

1. **How does Shakespeare use the metaphor of a stage to describe human life in "The Seven Ages of Man"?**

Answer:

In "The Seven Ages of Man," Shakespeare compares life to a play, with the world as a stage and people as actors. This metaphor shows that everyone plays different roles at different stages of life. The poem describes seven stages: the crying infant, the unwilling school-boy, the passionate lover, the brave soldier, the wise justice, the frail pantaloon, and the final stage of second childishness, where one is "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything." The stage metaphor highlights how life is temporary, with entrances (birth) and exits (death). For example, the school-boy "creeping like snail" and the soldier seeking "bubble reputation" show distinct roles. Shakespeare uses this metaphor to make life's changes vivid, suggesting that each stage has its own purpose, like acts in a play.

2. **Describe the characteristics of the lover and the soldier stages in the poem and explain what they reveal about human nature.**

Answer:

In "The Seven Ages of Man," the lover and soldier stages reveal key aspects of human nature. The lover is emotional, sighing "like a furnace" and writing sad love songs (woeful ballad) to his beloved's eyebrow, showing the intense passion and obsession of young love. This reflects how humans can be consumed by romantic feelings. The soldier, on the other hand, is brave, bearded "like the pard," full of strange oaths, and quick to fight, seeking "bubble reputation" even in danger. This shows human ambition and recklessness, as people chase fame despite risks. Both stages highlight universal traits: the lover's emotional depth and the soldier's desire for honor. Shakespeare uses vivid imagery to show how humans experience strong emotions and ambitions at different points in life, making these stages relatable.

3. **What is the significance of the final stage (second childishness) in the poem? How does it connect to the overall theme?**

Answer:

The final stage in "The Seven Ages of Man," called "second childishness and mere oblivion," is significant because it shows the end of life's journey, where a person becomes weak and loses everything—"sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." This stage connects to the poem's theme that life is a temporary play with distinct roles. It mirrors the helpless infant stage, completing the cycle of life by returning to a childlike state of dependency and forgetfulness. This emphasizes the fleeting nature of life, where even the wise justice or brave soldier ends in frailty. Shakespeare uses this stage to remind us that life's achievements fade, urging readers to value each stage. The metaphor of life as a stage reinforces this, showing that all roles, no matter how grand, lead to this final act of loss.

4. **How does Shakespeare use similes and metaphors to enhance the imagery in "The Seven Ages of Man"? Give examples.**

Answer:

Shakespeare uses similes and metaphors in "The Seven Ages of Man" to create vivid imagery, making each stage of life easy to picture. Similes, like "creeping like snail" for the school-boy, compare his slow walk to a snail's pace, showing reluctance. Another simile, "sighing like furnace," describes the lover's loud sighs, emphasizing passion. The simile "bearded like the pard" likens the soldier's beard to a leopard's fur, suggesting fierceness.

Metaphors include "all the world's a stage," comparing life to a play, and "men and women merely players," likening people to actors. The "bubble reputation" metaphor shows fame as fragile. These figures of speech make the poem lively, helping readers imagine each stage clearly and understand life's changes through familiar comparisons, enhancing the poem's emotional and visual impact.

5. **Discuss the role of the justice in the poem and what it tells us about middle age.**

Answer:

In "The Seven Ages of Man," the justice represents middle age, a stage of wisdom and authority. Described with a "fair round belly" from rich food (capon-lined), severe eyes, and a formal beard, the justice is full of "wise saws" (sayings) and "modern instances" (examples), showing experience and knowledge. This stage reflects middle age as a time when people gain respect and take on important roles, like a judge in a local court. Unlike the passionate lover or reckless soldier, the justice is calm and thoughtful, offering advice based on life's lessons. Shakespeare uses this stage to show that middle age brings stability and wisdom, but also physical changes like a round belly. The justice's role highlights human growth, where maturity replaces youthful energy, contributing to the poem's theme of life's evolving stages.