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A Play Within A Play

Hamlet, believing his uncle Claudius murdered his father, wants to capture Claudius through a play in which he will have opportunity to revisit the crime scene. Hamlet sets up the play in order to observe Claudius' reactions. It is the mirror that will convict Claudius and prick his conscious. It is the play within the play.

Throughout our lives we live vicariously through others. Children observe their parents and other role models and act out their behaviors as part of their play. All ages relate to stories and actors and project themselves in those stories. We become the actresses and actors, the villains and the heroes. We see ourselves and others through observation. It is an art to portray a character so defined that others can relate to that particular person.

Hamlet greets the king and queen dressed as a haunting skeleton. It is unnerving to be greeted by death. It was taken humorously, but Hamlet's demeanor was screaming "in your face". The first play was a mime and short version of what was to come. The actual play was dramatic. Hamlet's attention was divided between how pointed the play was and how the king and queen were responding. Just in case they were not getting the point of the play, Hamlet added his own narrations convicting the king before all.

King Claudius is outraged, the queen is offended, and both retreat to their quarters for the rest of the evening. Was the play effective or was it Hamlet's words that were most effective? The play probably would have been effective in itself to accomplish what Hamlet planned, but Hamlet's words only infuriated the king. Perhaps the play

brought out the fury that was within Hamlet, something unplanned for.

Claudius is brought to his knees in prayer, or so it appears. Maybe he was setting up a little play of his own. Hamlet filled with vengeance and given opportunity to kill Claudius is distracted by Claudius' portrayal of a praying man. He decides not to kill him at that time unless he is truly repented and sends him directly to heaven. Claudius reasons that his prayers are unheard and there is no forgiveness for him. He is ashamed of his murderous act against his brother, but there is still murder in his heart from which he will not turn away. He wants to see others dead, including Hamlet.