

The Meaning of the Duke in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. The Character of the Duke	3
2.1 His individual features	3
2.2 The Duke and James I	5
3. The Duke's Spiritual/Allegorical Meaning	6
3.1 The Incarnate Lord?	6
3.2 The Duke – The Embodiment of Moderation?	9
4. The Duke's Alter Ego: Friar Lodowick	10
4.1 The Duke in Disguise – "The Meddling Friar"	10
4.2 Unorthodox Views on the nature of Men and Life	12
5. The Duke's Plotting – The Dramatic Function of the Duke	14
5.1 Act I – III,I, 149: The Observer	14
5.2 Act III, I, 150 – IV: Craft against Vice/ Setting the Stage for the Trial	16
5.3 Act V: The Trial/ The Dissolution of Seeming and Being	18
6. Conclusion	21
7. Bibliography	24

1. Introduction

The Duke, lord of this play [...], is the prophet of an enlightened ethic. He controls the action from start to finish, he allots, as it were, praise and blame, he is lit at moments with divine suggestion comparable with his almost divine power of fore-knowledge, and control, and wisdom. There is an enigmatic, other-worldly, mystery suffusing his figure and the meaning of his acts.

[...] the Duke, with his shifts and tricks, which strain plausibility to the breaking-point, seems a puppet, manufactured to meet the exigencies of dramatic construction. [...] We cannot analyse such characters psychologically. The Duke of Vienna, on account of his great prominence in the play, has just enough plausibility of characterization to make an audience accept him; he has none to spare.

These quotations highlight the gulf between critics concerned with the Duke. The figure of Duke Vincentio, favourably seen as "a man of all temperance" by Escalus, apparently provokes extreme reactions: some critics tend to regard him as the initiator and manipulator of the action, a carefully designed character with various individual traits. Others deny him any personal feature but regard him as a highly artificial and merely functional character, a "stage Duke", who does not cause the events and determine the action on his own, but who is himself determined by the plot. Those seeing him in command of the action either approve of his plotting and find him the admirable embodiment of divine Providence, or they condemn him vigorously for his assumed callous experimenting with people.

In this essay I shall try to investigate to what extent the Duke can be considered an individual character by working out his personal features as they are ascribed to him in the play, either by himself or by the other characters, or as they become evident through his actions. It has also frequently been assumed that the Duke's individual traits are also partly modelled on those of James I.; these parallels will be described in so far as they add to the Duke's being meant to appear as a human figure. As the Duke is likewise said to have also a more allegorical and spiritual meaning, I will try to find evidence for this as well. I will especially attempt to explore whether he might be deemed to be the Incarnate Lord, as G. Wilson Knight suggested, or whether he could be considered a role model of moderation in all things.

The next chapter will be concerned with the meaning of his disguise and his intervention as Friar Lodowick. The Friar-Duke's famous speech in Act III, i will be focused on next, as it reflects a very impressive mixture of pagan, ancient, and Christian philosophy on men and men's existence on earth.

The following part of this paper will deal with the Duke's dramatic function in the play. I will attempt to probe the relevance of his plotting and scheming for the action.

It is important to note that some chapters in this paper cannot easily be set apart thematically; instead, they are closely related. For instance, the paragraphs investigating the Duke's role of Friar could also with some reason be assigned to the chapter about the dramatic function of the Duke, but disguise itself is a stage convenience that affects the Duke's meaning for the play on various levels, not only in his dramaturgical functions.

2. The Character of the Duke

2.1 His individual features

On first impressions, the Duke is not a particularly appealing figure. He opens the play with a lengthy speech which, though starting off in a well-balanced meter, is monotonous, and its meaning seems a bit evasive and cryptic. The Duke apparently likes to surround himself with an aura of secrecy: as a friar, he sends confusing letters to Angelo and does not give any explanations for his sudden return (Act IV, iv, 1-6). He also spreads rumours of his own death soon before staging his miraculous return: "This is a thing that Angelo knows not; for he this very day receives letters of strange tenour, perchance of the Duke's death, perchance entering into some monastery; but, by chance, nothing of what is writ" (Act IV, ii, 198-202). He is detached, one that has "ever loved the life remov'd" (Act I, iii, 8.)

He is very concerned about his reputation. Therefore, in his role of friar, he desperately tries to convince Lucio of the Duke's magnificent character, praising him(self) to the skies:

The very stream of his life, and the business he hath helmed, must upon a warranted need give him a better proclamation. Let him be but testimonied in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the envious a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier.

(Act III, ii, 137-142)

At various occasions, he seems disregardful and careless of the other character's suffering in his scheming which makes up the play. For example, he tells Juliet and Isabella that Claudio has to die, and thus does not spare Isabella the agonising controversy with her brother in Act III, i, before offering not the direct solution, but the bed-trick. Later on, he gives further pain to her by claiming that Claudio is dead.

