

Emotions, Expressions, and Barriers of Communication in Shakespeare's *Seven Ages of Man*

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Introduction

William Shakespeare was certainly the most influential writer of all-time whose work injects a lyrical element to play about poor paupers and great kings alike. The iambic pentameter verses of his writing became the natural rhythm of the English language and his theme and literary devices still inspire and influence the writers of today. In this poem "*Seven ages of man*", he contemplates the world a stage with men and women being players each having their entrances and exits. The language used by Shakespeare in this set speech is remarkably modern and contemporary. In this speech of incredible length, Shakespeare symbolizes life as a stage and distributes it into seven stages on the basis of changes in man's nature and behavior¹.

The poem showcases Shakespeare's remarkable passion and interest in literature. He discourses about the life of a young boy and the seven stages he goes through in the quest of becoming a man. He briefly explains each of the seven stages in a chronological manner in order to ensure a smooth flow from one stage to the next. Shakespeare's life resembles a great extent to the life of the subject of the poem and experienced these stages in the same manner as the subject did.

Some of the metaphors used in the poems are:

All the world's a stage

And all men and women are merely players²

Seeking the bubble reputation (reputation has been termed as short-lived like a bubble)

Some of the simile used in the poem are:

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Sighing like a furnace.
Creeping like a snail.
Some of the alliteration used in the poem are:
Shrunk shank.
Plays his part.

As You Like It isn't the only play where Shakespeare resembles Life to a stage, actually he made such a comparison in *Merchant of Venice* too where he uses Antonio to enunciate.

"I hold the world but as the world, Gratian... A stage where every man plays a part... and mine a sad one!" William Shakespeare³

The majority of people are well aware of the fact that Shakespeare's *Seven Ages of Man* refers to the planets as explicit places in William Shakespeare's horoscope. He was born during the dates of 22nd to 26th April, this provides one with the substantial knowledge about the placement of Shakespeare's natal planets and indicates that it greatly depends on the location of his natal moon, which could have possibly been Virgo or Libra. On basis of his description of the moon in the poem, it was probably in Virgo.

The poem *Seven Ages of Man* is a moral commentary on life carved in a remarkable exclusive style which is one of the grandest attributes of Shakespeare. During the time period of 20th and 21st Century, Shakespeare's work has been recurrently rediscovered and adopted by the scholarship and performance movements of the era. Even today, his play hasn't lost its familiarity and are constantly studied, reinterpreted, and performed in political contexts and various diverse cultures all across the globe.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages⁴

Shakespeare's deep awareness and knowledge of human psychology are portrayed in the poem and it provides one with a comical and classical description of human behavior and nature. Shakespeare compares the

world to a stage and equates living to act in which men and women are the players or the actors of the stage. He disintegrates life from mere existence to a certain death into seven distinctive ages. The world as a whole is portrayed as a global stage and all the men and women living in the world are mere puppets whose fate lies in the hands of destiny. Similarly, to the stages' infrastructure, the stage and the actors each have their own exclusive entrances and exits and every man in his life goes through these stages and plays his particular part in the act.⁵

Infancy/ Infant

At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.⁶

According to Shakespeare, the first stage of man's life is "infancy" in which the infant spend the majority of his time puking and crying. He is a helpless baby. This is the period before he can walk. Infancy is the period of real dependence. An infant is always in someone's hands and does not have much freedom at all. He is totally dependent on his parents or his guardians for his needs. The stage of infancy is the first and foremost act of every human being in which he makes his presence known by crying dreadfully at the top of his voice.

