime, titled 'Survey of Our National Phenomena'. The piece was presumably written sometime in the first half of 1962, since it refers to Adlai Stevenson being a national phenomenon in 1962 but also appears to have been written before Marilyn Monroe's death. Schwartz notes the often arbitrary nature of such phenomena. Sometimes a national phenomenon can be international: Princess Margaret's romance with Group Captain Peter Townsend, he observes, received a great deal of public attention in the United States. Sometimes, rather than being a person, it can be a thing or craze, such as *Scrabble*, an extraordinary success in the '50s. Sometimes, he notes, a national phenomenon 'is a person of genuine genius or eminence', but 'he is often, however, a mediocrity and sometimes the status is thrust upon him for freakish, bizarre, eccentric, questionable, or lawless behavior.'[66] In some cases – Lindbergh is the example Schwartz gives – a national phenomenon can be 'a swift, indisputable demonstration that the American Dream [is] still alive, that the courage, initiative, and self-reliance of the solitary individual might still accomplish new wonders' ('Survey of Our National Phenomena', p. 107). Most of the time, however, it is hard to determine what causes any one person or thing to become a national phenomenon. Schwartz draws three tentative conclusions that throw a great deal of light upon his lifelong preoccupation with the relation of the individual to his society. 'For one thing', Schwartz explains,

> the mere existence of a national phenomenon indicates a degree of national homogeneity; despite our vast geography, we can all share an intense interest in a person or thing, although our individual reactions to it may vary.
>
> Second, a national phenomenon is often the most spontaneous manifestation of the democratic process, because it is an expression of the public's moods and aspirations, hopes and fears.
>
> [...]
>
> Finally, national phenomena are important, perhaps most of all, as a means of communication and knowledge. Each of us is part of the public in one or another way, but it is the emergence of a new national phenomenon which makes the individual aware of the entire public, helps him to know he is part of that public, and shows him what he has in common with others and how he differs from them.
>
> Unless we know what preoccupies other human beings and excites their concerns and admiration, we can hardly be said to know them: And it is an old

[66] 'Survey of Our National Phenomena', in *The Ego is Always at the Wheel*, pp. 103-112 (p. 106).

> truth that when one does not know others, one hardly has any knowledge of oneself.
>
> (p. 112)

In this way, then, the likes of Monroe, Crosby, Lindbergh and Stevenson, and even non-human phenomena, play an extremely important role in defining national – and, in many cases, international – identity, providing a focal point that may unify otherwise disparate individuals.

CHAPTER 5

Summer Knowledge: 'infinite belief in infinite hope'

'A fabulous discovery of America': Schwartz and American History

In his introduction to *Last & Lost Poems*, Robert Philips responds to Berryman's lament that Schwartz's 'lovely work' did not improve by implying that to use such baldly qualitative language (albeit in an elegy, not an evaluative essay or review) is critically lazy. 'His poetry did not, in fact, "improve"', writes Philips. 'It became different. Few readers have been willing to examine these differences, to find merit in the later work' (*LL*, 'Foreword', p. xiii). It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate that there *is* merit in the later work and that it rewards close critical analysis every bit as much as Schwartz's sparer, more polished early achievements. I will also suggest that, despite striking surface differences, there is more continuity than has usually been assumed between the poetry Schwartz wrote in the late 1930s and '40s and the poetry he wrote in the 1950s. Phillips is not wrong to draw attention to Schwartz's 'enormous stylistic change of direction' (p. xv), but, given Schwartz's experimental tendencies in all his books, such a change ought not to have been so surprising. Equally, close study reveals that there are thematic and even stylistic similarities between the early and later works, to the extent that Douglas Dunn can plausibly argue that a poem such as 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine' reads as 'a summation of virtually everything Schwartz had been endeavouring to express from the very beginning.'[1]

Above all, I will claim in this chapter that Schwartz's late poems – which were written at around the same time as his seminal essay on Hemingway – can be read, collectively, as the culmination of his investigations into the American Dream. Although many of them seem, at first, to be straightforward, if effusive, nature poems, with little reference to the contemporary world, their repeated meditations on the importance, and nature, of hope implicitly link them to Schwartz's wider concerns about the world in which he lived. In positing a vision in which death always heralds rebirth, and in which 'It is always darkness before delight!'(*LL*, p. 3), Schwartz endorses a hope for America which he longed to embrace in the decades after the

[1] 'Introduction' in *What Is To Be Given*, pp. vii-xiv (p. vviii).

Second World War, decades which were tumultuous for him personally as well as for his nation. Taken alongside essays and stories of the same period that are more obviously socially engaged, and which demand a celebration of the actuality of American life rather than just an idealised version of it, Schwartz's poems acquire social resonances that may not be apparent on a first reading.

The poems are also 'internationally conscious', although not as explicitly as *Genesis*, say, with its transatlantic canvas and its direct historical engagements. It is impossible, for example, to locate the landscapes in Schwartz's late poems. They do not seem to belong in any particular environment. In fact, many of them are more dreamscape than actual landscape, nebulous and indefinable. To take an example, 'Darkling Summer, Ominous Dusk, Rumorous Rain', ostensibly describes a late summer sunset against a damp backdrop. Atlas dismisses the poem's 'haphazard, euphonious, virtually incomprehensible effusions' (Atlas, p. 326); Phillips, however, argues that it 'accurately recreates a sensuous experience' (*LL*, 'Introduction', p. xiv). Phillips's argument stands up rather better when one approaches the scene as a dreamscape, recognising that a lack of total clarity is inherent to the experience expressed: lines describing 'a filming gown / Of grey and clouding weakness' and a 'clouding vagueness' that fogs the windowpane, for example, attest to elements that muffle rather than elucidate, and 'the land's great sea' suggests a complete inversion of usual distinctions (*SK*, p. 149). The poem may depict truly enough the descent of misty cloud on a summer's evening, but it is truer still, in a metaphorical sense, to the haziness of a semi-conscious mind grasping for entities that seem perpetually to merge into each other.

The dream logic of such poems releases them from association with any fixed locale, making them more universal than they might otherwise appear. In addition to this, the poems also repeatedly question the notions of beginning and ending, readdressing the similar challenges that are also made in *Genesis*. Schwartz's late poetry is sceptical about the possibility of locating the origin of any given event in a specific moment, but it is fascinated with the idea of continual resurrection from moment to moment (as symbolised, in particular, by the phoenix and the ever-changing reflections of light on flowing water). Such preoccupations draw out Schwartz's conviction that all experience is relative or comparative. The poems remain deeply concerned with how the individual can define himself in relation to those around him. They tend to place greater emphasis on the individual's relationship

with his environment than with his or her peers or family history, and in this respect they differ from Schwartz's city poems and from *Genesis*. However, their moments of transcendence, in which the individual loses any sense of him or herself as an individual and is subsumed by his wider environment, are similar; and the poems' interrogations of the relationship between the beholder and what is beheld again recall Emerson's rhapsody about becoming nothing but seeing all.[2]

The discovery of America is an important trope in some of these poems, illustrating as it does the good that can arise from error. The number of published poems that make explicit reference to Columbus and other pioneering figures of American history are relatively few, but in poems such as 'The True-Blue American' and 'Kilroy's Carnival', the discoverer of America is seen as epitomising 'infinite belief in infinite hope' (*SK*, p. 163): he is presented as delusional, but also as achieving something far greater than he could understand, establishing a tradition within which

> every tragedy has a happy ending, and any error may be
> A fabulous discovery of America, of the opulence hidden in the dark depths and
> glittering heights of reality
>
> (p. 222)

The 'Lincoln' passage from *Genesis*, the only one reprinted in *Summer Knowledge*, is Schwartz's most overt engagement with American history in the latter book. It is arguably extracted because it is better able to stand alone outside its context within the longer poem than other passages, and perhaps also because what Schwartz says about Lincoln – that he was a 'manic-depressive' 'Hamlet-type' and yet a 'national hero' – has some resonance when considered in relation to his own 'Summer Knowledge' poems. Lincoln, Schwartz writes,

> spoke
> More than he knew and all that he had felt
> Between outrageous joy and black despair
>
> (p. 237)

This is essentially the spectrum that Schwartz himself covers in poems that celebrate intuitive knowledge over book learning and instinct over studied allusion (although Schwartz never wholly abandons either of these). They are poems that purport to speak more than they know.

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[2] Emerson, 'Nature', pp. 35-82 (p. 39).

In some respects 'Lincoln' jars in its position as the penultimate poem in *Summer Knowledge*, following poems that are stylistically more expansive and which are predominantly governed by a single voice (including the dramatic monologues spoken by Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob, with which it is most closely linked). It is unlikely that a reader not already familiar with *Genesis* would realise that the stanzas are spoken by ghosts, rather than a single jumpy thinker trying to account for Lincoln's success. However, the choice of passage (Schwartz refers to it in his 'Author's Note' as a poem in its own right) is important because it indicates, more overtly than other poems, that Schwartz remained deeply preoccupied with American history. His journals and unpublished drafts from the 1950s reveal that he was writing a great deal about the topic, even though very little of this was ever published. In drafts headed 'A!A!', presumably intended as parts of a massively expanded version of 'America, America!', Schwartz speculates about the beginnings of American history, offering alternative dates to 1492.[3]

> America's History Began
> When 3 ships of Capt. Newport
> On a beautiful April morning in 1607
> Anchored in Chesapeake Bay
> & on the shore
> Found fair meadows &
> Goodly tall trees[4]

Elsewhere, he sees the end of the Anglo-American War of 1812-1815 as the definitive point that confirmed not only an independence that, until then, remained precarious, but also the principle of populating the entire continent as one unified nation. 'Until 1815', Schwartz writes,

> nothing of America's history was decided
> Until the winter of 1815, several nations might have formed within
> Repeating the destiny which is the usual experience of history
> ...
> The idea of the unified harmonious system
> appealed to the imagination: appealed as a triumph of progress
> yet suggested dangers, all the more perilous
> being unknown and unparalleled –
> But in 1815 for the first time America ceased to

[3] Some drafts are headed 'K. J', with possible reference to 'Kilroy's Carnival' or the character Jackson, who appears in numerous drafts. Elizabeth Pollet notes that the heading could also stand for 'Kings of Joy', another projected Schwartz title (*Portrait*, p. 471). Regardless of their various headings, however, the drafts that address American history are consistent in tone and style, suggesting that they would have been incorporated into a single long poem.

[4] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 8, Folder 479.

doubt the path to follow
The unity of the nation established, its difference from
other societies defined
So that by 1817 the difference between America
and Europe was decided
The National Character was decided
and defined
The American was a new variety of man
Old [?] individuals were now chiefly important as types
[?] No longer seemed all (as in Europe) – and society nothing
(However, more interesting, a man might be
compared with his nation)
[...]
Here where morning is spoken in more than
seventeen languages...[5]

Even with the establishment of the ideal 'unified harmonious system', and of a 'National Character', Schwartz is conscious that no individual can ever be adequately understood solely in terms of his nationality. However, the relation of an individual to his nation and to his history does reveal something about his personal – as opposed to his national – character: 'a man might be / compared with his nation'. And although Schwartz's highlighting of the 'more than seventeen languages' spoken in the United States is a hugely conservative estimate, it does underline his sensitivity to the principle of 'e pluribus unum', the infinite variety that can be brought together within a unified system.

Schwartz never defines precisely what America's 'National Character' is, but he does point out in these drafts that if it is characterised, at best, by belief in the democratic ideals espoused by Lincoln, then it is also marked by opportunism and a lack of scruple. This strain is epitomised for Schwartz by Aaron Burr, Jefferson's vice-president, who notoriously killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, and who Schwartz sees as a precursor to the likes of Barnum, J. P. Morgan, and Rockefeller. Burr, he notes,

was as much a child of America
as honest Abe
[...]
He preceded Barnum in bold contempt
and in arrogance outranked—
He sold the Brooklyn Bridge to all the country boys
or the Louisiana Territory

[5] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 15 Folder 654. Question marks in square brackets indicate illegible words.

He came close to cheating his way to the White House
as President
(*Portrait of Delmore*, p. 472)

Schwartz's long unfinished poem about American history seems intent upon confronting the less admirable enterprises of the Union's early years: they, too, help to define the 'National Character'.

It is only possible to speculate about how the poem might have turned out had Schwartz finished it (or even reached a stage at which it could be appreciated as more than just fragments). What is apparent, however, is that the poems published in the second half of *Summer Knowledge* are only a sample of what Schwartz was working on at the time. Atlas explains that Schwartz relied entirely upon his friend, Elizabeth Reardon, to assemble the poems in the book on his behalf: 'He never even glanced at her selections' (Atlas, p. 350). Be this as it may, there is coherence and unity between the poems chosen, and they do represent what Schwartz describes in his 'Author's Note' as 'the point of view which is signified by the title of the volume' ('Author's Note', *SK*). The discussion that follows will attempt to explain exactly what that point of view is, acknowledging, however, that Schwartz's prose and unpublished poetry of the time sometimes explore other points of view, or explore more explicitly what is only ever implicit in the published poems. The engagement with American history is a case in point: the 'Summer Knowledge' poems only address it indirectly, and yet, in their meditations upon time, flux and continual resurrections and discoveries, the weight of American history is continually felt.

