

Measure for Measure Theme

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Themes

Mercy and Justice: The Duke is soft and often forgives offenders. Angelo is harsh and enforces old laws strictly. Claudio's case shows strict law without needed mercy. The Duke ends with pardons to restore social peace. Thus, justice works best when balanced with wise mercy.

Hypocrisy: Angelo claims virtue, yet desires Isabella with coercion. He condemns Claudio, then breaks the same moral rule. His public image hides private weakness and sin. The Duke exposes Angelo before all in Act Five. The play shows rulers can fail their own standards.

Appearance and Reality: The Duke hides as a friar to observe the truth. Lucio insults the Duke, not knowing his real face. Isabella's meeting becomes the bed-trick with Mariana. Angelo believes appearance, yet reality turns against him. Revelations in the end uncover masks and manipulation.

Crime and Punishment: Angelo revives a sleeping law against fornication. Claudio faces death for premarital sex with Juliet. Escalus and the Provost find the sentence too severe. The Duke's mass pardons question strict retribution alone. True justice should fit crimes with fair, humane proportion.