

THE SEVEN AGES OF MAN

William Shakespeare

JAQUES:
All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
5 His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling¹ and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover, **A**
10 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad²
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,³
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation⁴
15 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,⁵
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;⁶
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
20 Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,⁷
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide **B**

A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

Reread lines 5–9. Notice how Jaques describes the infant and the schoolboy. What do these descriptions reveal about his attitude toward childhood?

B RHYME SCHEME

Does Shakespeare employ a rhyme scheme for this poem? Support your answer.

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1. **mewling**: crying or whimpering.
 2. **woeful ballad**: sad, sentimental song.
 3. **pard**: leopard.
 4. **bubble reputation**: reputation, which disintegrates as quickly as a bubble.
 5. **with good capon** (kā'pŏn') **lin'd**: full of chicken.
 6. **saws . . . instances**: old sayings and examples showing how they still apply.
 7. **pantaloons** (păn'tə-lŏn'): a foolish old man.



The First and the Last Steps, Emilio Longoni. Private Collection. © Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

For his shrunk shank;⁸ and his big manly voice,
 Turning again toward childish treble,⁹ pipes
 25 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all, **C**
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,¹⁰
 Sans¹¹ teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

ANALYZE VISUALS

After reading the poem, what connection can you see between the poem and this image?

C METER

Read aloud lines 20–25, tapping your foot at each stressed syllable. How many stressed syllables are in each line?

8. **youthful hose . . . shank:** The stockings of his youth are too large for his shrunken calves.

9. **treble:** a high-pitched voice.

10. **oblivion** (ə-blīv'ē-ən): complete forgetfulness.

11. **sans** (sän) *French:* without.