The style of Schwartz's 'Summer Knowledge' poems

Any defence of Schwartz's late poems must address their style. Phillips endorses Dunn's view that this is characterised by 'energy and delight', terms that Dunn himself borrows from Humboldt's list of 'sacred words' in Bellow's novel (Phillips, p. xiv; Dunn, p. xi; Bellow, p. 7). It is not difficult to find passages to support this judgement. In 'The Fulfillment', for example, the speaker finds himself disorientated (possibly in a dream, and possibly after death, although his companion insists that this hardly matters) in a place where

all things existed purely in the action of joy –
Like light, like all kinds of light, all in the domination
of celebration existed only as the structures of joy!

(*SK*, p. 150)

There is no lack of 'energy and delight' in the insistent repetitions of 'joy' and 'light' here, in the internal echoes, and in the exclamatory clamour. However, the apparent idyll is undermined by the realisation that occurs in the next stanza.

> It was then that we saw what was lost as we knew where
> we had been
> (Or knew where we had been as we saw all that was lost!)
> And knew for the first time the richness and poverty
> Of what we had been before and were no more
>
> (p. 150)[6]

Although this is even-handed in acknowledging the poverty, as well as the richness, of what is lost when one finally achieves fulfilment, its tone of regret remains strong. This time the repetitions sound enervated rather than energetic, monosyllabic and backwards-looking rather than revelling in action and immediacy. There may be instances of 'energy and delight' in the poem, but these are counterbalanced by a more sombre, reflective tone, and this is true of Schwartz's late poems in general. Many of them gain poignancy precisely because they cannot sustain the 'energy and delight' for which Schwartz strives, and cannot conceal the strain inherent in promoting such a vision.

Dunn's celebration of the poems for their 'energy and delight' is also problematic as a critical assessment because it defines poems that often deal with abstractions in equally abstract terms. His point that 'critical discretion is over-willing to withhold its approval from a poem like ['Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine'] which rhapsodises itself out of any recognised form' (Dunn, p. xviii) is valid, but it does not overcome the fact that any reader's evaluation of how energetic and delightful the poems are will have more to do with personal taste than with the technical or aesthetic qualities of the poems themselves. It is for this reason that the contemporary reviews of Anthony Hecht and John Hollander, which do attend to the poems' composition as well as to their more general effects, are especially important – although they, too, stop short of the close reading necessary to vindicate Schwartz's looser forms and euphonious associations. Like Dunn, both poet-critics have caveats,

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[6] There are unmistakable echoes of 'Little Gidding' in these lines: 'the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time' (Eliot, *CPP*, p. 197). This suggests that Schwartz had not entirely abandoned Eliot: his ambivalence about the *Four Quartets* did not preclude him from drawing upon them.

but both also recognise that, far from indicating a loss of formal control, Schwartz's later poetry is technically daring and innovative. It is perhaps no coincidence that it should take two other Jewish-American poets, both of whom would gain renown as meticulous technicians, to see this.

Hecht argues that *Summer Knowledge* shows with 'remarkable clarity the development of a man's imagination over a long period of time.' This development, he goes on

> has not been smooth and gradual; it has been filled with sudden breaks and new starts that are rash and audacious and unbelievably risky. Yeats apart, I can think of no other poet of recent times, except Robert Lowell, who, after having found an idiom which he could manage with certainty and success, has had the courage of such radical innovation. [7]

By crediting Schwartz with conscious innovation – of the kind Tate had praised at the outset of his career – rather than lamenting a falling off of technical ability, Hecht resists the general tendency to attribute Schwartz's new style to his troubled personal circumstances. He appreciates that the move away from a detached, ironic style occurs because such a style could no longer serve what Schwartz needed to say rather than because he was no longer capable of writing tightly. Schwartz's innovation is as radical as Hecht claims it to be; but that his style and, indeed, his whole ideology should undergo such a change in the mid-1950s had already been suggested by the tensions apparent throughout *Vaudeville For A Princess*.

Hecht notes how the late poems

> are freer, metrically and emotionally, than the earlier ones. [...] the polarities of the early poems, always linked in a nagging, bitter, or ironic marriage, have been divorced and are trying to work out their own lives as discrete and separate attitudes.[8]

Such freedom, for Phillips, suggests the influence of the self-appointed forefather of American poetry: 'with their accumulations of details and syntactical repetitions, Schwartz's late poems seem to be modelled after Whitman, rather than his early master Yeats' (*LL*, 'Introduction', p. xv). The lines, like Whitman's, are long, and many of the poems contain expansive and ebullient passages that project a more overtly democratic vision than is apparent in much of the earlier work. Hollander,

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[7] Anthony Hecht, 'The Anguish of The Spirit and The Letter', *The Hudson Review,* 12 (1959-1960), 593-603 (p. 595). Hecht arguably overlooks the innovations of such experimental contemporaries as Louis Zukofsky and Charles Reznikoff, but this does not undermine what he says about Schwartz.
[8] Ibid. p. 597.

however, suggests that Schwartz's development cannot be understood simply in terms of a shift from one master to another. The late poems, he says,

> are not really written in lines in the sense that the earlier poems are; the long lines and verse paragraphs stem not so much from Whitman or from psalmody via Christopher Smart as from the impulse to produce incantations and spells. At its most successful there is a hypnotic quality about the music of this new poetry, resulting from the manipulation of faintly heard interior rhymes, syntactical parallels, and more phonological patterns.[9]

There is, then, something daemonic about the poems, but this is not to say that they can be attributed solely to inspiration: it requires an artisan to manipulate sounds in this fashion.[10] A consequence of Schwartz's method, for Hollander, is that relatively few individual lines are memorable: instead, the poems seem to 'fuse into one another, to gloss and amplify each other', although Hollander does insist that 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine', 'Narcissus', and 'Once and for All' are 'outstanding as self-contained performances' (Hollander, p. 368). Schwartz's new poems, he concludes, 'are writing to be grateful for; and even when they are almost unbearably diffuse or else pregnant with an implicit flood of meaning that never quite manages to break forth, there is real authority in their accents' (p. 368). Hollander ends his review by hoping that Schwartz will turn his attention 'back to the outer world again' (p. 368); but his esteem for what Schwartz achieves in his 'Summer Knowledge' poems is never in doubt.

Schwartz's relation to Whitman is a difficult one to define, but a comparison of some characteristic lines will reveal a few of the likenesses and differences. One striking aspect of Schwartz's alliterative, assonantal and internally rhymed verse is that, at its best, its movement tends to imitate the effects it describes. This is less commonly the case in Whitman, for whom anaphora and repetition cumulatively give weight to bold declarative statements of the kind that Schwartz is usually too sceptical or self-questioning to make without qualification. In 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry', a

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[9] John Hollander, 'Poetry Chronicle' in *Partisan Review*, Spring 1960, pp. 363-368 (368). Laurence Goldstein, in his discussion of 'Love and Marilyn Monroe', also evokes Smart, suggesting that Schwartz's form in that poem is a means of identifying himself with a poet who was confronting insanity (Goldstein, p. 11). Schwartz himself, in a scrawled manuscript, describes Smart as 'the poor mad poet (crazy as a posse of foxes)' (Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 263).

[10] For Bloom, 'daemonization' (a Neo-Platonic term) is when 'an intermediary being, neither divine nor human, enters into the adept to aid him' (*Anxiety of Influence*, p. 15). In more general terms, it denotes 'supernatural power or genius' (*OED*, 2), straightforwardly suggesting inspiration.

poem with clear resonance for someone who claims to be 'a poet of the Hudson River', Whitman describes the effect of sunlight upon water.[11] 'I too', he declares,

> Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
> Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
> Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape
> of my head in the sunlit water[12]

Through the figure of the halo of light, the poet invites us to associate sunlight with inspiration.[13] Whitman admits to greater self-doubt in 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' than in other poems, presenting himself as 'disintegrated' and admitting that 'The dark threw its patches down upon me also' (Whitman, pp. 136, 138). 'The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious', he continues. 'My great thoughts as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre?' (p. 138). Despite this, however, the poem remains an assured statement of Whitman's affinity with all people, and especially those who have not yet been born who will cross Brooklyn Ferry in the future. In the poem's final section, Whitman, with renewed certainty, apostrophises the river, the light, and Manhattan:

> Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till
> all downcast eyes have time to take it from you!
> Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or
> any one's head, in the sunlit water!
>
> (p. 140)

Whitman here is instructing nature, conferring his blessing but also imposing his own order. It is possible to take the tone of the lines as imploring, but there is also, in their direct addresses, an implicit understanding that the water and the spokes of light might be able to respond to Whitman's exhortations. The poet expects nature – and, indeed, the city – to shape itself around him, rather than him simply responding to nature.

Schwartz's 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood' also describes the effect of sunlight glittering on rippling water, but his overall effects, are quite different to Whitman's. With less emphasis than Whitman upon the self as active participant in the scene which is depicted, Schwartz attempts to convey an indescribable impression

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[11] This resonance remains despite the fact that it is the East River, not the Hudson, that divides Brooklyn from Manhattan.
[12] Walt Whitman, 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, pp. 136-137.
[13] Whitman often makes such an association, most memorably, perhaps, in section 25 of 'Song of Myself' in which he declares 'Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me, / If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me' (Whitman, p. 48).

in words, and does so by seeking an aural equivalent for the kind of motion discerned in the light:

> the litter and ripple of the river was excited by the advent and descent of light upon its slow flowing:
> The river was opulence, radiance, sparkle and shine, a rippling radiance dancing light's dances
>
> (*SK*, p. 213)

The light, this suggests, is what actually makes the river ripple, and it acts similarly upon other, seemingly fixed, features of the landscape as well: 'the dark statues of the trees', a few lines earlier, are described as 'flowing', and 'every solid thing', we are told, 'Moved as in bloom' (p. 213). In the lines just quoted, the way in which the short /I/ sounds in 'litter', 'ripple' and 'river' gives way to the long /aI/ sounds in 'excited', 'light' and 'shine' suggests a state of flux, of things continuously changing, but maintaining a clear relation to their earlier state (arguably, even, remaining fundamentally the same), under the influence of time. The /I/ sound is not entirely subsumed: it recurs in the adjective 'rippling', as Schwartz reprises the noun 'ripple' in a different form. Similarly, the participle 'dancing' precedes the noun 'dances', the words enacting a kind of dance of their own. The exact repetition of 'radiance' further draws out the shared /ns/ sounds in 'dancing' and 'dances', as well as chiming, sibilantly, with 'descent'.

In the lines that follow –

> And the birds flew, soared, darted, perched, perched and whistled, dipped or ascended
> Like a ballet of black flutes, an erratic and scattered metamorphosis of the villages of stillness into the variety of flying –
>
> (*SK*, p. 213)

the repetition of 'perched' demands a pause, a momentary cessation of all the movement before it begins again, whilst 'dipped or ascended' looks back to the earlier 'advent and descent'. The connotations of some of Schwartz's words enhance the sense of protean form that is already suggested in the sounds. 'Advent' and 'descent' are not opposites, but as Schwartz uses it, 'advent' takes on the meaning of 'ascent' in addition to its primary meaning of arrival.[14] This consequently blurs the word's Christian connotations, conflating advent and ascension, Christ's coming and his final return to heaven, suggesting the kind of timelessness that Schwartz insists – in this

[14] 'Assent', another word used frequently in the late poems, may also be suggested. See, for example, 'the heights of assent' in 'At a Solemn Musick' (*SK*, p. 148).

poem and in others – exists alongside our daily experience of transience. 'Litter' is evocative in a slightly different way, suggesting a bed of reeds, a birth, and all the debris carried by the river, but also – because of its proximity to radiance – 'glitter'. Schwartz draws out associations from words that are sometimes at odds with their primary meanings.

In answer to any objection that the lines are formless, it can be said that light – although it defines the forms of whatever it may fall upon – also lacks any form of its own; it is therefore appropriate that it should be described in nebulous lines, particularly as, in this case, it falls upon water, whose form is unfixed too and which, here, is in continual motion. Schwartz engages further in these lines with the concerns of his earlier poem, 'In the Slight Ripple, The Mind Perceives the Heart' (*SK*, p. 39): he is trying to perceive what is imperceptible in itself and which can only be known by its influence upon the things it surrounds. It is one of the most important preoccupations Schwartz takes up from Stevens, whose poetry, especially in *Harmonium*, is full of such ambiguous motions, and which regularly suggests how 'fluttering things' (like love) might have a 'distinct shade' (Stevens, p. 14).

We are to understand that the beholder in Schwartz's poem is as excited as the river is by the 'advent and descent' of light. As in the city poems, an extreme kind of pathetic fallacy is at play whereby what is beheld reflects back the viewer's own feelings, although it is true also that the viewer's feelings are affected by what he sees. It is difficult and painful for Schwartz's viewer to 'believe in the reality of winter' (*SK*, p. 213); he would seem not to have 'a mind of winter' (Stevens, p. 8), and is therefore not immune to the misery that comes from thinking of a desolate winter landscape. He is only able to console himself from the thought of May's green and gold giving way to 'holly, ivy, barberry bush and icicle' by detaching himself from the particulars of the immediate scene he views and thinking of universal truths – by thinking, that is, 'of how all arise and aspire to the nature of fire', and of 'how all things must suffer and die in growth and birth, / To be reborn, again and again and again' (*SK*, p. 214). This move away from the landscape is mirrored in the concluding sentence. This is given its own stanza and set apart from the rest of the poem by the fact that it occupies five whole lines. It is perhaps best described as a poetic paragraph since it can properly be described as neither a single line, nor many; but it is not prose either. Like Whitman, Schwartz seeks to apply a particular experience to a universal vision. But the movement of his poem is quite unlike to that of 'Crossing Brooklyn

Ferry': he withdraws, at the end, from the scene, rather than addressing it directly, as Whitman does. He is also much more interested in how the mind perceives and responds to a landscape than Whitman, whose notion of self is informed by a much closer sense of relation to the landscape he inhabits.

