

## POETRY

# The seven ages of woman

Rosalind F Croucher<sup>1</sup>

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 fuddle and bubble—  
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 pantaloons,  
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.

### Endnotes

1. President, Australian Law Reform Commission and Professor of Law, Macquarie University (on leave for the duration of the appointment at the ALRC). This adaptation 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. This contribution does not reflect the views of either the ALRC or Macquarie University.