Duke Vincentio: A Paragon of a Christian Prince or a Self-Centered Manipulator?

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นักวิจารณ์วรรณคดีหลายท่านลงความเห็นว่า ดุ๊กวินเซ็นซีโอ ในบทละครของเชกสเปียร์เรื่อง Measure for Measure เป็นแบบอย่างที่ดีของเจ้าชายตามคติความเชื่อของชาวคริสต์ เป็นบุคคลที่เปี่ยมไปด้วยความรัก ความเอื้อเฟื้อเผื่อแผ่ และความปรารถนาที่จะทำสิ่งดีให้กับคนอื่น แต่เมื่อวิเคราะห์ตัวละครนี้อย่างละเอียดแล้ว พบว่าเจ้าชายเป็นคนเสแสร้ง คำนึงถึงตนเป็นหลัก ใช้เล่ห์เหลี่ยมหลอกลวง สิ่งที่เจ้าชายได้กระทำลงไปเป็นการรักษาภาพลักษณ์และชื่อเสียงของตนเป็นหลัก

Abstract

Many critics have asserted that Duke Vincentio, in Shakespeare's ***Measure for Measure***, is a good Christian prince–a man who is full of love, beneficence, and benevolence for other people. However, upon a closer examination, the prince is a hypocritical, self-centered, and manipulative person. What he has done is primarily to maintain his own image and reputation.

Keywords: ***Measure for Measure***, Shakespeare, self-centered manipulator, Duke Vincenti, morality

At the beginning of the play *Measure for Measure*, Vienna, under the tutelage of Duke Vincentio, is rife with licentiousness and "sexual corruption (Bevington, 2005, 10). Bawds, pimps, and brothel clients openly violate strict statues against fornication and adultery which has been in existence for 19 years. This unrestrained sexuality, in the eyes of those in power, is "ostensibly subverting social order; anarchy threatens to engulf the State unless sexuality is subjected to renewed and severe regulation" (Dollimore, 1985, p. 72). In order to restore law and order to the State, the Duke of Vienna resolves to address these social problems. However, instead of handling the problems himself, he appoints his deputy, Angelo, to carry out the task, and he absconds by disguising himself as a friar and disappearing from public view. Because of his central role as a prime mover and manipulator of the action in the play, Vincentio has been the subject of controversy among critics. In spite of his ill design and stratagems, many critics still perceive him as a "good ruler" (Westlund, 1984, p.148) and as an efficient and idealized man who "by his wisdom and virtue is able to reconcile the conflicting forces in the play" (Kittredge, 1967, p. xiii). Other critics judge him in terms of the Christian theology. They see him as a good Christian–a man of both benevolence and beneficence or a man who wishes to do good things to other people and does bring light and the Christian faith to the other characters at the end of the play. Some believe that Shakespeare transposes the morality genre to question the Jacobean connection of divine and earthly law, and see the duke as a godlike figure, both for his "divine power" and for his power over the plot" who sends Angelo to condemn men who no longer fear his strict law. By following the Protestant view of Romans 13, which construes the idea that the ruler acts as a judge who dispenses both mortality and mercy. By appointing Angelo to perform the task, Angelo becomes a "substitute" God (Fulton. 2010, pp. 127-128).

Earlier critics often equate the Duke as a Christ figure who metes out grace to, expiates the sins of, and works for the redemption of the other characters so that they can be saved from their weakness and morality (Toscano, 1976, pp. 277-89). Still others see him as the Gospel itself. For example, G. Wilson Knight (1964), in his ***The Wheel of Fire***, says that the Duke represents "the prophet of an enlightened ethics" because:

> He (The Duke) controls the action from the start to finish, he allots, as it were praise and blame, he is lit at the moments with divine suggestion comparable with almost divine power of fore-knowledge, control, and wisdom (p. 74).

