I’ve increasingly thought of literature as iterative collaboration between writer and reader. Glimpsing patterns in disparate texts illuminates the writer’s need to retell fundamental stories; yet the nuances of their engagement with structures of narrative, and the reader’s engagement with this, in turn, creates something wonderful. You can laugh at a joke told in 1387 (alongside a Victorian); share the sadness of a Restoration poet; gain insight, ultimately, into a thousand minds and eras. This complexity excites me; I feel there’s so much in the texts I study that I have yet to discover.

Viewing literature as a continuing dialogue inspires me to investigate iteration and stereotype. An AEP seminar on adapting Shakespeare reframed ‘Othello’ as an adaptation both in its reliance on earlier texts and as a play inherently transformed through production. Thompson’s compelling account of ‘Othello’s Bronze Age’ led me to consider how later regressive whitewashing frames the play’s portrayal of racial difference as originally radically sympathetic and nuanced. ‘The Merchant of Venice’ and ‘The Jew of Malta’ contextualised this depiction, furthering my view that though 'Othello' draws from monolithic traditions relegating minority characters to buffoonery and villainy, Shakespeare's emphasis on characters’ commonalities is fascinatingly atypical and speaks to the radical humanity of his work.

I channelled my focus on reader interaction with texts into my EPQ, an analysis of popular online poetry’s parallels with non-poetic online communication. Navigating the unfamiliar worlds of sociolinguistics and literary critique, I examined stylistic similarities in order to interrogate the definition of poetry. Frustrated by scholarship which seemed only to ignore or denigrate, I evaluated the critical discourse around popular online poetics, crystallising my ideas about constructive literary criticism—conclusions I was able to review and challenge with my peers in my final presentation.

Co-leading my school's MythSoc, where I focus on the development of narratives from early oral tradition to implementation in modern culture, has solidified this view of collaborative, cyclical narrative. In researching vampires, I linked texts as diverse as Philostratus' proto-bloodsuckers and Polidori’s Gothic codification, reflecting on the evolving need to (monstrously) articulate social fears. I’m especially enthralled by this role's apotheosis in 'Dracula'; Stoker’s opposition of the ambiguously symbolic alien and aesthetically progressive protagonists who ultimately enforce the repressive status quo is a perfect tension of progress and tradition mirroring fin-de-siecle apprehension.

Studying History has revealed how narrative shapes retrospective construction of the past. Inversely, MythSoc underscores the indivisibility of narrative from social context. Reading recent reinterpretations of the Iliad, for example, I was struck by their struggle to recontextualise the epic by overcoming its alien cultural values. The society enables me to collaborate academically, coordinating and presenting theses with my co-leaders, as well as managing individual research!

Managing my studies around a part-time job and volunteering as a Brownie Leader and school Community Lead has developed my empathy, commitment and cooperation, crucial skills for a successful English student. I also enjoy creative writing, which I see as an extension of examining texts. My short story ‘Bite’, a consideration of the way demonisation of marginalised people in vampire literature obscures genuine vulnerability, was shortlisted for BBC YWA; I was gently banned from the Scottish Book Trust’s flash fiction contest for winning too many times; I took part in NT’s New Views with a Faustian satire on the wellness industry’s exploitation of insecurity for profit. As a writer, I approach literature as both consciously and unconsciously crafted work, which I'm keen to develop at degree-level study.