21L. 009: Introduction to Shakespeare   Prof. Henderson

Comparative essay assignment

1) Find an intriguing parallel between two plays we have read, a *specific* point of comparison. You might, for example, focus on:

>   -a scenic parallel, similar treatment of an event or encounter (a wooing scene, an interrogation, a death scene)
>   -a dramaturgical device (overhearing; disguise; the use of soliloquy)
>   -a clearly defined issue (an aspect of sexuality; the role of money; a daughter's rebellion; the representation of exotic "others")
>   -a shared pattern of language (imagery, figures of speech, verse forms)
>   -two similar characters, linked by their social position (e.g., Don John and Edmund in *King Lear*), situation (Hero and Desdemona), or attitude (Egeus and Brabantio)

This is only a list of suggestions: choose plays and parallels that interest you. I encourage you to discuss your ideas with me before you begin writing.

2) In an essay of 8-10 pages, focus on what you consider to be the most illuminating or crucial *difference* between the two treatments. How and why are these cases different? Develop a thesis about this contrast, considering how it reflects or contributes to the plays in their entirety. The difference could be one of tone, artistic method, social comment, or dramatic function.

n.b.: Given that you have selected a clear parallel, you can quickly make the grounds for comparison explicit in your introduction; then move right in to discuss the distinctions. Be sure you have a *thesis* about the nature of the difference between your two selections -- a thesis, moreover, that can be adequately developed and supported with textual evidence. Ideally, your conclusions will be compelling, persuasive, and not immediately obvious. I appreciate imagination, sensitivity, and wit, in a title as elsewhere; they can coexist peacefully (indeed, they thrive) with argumentation and correct, concise prose. Please allow plenty of time to proofread.

8-10 pages, due Friday, May 7 at 5 p.m..
Please email me in advance of the deadline if you are in a situation that might necessitate an extension.