"When we are born, we cry that we come to this great stage of fools." – William Shakespeare⁷

In the infancy stage, for a span of several months, crying is the baby's primary means of communication. The earliest years of the man's life is spent in reliance as he communicates only in a nonverbal manner. Every part of the body of an infant plays its role in the conveyance of their wants and needs. Majority of the time of parents and caregivers is spent on responding to these nonverbal pleads of an infant. Crying being the primary means, infant also uses the facial expressions and the whole-body movement to showcase their feelings. For instance, alert eyes along with a sparkling grin and laughing indicate pleasure while turning the body or head away is the common sign of discomfort or dislike. Language is a barrier in this stage because infants can't communicate verbally so when interacting with infants, we may jump to conclusions or misinterpret something they've said. These misinterpretations then color our own responses. At this stage, semantic barriers can cause communication

problem as it is not easy to understand the feelings of infants. Body language and gesture decoding is also a barrier at this stage, for example, the infants usually communicate through body language or gestures so sometimes it may be difficult to understand their gestures in the way they need us to. Infants usually spend more time with their caretakers or with their parents so whenever any stranger tries to communicate with them then distrust becomes a barrier in their communication. When an infant spell a word it is not so easy to understand that what he is trying to say so it also may cause a barrier in communication at this stage⁸.

Whining Schoolboy

Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school⁹.

Following infancy, the 2nd stage of man's life is "whining schoolboy" in which he steps into the school life. He is reluctant to leave his circle of protection and step into the harsh world & still lacks confidence when it comes to exercising his own discretion. New surroundings and places appall him and he doesn't feel comfortable in taking a step in such surroundings. Only a schoolboy knows about the struggles he had to make early in the morning along with the rising sun. The incredible use of Shakespeare's vivid imagery creates an illustrative mental image of a small boy with rosy red cheeks in the mind of reader dragging along to school. Education is important in life. Living in a judgmental world, an educated person is easily accepted by people. Leaving that topic aside, being a student is one of the most fun stages in life. You don't have to handle big situations. This is also the stage where man meets lots of people and socialize with them. The man is compared to a snail with respect to his unwillingness. Shakespeare tells about the school boy's creeping mornings. He had now learned to accomplish tasks on his own and can initiate new events. With this sudden growth of independence comes many discretion about actions to pursue in the nearest future¹⁰.

"Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books, but love from love, toward school with heavy looks." – Shakespeare, William¹¹

At this stage, he learns to produce a high-pitched, mournful, and protracted sound, as in agony, fear, appeal, or complaint. This does not mean that at

this stage a child is able to decipher all of an adult's abstract concepts & words. He has long known his parent's words have power over his life and is in midst of realizing that his own words can ignite a change as well. He originates deeper meanings through the use of his growing vocabulary. Still, he is not confident enough to express himself. He learns more about curiosity as he begins to look into the causes & deeper side of things. His communication is independent of style and it usually remains the same regardless of the listener or the place. Due to the fact, that school-age kids spend the majority of time away from home they learn to adapt to new speaking styles and dialects of friends or teachers. He is in constant quest of establishing his own distinctive independence.

He still hasn't excelled in the art of speaking and is unable to use language effectively which further complicates life and living. He finds participation in any discussion awkward, uncomfortable, or frustrating which becomes his main barrier to communication. At this stage lack of incentive (motivation) creates a hindrance in communication because motivation is an important element which pushes a person towards his aims and objectives. Lack of incentive is due to the fact that the ideas or suggestion of the person is not given the due significance and at this age if a child experiences the ignorance of his elders towards his thoughts and idea than it becomes a barrier in communication. On the other hand, lack of confidence at this age is also a barrier in communication as a child enters into a new environment where he is not familiar with anything or anyone, so it troubles him to communicate.

The Lover

And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow¹².

In this stage, the boy life changes completely as he grows into his late teens and the girls become the center of his attention. He is sentimental and is not afraid of making a fool of himself in quest of getting the attention of his lover. In this stage, the majority of his time is spent on writing poems and he is always maudlin and in awe of finding new ways to express his love in a fatuous manner. This stage is the time of his early youth and he experiences the peak of love and high romance. The boy sighs like a furnace burning with flames of love and sings the romantic

ballads of love. The impression of the reply of the lover can be witnessed in her eyebrows. He experiences the feelings & emotions of passion, joy, disappointment, and anxiety in this complicated stage of life. Shakespeare portrays this as the most ridiculous stage as at this time the lover is willing to do anything for his beloved one.

