1. Statement regarding the goal of the thesis or project

In my Honors Thesis I will undertake a reading of Jane Austen’s male characters through a feminist-critical lens. Austen focuses heavily on her female characters and how they strive to find equality, happiness, and love in a patriarchal world. Many studies of Austen expand on this topic, bringing further evidence of the sometime subtle feminism of her novels. From my own readings of the texts, I find advocates for feminism within her somewhat under-analyzed male figures. For my thesis, I plan to read three of Austen’s novels, study key scenes involving the central male characters, and examine their importance to feminist interpretations. I wish to study how characters such as Willoughby and Brandon in Sense and Sensibility and Darcy and Mr. Collins in Pride and Prejudice serve to advance plot and theme through their positive or negative qualities. I am more specifically interested in looking at the conversations between men and women—whether this be between a father and daughter or two people in love—and analyzing Austen’s varied approaches to male characters. I expect to gain a deeper appreciation for Jane Austen and her writing style; knowledge of how to interpret characters through plot, subject, and theme; and understanding of the range of possibilities for feminist readings of characters across gender categories.

The three Jane Austen novels I choose to focus on are Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, and Emma. Pride and Prejudice is Austen’s most popular novel, with male characters that are well known and play a vital role in the main female protagonist’s life. Given the many roles that men have in this book (especially as potential husbands) it is an obvious choice. Sense and Sensibility has two prominent female protagonists who are carefully opposed types, and introduces very different sorts of male characters who are integral to these two sisters’ growth. The men who move in and out of the sisters’ lives play a strong part in how the women change. Emma stands out due to our main character, Emma, being a rather unpleasant sort of woman, giving the novel a unique spin on the development of its heroine. As one of the more heavily flawed characters of Jane Austen, Emma is, especially in her interactions with men, a character who must change and advance. And her interest in match-making for others offers a new way of examining this process. This last novel will be integral to the thesis.

2. Key Readings

**Primary Readings of Jane Austen’s novels:**

*Sense and Sensibility*

*Pride and Prejudice*

*Emma*

**Secondary Readings:**


3. Communication
I plan to meet with my supervisor once a week for approximately one hour. During these meetings, we will run through my research for the week, discuss the readings and their relation to my thesis, and plan next steps for my research and writing. I expect to dedicate approximately 10 hours a week for reading, research, and writing between these meetings, with one hour for weekdays and longer time periods given for the weekend.

4. Specialized Training

This thesis will require no specialized training.

5. Methodology

I intend to invest in the critical readings of the texts informed by secondary materials, including original reviews and early responses to the texts. I will read and apply a range of interpretations of Austen’s male characters specifically and of the treatment of courtship and marriage more generally. Using critics such as Juliet McMaster and Hazel Jones, I can elaborate on how these male characters play a vital role in the shaping of feminism within female characters and the overall theme of Austen’s novels.

6. Timeline


9/16: Sense and Sensibility, continue discussion, begin secondary readings.

9/23: Discussion of secondary readings on Sense and Sensibility. First writing assignment due. 6-7 pages.

9/30: Discussion of writing assignment and secondary materials. Second committee member selected.

October Break

10/14: Second writing assignment due. 8 pages.

10/21: Begin discussion of Pride and Prejudice.

10/28: Continue discussion of Pride and Prejudice.


11/11: Discussion of writing assignment and secondary materials.


Thanksgiving Break.

12/12: Submission of draft of *Pride and Prejudice* chapter.

12/22: Submission of draft of *Sense and Sensibility* chapter.