

What different views
of the duke are
presented in acts 1-
3?

[Law](#)



Written in the early 17th century, 'Measure for Measure' was one of the many plays that Shakespeare wrote to entertain his King, which at the time was James I. Shakespeare used this play to present his own views of the King, and his ideals of a King through his presentation of the Duke Vincentio.

A more complex character than first believed, Shakespeare transforms the Duke throughout the play. As the Duke set out on a quest to not only escape the pressures of his role, but to learn from his experiences and find himself. The Duke is the first person to speak; this is one of Shakespeare's common techniques to indicate who he deems most important in the play. Even if it appears that the story evolves around the character of Angelo, under the surface it is evident that the Duke is the catalyst behind it all.

At the start of the play we see that the Duke is a man with general morals, complimenting the people under him. This is Shakespeare showing us from the start that he wishes the Duke to be seen as a good man. In the first scene we learn that for the head of a city he does not enjoy being in the public eye, " I love the people, but do not like to stage me to their eyes". This quote also shows us that he is an honourable and caring Duke as he loves his people, but he doesn't have the confidence to assert his authority.

In the beginning of the play the view of the Duke is formulated to be that he is nice but a little spineless; allowing his streets to be filled with sin, " bawds", " thief's". To re-enforce the opinion that Duke is honourable, Shakespeare makes the Duke accept fault for the state that the town is in, "'twas my fault to give the people scope", although he still doesn't do anything about it.

When the Duke is talking to Pompey in act three scene two, we see a different character emerging. From his 'real life' experience he appears to have gathered confidence and is beginning to show signs of authority, he calls Pompey a "wicked bawd" to tell him how disappointed he was with him. However these new found urges have to be suppressed as he is under the guise of the Friar, so he uses religious references to voice his feelings instead, "if the devil have given thee proofs for sin...". Shakespeare uses verse here to emphasise the seriousness as it is more rhythmic and emphasised by the stresses in the line due to iambic pentameter.

By the end of act three, the Duke is almost ready to take the reigns back of Angelo, as he has reached a point where he knows what a leader should be, and has gathered the knowledge and confidence to assert himself; "He who the sword of heaven will bear should be as holy as severe". In Shakespeare's time, Kings were the closest thing to Gods and therefore had to be perfect role models. Here the Duke is saying that they should be perfectly balanced; as good and moral as they are strict.

However the Duke shows a darker side of him, perhaps the slight edge of coldness needed to rule successfully, but nevertheless the Duke creates his own amusement whilst under the guise of the Friar to control the characters to carry out his plan. Although this was done to benefit his people, as he protected the almost innocent and also teach the guilty a lesson.

Shakespeare deliberately manipulates the audience's opinion of the Duke throughout the play as the character himself changes drastically from start to finish. Firstly we see his understudies having great respect for him, "always

obedient to your grace's will". However in act three it becomes clear to the audience that the townspeople only like him because they are allowed to do as they please.

The character of Lucio personifies the feelings of the townspeople when he tells the Duke himself, (disguised as the friar) that he doesn't doubt the intelligence or honour of the Duke, calling him "wise"; although also referring to him as, "A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow". Thus clarifying that the townspeople don't know the Duke and moreover that the Duke doesn't know them, "ignorant".

There is debate however that Lucio is aware that is the Duke and is deliberately making use of this to voice his true opinions of him, or perhaps merely for his own amusement as Lucio is a joker type character. However it could be countered by saying that this is too intelligent for Lucio and this is simply a comedic scene as Lucio is 'putting his foot in his mouth'.

Shakespeare makes the Duke speak in verse here, serving multiple purposes; firstly because it is more relaxed as the scene is a comedy. Secondly because it is a scene to move the story of the play on and verse would take too long to do this.

We also gather the character of Escalus' opinion of the Duke whilst he is still disguised, although it is great contrast to Lucio's. The character of Escalus appears as the wise old advocate, pointing out straight away one of the key themes of the entire play and also one of the main reasons that the Duke went into hiding; "above all other strifes contended especially to know himself".

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It is also debated that Escalus was aware of the disguise and knew exactly what he was doing, yet in this case it is more likely to be the case, as Escalus is the 'right-hand-man'. This theory is reinforced by the fact that Escalus then compliments the Duke, knowing that revealing the fact that the Duke's inner most fears are visible to someone else, he provides a comforter, " Rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry at anything which professed to make him rejoice". Meaning that the Duke would rather see others happy than be happy himself.

I feel that the true opinion of the Duke lies somewhere in between Lucio's and Escalus' views, as he was ignorant of the townspeople, however he is wise and very caring, shown in how he deals with Angelo at the end of the play.