In common with the modernist poets he admired, Schwartz remained ambivalent about Whitman, as is suggested by the title of his 1962 poem 'A Dream of Whitman Paraphrased, Recognized and Made More Vivid by Renoir' which at once admits Whitman's importance and suggests that section 11 of 'Song of Myself' (which the poem re-imagines) is not vivid enough for Schwartz in its original state. The earlier poet is indubitably important to Schwartz in the 1950s, but Schwartz's poems are not wholly derivative of Whitman, and Whitman does not displace Schwartz's other influences either. Whitman clearly matters to Schwartz as a poet of democracy and as a fellow Brooklyn writer, as well as for informing his method of composition, but some of this influence is diluted by Schwartz's inability, even in poems that seem hopeful, to overcome his sense of alienation. Various drafts and journal jottings reveal the extent to which Whitman was on Schwartz's mind in the 1950s and before, but few of them are respectful. Two notes from 1945 are condescending. 'Walt Whitman', he notes, 'was at first Walter Whitman – the diminutive bespeaks an overfriendliness which is characteristic' (*Portrait*, p. 275). In the second note, Schwartz pays the backhanded compliment of saying that 'It is as easy to get lost in Whitman as in the Sunday edition of *The New York Times* and for somewhat the same [reason]' (p. 275). Elsewhere, Schwartz comes up with the nickname 'Walt Windbag'.[15] The notes from the 1950s are generally more appreciative, though still guarded. 'Most readers are for Whitman or against him / As if he were a candidate for public office' (*Portrait*, p. 488), he concludes in one piece, perhaps trying to decide on his own position. This is followed by the suggestion that 'Whitman was in love with experience to the point of morbid infatuation. He tried to force his genuine experience to be a kind of witness and proof of his idea of experience' (p. 488). This suggests that Schwartz felt there was a disconnection between Whitman's actual experience and his doctrinal, declarative proclamations about it. This is a sense that Schwartz probes further in an undated draft for a piece of fiction. A reader writes in to *The New York Daily News* to ask whether most people

[15] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 3, Folder 224. Undated.

feel ashamed of being alone. The anonymous respondent suggests that most people are reluctant to admit any impulse that might be regarded as anti-social and speculates that

> No one in America has ever been quite as lonely as the poet of democratic friendship, one and all united, now and forever – with evil as with good, death as well as life – Walt Whitman: the poet of complete health was also the paralytic of the last twenty five years of his life.[16]

Schwartz, in reflecting on the difference between his own unhappiness at the time and the usually affirmative beliefs he was setting forth in his verse, might have considered this a point of identification. His awareness of the disparity between Whitman's experience and the philosophy he projects in his poetry is also, however, a reason why he could never embrace Whitman's vision fully.

To attribute Schwartz's late style solely to the influence of Whitman is to overlook a tendency towards euphony, half rhyme and internal echoes that is apparent from his very earliest poems, and that develops throughout *Genesis* (where the ghosts are already adept at Schwartz's later exclamatory mode) and *Vaudeville for A Princess* before reaching its apotheosis in *Summer Knowledge*. This tendency becomes much more important in the later verse, however, as a structural technique that holds together poems which abandon traditional metrical principles. Schwartz's method is more delicate than Whitman's here, and allows a greater degree of introspection and self-questioning. The new style does not constitute an absolute break from Eliot either. Schwartz did not much admire Eliot's plays, but he was aware that Eliot was experimenting in them with a new kind of meter. The choruses of *Murder in the Cathedral*, he notes, depart from 'the habitual iambic norm'. Often when poets attempt this, Schwartz says, the result is bad writing in which 'the meaning does not submit to the measure and movement of the words', causing the verse to 'collapse into prose'. Whitman, and 'the imitators of Whitman' are offered as examples.[17] It is not easy to date the draft in which Schwartz says this precisely – it may be from the 1940s, before his attitude toward Whitman had mellowed. However, early or later, Schwartz's praise of Eliot's succession of accented syllables in these

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[16] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 8, Folder 470.

[17] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 360. It is surprising that Schwartz here overlooks Pound's famous declaration: 'To break the pentameter, that was the first heave' (Pound, 'Canto LXXXI' in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* [New York: New Directions, 1996], p. 538), with its suggestion that a departure from 'the iambic norm' was a principle of the whole endeavour of literary modernism.

choruses cannot be ignored. Although Schwartz's repetitions are never as insistent as Eliot's in lines such as

> O late late late, late is the time, late too late, and rotten the year;
> Evil the wind, and bitter the sea, and grey the sky, grey grey grey.
> (Eliot, *CPP*, p. 243)

or 'O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark' from 'East Coker' (Eliot, *CPP*, p. 180), there are many instances of him seeking to emulate such a metrical effect. A voice in 'During December's Death' commands the speaker: '*Wait: wait: wait as if you had always waited*' (*SK*, p. 217; Schwartz's italics), whilst, in another poem, Schwartz describes a landscape as 'Wet, white, ice, wooden, dulled and dead, brittle or frozen' (p. 212), four stressed syllables beginning a thirteen-syllable line of which eight are emphatically stressed. Eliot's chorus also shares late Schwartz's concern with the passing of the seasons, singing of how 'golden October' declines into 'sombre November' and how the New Year waits (Eliot, *CPP*, p. 239). For Schwartz, the seasons epitomise nature's continual cycle of birth, fruition, death and rebirth, the cause of all the hope he can muster in his 'Summer Knowledge' poems.

'*The phoenix is the meaning of the fruit*': the principles of 'summer knowledge'

Schwartz's longer lines and euphonic principle of composition may be the first features of his late verse to strike a reader, but they are inextricably bound up with a particular world view that could not adequately be expressed in any other way. 'At a Solemn Musick', the first poem in the 'Summer Knowledge' section of *Summer Knowledge*, is likely to be most readers' first encounter with this new way of looking: there are three more poems after it before the title poem begins to offer definitions. Placed as it is, 'At a Solemn Musick' can be taken as a statement of poetic intent. Almost every question with which it engages, every figuration, every technique, recurs in the poems that follow. These poems can be read as variations upon a common concern – poems that, like the resurrected phoenix, are at once the same but different. They examine every aspect of the point of view that Schwartz terms 'summer knowledge', and continue to explore the poet's sense of selfhood and his relationship to the world around him, albeit in quite different ways to the early poetry.

'At a Solemn Musick' takes its title from a poem of Milton's, probably written in 1633.[18] Milton's poem longs for a renewal of 'That undisturbed song of pure concent' formerly heard in nature until 'disproportioned sin / Jarred against nature's chime'.[19] It also celebrates unity and harmony, the 'Blest pair of sirens', Voice and Verse, with their 'mixed power' (Milton, p. 168) perhaps suggesting the composite identity of the phoenix to Schwartz. Schwartz's poem starts as follows:

> Let the musicians begin
> Let every instrument awaken and instruct us
> In love's willing river and love's dear discipline:
> We wait, silent, in consent and in the penance
> Of patience, awaiting the serene exaltation
> Which is the liberation and conclusion of expiation.
>
> (*SK*, p. 147)

These lines alert us, first of all, to just how much Schwartz's poetry of this period aspires to the quality of music, in the manner of the traditional lyric: the melodious effects are no mere accidents of phrasing but the very essence of the poems. Several of Schwartz's titles declare their musicality. '"I Am Cherry Alive," the Little Girl Sang', 'A Small Score', and 'A Little Morning Music', in the section headed 'Morning Bells', all draw attention to musical composition, whilst 'Vivaldi', later, employs musical notation to delineate its tempo. These poems further develop Schwartz's interest in the likeness of poetry to music which he had explored in the earlier 'Poems in Imitation of the Fugue'. Although Schwartz also revels in the spontaneity of birdsong, he is especially interested in the ritualistic aspects of musical performance, something to which he draws attention here through his archaic and solemnising spelling of 'musick' (only used for this poem) and through the systematic and formal manner in which he relates the musicians' proclamations.

Much of Schwartz's earlier poetry dwells upon the heavy burden of guilt that we all bear – personal and historical, deserved and undeserved. His poetry of the 1950s increasingly seeks occasions for forgiveness and redemption. It also celebrates the possibilities of love, a word commonly used in these poems quite abstractly, in a quasi-religious way (almost like Dante at the end of the *Paradiso*), rather than to refer to sexual or familial love, or even love for a particular person.[20] The shared suffixes of

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[18] *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (London: Longman, 1968), 2nd ed. (1997), pp. 167-170.
[19] *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 168, 169-170.
[20] *Paradiso* concludes: 'But already my desire and my will / Were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed, // By the love which moves the sun and the other stars' (Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C. H. Sisson, ed. by David H. Higgins (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 499.

some of the words in the first stanza of 'At a Solemn Musick' invite a reader to consider more closely their semantic similarities: 'penance' cannot be achieved without 'patience'; true 'expiation' is a cause for 'exaltation' – though, lest such rejoicing become over-exultant, it is tempered by being 'serene'. Love, exaltation and expiation in the first stanza, are separated from the italicised lust and emulation rejected by the chief musician in the second. Love is imagined as a river and associated with the natural world, whilst lust is like 'barbarous kings', a comparison that evokes Tereus, 'the barbarous king' (Eliot, *CPP*, p. 64) whose rape of Philomel is presented in *The Waste Land*, and perhaps also the 'barbarous kings' in Pound's 'Lament of the Frontier Guard'.[21] Love triumphs over this, however. It precedes everything else, and the poem's final chant celebrates its omnipresence in a direct address.

> *Before the morning was, you were:*
> *Before the snow shone,*
> *And the light sang, and the stone,*
> *Abiding, rode the fullness or endured the emptiness,*
> *You were: you were alone.*
>
> (*SK*, p. 148; Schwartz's italics)

There is a strain in these lines, however. If it were possible simply to accept them as meaning 'you (that is, love) alone existed, and nothing else did', they would be relatively unproblematic. However, it is almost impossible to conceive of love without an object – something, or someone, to love, and to be loved, and it is hard to take 'alone' without its overtones of isolation, overtones which serve to undermine the communal feeling of the 'entire choir' chanting in unison. It is almost as though one has overheard the poet talking to himself, recalling himself to his own alienation even at the point at which he seems most to transcend his personal concerns. Such tensions serve to undercut the apparent optimism of many of Schwartz's late poems.

Schwartz's solemn, though uncertain, celebration of love is one of the reasons, presumably, why Bloom includes 'At a Solemn Musick' in his anthology of *American Religious Poems*. Although it plays upon the liturgical ceremony in which a chant is followed by a refrain from the congregation, the poem promotes no precise doctrine, and can only be regarded as religious in the specific sense that Bloom ascribes to American Religion in the introduction to that volume. 'Religious poetry, in the United States', Bloom contends, 'has little to do with devotional creeds of the Old World.'

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[21] Pound, *Selected Poems 1908-1969*, p. 69.

The American Religion's principle theologian is Emerson and its crucial components are 'the God within; solitude; [and] the best and oldest part of the self, which goes back before creation.'[22] There is no reason to suppose that the performance in Schwartz's poem should be read as taking place in an actual church or temple. There is no reason, in fact, to suppose that the poem describes an actual performance at all: its terms are speculative, hypothetical. None of its recurring verbs – 'let', 'may' and 'shall' – indicate a definite occurrence. This contributes to an understanding of Schwartz's 'Summer Knowledge' poems as poems of the mind. Their logic is often at odds with that of the external world.

Schwartz's late poetry is no less allusive than his early work. Beginning a poem with the word 'Let' may seem like another Eliotic gesture (particularly in a poem that praises the 'tenderness of surrender', recalling Eliot's 'the awful daring of a moment's surrender' [Eliot, *CPP*, p. 74]), but 'At a Solemn Musick' has a much greater affinity to Shakespeare's 'Let the Bird of Loudest Lay', George Herbert's 'Antiphon' (whose refrain is 'Let all the world in every corner sing / *My God and King!*'), and Smart's *Jubilate Agno*.[23] The echoes of Shakespeare's poem are especially striking:

> Let the bird of loudest lay
> On the sole Arabian tree
> Herald sad and trumpet be,
> To whose sound chaste wings obey.
>
> [...]
>
> Let the priest in surplice white,
> That defunctive music can,
> Be the death-divining swan,
> Lest the requiem lack his right.[24]

This also informs the chief musician's gnomic utterance that

> "*The phoenix is the meaning of the fruit,*
> *Until the dream is knowledge and knowledge is a dream*"
>
> (*SK*, p. 147; Schwartz's italics)

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[22] Harold Bloom, 'Introduction' in *American Religious Poems*, ed. Harold Bloom and Jesse Zuba (New York: Library of America, 2006), pp. xxv-xlvii (pp. xxv, xxvii).

[23] *A Choice of George Herbert's Verse*, edited by R. S. Thomas (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 19. Schwartz's very interest in metaphysical poetry is part of his inheritance from Eliot.