Despite all this, he undeniably has a merciful vein. He has not made use of the strict laws that exist in Vienna, and so his leniency has led to moral decay. He compares his handling the law to that of

fond fathers,

Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,

Only to stick it in their children's sight

For terror, not to use

(Act I, iii, 23-26)

Even Lucio, who slanders him elsewhere, acknowledges the Duke's philanthropic kindness and beneficence, while commenting on Angelo's ruthlessness towards Claudio:

Would the Duke that is absent have done
this? Ere he would have hanged a man for the get-
ting a hundred bastards, he would have paid for the
nursing a thousand. He had some feeling of the
sport; he knew the service; and that instructed him
to mercy.

(Act, III, ii, 112-115)

The Duke describes himself as being immune to love: "Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom" (Act I, iii, 2-3), "I am not inclined this way". Ironically though, he is defined in sexual terms by Lucio, and, contrary to Angelo, he is not portrayed as a "motion ungenerative" (Act III, ii, 108), an asexual being. Of course the gross comments on the Duke's

alleged sexual experiences and adventures entirely spring from Lucio's imagination, but his reasoning that "a complete man like the Duke, in contrast to his "ungenitur'd agent" Angelo, could only have failed to enforce laws against fornication in Vienna because "he knew the service"". Nonetheless, this still does not provide us with any reasonable grounds for his proposal to Isabella in the last scene, which does not seem consistent with what he has professed until then. After Lucio's calumny, he feels uneasy and puzzled, and turns to Escalus for reassurance concerning his true character. Escalus's response casts more light on the Duke's character: he is "A man of all temperance", whose main target consists of gaining self-knowledge; he is described as altruistic and caring for others: "Rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry / at anything which professed to make him rejoice" (III, ii, 229-230). He is modest as well as moderate, and he certainly has a good sense of humour, especially of irony, as can be derived from his remarks on some occasions.

2.2 The Duke and James I

The Duke's affinities with James I have often been described carefully. They will not be listed here in detail, only inasmuch as they add to the Duke's being designed as a character with individual traits. Interestingly, it is mainly these similarities that make the Duke seem to have some distinctive characteristics: both James I and the Duke accuse themselves of having governed with too much laxity, they are very touchy towards slander – which accounts for the Duke's harshness to Lucio in the end, – and they dislike staging themselves in front of crowds of people, as the Duke puts it:

I love the people,
But do not like to stage me to their eyes:
Though it do well, I do not relish well
Their loud applause and Aves vehement
(Act I, ii, 67-70)

What is more, both the king and Duke Vincentio have set an example of how justice should be accompanied by mercy – and they evidently share a liking for secrecy for the sake of dramatic effects – and disregardful of the peoples' feeling: James I had his prisoners be informed of their already being pardoned by royal order only at the very brink of death. This is paralleled in the Duke's behaviour towards Isabella, as he is resolved to conceal from her that her brother is alive for making her joy the greater in the end: "But I will keep her ignorant of her good, / To make her heavenly comforts of despair / When it is least expected" (Act IV, iii, 108-110).

This reasoning might as well apply to the case of the prisoners on the scaffold suddenly hearing James's unexpected countermand.

The similarities between the Duke and James I – which undeniably exists and cannot simply be ascribed to coincidence – make clear that Shakespeare cannot have meant his Duke to be seen a negative figure despicable for his heartless playing with people. Otherwise, Shakespeare would have risked to fall out of favour with the King, of whose approval he and his company were dependent.

3. The Duke's Spiritual/Allegorical Meaning

3.1 The Incarnate Lord?

Comparing the Duke, particularly in his disguise as a friar, with Jesus, "the prophet of a new order of ethics" or even with God seems to be a daring statement to make. For Shakespeare's contemporaries and their view of government, however, it was probably not: the play *Measure for Measure* was presumably written between 1603-1604, a period of transgression, while James I was appointed successor to Elizabeth, whose reign had lasted forty-four years. As E. M. Pope points out, the question of the ideal governor was naturally topical then and widely discussed in numerous sermons and treatises of the time. Renaissance governors derived their authority from God, hence it was acceptable to see them as 'gods', or as God's substitutes. This prevailing conception is also mirrored in *Measure for Measure*, sometimes with slightly ironical overtones: "this demi-god, Authority" (Act I, ii, 112.), or "outward-sainted deputy" (Act III, i, 88). Therefore,

considering the ruler in alliance with God was in keeping with the Renaissance view; James I supports this view in his treatise *Basilicon Doron*, where he states that the King is not only God's servant, but also, "by virtue of his heritage and responsibilities, the reflection of God."

Some critics assume that the Duke represents unerring Justice, which comes close to viewing him as a God-like figure, for it was a familiar conception among the Elizabethans that magistrates as God's vice-regents on earth held Justice in their hands.

The Duke's conduct, however, is not 'divine' throughout; on the contrary, he "resorts to shifts and stratagems more in keeping with the expected behaviour of a seventeenth-century ruler than of the Incarnate Lord." From the ethical point of view, his actions are highly controversial and definitely open to attack. So G. W. Knight's judgement that the Duke's "sense of human responsibility is delightful throughout: he is like a kindly father" in my view is, though not altogether false, an idealisation of the character, and almost cynical in his procedure towards Isabella.

