



All the world's a stage

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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,
His acts being seven ages.

[As You Like It Act 2, scene 7, 139–143](#)

The idea that "all the world's a stage" was already clichéd when Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It*. So Jaques is intended to sound at least a little pretentious here. Jaques (pronounced "jay-keys" or "jay-kweez") is the resident sourpuss in the Forest of Arden, home to political exiles, banished lovers, and simple shepherds. Picking up on another character's stray suggestion that the world is a "wide and universal theater," Jaques deploys the theatrical metaphor for his famous speech on the Seven Ages of Man. The first of these ages, according to Jaques, is infancy (when the babe is found "Mewling [sobbing] and puking in his nurse's arms"), and the last is "second childishness and mere oblivion" (complete senility). His glum epigrams make up a "set speech"; Shakespeare meant them to sound practiced, like a bit of oratory polished off and hauled out on the appropriate (or inappropriate) occasion.

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