

Angelo's soliloquies



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Contrast the opening soliloquy of Act II sc. iv with that which closes sc. ii.

Angelo's soliloquy in sc. li immediately follows his first meeting with Isabella, whereas the speech to which sc. Iv opens precedes her second visit.

Understandably, we see a change in Angelo from a man reeling from the shock of newly uncovered feelings, to a man excited and anticipating the appearance of the object of his desires, and, perhaps, something of a darker Angelo. These soliloquies, though short, are full of imagery, symbolism, and emotion as the character begins to warp and distort. In the earlier soliloquy, Angelo can be seen as shocked and confused. He questions himself, asking 'Is this her fault or mine?'. His use of rhetorical questions echo his searching for an understanding of the thaw taking place in his snow-broth. He examines his motives for his attraction to Isabella, and seems a little disgusted as his desire to 'raze the sanctuary' of Isabella's purity and 'pitch [his] evils there'. He also must seek for something solid now that his puritanical carpet has been whisked out from under him. When he exclaims 'O, let her brother live!' we can see not only his desire to accede to Isabella's demands, presumably to please her, but also his knowledge that he has lost the moral highpoint from which he was prepared to pronounce punishment. No longer able to claim calmly 'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, another thing to fall' from the dais of one who has neither met with temptation nor succumbed to it, he now searches for some compromise. In contrast, scene four shows an Angelo who has clearly been musing on his strange attraction for a while. He has found answers to all of his questions, and not a single question mark is now present in his reflections. This is now an Angelo who has reached some conclusions about the new version of himself he is confronted with. He explains to us that: 'in my heart [is] the

strong and swelling evil of my conception.' Far from shrinking from his awakened 'darker side', Angelo openly acknowledges it to the audience. He explains that he is powerless to resist it (if his prayers to heaven are read as attempts to do this), and the audience are presenting with a much more frightening, calculating Angelo. Even his language here is excited; 'conception' suggesting a pregnant evil to mirror the supposed 'evil' of Juliet's illegitimate baby. Whilst Claudio's child is born out of love, however, Angelo's child is born out of lust. The imagery used in scene two reflects Angelo's disturbed state of mind. He likens himself to a carrion in the sun which becomes 'corrupt with virtuous season' and festers rather than being preserved (seasoned) or fortified like a flower. In this image, the sun seems to symbolise the chaste Isabella who encourages Angelo to carnal desires by virtue of her purity. This comparison is reminiscent of sonnet 94, in which we are told: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.' This reflects again Angelo and Isabella, who both have a long way to fall from grace because of their great (apparent) virtue. In these soliloquies, Shakespeare also uses the religious imagery so appropriate to Angelo to elaborate on his state of mind. In the earlier speech, Angelo accusingly describes Isabella: 'O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint, with saints dost bait thy hook!' Here Angelo compares himself as an anchorite tempted in a dream by Satan disguised as a virtuous woman. In his eyes he is still ironically 'the saint' he has always been. He has yet to mentally adjust to the changes Isabella is wreaking in him. In the later speech, Angelo has become the devil declaring: 'Let's write good angel on the devil's horn) 'Tis not the devil's crest.' Although this is not Shakespeare's clearest metaphor, it can be deciphered as meaning that Angelo will maintain part of his disguise by writing 'good angel' on his

revealed diabolic side. He is aware, however, that he is no longer an angel. It is this self-awareness which is lacking in the earlier soliloquy. The religious ideas are also present here when Angelo declares that Heaven is in his mouth alone, and no longer has a place in his heart. By this speech, Isabella has displaced religion as Angelo's obsession, and he knows it. Not only recognising the perversity of his love, Angelo seems to throw the whole weight of his 'zeal' behind it. He explains that his duties and studies have grown 'sere and tedious' to him, and that he is ready to change from a religious zealot into an 'idle plumed' gentleman. He is positively enthusiastic in his anticipation of Isabella's visit. No longer does he agonise over the morality of the situation, but dismisses it saying 'Blood, thou art blood!' Indeed, he seems to care more for the perceived immorality of his intended act and inner feelings than the absolute irreligiousness of it. He admires men who can 'wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls to [their] false seeming' because he fears he cannot hide what he is becoming. It is interesting that Angelo mentions that he took pride in his 'gravity' and severe reputation as it is further evidence for Angelo's concern with public appearances. In sc. iv he also crows to Isabella that even if she were to expose him to the world, no-one would believe her. He has, then, a very strong conception of his own image in the eyes of others, and, when the foundations of this are rocked in sc. ii, he quickly realises by sc. iv that a false public perception is as useful as a true one. In sc. ii, then, Angelo recognises the perversity of his own desires but feels powerless to resist them. The intensity of his feelings both shock and confuse him as he is forced to come to terms with another aspect of himself that was previously dormant. By sc. iv he has changed mentally and declares his readiness to

change now in his outward appearance and interactions with others. Having now accepted the surprising reality of his snarling libido, he sets out to satisfy it in a terrifyingly unconcerned and calculating way. Despite the heats of his desire, his cold ruthlessness is still apparent and he has mutated from the Malvolean puritan to a self-accepting villain more akin to Richard III.