“Such is my love, to thee I so belong, that for thy right myself will bear all wrong.” – William Shakespeare¹³

In this stage of his life, the dramatic motion is generated in his words. He's shy but also tries to express feelings to his love. He tries to be romantic at this stage in his early youth and he is in love with the feeling of love and he goes with the flow of his emotions, sad and sentimental. His thoughts are only about the way he feels about the one he loves or admires. The main barriers causes in his communication at this stage is that he sometimes can't clearly tell his feelings, he assumes that the person he loves should know his feelings which creates confusions in his mind and put him through ups and downs of his emotions. As compared to the previous stages of his life he is now capable of communicating verbally in a proper way, his level of confidence has now increased. He can also communicate nonverbally as by now he is capable of sharing his own ideas and thoughts, he becomes expressive and tries to prove his self. His childish behavior somehow vanishes¹⁴.

At this stage lack of attention serves as a barrier to the person because if attention is not given to the feelings or emotions of a person than he may suffer from lack of attention and there arises psychological hurdle in the communication. Emotionally when a person is disturbed than it is not easy to understand what he or she is trying to convey it may cause trouble for others to understand due to which emotional barrier occurs. As it is explained by Shakespeare that at this stage man plays the role of a lover and he becomes sentimental, he writes poems about his love and tries to express his feelings than barrier of unclarified assumptions can also occur, for example, if he thinks that his love is familiar with his feelings but in actual she is not quite familiar or sure about his feelings but he keeps telling her as if she knew every detail so that it will cause barrier in communication.

Faulty translation can also become a barrier because it is necessary that the level of understanding of people communicating should be equal so that communication can be successful but if their levels of understandings are different that it may cause a barrier in their conversation. Semantic barriers can also take place if the person who is trying to explain his message or his idea got misunderstood by the listener than the semantic barrier takes place.

A Soldier

Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth¹⁵.

The boy turns into a man in this stage and the fourth stage is that of manhood. Shakespeare cites the example of an arrogant soldier with a shaggy beard and appears like a fierce leopard. He is confident, enthusiastic, ambitious, and always on the lookout for performing an act of valor. In an attempt to establish a status in a society ruled by man, he curses and swears in an awkward manly fashion. He fiercely protects his reputation and is always ready for defending his honor. In the pursuit of glory, fame, and recognition, he is willing to sacrifice his life on the battlefield. He is not afraid of taking fooling risks in an attempt to make a reputation for himself, however short-lived it may be. In this stage, he transitions from a boy into a soldier and is confident enough to take over strange oaths and is hot-headed who spend the majority of his time in quest of bubble reputation. In his mind, this stage is full of vows, oaths, compliances, commitments, and obligations & he fights endlessly in order to maintain a dignified reputation¹⁶.

He is willing to defend the honor of his motherland with his life and blood and his life acts as the source of inspiration for the younger generations of the nation. His mind is free from politics and he serves the ruling government in the greatest of manners. Merely intellectual enough to know the truth behind the strange oaths, he is dauntless and not afraid of taking such oaths. He is quick tempered and commits his life to something larger than his own existence.

“The soldier is the Army. No army is better than its soldiers. The Soldier is also a citizen. In fact, the highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one’s country” —George S. Patton Jr¹⁷.

The man has now acquired a sense of productivity, accomplishment, and triumph. He achieves mature, civic and social responsibilities. He maintains healthy life patterns. As compared to the previous stages of his life he has now become sensible and mature, his childish behavior has gone now, and he is now capable of dealing with hardships of life, he knows when to speak and how to speak. By now his words shows his maturity. His attitude follows the path of a leader and his values begins to shape up his character. In terms of status, employees are divided into several classes on the basis of their level. This formal division becomes a barrier in communication specifically in cases where the communication flows from bottom to top. In addition to this, the rules of the organization also act as the barrier in communication and the aspects such as subject-matter, medium, etc. need to be considered in communication. Tangled up in the definite rules, senders quite often face complications when it comes to sending messages to the higher level of the organization due to these barriers. Other barriers such as those of fears and challenges of the authority also take place at this stage as everyone is in quest of acquiring a higher position in the organization. Due to such competition, officers usually try to conceal their weaknesses and decides not to clearly communicate their thoughts and ideas. There always exists the fear of falling down a level in the minds of the officers which restricts them in communicating with ease.

