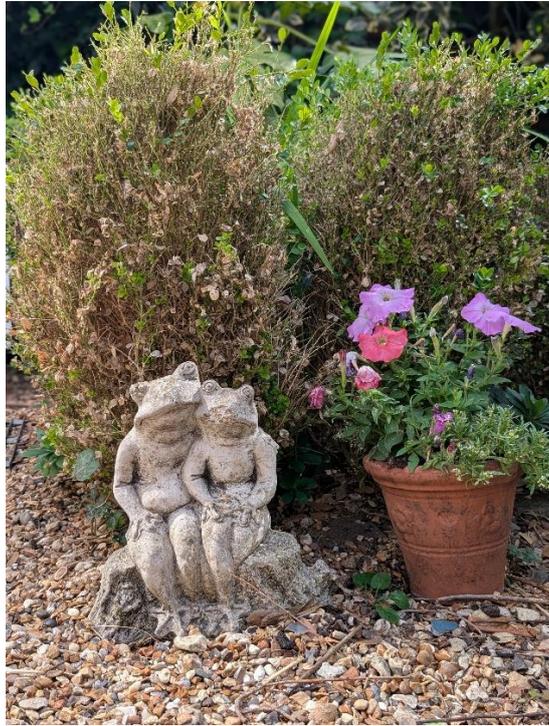


All the World's a Keystage

—what and how we nowadays learn



All the world's a keystage
And all the men and women mere examinees.
They have their entrances and their outcomes
and each one in their time takes many tests,
Their trials having seven levels. First, the infant
schooled to note, mark, inwardly digest, not puke.
And then in streams and sets and bands
creeping like tube trains to the final stations
of their destined routes. And then the lover
seeking sublimation in trends and charts,
and dark satanic mills and boons. Next on terraces
full of strange oaths, yes, and strange jeers and chants,
aggressively jealous in the colours of their club,
worshipping league tables for the measurement of man,
and mirror of our nature. And then the customer,
getting and spending as the market needs,
and consuming goodies from its hidden hand.

As parent, patient, passenger, paying taxes,
humbly fain to dwell with charters and their gentle rule.
And so we take our tests. The sixth age reaffirms
the wills and affections of our earlier lives,
obedient peasant slaves, ever uncomplaining drones,
batting for this scepter'd isle, attending church on time,
loyal and proportion'd, rocking not the boat, and
knowing right from wrong, and on quinquennial occasions
thinking, choosing, voting, right. Last test of all,
that ends this flat and uneventful tale,
is gracefully to accept your final end-of-keystage grade:
no face, no flesh, no breath, nought.



Source: a lecture on 'schools and the politics of spirituality', Brahma Kumaris World University, Harlesden, 1994, published in *Fortunes and Fables: education and hope in troubled times* by Robin Richardson, Trentham Books 1996, pp 109-125.