Another argument that the Duke is far from being a perfect Christ-like figure or divine Providence is his fallibility. He is not an ideal ruler: during his reign, the city of Vienna has become morally corrupt due to his laxness. Yet those who tend to idealise the Duke do not see this as a failure on his part: his "inefficient" government is ascribed to his relish in "meditation and self-analysis, together with profound study of human nature" which have taught him "that all passions and sins of other men have reflected images in his own soul." This implies, however, that the Duke already disposes of a thorough understanding of human character, which, I would argue, is not the case. There are several instances where he has to realise that he was wrong in his evaluation of people, of their character and behaviour. For example, Angelo's not keeping to the agreement and still insisting on Claudio's execution take him by surprise. Moreover, he is outraged at Lucio's calumny to which he falls victim, and in his reaction he shows over-sensitivity to defamation, which is another 'flaw' which surely could not be found in a divine character. Afterwards, he recognises

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?
(Act III,ii,179-182)

It is only after his encounters with people, specifically with those from the 'lower half' of the city, that he gains further insight into the human nature.

He wishes somebody else to re-establish firm order and discipline in Vienna, but his true motives for this remain a bit shadowy:

I have on Angelo impos'd the office
Who may in th' ambush of my name strike home,
And yet my nature never in the fight
To do in slander. (Act I, iii, 40-43)

The Duke either wishes to shift the responsibility onto Angelo and make him do all the dirty work in order to keep his own name clear, or he does not feel capable of accomplishing this himself. These reasons would give further evidence of his being imperfect and thus a man in the ranks of humanity. A third possibility could be his intention of putting Angelo to the test, which then, however, would be reminiscent of God's testing people.

By being omnipresent to a certain degree, he keeps himself informed and consequently achieves superior knowledge, which might at times perhaps seem to border on divine omniscience. But he is neither omnipotent nor providential: He does not always contrive to convince people: neither Barnardine nor Claudio yield to his efforts to prepare them for death. His vain attempt to persuade Barnardine to agree to being executed even makes a laughing stock of him, and it also puts him in his place: "at the level of the individual's right to live, authority must accept its limits". Providence itself has to step in and help him out with Ragozine's death, which supplies him with the head he needs for his plotting.

There are, however, "hints of heavenly Grace" in the Duke, who might, after all, be characterised as being a representative of the virtue of mercy. Throughout the play, he tempers justice with mercy: although he seems ready to make short work of Barnadine for granting the success of his

plot, he shows compassion when actually being face to face with him, "A creature unprepar'd, unmeet for death; / And to transport him in the mind he is / Were damnable" (Act IV, iii, 66-68). His almost divine mercy is displayed most impressively in the end, in the trial scene, at which he presides as a near God-like figure. There is no poetic justice, as nobody is penalised according to any law, and even Angelo is allowed to go unpunished.

3.2 The Duke – The Embodiment of Moderation?

Some critics see Duke Vincentio as the representative of the Virtue of Moderation. This view seems to be justified by Escalus's portraying him as "A gentleman of all temperance" (l. 230). According to Aristotle, temperance means "moderation in all things", which forms a connection to the title of the play, since another expression for moderation could be 'measure'. Aristotle defines temperance mainly in terms of man's physical desires, particularly sexuality, and sees it as "the mean between the excess of overindulgence and the defect of insensibility, both of which he recognises as opposed varieties of intemperance [...]. Temperance is the moderate gratification of natural physical appetites in the proper way and at the proper time and in the proper place." The Duke himself professes that he is insensible to love, he seems to have no bearing on sexuality, which brings him close to Aristotle's 'defect of insensibility'. Evaluating his proposal to Isabella from this point of view, it might be an attempt to find a way to the golden mean by not denying this human aspect about him any longer, but accepting and living his 'natural physical appetites'.

There is also another field in which the Duke needs 'balancing': his way of governing has been too lax, as the "strict statutes and most biting laws" (Act I, iii, 19) that exist in Vienna have not been administered, and as a result, "Liberty plucks Justice by the nose" (l. 29). Moderation is lacking, i. e. "a judicious mean between laxity and severity", which the Duke seeks to achieve by relinquishing his post to Angelo, "A man of stricture and firm abstinence" (Act I, iii, 12), who seems to be temperate and thus able to counterbalance laxity, but who later turns out to represent the other 'unhealthy extreme'.

All in all, I think the Duke is rather a ruler striving for moderation than epitomising it – although it might be speculated that he has accomplished temperance in the end – through marriage, and

through his experiences and insights while observing Angelo ruling Vienna in a manner completely opposed to his own – and thus feeling urged to interfere and "counteract the new imbalance."

4. The Duke's Alter Ego: Friar Lodowick

4.1 The Duke in Disguise – "The Meddling Friar"

The sovereign in disguise is a widely current motive from world folklore and a widespread literary device. His disguise, which belongs "to the category of conventional theatrical tactics", allows the Duke to interact with people from all social layers, to "Visit both prince and people" (Act I, iii, 45), which would be impossible for him in his position of head of state.

