

Shakespeare: Four Soliloquies

(posted on 17 January 2023)

1. To Be or Not To Be

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep
No more; and by a sleep, to say we end
The Heart-ache, and the thousand Natural shocks
That Flesh is heir to? 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep,
To sleep, perchance to Dream; aye, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

(by Hamlet in Hamlet)

2. A Poor Player

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(by Macbeth in Macbeth)

3. The Seven Ages of Man

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, deeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth.

And then, the justice, in fair round belly, with a good capon lined, 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 slippered pantaloon, with spectacles on nose and pouch on side, his youthful hose, well saved, 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.

(by Jacques in As You Like It)

4. The Quality of Mercy

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

(by Portia in The Merchant of Venice)