Battenhouse (1946) also sees him in light of the Christian theology as Knight does, but he equates the Duke with the Messiah instead of the Gospel. Convinced that the word "Vincentio"–the Duke's real name which means "conqueror," and "Lodowick", his assumed name which means "famous warrior," Battenhouse asserts that Shakespeare, in writing this

play, had in mind Isaiah, Ch. ix, 6: "and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (p. 1035). Similarly, Kirsch (1975) contends that *Measure for Measure* is a Christian play and that the Duke's secret plotting is the hidden working of Providence. He also sees the Duke as a man who struggle successfully to reform his vice-ridden people by having them repent of their sin (89-105) while Lewis (1983) see him as a man who tries to uphold a moral standard, by relegating the task of achieving it to his deputy-Angelo. When he tells Angelo that "Mortality and mercy in Vienna / Live in thy tongue and heart" (I.i.44-45), the Duke wishes to have judgment meted out in moderation in order to achieve "a balance between exact punishment and forgiveness" (271). In telling Angelo to be moderate in judgment, Duke Vincentio depicts himself as a kind person. Even today, the idea that Duke Vincentio is seen as a God-like future still persists. For example, Fulton (2010) asserts that Shakespeare transposes the morality genre to question the Jacobean connection of divine and earthly law, and that the Duke is a godlike figure, both for his "divine power" and for his power over the plot who sends Angelo to condemn men who no longer fear his strict law, since according to the Protestant view of Romans 13, the ruler acts as a judge who dispenses both mortality and mercy. Therefore, by appointing Angelo to perform the task, Angelo becomes a "substitute" God (Fulton. 2010, 127-128), and by implication, the man who appoints Angelo is a God himself.

Some critics assert that Shakespeare depicts his duke not as an ideal monarch but as a flawed human who administers arbitrary and often cruel sentences (Brown, 1996), and *Measure and Measure* portrays the human imperfections of early rulers (Lewis, 1983). Others see the Duke as an impersonator of King James I, who liked to spie on his subjects, and a few critics have seen direct parallels between the last acts of the play and a specific event during James's reign that occurred in December of 1603-one year before the performance of *Measure for Measure*. This was the prosecution of the conspirators of the Bye plot (including Sir Walter Raleigh), for whom the king staged a public execution, one which he secretly did not intend to enact. In this event, James made each offender prepare for death and approach the scaffold-twice. Only at the last moment were they reprieved. Shakespeare has his duke in act 5 plan a spectacle as elaborate and self-enhancing as James did, with both rulers showing their astute appreciation of the art of self-promotion and image enhancing. Some critics see this event as Shakespeare's tribute to the king for his love of stratagems and fondness for dramatics (Bennet. 98, 99, cited in Brown, 1996) while others see this as a means for Shakespeare to display the duke as an ordinary man who resorts to "elaborate theatrical fakery" to project a mightier image of himself and the state (Bernthal, 1992). Still, other critics such as Howard (1987) see the duke as a comic authority figure who uses "the arts of theatre to order a disordered society" (182).

Whether Duke Vincentio is regarded an ideal ruler who is full of love, grace, and mercy for his people or whether he is perceived as an imperfect ruler focuses only on his outward behavior and fails to see the inner motives behind his actions. Upon close scrutiny, we will see that Duke Vincentio cannot reasonably be equated with Jesus Christ or the Christian ethics, nor can his intentions be regarded as being benevolent and beneficent. He is as corrupt and as blemished as the other characters in the play. His seeming good deeds protect his own personal interests and consolidate his power base through the promotion of his own image as a man of magnanimity and mercifulness. In this paper, I will argue that Duke Vincentio is a manipulative prince who uses stratagems to contain and suppress licentious sexual behaviors of the people which are threatening to subvert his authority and the law and order of the state.