In effect, two popular comic conventions of the time are merged here: the sovereign in disguise and the intriguing friar. In comedy, disguise is frequently found as a comic device, but these comical effects are not exploited in *Measure for Measure*. Of course, there are some funny passages and remarks associated with the Duke's disguise; e. g. Lucio's obvious enjoyment in slandering the Duke in the Friar's presence, or the Duke-as-friar's ironic comment "I protest, I love the Duke as I love myself" (Act V, i, 339).

Being released from his ducal constrictions, the Duke can intrude even into the lower world of Vienna and communicate with its people. As a go-between, he is given a full view on his city now, being enabled to see his Vienna from an entirely new angle – and, as the inconspicuous kindly father, he can also enquire about his own reputation among the people. On the whole, being dressed up as a friar serves him to gain further insight in the state of Vienna, since he can complete his view that he formed out of touch with his people.

His disguise thus allows him with a certain omnipresence: as the "Duke of dark corners" (Act IV, iii, 156)), he can secretly listen to the other characters' conversations without being recognised. He is in fact "a dark figure, directing, watching, moralizing on the actions of the other persons."

The Duke appears in disguise almost all the time in the play; it is only in the beginning and in the end that he does not play a part, so to speak. His appearance as a friar is a bit ambiguous, though: on the one hand, he asks Friar Thomas how to act like a friar (I.iii, 45-48), on the other hand, just a short time after this, Mariana portrays him as "a man of comfort, whose advice / Hath often still'd my brawling discontent" (Act IV, i, 8-9), which might mean that the Duke had taken to playing the friar even before the play began – but then he would not need instruction.

The Duke as the ruler of Vienna is a representative of state authority, which in the Renaissance view was derived from God. Therefore as the governor of Vienna he is also the representative of divine power. This spiritual function is given further weight by his appearing as a friar, which makes him the representative of the Christian church – and even saves him from Angelo's attempted abuse of power, since he could not be subject to state, but only ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Duke thus "combines the functions both of State and Church in his person." He epitomises supreme authority, secular as well as religious, which entitles him to advise and to guide other characters.

4.2 Unorthodox Views on the nature of Men and Life

The Duke's assumptions about life are revealed in his famous speech to Claudio in Act III, i, which resembles the *de contemptu mundis* part of the traditional sermon on death, *ars moriendi*. This homily-like speech creates a certain gloomy atmosphere. Also, it is evidence against the hypothesis that everything said or done by the Duke is mainly meant to carry on the action, since it does not induce any advancement in the action: it does not succeed in preparing Claudio for death, but serves as a foil to show the power of human instinct to live, which is manifested in Claudio's response to it.

For the Duke, this would actually be the most suitable occasion for him in the whole play to act as the friar he pretends to be and give a Christian sermon. Yet he seems to represent Christian faith rather elsewhere in the play – it is remarkable how frequently he refers to the bible and Christian thinking while appearing as the Duke.

Here, however, various philosophic ideas are intertwined in his speech which presents us with a grim picture of life, mainly based on pagan and stoic views rather than on Christian faith, which is strange for a friar, or at least unusual. Accordingly, he does not mention redemption and immortality, which would be the normal Christian doctrine of salvation, but emphasizes man's mortality, which affects both body and soul. His arguments are often commonplaces which can be found in Cicero, Lucretius and Seneca.

The pessimistic attitude towards life that he assumes here is not in character with his attitude elsewhere; he describes all the vanities and miseries of living: everything that would normally be considered positive and worth striving for is being denied and, as it were, devalued. Life is something that none but fools would keep; it is "Death's fool" (. 11), or the living creature himself is foolish in his attempt to escape death, since in doing so, he is running ever towards death. This idea of foolishness is taken up again in the Duke's comparison with the "ass whose back with ingots bows" (l. 26) and who is finally unloaded by Death. Consequently, all earthly riches are useless, a heavy load and burden. According to his words, man's life – or man himself – is but a breath. Even if this is basically a Christian doctrine, since breath is God-given, this idea is distorted here, for man is seen as weak and not self-determined, a plaything to outward forces, he is "servile to all the skyey influences", i. e. cosmic, not heavenly influences, such as stars and planets. This alludes to a belief in astrology, which was very popular in Shakespeare's times, but normally took no part in the Christian view of the world, which would rather rely on Ptolemy's statement: "The soul is lord over the stars", here, the opposite is the case. Likewise, man's complexion is determined by the moon, which is a symbol of changefulness, and it can alter in unpredictable ways. This dependence and weakness of man is also reflected in the metaphorical expression of "all the accommodations that thou bear'st / Are nursed by baseness" (ll. 14-15). This means that everything, however elaborate or noble, is composed of base material, and thus nothing is truly noble, valuable or spiritual, just as the human body, that is made of decaying

matter, which itself springs from dust. Consequently, "Thou art not thyself" (l. 19), which again is ambivalent: taken literally, it implies that man is not himself; i.e. he is not what he seems to be. At the same time, it could claim that man does not belong to himself, since he is not an 'entity of human substance', but "exists on many a thousand grains" (l. 20) . This goes back to Epicurean atomic theories, which implied that when a dead body died and disintegrated, the atoms dispersed and could be used again in new formations. This view again runs contrary to Christian faith, as ancient Greek philosophers believed that human beings had no immortal soul. Here it also denies individuality and uniqueness. However, the idea of dust as the origin of life links it up with Christian assumptions, as it is said in Genesis 2:7: "Man is made of the dust of the ground".

