The Symmetrical Tyger: the issues and tensions of teaching Romantic poetry at A-level

by

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Abstract

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<u>at A-level</u>

Poetry is an expression of creativity through language, which has the power to unlock universal themes that link all of humanity. Historically, the genre has been a neglected area of the curriculum that has suffered because of insufficient curriculum time, poor teaching, as well as a deference perpetuated in some circles, which has resulted in the medium being regarded as impenetrable by many pupils and teachers. This research focuses on understanding the place of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and considering student's holistic growth as well as their cerebral development. I explore what poetry experiences students have at A-level, consider the attitude of teachers to Romantic poetry and explore the impact that this has on their students. Working from a constructivist grounded theory perspective, this study considers the attitudes and experiences of a group of year 12 and 13 students in Somerset, England, towards Romantic poetry. Exploring the priorities, interests and understanding of the sample group of A-level students and their teachers, I ultimately conclude that the foundational experiences that students have of poetry are very important and the attitudes exhibited by their teachers can be very influential.

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In memory of the two Ds along with my dear old dad. The sky is a little brighter because of you all.

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Contents

The Symmetrical Tyger: the issues and tensions of teaching Romantic poetry at A-level.

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

(*The Tyger*, Blake, 1794)

(appendix N)

Blake's poem *'The Tyger'* (1794) can be interpreted as an allusion to the vast potential of humanity and its contraries, that can be both frightening and awe inspiring. In achieving the classical quality of 'symmetry' that was associated with virtues and beautiful works of art, the mighty tiger that can be ferocious and unstable, can achieve serenity and balance. In this study, the tiger metaphorically represents both the need for A-level students to achieve an equilibrium between academic achievement and holistic growth, and the necessity for teaching practitioners, keen to facilitate exam requirements, to foster an appreciation of poetry. The aim of this thesis is to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement. For many English teachers, teaching Romantic poetry reveals challenges that need to be understood. Working from a constructivist grounded theory perspective, this study explores the issues and tensions that surround the teaching and learning of Romantic poetry and seeks to implement findings that resonate with students to improve existing practice (Charmaz, 2014).

Romantic poetry is now a compulsory part of literature at key stage 4 and an important foundation for the study of poetry at key stage 5. In 2015, government policy brought about changes to the English literature GCSE and A-level curriculums, which 'set tougher minimum standards for schools' by making the requirements more 'rigorous' (Gove, 2013). To create equality and raise ambition in our education system based on a 'belief that any child – and every child – can succeed… nothing is too good for the children of this country' (Gove, February 2014), is laudable. Responding to 'commentators [who had] … lamented … entrenched illiteracy… [and] the flight from rigour' (Gove, 2013), new GCSE specifications stipulate fifteen poems need to be studied from 1789 onwards, with a specific focus on Romantic poetry. However, perhaps surprisingly when you consider students have chosen to study A-level, the AQA A-level syllabus (B) specifies only two poetry texts must be studied, suggesting a reluctance to prescribe poetry. Whilst not limited to Romantic poetry, the Romantics represent half of the named choices. The National Curriculum highlights the importance of reading a variety of texts that are of 'high quality, intellectually challenging, and substantial' (DfE, 2013); nevertheless, judgements of worth are always subjective and understanding attitudes surrounding Romantic poetry may help to make it more accessible as part of A-level literature.

As part of AQA syllabus (B), students study selected works by William Blake and John Keats. I would argue Romantic poetry's concern with the universal questions of life and the importance of free thinking, transcend the temporal conflicts that inspired much writing at the time, and keep Romantic poetry relevant today. Blake, aware of the contraries of human existence, believed that innocence and experience are inseparable from each other, as are good and evil, love and hate, generosity and greed, honesty and corruption. His focus on humanitarian issues and contemporary injustice recognises that one force works against the other, and strikes a chord with current societal issues by highlighting the perennial frailties of mankind and the need to think independently about how we respond to injustice. Blake explores his interest in slavery and oppression in the poem '*The Little Black Boy'* (appendix R), censuring the conditioned response of a child who describes himself as 'black as if bereaved of light' yearning only for equality in heaven. Having been brought up to believe in his own secondary status, Blake is critical of teachings that weaken an individual's agency to effect change. Similarly, he draws attention to abuse of power and a lack of compassion shown to 'The *Chimney Sweeper'* (appendix S), whose innocence is exploited firstly by his own father who ' sold' him while his tongue 'Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!" ' (line 3). Forced into 'coffins of black' (line 12) the sweeps have no choice but to risk their lives encouraged by promises of heavenly rewards if they are ' good boy[s]' and do as expected (line 19). Critical of hypocritical institutions that tolerate the exploitation of vulnerable persons, '*London'* and both '*Holy Thursday'* poems draw attention to the warped values of institutions like the Church that tolerate and benefit from poverty. Because charity is a necessity, ordinary people are condemned to a life of compliance constrained by 'mind-forg'd manacles' (London, see appendix Q) that limit their imaginations and attempts to break free from institutional indoctrination.

The Romantics interest in creativity and the potential of the imagination were further explored by Keats who used aspects of tragedy to indicate life ultimately ends and that we must go beyond the physical to find true knowledge through sensation. The eponymous poem '*Lamia*' (appendix K) tells of her doomed relationship as she falls 'into a swooning love' with Lycius, her true nature constrained by her 'serpent prison-house' facade. Allegorically, Lamia's haste in falling in love foreshadows the relationships speedy conclusion and emphasises the tension between the polarities of appearance and reality. Critical of the 'touch of cold philosophy' (Part 2, lines 229-38) that equates everything to scientific accounts and measurable entities, nature and the quest for truth through creative impulses are valued. Despite any sympathy we may feel for Lamia, she is associated with evil and trickery through the snake image, presenting 'beauty' as transitory Keats warns it should be scrutinised. Likewise, a sense of destiny in '*Isabella; or the pot of basil*' (appendix J) describes the doomed relationship of Lorenzo the 'murder'd man', and Isabella, 'Imploring for her Basil to the last' (line 498). Love is described as painful, a 'malady' and a 'sick longing', suggesting emotion is something harmful and potentially dangerous. Exploring the oppositions of beauty and revulsion, the poem captures the prevailing turbulence of the time whilst exposing a story of male domination and the importance of social standing. '*La Belle Dame sans Merci*' (appendix M) uses setting to tell us about the inevitable fate of the knight in a 'wither'd' 'sedge' with 'no birds sing[ing]', unconsciously framing societal instability .The cyclical nature of the poem represents the futility of a landscape devoid of life 'on the cold hill's side' whilst the knight 'palely loiter[s]' awaiting his unavoidable fate. Exploring the transience of life, Keats saw individuality and originality as important to ensure self-expression, important themes explored throughout Romantic poetry and relevant for young people making their way in life.

Exploring the position of poetry within the curriculum, its transformative and reflective quality (Shelly, 1840; Arnold, 1880; Van Buskirk and London, 2008) facilitates 'see[ing] as deeply as possible, as widely as possible, as accurately as possible' (Berry, 2011, p.14), which can have immeasurable benefits for secondary school students' reflexivity. Poetry, like Romanticism, has many dimensions and resists attempts to restrict it to a set criteria (Pirrie, 1994; Goia, 1998; Rosen, 1998; Brownjohn, 1994). As poetry is 'above all a concentration of the *power* of language, which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe' (Rich, 1995, p.248), that encapsulates the 'human soul, entire, squeezed like a lemon or lime, drop by drop into atomic words' (Hughes in Rampersad and Knopf, 1994, p.4), Romantic poetry requires exploration on a personal level and resists the 'depositing' of knowledge through instruction (Freire, 2010). Engaging with the aural and oral as well as the visual, poetry 'is to be heard… [as] it lies dead on the page, until some voice brings it to life' (Bunting, 2009, p.42). Appealing to the essence of what it is to be human, poetry gives voice to emotion and experience, which can result in profound knowledge (HMI, 1987; Rosen, 1998; Lambirth, 2004). Since poetry has such a significant impact on our relationship with language, how we communicate and how we express ourselves, its importance within the National Curriculum cannot be overstated. As members of society, students' experience of poetry is of huge consequence as 'we will all profit by or pay for what [students] become' (Baldwin, in Porton, 2014).

Promoting progressive liberal ideals that underpin our relationship with society (Arnold, 2016 [1880]), this study explores the factors that affect how Romantic poetry is viewed. Arguably in the uncertain reality of Brexit Britain, there is much we can learn from the Romantics who successfully navigated the 'revolutionary movement of [their] age' (Halpin, 2007, p.5), and Romantic poets, who deal with the universal truths of existence, are more

relevant than ever. In this thesis, I use a grounded theory approach to investigate the place of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum by exploring emerging issues and tensions that may affect student engagement. For many English teachers, teaching Romantic poetry reveals challenges that need to be understood to allow our students to gain the most benefit from their studies. In this thesis I explain the process undertaken and explore possible implications. Firstly, the methodology describes the methods used in this study; secondly, the literature review explores the extant literature related to emerging themes; furthermore, the data analysis analyses the data used to inform this study; moreover, the conclusion discusses the findings and suggests practical steps that can be taken to improve students' experience of Romantic poetry at A-level.

Chapter 2: Methodology

> Knowing a fact is not something that one does; it is a condition that one has come to occupy in relation to information   (Rescher, 2003, p.xvi).

The Romantics, as progressive thinkers, believed in the importance of education, which should be active and integrated, to ensure 'comprehensive sense' can be made of learning experiences (Halpin, 2007, p.68). To achieve my central objective of improved teaching and learning of Romantic poetry at A-level (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004) by exploring Romantic poetry's place in the curriculum, coherent research design illuminated the constructed reality of individuals (Denscombe, 2010) within the specific context of a comprehensive school in Somerset (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Whilst empirical data should guide 'emerging theory' because research is 'constructed' and not discovered (Denscombe, 2003, p.124), qualitative data was systematically collected through open-ended questioning and observations, and reflexively directed the theory (Charmaz, 2014, p.13). This chapter describes the overt processes undertaken to explore the experiences of eight A-level English literature students studying Romantic poetry and eight teachers, four of whom teach A-level. By outlining the philosophical assumptions at the heart of this research and the paradigm of inquiry, I explore the implications of 'a mixture of sensations, feelings, images and ideas' as suggested by the data (Dymoke et al., 2015, p.18). This chapter describes: how data was collected to help reveal implicit meaning; how the actors in the sample group were chosen; the ethical considerations adhered to before the research began; the methods employed to carry out the research; the techniques used to analyse the collected data.

<u>Type of enquiry</u>

> All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied
>
> *(*Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.22).

As part of a small-scale emergent study 'allow[ing] the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data' (Martin and Turner 1986, p.141), I used constructivist grounded theory (CGT) which facilitates the analysis of emerging issues (Charmaz, 2014). This exploratory research that does not claim to be exhaustive or universally applicable (Denscombe, 2012), but is none-the-less pertinent and insightful for the participants studying or teaching Romantic poetry at A-level, investigated associated issues and tensions linked to the process. Situated within the 'interpretivist' paradigm of inquiry in which meaning is constructed by the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2014; Mills, Bonner, and Francis, 2006), this research did not have a hypothesis and aimed to arrive at holistic understanding of human experience and to 'hear [data] and understand' meaning in context (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.17), through the examination of multiple realities that exist and are subjective in nature. Taking place within a natural setting, this research fits into the critical realist 'post-positivist' paradigm that draws upon empiricism (Burr, 2003), asserting that knowledge is generated from experiences and the researcher learns from the research (Wolcott, 1990).

Grounded theory (GT) and ethnography are research methodologies that use participant observers - by which I mean the observer participates in the normal routines of the people under observation (Denscombe, 2010). Though Charmaz accepts the contention that some

ethnographers have always used grounded theory methods in their work (2014, p.278), she argues grounded theory method (GTM) provides a codified process with specific methods that encourage 'rigor and efficiency that earlier ethnographic studies typically lacked' (ibid, p.278). Both methodologies share philosophical roots in symbolic interactionism that sees 'human actions as constructing self, situation, and society' (Charmaz, 2014, p.262), which is pertinent to understanding how the attitudes of both the students and teachers towards poetry have been influenced by others. Whilst ethnography tries to understand the significance a specific culture 'attaches to symbols in organizing and interpreting their life experiences' (Parse, 2001, p. 127), GT generates substantive theory about the relationship between human agency and 'what we ask, see, and tell' that can inform classroom practice (Charmaz, 2014, p.284). Ethnography aims to describe all observed phenomenon to 'locate the ethnography within a theoretical context' which can result in an enormous amount of data (Denscombe, 2003, p.87); whereas, GT integrates data collection and analysis through a narrower focus on specific phenomenon allowing the construction of coherent theory which was useful for this study. Because ethnography requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the participants' world for lengthy periods which can shift research focus from 'passive observation to full participation' (Charmaz, 2014, p.36), ethically and practically a GT approach was an appropriate tool for this study.

Ontologically and epistemologically, this study takes a relativist position that believes reality is socially constructed and considers the significance of context (Annells, 1996; Denscombe, 2010). Acknowledging that we all come with preconceived notions and so struggle to be 'neutral observer[s] and value-free expert[s]' (Charmaz, 2014, p.13), beliefs are created and given worth (Gordon, 2009). Unlike phenomenological research that starts with a research question, the 'generate[d] or discover[ed]' theory was 'grounded' in the emerging data'

(Creswell, 1998, p.56). As individuals are 'socially constructed and constructing' (Sayer, 1997, p.454), once themes started to emerge from the data, 'open-questions' became more focused. Qualitative data was collected through a series of unstructured interviews and classroom observations, which allowed conceptualization of ideas to emerge through heuristic procedures that exploited opportunities that arose within the teaching context (Charmaz, 2014; Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont, 2003). An 'inductive analytical approach' to emerging data allows theory to come to the surface which can be tested against further responses (Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Martin and Tuner, 1986; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) using iterative strategies that foster the interaction between data and analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Glaser, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Taking a constructivist approach I acknowledge the role of the researcher in constructing theory from identified areas of significance, which are refined through the constant comparison of the data, resulting in a constructed 'truth… through dialogue' (Ritchie and Rigano, 2001, p.752).

Justifying Grounded Theory

Writing theory based on data gathered from small samples (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010, p. 177) and simplifying complex phenomena into subjective codes (Denscombe, 2010), the value of GT has been scrutinized. As an inductive research tool, that develops theory from empirical data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), GT provides a systematic framework that 'can be used for conceptualizing underlying causal issues, rather than merely describing them' (Allan, 2007, p.9) that are pertinent to distinct populations. Adopting a GT approach allowed me to explore what factors affected sixth form students' engagement with Romantic poetry and identify practical measures that could improve practice.

Although both Glaser and Strauss initially attempted to explore phenomena through qualitative inquiry that exploited explanatory theoretical frameworks. Glaser felt the use of a 'conditional matrix' limited the inductive process and influenced the theoretical process (Charmaz, 2014). The prescriptive steps of 'open coding', 'axial coding', 'selective coding' and 'coding for process' as favoured by Strauss and Corbin, have been criticised for not allowing 'the data …to speak for itself' (Glaser, 1992:19). Strauss's framework for analysing qualitative data has been critiqued as forcing codes upon data rather than allowing categories to emerge; however, Glaser's approach has been criticised for seeking to explore data inductively without using extant theory (Layder, 1998). Other charges levelled at GT include not allowing 'precise planning' as the researcher cannot predict 'the nature [or size] of the sample' because of the nature of the sampling process (Denscombe, 2010, p.122). However, using a paradigm that is ontologically, epistemically and methodically constructivist, CGT does not 'divorce the explanation of the situation being studied from broader contextual factors' and considers the applied relevance of particular findings to a concrete situation (Denscombe, 2010, p.122). Acknowledging that researchers are affected by prior experiences and knowledge (Denscombe, 2010; Charmaz, 2014), the data produced in this study is useful for understanding phenomena within a specific context and generating relevant conceptual theory (Glaser, 1978/1992; Glaser and Straus, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

Although an interpretive theory approach has been criticised for the close relationship that can develop between the subject and the researcher, which could influence perception and result in a failure of objectivity, reflexivity can give focus to analysis and guard against partiality. As the researcher is not neutral, it is important to reflect on how the researchers' values and preconceptions shape the research process within the context. Like the Romantics, a Straussian approach views individuals as 'active agents in their lives and in

their worlds' (Charmaz, 2014, p.9), emphasizing a 'constructed reality' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) in which outside influences are not considered when data is being analysed (Denscombe, 2010). As a teacher researcher with a vested interest in the results of my study, my objectivity can be called into question, and as a participant of an 'already interpreted world' (Cohen *et al.*, 2009) I would argue that research is always contextually influenced by 'embedded' overtones (Adler and Adler, 1987), as language is a human creation loaded with value, expectation and connotation, and so no theory can be thought of as neutral or without partiality (Popkewitz, 1984, p.183). Nevertheless, the constant comparison of focused codes refines analysis and moves description into conceptualisation. CGT understands the researcher's perspective is influenced by environmental factors, but their perspective also helps construct reality and so must be considered as part of the research experience, as well as the experiences of the participants.

