

Paper Two:

Option A: Imperfect Sympathies in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*

The greatest moments in Austen's novels happen when two characters perfectly understand each other. But there are many more moments in which characters don't! Some characters are prone to misunderstanding yet are redeemed by our opinion of them. Other characters get it wrong and are utterly reprehensible. What are the various sorts of misunderstanding, and which ones matter most?

Consider some significant cases of misunderstanding between characters. How does Austen reveal the confusion to us and to the characters? How does she decide whether or not to let it be resolved? How are the characters themselves involved in discovering and rectifying the misunderstanding? What does it take to restore understanding after such a lapse? What does Austen teach us about the human condition by showing us these struggles? How easy is it to forgive someone for a serious misunderstanding? What promotes that forgiveness?

Option B: The Errant Imagination in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*

The imagination expresses itself in many ways in Austen's novels. Most of them are beneficial and lead to a greater understanding of our place in the world both of nature and of human society. Imagination enables empathy with others, as Shelley said. It shows us important connections and relationships. It makes us aware of beauty. The education of the imagination is one of our most important responsibilities as we develop, Austen would insist. But the imagination can curse as well as bless. There are some instances of imagination gone wrong, by excess, by indulgence, by its own intrinsic failure to live up to its promises. Consider the successes and failures of the imagination in these two novels. What guidance does Austen give us in preventing an errant imagination?

Option C: Modes of Generosity in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*

For Austen much of a person's character can be revealed by their impulses of generosity. How fully does one person understand the needs of another and how well can they serve those needs through acts of generosity. Gift-giving is one form of generosity. But so is patience, good-listening, true concern for what best affects the other. By contrast some of Austen's characters are purely intent on their own self-aggrandizement. Examine some key instances of generosity or its absence and reflect on how one's interaction with others defines oneself. Would Austen say it is possible to be too generous?

Three to five pages, typed, double-spaced, plus works cited, if relevant. Due Wednesday, March 4th.