Dogs Are Shakespearean, Children Are Strangers

BY DELMORE SCHWARTZ

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

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

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