Whilst recognising the collection of data can be 'painstaking' (Glaser 1978, p.16), a systematic approach helped synthesize large amounts of data, making the findings of this study valuable and trustworthy (Newby, 2014). A pragmatic focus on 'understanding and improving matters in terms of interpersonal relations' that are 'grounded in reality' make CGT an appropriate methodology for this exploratory research (Denscombe, 2010, p.121). Whilst a Glaserian GT approach maintains that the researcher should avoid 'contaminating' the data with preconceived ideas by reading extant literature before the generation of theory, Straussian GT acknowledges the researcher will have preconceptions but must maintain objectivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thus, rather than providing 'a window on reality… the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts' (Charmaz in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.524), making CGT an appropriate methodology for this research. Meaning is co-constructed by the participant and

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the researcher iteratively (Charmaz, 2014) and as this research seeks to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, CGT facilitates the conceptualisation of underlying phenomenon by illuminating what is important to all participants to ensure students are enriched holistically (Allan, 2007). Although I believe that meaning is constructed rather than discovered, it is important that what is relevant is allowed to emerge from the data through 'open, focused and theoretical coding at incremental levels of abstraction' rather than constrained by artificial edifices (Charmaz, 2014).

GT 'offers a theory that provides more accurate reflections of relationships and influences' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.250) and contextualizes synthesized data systematically. The definitive purpose of identifying issues and tensions that surround the teaching of Romantic poetry, is to construct theory about how it can be taught well at A-level by understanding its position in the curriculum. To this end, CGT supports the Romantics' endeavours to improve education through progressive measures that are sensitive to situational contexts rather than shoehorning experiences into homogenized learning and develop 'children's imaginative and aesthetic lives' (DES and WO, 1989). A CGT perspective encourages flexible, emergent conceptualizations that 'attend to what we hear, see, and sense while gathering data' (Charmaz, 2014, p.3), and allow the researcher to study micro issues that can be related to larger issues, and develop theory, based on real events in real places, to 'discover what is relevant' to the sample (Cohen *et al.,* 2009, p.491). Interpretative theories consider environmental factors, which social context affects and influences, resulting in a construction of reality that is 'inseparable from social reality' (Charmaz, 2014, p.14). Accordingly, a CGT approach allows this piece of research to explore the sample group's perceptions of Romantic poetry and find out 'what is relevant' to them (Cohen *et al.,* 2009)

to ensure practice in the classroom can be adapted where necessary to improve the educational experience of this group of students, as well as construct theory which may be relevant to future cohorts. In spite of any criticisms about GT research strategies ('critics often attack assumptions and approaches that pertain to one version of grounded theory but not all' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 242)), because a CGT approach is rigorous in nature (Urquhart, 2001, p.27), and allows theory to be constructed through a 'complex array of variables' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 237), it is a suitable method for this study.

Research strategy

A constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach allowed me to use GT strategies systematically to decipher meaning and make analytic sense of data, whilst recognising the researcher's subjective viewpoint (Charmaz, 2014). Interpretative theories that consider how actors construct their realities by articulating their circumstances and the affect these accounts can have on ensuing actions and behaviours, facilitated the simultaneous immersion in and analysis of, collected data. A pragmatic perspective that assumes that people construct their identity (Charmaz, 2014), allowed inductive research to determine 'what [was] relevant' to the A-level students and their teachers in my study (Cohen *et al.*, 2009) and so engage with the Romantic ideals of progressive education (Halpin, 2007) that develop 'personal and social experiences worth sharing' (Dixon, 2009, p.244) .

With an aim of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and the factors that affect student engagement to generate new theory, allowing the 'researcher [to] derive[s] a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants' (Creswell, 2009, p13), information gathered inductively was analysed and re-analysed to explore the relevance of emerging codes. Using a heuristic focus

(Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont, 2003), guided by students' priorities (Halpin, 2007, p.48), analytic questions refined emerging codes (Charmaz, 2014). During each cycle of information gathering, comparisons made across texts moved theory development forward. To ensure 'the child [is] at the centre of the educational stage' (Peters, 1981, p.15) reflexive strategies helped to unpick my thoughts about the emerging themes. As an analytic tool, memos helped me to identify what was important to the learning experience, recognise questions that arose from the data, as well as reflect on the developing picture and my role within the process (Charmaz, 2006, p.72). Memos written during the theoretical sampling process assisted my identification of gaps in the data, which were addressed in subsequent interviews (appendix D).

Although Glaser (1992) believed literature should be avoided in entirety until research is completed because preconceived notions can intrude on theory development, a constructivist GT approach recognises that theory should be allowed to emerge from the data but the researcher should be allowed to approach the literature review flexibly (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher influences the research that is 'created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data' and 'cannot stand outside' of their experiences and understanding (Charmaz, 2014, p.239). It has been argued that because researchers have been exposed to extant concepts as part of their professional routines and wider experiences (Charmaz, 2006), delaying the literature review hinders theoretical sensitivity, which can help guide theoretical sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As an English teacher it is disingenuous to suggest I will not have been exposed to a variety of theories and literature related to my focus area (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014), which may reveal gaps in substantive research (Charmaz, 2014). To ensure my theory remained grounded and was not constrained by prior reading, some extant reading

took place at an early stage to rationalise my methodology and safeguard the originality of my focus (Charmaz, 2006, p.168), but a full literature review was not carried out before my data had been collected and analysed (Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The integrity of my research was maintained by not engaging with 'previous theories and concepts to make sense of the data and… [remaining] open to discovering new factors of relevance'(Denscombe, 2010, p.108) and a 'commitment to analyze what [I] actually observe[d]' (Charmaz, 1990, p.1162), to further facilitate sixth formers' engagement with Romantic poetry.

Other research questions

As the researcher should conduct research without 'preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, 'relevancies' in concepts and hypotheses' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.33), a deductive approach to the data facilitated the emergence of open, focused and theoretical codes. As supplementary questions are not part of a GT approach, it was only possible to identify tentative areas of interest that I used to guide the investigation and ensure my research focus was not too broad or unwieldly as to hamper the production of theory.

1) What part does the study of Romantic poetry play in helping a student decide whether to study A-level English literature?
2) Do teachers' attitudes affect how students perceive the genre?
3) Do students enjoy Romantic poetry and why do they study it?

With the objective of constructing inductive theory, initial interview questions were guided by research areas that generated data, which was 'systematically obtain[ed] and analyz[ed]' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.1). To safeguard rigorous inquiry, the adoption of a reflexive

approach that followed GT guidelines (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Urquhart, 2002), helped direct subsequent interview questions, which were similarly steered by student and teacher response. Through the systematic and responsive cycles of theoretical sampling, coding and constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), what was pertinent to how the sample group felt about Romantic poetry was revealed, which helped 'construct[ed] a theory *grounded* in [the] data' (Charmaz, 2014, p.1).

Sampling strategy

Despite the subjective nature of theory construction as we 'deduc[e] what is going on based on data but also based on our reading of that data along with our assumptions about the nature of life' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 136), the rigor of the study was upheld through the thorough application of the analytic procedures of CGT (Lincoln and Guba [2000] in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). To understand 'how' and 'why' students 'view their situations', the sampling process facilitated the creation and evolution of conceptual theory (Charmaz, 2014, p.239). Because germane issues emerge from the data, the size of the sample was not predetermined but evolved from the interview process.

As 'expert participants, with rich, extensive prior experience' of how poetry is taught in school (Razavi and Iverson, 2006, p.461), when data collection commenced, students studying literature were asked whether they would be prepared to take part in my research. Across two year 12 classes who were going into year 13, nine of the sixteen students returned consent forms and agreed in principle to take part. Students were approached at the start of the summer term as I hoped that after they had taken their AS literature examinations a suitable window of opportunity would allow me to conduct interviews at convenient times that would not impact them adversely. Those that agreed, filled in a questionnaire about

their feelings about poetry and their exposure to the genre (appendix B). Pragmatically, based on how much detail they included in their answers, a general impression of willingness to express ideas in class and differing levels of engagement with poetry, an initial purposeful sample of four students were selected. To 'reach saturation [by]… [m]aximiz[ing] differences in… [the] groups in order to maximize the varieties of data bearing on the category' to create diverse research areas, individuals were asked to take part in an interview (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.62). Although the questionnaire was not analysed for data as part of this study, it did feed into my opening prepared questions: 'You named the poem/ poet_____ as a poem/ poet that you have enjoyed. What was it about it that you enjoyed?'; 'You said you liked reading/ don't like reading – what was the last thing you read?'; 'Do you/ have you ever read poetry outside of school?'. Teachers who taught poetry across the key stages and represented a broad spectrum of experience, were approached directly and all agreed to take part. Teachers were not asked to fill in a questionnaire as I felt this would be viewed as an administrative burden that might affect individual's willingness to be involved. Questions that were asked at the start of the semi-structured interview can be seen in appendix C.

Collection method

Initial interviews were analysed and each line was coded with a node that categorized what it was about (appendix F). Memoing on the nodes helped construct several themes that encapsulate categories that were pertinent to the students and teachers such as: lacking confidence; expressing reticence to speak out loud; expressing emotion; continuing family traditions; wanting to fulfil expectations / wanting to rebel against expectations; fitting in with friends; seeing A-levels as a steppingstone / having no direction and not knowing where A-levels were leading; lacking interest / disliking poetry (see appendix G). To establish

'What is this data a study of?' (Glaser, 1978, p.57), an additional two students were interviewed to develop and check the veracity of emerging themes. NVivo helped identify categories that appeared across interviews and analysis of the data revealed additional themes of interest which were checked with previously collected data in a process of constant comparison to 'decide what data to collect next and where to find [it], in order to develop … theory as it emerges' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.45)**.** Developing theory was checked against observations made in field notes, which helped provide additional elucidation to identified focused codes and challenge others in a process that helped to refine categories (see appendix H). The analysis revealed that a strategic engagement with poetry to achieve and an anxiety about talking about emotions were pertinent to many of the sample. In line with CGT design:

> …the constructivist continuously seeks to refine and extend the design - to help it unfold. As each sample is selected, each datum recorded, and each element of the joint construction devised, the design itself can become more focused. As the constructivist enquirer becomes better acquainted with what is salient, the sample becomes more directed; the data analysis more directed, the construction more definitive
>
> (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 180).

At the start of the new academic year, all three members of the comparatively small incoming year 12 literature class were asked if they would be prepared to take part in the study by filling in a poetry questionnaire, and all agreed. To facilitate the identification of variation and to develop concepts that illuminated 'emergent ideas' that directed my findings (Charmaz, 2014, p.106), additional interviews were arranged. Another two students were interviewed using open questions and individuals who took part in previous interviews were interviewed again. To refine emerging codes 8 students and 8 teachers were interviewed in total; all students were interviewed at least twice, whilst 2 students were interviewed three times each and 2 students (who were 'English Ambassadors' and took part in a workshop debrief having run poetry workshops for younger students), were interviewed four times, one of which was a joint interview (appendix D). Only one teacher was interviewed twice

and another three times, both of whom taught A-level. Once the identified categories were saturated as new data failed to offer additional insight to the core categories (Charmaz, 2014) and no new themes emerged from the data, conceptual analysis revealed what was important to the participants of the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Using NVivo: Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and then analysed for initial codes. As 'language underwrites all our ideas of the world' (Hassan, 2003, p.4) reflecting reality and how we 'construct' our understanding of it (Gee, 2005, p.97), how students and teachers expressed their ideas was pertinent to this study. Focusing on how sixth form students articulated their experiences of Romantic poetry, the inductive process of theoretical sampling allowed new theory about the significance of poetry to develop (Flick, 1998; Glaser, 2001; Cohen et al, 2009), and the use of computer software (NVivo) helped organise the data and keep track of emerging codes. Providing a flexible platform on which to store data, it was easily navigable to ensure information could be accessed systematically and analytically. Emerging categories were identified from the language used in memos, interviews and observations (Denscombe, 2010), that could be continually revisited to establish their significance (Charmaz, 2014). Because NVivo does not generate codes it simply helps organise the data, it was an appropriate program to use for this research as it supports data analysis by allowing the researcher to co-construct meaning with participants.

NVivo was used to collate nodes, which are identified categories on a particular theme, within the data. Early in the research I ran a word frequency query to identify possible themes which identified significant words that occurred several times such as: enjoyment, reason, interesting, which were explored in more detail in follow up interviews. Recording

my thoughts in memos about the crossover relationship that existed between different codes, many pieces of data had more than one node attributed to them which was made easier to navigate through the computer software which would have been cumbersome if all the coding had been notated by hand. Whilst NVivo can generate diagrams and illustrate the relationship between codes, as part of my theory construction the act of drawing up diagrams manually helped me to reflect on the relationship between emerging codes and distil my observations through memos (appendix I). Coding on nodes were systematically collapsed into conceptual codes and further rationalised through the process of theoretical coding (appendix I.2, I.3)

Data collection context

Data was collected within the school in which I teach, between April 2016 and September 2016. Because year 12 students were preparing for AS examinations until late May, four teachers were interviewed before I carried out my first student interview. Part of a mixed comprehensive school in rural Somerset, the sixth form has 67 students. The subjects English literature and English language are offered at A-level and attract similar numbers of pupils. Timetabling of the subjects means that both classes happen at the same time, and so at present it is impossible for a pupil to study both subjects. As part of the AQA literature A-level (B syllabus), students study two Romantic poets: John Keats and William Blake, as well as poetry that they choose themselves as part of their non-exam assessment (NEA). A series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews recorded in school, field notes collected within my teaching room and lesson observations of students taught by another teacher in the school, generated theoretical categories that were refined by the sampling process. Teachers were interviewed at a time that was convenient for them – both before and after school. Only one teacher had to reschedule an interview because an unexpected work

commitment transpired during the course of the day. Likewise, interviews were arranged with students at times that were the most convenient for them. One student did not turn up to a prearranged interview but having forgotten the appointment emailed me to rearrange it at another time that was convenient for them.

Sample group

All students in the sample were seventeen and eighteen years old and were studying English literature. Out of twenty-two students studying A level literature in Year 12 and 13 (split over three classes with 2 classes in Year 13), twelve students agreed to take part, from which the interviewed sample was chosen. Although I taught some of the A level students selected, initially I did not teach poetry to any of the students. By the time select individuals were interviewed for a third time, I was revising Blake with the Year 13s, as part of their lesson. All teachers approached agreed to take part, representing a wealth of teaching experiences ranging from several months to twenty-four years. Although only four of the eight teachers were currently teaching A-level, all teachers taught poetry as part of the curriculum lower down the school. Two of the teachers, although vastly experienced, were not subject specialists. Maintaining the integrity of CGT as a research tool, the sampling process facilitated the collection of data and analytic abstraction of theory by following emergent categories, revealing discrepancy and identifying gaps (Charmaz, 2006).

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues should be rooted in research and 'reflected in the moral stance taken by the researcher   (Newby, 2014, p.51).

Collecting data as a participant-observer allows the researcher to explore everyday

issues whilst participating in the routines of the people studied in a natural setting (Mac

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an Ghaill, 1996). Reducing the degree to which the natural environment is disturbed by research (Hargreaves, 1967, p.193) the researcher can get to grips with what is really going on. The role can pose ethical issues if research is undertaken covertly without disclosure; however, participant as observer research, appropriate for most school based investigations, ensures informants are aware of the research which can help build theory and improve practice (Denscombe, 2010). Whilst awareness of research can cause changes in behaviour if the naturalness of the setting is not sufficiently established before the outset of the research, the participant as observer facilitates understanding situations from the point of view of participants. The 'closeness and intimacy' of participant observation creates the danger of confidential material being inadvertently exposed to the researcher (Denscombe, 2010, p.205). In such circumstances, if material disclosed is used, the researcher must anonymise material to safeguard individuals and 'ensure that no one suffers as a result' (ibid, 2010, p.205).