[24] William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 373, 374. Burrow notes that although 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' is the title most commonly given to this poem, this was not used until 1807. When the poem first appeared it bore no title.

The phoenix and ripe fruit are Schwartz's dominant symbols in the 'Summer Knowledge' poems for fulfilment followed by decay and regeneration. The earlier declaration, by all the players, that

> "*The river of the morning, the morning of the river*
> *Flow out of the splendour of the tenderness of surrender*"
>
> (*SK*, p. 147; Schwartz's italics)

also highlights two dominant preoccupations – the continual recurrence of morning and the ever-changing nature of the river, defined by its motion – that are present throughout the poems. In both cases, the use of chiasmus indicates the symbiotic relationships between knowledge and dream, morning and the river, and simultaneously emphasises similarity and difference.

The poem titled 'Summer Knowledge' helps a reader to conceive what this kind of knowledge might be. Put simply, it is akin to instinctual knowledge rather than the knowledge derived from book-learning. It is the kind of knowledge that Socrates distinguishes from mere opinion in *The Republic*, and, because it cannot be derived solely from felt experience, it eludes more precise definition. This is one of the reasons why it cannot be set forth in an already established poetic form: the composition, like the knowledge itself, needs to be instinctual – although this is not to deny that the verse is consciously crafted. This is also a reason why Schwartz needs to try out a number of different definitions, many of them outlining what 'summer knowledge' is not, rather than what it is. It 'is not the winter's truth', nor is it 'May knowledge' (*SK*, p. 157). It 'is not picture knowledge, nor is it the knowledge of lore and learning'. Instead, it 'is green knowledge', 'bird knowledge and the knowing that trees possess when / The sap ascends to the leaf and the flower and the fruit'. As the poem gains momentum from its accretion of definitions, the definitions themselves become more confident. 'Summer Knowledge', Schwartz asserts towards the end, 'is the knowledge of death as birth, / Of death as the soil of all abounding flowering flaring rebirth' (*SK*, p. 158). The poem concludes, like 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood', with the verse collapsing into a kind of prose, although its more traditionally poetic nature is reasserted through the poem's one true end-rhyme.

> For, in a way, summer knowledge is not knowledge at all: it is
> second nature, first nature fulfilled, a new birth
> and a new death for rebirth, soaring and rising out
> of the flames of turning October, burning November,
> the towering and falling fires, growing more and
> more vivid and tall

In the consummation and annihilation of the blaze of fall.

(*SK*, p. 158)

Although Schwartz charts the progression of time as we experience it, summer giving way to October which then gives way to November, he presents consummation and annihilation as occurring simultaneously rather than consecutively. This reaffirms the idea of death *as* birth, or rebirth – an idea that is also suggested by the fact that the fires tower and fall at the same time.[25]

It is noticeable how similar Schwartz's notion of 'Summer Knowledge' is to the ideology of the protagonist of 'Dr Bergen's Belief', the verse play that appears at the end of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities.* The play is, admittedly, more of an excuse for a philosophical dialogue than it is a dramatic piece with developed plot and characters. Mrs Bergen explains to the rationalist, Dr Newman, that her husband and his disciples believe the sky to be 'God's blue eye' and that by looking at it 'you will know what is good and what is evil. He calls this the intuitive understanding or inspiration.'[26] The Bergens' daughter, Eleanor, has taken her own life. Dr Newman has a letter in which she explains that she cannot live without her married lover, but Dr Bergen believes, instead, that she has sacrificed herself as a martyr to his religious belief. Newman insists that 'Intuition is not proof' ('Dr Bergen's Belief', p. 113), maintaining that 'The sky is what it is for perception, no matter what is said about it, and almost anything can be said', whilst Bergen insists that Newman is 'blinded by scientific method' which causes him to forget 'the facts of direct experience' (p. 114). The play, in the end, appears to vindicate Newman. He produces Eleanor's letter, and Bergen throws himself to his own death, followed by his other daughter, Martha, claiming that he can no longer 'endure the long experience of doubt' (p. 117). Given the hindsight of the 'Summer Knowledge' poems, however, Bergen appears in a more sympathetic light, and the play can perhaps be seen to satirise the ritualisation and institutionalisation of such a belief more than the belief itself.

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[25] The word 'fall' here is laden with connotations relating to Adam's fall, as it often is in American poetry. Stevens, for example, is particularly sensitive to this association, and it is often implicit in *Genesis*, with its own suggestion that Hershey must undergo a fall from grace before he can be redeemed.

[26] 'Dr Bergen's Belief' in *Shenandoah and Other Verse Plays*, pp. 93-120 (p. 99). Bergen's belief recalls 'the sky's inexorable blue' (*SK*, p. 58) of 'Socrates' Ghost Must Haunt Me Now', whilst the opening lines of Karl Shapiro's 'V-Letter' draw out the association of blue eyes with Jewishness: 'I love you first because your face is fair, / Because your eyes Jewish and blue / [...] stare rather than dream' (Karl Shapiro, 'V-Letter', *Collected Poems 1940-1978*, ll. 1-4, p. 78).

In his late period, Schwartz's belief in death as birth, and of the moment of death or decay as also marking a point of ultimate fulfilment, is conveyed in two potent symbols – the phoenix and ripe fruit mentioned above. One of his most deceptively simple poems, '"I Am Cherry Alive," the Little Girl Sang' (whose title suggests that the girl in question feels optimally alive, ripe with youth) concludes with the girl singing 'I am red, I am gold, I am green, I am blue, / I will always be me, I will always be new!' (*SK*, p. 161).[27] She celebrates that state in which one retains individuality but is also continually changed or renewed and which Schwartz associates with the phoenix – the mythical bird, itself brightly-coloured, that burns after death and is then reincarnated from its own ashes. The symbol becomes most prominent in Schwartz's later work, evoking the renewal that we all undergo every morning upon waking, and also the changing of the seasons, but it is present in early poems too. In 'Father and Son', for example, the father says

> Always the same self from the ashes of sleep
> Returns with its memories, always, always,
> The phoenix with eight hundred thousand memories!
>
> (*SK*, p. 32)

Waking every morning is like a rebirth except that one retains memories from before one slept, memories which accumulate throughout a lifetime.

One of the subsections of the 'Summer Knowledge' part of *Selected Poems* is titled 'The Deceptive Present, The Phoenix Year'. Some of the ways in which Schwartz regards the present to be deceptive have already been suggested: in 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood', the 'superexuberant vitality' of summer makes it 'difficult' and 'painful' to 'believe in the reality of winter', whilst in the poem that shares its title with the section heading, it is suggested that to live only in the moment – and in the poem's stark world of winter – would not only be unremittingly bleak but would also be a falsification of experience. To have knowledge of summer, however, and to see the potential for birth – and rebirth – in this desolate scene is akin to intuitive hopefulness. The speaker of 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood' finds consolation in recognising that winter (like sleep) is also part of nature's vitality, a necessary part of the continuous cycle without which the very idea of summer is

[27] 'A Little Morning Music', which concludes the section, 'Morning Bells', that '"I Am Cherry Alive," the Little Girl Sang' begins, presents birds speaking and bubbling (as many of Schwartz's birds do) 'As cheerful as the cherry would, if it could speak when it is cherry ripe or cherry ripening' (*SK*, p. 168).

unfeasible. Summer, for Schwartz, is inconceivable without winter and therefore winter is a part of summer. Life is inconceivable without death and therefore death is a part of life. It is in this respect that Schwartz can write in another poem, 'The First Morning of the Second World', of the 'illusion of death' (as opposed to the 'reality of the agony of dying') (*SK*, p. 156), and it is in this respect also that he can offer his definition of 'summer knowledge' as 'knowledge of death as birth' (p. 158). Whitman – for whom 'to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier'[28] – informs Schwartz's sensibility and philosophy here, as does Stevens, for whom 'death is the mother of beauty'.[29]

The condition of the phoenix, then, figures nature's cycle of life, death and rebirth, a cycle that Schwartz's late poems emphatically assert is to be celebrated. In a gesture that grants nature its own will, 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood' concludes by imagining the

> *desire* of the bud and the flower and the fruit the tree and the vine to be devoured and to be phoenix in nature, fulfilled in the phoenix sensuality of blood and of wine, or stilled in the mud near the root under the ground once more awaiting the sun's domination, the sun's great roar and fire.
>
> (*SK*, p. 214, my italics)

Such a cycle not only exists but is the intense wish of every living thing. Implicit here is the recognition that it is in burning, ending its life, that the specific identity of the phoenix *as a phoenix* – not just any bird – is fulfilled.

In 'The Kingdom of Poetry', Schwartz announces that 'Poetry resurrects the past from the sepulchre, like Lazarus' (another figure who recurs in the late poems, with obvious resonance), and goes on to claim that 'poetry invented the unicorn, the centaur and the phoenix' (*SK*, p. 188): they are not, then, natural phenomena, and this suggests a belief that it is poetry alone that is able to effect the rebirths upon which Schwartz dwells. If the phoenix is a poetic invention, it is not surprising, then, that Schwartz should regularly evoke some of its previous incarnations in poetry. Shakespeare's 'Let the Bird of Loudest Lay' has already been noted. In that poem, much is made of how the phoenix and the turtle dove, though separate, are made one through their chaste love, which only finds its true fulfilment in death:

> So they loved, as love in twain
> Had the essence but in one;
> Two distincts, division none:

[28] Whitman, p. 31.
[29] Stevens, p. 55.

Number there in love was slain.

[...]

Either was the other's mine.

Property was thus appalled,
That the self was not the same;
Single nature's double name
Neither two nor one was called.[30]

This can be applied to a Christian context, the shared identity of the two birds being of a similar nature to the three-in-one manifestation of the Holy Trinity, whilst, through its ability to resurrect itself, the phoenix resembles Christ. However, for Schwartz, it resounds more as a poem of love between individuals, whereby one realises one's sense of self through love, sustaining one's own self through devoting oneself to another. Much of the sadness of Shakespeare's poem comes from the knowledge, though not directly stated, that the phoenix will be resurrected whilst the turtle dove will not.

Elsewhere, in 'The Studies of Narcissus', Schwartz makes direct reference to Donne's '"Call us what you will: we are made such by love"' (*LL*, p. 61) from 'The Canonization'. In the same stanza of Donne's poem, the lovers are directly identified with the phoenix:

> The phoenix riddle hath more wit
> By us; we two being one, are it;
> So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
> We die and rise the same, and prove
> Mysterious by this love.[31]

Narcissus, in Schwartz's poem, is not in love with his own image, but yearns instead to be beautiful enough to be loved (*LL*, p. 59): he aspires to the ideal shared by Shakespeare and Donne of 'two being one', but does not think well enough of himself to be able to make this happen. Schwartz, however, sees in nature the continual enactment of the phoenix's dying and rising 'the same', the mystery of death and birth occurring simultaneously all the time.

Another phoenix simile occurs in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. This is not directly referred to by Schwartz, but his admiration for the 'spiritual grandeur' of Milton's dramatic poem is apparent from his 1949 lecture on 'The Literary

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[30] *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, pp. 374, 375.
[31] *John Donne's Poetry*, ed. by Donald R. Dickson (Norton; London, 2007), p. 78.

Dictatorship of T. S. Eliot' in which he traces resemblances between *Samson Agonistes* and *Four Quartets*.[32] Milton's simile is importantly suggestive in terms of why the phoenix might have mattered so much to Schwartz as a symbol in the 1950s. Milton's semichorus describes the return of Samson's strength (and virtue) as follows:

> But he though blind of sight,
> Despised and thought extinguished quite,
> With inward eyes illuminated
> His fiery virtue roused
> From under ashes into sudden flame,
> And as an evening dragon came,
> Assailant on the perched roosts,
> And nests in order ranged
> Of tame villatic fowl; but as an eagle
> His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.
> So virtue given for lost,
> Depressed, and overthrown, as seemed,
> Like that self-begotten bird
> In the Arabian woods embossed,
> That no second knows nor third,
> And lay erewhile a holocaust,
> From out her ashy womb now teemed,
> Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
> When most unactive deemed,
> And though her body die, her fame survives,
> A secular bird ages of lives.[33]

Milton's use of the word 'holocaust' here is imbued with wholly new significance for any post-Second World War reader. Schwartz may rarely address directly the mass genocide that constituted the darkest passage of twentieth-century history, but his poetry often makes reference to burning and to ash, and the holocaust is perhaps implicit in every reference he makes to the phoenix. He writes of the Jew surviving 'the annihilating fury of history' ('The Vocation of The Poet', p. 23) at the same time as the phoenix becomes his dominant symbol. The conclusion of 'Summer Knowledge' suggests that such annihilation could also be a consummation; and that if, as Schwartz said in one of his better-remembered early poems, 'Time is the fire in which we burn' (*SK*, p. 67), then something glorious might yet grow out of that burning.

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[32] 'The Literary Dictatorship of T. S. Eliot' in *Selected Essays* (pp. 312-331), pp. 316, 320.
[33] John Milton, 'Samson Agonistes' in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (Longman; London, 1968), 2nd ed. (1997), ll. 1687-1707, pp. 411-412.