The Justice

And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part¹⁸.

Shakespeare entitled this stage as ‘The Justice’. Following the stage of the soldier, in this stage, he has acquired wisdom through countless experiences and events of life and is in search of a way to impart it. The man has now reached the prosperity and has acquired an established social status. He learned the significance of enjoying finer things of life and

becomes vainer. He is more confident in sharing his views and ideas and likes debating over thoughts and making speeches. He has succeeded in making a name for himself and is now prosperous and well-respected. He is fat like a chicken and flesh is bulging out of his waist. He has a beard of formal cut along with severe eyes. He had now become responsible, conciliatory, and serious in nature. He now uses examples to prove his point. The time when everyone's interest can be balanced is the time when the true justice is ultimately achieved. This stage talks about the significance of consideration of social contact and the rights of an individual. These rights are defined majorly on the basis of self-chosen principles rather than by the expectation and rules of others¹⁹.

In this stage, the man learns to focus on the significant effects of situational characteristics in the determination of allocation preferences. He tends to go through the phase of disorientation as he drifts away from his original purpose and become more devoted to potential experiences and objects related to ascent. He is in the midst of experiencing the stage of evolution, development, and transcendence.

The entire process is the inclination toward belief in finite and externally extended personal experiences, developed in an experiential state of indistinguishable unity with the manifest gesture of courtesy at the heart of the body-mind. This stage is deemed as the stage of mysticism and evolutionary adaptation to the higher level of brain and mind.

“The most reasonable man always manages, when he pulls the trigger, to become a dispenser of justice.” -Jean Genet²⁰

At this stage when man acquired wisdom he tries to convey and share his ideas and his experiences with everyone going through the same situation in which once he was, but as compared to his age other people do not listen to him with that keen interest in result psychological or emotional barriers occur in communication. Sometimes he expresses his such thoughts and experiences that can't be understood by everybody easily, so it causes language barrier in communication. And in other times, he gets into misconception over the fact that the listener knows the basic principles behind his ideas and skip over only to the major parts. His point of view could be regarded as correct in terms of daily communication but it is certainly wrong in case of specific messages and results in a barrier of

unclarified assumptions. Even a symbol or a word conveyed by the man who got misunderstood can create a barrier in communication.

An Old Man

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.²¹

Shakespeare refers to this stage as “Old Age”, at this stage, the man begins his fall from the top and becomes the butt of others’ jokes. He loses his command over assertiveness and firmness as his stature and personality worsen. In this stage, man is no longer interpreting and perceiving his thoughts and ideas with individuated body-mind. From the leader, man transitions into becoming merely the witness of what transpires around him in the play of life. Though life continues to progress like a movie, one experiences the greater ingress of existence and the non-necessity of events that may arise.

The stage can also be referred to as the stage of ‘ego-death’ as he loses his grip over his unique self-sense. As described by Shakespeare, man becomes a shell of his former self physically and mentally. His manly vigor has lessened, and he behaves like an old man and speaks in a thin piping voice. His influence over course of events that transpires around him lessens. In other words, man becomes old and gets physically weaker as his mind becomes duller due to the onslaught of time. He looks like a silly old man with spectacles on his nose and purse slinging on his side with the slippers on his feet. His attire changes drastically and now he wears an ill-fitting pair of trousers as he had now become frail and thin²².

The breeches which he had worn in his youth preserved cheerfully for his old age don't fit him anymore as they are too big for his thin legs. His manly voice has become shrill and feeble like a child's voice. He is mean. He stops because he wants to save his pouch on his belt. He keeps lovers apart. He is parsimonious.

The breaches of the past which he wore with honor don't fit him anymore as they become too big for his thin fragile legs. The manly voice he once had have now become feeble and shrill similar to that of a child. He becomes mean and impatient in nature and stops because he wants to save his sack on his belt. He distant lovers and become parsimonious.