Life is aligned with short yet arduous journey, whose destination is unclear. A related idea is expressed in II, i, 36, where the Duke describes life in explicitly Christian terms as a pilgrimage, whereas here, in the guise of a friar, neutrally refers to it as a journey whose end is death.

Also, life is altogether exhausting and tormenting; men is not capable of finding satisfaction, since he always strives for the things he does not have, and at the same time fails to acknowledge the things he has – which is a commonplace well-known in Shakespeare's times. So man can never live life to the fullest, since youth lacks money to enjoy life's pleasures, and old age fails to enjoy them for he lacks the energy and power of youth. Equally, the power and strength of youth are over soon, and man becomes afflicted by diseases such as serpigo or rheum and other weaknesses of old age. To complete his denigration of both man and life, all higher values and virtues in man are denied, life is merely a delusion: man does not have any real friends, nor can he rely on his nearest relations, since his 'offspring', his own flesh and blood, rather wish him dead. As a result, the best about life is sleep, which offers recovery and rest, and as life itself is no more than sleep, or like an "after-dinner's sleep" (l. 33); the Duke tries to reason that any fear of death is absurd. Man is not "valiant" (l. 15) or brave, as he fears "the soft and tender fork / Of a poor worm" (ll. 16-17), i. e. the tongue of a poisonous snake, which can bring this 'relief'. There is no justice and equity in life, but death is merciful and noble, since it brings about final justice by levelling off all the differences and inequalities. This is again a commonplace going back to Antiquity.

In this scene, it is not the Duke who preaches Christian thoughts, but rather Isabella, the novice, who holds the Christian view of death as neither sleep nor extinction of human soul, but

immortality. Therefore it is astonishing that he draws Christian conclusion from the Duke's homily.

All in all, the Duke-as-friar's spiritual counsel to Claudio is no account of Christian doctrine of salvation, but a mixture of ancient and pagan images of the nature of man and life. It might be assumed that his speech aims at undermining "the whole belief-system – both onstage and off – that views death as a blessing."

5. The Duke's Plotting – The Dramatic Function of the Duke

5.1 Act I – III,I, 149: The Observer

The Duke's scheming and plotting form the core of the play. He could have sorted out things directly, but if his function is to be seen as that of a teacher, he has to get there in a rather roundabout way by making each of the other characters involved aware of their own faults by their failing. For this, he creates and arranges situations and events in which the characters have to prove themselves. Angelo is his first 'guinea-pig' in the series of tests that the Duke carries out, as it were. He is handed over absolute power: "Mortality and mercy in Vienna / Live in thy tongue, and heart" (Act I, i, 44-45) in order to prove that the virtues he promises to have are not only mere appearances, but that his "heart and tongue" (Act I, i, 45) are truly identical: "Office is to prove the man." Nonetheless, being now given the Duke's 'scope', Angelo misuses his power and goes to extremes: he turns the Duke's lenient application of the law into unmerciful sentencing.

After passing over his authority to Angelo, the Duke ostensibly withdraws – but returns soon again as Friar Lodowick, clarifying his motives for his withdrawal from power: he intends to check out whether the seemingly virtuous and "precise" (Act I, iii, 50), 'snow-blooded' Angelo, who is meant to restore discipline in Vienna, is truly noble, honourable, and just. Therefore, the Duke prepares to put on the habit of a Friar to keep an eye on his deputy, to whom he has just entrusted his authority: "Hence shall we see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be" (Act I, iii, 53-54). This indicates that he is rather wary of his deputy – which makes his motives for delegating his authority to Angelo the more ambiguous. Hence it might be reasonable to presume

that the Duke's motives for his appointing Angelo and his hasty departure are arbitrary and not to be checked for any plausibility, but they are rather to be seen as a dramatic necessity for the action to evolve.

In Act I, iii the Duke's words also put emphasis on some central themes of the play: for example, the question of the ideal government is raised here, and the relation between seeming and being. The Duke is off-stage for some 560 lines afterwards; he reappears in prison as a friar, which is necessary for him to get acquainted with the other character's conflicts which his plotting in the following Acts is to resolve. At the beginning of Act III, i, he delivers his elaborate speech to Claudio to prepare him for death, which in Claudio does not produce the reaction that it supposedly aimed at, as Claudio soon afterwards seems the more eager to live – but this might just have been what the Duke's homily meant to provoke: In his discussion with Isabella, Claudio's eloquent portrayal of the horrors of death seems inspired by the Duke's imaginative exposition, it is like the *contemplatio mortis* part of the traditional sermon on death, *ars moriendi*, completing the Duke's *de contemptu mundi* part.

To sum up the Duke's function up to Act III, i, 149: Duke Vincentio, "far from being guide and controller", is not merely a "conventional piece of dramatic convenience for creating the setting for the human conflicts", but beyond this, he supervises his deputy from a monastery near Vienna, remaining close enough to interfere, if necessary.