With the aim of 'extend[ing] knowledge' and 'understanding' the place of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum (BERA, 2018, p.3), ethical principles ensured my approach 'maximis[ed] benefits and minimis[ed] any risk or harm' to those taking part (ibid, 2018, p. 8). The ethical imperative upon a teacher-researcher, as a participant-observer, is to fulfil the professional demands of a teacher and a researcher, and to ensure neither role is compromised (Taber, 2007). The power imbalance of student/teacher relationships needs to be addressed to ensure students do not feel compelled to take part (ibid, 2007, p.139). As a teacher–researcher I have a responsibility to consider if there are any potential risks for those taking part in my research and equally if those not choosing to take part would be disadvantaged in any

way. With this in mind, my research was designed to ensure participating in the research would not be onerous for the respondents as it did not make 'excessive demands' on their time, and conducted over a relatively short timeframe there was no pressure of a long-term commitment to the research (BERA, 2018, p.19). Interviews were driven by the respondent's responses so there was no expectation that individuals respond in a particular way and although discussions considered students' attitudes towards various issues connected to the syllabus, there was no explicit educational instruction given that would advantage those involved. Because there was no quantifiable benefit as a result of taking part in the research apart from supplementary knowledge and a more conscious engagement with poetry, those who chose not to take part were not disadvantaged by the research either.

In accordance with non-hierarchical structures and negotiation (Charmaz, 2006), decisions about where and when interviews should take place were agreed upon by the researcher and the interviewee. In the pursuit of ethical data collection, researchers must be 'sensitiv(e) to the rights of others' which can mean that the choices open to a researcher are limited 'in the pursuit of truth' (Bulmer and Ocloo in Walford, 2010, p.377). The head teacher of the school gave consent to carry out the investigation but specified that sixth form participants must be asked for their consent to take part, which was sought before the research began. Data was collected in accordance with BERA guidelines (2018). Because the researcher has responsibility to participants who 'have the right to be informed about aims, purposes and likely publication of findings' (BERA, 2018), all participants were asked for their oral voluntary informed consent, by which I mean students were furnished with information about the project to explain the facts of the investigation, which potential participants used to decide whether they wanted to take part of not (Cohen *et al*., 2009), and were informed

that they had the right to withdraw at any time if they so wished.

Protecting the confidentially and identities of participants at all stages of the research, interviews were anonymous, and the 'best interests' of the young people remained the 'primary consideration' at all times (Article 3 and Article 12 of the United Nations convention on the 'Rights of the Child'). In this way, interviews were arranged around student's timetables at a time chosen by the sample, so as not to encroach on break or lunchtimes. Practical steps were taken to ensure that all aspects of the study were ethically sound and that it was conducted in a non-threatening manner and without causing stress or anxiety. In writing a questionnaire, in addition to the practical issues about when and where students would be given the opportunity to fill them out, the researcher must consider ethical questions about possible harm that can be caused. Badly structured questionnaires may cause worry or anxiety in students who worry about content that they are unfamiliar with that they are asked about. Similarly, interviews that make assumptions about knowledge can leave students feeling vulnerable, without sufficient knowledge and 'diminish their self-esteem' (Cohen *et al.*, 2009, p.63), and the use of leading and intrusive questioning can disenfranchise students, leaving them voiceless and 'invading their privacy' (ibid, 2009, p.63). As the teacher of the class and a participant- observer, it was important that all participants did not 'suffer' during the process, anonymity was maintained and meaningful research that improves the learning experience was generated (Denscombe, 2010). It has been argued that the moral and ethical risks involved in GT research are reduced as the nature of this type of inductive methodological inquiry increases the autonomy of the actors who are in familiar surroundings and allows the researcher less control (Alston and Bowles, 2003).

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Taking part in research can create vulnerability, thus how it is carried out needs to be planned at the outset (Cohen *et al*., 2009). According to the Care Quality Commission safeguarding should protect 'people's health, wellbeing and human rights' whilst allowing them 'to live free from harm, abuse and neglect'. Safeguarding the reputation of institutions as well as the individuals involved, identities should not be disclosed. Having gained fully informed consent from the head teacher (written information about the scope of the project was given and discussed in a meeting in which I explained the research I wanted to carry out), the 'dignity, privacy and interests' of the institution in which I was collecting data needed to be 'respected and protected at all times' as were those of the participants (Cohen *et al*., 2009, p.76). To this end, research findings were considered from the perspective of the institution and participants respectfully, and contentious conclusions were 'handled with sensitivity' ensuring individuals could not be identified or hurt professionally or personally (Cohen *et al*., 2009, p.76). All information about the school and the teachers who taught there was anonymised as any use of data should ensure that no one suffers as a result (Denscombe, 2010). With the consent of participants whose identities were concealed, data was compiled and stored in accordance with the data protection act, which was deleted as soon as it was no longer needed. Pseudonyms were used for participants who were asked to check data gathered in interviews to give them the opportunity to refute, 'dissent or distance themselves from research', as well as withdraw from the process at any point (Cohen *et al.,* 2009, p.77).

<u>Collecting data</u>

The first interview produced 47 codes, which were supplemented by subsequent interviews; however, after 11 teacher interviews and 22 student interviews, no new codes were identified within the data. To ensure the veracity of my research I started my analysis whilst gathering data, using theoretical sampling to provide focus to my data collection. Using line by line coding, I compared events happening in different pieces of data at the same time. Having identified codes that appeared several times, I documented my thoughts about their significance in memos and looked at new and old data to see if there was further evidence. In-vivo codes, that transformed static description into dynamic occurrences, were initially used. Selective coding allowed me to make sense of everyday codes by illuminating what they suggested, and the point of view represented (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). Although theoretical sampling has been criticised for 'produc[ing] a list of 'themes' from which 'somehow theory emerges' (Barbour, 2001, p.1116), a systematic approach to coding and conceptual analysis ensured identified issues that affect student engagement with Romantic poetry were grounded in the data. Theoretical sampling helped to identify which interviews needed to be completed and helped to move theory forward. Thus, in determining the salient issues for the students in my sample, CGT allowed me to explore emergent issues and generate theory originated in the data.

<u>Questionnaire</u>

To help identify my initial sample, a questionnaire was designed to help explore attitudes to poetry and experiences both within and outside of school. Because some participants are more willing to contribute to iterative conceptualisation, purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who were willing to contribute to the data. Whilst collecting and analysing data is time-consuming, some pre-coded questions were used because they were

quick to analyse (Denscombe, 2010) and statement questions allowed students to express 'individual perspectives and experiences' (Patton, 1982, p.163). The questionnaire identified some emerging in vivo categories that fed into the cycles of theoretical sampling. Although omissions in participant's answers and an inability to verify responses is a weakness of this type of data, when used with other types of data the questionnaire was a useful tool to stimulate opinion (Denscombe, 2010).

The questionnaire given to the students was designed with ethical considerations to find out about the respondents' attitudes towards poetry. The head teacher gave permission for the questionnaire to be given to year 12 pupils at the end of dialogic lessons in which teachers were feeding back improvements that could be made on end of unit assessments, before the introduction of poetry units. Thus, taking advantage of teacher agency (Comber and Kamler, 2004) the timing of the questionnaire aimed not to impact on student learning and disadvantage students but focus students thinking on the upcoming unit. Potential respondents from two A-level classes were given information about the research project so that they understood why their thoughts on poetry were being sought, allowing them to make an informed judgement about whether they wanted to fill in the questionnaire (Denscombe, 2010). Because it can be helpful for the researcher to be present as 'it enables any queries or uncertainties to be addressed immediately' (Cohen *et al.*, 2009, p.344), by prior appointment I visited both classes fifteen minutes before the end of the hour long lesson and explained to the students that the information that I was embarking on gathering would explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and seek to discover how Romantic poetry could be taught well. It was made clear that filling in the questionnaire was voluntary and all responses would be confidential and only used by the teacher–researcher for the purposes of identifying individuals to invite to interview to share their opinions in

more detail and did not aim to 'change people's attitudes or provide them with information' that would be denied to others who chose not to take part (Denscombe, 2010, p.144). Students were given the option of completing the questionnaire at home if they preferred; however, only three students who took it away returned it later, the rest choosing to complete it in the time allowed whilst those not completing the survey started to familiarise themselves with the course anthology for the next unit. Students who were added to the sample at the start of the new year in September were given the same information and went through the same process, before they started their first unit of study so as not to distract from their studies.

About half of the students who agreed to take part in the research chose to answer the questionnaire in the lesson. Questions were deliberately short and precise to ensure the task was not arduous, boring or questions could be misinterpreted, which might impact on the quality and efficacy of the answers given (Denscombe, 2010). They consisted of 8 pre-coded and 8 open questions laid out with space for answers on a double sided A4 form (appendix B). Despite making it less easy to make comparisons between respondents, statement questions invited 'authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour' (Cohen *et al.*, 2009, p.330) generating word-based data that was useful for identifying areas of interest in the semi-structured interviews. The questions were designed to avoid leading questions and to encourage respondents to write about their own experience and opinions. In line with questionnaire guidance, questions did not assume knowledge or practices and were ordered with the most basic questions at the beginning to engage respondents with the questionnaire (Denscombe, 2010). The pre-coded questions used semantic differential scales (Osgood *et al.*, 1957) with multiple options to ensure all opinions were represented, required

respondents to circle relevant responses. Quick and easy to answer and analyse, correlated data across questionnaires suggested autonomy was an area of significance that was delved into more closely in the initial interviews (Oppenheim, 1992, p115). Although the lack of personal interaction with the researcher may elicit honest responses, they also offer little opportunity to check the truthfulness of answers which is why the questionnaire was followed up with observations and interviews (Cohen, 2009, p.327).

Observations

Field observations that allow one to record ordinary activities that may not be noticed (Cooper and Schindler, 2001) and access the subject's viewpoint without interpretation, were written up in field notes. As a teacher researcher in the natural learning space of the classroom, I could observe how students interacted with different texts rather than relying on their accounts (Denscombe, 2010). Over a period of three weeks I kept field notes at the end of every revision poetry lesson that I gave my year 12 class, which amounted to 6 lessons. Thereafter, I continued to record memos with insights as they arose during revision sessions. Field notes were also kept for my incoming year 12 class for the duration of the Keats' poetry unit. Lessons that were before break or at the end of the school day allowed me to write my notes up straight away but lessons before another lesson meant that I had to wait until lunch or after school to write down my impressions, which led to me scribbling down key observations during the five minute changeover period between lessons that would remind me of occurrences / impressions of interest that I could reflect on at greater length. However, human memory can be unreliable and accurate field notes can be challenging on the observer. Because a working relationship existed with the classes, I was careful not to make observations intrusive or interfere with learning structures. I observed routine processes manifested by the actions of students and teachers, which were symbolically rich as they created structures within the classroom. For my purposes observations were useful

as they helped me observe '[w]hat's happening here?' (Glaser, 1978), which could be further explored in one-to-one interviews as 'subjectivity is inseparable from social existence' (Charmaz, 2014, p.14). Because '[a]ll is data' (Glaser, 2002), field notes helped illuminate emerging codes and gather rich data about how individuals reacted to different poems (Charmaz, 2014).

In addition to field notes, I observed the year 12 class that I taught, being taught by their other English teacher on two occasions; once when they were in year 12 and again in year 13. The class consisted of 8 pupils and each observation was for one hour each time. The practicalities of timetabling meant I was only able to observe the incoming year 12 class, which had 3 pupils in it, once, for one hour. Nevertheless, all observations allowed me to observe 'what actually happens' in the classroom (Denscombe, 2010, p.192) and provided interesting insights that were explored in more depth during interviews. All lessons were in the student's normal teaching environment and students were aware that I was there as part of my research to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and observe Romantic poetry being taught. The lessons were orally recorded with the agreement of the teacher and students and I also made notes. Although there is a danger that individuals will change their behaviours because they are being watched, which is known as the 'observer effect' (Le Compte and Goetz, 1982), because the students are used to having me in the classroom as their other teacher, my hope was that I would 'observe things as they normally happen' without disruption to the natural setting (Denscombe, 2010, p.193). Carrying out holistic observations with a wide focus that 'go into a situation and observe what is taking place before deciding on its significance' (Cohen *et al*., p.397) rather than focused observations with a criteria of events to observe, allowed events to emerge naturally. To allay

concerns about reliability of data gathered by participant observers because of bias as a result of lack of objectivity (Robson, 2002, p.324-5) and selective memory that is filtered 'through the senses' (Denscombe, 2010, p.193), I sought to corroborate potential insights through the interview process.

Interviews

As grounded theory does not try to prove a hypothesis, open-ended questions allowed relevant data to emerge and participants to converse unimpeded by structured stimuli (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). Guided by emerging themes and theory, this inductive research collected data from unstructured interviews that were simultaneously analysed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Because the aim of this research is to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum by discovering what is important to the interviewees, a flexible approach was important to explore individual's experiences and feelings using some semi-structured questions to stimulate debate. Thus, initially 4 teachers and 4 students were approached to partake in interviews but the sample altered over the course of the research to include 8 teachers and 8 students, who were interviewed between one and four times each over five school months that spanned two academic years (appendix D).

As 'social, interpersonal encounter[s]' (Cohen *et al.*, 2009, p.361), I aimed to create a comfortable environment in which to carry out my interviews; I wanted respondents to feel at ease and happy to express their views. I considered the venue for my interviews carefully as 'good planning, proper preparation and a sensitivity to the complex nature of interaction' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 164) was important to access 'genuine reflection[s]' of peoples' feelings (ibid, 2010, p.163). The library was one setting I considered because it has comfortable furnishings making it feel more relaxed; however, I rejected it as a location as

I could not guarantee there would be no interruptions. There are several meeting rooms in the school which were alternative venues I considered, but because they are usually used for formal meetings with parents I judged them more intimidating than my teaching classroom that did not share the same potentially punitive connotations. Moreover, in my classroom I could ensure privacy using signage and arrange seating to feel welcoming which might be difficult to do in a room pre-booked for other purposes. Arranging seats at right angles, I aimed to establish good communication and be unconfrontational, whilst engaging in discussion 'dedicated to investigating a given topic' (Denscombe, 2010, p.164).

Lasting for approximately twenty minutes, audio recordings were made of each interview which were transcribed and fact checked with participants to ensure their thoughts had not been misrepresented (Denscombe, 2010, p.186). Although note taking can supplement recorded information with salient detail (Glaser, 1978), I only took notes which related to emerging lines of inquiry that might resource the next part of the interview as I found it difficult to maintain the thread of the discussion, keep eye contact and create a relaxed atmosphere, whilst writing (Cohen *et al.,* 2009). One-to-one interviews allowed individuals the freedom of expressing their opinions without exposing themselves to scrutiny or influencing others' views. Conducting in-depth interviews on a one-to-one basis allowed me access to 'privileged information' (Denscombe, 2010, p.174), which informed the starting focus of successive interviews that 'develop[ed] and refine[d]… categor[ies]' (Charmaz, 2014, p.107). Although most of the student interviews began with semi-structured questions about respondents' experience of poetry as detailed on their questionnaire, a flexible approach enabled the respondents to direct the ensuing discussion to areas that were important to them in an unstructured manner. The areas of focus were pre-planned but the

direction that the interview took was non-directive and developed organically. In this way, the unstructured nature of the interview can make the data more reliable (what people do 'differ[s] from what people say they do' (Robson, 2002)) as the 'interviewer effect' (the interviewee changes their behaviour because they are aware that they are being watched and can be less open) is negated (Denscombe, 2010). As part of a CGT study, interviews facilitated emergent interactions and validated the interviewee's experience (Charmaz, 2014, p.93), which made them a valuable tool for my research but also valuable for individuals who were being given an opportunity to express their feelings. Because the interview process 'goes beneath the surface of ordinary conversation and examines earlier events, views, and feelings afresh' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 26), unstructured interviews were important for finding out the significance of Romantic poetry as part of A-level and how individuals felt about it. Because data can help 'resolve problems in local practice' in specific contexts, the relatively 'small number of interviews' was enough to develop theory (Charmaz, 2014, p106).

Memos

As part of the process of mutual co-construction between the interviewer and the interviewee in which language is used to create meaning (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), memos were kept about the emerging data to help disentangle developing codes and help make connections between them. The act of committing my thought process to paper helped crystalize some of my thinking through analytic engagement with the data, which developed as part of the theorising process. Although the researcher's selection of codes helps to co-construct theory, an unbiased appraisal of the data is necessary to ensure codes are not forced (Glaser, 1992) and the memoing process reflexively goes 'with the data' (Glaser, 2001 p. 47).