From the beginning of the play, though the Duke's words seem to show some concern for the disintegration of sexual morality of the people of Vienna, his actions suggest that he is more concerned with his personal interests than with the will to restore it himself. For 19 years, he has failed to enforce the strict statutes on fornication and adultery. As a result, the morality of the people in Vienna has deteriorated because of his misrule and his permissiveness. The Duke himself does not have the courage to put the laws into effect for fear that he would be seen as a tyranny if undertakes such a task upon himself. He confesses his concern and fear to Friar Thomas as follows:

> I do fear, too dreadful
> Sith't was my fault to give the people scope,
> 'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
> For what I bid them do; for we bid this be done
> When evil deeds have their permissive pass,
> And not the punishment. (I.iii. 34 -39)

Here the Duke can be praised for confessing of his negligence, but it also shows the excuses for his inaction or incompetence. It is evident that the Duke is more concerned with his own image, fearing that he will be seen as a tyrannical person. He wants to remain a loving and caring prince who shuns imposing unpleasant law and hardships upon the people. Therefore, in order to safeguard himself against the adverse consequences which might occur from such enforcement of unfavorable laws, he passes this burden onto Angelo, his deputy, so that Angelo can be the scapegoat for carrying out the job. Angelo will be blamed and the Duke will be exculpated and his popularity untainted. The Duke says:

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

Many critics, such as Jocelyn Powell (1972), attempt to defend the Duke's action as revealed in the speech above as being right since the Duke tries to avoid being the one who taints the office of his dukedom. Powell says that it is "necessary to preserve the reputation of the office he (the Duke) has failed in by dissociating himself (the symbol of that office in his people's eyes) from a change in judicial procedure that may appear tyrannical" (184). However, his argument tends to overlook the Duke's selfishness and irresponsibility. He only thinks about himself and his own image, but he never thinks about the image and reputation of the man whom he chooses to be ruined in place of him. If he is really a responsible ruler, he has to accept both the good and the bad. Through manipulation and scheming, he can save his own skin and lets his deputy get the blame. He doesn't care what will happen to the man he has appointed to execute the duty which should be his. At the opportune moments, he would come out as if he were the knight riding a white horse to put things in order and mete out justice to all, and earn high regard for himself from his people.

In appointing Angelo to be the acting duke during his seeming absence, Duke Vincentio has another motive to advance his personal gain. He is very aware of Angelo's rising fame as a man of strict self-imposed morality and asceticism, so he wants to test if power can change or corrupt the man (I.iii. 50-54). In spite of Angelo's protest that he is not ready for the job, Vincentio, with his ulterior motive, insists on appointing the man. In fact, he first considers appointing another able man, Escalus, who is both experienced in and conversant with the art of state administration, but he drops the idea and decides to elect Angelo to do the job instead.

That the Duke is setting up Angelo for a fall while protecting himself from the blame and unpopularity is first implicitly stated in his lavish praise on Angelo in a long and elaborate passage (1.i. 26-41), while knowing all along that Angelo has abandoned Mariana, an act which he later labels "unjust unkindness" (III. i. 240). He uses this praise as a ploy to cover up his ill design and to mislead the public to believe that he has a complete trust in Angelo. However, he reveals his ill intention against Angelo more explicitly when he talks to Friar Thomas (I.iii. 50-54), as mention above. His last sentence, "hence shall we see,/If power change purpose, what our seemers be" indicates that the Duke does not completely trust his deputy for he says that there are hidden possibilities for evil in Angelo (Gilbert, 1964, p. 46). On the surface, he hands over his power to Angelo so that he can test Angelo's integrity-to see whether Angelo is steadfast to his principle and free from corruption tempted by the power given to him. Deep down in his intent, however, the Duke may want to discredit Angelo and to disrupt Angelo's rising fame. He knows that men are weak, fallible, and easily corrupt by absolute power. With the belief in Angelo's fallibility, he hands over his own power to Angelo in the hope that Angelo will be succumbed to it and, thus, abuse it.

In order to get Angelo trapped in the mesh of power, the Duke explicitly instructs him to exercise the power in full. He tells Angelo that "In our remove be thou at full ourself. /Mortality and mercy in Vienna /Live in thy tongue and heart" (I.i. 44-46), and later he also tells Angelo that "your scope is as mine own,/ So to enforce or qualify the laws/As to your soul seems good" (I.i. 65-67). At the same time, the Duke also devises the plan to undermine Angelo's credibility and integrity after he has pretended to grant Angelo the full power to rule. Instead of leaving the country and giving the full rein to Angelo to run the state as he has indicated, the Duke, posing as a friar, has Angelo under surveillance to spy on the man to whom he publicly declares to have a complete trust. He goes stealthily around the state of Vienna in order to "behold his (Angelo's) sway" (I.iii. 43), and ironically Angelo's "sway" is a result of the Duke's scheme against him.

