Complex characters

A close look at motivation
What makes a complex character?
Complex character:

A complex character has:

- Conflicting motivations
- Multiple roles
- Multiple responsibilities
- Both strengths and weaknesses
Motivation

What is motivation, exactly?
Motivation

It is what makes people behave the way we do.

It is what causes us to act.

In literary analysis, motivation refers to the reasons a character or person would do something, want something, or think something.
Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the individual and often involves rewards such as trophies, money, social recognition or praise.

Intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual, such as doing a complicated cross-word puzzle purely for the personal gratification of solving a problem.
Analyzing character: motivation

Ask:
• Why is the character doing this?
• Does the character have justification for acting in this way?
• Was the character hurt by someone in the past?
• Was the character helped by someone in the past?
• What does the character want most?
• What else does the character want that conflicts with the first motivation?
Analyzing character: speech

How does this person express himself/herself verbally? Look at what he/she actually says or does not say.

What is the effect of the author’s choice for this character regarding:
Diction ?  Idioms ?
Dialogue ?  Phrasing ?
Dialect ?
Analyzing character: actions

• How does the character treat others?
• What does the character actually do, versus what the character wants to do?
• How does the character react to others’ actions?
• How do others treat this character?
Complex character = possible thesis statement

Whenever you have conflicting motivations, you have fertile grounds for constructing a strong, arguable thesis statement.

How?
Constructing a thesis statement

Choose a complex character and focus on one of their motivations. Take a stand that the character was motivated above all by this one desire. OR,

Take a stand that this one motivation caused something in particular to happen.
Example 1:

For instance, Friar Lawrence wanted several things at once:
• the feud to end
• Romeo to be happy
• Romeo and Juliet to be safely together, whether in Verona or away in Mantua
• to be free from blame for the tragedy
Example 1:

You could argue that as the tragedy progressed, Friar Lawrence was motivated most by his desire to be free from blame.

Or, you could argue that Friar Lawrence was motivated most by his desire for the feud to end.

Another reader could disagree with your claims, and both points of view could be supported by the text.
Example 2:

Read *Fences* with motivation in mind.

• What does Troy want most? What other things does Troy want that make him a complex character?

• What does Rose want most?

• What does Cory want most?