<u>Building theory</u>

With the aim of understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, data was gathered that looked at actions and processes, by which I mean events 'unfolding [as] temporal sequences' that are linked but change over time (Charmaz, 2014, p.16). In line with CGT, data collected through interviews and during observations was used to identify initial codes that used gerunds to help make connections with actions and events. Open-ended questions encouraged participation from respondents and line-by-line analysis helped establish nodes using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo that fed into initial codes that considered the language used by participants to help to understand their experiences (appendix F). These codes were simultaneously analysed whilst additional data was collected to identify what was important to the respondents (see appendix H). To help refine categories, memos were sorted manually on written notes that created a direct relationship between the researcher and the coding process, which allowed alternative relationships to be considered (Charmaz, 2014). Because 'the content [of any text] is inseparable from the language in which it is presented' (Eagleton, 2013, p.3), the way respondents describe events can reveal important concepts that must be explored in more depth. Freire significances the importance of understanding the evolution of words that are not just 'an instrument' that facilitate 'dialogue', but ontological tools that communicate truth, as 'within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action', that rely on each other so 'that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers' (Freire, 2010, p.75). To this end, memoing the researcher's thoughts on the possible links between in vivo codes and descriptive codes helped to produce focused codes that sought to give clarity and 'separate, sort and synthesise' what was happening and acknowledge the researcher's

role in helping to create theory (Charmaz, 2014, p.19). Codes were further explored using constant comparison which compared new data and existing data to discover relevance and refine concepts within the codes. Consequently, theoretical memos were written about categories to further conceptualise the relationship between codes which were diagrammed to facilitate further discoveries about the relationship between codes and build theory (appendix E).

Data analysis

Working from a CGT perspective interviews and observations were analysed in parallel using constant comparison, comparing new data with existing data, and coded accordingly. (Glaser, 1996). This method allowed the codes that had the highest occurrence to be identified, and focused coding allowed several related codes to be incorporated into single key ideas (Cohen *et al.*, 2009), which were further distilled into theoretical codes.

The coding process:

In vivo codes and memoing facilitated flexible engagement with emerging data from interviewed students and teachers that was 'grounded in reality' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). With the aim of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum, questioning allowed me to construct an understanding of respondents' pragmatic focus. 17 individual concepts emerged from the first two student interviews connected to the initial in vivo code 'speaking first – no way' and the code 'lacking confidence'. Data produced by English teachers also revealed a pragmatic focus drove a desire to guide and facilitate students' attainment. Corroborating nodes identified in teacher interviews: 'believing there is a right

answer', 'lacking autonomous views', 'limiting expectations', 'feeling insecure', 'being needy', 'missing opportunities to express opinion', 'guarding own thoughts', indicated the relevance of autonomy that individuals were striving for but not always attaining. Nodes related to sovereignty were identified a number of times during open coding (see appendix F). Memoing about the significance of emerging categories, I identified the greater occurrence of nodes related to a lack of agency on the part of the students which paralleled a desire to strive for 'independence', as key issues that informed the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and student engagement with it. During the process of sorting memos related to the abstract state of being reliant on others, concepts were merged together. I noted students' decision to take English literature was often mediated by teachers or parents and not driven by the students' own desires or ambitions. Making links between categories through diagramming (appendix I) helped identify the relationship between codes and rationalise recurring themes to do with lack of fee will, thus although many students were keen to gain their independence, their reliance on others affected their self-determination and ability to effect change in their context. Asking students specifically about the process of understanding a poem, Stephanie commented that 'Sir goes through [poems] line by line with us'. The potential category of 'allowing yourself to be directed by others' was supported by two other students who made comment about their expectation that content is unlocked by teachers but memos about related data raised the connection between the students' attitudes and 'achieving status' and 'ascertaining value' that were potential by-products of taking instruction from more knowledgeable individuals. Using focused coding to theoretically saturate the conceptual category, constant comparison of the emerging data went beyond the descriptive detail of students' failure to voice opinions in class or their desire to

achieve, and moved to the conceptual coding of student indoctrination and motivation. In this way, although a focus on independence and autonomy is relevant to this study, moving back and forth between categories in the data revealed the code of 'dependence' was important in understanding how to engage students with Romantic poetry as students were accepting of their dependent status on the more knowledgeable and worldly wise (I.2, I.3.).

More than one analytic line was suggested by this data which resonated with the theoretical theme of 'emotional engagement'. The initial categories of 'expressing views openly', 'feeling obligated', ' feeling suppressed', ' finding resonance in language', 'motivating behaviour', ' feeling connected', ' feeling disconnected', ' achieving status', and 'ascertaining value', fed into the focused codes of 'striving for independence', 'finding a voice', ' valuing what it represents' (see appendix I.2,1.3). Whilst these codes were pertinent to help describe emerging issues related to the code of 'Dependency' , they were none-the-less relevant to another code emerging that related to the students' emotional reactions to why they were studying Romantic poetry and how they interacted with it in the classroom. Looking back through previous interviews, several other in vivo nodes were identified as related: ' understanding how to express ideas', ' talking a lot and saying very little', ' scared to say it, in case they are wrong'. Tentatively grouping these ideas together under the umbrella code of 'using poetry to express emotions', I coded on to establish the veracity of this link.

Memoing about my lesson observations, I had commented about students' who were

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hesitant to express themselves in class. 'Searching for meaning' through their teacher's observations about the poems, they were 'emotionally mute' in class. Many were guarded in their approach as part of a group, leaving opportunities for 'exploring emotions' and 'finding resonance' underdeveloped in the classroom. Contextually the observation took place at the beginning of the January term, and although still some time off, students were aware that they would be sitting an AS exam at the end of the Summer term. Speaking in interviews some time afterwards, several of the most vocal students in the class reflected on feeling obligated to making some contribution and under pressure to speak out ' because everyone was quiet' (Sarah), which fed into the categories 'needing to contribute', 'feeling resentment' and 'feeling duty bound'. Reflecting on emerging codes, a lot of categories related to emotion had negative overtones, with individuals acknowledging that they 'enjoyed listening' to others and staying emotionally remote so that they could achieve some objectivity about material, and as they were not always sure about how to interpret the poems, they preferred not to be pressured into contributing if they did not volunteer a response willingly themselves. In this way, individuals were missing opportunities to express themselves and to engage holistically with notions in the classroom that might have greater resonance for them. A distinction emerged between private and public arenas. Some students did recognise 'links' between themes in the poems and real life, but saw the classroom primarily as somewhere to learn what they needed for the exam.

In interview, several students reflected on the Keats' poems and made connections between characters, events and real life; however, this was done once students felt confident with the poems after they had sat their AS exam, which suggested a link

between knowledge and emotion . Finding personal resonance and enjoyment, as I revised Keats with students in the autumn term, more positive engagement was noted that contrasted with the classroom observation conducted at the beginning of the Keats' unit. Memos produced as part of my field notes about observations in my own classroom and revelations in interview, suggested growth and progression in understanding had changed how they interacted with the poems. Students 'enjoyed villainy', found an 'opportunity to explore other ways of seeing', felt 'nostalgia', valued 'freedom of expression', and strove to feel 'empathy'. A temporal relationship with emotional engagement was identified. Similarly, students were more candid about how they felt about the poems outside of the class than they had been when I observed them in lessons. This could be because they felt scrutinized and under pressure from each other or someone other than their instructing teacher watching them; however, having interviewed their teacher and asked about class dynamics, he revealed 'that is pretty much how they are most of the time' (TP). Tension between poetry in private and public arenas emerged as significant to students and how they interacted with Romantic poetry on their own and with others. Some students developed quite strident views about certain poems, which were not challenged by other students. In interview students identified the progressive 'personal growth' model of English, that values the individual's opportunity to develop, had resonance with student's interactions with poetry outside of the classroom (Sarah: 'It can help you reflect on things going on in your own life'). In this way, the legitimacy of shared and personal interactions emerged as relevant, as public engagement with the genre posed questions about how candid individuals were being. Multi-faceted focused codes were united under the theoretical code of 'emotional engagement', which was identified as relevant to understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and how

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it could be engaged with more successfully.

At the outset of students' exploration of Keats in year 12, the methical analysis of qualitative data (Denscombe, 2010) revealed apathetic attitudes to the genre by most of the group, which raised questions about perceived relevance (Glaser, 1996). The inductive Glaserian 'emergent fit' approach to GT (1978) that emphasises contextual factors and improvements to the lives of the sample group (Charmaz in Denzin & Y. Lincoln 2000) informed the theorising process. Questions about poetry's ability to evoke emotion revealed students' limited experience of Romantic poetry within educational settings or as part of their home culture. Imbued for many with an 'otherness' (Bauman, 1995) that made poetry distant and inaccessible outside of the teacher's scaffolded analysis, students' accepted it was part of the course but felt little personal resonance. Synthesizing data established the significance of several focused codes: ascertaining value, balancing conformity versus maverick attitudes and aspiring for achievement. Constant comparison of student and teacher data developed analytic engagement that exposed the relevance of the theoretical code of the commodification of poetry, which reflected the concerns of the Romantics who emphasised the importance of the imagination over logic and the mechanised world. Whilst an interpretative theories perspective takes advantage of the relationship between the researcher and the subject, inferred meaning through abduction revealed maverick attitudes and acquiescence to expert opinion, indicating a distinct link between youth culture and compliance. Attitudes were seen to be linked to societal context (Flint, 2006) paralleling some of the uncertainty surrounding the Romantics. Simultaneous analysis and gathering of data raised questions about youth culture's relationship with mass media technologies and creativity, which inductively generated mini theories about image which stood up to further scrutiny (McGhee et al., 2007). Resisting a mechanical approach, the interpretative process

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developed tentative analytic categories that needed to be refined. Just as the Romantic poets used language to elucidate significance, the theoretical code of pattern unlocked implicit meanings and the relationship between language and actions.

Conclusion

To ensure the reliability of qualitative data and the credibility of the ensuing research, CGT methods were adhered to rigorously (Charmaz, 2014). However, because grounded theory is a conditional 'pause in the never-ending process of generating theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.40), all research must acknowledge its subjectivity. Certain codes were picked over others because they helped unify ideas that were important to understand student engagement. Codes identified as appearing frequently in the data, were checked against new data, which either helped elucidate meaning by suggesting new insight, or questioned the veracity of a concept. Memoing at this stage provoked reflexivity and the act of tracing back strands of data, suggested new insights that were often more fruitful than the original lines of inquiry. Whilst learning does not 'occur in a vacuum' (Glaser, 1996) and 'learners… are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active organisms' from whom we create meaning about what we observe and how we react (Driscoll, 2005, p.387), all the participants, including myself as participant researcher, contributed to the theory as 'there is no objective truth to be known' as no objective reality exists (Hugly and Sayward, 1987, p.278).

Theory, which is an explanation of the issues surrounding the teaching of Romantic poetry, was created by the participants, who guided the 'explicit development' of theory (Charmaz, 2014, p.199). This research has resonance 'on the ground' (Locke, 2001, p.59) because it has been mutually co-constructed by students and teachers and helps us understand the

position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum which is useful to improve existing practice. The 'open' nature (Cutcliffe, 2000) of the research question that does not seek to reinforce existing beliefs or hypotheses, was well served by the methodological perspective of CGT (Charmaz, 2014), which allowed 'persistent interaction with… data, while remaining constantly involved with … emerging analysis' (Charmaz, 2006). In keeping with the principles of CGT, the cycles of data collection were guided by the 'iterative process' of theoretical sampling that was steered by emerging theory generated by themes that came to the surface deductively (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

To be a meaningful piece of research, a study must carefully consider: the paradigm of enquiry used to facilitate research; the data collection process; the sampling criteria; ethical considerations; the research methods appropriate to the study; the techniques used to analyse the collected data. Having discussed these areas in this chapter to show why CGT was used to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, in the next chapter I will outline the terms of reference used to inform my data analysis in the literature review.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

To ensure my theory remained grounded and was not limited by prior reading, the majority of the literature review was not carried out before my data had been collected and the process of theoretical coding was underway (Glaser, 1992). The potential field of reference related to teaching and poetry is vast; however, this piece of research explicitly looks to understand the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and the factors that affect student engagement. Whilst acknowledging accessing a quality education or exploring the abundant virtues of the genre are pertinent to any discussion about poetry, they are not the focus of this writing. The Romantic poets share common ground with progressive educational thinkers and intellectuals across numerous epochs, who have significance for educational practice; indeed, it can be argued that the Romantics inspired 'many of the central organizing ideas of [a teacher's] unconscious, as opposed to imposed, pedagogic philosophies' (Halpin, 2007, p.3). As radical thinkers, the Romantic poets were concerned with democratic processes and opportunity within education, whose sometimes strident views about their changing world would seem to be pertinent for students studying in the United Kingdom in the twenty-first century, as the country tries to forge a new global identity for itself in the face of Brexit. Consequently, to help explore the thesis statement: The symmetrical Tyger: the issues and tensions of teaching Romantic poetry at A-level, this chapter will draw upon: Romantic period thinkers views on learning and poetic verse; academic and philosophical perspectives on poetry and education; literature about teaching and the curriculum; cultural perspectives that help to inform contextual factors relevant to study and poetry.

Romantic period thinkers

To understand the potential significance Romantic poetry may have as part of the A-level curriculum and the factors that affect student engagement, we have to understand what the Romantics stood for. Romantic period thinkers believed education was important. Their views are directly relevant to this piece of research, as the principal characteristics of Romanticism have had a tangible impact on the evolution of educational discourses in Western civilizations (Schiller in Schulenberb, 2015), which have permeated cultural practices and teaching pedagogies beyond the curriculum taught within schools (Willinsky, 1990; Chaplin and Faflak, 2011). Inspired by Rousseau's belief that '[c]hildhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it' and distinct from adulthood (1762), the Romantics saw children as innocents who should not be enslaved by the 'mind-forged manacles' of corrupt organisations which could restrict one's ability to think freely (Blake, *London*, 1794), leaving children vulnerable to hypocritical institutions which had the power to 'reduce[d] [children] to misery' (Blake, *Holy Thursday*, 1789).

Attitudes and beliefs:

In an age of sweeping change, the Romantics saw childhood as a distinct developmental stage that could be 'moulded by experience' (Stone, 1979, p.406). In keeping with educationalists today, an autonomous desire to learn resonated with reformers (Godwin, 1797), who were critical of students 'contract[ing] a benumbing indolence of mind, which … [they have] seldom sufficient vigour afterwards to shake off' to 'seek[ing] information' and consequently may rely 'implicitly on the answer … [they] receive[s]' (Wollstonecraft, 1792, chap 12, para 2). They believed childhood had an affinity with the natural world and a potential that could be harnessed if carefully nurtured (see Blake *Songs of Innocence and Experience*) that was unsullied by the corruption of society and prospered

in an 'abyss of idealism' that could counter the bleakness of reality (see *Immortality ode,* Wordsworth). Rousseau's assertions that 'the first impulses of nature are always right' and that 'there is no original sin in the human heart' (*Emile*, 1762) were much-admired; children were portrayed as essentially innocent and in need of protection from a world of corruption in which one could not 'expect to give… many hours to pleasure' because of unethical practices that existed at the heart of society and affected day-to-day life, that needed to be addressed (Keats, *Letter to George and Georgina Keats* [1819], in Cook , 2008).

Pertinent to educational discourses in the twenty-first century, Hazlitt like other Romantic thinkers celebrated the imagination whose 'inspiring vision and vocabulary… [have influenced] more than a few educators…this century' (Willinsky, 1990, p.1); however, contemporary educational experiences that are driven by an accountability culture, would have conflicted with ideals of tangible learning (Hazlitt, 1822). Blake's assertion that '(n)atural objects…weaken, deaden and obliterate' the imagination, rather than negating the importance of nature, is a 'defense' of the spirit of creativity (Keynes, 1956, p.821) which allows the child to see the magnificent in the everyday; thus, serving to underline his belief that a perception of beauty is subjective, and one must nurture one's ability to seek out what is truly beautiful and morally correct. Like Charles Lamb who spoke about the need to encourage creativity to allow the individual to 'see into the life of things' (Wordsworth, 1798) and compensate for the 'incompetence of human speech' (Wordsworth, 1850), Blake believed creativity should be nurtured as it could facilitate the transformation of the world and allow one to '(h)old infinity in the palm of your hand' (in Jonson, 2014).

