

## **Kierkegaard's Metaphor of the Theater**

Alas, in regard to things spiritual, the foolish of many is this, that they in the secular sense look upon the speaker as the actor, and the listeners as theatergoers who are to pass judgment upon the artist. But the speaker is not the actor – not in the remotest sense.

No, the speaker is the prompter. There are no mere theatergoers present, for each listener will be looking into his own heart. The stage is eternity, and the listener, if his is the true listener (and if he is not, he is at fault) stands before God during the talk. The prompter whispers to the actor what he is to say, but the actor's repetition of it is the main concern – is the solemn charm of the art. The speaker whispers the word to the listeners.

But the main concern is earnestness: that the listeners by themselves, with themselves, and to themselves, in the silence before God, may speak with the help of the address. The address is not given for the speaker's sake, in order that men may praise or blame him. The listener's repetition of it is what is aimed for. If the speaker has that responsibility for what he whispers, then the listener has an equally great responsibility not to fall short in his task.

In the theater, the play is staged before an audience who are called theatergoers; but at the devotional address, God himself is present. In the most earnest sense God is the critical theatergoer, who looks on to see how the lines are spoken and how they are listened to: hence here the customary audience is wanting. The speaker then is the prompter, and the listener stands openly before God. The listener, if I may say so, is the actor, who in all truth acts before God