

All the world's a stage

William Shakespeare

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,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling 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,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Summary

“All the world's a stage” is taken from William Shakespeare's play “As You Like It”. These lines are spoken by Jaques in Act II Scene VII.

The opening lines say that all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely its players. In these lines the poet compares this world to a stage. All men and women are only actors and actresses on the stage of this world. All these people have different routes to enter this stage and also have different exits to go out. They enter this stage when they are born and leave this stage when they die. Every person, during his life time plays many parts. These parts are called seven ages. Every player plays seven roles during his life. In fact human beings play their parts in life as characters play their role on stage.

Shakespeare says that each human being performs seven parts in this small drama on the stage of the world.. This stage ends when the infant grows into a school child.

The first stage is that of an infant when he is helpless in his mother's arms. He merely pukes in the nurse's arms. He makes his entry as a baby who is fully dependent upon others.

In the second role, he is a child who goes “creeping like a snail unwillingly to school”. He is innocent. He is not willing to learn. He wants freedom. For learning, he must lose his childish liberty.

The third stage brings before us the lover who sings woeful ballads for his beloved. In the youthful age when man is full of energy and might, he does everything to please his beloved. Even this shift of life, filled with merrymaking and joyous songs, passes so quickly as well.

The fourth stage is soldier and this stage portrays the man as a soldier or a fight for the nation. His beard depicts all those strange oaths that he takes to protect his country and all the men and women living in it. No doubt he quarrels, but he also maintains his dignity to create and develop his reputation in front of others around him..Here man seeks fame though it is temporary and short lived. He endangers his life for it. It alludes how man goes every extreme for temporary success, as success is always temporary. This is perhaps the toughest stage in his life

Then comes the fifth stage, where he turns into justice, the one who knows what is good and what is right. At this stage, he is perhaps the best person to approach to find out who is correct and who is wrong. He has round belly. He cites modern instances.

In sixth age, man becomes very weak. He keeps pouch with him. He wears warm hoses. Man’s shank(ankle) has shrunk. “His big manly voice is turning again towards childish treble”. His voice is not clear due to loss of teeth. In the last stage, the condition of man becomes very miserable. Now he has grown very old and weak.

The last stage comes for him to go through oblivion. No matter how hard he tries to remember things, he is just not able to. When he enters in this stage he changes from his old age to the oldest one. This is a strange stage of life. In this period all the life which has been previously full of strange events, comes to an end. Man becomes child once again. This is like his second childhood. In this stage he is childish as well as childlike. At this stage he forgets almost everything. His memory becomes very weak. He loses teeth, eye- sight and taste. He is without everything. This is the stage in which he completes the drama of his life and leaves the stage of this world for the next. Thus Shakespeare pictures the seven stages of a man’s life in the poem ‘All the World’s a Stage’.

The Retreat

Henry Vaughan

Two meanings of the term 'retreat'.

The first, that of hiding or getting away from one's life,

The other as a reference to a place of happiness.

- ❖ *'The Retreat'* by Henry Vaughan describes a speaker's desire to escape to the past where he was a younger, purer, and generally happier human being.
- ❖ The poem begins with the speaker mourning for the lost days of his youth.
- ❖ He longs to return to a time when he was in his "angel infancy" and had yet to be influenced by the dark forces of the world.
- ❖ It would be a time in which he had yet to stray far from his home or realize the struggle that would take him over internally.
- ❖ In the present day he worries about his own emotions and the sinful nature of them.
- ❖ He is concerned over his own being in a way which was not even considered when he was young.
- ❖ In the final lines the speaker describes the end of his life and how he will return to the dust of the earth.

Lines 1-6

Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my angel infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white, celestial thought;

- In the first section, the speaker is looking back on the days of his youth and remembering what it was like when he “Shined in [his] angel infancy.”
- He is long past these moments, but remembers them very fondly.
- They seem to him to be the clearest, purist, parts of his life. The following lines continue his reminiscences by speaking of how now he understands “this place.”
- He knows the world he is living in and can see all of its dark corners.
- Before though, this was not the case.
- As a youth he used to live so purely he didn’t even think about how “celestial” his thoughts were.
- Now, thinking cleanly takes a concerted effort.

Lines 7-10

When yet I had not walked above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back, at that short space,
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;

- In the next section of the poem the speaker goes on to describe what his life was like before he strayed far from home.
- It was during this period that he “had not walked” more than a “mile or two from” his “first love.”
- He had not seen very much of the world at this point and knew nothing about its dangers.
- When he looks back now he realizes this was when he could “glimpse” the face of God.

Lines 11-14

When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;

➤ It was only for a “short” span this was possible and in moments in which he gazes upon a “gilded cloud or flower.”

➤ When he was young he could spend an hour simply contemplating the beauty of the natural world.

➤ In the final lines of this section he speaks on the glimpses of “eternity” he caught in these moments.

➤ They were only “shadows” but they felt infinitely important to him.

Lines 15-20

Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A several sin to every sense,
But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

- In the next section the poet continues on the same path of describing the life he used to lead when he was young.
- The speaker is remembering the years of his life which were not marked by his “tongue” wounding his own “conscience.”
- He didn’t worry about what was morally right or wrong, he simply lived as a young person.

➤ This is expanded upon in the next lines in which he speaks of “black art” tainting emotions. Before he aged he did not worry about how he felt and if it was sinful. Now though, the nature of his own emotions bother him.

➤ This has been brought on by the teachings of society and perhaps religion.

➤ Rather than experience these guilty thoughts about his own life, he felt within his “fleshy dress,” or body, “shoots of everlastingness.”

➤ It seemed to his younger self that he would live forever in a perpetual state of youth.

Lines 21-26

O, how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain
Where first I left my glorious train,
From whence th' enlightened spirit sees
That shady city of palm trees.

- The next part of the poem takes a turn. He stops reminiscing and instead expresses his general longing for the past.
- He makes another exclamation stating, “O, how I long to travel back” to the past. The speaker would rather live in the past and walk again on “that ancient track” than live as he does now.
- If he could return, he might have a chance of reaching “that plain” where he left his “glorious train.”
- He would hope to recover his previous state of being.
- He knows exactly where he left it too, on the hill alongside the “enlightened spirit.”
- The spirit, which represents his youth, is able to see the “shady city of palm trees” from where it rests.

Lines 27-32

But, ah! my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love;
But I by backward steps would move,
And when this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came, return.

- In the last six lines the speaker mourns for what he will never have again. He has become “drunk” with his own longings and remembrances.
- The speaker knows it is not a healthy way to live as he will “stagger” about his life without purpose.
- This fact does not keep him from changing his opinion.
- He knows he is unlike other men; he loves the “backward steps” rather than the “forward motion.”
- In the final two lines he speaks on his own death. It will be the ultimate returning as he resumes the form of “dust.”
- His body will return to the earth and become again what it was before he was born.