The study of Romantic poetry as part of the A-level curriculum helps connect the liberal

values of the Romantics with a new generation. Believing that education should be an experience that 'call(ed) forth' the natural potential of an individual, just 'as the blossom is educed from the bud' (Coleridge, 1830, p.585), and not a process to be endured 'under a cruel eye outworn' that deny the student's desire to be free and keep them confined to the classroom like a bird in a cage (Blake, 1789). Exponents of reform like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake believed that education was 'a grand national concern' (Wollstonecraft, 1792) that may not be able to right all the wrongs in society but could still 'do much' to ease some of the injustices (Godwin, 1797, p.3), and was important for both the individual and society as a whole. Coleridge agreed with the notion that some form of universal system of education was necessary as '[t]he powers, that awaken and foster the spirit of curiosity… [that can] be found in every village' needed to be channelled correctly (Coleridge, 1837, pt1, 199-201), to ensure well-balanced individuals were nurtured (Rousseau, 1762). An inflexible curriculum that failed to allow teaching and learning opportunities beyond tightly dictated parameters, was considered ineffective (Hazlitt, 1822), and for adults to 'impose' a curriculum on children, as we do in school, was 'a presumption against the nature of childhood and [demonstrated] a failure to trust imagination to make its way in a precarious world'(Chambliss, 1996, p.535). In this way, a fear of assessment was driven by pragmatic considerations to listen 'to the sentiments of the people' (Byron, 1812) and the need to maintain social stability and usefulness for the greater good of society (Knight, 2010, p.58-71), as he believed anyone 'subject to [the] punishment[s]' of such an inadequate education 'will [not] stand in fear of Newgate [Prison], or feel any horror at the thought of [being put onto] a slave ship!' (Coleridge, 1808, in Southey, 1812, pp.95-6). Arguably, exposure to Romantic ideas as part of the A-level curriculum may strengthen liberal thinking and help to create a more cohesive society.

Shaping experiences:

Just as Wordsworth's and Coleridge's views about education were influenced by their personal involvement in the dissemination of knowledge through teaching, Leigh Hunt's circle of 'second generation' Romantics' negative assessment of the societal mechanisms that limited individual liberty and promoted the power exerted by the state, were informed by their own experiences and observations (Godwin, 1793). The practice of learning by rote (advocated by Joseph Lancaster a Quaker educationalist) was considered reductionist in outlook, dehumanizing and at odds with the core values of education (Halpin, 2007, p.15); conversely, some influential policy drivers have advocated 'memorisation… [as] a necessary precondition of understanding' in schools today (Gove, 2012; Willingham, 2010; Lo and Andrews, 2015), although primarily there is an emphasis on deep learning rather than repeating facts. The 'liberal' education that stimulated creativity which Coleridge supported did not 'blunt' the natural 'inheritances' of the child (Cunningham in Halpin, 2007, p.43) or 'flog' children 'into following the style of a fool' (Blake in Gardner, 1998 p.11); it rejected the longstanding view that the mechanical learning of 'facts alone' was needed to facilitate knowledge (Dickens, 1854), as 'the man, who has mastered all the conditions of *freedom*, is *Homo Liberalis…* who knows himself and walks in the light of his own consciousness' with knowledge and freedom (Coleridge in Griggs, 1971). Wordsworth considered the school curriculum of the day insufficient not least because a student's 'moral disposition[s] and character depend very much, perhaps entirely, upon education' (Godwin, 1783, pp.2-3), but also because the material studied should be 'interesting for its own sake' and topics should be taught 'because they are interesting, not interesting because they are known' (Wordsworth, 1851, p.168), thereby listening and responding 'to the sentiments of the people' (Byron, 1812). In accordance with contemporary opinion, radical thinkers at the time believed that a limited curriculum that failed to instigate ingenuity (see Keats in Cook,

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2008) might have a 'desolating' effect on creativity, individual thought, and was in danger of '[p]ollut[ing] whate'er it touche[d]'(Shelley, *Queen Mab*, 1813, in Donovan, 2016, p.180); ultimately, it could be held accountable for brutalising society (Roe, 1997; Holmes, 1998).

The Romantics' assessment of necessary change:

With a view of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, the Romantics' values need to be understood. In an effort to combat poor educational experiences that focused on 'minute, remote, trifling facts in geography, history, natural history' which were considered uninspiring and counterintuitive to fostering original thought (Wordsworth, 1806 in Byatt, 1997, p.176) and hampered the realisation of an individual's ' negative capability' or potential not yet achieved (Keats' *Letter to George and Tom* (1817) , in Cook, 2008) , many championed Doctor Andrew Bell's innovative 'madras' teaching methods, which advocated independent learning and inquiry, allowing all students to 'advance according to their talents' (Wordsworth, 1969-1970, p.513). The view that children should first be taught to think and then gradually knowledge should be 'awakened, developed, and formed into habits' (Coleridge, *The Friend*, I, p.238), through quality instruction rather than a 'superficially… omniscient' schoolmaster who is 'expected to know a little of everything'(Lamb, 1867, p.347), in part concurred with Hazlitt's view that 'happy are those who live in the dream of their own existence and who see all things in the light of their own minds; who walk by faith and hope, not by knowledge', who espoused the joys of being autonomous and not being constrained by the curriculum (Howe, 1928-32, vol 12, p.239).

Although there was some intolerance of objective approaches being thought compatible with creative disciplines (Keats spoke sceptically of the 'demystifying' nature of science in his poem '*Lamia*' (2007[1820]) and Southey maintained that science and the arts were greatly divided), in some circles there was an acceptance that the poetic imagination and the scientific principle complimented each other as the 'imagination' and 'reason' are needed to achieve 'the philosophic mind' (Davy, 2012). In this way, the second scientific revolution (Coleridge in De and Jackson, 2000) was believed by many (Cowper, *The Winter Evening,* 1784, lines 107-19; Davy, 1858) to metaphorically champion the expansion of understanding and imaginative intensity 'towards the journeying Moon' and beyond (Coleridge, 1817), that could further enhance the individual and was compatible with radical thinking about education cultivating within the child a 'perception of truth' (Davy, 2012). Hazlitt criticised the inflexibility of formal education that eradicates the 'exuberance of invention and the greatest freedom from prejudice' enjoyed by the uneducated (Wu, 1998, Vol 6, pp.65-6), and results in 'boys who shine at school… [failing to] make the greatest figure[s] when they grow up and come out into the world' because the topics that a child is expected to learn at school 'and on which his success depends' are not the 'highest or the most useful faculties of the mind' (*Table-Talk*; viii, 1930, p.71).

Although Rousseau can be said to have 'put childhood on the map as a generally accepted entity' (Peters, 1981, p.30) placing 'the child at the centre of the educational stage rather than the curriculum or the teacher' (ibid, 1981, p.15),   Romantic thinkers did not subscribe to his view that children should be discouraged from reading books or deprived of external knowledge (Halpin, 2007, p. 46), rather believing youthful enthusiasm should be nourished and not stifled. Whilst acknowledging that 'All the knowledge I possess everyone else can acquire, but my heart is exclusively my own' (von Goethe, 1772, II, para 37), the industrial

world and its dehumanising effects on children needed to be prepared for by furnishing individuals with adequate education (Blake in '*Songs of Innocence and Experience*'; Wordsworth in '*Lyrical Ballads*'). In this way, Blake sought to 'liberate the limitations of adult consciousness through a recovery of the key characteristics of childhood innocence' in his poetry (Halpin, 2007, p.38). In accordance with liberal thinkers today, Romantic progressive thinkers were interested in nurturing symmetrical individuals who were spiritually nourished, academically curious and holistically whole. Reflecting on the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, the values it espouses would appear greatly advantageous for nurturing free-thinking, intellectually curious and empathetic individuals.

Academic and Philosophical perspectives on poetry and education

Understanding the developmental influence that education has on an individual's outlook explains why Romanticism has resonance within the curriculum. What makes poetry unique from other genres needs to be considered to appreciate some of the factors that affect student engagement with Romantic poetry. Acknowledging '[a] large portion of the language of every good poem' is no different 'from that of good prose' (Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, 1798), unlike other genres poetry reflects the rhythm of 'existence' and 'the way we experience life in our bodies' (Furniss and Bath, 1996, p.25) by animating experiences aurally and orally. Distinctive from other genres, poetry 'short-circuit[s] explicit communication, and directly evoke[s] emotionally charged meaning and memory' (Buskirk and London, 2008, p.304) by appealing to our senses. Critically, poetry is a creative construction, which uses language to communicate the human condition that is grounded in our everyday experience that 'draws from all areas of human intelligence' helping us to

connect with our humanity (Robinson, 2001, p.138). Not limited by inflexible rules, poetry is a multimodal medium that enjoys creative freedom, making it difficult to define (Wolosky, 2001). Requiring the writer to 'distil thought in order to communicate and suggest ideas to others' (Bluett in Dymoke *et al,* 2015, p.88) poems are untranslatable as not '[o]ne word' can be edited or 'the whole work fails'(Sidney, *Apology for Poetry*, 1580; Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 1814.) Poetry, a powerful instrument of protest and activism, holds a mirror up to society (Wordsworth*, Tintern Abbey*,1798) and because it has been seen as culturally dangerous (consider Shelley, *Queen Mab*, 1813) poetry is an important medium that facilitates self-expression personally, culturally and globally in a changing world.

Accepting that poetry is not governed by regulations that must be adhered to: poems 'bend, break, create, and re-create rules all the time' (Yaron, 2008, p.136), can liberate readers as the meaning of a poem is not fixed to the context in which it was first conceived, but can have meaning 'outside its original context and may alter its meaning' just as 'a baby… is detached from its mother as soon as it enters the world' (Eagleton, 2014, p.117).

Value of poetry:

Aristotle contended that poetry is 'more philosophic and of greater significance than history' because it talks of universal truths rather than specific events (Poetics, 335-322 BC), and as 'an experience … [it has the power to] change[s] the person who experiences it' (Gadamar, 1993, p.102). As 'highly valued writing' (Eagleton, 2008, p.9) poetry can augment our understanding of language (Eagleton, 2014), but because taste is 'not a stable entity', it is vulnerable to 'value-judgements [that] are notoriously variable' (Eagleton, 2008, p.9),

which can impact on the poetry studied in the classroom. Elitist opinions contend that only a 'critical minority' can appreciate 'the finest human experience of the past' who should be trusted to ensure the 'subtlest and most perishable' values are upheld and preserved for humanity (Leavis, 1930, p.3-4); however, the lack of strict structural parameters that allow the expression of 'sound and melody, rhythm, colours, odours' to be articulated freely (Kristevea, 1995, p.104), supports the view that poetry can be a democratising form of expression that should be available to all (Harrington, 2014; Love and Mattern, 2013). Valuing all human experience in 'the real language of men' (*Lyrical Ballads*, 2005 [1798], p.367), Romantic poetry is an important part of the A-level curriculum because it addresses the worth of a 'child-centred pedagogy, placing a high value on self-expression, experiential learning, creative imagination' and 'moral growth' (Reid, 2002, p.19).

Cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p.11), by which I mean valuable behaviours and knowledge that certain individuals are privileged with by virtue of their upbringing, means that some students are better equipped to engage with Romanticism in the A-level classroom than others. Thus, the value systems and practices of the dominant class and culture are proliferated (Gramsci, 1971; Giddens, 1973); they are represented in embedded signification and literacy habits that translate into teaching practice and learning experience (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1984 and 2000) that need to be democratic as part of a progressive education. Unlike Habermas who was not interested in 'everyday life in schools and classrooms… [and concerned himself with] a rarefied region of theory and jargon that does not touch the children and the classrooms that we know' (Gibson, 1986, p.41), Freire was interested in how 'knowledge emerges only through [the] invention and reinvention' of a dialogically rich 'problem solving education' (1996, p.53). As pedagogical discourse is politically loaded and lacks neutrality (Freire, 2013; Carr, 1998), Freire

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maintained that the student and the teacher can liberate themselves if they recognise both their oppression and humanity: 'the struggle' manifests in the oscillation from alienation to kinship, acknowledging the process of humanisation and coherent democratic principles that need to be championed in the classroom (Freire, 2000).

Unlike Descartes who believed in the 'interiority' of the self and the sovereignty of thought, Hegel believed that 'self-consciousness' was directly related to the presence of the 'other' (in Freire, 2010, p.111), as a person does not exist in isolation and is defined by the relationships that one maintains. Thus, by being in a classroom and having access to another's thoughts and impressions of a poem, an individual formulates their own opinions and judgements. Freire maintained that the development of the self is an on-going action because of the dialogical process by which a person communicates with others (2010), and reality is transformed through the enlightenment of 'conscientization' that helps the individual develop critical consciousness of 'knowledge' which is influenced by 'outside' authorities as well as the 'inside' participant's innate sense of being, and openness to the world (Freire, 2013, p.3). Individual freedom from subjugation by a dominant group can be achieved through the dialogical process that facilitates cerebral activity and an awareness that we are 'conditioned' by our experiences (Freire, 2013, p.13); however, the universal pragmatics of human communication (Habermas, 1998) that are informed by social discourse and influence how a student may respond to a text (Freire, 2010) can be warped by powerful stakeholders who apply anti-dialogical actions that reject 'communicative action' as well as liberated thought, resulting in 'systematically distorted communication' (Habermas,1979, p.210) and dependency on an evolving 'internalized…servile consciousness' (Morrow and Torres, 2002, p.96). Thus, the Romantics' conviction in the 'huge potential of childhood' to find meaningful independent resonance in literature (Halpin,

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2007, p.49) may be squandered and the holistic benefits of poetry, undiscovered.

Students' understanding of literature:

To establish what factors affect student engagement with Romantic poetry we need to explore academic and philosophical perspectives about how students become knowledgeable. Habermas' assertion that individual students gain 'knowledge [that] is rooted in actual tradition…[and] remain[s] bound to contingent conditions' (1988, p.170), concurs with Vygotsky's view (1978) that our identity is connected to and constructed by our 'habitus', by which Bourdieu meant the environment in which we learn important behaviours and values (Richardson, 1986). It is the duty of the more knowledgeable teacher to 'take the child in tow, making him the object of pedagogy' (Premack in Gazzaniga, 1984, p.33) to ensure the 'cognitive gap' is filled (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky viewed 'cooperation between the child and the adult [as being a] … central element' of dynamic education, by which scaffolded 'knowledge… [can be] transferred to the child' (1987, p.169), to help support the cognitive development of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978); however, the deficit model of education (Swadener, 1995), by which the failure of education is blamed on students' subjective deficiencies (Harry and Klingner, 2007, p.16), marks out individuals as needing special attention. Systems that just teach students 'what they need to know' (Delpit, 2006b, p.3), encourage dependent relationships that fail to develop capacity and independent cognition (Lipsky and Gartner, 1997; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1995; Foucault in Bouchard, 1977). An application of this philosophy may result in a reliance on the teacher's interpretation of a poem. Sartre maintained that as human beings have no predetermined purpose or fixed values, we are 'condemned to be free' and are obliged to make choices about how we imbue our lives with meaning to ensure we live

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'authentically' and do not accept the 'absurd' (1992); however, if thought has the capacity to emancipate or subjugate the individual (Foucault ,1977, p.5) dominant discourses (Foucault in Gordan, 1980) that inform the A-level curriculum can inhibit the creation of a 'Socratic' community of inquiry, which Kant believed was the most effective way to assimilate information and develop a more complete understanding of ourselves and the world around us (Abbs, 1994, pp. 11-25).

How students learn:

The 'Banking Concept of Education' (Freire in Bartholomae and Petrosky, 2008), where the teacher knows everything and 'deposits' information in the student, would seem to hinder academic endeavour and holistic evolution. The student remains 'a spectator, not re-creator' or a 'conscious being', but instead 'the possessor of a consciousness: an empty 'mind' passively open to the reception of deposits' from the world around them (Freire in Bartholomae and Petrosky, 2008, p.247). Maintaining that passive learning frustrates one's state of consciousness and ability to respond to one's surroundings, Freire believed it resulted in a lack of action and 'the subordination of students to teachers' (ibid, 2008, p.247). This can lead to a lack of symmetrical growth within an individual, whereby I mean the student is unable to apply their knowledge because of their limited understanding and so they fail to holistically develop from the process. Likewise, Foucault asserted that because the 'unconscious forces and cultural practices' (Ball, 2013, p.22) of the ruling elite are so powerful, liberation can only be achieved through proactive endeavour and action. '[E]nslaved sovereign, observed spectator' (Foucault, 1970, p323): the product of their education, students find themselves in a contradictory state that makes them dependent on the systems that have indoctrinated them, and are unable to move forward to express

independent endeavour. They are conditioned by the 'authorities of delimitation' (ibid, 1970, p.323) who direct pedagogical discourse. Giroux and McLaren expounded on the contention that schools are a dichotomy of tradition and transformation (Sarup, 1982; Althusser 1971), and that the dominant interests of the state preserve 'a terrain of struggle' that needs to be negotiated by students accessing educational discourses which should be accessible in 'vernacular as well as scholarly terms' (Giroux and McLaren, 1989, p.xiii) so that the culture of silence amongst the oppressed, who are not listened to, is broken and personal growth is achieved (Freire, 2010). Whilst Wordsworth and Hazlitt 'distrusted mere book-learning and the pedantry that often accompanies it' (Halpin, 2007, p.65), like the other Romantics, they believed in a broad education and championed poetry as 'the most valuable object of all writing' (Wu, 1998, 2, p.165) that could be 'transformed into a political weapon' (Hay, 2010, p.xvi) and should be accessible to all (Wordsworth, 1798).

