

# Duke vincentio in measure for measure essay sample

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



The character of the Duke is portrayed by Shakespeare as a very complex, hypocritical and contradictory character. To many critics, he is conveyed as a Machiavellian Prince, using others for his own political ends, and to some critics, a God-like figure, testing the pathology of power in Vienna. Despite these two polar opposites the character is nevertheless a character of ambivalence. Contradiction is one of the main themes of the play, as is appearance versus reality, law versus grace and justice versus mercy. The Duke never lets go of the puppet strings, pulling events and manipulating other characters in the play. Vincentio's motives for influencing the events are controversial; it has been argued that the Duke enjoys watching others fall, and also uses others to do his 'dirty work' for him. He has also been called a moral coward, and this essay will examine his different personas in order to find out how Shakespeare conveys the complexity of the Duke through his language choices.

Firstly, the character of the Duke can be divided into three different personas; the public duke, the politician; the Friar Lodowick, and the private Duke. The private Duke appears to the audience in Act one, scene one, when he seems tentative, in his convoluted language, abdicating his power to Angelo. This captious vocabulary pertaining to the legal discourse is used to assert the Duke's position of authority and office when he asks Escalus of Angelo 'what figure of us think you he will bear?' The use of the word 'bear' shows the audience that he recognises the responsibilities of being the ruler, and Angelo will have to endure these responsibilities for Vincentio. The use of the word 'figure' shows us that the Duke may also be disconcerted by the

possibility that Angelo will discredit the judiciary. The noun 'figure' meaning a person's public image shows his concern.

As the Friar Lodowick, the Duke's language changes from legal discourse to religious discourse. In Act 2. 3, the Friar tells the Provost 'bound by my charity and my blessed order/ I come to visit the afflicted spirits'. This line is rich with religious vocabulary. The abstract noun 'charity' is used to mean that the friar comes only to help others, not for his own gain. The audience can see that the friar is actually the Duke come to spy on Angelo, made obvious by the Duke's earlier statement 'if power changes purpose/ what our seemers be', which creates dramatic irony.

The Duke's clever switch in discourse becomes more obvious through Act 2. 3 when he uses language such as '? daughter, but lest you do repent/ As that the sin hath brought you to this shame-/which sorrow is always toward ourselves not heaven?' Such religion-orientated words such as 'daughter', 'repent', 'sin', and 'heaven' are all associated with discourse pertaining to religious figures. However, it is not just in the figure of the friar that the Duke uses religious arguments. In Act 5. 1, the Duke uses the Old Testament teaching 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' when judging Angelo; 'An Angelo for a Claudio' and 'measure still for measure'. However, he is not so harsh when judging the provost, Escalus, Isabella and Mariana. The Duke says 'the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof' in judging those who have sinned in order to save others (the provost), or to keep their principles intact (in Isabella's case- her chastity).

Another biblical teaching 'judge not, lest ye be judged' or 'let he that is without sin cast the first stone' is used when the Duke tells Isabella that 'he [Angelo] would have weighed thy brother by himself'. The theme of 'weighing' is brought up many times in the play, for example, when Lucio calls the Duke 'a very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow', and in the Duke's speech 'and measure still for measure'.

St Matthew 7: 1-2 says 'do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others.' These lines seem to be echoed in the Duke's argument for Angelo against Isabella.

However, Angelo is soon seen by all as a fornicator and a murderer, and the Duke uses the marriage to punish both him and Lucio. Angelo doesn't want to be married and neither does Lucio. Therefore the Duke uses marriage as a punishment instead of death. He commands Angelo with the imperative 'look that you love your wife' and tells the provost to 'proclaim it? around the city'- that any woman disvalued by Lucio should come forward.

In marrying both Lucio and Angelo, he is committing them to a life of misery, far worse than being executed, and also humiliating and disgracing them. Neither of the marriages are likely to last long, and justice is only done for Mariana in terms of law, not in terms of love. Mariana is given what she wants, but the marriage will inevitably fail. Kate Keepdown is also done justice in terms of law, but may not want to be married, as she will no longer be able to continue being a prostitute.

Also, this is not really fair for Lucio, no one else had been charged for fornication with a prostitute, and the only reason Lucio is being judged so severely is because he slandered the Duke.

Lucio called the Duke ' a very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow' and also told the Friar that ' his [the Duke] use was, to put a ducat in her clack-dish... he would be drunk too'. This creates dramatic irony as the Duke is actually the Friar in disguise. ' A ducat in her clack-dish' is a euphemism for being with prostitutes. The Duke's response to this is shown in his monologue in Act 3. 2.

' No might nor greatness in mortality

Can censure ' scape: back-wounding calumny

The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong

Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?'

The Duke is obviously disconcerted by Lucio's slander, and Lucio is his first concern in Act 5. 1, when he says ' sneak not away, sir, for the Friar and you must have a word anon- lay hold on him'

The Duke's public image is important to him, and he treats Lucio harshly because he had marred the Duke's character.

How the Duke seems is important to him; but the person he actually is, is always concealed from the public.

The Duke conceals himself, not only through his actions and language, but also through his clothes. 'Cucullus non facit monachum' says Lucio; the hood make'st not the monk. This is true of the Duke, as he is not a Friar. The Duke could be described as the biggest seamer, or greatest deceiver in the play, and one of his biggest lies is pretending to be the Duke.

After the unmasking of the Duke, the Duke transforms into the politician, with the ability to persuade and direct others through rhetoric.

He is clearly directing everyone after the unmasking as is evident in the following lines [To Escalus] 'sit you down... come hither Mariana? Go, take her there and marry her instantly'.

Vincentio uses the rhetoric style of pathos to appeal for Isabella's hand in marriage. Relying on her reaction to the Duke's redemption of Claudio, he informs her 'your friar is now your prince' and 'give me your hand, and say you will be mine/ he is my brother too'.

The Duke's character is totally different at the end, from the way it is at the start of the play. He said to Angelo 'I love the people, but do not like to stage me to their eyes' and 'I ever loved the life removed'. However, in Act 5. 1, the character of the Duke is revelling in his control over justice and mercy, while at the same time trying to appear righteous to Isabella.

In conclusion, the character of the Duke is a contradictory one, professing to be a pious Friar and then lying to and deceiving others. He uses the Old Testament teachings of 'an eye for an eye'- 'an Angelo for a Claudio' and

then forgives each character- even Barnardine who has committed murder. However, despite how much the audience is compelled to dislike the character of the Duke, there is no disputing over his real function. He is the source of most of the comedy in the play, providing comic relief in one of Shakespeare's darkest plays. It is also possible to determine that none of the actions of the play would be possible without the Duke's craftiness which he wilfully admits; ' I will apply craft against vice'. The Duke leads the audience through confusion before finally ending the play by regenerating the society where Friar Lodowick saw ' corruption boil and bubble/ till it o'errun the stew'. The Duke provides one of the most important parts in that his character shows the difference between, and necessity of, justice tempered by mercy.

Shakespeare manages to create the many guises of the Duke by changing his registers, discourse and vocabulary choices skilfully, so that each of the personas is perfectly plausible.