

How does Shakespeare explore the theme of honour in the play?

- *"he hath wronged his honour in marrying the renowned/ Claudio--whose estimation do you mightily hold/ up--to a contaminated stale, such a one as Hero."* - this shows the importance of a young woman remaining chaste until marriage and highlights the danger of marrying a "stale" (prostitute - as in she is not a virgin) for a man. This is particularly significant for Claudio, who is of high status - marrying an impure woman could ruin his future prospects and put his name in disrepute. It also shows how easily a man's honour can be tainted, and how Claudio may well lose his integrity amongst his male friends. It also reflects how even low-status characters such as Borachio are aware of this dishonourable act.
- *"Give not this rotten orange to your friend;/ She's but the sign and semblance of her honour."* - Semblance is defined as "the outward appearance or apparent form of something, especially when the reality is different." This reflects the motif of appearance vs reality, whilst "rotten orange" implies that, whilst Hero looks nice and sweet on the outside, she is "rotten" on the inside. It is also ironic, as of course Claudio has been tricked by the semblance of two lovers, appearing to be Hero and another man. This line also highlights the importance of a woman's reputation at the time, as they would not be able to marry if unchaste. It also reflects how women were solely judged on how they presented themselves and that their "sign and semblance" was all they were worth.
- *"But, on my honour, she was charged with nothing/ But what was true and very full of proof."* - Don Pedro's line here represents the lack of remorse and mercy felt by those who had harmed a person deemed to be dishonourable or impure. This shows how male friendships could be lost almost instantly through dishonour, but also how high status characters like Don Pedro jump to conclusions. The use of "nothing" at the end of a run-on line is ironic as of course she has been charged with nothing as she is not guilty of this supposed crime. "Nothing" is also a theme throughout the play, and here we see that the supposed evidence is actually completely empty of any truth.
- *"I know not. If they speak but truth of her,/ These hands shall tear her; if they wrong her honour,/ The proudest of them shall well hear of it."* - Leonato demonstrates how physical violence was used to control women who had been unchaste, which was not uncommon in the Shakespearean era. However Leonato also states that people who "wrong her honour" should also be publicly shamed. This once again presents honour as a slightly mystical, all-important force that controlled these characters' lives. It also shows that dishonouring someone was seen as a crime and highly punishable.
- *"I stand dishonour'd, that have gone about/ To link my dear friend to a common stale."* - Don Pedro's line reinforces the sense that even the friends of people who were linked with unchaste women ("stales") were at risk of having their reputations ruined. It also demonstrates the fragility of male friendship, compared to Beatrice consoling and comforting Hero when she is