Societal influences:

As specific value judgements are promoted at the expense of others (Alexander, 2013, p.86), education is viewed by many to be a political issue (Giroux, 2011; Carr, 1998; Carr and Kemmis, 2002; Carr and Hartnett, 2002; Alexander, 2013) that is relevant to the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum. These judgments can influence students' academic performance and subsequent economic success, as the commodification of the curriculum can alienate individuals (Marx, 2011). Although Gramsci believed the 'hegemony' - which he saw as 'the ideological predominance of bourgeois values and norms over the subordinate classes' (Carnoy, 1986, p.66) - is always in a state of conflict because those in 'subaltern' positions can only achieve dominance and be assimilated by 'creating a system of class alliances which… mobilize the majority of the working population' to participate

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hegemonically, thus the identity and the context of the dominant group consistently shifts (Gramsci, 1994, p.320). Gramsci believed that students obediently accept and follow 'a conception which is not [their] own' and as a result their 'conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate' to the teacher (Gramsci, 1980, p.327).

By obeying coercive forces within education (such as the National Curriculum and formal examinations), which can 'perpetuate social differences' (Gramsci, 2005 [1971], p.40), rather than transforming a student's consciousness (ibid, 2005, p.10), Gramsci believed the dominant group, as represented by the instrumental power of the teacher, works to create a state of equilibrium where 'the general interests of the subordinate groups' are assimilated (ibid, 2005, p.182) by the 'state apparatus' of the sovereign group (Foucault in Gordan, 1980, p.122). Nevertheless, Bourdieu would argue that by not 'giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone', namely an ability to operate within a system which is fostered by one's 'upbringing' (in Karabel *et al*, 1977, p.494), an elite 'habitus' is maintained (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986). Nevertheless, the liberal values of the Romantics represented 'a radical democratisation of high culture' (Hay, 2010, p.74) that strove to be accessible and relevant. As a result, Romantic poetry has the capacity to bridge cultural groups, encouraging access to other poetry.

In trying to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and understand emotional responses, formative experiences can affect student engagement. As a result of inadequate teaching through 'pedagogic transmission', a student can adopt 'a smoke-screen of vagueness over the possibility of truth or error' when communicating their beliefs to

compensate for their lack of understanding (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000, p.114), which can leave those not privileged with cultural capital, disadvantaged by their educational experiences. Neoliberal discourses can 'lay the grounds for new kinds of success and recognition', however, Davies and Peterson warn that they are 'seductive' (2005, p.1), as 'performativity works best when we come to want for ourselves what is wanted from us' (Ball, 2013, p.140). Although Freire would argue reality should be objective and not confused 'with the myth of…neutrality' (Freire, 1985, p.157), the language used to effect change 'subverts and re-orients us to its truths and ends. It makes us responsible for our performance and … [that] of others' (Ball, 2013, p.138). Education should aim 'to provide the soil and the freedom required for the growth of …creative impulse' (Chomsky in Otero, 2003, p.164), but because the individual is 'burdened with the responsibility to perform' (Ball, 2013, p.138), both students and teachers often exercise less creativity in their competitive endeavour (Kohn, 1992). Apple would argue that education can change society through 'decentred unities' (2013, p.13) that work as progressive movements and 'overtly challenge[s] class and capitalism' (ibid: 2013, p.12), whilst Herman and Chomsky maintain that socially constructed influential power legitimates the state through 'manufactured consent' (2002 [1988]).

Engagement:

To understand the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum contextual influences need to be explored. Just as students today must be aware of the dangers of social media and having an on-line presence, the Romantics had to navigate libel laws that restricted their freedom of speech. Unlike Foucault (in Gordan, 1980) and Gramsci (2005) who saw subjugation through action, Freire and Bourdieu recognised 'violent' acts (Freire,

2010) are not always physical but controlling, coercive and fundamentally dominating. Thus, an academic focus on Romantic poetry at the expense of holistic engagement, can be seen as a destructive action that deprives students of comprehensive understanding which could foster engagement with other poetry. 'Symbolic acts' in education, centre on taste judgements and 'symbolic violence' can marginalize outsiders who, as a result of not sharing 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu in Karabel *et al* , 1977), may feel alienated by a poem. By engaging with hierarchical institutions and adopting their 'speech acts' (Austin, 2011), an individual may be complicit in perpetuating acts of domination; however, by rejecting dominant discourses, a student can be seen to exercise 'symbolic power'. In the same way cultural capital is afforded to valued formal qualifications that provide symbolic prestige and are linked to economic wealth, certain writers such as Keats and Blake as part of a prestigious canon of writers are fated with symbolic power to discredit or defend liberal values that might affect student engagement.

Bourdieu recognised that hierarchy existed in the 'field of cultural production' of literary texts: 'heteronomous' popular texts are imbued with influence because of their widespread appeal, and 'autonomous' canonical works have symbolic capital; however, granting that many see the 'ideology [within a text as]…a form of communication systematically distorted by power' (Eagleton, 1991, p.14), Leavis perceived the 'fundamental values [of a text] precisely as cultural creations and was impressed more by their fragility than their power' (Bell in Walton Litz *et al* 2000, p.407). Whilst the Romantics are now considered part of the British 'literary canon', Eagleton acknowledges that it is a construct, 'fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time' (1983, p.11). Although Bourdieu reasoned that an individual's sovereignty empowers them to discount prevailing cultural

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influences, current thinking informs a piece of literature's literary capital; nevertheless, culturally an onus continues to be placed upon the teaching classroom 'to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language' (Cox, 1995, p.33). In this way, A-level literature, which reflects current educational standards, offers students the opportunity to make important discoveries about 'the significance of… contexts' and encourages 'perceptive exploration of connections across literary texts' (AQA, 2015).

Accessibility:

The demystification of poetry, by which I mean equipping students with the tools and confidence to discover possible meaning, allows teachers to effect change and create a culture in the classroom that promotes good poetry engagement by both teacher and pupil. In this way, '[n]ature produces culture which changes nature' (Eagleton, 2000, p.3), and the socially constructed culture of one's environment is constantly influenced and altered in a never-ending cycle of renewal as the class comes to understand some of the concerns of the Romantic poets. The hermeneutic circle of interpretation is effected by an individual's 'fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones' (Echeverria, 1981, p.226) when initial expectations are dissipated. Foucault acknowledged that a text can go 'beyond its own rules and transgress[es]' its cultural limitations (in Rainbow, 1998, p.206) to create new meaning. This chimes with Leavis' evaluation that the value of any piece of writing is based on personal judgement, as a poem is a 're-creative response of individual minds to the black marks on the page' (1972, p.62). A 'necessary faith' allows students to engage with the curriculum and share interpretations whilst finding personal resonance through dialogic processes (Leavis, 2013, p.74). With the aim of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, I have considered

academic and philosophical perspectives on poetry and education, and now consider

other studies about subject knowledge and good teaching.

Teaching and the curriculum

This study sits within a body of work that explores student engagement and the importance

of poetry within the classroom for both students and teachers. Goodwyn (2012) considers

different research studies that reflect how literature is viewed by teachers at different stages

of their careers. He comments on its position in the curriculum and students' changing

relationship with literature as a result of assessment and official doctrine that mediate how

literature is delivered causing dissatisfaction amongst many veteran educators. Arguing for

the importance of immersion in complete texts, Goodwyn identifies anxiety amongst

secondary English teachers who value literature but are critical of teaching through extracts

and superficial engagement with poetry at KS4 that fulfils exam requirements but fails to

engage students creatively. Goodwyn advocates a 'paradigm shift in the status of literature

in schools' (2012, p.225), considering prescriptive teaching, as directed by assessment

regimes, constraining and stultifying. The status of literature is judged 'diminished' within

secondary schools (ibid, 2012, p.224) and Goodwyn's analysis supports the 'authentic status

'of literature in schools (ibid, 2012, p.225) by which he means students should be

encouraged to find personal resonance with poetry.

In exploring what factors affect student engagement, Pike (2011) has looked at the

relationship between English teachers' personal values and nurturing virtues through

poetry. He explores the tensions that exists between the realities of teaching that require

teachers to be knowledgeable implementers of strategy (Pike, 2011, p.227) and the role of

reflective professionals whose practice is underpinned by a desire 'for social justice' and

'the ethical learning of their students' (ibid, 2011, p.224). Maintaining that English teachers cannot be judged as '"*good*"… on technical grounds alone' (ibid, 2011, p.227), he comments on the value of poetry for teacher development through 'professional learning' (ibid, 2011, p.224). Pike warns against the de-professionalisation of English teachers who have to follow routine technical procedures, which can stifle 'ethical' expertise (ibid, 2011, p.224) and commodify learning by marginalising personal and emotional engagement with poetry within the classroom.

Hennessy and McNamara (2011) also explore the effects of commodifying poetry by investigating Irish pupils' perspectives on how and what they are taught. The study identified a teachers' prioritisation of exam performance marginalising 'subjective analysis' (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011, p.213); however, for the vast majority of the students in their study, poetry was only important because it was necessary to get a 'good grade' on their leaver's certificate (ibid, 2011, p.215). Pragmatic attitudes towards learning outcomes meant that most students were happy with an 'uncomplicated' time efficient pedagogical approach, in which meaning was clearly defined by the teacher (ibid, 2011, p.213). Despite the curriculum advocating enriching activities, limited opportunities were made for 'creative and aesthetic engagement' (ibid, 2011, p206), which some pupils expressed concern about. In this way, Hennessy and McNamara point out the need to consider pedagogical priorities to help foster creativity and innovation.

Also exploring pedagogical practice, Xerri discusses the 'shared beliefs' of A-level English students and their teachers in Malta that drive a conditioned approach to find the ' hidden meaning' in poetry and assessment being prioritised (2013, p.134). In his research, Xerri observed 'contradictory pedagogies' amongst teachers who spoke of encouraging active

engagement that excites creativity but observed passive students being spoon-fed meaning (2013, p.141). He explores the symbiotic relationship between students' expectations and teachers' actions that proliferate passive learning experiences. Acknowledging the importance of creativity, Xerri identifies teachers' 'crucial role in inspiring' students and 'stimulat[ing] either a lifelong passion for the genre or equally vehement rejection of it' (2013, p135).

Likewise, Weaven and Clark (2013) consider the role of the teacher in relation to poetry teaching. They use professional discussion, in their study of Australian secondary English teachers, to explore a reluctance to teach poetry in part because of students' perceived lack of cultural capital. Despite a recognition that poetry was important and valuable, a 'strong commitment to the educational interests of their students' (p.206) meant a belief that students would perform less well in it than other genres. Teachers were scared about their own ability to teach poetry and concerned that it was 'unsuited to students who struggle with academic study' (p208). A 'crowded curriculum' (p.207) and anxiety about students' ability to perform well in assessment resulted in texts being chosen that students could do well in.

Teaching ideology

> Once a poem has come alive, we are up against the mystery of how words that lie silently on the page can make us feel, think and imagine the way we do. Teachers need to be able to empower children to notice what is there to be noticed, not to explain the poem but to illuminate how the poet has shaped the everyday stuff of language into an expressive form that can influence how we feel in its presence

> (Eisner, 2002, p.17).

How a teacher approaches a poem, and indeed what poem a teacher chooses to explore with their students, is fundamental to the process of fostering an appreciation of poetry. It is the job of the teacher to empower the student to engage with any poem, although arguably the

inclusion of the poets Keats and Blake as part of the AQA A-Level B curriculum could be seen as strengthening traditional elitist values (Maybin, 1996; Davison and Moss, 2003; Williams, 1973), and reinforcing canonical standards to judge what should be considered worthy of study (Andrews, 1991). Nevertheless, in endeavoring to ensure the laudable objective that 'every child, regardless of background is given an education which allows them to realize their potential' (DfE, 2015), educationalists make the case for studying literature that encompasses 'the best that has been thought and said in our language' (DES, 1988), regardless of subjective or aesthetic judgements about worth (Kant, 1790; Dixon, 2009; DfE, 2013). One could argue that a productive A-Level learning environment needs to be created to carry the reader 'forward… not by a desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself' (Coleridge in Rosenblatt, 1978, p.28). Whilst there are many justifications for why pupils should study good literature that 'deals in universal truths' (Peim, 1993, p5) that can liberate the reader's thinking (Searle, 1963; Holbrook, 1981;Whitebrook, 2001), the crafting of the curriculum has been described as an 'ideologically loaded business' that is influenced by current educational thinking and requires teachers to adhere to its standards (Peim, 1993, p.5) that impacts the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum.

Despite recent changes to the profile of poetry in schools, the English teacher needs to engage the student with a genre that historically has been a neglected part of the curriculum (Xerri, 2013b), which consequently is less popular 'than it could be' and for the general public probably is 'on par with clog dancing' (Motion, 2010, p.4). Although its popularity has improved in recent years (Dymoke *et al,* 2013, p.2) through increased profile of National Poetry Day in schools, popular 'Slam Poetry' events (energetic poetry competitions showcasing a poet's own work that are democratically judged by the audience who decides

on the winner) and 'folk poetry events' (local folk days or village fetes at which poetry recitals, performances and competitions take place), poetry engagement is still on the periphery of cultural engagement. Badly taught lessons have affected how poetry is perceived and its place more generally in society (Thompson 1996; Ofsted 2007; Locke in Manuel *et al*.,2009), resulting in the genre being viewed as problematic by some teachers (Andrews, 1991) and as 'a bore by many pupils' (Motion, 2010, p.4). Although issues facing teachers and pupils studying poetry at A-level are common to all key stages, the opportunity that poetry can afford in terms of 'personal growth, which is of particular relevance to adolescents' (Davies and Statton, 1984, p. vii), makes identifying the specific issues affecting a key stage 5 classroom important to this study.

Generating an interest in learning:

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, appealing to 'creative and imaginative capacities' help generate academic and spiritual symmetry in an individual (Halpin, 2007, p.68). Modifying schemes of learning so that they are more interesting or contextually applicable to a group of students (King in Peim, 1993, p. xvi) and 'sufficiently linked by [the teacher to the students'] ...experience' and points of reference (Halpin, 2007, p.5) can affect student engagement. Conversely, the teacher who fails to tailor their lesson to their pupils' needs or experiences may be equated to a 'technician carrying out the commands of those who determine what is to be taught' (ibid, 1993, p. xiv). Inflexible materials, or resources used badly, can 'systemically alienate pupils from their own experience' (Friedenberg in Willinsky, 1990, p.177), vanquishing originality (Xerri, 2013, p.10) and extinguishing a dynamic engagement with poetry (McRae, 1991, p.8). Poems read 'to teach something about poetry' rather than because they are 'worth reading' (Martin, 2003, p.16) frame the teacher as the expert who

leads the hunt for the concealed meaning through literary analysis (Xerri, 2013b), and relegate the pupil to the role of passive observer (Xerri, 2013; Snapper, 2009).

An emphasis on 'written literary analysis' (Snapper, 2009, p.2), in part because of accountability cultures (Snapper in Dymoke *et al.*, 2013) that unwittingly privilege pedagogy that perpetuates 'teaching instead of learning' (Halpin, 2007, p.9), has been accused of stifling creativity and encouraging 'static almost mechanical learning' that strives to 'assimilate' and 'reproduce' what pupils have learnt in class (McRae, 1991, p.8). Although Dias and Hayhoe (1988) have identified that teaching styles often cause discontent amongst students, Halpin argues that teachers need to be able to justify their teaching choices to students. Halpin states that the 'ability to teach [a poem] well' does not 'depend[ed] entirely on personal verve and enthusiasm' (2007, p.5). However, Wade and Sidaway acknowledge that '[e]ven where a National Curriculum exerts its influence towards good practice' what happens in each classroom will vary depending on a 'teacher's own experience, actions and attitudes' (1990).

In exploring the factors that affect student engagement in Romantic poetry, teaching methods need to be considered. Teachers adopting a reader-response pedagogy can empower the learner by giving them an active role in 'assembl[ing]' meaning (Iser, 1978, p.38). Reader-response pedagogy, by which I mean the practice of validating the reader's personal experience of a poem, can liberate the student voice. Building on Louise Rosenblatt's 'aesthetic' approach to literature that acknowledges an individual's singular experience of a text (Rosenblatt, 1994), reader-response theory contrasts with 'efferent' reading which is designed to communicate information or impart a viewpoint. Refuting the structuralist view that meaning is implicit to the text, reader-response theory recognises the co-construction of

meaning between the writer and the reader, who imparts real meaning through interpretation. The reader's subjective reading in a particular context with particular life experiences transforms literature into a 'virtual text' that changes depending on the reader (Iser, 1978). Whilst the reader of a poem, as an active participant in the creation of meaning, may respond uniquely to a text, they are also members of 'interpretive communities' (Fish, 1980). Thus, students who share common school experiences, backgrounds and cultural knowledge may connote similar understandings of a particular text about a subject that they have collective experience of. Textual ambiguities, by which Barone means opaque references that can be interpreted depending on reader experience (2001), allow students and teachers to explore multiple interpretations and invite new insight about the human condition and personal experience, creating richer, more meaningful understanding.