As a medieval prince, the Duke follows the advice resolved to die, and unsympathetically persuades the

of Niccolo Machiavelli who says "it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case" (p. 84). According to Machiavelli, a prince needs to employ every possible means, good or evil, to take him to reach his goals. In this case, the Duke's goal is to subjugate his deputy whose fame is a threat to his own and to enjoy the popularity and fame for only himself. Following what Machiavelli has laid down in ***The Prince,*** Duke Vincentio is not hesitant to become a schemer. Though Angelo works for him, the Duke shows no sincerity to him nor does he give Angelo due respect and trustworthiness. Having learned about Isabella pleading mercy for her brother, the Duke has slyly eavesdropped on her conversation with Claudio in order to gather the evidence to discredit Angelo. Once he learns of Angelo's sign of weakness, the Duke quickly seizes the opportunity to work against his deputy. His mind starts devising the scheme to trap Angelo, and begins to manipulate other characters in the play to work for him. He says in his soliloquy at the end of Act II that he will apply "craft against vice" (255), that is, a trick to capture or unmask Angelo. Knowing that Angelo desires Isabella's virginity, the Duke immediately devises a "bed trick" scheme by sending a substitute to sleep with Angelo so that Angelo can be caught in flagrante delicto. Disguised as a friar, the Duke utilizes his false priesthood talk to both Isabella–a novitiate who is more likely to obey and respect his priesthood, and Mariana–a woman who has a complete trust in his identity, into complying with his scheme of intrigue. Knowing that a woman always feels sympathetic with another woman who has been wronged by a man, and that human beings always love their close relatives, the Duke exploits this knowledge to his own end. He appeals to Isabella, manipulates her, and arouses her to a desire to punish Angelo and to help the wronged woman. His mind seems to be teeming with schemes– a scheme to trap Angelo, a scheme to get the women to work with him and for him, and a scheme to show his magnanimity and to boost his reputation as a good prince if the plan becomes successful.

By devising the "bed trick" scheme, the Duke hopes to produce hard evidence against Angelo. Obviously, he is not satisfied with the verbal evidence he has heard from Isabella since it is not binding enough and can be refuted easily. He reveals his intent to get the hard evidence implicitly when he says to Isabella, "Yet, as the matter now/ stands, he will avoid your accusation" he made trial of/you only" (III. i. 197–99). From this speech he implies that he needs strong evidence and in producing it, he needs Isabella's cooperation. He tells her that if she cooperates with him, she will "much please the absent Duke" (III. i. 205–06). Of course, he should be pleased because, if successful, he will be able to scale down the rival of his reputation and he himself will remain the man at the helm. Once Isabella submissively agrees to become his accomplice, the Duke begins to lay out his scheme to bring down his deputy. He tells Isabella what to do (III. ii. 247–252), and he himself will do his part:

> The maid will I frame, and make fit for his attempt.
> (III. ii. 260–261)

Many critics see in this speech the Duke's benevolence –his desire to save Claudio's life, to help Mariana in getting her husband, and to extricate Isabella from vice in her dealing with Angelo. These critics either ignore or underplay the Duke's manipulation of other characters for his own ends which renders the Duke undue credit. If we look carefully at his speech, in fact, we will see that the Duke has no regard for other people, especially women. What he cares most is the fulfillment of his egocentric ends. Thus, he makes a decision for Mariana without her consent. He infringes upon her life. Regarding her as a sex object that he can manipulate at will, the Duke sends her to sleep with a man in order to get firm evidence against the man and force the man to marry the woman he unwittingly sleeps with. When he tells Isabella that by complying with his plan her brother will be saved and her honor will be untainted, another phrase should be added – the Duke's desire to bring the downfall to Angelo will be fulfilled.