“The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young.” – Oscar Wilde²³

At this stage man becomes too weak, he becomes old so that he can't communicate with proper body language or gestures which can cause body language and gesture barrier in communication. For instance, nodding one's neck in reply to a question could be deciphered as either 'yes' or 'no' and he becomes unable to properly indicate his meaning. He conveys his ideas n thoughts according to his level of understanding which may not match the level of understanding of his listener hence barrier of faulty translation occurs.

Dotage and Death

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything²⁴.

The last scene of all is referred to as “Dotage & Death” by William Shakespeare and in this stage, senility gets the better of the man. His sight fades away and his hairs and teeth begin to fall out. This slow demise painfully guides the man into the oblivion of death. Once again, he becomes completely dependent on others and is unable to communicate with the world. He takes a trip back to the start of it all into the stage of innocence and oblivion. The first six stages of life awaken and tests various aspects of human potential up to the point of true maturity. While the seventh stage makes the man experience the woeful transition to radiant transcendental from the whole body-being.

The last stage of life releases man from all kind of egoistic limitations of the past six stages. The awakening of the seventh stage is merely an experience and the true nature and fate of everything come into the light. The man acquires a better understanding of the fact that every apparent

thing is perfectly & eternally the same as happiness, consciousness, truth, reality, and God. This understanding is the grandest bliss of them all and is defined as the supreme love-bliss. In simpler words, the final stage makes the man grow extremely old and disorientated²⁵.

The final stage of man on the earth is illustrated in the last stage. Bringing an end to his presence on this planet and slowly beginning his descent into the abyss of death. The entire act comes slowly to an end and man bows down in front of the ruthless hands of time and becomes helpless and forgetful.

This final stage is correctly referred to as “Second Childishness” as once an independent man falls back all the stages and find himself right back at the first stage of infancy and dependency. He reaches a vegetative state as he no longer has command over his taste buds, eyes, or teeth. He finds himself on the verge of losing and can hear the ultimate calling of death.

“Your end, which is endless, is as a snowflake dissolving in the pure air.” - Buddhist Saying²⁶

At this stage man becomes too weak he is not even able to communicate the way he used to in previous stages of his life. His weakness and illness are barriers to his communication. He becomes too weak and old even to express his thoughts or to communicate, he forgets things and becomes dependent for his every need. He is too close to death.

Conclusion

The poem shed light on the different stages of a man's life with the sole purpose of universalizing the aspirations, moods, and feelings of human beings in accordance with the different stages of life. It showcases the inevitability of a man as everyone is destined to pass through these 7 stages of life. The theme of this speech is the cycle of life beginning from infancy and ending at dotage & death.

William Shakespeare's play *As You Like it*, is written in a narrative style as a monologue in a free-form. The use of several literary techniques such as alliteration, metaphor, and simile are clearly visible in the play. In terms of Shakespeare, the human comes into existence as an infant who relies completely on others. As the stage progresses, he grows into a school child

who despises going to school but slowly with the passage of time his thinking changes. The time changes the schoolboy into a youngster and makes him fall in infatuation due to lack of maturity. This young man learns the tricks and trades of surviving in this cruel world and emerges as a brave soldier. His lack of maturity now transforms into his aggression and he becomes hot-headed and hasty. The stage of bravery opens the doors of justice as he becomes more mature and sensible along the way. As a judge, he delivers wise saying and has cold, unemotional eyes and wears a formal cut beard. The end of this stage begins the next as he turns into an old man. The strong voice and stature he once had slowly faded away as his tone become shrill and his body becomes fragile. The last and the seventh stage is the dotage or death of the entire play and man's life. He finds himself once again dependent on others and slips into the phase of second childishness. "Our Whole Life is Like a Play."

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Abstract

In his poem *Seven Ages of Man*, Shakespeare symbolized life as a stage and distributes it into seven stages on the basis of changes in man's nature and behavior. The theme of poem is the cycle of life beginning from infancy to ending at dotage and death. This article aims to discuss barriers of communication in every phase of a man's life. Shakespeare's deep awareness and knowledge of human psychology are portrayed in the poem and it provides one with a comical and classical description of human behavior and nature. Causes of communication barriers are varied. The article highlights and all seven stages of man and discussed them in detail.

Keywords: Communication barriers, seven stage of man's life, Shakespeare's play