Students' perspective

To explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English curriculum one needs to consider student perceptions. Disappointingly, research into the experiences of students studying poetry in post-compulsory education has reported that the delight experienced by younger children who discover the joy of playing with the sound and rhythm of language (Grainger, Goouch, Lambirth, 2005) is often replaced by a 'reductive process' (Dymoke, 2003, p.11) that prioritises assessment and exam achievement over enjoyment (Snapper, 2009), leaving pupils feeling 'indifferent to, and sometimes even alienated' by the genre (Roberts, 2000, p.16). It has been argued that teachers caught up in the politics of league tables and the time constraints of schemes of learning (Alexander, 2008) help to facilitate 'exam factories' (Courtney, 2016), that often deny pupils the freedom to select what they want to read or write in schools (Atwell, 1998, p.151), as well as discourage personal expression and further exploration of the genre (Snapper in Dymoke *et al*, 2013). Thus,

students fail to benefit from the 'most effective teaching' that uses creative strategies to 'encourage pupils to play with and deconstruct poems' (Ofsted, 2007, p.9). Perhaps timely and relevant, many of the criticisms of 'externally imposed targets and associated forms of performance management ... each designed to accommodate the demands of assessment rather than to promote learning for its own sake' (Halpin, 2007, p.3) echo Coleridge's misgivings about the uninspiring practices of educational establishments in his own day (Byatt, 1997). Believing children should 'on occasion, be allowed…to control completely the form, content and pace of their learning' (Halpin, 2007, p.48), Rousseau reflected the Romantics progressive views on education which upheld the superiority of the imagination which teachers should inspire by 'lift[ing] the veil from the hidden beauty of the world' (Shelley, 1821). As Romantic poetry is 'the stuff of which our life is made… for all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it' (Hazlitt in Wu, 1998, 2, p.165), it is as relevant to students today as it has always been, and can facilitate engagement with other poetry that elucidates the complications of contemporary civilization (Leavis, 1930).

Whilst liberal values such as liberty, equality and justice are widely accepted as upheld by modern society, limiting students' independent thinking by imposing an accepted reading upon a poem (Xerri, 2013) so it is not 'inaccessible or alien' (Steiner, 1978, p.280), was not thought dogmatic by many (Barfield, 1973; Boagey, 1977; Davies and Stratton, 1984). Voltaire recognized that '[t]o compel' someone to believe something 'is absurd' (Garrard, 2003, p.71) runs contrary to democracy. Thus, research has indicated that quality feedback on a student's work can be valuable for stimulating independent thinking and alternative meanings (Hattie, 2008). Nonetheless, feedback that is not given privately (Lemov, 2015) can make students reluctant to share their views about poetry in a public forum, leaving them feeling self-conscious, vulnerable and exposed (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1959;

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Wilson and Demetriou, 2007), which can be damaging (Coe *et al*., 2014); similarly, indiscriminate 'praise for intelligence' that does not analyse specific features of note or build on achievements 'can undermine children's motivation and performance' and make them blasé about their understanding (Mueller and Dweck, 1998). To this end, regular dialogic feedback needs to provide the opportunity for an 'interactive exchange in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified' (Carless *et al.*, 2011, p.397). A 'system of guidance that provides not only a summative judgement of performance, but support through opportunities for a discussion which identifies areas of improvement and scaffolds the student to help achieve higher grades' (Beaumont *et al*., 2011, p.674), can improve performance and help to foster more confidence within a student, who might be reluctant to share their views on a poem. In this way, the classroom can become a stimulating environment, in which thoughtful debate can help to unlock alternative readings and foster student engagement.

Fostering confidence in Literature

A student's relationship with poetry is informed by accessibility. An individual who feels intimidated and unable to access verse, can be prejudiced by the views of their teacher and this can impact on a student's growth and motivation as a reader (Cremin *et al*., 2009). Inevitably 'dogmatic' teaching styles fail to inspire self-assurance in a student and can reveal anxiety on the part of the teacher (Benton, 1999). Poetry can be confusing and difficult for learners (Thompson, 1996; Locke in Wyse, 2010) if students are not put 'at the centre of the educational stage rather than the curriculum or the teacher' (Peters, 1981, p.30). Rather than helping pupils to develop as autonomous readers, an authoritarian approach rejected by the Romantics erodes a student's confidence to explore the meaning of a poem on their own and diminishes the position of poetry within the curriculum (Dymoke *et al*, 2015; Westbrook *et*

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al., 1998). 'Learner abilities and teacher competencies' that have been normalized into standards (Ball, 2013, p.48) of 'officially sanctioned developmental truths of the child' (MacNaughton, 2005, p.30) and the teacher (Ball, 2013), can limit a student. Rather 'the only habit which a child should…form is that of forming none' (Rousseau in Archer, 1964, p.80).

Establishing the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum, a poem must be understood as 'an event in time' (Rosenblatt, 1970) that is free from 'canonical baggage' (Bluett in Dymoke *et al*, 2015, p.89) and can create meaning for an individual. However, implicit power structures, wielded by instrumental regimes, inform how A-levels are delivered. Poetry has the potential to 'empower and transform' (Dymoke *et al*., 2015, p.1) and can enrich the lives of students (Arnold, 1910). The prescriptive nature of the A-level curriculum can help foster judicious taste; nevertheless, to understand those judgements an individual must be given the opportunity to experience a variety of poetry so that they do not become 'trainspotting fanatics eagerly looking for assonance, sibilance etc. and ignoring the taste of [poetry]' (Benton, 1999, p.530). The curriculum is loaded by the pedagogy of schools and teachers, which act upon the curriculum to confine creativity and an independence of thought (Naylor and Wood, 2012). Shor warns against allowing the teaching paradigm to become teacher dominated and maintains the view that neither teacher nor student knowledge is dominant (1992, p.201). D'Arcy adds that effort must be made to accommodate the two so that 'when the whole class and the teacher tackle a poem together… [the ensuing discussion does not end up] more like an oral comprehension test than a genuine discussion' (1978, p.148).

It has been argued that a lack of successful strategies to engage pupils with poetry (Benton, 1999) or promote the liberation of the imagination (Frye, 1990; Kazin, 2011), have been responsible for further stultifying teaching and learning of poetry (Halpin, 2007, p.3). The argument that teachers are duty bound to expose pupils to emotion in action (Steele in Dymoke *et al*., 2015, p.17) that 'bursts the circumference of the reader's mind' (Shelley, 2017 [1821], p.51), to nurture symmetrical adults, is persuasive. Thus, the 'remedial merit' of rejuvenating 'teachers' critical consciousness' can positively impact wider society (Halpin, 2007, p.2). In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and factors that affect student engagement, relevant issues that pertain to teaching and the curriculum have been considered, which are influenced by educational authorities and political influence.

Educational Authorities and Political Influence

Recognising the factors that affect student engagement with Romantic poetry, the approaches English teachers take as a result of legislation can define the experience their students have of both the subject English and poetry. Historically the subject English was not designed to elevate students to greater societal influence but to provide rudimentary literacy to the proletariat as a form of social control (Matthieson, 1975). Only in the late nineteenth century was a focus on literature and poetry included to foster 'creative activity' and challenge 'the passive reception of knowledge' (Arnold, 1979, p.97). Championed by Mathew Arnold, who believed strongly in the virtues of poetry 'to form the soul and character' and nurture 'noble principles of action' (1908, p.60), literature was acknowledged as offering 'some power over language as an instrument of thought and expression' to the masses (Board of Education, 1904, p. viii).

Arnold believed schools should prepare students for life and give them moral direction by exposing them to 'good and sterling poetry' that helps to form 'the soul and imagination' of an individual (1910, p.191-2) as well as 'high and noble principles' (Arnold, 1910, 200-1). Teachers should facilitate the acquisition of 'knowledge… build[ing] on what they already know' (DfE, 2014, p.4), and nurture vitality through the simultaneous contrast between academic achievement and personal growth to create well-rounded vibrant individuals. The ability of poetry to inspire, communicate feeling and develop analytical ability has long been acknowledged by policy makers (Arnold, 1880; Kingman Report, 1988; DES and WO, 1989); however, poetry objectives have been driven by a governmental results-based policy, which has 'frequently neglected and poorly provided for' poetry, through its 'inadequate and superficial' handling and coverage of the genre (HMI, 1987, p.4). Although some modern approaches to the teaching of poetry and traditional examinations still exert a limiting influence on the full potential of poetry, Bullock's 1975 report which stated, 'literature had receded' and had been substituted for 'model answers' and 'stereotyped commentaries …with no hint of felt response', is no longer a fair description of the educational landscape.

In trying to understand the position of Romantic poetry within the English curriculum it is helpful to consider different approaches to English. Cox's models of English teaching are important because different educational priorities are identified. As an English teacher, how one positions oneself in relation to 'the differing opinions that are held on a number of issues that lie at the heart of the English curriculum and its teaching' (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1989, para. 1.17) inform one's pedagogy and underpin practical decisions that are taken in the classroom and can affect student engagement. Trying to accommodate the many 'version[s] of English' that exist (Marshall, 2000, p.3), the Cox Report (1989) recognised five perspectives on English teaching that built on ' cultural

heritage', 'skill' and 'personal growth' that were similarly identified in the antecedent reports 'Growth through English' (Dixon,1967) and 'A Language for Life' (DES, 1975). Cox's 'personal growth' model centres on the individual needs of the child and recognises that literature is important in nurturing creative growth, whilst his 'cross-curricular' model maintains that language is the responsibility of all teachers. The 'adult needs' model focuses on the communication skills needed for adult life and the 'cultural heritage' model upholds the view that education has a responsibility to expose students to great works of literature. Cox's final 'cultural analysis' model focuses on how English facilitates an understanding of culturally determined meanings that influence our understanding of the world around us. Although Cox maintained that the position teachers take 'are not sharply distinguishable, and … certainly not mutually exclusive' (para.2.20), different models of the subject privilege the interests of certain groups over others (Moss in Davison and Dowson, 2009). Goodwyn's research into how teachers' classroom practices corresponded to Cox's models and his subsequent research with Findlay (1992; 1999), revealed that all the teachers involved in the research believed that the five models were of importance. However, the student centred progressive 'personal growth' model and the 'cultural analysis' model guided classroom practice most regularly, and the 'cultural heritage' model was viewed as too prescriptive and the least useful.

Because Cox's suggestions still influence the English curriculum and 'continue to be used as a justification of the New Literacy culture' (Phillips, 1997:156-7), the identified competing philosophies about how English is taught are relevant in understanding the position of Romantic poetry as part of the curriculum. Marshall (2000) identified philosophical standpoints that underpin teaching practices that correspond to Cox's models

and consider teacher motivation to encourage reflexivity. Marshall '[f]ormalis[ed] the philosophies' of English teachers (2000, p.55) into five categories according to attitudes and practices. 'Old Grammarians' are seen to share much with the Romantics, 'believ[ing] in the improving and civilising qualities of literature' (Marshall, 2000, p.73) by offering opportunity through 'personal growth' and 'fostering individuality, imagination and inspiration through literature' (ibid, 2000, p.82), as do the Liberals who share Arnoldian values and foster holistic development. Upholding 'strong belief[s] in the benefits of English as a subject' and aesthetic values (ibid, 2000, p.91) the Liberals occupy a position of tolerance and pastoral support. Marshall identified Pragmatists as adopting a cultural analysis approach '*empowering pupils*' to '*analyse critically the society in which they live*' (ibid, 2000, p84). Seen as modernisers who make practical preparations for change, the Pragmatists accommodating approach diverges from the dissenting influence of the Romantics. Likewise, Technicians whose values correspond to Cox's 'Adult Needs' model, esteem 'the skills necessary to be good at English' (ibid, 2000, p.96) to 'prepare children thoroughly' for examinations in line with neoliberal forces that favour accountability and free market forces (ibid, 2000, p.97). Believing 'it is important for children to be taught appropriately according to their needs', not all literature is relevant to all pupils and so should be mediated by teachers (p.97). In contrast 'critical dissenters' believe all students should experience equality of experience and access the 'same texts and ideas' (ibid, 2000, p.110). Described as 'cultural theorists' and interested in 'critical literacy' (ibid, 2000, p.109), the idea that 'the value of any text is not absolute but culturally determined' (Moss in Davison and Dowson, 2009, p.5) is disputed, and has led to the exploration of 'radical readings of canonical texts' and 'alternatives to that canon' (Marshall, 2000, p.110). In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within A-level literature, more 'pedagogical knowledge and subject knowledge' has been identified as improving the effectiveness of

English teachers (Grainger *et al*, 2005, p.10).

Teachers 'fight[ing] for, those ever harder to find spaces in which to develop the voices of the children they teach' need to reflect on their practice (Marshall, 2000, p.171). Occupying a privileged position from which they can foster curiosity and 'a developing love of poetry with younger learners' (Cremin, 2015, p.3), as well as extolling the virtues of literature (Peel, 2000; Gannon and Davies, 2007), the educational edifices in all their guises - from the head teacher of a school to the Minister of Education - need to ensure that teachers feel equipped to teach so that pupils receive a quality poetry education (Benton, 1984; Ray, 1999; Dymoke and Hughes, 2009; Dymoke *et al*., 2015). Clearly encouraging a high calibre of teachers into the profession is important (Tunnicliffe,1984; Benton, 1986); however, regardless of the fact 84% of the intake of trainee English teachers in 2013/14 possessed a 2:1 or first in their degree (National College for Teacher and Leadership and Department for Education, 2014), studies have shown that there is still much trepidation about teaching poetry (Benton, 1984; Ray,1999; Dymoke and Hughes, 2009; Dymoke *et al*., 2015), with many feeling apprehensive about teaching technical aspects of the genre because they do not know enough about it (Benton, 1999). In spite of the fact that various reports have attempted to address poor provision, 'The Ofsted survey of poetry practice' (2007) observed that young teachers are going into schools 'remember[ing] being anxious around reading and writing poetry when they were children themselves, and ...[are] likely to end up communicating that anxiety' to their students (Motion, 2010), thus continuing a cycle which results in 'few students...start[ing] A-level Literature with wholly positive attitudes towards poetry' as a result of their experiences in other key stages (Snapper in Dymoke *et al*, 2013, p.37).

Promoting literature:

To understand the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum it is important to acknowledge many teachers are themselves victims of the devaluation of poetry as part of their own education yet are now in the position of expert. Having little experience of well taught poetry, they are anxious about unfamiliar material and overly reliant on secondary sources to give them the answers (Benton, 1999). The confidence that teachers have in their ability to teach the curriculum has clear implications for government policy. The need to 'introduce a curriculum that gives individual schools and teachers greater freedom to teach in the way they know works' (DfE, 2015), is a clear justification for the changes to the existing GCSE and GCE qualifications.

On the one hand this implies more autonomy within the classroom in the delivery of lessons and less government interference; however, conflictingly, at a speech given to the 'Sutton Trust' and 'Education Endowment Foundation' in 2015, the then Minister for Education blamed the low attainment of poor children at school on the 'bigotry of low expectation' (Morgan, 2015), which by implication would imply the need for more prescriptive teaching methods to ensure the delivery of 'essential knowledge' is maintained and standards upheld (DfE, *National Curriculum*, 2013). Although ideally the equity of pupil experience is desirable, variables such as wider reading, home culture or teacher knowledge, are likely to influence a student's confidence and familiarity with accessing certain models of high culture (Benton, 1999). Educational frameworks should work to ensure that 'there is no trade-off between relevance and rigour' (Gove, 2014) and that 'real readers' (Benton, 1999) are able to appreciate 'memorable speech' (Auden and Garrett, 1935) from their position of 'normality' (Richards, 2001 [1924], p.180), that provokes the excitement of emotion,

intellectual curiosity and fluency of expression (Rosen, 1998).

