

The True-Blue American

By Delmore Schwartz

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

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

Delmore Schwartz, “The True-Blue American” from *Selected Poems (1938-1958): Summer Knowledge*.
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Born in Brooklyn to Romanian Jewish parents, Delmore Schwartz is a tragic figure—a gifted writer

who only fitfully fulfilled his potential before an early death. After the remarkable accomplishment of his first autobiographical poems and stories, which poignantly describe the sensations of childhood and the conflicted aspirations of the intellectual children of immigrants, he lived chaotically and pursued an eccentric career. Schwartz's decline into paranoia and his lonely demise in a Times Square hotel were fictionalized by his friend Saul Bellow in *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), and several of John Berryman's *Dream Songs* elegize him.

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