5.2 Act III, I, 150 – IV: Craft against Vice/ Setting the Stage for the Trial

In the second half of the play, from Act III, i, 150 onwards, the Duke gives up his role as mere observer of what is going on around him and assumes a more active part himself – although this in the beginning mainly consists of giving advice and seeing how his plans work out.

He suggests the bed-trick to Isabella, the "remedy" that "presents itself" (cf. Act III, i, 198) which will make Angelo commit the same crime as Claudio, and therefore allow to hold up a mirror to him in the end. Like the sovereign in disguise, "the secret substitution of the real bride in the

"husband's bed" is another fairy-tale motive. In this scene there is also further evidence that the Duke is rather expected to fulfil dramatic functions by setting in motion the plot than to be a consistent and understandable human character: he suddenly admits that Angelo does not simply arouse suspicion for seeming too virtuous to be true, but that he has failed before, as he tells Isabella after eavesdropping on her conversation with Claudio: "The assault that Angelo hath made to you, fortune hath conveyed to my understanding; and, but that frailty hath examples for his falling, I should wonder at Angelo." (Act III, i, 183-186). It becomes clear that he has known about Angelo's dubious past before, which makes his reasons for appointing him his deputy the more baffling.

"Craft against vice I must apply" (Act III, ii, 270), or, in other words, 'the end justifies the means' is the outspoken motto that is to vindicate his often questionable stratagems. This is on the one hand another allusion to James I, who in his treatise *Basilicon Doron* maintained the view that a ruler might even take unusual measures for a good end. On the other hand, it might announce a variation of the measuring theme of the play, as the Duke's further elaborations show: "So disguise shall by th' disguised / Pay with falsehood false exacting, / And perform an old contracting" (ll.273-275). This rhyming couplet is a comment and evaluation as well as an announcement that he is going to take the matter in his hand. And in fact, "Act IV is largely concerned with plot, with the tricks by which Claudio will be saved, with the devices and stratagems by which Angelo's deeds will duplicate those of Claudio, with the mechanics of the Duke's return to Vienna."

One function of the Duke is to intensify emotions and reactions both on the stage and in the audience – which parallels a playwright's scheme. To this end, everything seems to be allowed, and so he makes use of every means of deceit: he withholds the truth, or he 'actively' tells lies, as he does to Isabella, when she asks whether Angelo has sent the pardon for her brother. The Duke's procedure towards Isabella is utterly cruel, he could have spared her a lot of pain by telling her the truth, that her brother was alive. Yet he rather entangles things by acting out his part as the powerless friar who has to resort to tricks and schemes, instead of directly establishing justice by reassuming his rule, i. e. not setting off his whole intrigue at all, although this of course would not

have made up an interesting play. "No, he knows what is expected of him as a stage Duke, and makes the most of his part."

Even his way of telling her the lie of her brother's death is mean: "He hath releas'd him, Isabel, – from the world" (Act IV, iii, 114). The first half of the sentence is meant to arouse expectations, which are frustrated at the end of the sentence, making her disappointment the worse. His lie serves at least two 'dramatising functions': Apart from making her joy the greater when she finds that Claudio is not dead, Isabella's desire for revenge is to be stirred, and at the same time, it prepares the ground for the test of her mercy in the last act.

He also deceives Claudio by pretending that Angelo has confessed to him that he was not serious about his offer to Isabella, that he only intended to test her virtue, and so Claudio has to accept that there is no remedy for him – which would also add to his happiness at finally being released.

In these scenes where the Duke sets in motion his schemes, a variation on the measure for measure theme forms a part of his tactic: for example, in the beginning, he substitutes Angelo for himself; Mariana replaces Isabella in his bed-trick, and Ragozine's head will make up for Claudio's, after the originally intended substitute Barnardine refused to die.

5.3 Act V: The Trial/ The Dissolution of Seeming and Being

The last act is like a trial scene in which judgement has to be passed for the restoration of order. To put it bluntly: a happy outcome is needed, after all, Measure for Measure is a comedy. Yet the way to it is winding, and almost until the very end of the play, the situation is rather tragic: four characters are sentenced to death, and they are released only in the last moments before the play draws to a close.

In this scene, the Duke's function as a stage manager becomes most obvious; he is the one who contrives the dénouement. There are, however, some occurrences that he presumably cannot have foreseen: For example, whether he reckoned on Lucio to unmask him, or on Isabella to be implored for help by Mariana, and actually supporting her case, is difficult to tell.

Therefore I would argue that the Duke is rather an improvising stage manager, as it were, than a playwright: he can well try to direct people's reactions and behaviour, and often he does successfully so, but the characters are not altogether puppets to him and still may act in unpredictable ways. The most striking example of this is Lucio, "that extension of the medieval Vice", whose behaviour is beyond the Duke's control – yet Lucio 'involuntarily' contributes to the success of the Duke's scheming, as he renders Friar Lodowick's appearance in court necessary by insinuating him slanderous remarks about the Duke. Moreover, he fearlessly unveils the suspicious friar – which is the most elegant way for the Duke to have his true identity brought to light.