The moment of the phoenix's combustion is, additionally, analogous to optimum ripeness, that state in which fruit is at its best but which also immediately foretells the beginning of decay. In referring so often to ripe fruit, Schwartz takes his immediate cue from Stevens, whose early poetry is full of 'good, fat, guzzly fruit' and wonders what beauty there can be in an unchanging heaven. [34] 'Is there no change of death in paradise?' the elder poet asks in 'Sunday Morning':

> Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
> Hang always heavy in that perfect sky[?]
>
> (Stevens, p. 55)

If so, what beauty, or what purpose, can there be in having fruit at all?

> Why set the pear upon those river-banks
> Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
>
> (Stevens, p. 55)

At the heart of Stevens's philosophy is the belief that 'Death is the mother of beauty' (p. 55): a world, even a heaven, without change could only be sterile. In 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' Stevens also strives for an acceptance of earthly things as they are, proposing, in a way that is also sexually suggestive, that

> The honey of heaven may or may not come,
> But that of earth both comes and goes at once.
>
> (Stevens, p. 12)

This is concordant with Schwartz's insistence that consummation and annihilation may occur simultaneously. Love, Stevens further speculates, 'comes, it blooms, it bears its fruit and dies' (p. 13). This prompts a comparison of a pair of lovers whose 'bloom is gone' to 'Two golden gourds, distended on [their] vines', hanging 'like warty squashes' to be 'Washed into rinds by rotting winter rains' (p. 13). There is no way to preserve love at its stage of blooming. Stevens admits, two stanzas later, that he knows 'no magic trees, no balmy boughs, / No silver-ruddy, gold-vermillion fruits' (p. 13), but comes to reconcile himself to this condition. After all, beautiful and exotic though the words 'silver' and 'gold' sound here, they are merely decorative when applied to fruit and are far less enticing than 'ruddy' and 'vermillion', colours which suggest that the fruit might actually be good to eat.[35]

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[34] Stevens, p. 33.

[35] If Eliot is the dominant influence upon Schwartz's poetry up to *Vaudeville For A Princess*, then Stevens (whose lines sometimes echo through the early poetry too) is especially important for late Schwartz. It should be remembered, too, that Stevens maintained faith in Schwartz even when others were beginning to lament a waning of talent. Stevens' admiration of Schwartz can be discerned from a

Similarly, Schwartz often suggests the inevitability of fruit eventually rotting. At his most desolate, in the 1962 poem beginning 'Remember midsummer', for example, he describes pears hanging 'yellowed and over-ripe, sodden brown in erratic places, all bunched and dangling, / Like a small choir of bagpipes, silent and waiting', and sees in their decay a mockery of 'hopes and ambitions' that have been long abandoned (*LL*, p. 13). The 'cherry alive' girl is more accepting in her song. She admits that 'The peach has a pit' (*SK*, p. 161): it is not perfect, in other words, although one cannot forget that the peach's pit is the seed from which it grew. The girl counters this by singing that 'the pit has a peach': the stony, inedible part of the fruit is what sustains the edible flesh. She goes on to admit that

> both may be wrong when I sing my song,
> But I don't tell the grown-ups: because it is sad,
> And I want them to laugh just like I do
> Because they grew up and forgot what they knew
>
> (p. 161)

Both ways of viewing the peach may be wrong because one's actual experience of holding, or eating, a ripe peach may be so absorbing that one is able to disregard completely that fact that it has a pit at all, whereas if one focuses solely on the pit after the flesh has been eaten it is easy to forget that this, in due course, could be used to grow a new peach tree. Both may be wrong in the same way that May may be false in 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood'. There is the question, on the one hand, of one's immediate experience, but also of one's knowledge of how things change over the course of time. This is a characteristic example of Schwartz adopting a position in which he accepts two apparently opposing positions as both being valid at the same time. It is far less common for him to choose one distinct possibility over another.

Like Stevens, Schwartz relates the full bloom and ripeness of fruit to the feeling of being in love. In 'The First Morning of the Second World', Schwartz – drawing upon Alfred North Whitehead's discussion of 'the withness of the body', which he had previously used as an epigraph for 'The Heavy Bear Who Goes With Me' – declares:

> Withness is ripeness,
> Ripeness is withness,
> To be is to be in love

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stanza of 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' that clearly alludes to Schwartz's 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar': 'He may not evade his will, / Nor the wills of other men; and he cannot evade / The will of necessity, the will of wills —' (Stevens, p. 410).

Love is the fullness of being.

(*SK*, p. 154)

This is one of many allusions in the 'Summer Knowledge' poems to Edgar's speech to Gloucester in Act V Scene ii of *King Lear*: 'Men must endure / Their going hence even as their coming hither, / Ripeness is all', lines which evoke birth and death, ending and beginning, and which support Schwartz's belief in seeking the fulfilment of one's nature.[36] 'Gold Morning, Sweet Prince', which is specifically a tribute to Shakespeare, modulates '*Ripeness is all*' (Schwartz's italics) into 'Love / Is all' and, with further Shakespearean echoes (this time of *The Tempest*), Schwartz goes on to state how

> Our little life, green, ripe, or rotten, is what it is
> Because of love accepted, rejected, refused and jilted, faded, raided,
> neglected or betrayed.
>
> (*SK*, p. 174)

One must do whatever one can to enable love to ripen, but love's more negative aspects also make us who we are. It cannot be entirely coincidental that, some years earlier, Matthiessen had also used Edgar's lines, marked by Herman Melville in his copy of *Lear*, as one of the epigraphs for *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, his landmark study of the new beginnings for American Literature that took place in the mid-nineteenth century. For Matthiessen, the years 1850-1855 were when literature in America became ripe. For Schwartz, achieving such ripeness in life and in literature is a continual aspiration.

An important facet of Schwartz's 'summer knowledge' is the realisation that ripeness cannot be achieved in isolation: one cannot think only of oneself. Once again, the use of a chiasmus in 'The First Morning of The Second World' indicates the necessary reciprocity in any fulfilled relationship. It would be easy enough to argue that 'summer knowledge' is really just a new, all-embracing way of looking at the world. However, Schwartz insists that it is actually transformative. At the climax of 'The First Morning of The Second World', for example, when the poet recognises *both* the autonomy of the self *and* its dependence upon others, Schwartz writes

> Suddenly it was the awe and moment when Adam first looked upon another self, a self like his own self, yet an absolute other and newness, being the beginning of being and love and loving and being loved
>
> (*SK*, p. 155)

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[36] *King Lear* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans et al (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 1303-1359 (p. 1339).

The second world, created by this realisation, may resemble an earlier world but it is, in fact, entirely new. The paradox is that the moment of Adam's first understanding of a world outside himself is both unrepeatable, because the world is always changing, and yet continually re-enacted, because each moment renders the world new again and makes necessary another such realisation. Although not evoked explicitly in this poem, the phoenix symbol still hovers around these lines – in its continual resurrections, the phoenix is forever making 'another self, a self like its own self, yet an absolute other and newness'. As has been noted in previous chapters, Schwartz makes much, elsewhere, of how history and myth are forever re-enacted, but this is not to deny that individual experience is also unique, absolutely other and new. 'The First Morning of the Second World' also, through its considerations of Adam, ripeness, and knowledge, evokes the forbidden apple, and attempts to recover a kind of knowledge that is purely instinct whilst celebrating the reality of an imperfect world in which ripe fruit does continuously fall.

'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine'

In his review of *Summer Knowledge*, Hecht warns that 'there is very little visual interest' in Schwartz's work, adding that 'there are probably more abstract nouns and adjectives per page in the book than in the work of almost any other modern writer in English.'[37] This is not offered wholly as a criticism; Hecht sees it as an interesting counter-tendency to the dominant belief that poems should contain lots of images. However, although there *is* a great deal of abstraction in Schwartz's late poems, Hecht's claim that they also lack visual interest is not wholly true. There are a number of vivid visualisations: the 'sunflower-lanterned' summer afternoon described in 'The Mounting Summer, Brilliant and Ominous', for example, turns the sunflowers into sources of light in a way that suggests much more than that they are merely bright and yellow. In 'The Deceptive Present, The Phoenix Year', Schwartz's description of a poplar as rising 'Like a slender throat' requires us to re-visualise the tree as a human body, whilst his description of apple blossom as 'surf [...] delicately foaming' (*SK*, p. 212) transports us to the seashore. His further presentation of trees in winter as 'Silent soldiers, a vigil of woods' whose

[37] Hecht, p. 597.

hidden feelings
Scrawled and became
Scores of black vines,
Barbed wire sharp against the ice-white sky

(*SK*, p. 212)

can also only be appreciated in a visual sense – and this depiction suggests, again, that Schwartz may have been thinking of harrowing photographs of concentration camps more than has usually been assumed.

The poem that most clearly engages with the world of visual art is 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine'. It is unique in Schwartz's oeuvre as an ekphrastic poem, but it also epitomises many of the tendencies in his late poetry.[38] Like the earlier 'Far Rockaway', which also presents an artist-figure observing 'Sunday people' (*SK*, p. 190) at play, the poem addresses the relation of the artist to the world he depicts. In both poems, the artist takes in the scene he beholds fully but does not participate in it. In the Seurat poem, 'The one who beholds them, beholding the gold and green / Of summer's Sunday is himself unseen' (p. 190). Seurat, says Schwartz, is 'fanatical' (p. 194), and the poem invites the reader to seek analogies throughout between the painter's method and that of the poet. Even though the unusual length of Schwartz's poem seems to imitate the vastness of Seurat's canvas, it is impossible to read the poem in the same way as one looks at a painting, taking in the whole impression first and then honing in on the finer details. Because poems are traditionally written in lines, and progress chronologically – as well as physically, across the page, down it, and then over it – one cannot take in the whole effect at once as one can with paintings.[39] Schwartz, however, seeks to emulate, within the limitations of his own craft, what Seurat achieves through his.

As Atlas notes, the poem draws heavily upon Meyer Schapiro's lecture on Seurat. Although this was not published until 1958, Schwartz had heard it many years earlier (Atlas, p. 257). Aside from the numerous direct borrowings that are so important in Schwartz's poem, Schapiro's discussion of Seurat's technique must have prompted Schwartz into a greater awareness of his own method. Schapiro begins with

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[38] Amongst Schwartz's manuscripts there are drafts of a poem to be titled 'Vermeer's Officer and Laughing Girl'. This shows that Schwartz's poem about *La Grande Jatte* is not his only attempt to write about a celebrated painting, even though the Vermeer piece was never completed or published (Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 4, Folder 236).

[39] Some kinds of visual and concrete poetry would challenge this assumption. Schwartz, though innovative, never goes so far, however, as to treat his pages as a canvas or his words as brushstrokes. Although its lines are long, the poem conforms to linear conventions.

a defence of Seurat's pointillism. He says that he cannot imagine 'Seurat's pictures painted in broad or blended strokes', going on to insist that

> without his peculiar means we would not have the marvelous delicacy of tone, the uncountable variations within a narrow range, the vibrancy and soft luster, which make his canvases, and especially his landscapes, such a joy to contemplate. Nor would we have his surprising image-world where the continuous form is built up from the discrete, and the solid masses emerge from an endless scattering of fine points – a mystery of the coming-into-being for the eye.[40]

He is claiming that Seurat's canvases do much more than just create a pleasant impression upon the eye: they require contemplation and prompt a new consideration of perception. Seurat's dots, he goes on,

> are a refined device which belongs to art as much as to sensation; the visual world is not perceived as a mosaic of colored points, but this artificial micro-pattern serves the painter as a means of ordering, proportioning and nuancing sensation beyond the familiar qualities of the objects that the colors evoke.
>
> (Schapiro, p. 102)

In Schwartz's work, the euphony compensates for the visual delicacy of Seurat's painting, but he, too, is concerned with far more than creating pleasing impressions: his poem is a meditation upon perception and the relation of the viewer to the artwork he or she observes. Seurat's 'artificial micro-pattern' is replicated in Schwartz's poem through the variations in the way that sounds – and sometimes whole words or phrases – recur with slightly different emphasis each time, and also in the particular scenes within the painting to which Schwartz returns.

There is also the fact that Schwartz's 'continuous form' is built up from discrete units – words, lines, and verse paragraphs – which, taken alone, may have their own interest but may also give a skewed perspective of the whole work, appearing to be little more than 'artificial micro-patterns'. Richard A. Johnson, for example, objects to the lines

> If you look long enough at anything
> It will become extremely interesting;
> If you look very long at anything
> It will become rich, manifold, fascinating
>
> (*SK*, p. 191)

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[40] Meyer Schapiro, 'Seurat' in *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), pp.101-110 (p. 101).

on the grounds that this 'is not [...] a very interesting way of saying it.'[41] Taken outside the context of the whole poem, he is right. However, the inclusion of these lines is justified, partly because they are an apt summation of a verse paragraph that delineates the various points of visual interest in the painting, segueing into a paragraph that takes a more universal view, and partly because they show how the poem is not afraid to accommodate the mundane alongside the exuberant – much as Seurat is able to invest a picture of normal people simply standing or sitting by a river with a radiant aura. More importantly, the lines are consistent with the whole poem's fascination with ways of looking. After all, 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine' begins by asking 'What are they looking at?' and goes on to contemplate the people looking at the river (or at least in its direction), the painter looking at the people, the viewer/poet looking at the painting, and even the painting itself looking back at the viewer: at one point Schwartz describes Seurat's dots as 'eyes' (p. 190). The poem, then, demands to be taken as a whole. Its overall effect is distorted when individual lines are extracted rather than seen as constituent parts of a larger project. The same would be true of the painting: a small enough segment would reveal little more than a formless amalgamation of colourful dots.

