

The Seven Ages of Woman

*Rosalind F Croucher**

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And each in her time plays many parts,
Her acts being seven ages.

Act I—*Leggiero*

At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in her mother's arms
(Not much she can do about this one—
For all her charms).

Act II—*Allegretto giocoso*

Then the schoolgirl—
Never whining; always with satchel—
With shining face and morning pigtails,
Skipping trippingly to school.

Act III—*Allegro appassionato e con fuoco*

And then the scholar—
Lectures, lovers and all—
Dreaming and preening.
'Will he call? No—will *I* call?'
She couldn't care less—they're all in her thrall.

Act IV—*Andante moderato e tranquillamente*

Now a mother—or not;
All life in her handbag:
Books, briefs, lippie—the lot!
Calm, even-tempered,
Never quick to a quarrel.
Let the boys fubble and bubble—

* President, Australian Law Reform Commission and Professor of Law, Macquarie University (on leave for the duration of the appointment at the ALRC). This adaption of William Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' from Jaques's speech in *As You Like It*, Act II Scene VII, was presented as part of the keynote speech at the function held by the NSW Women Lawyer's Association, 'Celebrating Women in the Judiciary', on 29 July 2010 at the Union, University & Schools Club, Sydney. It was subsequently published in (Summer 2012–2013) *Bar News* 93. This contribution does not reflect the views of either the ALRC or Macquarie University.

She remains unruffled, upright and moral.

Act V—Largamente maestoso, ma non troppo

And then the justice,
In fair round belly—waistline lost;
Her wardrobe in three sizes: present, past, and past-past;
Full of wise words and timely inferences;
And so she plays her part.

Act VI—A piacere

The sixth age shifts—‘Hooray!’
Lean and slippered pantaloons? ‘No way!’
Spectacles—unavoidable, but elegant;
Her voice—still contralto, more resonant
Than before; her delivery—well-paced;
Ne’er a giggle, but a guffaw.

Act VII—Tempo comodo, ma con brio

Last scene of all,
That ends this *proud*, eventful history:
His second childishness and, yes, oblivion;
Her triumph, release, her very liberation:
Super, secure—post husband, or three;
New teeth; *new* eyes; *new* tastes, *new* everything!

Shakespeare’s original

As You Like It

Jaques: [Act II Scene VII]

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;
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.