The last act also shows inconsistencies in the Duke's character and thus makes clear that he is, first and foremost, designed to serve the plot. His personality has to yield dramatic necessities. For instance, as he does not like appearing in public, he might have resumed his authority in the same unceremonial manner in which he handed it over. Instead, he orders trumpets for his return to Vienna, and, for the little time he has, he manages to prepare a ceremonial procession – in order to give more publicity to the following trial over Angelo, which bears resemblance to the Last Judgement, with the Duke as the Supreme Judge.

In this trial-scene, the Duke again creates tension and dramatic effect by withholding what he knows – in his formal greeting of his deputy, he still pretends the same high estimation for Angelo that he showed to him in the beginning; he first of all praises his justice (l. 6), which of course is sharply ironic, and professes Angelo's alleged merits in a pompous language:

O, but your desert speaks loud, and I should wrong it
To lock in the wards of covert bosom,
When it deserves with characters of brass
A forted residence 'gainst the tooth of time
And razure of oblivion. (Act V, I, 10-14)

Angelo's credits shall be made seen to the audience, which is in effect ironic again, as it is his failure and misuse of power that will eventually be made known. The 'villain' is honoured here, to make the Duke's disclosure of his true knowledge the more dramatic for its contrast to this panegyric. The Duke maintains his purported favouritism for Angelo and thus seems to enhance the chances that Angelo might finally get away with his dark secret. Moreover, the Duke treats the women very condescendingly, he denounces them as "pernicious women" (l. 240), insinuates that Isabella is mad ("Poor soul, / She speaks this in th'infirmity of sense" (ll. 49-50) and so makes their case seem hopeless. Of course, as a true 'stage Duke', he does so for spurring the dramatic impact again – the final restoration of Isabella's and Mariana's name which is necessarily connected with Angelo publicly being deprived of his "unsoil'd name" (Act II, iv, 154) will be the more emphatic.

The Duke then leaves the trial, as he has to return as Friar Lodowick, and ironically makes Angelo his substitute again by appointing him judge over his own cause (cf. ll. 168-169) – and so puts the trial "in the villain's mouth" (l. 300), which could be seen as another dramatic device of the Duke: He thus provides Angelo with an opportunity to either admit his crime – which he does not seize, though, – or to incriminate himself further – which he thoroughly does. For that reason, the uncovering of his secret becomes the more humiliating for him. As Friar Lodowick, he assumes also another role in the trial as a witness who lays further blame on Angelo, before returning as judge.

Even after the Friar's true identity has been laid bare by Lucio, the revelation of the truth does not take place immediately. On the contrary, the Duke still repeats the lie of Claudio's death to arrange the test situation for the second main character who has to prove virtuous: Isabella, who is seemingly offered vengeance according to the conception of 'measure for measure' in the Old Testament:

'An Angelo for Claudio; death for death.
Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;
Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.' (Act V, i, 407-409)

But Isabella, unlike Angelo, does not fail. Still believing that Angelo has had her brother executed, she is for Mariana's sake compassionate and merciful, and pleads for his life, thus pardoning him also the blackmail attempt which would have dishonoured her completely if she had yielded to it.

While Angelo is stripped of his good reputation, the discrepancy between his seeming and being is brought to light, while the Duke claims he has never changed his philosophy with his habits, but has remained true to himself all the while: "Not changing heart with habit" (l. 382). However, the Duke might turn out to be "a seemer", too, not only in his guise of friar, but also in his attitude towards the other sex: if we take his proposal to Isabella as a declaration of love, it is true that even the seemingly abstinent Duke is finally conquered by love – and thus grows more human, leaving behind his coolly detached manner.

Suspense is built up until the end of the play, which is altogether the Duke's work, and it meets comic conventions, since those condemned to death are pardoned, and four marriages are set up by the Duke. Although for Angelo and Lucio, these marriages are rather a punishment than a release; and we can only speculate about the women's views. Of course, the marriages are advantageous for them, as their honour and social standing will be restored, but it is questionable if for instance Mariana will be happy with a husband who does not love her, but it might be a too modern view of love as the basis of a blissful marriage.

At any rate, if one looks only at the surface, the Duke, who acts as a matchmaker here, manages to bring the story to a structurally harmonious and balanced ending.

The Duke's pairing off the characters in marriage couples also brings to light the Duke's enlightened and humane ethic by redefining the illicit sexual relations between ordinary people not as crimes, but as "relationships to be sorted out and directed toward completion in marriage, a dramatic function appropriate to the friar disguise the Duke assumes." To put it differently, the Duke sets an example of "corrective rather than retributive justice"; he repudiates the strict enforcement of law according to the concept of "measure for measure" in the sense of the Old

Testament. Instead, he exemplifies the view of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' Finally, he modifies this idea again by showing the value of leniency to those who have dared to pass judgement.

