

# 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,  
Mewling<sup>1</sup> 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 ballad<sup>2</sup>  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,<sup>3</sup>  
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation<sup>4</sup>  
15 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,<sup>5</sup>  
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;<sup>6</sup>  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
20 Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,<sup>7</sup>  
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. **pantaloan** (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;<sup>8</sup> and his big manly voice,  
 Turning again toward childish treble,<sup>9</sup> pipes  
 25 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all, **C**  
 That ends this strange eventful history,  
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,<sup>10</sup>  
 Sans<sup>11</sup> 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.