Moreover, the Duke abuses the offices of a priest because he manipulates and provides the venue for the tricky copulation while posing as a friar. Instead of promoting the communion between man and woman through mutual love and understanding, he urges the woman to get a husband by trick. No hint of romantic love between the couple is evidente. We only know from the Duke that there used to be an arrangement for their marriage which Angelo later breaks off, and nothing else. His act of compelling Angelo to pay Mariana's recompense, though legalistic, is "a far cry from charitably helping two people to reach each other" (Martz, 1982, p. 101).

The Duke also acts un–priestly and unscrupulously when he loftily lectures the condemned Claudio to be

hard-headed Barnadine to offer his head in place of Claudio's. As a priest, he should be more sympathetic to their predicament and give them warm consolations. He is not supposed to urge them to destroy their lives which are the product of the "divine creation" (Genesis, 1, 26-31). In persuading them to give up their lives, he is insensitive toward their feeling.

The Duke is far from being a good ruler whose primary concern is the interest, law, and order of the state. In his desire to unmask and undermine Angelo, he attempts to corrupt the machinery of the state. He persuades the Provost to deceive Angelo by sending a false head, instead of Claudio's, to Angelo when the latter orders Claudio's head to be brought in to him after the execution. The Duke's action here is tantamount to encouraging the state machinery to defy and challenge the state power and disrupt the function of the state. As a ruler, he should have encouraged state functionaries to carry out their duties as they are assigned by a legitimate ruler. Instead, the Duke sets a bad example for the government officials to properly carry out their duties and disrupt the flow of state functioning. In fact, in persuading the Provost to deceive Angelo and to disobey Angelo's order, the Duke undermines his own power since Angelo has ruled in the Duke's name.

The Duke is a great liar and pretender. First, he lies to Angelo and other courtiers that he will go abroad, but he doesn't. Instead, he has an insidious scheme to spy on their activities. In spite of his awareness of Angelo's desertion of Mariana, he pretends not to question Angelo's credibility and integrity publicly and expresses his complete trust in the man. When he visits the prison, he gives false information to Claudio that Angelo has no real intent to corrupt Isabella. He says that Angelo "hath never the purpose to corrupt her; only he had/ made an essay of her virtue to practice his judg/ment with the disposition of natures" only. Then he leads Claudio to believe that he is a "confessor to Angelo, and I know this to be true" (III. i. 162-164). We know that he has just gone incognito and disguises himself as a friar for only a few days, and he has no chance for Angelo to come and confess to him. When Isabella comes early in the morning to ask whether the pardon for her brother has arrived, the Duke conceals the truth from her. Before Isabella enters, the Duke soliloquizes:

> She's come to know
> If yet her brother's pardon become hither
> But I will keep her ignorant of her good,
> To make her heavenly comforts of despair
> When it is least expected.
>
> (IV.iii. 108-112)

When Isabella asks him upon her entering the room, he simply tells to her: "His head is off and send to Angelo." (IV.iii. 117). His words to Claudio may be coated with good intention in that he may want to pacify the latter's anxiety and his anger with Isabella. However, his not telling the truth reveals that the Duke is a man whose words cannot be trusted.

The Duke's words are, most of the time, contrary to what he has in mind. By not telling Isabella the truth, the Duke seems to have two ulterior motives-to make Isabella angry and hate Angelo more and to express his desire to intensify his revenge on Angelo since Angelo surprises him with the execution order of Claudio after he has sexual intercourse with Mariana. The Duke has expected Angelo to keep his promises and grant the pardon for Claudio. However, Angelo has outwitted him and disrupted his plan. By not telling the truth to Isabella, the Duke hopes to exhort her to launch an accusation against Angelo in public when the returning Duke holds court at the city gate. And the Duke succeeds in his design to bring Angelo to a disgrace because Isabella, believing in the Duke's words and acting on his exhortation to publicly excuse Angelo, agrees to comply with the play. This shows how cunning the Duke is. He does everything to advance his personal gain and doesn't care much whether he will hurt the other people.

