


Philosophical Reflection of Life in William Shakespeare's "All the World's a Stage"

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Abstract

Life is not a bed of roses. It has its ups and downs. A man has to move through different phases during his life time. Shakespeare compared the entire world to a stage in his poem, "All the world's a stage.". We all are mere players in this stage of life. Shakespeare presents a philosophical reflection of life in "All the world's a stage." He exhibits each stage undergone by a man, during his course of a life time. The seven stages of encompass infancy, childhood, boyhood, adulthood, middle age, old age, second childhood. All the materialistic happiness and reputations are secondary as death will capture everyone in the end; death is the great conqueror.

Keywords: Phases, Philosophical reflection, Stage of life, Players, Seven stages, Encompasses and Second childhood

Introduction

William Shakespeare is regarded as the greatest writer in the English language. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he was baptized on 26 April 1564. He is known as England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon." He is famous for his thirty-six plays printed in the First Folio of 1623 and one hundred fifty-four sonnets. His important plays are *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*; all come under the genre of tragedies. He is excelled in his wit, intelligence, humor, etc.

His other works include *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *As you like it*, *All's well that ends well*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, etc.

Shakespeare's famous poem "All the world's a stage" focuses on the life stages of an individual. "All the world is a stage" is a phrase that is being spoken by Jacques in Act 2, Scene 7 of Shakespeare's play *As you like it*.

When we make a glimpse of this world, we find lives around us, who are unique in the way they are based on their race, gender, etc. Shakespeare's poem "All the world's a stage" draws upon the transformation happening in the lives of human beings. It revolves around the seven stages of human beings such as infancy, boyhood, lover, adulthood, middle age, old age, and second childhood.

Infancy is the foremost or the earliest stage of a person's life. Many of us are not able to recollect the things that happened in our infancy stage, as it occurred during our baby stage. The word infancy comes from the Latin word *infantia*, which means "early childhood" and literally, "inability to speak." Also, it can be called as the growing stage or the developing stage.

Childhood is the best stage in one's life, where a baby learns to walk, speak or respond, etc. It can be regarded as the innocent stage of one's life. There come two distinctions in childhood stages, such as early childhood from three years to eight years and middle childhood from eight years to eleven years. It is called the learning stage. The next stage is the adolescence where a person undergoes physical changes and has an attraction towards the opposite sex. It can be referred to as the stage of enthusiasm, curiosity, love affairs or adventures, and new trends, etc.

Middle age is the stage of maturity, where a person moves through many hurdles in his or her life. The next stage is the old age, where the person becomes physically weak and is the victim of many diseases. And the last fall the second childhood, where a man again becomes a child mentally who needs the help of another person for his or her purposes and movement.

According to Shakespeare, the world is a stage, and he compares men and women as mere actors or players of this stage. They have their entrances and exits, which are equivalent to their births and deaths. Each player or actor plays their role in this stage of the world, which is their life. Here Shakespeare uses metaphor to compare this world to a stage and the men and women as players of this stage.

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.

According to Shakespeare, a man plays seven roles in this stage of the world. The first stage is infancy, which is the most innocent as well as the beautiful stage in one's life. Infants are free of thoughts and tensions. This can be referred to as the colorful days in one's life. In this poem, the poet presents about a helpless child who mewls and pukes in the nurse's arms. The second stage portrayed in the poem is childhood, where he mentions about a crying schoolboy. He uses a simile to compare the unwillingness of schoolboys to the movement of a snail.

Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

The third stage in a man's life is that of a lover, which is his or her adolescence. This stage showers his energy and spirit that he may do anything to satisfy the needs of his lover. Shakespeare then presents the role of a soldier who goes behind a bubble reputation (which does not last forever). The fifth stage is of a middle-aged man, who now becomes mature from his life experiences. He has modern instances, even if he does not look handsome. He has gone through several hardships, struggles, experiences. So here, the poet presents the role of the judge, who is wise enough to make decisions accordingly. The sixth stage is old age, where a man becomes weak physically. He wears warm hoses. He needs a second person's help for his needs as he became weak. The last or the seventh stage in a man's life is second childishness, where he sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, etc. He becomes mentally as well as physically a child, where other people have to look after them.

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.

The word Identity serves different meanings to different individuals. A man is always in search of his identity. He or she keeps on moving behind wealth or reputation. But all follow a repeated cyclic structure of stages in their life. Some may lose their lives before completing all cyclic stages, and others follow all stages of the cyclic structure. Each stage teaches us many things, including morals, knowledge, kindness, maturity, etc. But the end Is the same for all human beings, death.

Death is the great leveler of one's life. In the end, there is no value for all those materialistic things, money, or wealth attained by a man in his or her life. So we are just the players or clowns in this stage of life.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage" is an apt representation of the life stages in one's life. He draws out each stage with its merits and demerits. We can make a comparison among all the seven stages in a man's life. The life of a man is not a bed of roses. It has both its fragrance as well as thorns. It is similar to a bubble. He may boast about his achievements, but

in the end, he will realize that his life is short as well as not worth it. This is the point that Shakespeare wants to stress through this poem, where he portrays man as a mere actor. Therefore Shakespeare's "All the world is a stage" is a philosophical reflection of life. So try to enjoy every little thing in life and spend life merrily and bravely.

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