This relation of the individual component to the greater whole recollects, again, the principles of 'international consciousness'. Schapiro remarks that 'One can enjoy in the *Grande Jatte* many pictures each of which is a world in itself' (Schapiro, p. 103). Schwartz takes this idea further in a passage that recalls the obsession with lineage that is so prominent in *Genesis*. Each of Seurat's many pictures, Schwartz says,

> is a world itself, a world in itself (and as a living child links generations, reconciles the estranged and aged so that a grand child is a second birth, and the rebirth of the irrational, of those who are forlorn, resigned or implacable),
> Each little picture links the large and small, grouping the big
> Objects, connecting them with each little dot, seed or black grain
> Which are as patterns, a marvelous network and tapestry
>
> (*SK*, p. 194)

This way of looking at the painting – and, indeed, at life itself – prioritises each individual component but only insofar as it contributes to, or mirrors, a much larger vision of unity and a sense of order that cannot be discerned by looking only at the components themselves. Again, this works not only as an analogy for the method of

[41] Richard A. Johnson, 'Summer Knowledge, Hard Hours', *The Sewanee Review* Vol. 76, no. 4, Autumn 1968, pp. 682-685 (684).

'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine', but also for Schwartz's late poetry in general. Some of the individual poems may seem slight in themselves, but taken together they constitute a complete – though sometimes contradictory – philosophy or ideology. The sense of overall cohesion that Schwartz gleans from Seurat's pictures within the painting is heightened a few lines later when the poet withdraws further from the details of the painting – a technique reminiscent of the panning in and out that was observed in 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' in Chapter 1 – and announces that 'Each micro pattern is the dreamed of or imagined macrocosmos' (p. 195). Schwartz's cosmological language here suggests that Seurat may be depicting truths that apply beyond our immediate experience of the world. Such universal application (in every sense) represents the furthest extents of 'international consciousness'.

Perhaps Schwartz's most important borrowing from Schapiro is his depiction of Seurat as an alchemist. Schapiro, in accounting for Seurat's use of minute dots as compositional units, quotes Rimbaud's *Alchemy of the Word*, in which the French poet explains: 'I regulated the form and the movement of each consonant' (Schapiro, p.102). This, Schapiro says, 'was to inspire in the poets of Seurat's generation a similar search for the smallest units of poetic effect' (p. 102). Schwartz does not necessarily go to this extreme, but he, too, weighs up his consonants, conscious of how each word contributes to the larger scheme. Schapiro goes on to maintain that 'Seurat practices an alchemy no more exacting than that of his great forbears, though strange in the age of Impressionist spontaneity' (p. 103). This is as if to say that Seurat's effects are almost all reliant upon meticulous, studied technique in an era that values careful craft less than capturing a sense of immediacy. Schwartz, equally – however effusive he may seem – is not really an impressionistic writer. His free verse is as patterned and as technically accomplished as any of his more conventionally formal poems.

Schwartz develops Schapiro's alchemical references by insisting upon the golden quality of the light in *La Grande Jatte*. Seurat, he writes,

> is at once painter, poet, artist, and alchemist:
> The alchemist points his magic wand to describe and hold the Sunday's gold
> [...]
> –His marvellous little marbles, beads or molecules
> Begin as points which the alchemy's magic transforms
> Into diamonds of blossoming radiance
>
> (*SK*, p.192-193)

The process by which alchemy turns the mundane into the wonderful can be seen as akin to the transformative ability of the phoenix; and the magical (yet scientific) practice evokes not only Rimbaud but, once again, Donne. In this context, when Schwartz writes again of 'time's great fire' (p. 194) it acquires a quite specific sense, evoking the furnace in which base metal might be melted down and purified. This fire, aided by the alchemist himself, 'turns / Whatever is into another thing, continually altering and changing all identity' (p. 194). It is a process to which all things are subjected, but which yields the most valuable results in the hands of an artist who knows which materials he can use and how he can use them.

Schwartz's dedication of 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine' to Schapiro and his wife, Lillian, is an acknowledgement of the debt he owes to his art historian friend. There is also, however, another possible – and intriguing – source for the poem. In March 1952, Schwartz accepted Frank O'Hara's 'On Looking at *La Grande Jatte* the Czar Wept Anew' for publication in *Partisan Review*.[42] O'Hara's poem imagines the czar looking at Seurat's painting and wanting to escape into it. '[T]he rug / he sees is green' – this is the green of the grass by the Seine, which contrasts with the blue rug on which the czar himself paces.[43] The czar knows that he 'cannot, after all, walk up the wall', but this does not stop him from wanting to 'take up the rug, and join his friends / out there near the lake' (O'Hara, p. 63). In the poem's second section, the czar suddenly recalls Seurat's painting at an informal dinner party and impulsively 'steps into / the mirror' (p. 64) (or so we are to imagine, as the poem takes a surreal turn). There is a strong sense of disorientation, both here and at the start of the third section. Did the czar mean to step into the painting instead, and does he somehow end up in it anyway, despite the fact that he then goes on to send a telegram from the 'Ice Palace'? When, towards the end of the poem, he addresses the muzhiks, saying '"If I am ever to find these trees meaningful / I must have you by the hand"' (p. 64), the trees to which he is referring, with their 'dusty fingers'(p. 64), appear to be those in Seurat's painting. These lines acquire additional irony given the czar's knowledge that 'the muzhiks don't read' (p. 64): they won't find his missive meaningful either. This underlines the extent to which the czar is alienated, and his inability to communicate with his people. Because of his personality and status, and

[42] See Brad Gooch, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1994), p. 186.
[43] O'Hara, p. 63.

because he does not know how to appreciate the artwork, he can only bring winter to Seurat's idyllic scene rather than inhabit it as a means of prolonging summer:

> There could only be a stranger wandering
> in this landscape, cold, unfortunate, himself,
> frozen fast in wintry eyes.
>
> (p. 63)

This is a projection of alienation that it is easy to imagine Schwartz appreciating.

O'Hara clearly engages with Schwartz's 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' in this poem. The facts that his czar is 'hysterical / for snow' and steps into a mirror suggest, too, that the younger poet was well aware of the symbols that characterise much of the verse in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*.[44] Schwartz's awareness of O'Hara, apart from his publication of 'On Looking at *La Grande Jatte*, the Czar Wept Anew', is harder to gauge. His only reference to O'Hara in his journals (from 22 April 1957) shows little more than that he intended to read the younger poet, along with others: 'See Rilke, Berryman, [Frank] O'Hara [poet] too & [James] Schevill [poet]' (*Portrait*, p. 572). The affinities between 'Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine' and 'On Looking at *La Grande Jatte* the Czar Wept Anew' are strong enough to suggest, however, that Schwartz owed a veiled debt to a poet whose encounter with the same painting had also prompted a consideration of the relationship between the viewer and the painting he regards.[45]

Both poems acknowledge the sense of escapism that a work of art can provoke, but also the poignancy of not being able to sustain such a sense of escape, or to make it actual. Schwartz's poem concludes by stepping away from the painting in which it has been so thoroughly absorbed. First of all, Schwartz acknowledges that by looking at the painting in a gallery he has also been performing an act of homage to the city in which he lives and where he has been able to see the painting. This is a

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[44] Alongside the obvious reference to 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities' in 'Memorial Day, 1950', O'Hara's use of Plato's cave in 'A Letter to Bunny' (which includes the phrase 'heavy cave' [O'Hara, p. 22]) further suggests the influence of Schwartz upon his early poetry. See also 'Ode (to Joe LeSueur) On the Arrow That Flieth By Day', written in 1958, in which O'Hara refers to an episode in which he claims to have rescued *La Grande Jatte* from a fire at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in which he again exploits the incongruity of the czar (and perhaps, implicitly, given the historical moment, Stalin) caring about Seurat's painting.

[45] Gooch claims that Schwartz was present a party hosted by John Ashbery at which O'Hara first met the artist Larry Rivers (Gooch, p. 174). Gooch also claims, intriguingly, that Schwartz wrote a recommendation for O'Hara when he applied for his first position at the Museum of Modern Art (Gooch, p. 207). If this was the case, then it is all the more surprising that Schwartz appears not to have had any other interaction with O'Hara.

gesture that would seem to equate him looking at the painting in New York with the Parisians looking at the Seine.

> —Here we have stopped, here we have given our hearts
> To the real city, the vivid city, the city in which we dwell
> And which we ignore or disregard most of the luminous day!
>
> (*SK*, p. 196)

But if this is a wholly positive attitude, the lines which follow indicate how brief the experience has been. They bear the revelation that

> Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon along the Seine* has gone away,
> Has gone to Chicago: near Lake Michigan,
> All of his flowers shine in monumental stillness fulfilled.
>
> (p. 196)[46]

Both Schwartz and O'Hara's poems end on a similar note of regret for the fact that it is impossible for the viewer actually to inhabit the painting. Schwartz – although he cites Flaubert to affirm the sense of immediacy that the painting maintains ('*Ils sont dans le vrai!*') – imagines, in his final lines, Kafka saying:

> 'Flaubert was right: *Ils sont dans le vrai!*
> Without forbears, without marriage, without heirs,
> Yet with a wild longing for forbears, marriage and heirs:
> They all stretch out their hands to me: but they are too far away!'
>
> (p. 196)[47]

This is as if to say that, yes, the painting maintains its immediacy; but it still has to go away. Its vision is true, because it is fully accessible to all, visually and imaginatively; but it is also false, illusory, because there is no physical way of entering into its world. Schwartz's response to Seurat's painting of summer is not unlike his attitude to summer itself in a poem such as 'May's Truth and May's Falsehood': it is true and false at the same time. The desperation of Schwartz's final line echoes the inability of O'Hara's czar to take his muzhiks by the hand; and it infects a poem that had celebrated all that a great work of art *can* achieve with a tone of sadness at its limitations.

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[46] O'Hara first saw *La Grande Jatte* at the Art Institute in Chicago in 1951 – presumably on the same exhibition tour as Schwartz saw it in New York (Gooch, p. 185).

[47] Max Brod noted that Kafka often liked to quote Flaubert's remark, which the unmarried French novelist is reputed to have made on visiting a bourgeois family. See, for example, Ronald D. Gray, *Franz Kafka* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1973), p. 53.

Narcissus, Kilroy and Columbus

Most of the previously unpublished pieces that appear in the posthumous *Last and Lost Poems* revisit the interests that Schwartz explores in his 'Summer Knowledge' poems. Poems such as 'All Night, All Night' and 'The First Night of Fall and Falling Rain' examine anew the difficulties of the self-absorbed individual on recalling again 'all that [live] outside of [him]' (*LL*, p. 14) or that he is 'only one among eight million riders and readers' (p. 5) as he travels upon a train.[48] Other poems again address the passing of the seasons and evoke the phoenix; others self-consciously attempt to define the role of the poet; and others – like 'Love and Marilyn Monroe' – undertake more explicit analyses of what it is to be American, whilst also contemplating the questions of love and hope. The most ambitious late pieces, 'The Studies of Narcissus' and 'Kilroy's Carnival: A Poetic Prologue For TV' (both dated 1958 in the versions given by Phillips), both look back to all that Schwartz had achieved in his career up to that date, and also suggest directions that his poetry might have taken thereafter.[49] They are both inconsistent and unfinished, but also contain passages that are as vivid as any Schwartz ever wrote.

In the 'Prologue' to 'The Studies of Narcissus', Schwartz maintains that the myth has been continually misinterpreted – or at least that Echo, along with all the others, was mistaken in believing that Narcissus had fallen in love with himself and would find her imitation of his voice and words desirable. 'The truth', Schwartz says,

> was that he was entirely dissatisfied with the image of his own face, yet the river, continuously changing under the continuously changing light, and promising so much to Narcissus, nurtured an inexhaustible hope in him, and hopes; the hope that he would be satisfied, and beautiful enough, as an image, a face and a being, to be able to be loved by a truly beautiful being. But the river itself was the most beautiful of all the beings he had ever beheld.

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[48] Given the complex relationship of influence already noted between Schwartz and O'Hara, there is a possibility here that Schwartz has in mind O'Hara's 'Personal Poem', which ends:

> I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is
> thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi
> and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go
> back to work happy at the thought possibly so
>
> (O'Hara, p. 336)

The eight million riders here also recall the impression that the then six million inhabitants of New York made on Jacob Cohen in 'The World is a Wedding', fourteen years earlier.

[49] Three of the most sustained passages from 'The Studies of Narcissus' are extracted and appear in *Selected Poems: Summer Knowledge*, but there is much to commend the poem as a whole – and its more fragmentary passages – too.

(*LL*, p. 59)

This implies that – perhaps like O'Hara's czar – he wishes to be embraced by the medium of his reflection rather than being the subject of that reflection. As in the other 'Summer Knowledge' poems, then, the play of light upon moving water becomes associated with love and prompts passages of intense self-searching. Schwartz would not have known about Eliot's early 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' (which he was to rework into 'The Burial of the Dead') but Eliot's influence is again apparent as Schwartz's protagonist wrangles with the inadequacy of language.

