

**Delmore Schwartz**  
**"The Ballad of the Children of the Czar"**

**1**

The children of the Czar  
Played with a bouncing ball

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

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

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

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

**2**

While I ate a baked potato  
Six thousand miles apart,

In Brooklyn, in 1916,  
Aged two, irrational.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt  
Was an Arrow Collar ad.

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

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

Then left for America  
To become a king himself.

**3**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let anger be general:  
I hate an abstract thing.

**4**

Brother and sister bounced  
The bounding, unbroken ball,

The shattering sun fell down  
Like swords upon their play,

Moving eastward among the stars  
Toward February and October.

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

And if for a moment they fight  
Over the bouncing ball

And sister pinches brother  
And brother kicks her shins,

Well! The heart of man is known:  
It is a cactus bloom.

**5**

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

The wheeling, whirling world  
Makes no will glad.

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

A pitiless, purposeless Thing,  
Arbitrary and unspent,

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

The innocent are overtaken,  
They are not innocent.

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

**6**

Now, in another October  
Of this tragic star,

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

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

It falls from the highchair down  
And I begin to howl.

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

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

Even a bouncing ball  
Is uncontrollable,

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

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