Most critics attack Angelo for his hypocrisy. However, if we look closely at the play, we will see that Duke Vincentio is as hypocritical as Angelo, if not more. Whereas Angelo's hypocrisy happens suddenly when his sexual desire is aroused by Isabella's beauty, the Duke's hypocrisy seems to be part of his nature which he reveals almost from the beginning to the end of the play. In Act I Scene 1, when Escalus and Angelo express their wishes to escort him on the way, the Duke tells them that:

> 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.
>
> (I. i. 67-71)

However, at the end of the play he is holding court at the city gate in which he is the cynosure. All eyes are focusing upon him. When he gives instruction to Friar Peter to go and fetch Flavious, Valentinus, Rowland, and Crassus, he tells the friar to "bid them bring the trumpets to the gate" (IV. v. 9). Of course, the trumpets are used to call on the attention of the people and indicate

the presence of the prince. If he really wanted to avoid the public display of himself, he would not have done that. His holding court at the city gate clearly suggests his desire to be in the limelight. When he unmasks Angelo and passes judgment to Angelo and Lucio in front of the people, he is able to stage his own show that he is in control of the situation, and that the life and death of the people in Vienna are in his hands. Later, when he grants them pardon, he displays himself as a man of generosity and magnanimity. He pretends to be a knight riding a white horse who comes to restore the law and order, which is, in fact, a result of his own scheme or machination. He knows that, by granting mercy to both the corrupt deputy and the other condemned men, he will be hailed as a good, loving, and caring prince.

Not only is the Duke hypocritical about being the center of attention, he is hypocritical about his desire to relieve himself of the power as well. After he has handed over his power to Angelo, he goes to see Friar Thomas and tells the Friar:

> How I have ever lov'd the life removed
> And held in idle price to haunt assemblies
> Where youth and cost and witless bravery keeps.
> (I. iii. 8-10)

In this speech, he professes that he wants to be free from the burdens and cares of running the state. But even in his disguised role, he never throws away the power. On the contrary, he steadfastly holds on to it and plays with it. He pretends to give his power to Angelo, but that is a stage show. Throughout the play, he keeps exercising his manipulative authority or power as if he were the director of a dramatic troupe who assigns roles for others to play. He gives a role for Angelo to act as the head of the state; he devises the plan for the Provost to deceive the newly appointed head of the state; he sets the venue for Mariana to get a husband with the expense of her virginity. He exhorts Isabella and Friar Peter to cooperate with him in his attempt to unmask Angelo. Why does he do all of these? The answer is his enjoyment in playing the power game. By assigning roles and manipulating other people, he feels that he has control over their lives, and that feeling gives him a sense of satisfaction and power. He feels he is important because other people are inferior and submissive to him. Most importantly, by playing the power game and using stratagems to manipulate other people, he has got the upper hand and emerges as a winner at the end. First he brings harmony to Vienna and reconciles the sinner and the virtuous in the merciful institutions of the state (McEvoy, 2000, 215). Everyone owes him gratitude for his mercifulness. Secondly, he is able to suppress and contain the disruptive and subversive ideas that threaten the ruling class.

In conclusion, in spite of his success in bringing harmony to the state and containment of subversive morality of the ruled, the Duke cannot wholly be regarded as a good prince since his concern is primarily for his own personal interest, not the well-being of the state and the welfare of the people. Throughout the play, he focuses all of his energy and actions either to further his personal gain or to protect his own image. He is irresponsible for his misrule and lacks the courage to put things right even when he learns about the adverse consequences of his laxity and permissiveness. Instead of carrying out the task himself, he imposes it to his deputy and spies on him while he carries out his duty. The Duke also practices hypocrisy, lies, and tricks so that he can maintain his power and supremacy over other people. He creates the chaotic situations in the state of Vienna, kindles the dissenting feelings among the people, and then stages a show for his comeback as a hero to restore the chaos. He is a scheming prince who commits himself to doing everything for his own benefits. Under his seeming good, generous, beneficent, and benevolent actions and intention, there is a motive to advance his own personal gain. He cannot be a Christ figure who sacrifices himself for the good of the people because he is too selfish to love other people. He cannot be the Gospel because his words cannot always be relied on, and his show of mercy and grace is intended to further his own image as a good prince. In fact, he is a self-centered man whose primary concern is the interest in his own image and reputation.

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