> The words for what is in my heart and mind
> Do not exist: But I must seek and search to find
> Among the vines and orchards of the vivid world of day
> Approximate images, imaginary parallels
> For what is in 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

(*LL*, p. 67)

There are a number of dramatic monologues – spoken by Sterne, Swift, Hölderlin, Baudelaire, Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob – amongst the 'Summer Knowledge' poems. Here, speaking through another's voice enables Schwartz to employ a tone that is rawer than those he more characteristically uses. By now, the fascination with sons failing to live up to the images projected by their fathers will be familiar. So too will be the suspicion of 'deceptive resemblances', which recall Schwartz's interests in masking and in theatrical performance. There is, nonetheless, new intensity in the direct way in which he admits the limitations of the tools of his poetic craft. There is an irony in the fact that a passage that is so distrustful of comparison and metaphor should contain so much of them. It is just possible to take the 'vines and orchards of the vivid world of day' literally, although their figurative connotations – suggesting everything, in effect, that exists in the natural world – are stronger. The extended comparison of false metaphors to false sons, initially appears to aid a reader's (or listener's) comprehension of the problem, but in fact directs them away from the primary issue – of language, of the relation of the sign to the thing signified – into an entirely different area. And even the words 'image' and 'parallels' are not exact. To question their validity would, admittedly, be to throw us into a world of meaningless

chaos but the intangibility of the word 'image', in particular, is important because of its relation to the imperfect image of Narcissus's imperfect face in the water. Narcissus nurtures an inexhaustible hope that the image of his face will one day be beautiful, perfect; he also maintains an inexhaustible hope of finding the perfect word. In the meantime, he must use approximate images, even whilst dismissing them, because, as he says, there are no better forms of expression available to him. It is all that he *can* do.[50]

Because words are misleading and have dual tendencies, every act of revelation is also an act of concealment. 'The game of the mystery of reality', Narcissus muses,

> Began when the first thought concealed itself,
> When the speech of ripened lips
> Hid what was already hidden, or not yet known.
>
> (*LL*, p. 63)

If this had not happened there would be no need for verbal communication, no need to grasp for truths that cannot be known, and no need for poetry. Given the distrust of language that infiltrates the poem, each of its fragments can be read as a fresh attempt at articulation from Narcissus. Each previous attempt is discarded, but each also builds upon those that have gone before, creating a cumulative effect. The oddness of some of the shortest utterances, such as 'A suave bush' (p. 75) or ':death to apes' (p. 81), might suggest that they had found their way into the poem – which had, after all, only been left in draft form – by accident. But they are consistent with a poem that sometimes pairs words in a farfetched way as it attempts to seek an appropriate form of expression.

The poem doesn't reach anything like a definitive conclusion. The abrupt gnomic ending is as unexpected as anything Schwartz ever wrote, a rhythmic

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[50] Lowell's 'Unwanted', written some twenty years later, provides an interesting comparison. Lowell reflects on how he used to find

> a humor for [him]self in images,
> farfetched misalliance
> that made evasion a revelation
>
> (Lowell, p. 831)

and, in 'Epilogue' also concludes that 'All's misalliance' (p. 838). This suggests that comparisons that may seem revelatory in fact direct attention away from the poet himself and towards the thing to which he is aligned.

experiment whose stressed monosyllables and slow pace imitate the beating of drums in lines that appear to describe an al fresco bacchanal:

> Drums: white drums: the white round drums
> Of the slowly swaying buttocks of drunken girls.
>
> (*LL*, p. 81)

It is possible here that Narcissus is at last awakening to an appreciation of sexual possibility and of the world around him. He has earlier described looking at 'dancers, swaying' (p. 64), and the experience of hearing a girl, concealed in a grove, screaming in the throes of sexual pleasure. Both encounters only confirm his isolation: to him, for example, the girl's joy is 'unheard of before, and never known, / And given to me or given / By me to girls' (p. 68). At the poem's end, however, Narcissus seems to finds beauty in the naked girls, distracting him from the futile search for his own perfection. It is equally possible, however, that his vision just entrenches his misery further: seeking the perfect image of his face in the river – whose ripples accentuate the swaying – he finds only a farcical debauch.

Narcissus learns from the river – which he describes as his 'school' (*LL*, p. 65) – one of the crucial principles of Schwartz's late ideology. It is evidently not one that he finds easy to believe, but its importance is not diminished for that. Reality, the river sings to him,

> is magical and musical.
> It comprehends the stones and the hearts of men
> And all the variety between these two
> Completes the comparison
> Which makes all dreams poor and inadequate
> Once set in contrast with reality's ingenuity
>
> (p. 72)

One of the difficulties, in a world of 'deceptive resemblances', is recognising reality for what it is. There are so many misleading surface impressions. In 'Kilroy's Carnival', for example, DJ Orville Wright, Jnr. crams his broadcast with trivia and eccentric flights of fancy. However, despite giving considerable attention to the ongoing threat of atomic war and to the pronouncements of Frank Costello, Marlon Brando and Marilyn Monroe, he suggests that such news and information distracts us from what is really important. 'This was a normal day as days in the fearful twentieth century go', he announces; 'the number of rapes, seductions, murders, and perjuries was average' (p. 89). However, much more important than all this,

> the Creation occurred [...] the Creation occurs every morning at dawn and all day long. The world is a fire, a great fire, a bonfire, a wild fire, a conflagration: it must be sustained by a new supply of fuel continuously.
>
> (p. 89)[51]

If Wright's focus on combustion never quite lets us forget about the nuclear threat – and a few lines earlier, his observation that 'Rain fell. Sparks flew. Dust rose' (*LL*, p. 89) also has apocalyptic overtones – his primary claim is that the continual renewals and resurrections seen in nature all the time (and commented on so often by Schwartz) are the greatest reality and that nothing else especially matters.

Wright's pronouncements on Columbus provoke further thoughts on the relationship of dreams to reality in a specifically American context. When asked about the 'probable future' of the United States, he suggests that 'It will be clearer and clearer that Columbus discovered not only America but Hollywood', adding that 'The moon pictures will still be transparent revisions and paraphrases of the American Dream' (*LL*, p. 99). Finally, Wright reads out a letter from a disgruntled listener who challenges the belief he has proclaimed in 'the dream of the new world forever new, the dream of deathless hope ever renewed, reborn each morning and after each fiery death as the phoenix and the springtide' (p. 100). 'How can we know', the listener goes on,

> That this is not a delusion or a hoax [...]? Don't forget that you yourself said that the entire history of the United States of America was made possible by an error in navigation, the lifelong delusion of a destitute optimist, seeking sesame, intent on finding a passage to the Indies and unable to tell a coral reef from a continent, incapable of distinguishing between a harbour and a hole in the ground.
>
> (p. 101)

Wright's silence means that the letter-writer's claim can stand uncontested. The DJ doesn't respond, either, to the concluding remark that 'no one now remembers that the founding fathers of this country were Danton, Robespierre and Napoleon Bonaparte' (p. 101). However, implicit in everything that Wright has said up to this point is an understanding that even if Columbus's dream was not fulfilled in the way that he had expected, it did, in any case, expose him to a new actuality that, in time, would far surpass all that he had dreamed. What Columbus discovered was different to what he had imagined, but perhaps also more wonderful than that.

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[51] A possible source for this – and other late Schwartz poems that treat combustion and resurrection – is Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection'.

One of the lessons to be learned from Columbus's accidental discovery of America is that whilst dreams may have their value, we should not – and cannot – live in dreams alone. Our experience of actual life may ultimately prove much richer. This is a point upon which Schwartz insists in his analysis of the Beat poets in his 1958 lecture on 'The Present State Of Poetry'. He criticises the Beats (whom he nicknames 'The San Francisco Howlers') for being

> imaginary rebels since the substance of their work is a violent advocacy of a nonconformism which they already possess and which requires no insurrection whatever, since nonconformism of almost every variety had become acceptable and respectable and available to everyone.
>
> ('The Present State of Poetry', p. 45)

Kenneth Rexroth, he goes on, their spokesman,

> does not recognize the difference between the Red Army and the *Kenyon Review* critics, between Nikita Khrushchev and John Crowe Ransom, or between the political commissars of a police state and the tyrants who write advertising copy on Madison Avenue.
>
> (p. 46)

This is a wisecrack as wicked as any of Jarrell's, and it oversimplifies the endeavours of the Beats, but the point is also made seriously and it prompts a statement – the central point of the lecture – that has the conviction of a manifesto. Schwartz points out that 'the leading motive of classical American literature and of twentieth century writing has been a criticism of American life.' Often, he goes on, 'the actuality of American life has been criticized from the exalted point of view of the American Dream... [or] by being compared with the culture of the Old World' – something which is also true of much of Schwartz's own pre-War writing. However, he continues,

> since the Second World War and the beginning of the atomic age, the consciousness of the creative writer, however detached, has been confronted with the spectre of the totalitarian state, the growing poverty and helplessness of Western Europe, and the threat of an inconceivably destructive war which may annihilate civilization and mankind itself. Clearly when the future of civilization is no longer assured, a criticism of American life in terms of a contrast between avowed ideals and present actuality cannot be a primary preoccupation and source of inspiration. For America, not Europe, is now the sanctuary of culture; civilization's very existence depends upon America, the actuality of American life, and not the ideals of the American Dream. To criticize the actuality upon which all hope depends thus becomes a criticism of hope itself. No matter what may be wrong with American life, it is nothing compared to the police state, barbarism, and annihilation.
>
> (p.46)

With hindsight, this evidently underestimates the extent to which Western Europe would recover from the War: we are fortunate to be able to read this at a time when the specific threats Schwartz identifies have diminished (regardless of those which have superseded them). The intelligence and the conviction of the attitude are not in doubt, however, and they help to account for the change of focus in much of Schwartz's later poetry.

Schwartz, then, became – or at least tried to become – reconciled to the actuality of modern American life. This does not mean that he abandoned his persistent exploration of the American Dream, or that he abandoned his personal dreams. The example of Columbus shows the importance of having dreams and aspirations, but also of accepting actuality, the unexpected world one has discovered or in which one lives, when those dreams have been fulfilled or are no longer tenable. The dreams need to complement one's experience of the actual world, not to overrule it. Equally, a balance needs to be found between appreciating the actual sensual experience one has of one's world and environment, and the equally actual experience that one has in one's mind – an experience which may lack obvious external referents, but which is no less real for that. Schwartz's final position is that the poet must be neither solely a commentator on his culture and times, nor a Platonic philosopher-king figure, but both. This is clear enough from one of his final poems, 'Apollo Musagate, Poetry, and the Leader of the Muses' that talks of how the poet 'must be a nymphomaniacal whore yet preserve his virginity', be 'Chaste yet a gigolo', and 'The Czar yet Figaro' (*LL*, p. 55). The poet must be able to sustain such contradictions, to live in the world as he experiences it, yet also to live in a world of his own creation.

CONCLUSION

In 'Dream Song 282', Berryman reflects on past conversations with dead friends ('Richard & Randall [...] / & Delmore') about the relation of European culture to that of America:

> I hear the three freaks in their different notes
> discussing more & more
>
> our meaning to the Old World, theirs to us
> which much we pondered in our younger years
> and then coughed & sang
> the new forms in which ancient thought appears
> the altering bodies of the labile souls,
> foes fang on fang.[52]

Blackmur and Jarrell, amongst others of their generation, shared Schwartz's self-conscious sense of modernity, set in relief here by Berryman's use of the phrase 'Old World'. This sense is heightened, not diminished, by trying to understand what relation modern American life might have to age-old Western philosophies. 'Ancient thought' endures, even if the means of expressing it undergo transformations. In trying to make such thought meaningful within the specific conditions of his time, Schwartz, like his contemporaries, was questioning the role of the poet – and, indeed, the critic – in twentieth-century American society. This is a problem that he never resolved, but the fruitfulness of his struggle is evident in almost everything that he wrote, and constitutes perhaps his most important legacy to later American poetry.

Eliot's assessment of the varying demands that criticism has historically made upon poetry, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, highlights the difficulties incumbent upon the poet whose lyric impulse is constrained by a sense of social obligation. Schwartz, with his Jewish heritage, felt such difficulties more than most. 'The important moment for the appearance of criticism', Eliot speculates, 'seems to be the time when poetry ceases to be the expression of a whole people'.[53] This study has emphasised how Schwartz blamed the increased isolation of the modern poet from society on the destruction of a universal world picture. As poetry becomes the expression of fewer people, it becomes more necessary to ask exactly what poetry and its uses are: this is no longer self-evident. Eliot concludes that the tendency of modern criticism is 'to expect too much, rather than too little, of poetry' (Eliot, *Poetry and*

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[52] *The Dream Songs*, p. 304.
[53] Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* , 2nd edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 22.

Criticism, p. 149). For Dr Johnson, 'poetry was still poetry, and not another thing' (p. 65), but since Johnson's time more and more 'expectations and demands' have been made upon it, culminating in a modern age whose critics seem 'to demand of poetry not that it shall be well written but that it shall be "representative of its age"' (p. 25). For Eliot, the modern critic's challenge is to distinguish between 'what is permanent or eternal in poetry' and the sociological and other purposes that poetry may have been made to serve but which are not, in fact, its essence. It follows that the modern poet must equally be aware of such distinctions in his work, perceiving, however, that not to be representative enough could be just as fatal to posterity as not reaching enough for the eternal.