6. Conclusion

The figure of the Duke proves that it is extremely difficult – if at all manageable – to create a character that is at the same time a psychologically sound and coherent human figure, and that is yet to be seen as superior to normal persons, as the character is also meant to represent higher values, or even supreme divine power. Things become even more complicated when this figure is additionally combined with highly functional purposes, as it is the case with the Duke. The origins of the role lie in world folklore: "Historically he belongs to a familiar dramatic type; that of the omnipotent disguised character who directs the intrigue, often hearing strange things of himself by the way".

It is not easy to ascertain whether the Duke is a rounded, individually shaped character, or whether his personality remains a brief outline and is therefore of secondary interest. If he were rather a type reminiscent of the stock characters e. g. of medieval morality plays, the functionality of his figure would be stressed the more. I have suggested a mid-way position by showing that the character of the Duke combines both human qualities – and flaws – as well as spiritual meaning. Yet even if the Duke is given some individual traits, he is not emotionally involving, since he himself does not really get involved in the action he manipulates, but remains aloof, an observer. Moreover, an important feature that constitutes a 'genuine' character is the capacity to develop and to learn from one's experiences. Applying this to the Duke is difficult, for he is not the one to be tested, but the one who intrigues and intervenes to assay others, and therefore the Duke's plotting and how it works out is in the focus of attention, not the Duke's development – if there is any. It is an enticing idea to say there is, as Marion Bodwell Smith concludes:

In resuming his authority the Duke accepts the responsibilities of his office in a way he had found it difficult to do at the beginning of the play, [...] the Duke's resumption of his authority will not be attended by his former laxity, a laxity based [...] on the desire to

retain the approval of public opinion. He has learned that calumny is an inevitable hazard of public office and is ready to accept the uncomfortable consequences of fortitude as applied to firm administration [...] in future the Duke will strive to rule in the image of his own temperance."

This is an interesting and beautiful inference, but I believe it is rather speculative, as there is no real evidence for this in the play itself. Also, as yet the Duke has demonstrated rather mercy than justice, which could perhaps be interpreted as more consistent with his former 'laxity' than with any strict rulership to be expected from him in the future. But there might be some hint of an inner change of the Duke: his offering his hand to Isabella could be meant as a 'measure' he imposes on himself as a cure for his sexual indifference or uneasiness – or this marriage is not to be reasoned psychologically as the consequence of a character's development, but as a mere dramatic necessity, unveiling the current comic conventions.

Interpreting the Duke as a type with allegoric meaning, the features of his character also add to his dramatic function; throughout the play, he represents "the truly detached, philosophical, self-controlled person not passion's slave." At least in the end he might be deemed a role model of the Aristotelian virtue of temperantia, and correspondingly of mercy as tempered justice. As the embodiment of temperance, "the prophet of an enlightened ethic", he refutes that justice at all cost of the Old Testament as 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth', which is not the kind of 'measure' he wishes people to adopt. Though, seeing him in this light makes his behaviour in the previous acts the more astonishing.

If we then admit him to be at least a teacher, he presents us in the end that 'measure' as moderation in all things serves as the base of harmony both within a person and in a whole community or state, but it has to be completed with mercy. Also, by imposing marriage on those two who least like it, Angelo and Lucio, he teaches them to assume responsibility for their deeds.

If the Duke is not very interesting as an individual character, the philosophy he accounts of is stimulating. He tends to blend Elizabethan commonplaces with Christian and ancient views, as he does not only in his guise of a friar, e. g. in his impressive speech on the vanities of life (Act III,i), but also while being truly himself, the Duke. For example, while appointing Angelo his

substitute, he expresses the idea that virtues are wasted unless they are evinced in action (Act I, i, 29-40), and illustrates this by referring to the biblical parable of the talents that had already become a commonplace, and to the Stoic image of Nature as creditor, which goes back to Seneca. Although the Duke is not merely a "convenient stage machine", his main function is to bring about and direct the events and actions throughout the play. An important device for this is his disguise of friar, which is reminiscent of the old folk-motive of the ruler in disguise mingling with his people, and also takes up "the conventional stage-character of the plot-promoting priest". His friar's disguise enables him to be 'omnipresent' in the place where Angelo's misuse of power can be noticed first, the prison. There he overhears the conversations of the other characters, and in so doing, he becomes well-informed, almost 'omniscient', which is an essential prerequisite for his becoming the driving force in the plot. With his supreme knowledge and authority, he can function both as playwright and stage manager, sometimes showing us the dramatist's technique, but certainly not as a puppet master, as the other characters playing a part in his plot do not always act as he wants them to.

His meaning in the play consists of arranging test situations in which the characters have to prove if they have found the golden mean, the moderation that makes them balanced, virtuous, and fully integrated personalities. The Duke and his scheming thus serve to mirror the characters' flaws, "to provide the touchstone which reveals such inconsistencies, and his purpose to reconcile their conflicts by helping his subjects to supply their deficiencies, curb their excesses, and thus bring them closer to his politic ideal of moderation in all things."

The situations that the Duke creates would make at least Angelo and Isabella turn into tragic figures if they were allowed to carry out their plans. Yet with his intervention, the Duke prevents the tragic consequences and reveals in the end that the situation is not what it seems to be.

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