Schwartz wrote his poetry as a critic, and his criticism as a poet. His consciousness of the pure poem's limitations, and of the difficulties inherent in returning poetry to 'the center of the community' ('Isolation of Modern Poetry, p. 13), however, did not help him to resolve what kind of poet he wanted to be. This accounts, in part, for the ambivalence of his critical reception. He is torn, throughout his career, between writing a poetry of conscious social engagement and pursuing the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' – which, Eliot points out, is not in any case as purely aesthetic as it claims to be but is rather an extension of Arnold's view that poetry is 'a capital substitute for religion' (Eliot, *Poetry and Criticism*, p. 26). Schwartz's dilemma manifests itself in his dual impulses towards the overtly lyrical (the aesthetic) and the 'morbidly pedestrian' (the social), towards high culture and popular culture, and towards the individual and the universal. At its best, his poetry admits these binaries, holding them, engagingly, in counterpoise. At other times, however, it gives way to indecision, Schwartz's conflict of purpose apparent but unresolved.

Such difficulties are exemplified in 'The Would-Be Hungarian'. This 1955 poem is memorable insofar as it ironises the hopes that had driven Schwartz's own Eastern European ancestors to emigrate, reversing them in the titular character's desperation to forsake his Americanness and be Hungarian. It captures a moment of social history at which, in a certain locality, a minority community can become a majority. As an interrogation of American identity, however, it struggles to negotiate between the specific instance recounted and the envoy's vast claim that the boy's experience of alienation is emblematic of what everyone in America feels. The poem strains as Schwartz attempts to make it more than a diverting anecdote:

Behold how this poor boy, who wished so passionately to be Hungarian

Suffered and knew the fate of being American.
Whether on Ellis Island, Plymouth Rock,
Or in the secret places of the mind and heart
This is America – as poetry and hope
This is the fame, the game and the names of our fate:
This we must suffer or must celebrate.

(*SK*, pp. 164-165)

The move from particular incident to general statement is familiar from *Genesis*, with which this poem, despite its brevity, has formal and tonal affinities. However, whereas the dramatic context of *Genesis* enables us to set the ghost's generalisations against each other, and to question them, these lines admit no such scepticism. Their tone is earnest and didactic, especially in contrast with the wry long-lined narrative that precedes them. This does not mean that they are assured. The preponderance of internal rhymes and nebulous substantives conceals the fact that there is little analysis of what is actually being stated. As a consequence, the piece suffers, both as social analysis and as a poem.

The less socially engaged 'Summer Knowledge' poems are more probing in their search for universal truths. They certainly succeed better as works of decorative art, which is what, Eliot suggests, the earliest English critics considered poetry to be (Eliot, *Poetry and Criticism*, p. 23). Even when unresolved, however, Schwartz's grappling to establish a definite position animates his oeuvre: the process by which he arrives at beliefs, doubts them, reasserts them, abandons them, and replaces them survives in the poems themselves. Despite the uncertainties of 'The Would-Be Hungarian', for example, its final line is an important statement of Schwartz's ideology. Its implication initially seems to be that the child should celebrate who he is, rather than hopelessly wishing to be somebody else. However, one has to know oneself and one's fate before any such celebration is possible. The 'or' is therefore misleading. One can only decide to celebrate one's fate when one has first endured the suffering. This is a reason why Schwartz, in the spirit of another of his child-subjects, the 'true-blue American' (*SK*, p. 163) Jeremiah Dickson, so often chooses both – to suffer *and* to celebrate.

For Auden – even though he saw great potential in Schwartz's work – such a position amounted to hedge betting. Schwartz's inability to establish his religious position was reason enough for the elder poet to discourage him from publishing

Genesis. '[Y]ou have now approached the frontier where the question of religious faith is inescapable', Auden commented,

> the point at which you have become aware that ahead of you lies *either* faith *or* despair, but [...] you are still confused about what faith is: because the road that has led to this point has been that of aesthetic and ethical consciousness, you still cling to the hope that it crosses the frontier – but it doesn't.
>
> (Quoted in Atlas, p. 217)

The Prelude comes off aesthetically, Auden argues, because Wordsworth 'really manages to believe' that 'the poetic imagination and religious revelation are one' (Atlas, p. 218). Schwartz is 'too advanced' to be able to believe this. He is also unwilling to confront his paradoxical insights into the nature of suffering: on one hand, that it has (aesthetic) value, and may therefore be desirable, but, on the other, that it is (ethically) shameful, and that to desire it would be to refuse the pursuit of happiness. Schwartz's psychological and metaphysical speculations, Auden says, are not sufficient substitutes for belief or the honest acknowledgement of faithlessness. These speculations become destructive when they presuppose only human consciousness rather than a religious faith. Nor, in writing about personal memory, will one find significance, value, and belief simply by looking up and remembering enough. This may *lead* one to faith or despair, but it is only at this point that one can really begin to examine one's own life or write from a religious perspective.

To some extent, Auden's reading is over-determined. As Atlas points out, Schwartz's God is 'essentially a poetic device' (Atlas, p. 220) and the poem does not demand to be read in such theological terms. But Auden's point is that Schwartz needed to decide upon his religious position in order to secure his aesthetic position. Schwartz himself recognised the correlation between the two in suggesting that Eliot's aesthetic and ethical ideologies – which included his anti-Semitic 'squint' – were consistent with his faith in Anglo-Catholic Royalism.[54] Stevens, conversely, had propounded his own aesthetic – of belief 'in fiction which you know to be fiction' (Stevens, p. 189) – in response to his certainty that God did not exist. Schwartz's agnosticism, however honest, diminishes his authority. The sense is often that he longs to believe in something but can never bring himself to do so.

In stressing Schwartz's lack of conviction, Auden draws attention to what Berryman more favourably suggests is restlessness. Schwartz's refusal to settle upon a

[54] Delmore Schwartz Papers, Box 6, Folder 359.

single definitive world view or a single definitive poetic form is indicative, in Berryman's view, of the particular lability – proneness to lapse, instability (*OED*) – of his soul; it certainly indicates (as Berryman goes on) his restless pursuit of 'insights' (*Dream Songs*, p. 304) and his unwillingness to stop pondering the questions that had occupied him in his younger years. Whether seen in a positive or negative light, as evidence of a mind too intelligent to accept anything without questioning or of one too distrusting ever to believe in anything, such tentativeness is one of Schwartz's defining characteristics. If it eventually counted against him, the fact remains that, in 1938, when *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* was published, the directions that American poetry might take after Eliot and Pound, Stevens and Williams (all of whom were to keep writing for many more years) were not clear. Schwartz's career is marked by experimentation; at each stage, such possible new directions are suggested, even though they are not always followed to their limits. Is it possible, however, to imagine the particular development of the strands of later-twentieth-century American poetry represented, on the one hand, by Lowell and Berryman, and on the other by Ashbery and the New York school, without Schwartz's prior example in propounding a post-modern (in its most literal, temporal sense) poetics of the self in relation to the international, a poetics of prosaic lyricism and of Romantic Modernism?

Schwartz's unique contribution to American letters might, ultimately, be felt more through his influence, the ways in which particular poets have responded to his body of work, than through the endurance of the work itself. But to appreciate why this may be, one must first elucidate the appeal, and the genuine strengths, of Schwartz's writing. This study has emphasised a number of his most important innovations and convictions, ones that would be taken up by peers and successors. Among these are his attempts – first in his 'Poems in Imitation of the Fugue' and other early poems but also, more starkly, in *Vaudeville for a Princess* – to negotiate between 'pure' and demotic poetry, to set the simply musical qualities of the lyric alongside a broader engagement with the world at large. Equally important is his return (albeit only temporarily, in *Genesis*) of the individual self to the centre of the poem, a reaffirmation, in the wake of Modernism's declared aspiration towards objective, impersonal tenets, of Hegel's definition of the lyric as 'an intensely subjective and personal expression'.[55] Schwartz also extends the traditional scope of

[55] Cited by Johnson in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

the lyric through his brand of lyrical epic, challenging generic distinctions not just between kinds of poetry but also between poetry, prose fiction, and verse drama.

Ashbery has pointed out the 'inherent American urge' in the 1930s and beyond 'to make it big as well as new'.[56] For Schwartz, in *Genesis*, bigness corresponds to universality, but also coincides with an urge to make it personal. Both urges were prompted, for Schwartz, by living among the alienating crowds of New York City. He begins an endeavour, in response to ways that Baudelaire and others had written about Paris, to map the poetic landscape of the metropolis. This endeavour would be taken up by poets of the generation after him, particularly O'Hara. Meanwhile, Schwartz's insistence on the international scope of any given life evinces his consciousness of the ways in which such a life might be epic; this can only be understood, however, if one also has a strong sense of personal integrity. It is not the individual and the international, the lyric and the epic, in and of themselves that matter most for Schwartz, but the interrelationships between them.

Schwartz, despite his popular leanings, was a poet's poet. By overlooking him, literary critics have not only put his own reputation at stake; they have risked misunderstanding, or only partially understanding, those whom he influenced. This study has aimed to show why they might have held him in such high esteem. It was not only those junior to him who followed Schwartz's examples either. Stevens's allusion to 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' has been noted in Chapter 5, and Ashbery suggests that Auden's 'The Sea and the Mirror' (1944) might have been influenced by *Genesis* (*The Heavy Bear*, p. 7).[57] This is possible, despite Auden's critical comments on Schwartz's draft. Auden's work, however, has a much closer affinity with 'Coriolanus and his Mother', published five years earlier. Aside from the fact that both works reinterpret Shakespeare plays from modern and meta-theatrical perspectives, both engage with questions of exegesis and audience – who they might be and how they might respond. There are also tonal similarities. 'Caliban to the Audience', for instance, is sometimes described as late Jamesian, but its rambling philosophising and direct addresses also recall Schwartz's prose interludes.[58] Auden's Caliban's 'All we have ever asked for is that for a few hours the curtain should be left

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[56] John Ashbery, *The Heavy Bear: Delmore Schwartz's Life Versus His Poetry* (Tokyo: The English Literary Society of Japan, 1996), p. 7.

[57] Ashbery also suggests, more convincingly, that James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* is influenced by *Genesis*. For Stevens's allusion, see p. 227.

[58] See, for example, Jeremy Noel-Tod, 'Caliban's Last Sigh' in *The Guardian*, Saturday 27 September, 2003, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/sep/27/poetry.classics, accessed 22 January, 2012.

undrawn, so as to allow our humble ragged selves the privilege of craning and gaping at the splendid goings-on inside' is as eloquently colloquial, for example, as Schwartz's 'Between the acts something must be done to occupy our minds or we might become too aware of our great emptiness' (*SK*, p. 92).[59] Meanwhile, in the second part of 'The Sea and the Mirror', Antonio's 'I am I, Antonio / By choice myself alone' (Auden, p. 412) resonates with the many statements of self-reliance made by Schwartz's Coriolanus.

Schwartz's importance to Lowell and Berryman on one hand, and Ashbery, O'Hara and Kenneth Koch on the other, has been further reaching. Lowell's 'To Delmore Schwartz', positioned in 'Part Three' of *Life Studies* alongside poems for Ford Madox Ford, George Santayana, and Hart Crane, is perhaps an acknowledgement that without Schwartz the sequence that follows could not have been written. Like *Genesis*, 'Life Studies' documents a family's collapse against a larger historical backdrop, seeking universal truths in individual experience. In describing his mother's '*Risorgimento* black and gold casket' as being 'like Napoleon's at the *Invalides*....', for example, Lowell makes the same kind of claim for his family's relation to major historical events as Schwartz does in 'The Ballad of the Children of the Czar' and *Genesis* when he relates how his grandfather fled the Russian army.[60] Both Schwartz and Lowell present themselves as the children of history.

Meanwhile, Ashbery's description of O'Hara's career as 'an unrevised work-in-progress' could equally be applied to Schwartz, the bulk of whose work, Ashbery elsewhere points out, 'is unpublished and probably unpublishable' (*The Heavy Bear*, p. 6).[61] Discussing his own admiration for Schwartz, Ashbery cites the elder poet's presence as his main reasons for wanting to study at Harvard. Schwartz is the most consistently overlooked of Ashbery's diverse influences. To give just one example, in his lecture on Schwartz, Ashbery observes that tall buildings are one of Schwartz's recurring motifs. Mutlu Konuk Blasing has noted that they are a feature of Ashbery's own poetry too. Her observation that 'Ashbery's cityscapes often recall Auden's', whilst entirely accurate, is limited by her failure to observe that they also recall

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[59] W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 425.
[60] Lowell, p. 179.
[61] 'Introduction' in O'Hara, pp. vii-xi (p. vii).

Schwartz's – who had, himself, often responded to Auden.[62] It seems likely that Ashbery's high buildings are derived from both Auden *and* Schwartz, especially given his acknowledged admiration for them both. Schwartz's importance to his younger contemporaries would be a fruitful area for further study.

Ashbery does not hesitate in describing Schwartz as a neglected 'major poet' (*The Heavy Bear*, p. 3). Although he admits to some reservations about the later poetry, Ashbery – along with Berryman and Robert Phillips – anticipates a revival in Schwartz's reputation. He 'is but one, albeit perhaps the most distinguished one, of a group of poets of his time whom a revolution in taste [...] has swept from view, perhaps to be swept back in by some future revolution when his time has come' (p. 3). Whether or not Schwartz does come to be regarded as major, he is certainly more than a minor poet. His poetry reveals, and fights against, the titanic influence of Eliot, but it is also at once representative of its age and innovative in its own right, containing much that is permanent and eternal.

[62] Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry: O'Hara, Bishop, Ashbery, and Merrill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 120.

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