The impact of Policy

Regardless of the Government's backpedalling on legislation to force academisation (2016) (all schools had to commit to convert into an independent state funded school sponsored by a charitable trust, by 2022), worryingly the policy would seem to indicate a tolerance towards editing the curriculum which might impact on poetry in schools. The policy demonstrated a desire to further empower free market education by allowing schools not to follow the *National Curriculum*. Thus, art subjects are in danger of being marginalized by a busy curriculum (Courtney, 2016/2017), which will result in a lower status (Ball, 2011, 2013). Subjects like poetry that has suffered an image problem for a number of years (Andrews, 1991) may be side-lined, thus compounding the concept that the arts are elitist. Despite the hiatus in the recent proposals to expand grammar schools (since the removal of the restriction on opening new selective establishments that had been in place since 1997), which was billed by Prime Minister May as an example of 'great meritocracy' (2016), the proposal would suggest a significant section of the political elite favour a selective education which by implication will privilege some and not others. A continuous shift in educational priorities exemplifies the ongoing struggle to crush inequality and implement progressive measures when education, subject to ideology, is driven by economic considerations (EHRC, 2010; Ball, 2013). Measures such as 'Progress 8' scores (which calculate a pupil's attainment in eight key subject areas minus their estimated 'Attainment 8 score', which is the average score of all the pupils who have the same prior attainment at Key Stage 2 across the country), provide gauges of impact and effectiveness which are prioritised by educational institutions (Snapper, 2009; Ball, 2013), rather than looking at an individual's holistic achievements.

Although new legislative measures now recognise the equal value of English language and English literature (a student sitting both qualifications will get credit for the higher grade), which is reflected in the 'overarching aim … [of the National Curriculum] to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment' (DfE, 2013)), the personal achievements of a student who comes to know and like Shelley's '*Ozymandias*' will mean nothing in academic terms, if they have not achieved their target grade, thus the significance of poetry for the individual will be lost.

Assessment

In identifying the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum one must be aware of overarching objectives. In an endeavour to facilitate tangible measurable goals, the summative assessment at Key Stage 5 builds on the new 'more ambitious and more rigorous' English literature GCSE (Gove, 2014) that covers poetry from 1789 up to the present day. The recently changed A-level specifications require a minimum of eight texts to be covered from a prescribed list, of which three must have been published before 1900 (DfE, 2014). In this way, the objective of educational standards is to expose students to 'a wide range of reading in poetry' to 'encourage students to develop their interest in and enjoyment of literature and literary studies' as well as 'engage critically and creatively with a substantial body of texts and ways of responding to them' (DfE, 2014). In this way, the new requirements aim to build on the aesthetic of reading poetry (Benton, 1999) rather than 'efferent reading' (Rosenblatt, 1978) allowing 'meaning [to] take shape as a practice, rather than handling it simply as a finished object' (Eagleton, 2011, p.68), and evoke the symbolic

function of a poem (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.96) which can mean the opportunity for an original poetic 'event' to occur through individual response. The published report from AQA, the largest exam provider in Britain, about the June 2014 poetry responses, noted that 'The most effective responses consider[ed] alternative interpretations' and did not simply parrot received knowledge, but gave 'detailed and engaging' answers that explored the effect on the reader. Thus, a personal response to poetry is valued, as each 'transaction' involves not only 'past experience' but also 'present interests and preoccupations' (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.20-21) that can inform a unique perspective.

Nonetheless, poetry is vulnerable to 'the political reality' of society and schools, which are 'concrete historical expressions of the relationship between education and society' (Carr and Kemmis, 2002, p.160) and reflect the will of the dominant culture (Gramsci, 1971), educational authorities and the forces driving the 'knowledge economy' (Slee and Allan, 2008, p.45). Exploring 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' (Keats, 2008) has to give way to certainty and the correct answers. In this way, schools have become 'vehicles for government reasons and regulation' and are directed by economic considerations, which respond to 'the signals and requirements of performance represented in League Tables' (Ball, 2013, p.103) and encourage 'competitive individualism' (Slee, 2011, p.151) rather than holistic cultivation. As part of a global community, policy is increasingly interested in 'how we're doing compared with our international competitors' as that 'will define [the country's] economic growth and our country's future' (DfE, 2010); thus, it has been argued that governments around the world have commodified the educational experience and the curriculum is driven by economic strategy rather than a desire to facilitate individual fulfilment (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008).

As part of the curriculum, poetry is no longer 'great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself but with its subject' (Keats, in Motion, 2003, p.229), and is instead focused on final outcomes that are economically driven. In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, I have considered educational authorities and political influence which are also influenced by cultural perspectives.

<u>Cultural perspectives</u>

> Literature, like all art, like language, is a collective activity, powerfully conditioned by social forces, what needs to be and what may be said in a particular community at a given time…Within any community tastes, opinions, values, the shaping stuff of art, are socially generated
> (Butler, 1981, p. 9-10).

As part of an increasingly global community, having an awareness of the 'social forces' that 'condition' the cultural perspectives of the Year 12 and 13 pupils who are studying Romantic poetry, can help the researcher have a better understanding of how and why an individual may entertain certain attitudes towards poetry and the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum (Hayes, 2011). All texts can be interpreted in many ways depending on the context in which they are being read and the context in which they were written, and it 'is implicit in good teaching at A-level' (Jacobs, 2017) to foster original perception and make 'enough room for pupils to engage with the [poetry] text' meaningfully (Fleming and Stevens, 2015, p.186).

Despite the manifest similarities between the genres of poetry and music (Keats in Motion, 2003, p.35) that offer 'the key by which... feelings [can] be unlocked' (The Examiner, 1816)

through 'intensified reflexivity, symbolic [connectedness]... [and] the abstract, musical possibilities of language' (Snell, 2013, p.125), in a twenty-first century context they have been treated quite differently (Dressman, 2010). In trying to understand the factors that affect student engagement with Romantic poetry, a distinction must be made between the approach taken to reading poetic verse in the form of lyrics (whose meaning needs to be put across and reiterated several times within a three-minute track) and poetry (whose meaning may not be immediately apparent and can manifest over time), although there are elements that unite them that can be exploited in the classroom. They are both essentially oral texts that use language and form skilfully to create meaning and evoke emotion in their audience (Pattison, 2011). Both poetry and lyrics aim to engage the reader/listener and to give pleasure, and although verse may not have 'authority in the province of 'certified facts'' verse has authority over what 'humanity is likely to find a satisfactory way of life' (Leavis, 1932, p.42), which may explain why many teenagers can relate to the lyrics of songs (Lown and Steinbergh, 1996). Leavis, who grieved the 'present plight of culture' where the 'standards hitherto kept alive by tradition have dissolved' and 'there is no longer an informed public taking serious and intelligent interest in literature' (1932), would have discriminated between the 'world narrated' in song lyrics and the 'world depicted and displayed' in poetry. Thus, he would have discriminated between '*The Human Abstract'* by Blake (Kress, 2003, p.1,4), supporting the view that literature 'ris[es] above' its initial construction as it has 'endured the test of time' (Sinfield, 2007, p.31) and the music of Beyoncé that enjoys popular appeal; however, when 'art' falls out of fashion 'we put that down to error, rather than remarking that the concept is inherently relative,' (ibid, 2007, p.31).

In understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum poetry is

becoming a progressively inclusive expression of creativity: Simon Armitage whilst enjoying the prestigious accolade of being a professor of poetry at Oxford University (2015), is also 'a self-schooled poet who views poetry from a hill above a Yorkshire village' and has a sizable 'young audience who like poetry…[who] feel he speaks to them' (Bragg, 2015) ; Carol Ann Duffy, the current poet laureate, manages to enjoy 'critical acclaim…[and] popularity' whilst being female, a mother and a lesbian (Flood, 2009). In this way, the once elite 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1986) occupied by a privileged self-selecting literary canon, is being democratized, liberating the art form from 'the educated middle classes' so it can be 'read in school because it is [relevant]…It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place' (Winterson, 2008) that can reveal the power of language and literature (Fairclough, 1989; Rylance, 2016; Wassiliwizky *et al*, 2017). Thus, the egalitarian status of contemporary poets reverberate with the attitudes of William Blake amongst others, who lamented the impoverished living conditions of the poor and the inequity of everyday life, standing fast with radical reformers who demanded change.

Change:

By way of justifying curriculum changes, Gove's seminal 'Mr Men' speech advocated challenging texts almost exclusively from the established British canon of literature (2013) that can empower pupils by giving them access to high culture and consequently rights to formulate informed opinion (Gramsci, 1971; Fairclough, 1989; Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, 2011) and open them up to the 'wonder and the sometimes astonishing possibilities of language' (Burnside, 2012). However, eighteenth century poetry must be made relevant and accessible by all teachers who have at times 'felt constrained to adopt strategies which they felt actively hindered' students' 'learning and engagement with poetry' (Benton, 1999,

p.521). A virtually 'exclusive emphasis on written literary analysis of poetry under exam conditions which dominates GCSE onwards', as well as reduced engagement with alternative 'modes of response (such as performance), and on creative writing' (Snapper, 2009, p.2), arguably has done little to change the learning culture or foster a love of the medium within schools (Williamson in Barry, 2005). By emphasising the importance of 'archaic' verse that may be unfamiliar to the vast majority of twenty-first century teenagers, as a developmental experience at Key Stage 4, there is a danger of reinforcing poetry with a sense of 'otherness' (Bauman, 1995) that is vastly different from familiar cultures (the home and popular culture being the most familiar to the vast majority of teenage students), and could leave individuals feeling alienated and disenfranchised by poetry and the empowerment of diction (Williamson in Barry, 2005). Accepting 'the Self's identity is constituted through its opposition to the Other' (Marotta, 2014, p.42), adjustments to perception need to take place; as Romantic poetry becomes more familiar, these changes at the heart of the curriculum may result in more challenge being injected into programmes of study at formative key stages, which will foster understanding and an engagement with poetry (Gove, 2013). Romanticisms' 'commitment to the cause of popular education' and 'intellectual enlightenment' (Halpin, 2007, p.2), as well as the value placed 'on the inner life of the individual' (Breckman, 2008, p.38), make Romantic poetry relevant.

Embracing literature:

In trying to understand the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum the 'synthetic and magical power' of the imagination (Coleridge, 1817, Ch. XIV, Vol. II, p.12) has ensured the popularity of some poetry, which is reportedly 'thriving' as part of popular culture. Young people are attending poetry recitals at festivals, spoken word events as well

as 'seminars, creative writing classes, workshops, gatherings' (Doty, 2010); consequently, it is important to identify the catalyst for change, so it can be harnessed and used in the classroom to facilitate holistic engagement with Romanticism . Context and culture are important to help understand an 'event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader' (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.141), which is unique to each student (Crystal, 2003). On first encounter some poetic verse may appear inaccessible and detached from the lives of people in the twenty-first century, and Romantic poetry (written at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century), which marked the beginning of the end of an agricultural England, on a superficial level, could be accused of 'erecting a considerable barrier' to its accessibility (Benton, 1986, p.6) because society has changed so much. In the wrong hands Romantic poetry, like all poetry, can be inaccessible (Andrew, 1991); however, skilled practitioners who are not scared of 'sacred' texts and who can encourage a student to remove a poetry book from its place on the bookcase and read it through their own eyes (Auden and Garrett, 1935), can help a student to discover the implicit connections between the values expounded at the time when a poem was written and the many pressing shared concerns about the environment, education, liberty as well as creativity, that resonate with readers of Romantic poetry today (Halpin, 2007).

Poetry is fundamentally about the human experience and so it could be argued that all poetry should be of interest to us and offer an opportunity to engage with ideas that are important to humanity (Koch, 1998). Nonetheless, some poems will resonate more strongly with certain individuals as well as having more relevance to a certain demographic of the population, and as a result engagement is easier (Rosen, 1998; Meek, 1991). Romantic poetry has been described in both enthusiastic terms: 'with an eye made quiet by the power

of harmony, and the deep power of joy, we see into the life of things' (Wordsworth, 1798, lines 48-50), as well as disparagingly: 'an abuse of adjectives' (de Musset in Majewski, 1989, p.9); 'haughty' and 'self- important' (Beus, 2003). The selective and remote perception of high culture and the inclusive and accessible perception of popular culture undoubtedly elicit judgments about what is of value to diverse groups (Williams, 1974). Finding resonances in literature is important (Cremin *et al,* 2014, p.6), because as we 'write our social worlds into being, we write ourselves into being' (Richardson, 1997, p.137), and poetry affords the opportunity for individuals to grow as a whole (Croom, 2014). By encouraging our students through literature to 'make meanings, consider others' worlds and form new insights about their own' culture (Cremin in Fletcher *et al*, 2010, p.1), we can protect children 'against exploitation' (Pirrie, 1994), as well as affording the individual the opportunity to get to know themselves better and value their own identity, which, Barthes would say, is formed as a result of our interaction with others (1967).

Shifting values:

In an ever-changing reality Tunnicliffe makes the point that value is relative; technological advancements have diminished the standing of canonical writers, which became 'a museum of curiosities' (1984), with no relevance in the modern world. However, it is this same technological platform that is working to keep our literary heritage alive through endeavours such as the Gutenberg Project which is a cultural archive of 'digitized' ebooks that are freely available. The National Literacy Trust (Clark, 2015) reported that technological multimodal reading platforms have been pivotal in keeping reading relevant and reported a healthy interest in types of poetry. Data suggests that these digital platforms are the most popular forms of reading outside of lessons: 65.6 percent of girls and 34.2 percent of boys read verse regularly (at least once a month), in the form of song lyrics; moreover, the number of pupils

who explicitly read poetry has risen from 14.8 percent in 2013 to 16.7 percent in 2014. Surprisingly, considering poetry's traditionally elitist credentials, it reported that young people who receive free school meals (FSM) 'are more likely to read poems outside class' (21.0% as compared to 15.4%), which would seem to support Thompson's assertion that there is 'no cabal of posh people' whose sole endeavour is to make poetry 'unintelligible' and is 'open to anyone'(2013). The positive engagement with verse of the young people in the survey might suggest that it is the 'mediation' that happens in schools, which reflects the values of a 'quick fix culture' (ibid, 2013), that is at fault. Thus, current students must balance the pursuit of 'rapid judgements' as a result of 'a surfeit of stimuli competing' for attention (Burbules in Synder, 1998, p.108), with the need to savour verse. Technological developments can satisfy the needs of technologically literate sixth form students, but the pleasure of discovering 'something new and beautiful' is equally satisfying (Thompson, 2013).

Although social media has been held responsible for increases in narcissistic behaviours amongst young people (Twenge and Campbell, 2010), it is possible that its multimodal potentialities are in part responsible for reinventing the genre of poetry to ensure its relevance for a connected generation, using a democratic platform that does not discriminate and facilitates an individual's voice and creativity. Contrary to Thompson's assertion that 'Poetry is dying' (2013), the ability of poetry to communicate powerful emotion (Tony Walsh's defiant tribute to the Manchester terror attack in May 2017) continues to preserve its enduring relevance and justify why it deserves a place within the education system. In mainstream education, poetry has historically been marginalized, which has reinforced its discriminatory credentials and denied all pupils the cultural experience afforded to some who are advantaged by 'habitus' (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986), and thus denied 'cultural

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power' or the ability to improve their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986) and find a symmetry of the academic and spiritual through the medium. Poetry online allows the individual to '[t]ransgress[ing] genre distinctions' (Snell, 2013, p.124) and to be creative, in this way embracing the Romantics' ideals.

In this chapter, with the aim of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, I have discussed relevant literature that creates a framework for the analysis of this CGT study. The field of reference included covers: Romantic period thinkers' views on learning and poetic verse; academic and philosophical perspectives on poetry and education; classroom teaching and the curriculum; educational authorities and political influence; cultural perspectives that help to inform contextual factors relevant to study and poetry. In the next chapter I will analyse the data collected in my methodology and make use of the terms of reference detailed in my literature review to inform my analysis.

Chapter 4: Data analysis

<u>Introduction</u>

> Every body does not see alike…But to the Eyes of a Man of Imagination,
> Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he sees.
>
> (Blake in Gray *et al*, 2011: Letter to Reverend Dr. Trusler: August 23rd, 1799).

The Romantic poet Blake would concur that '[t]he creative life is not ornament, surplus, extra, but the beating heart of who we are…It is a necessity, not a luxury: a birth-right, not an optional extra' (Winterson, 2008) that is fundamental to how we see the world and our experience of it; however, a shift in governmental priorities has championed the pursuit of quantifiable goals 'with higher overall standards' (DfE, 2011b, p.47) over a 'Romantic orientation towards the world' (Egan in Willinsky, 1990, p.290) exemplified by intangible holistic gains that are arguably more important to transcendental wellbeing (Kant, 1790). To strengthen the integrity of the educative process and symmetry within the 'whole child' (DfES, 2003) so that the individual can be successful throughout their life, an understanding of the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and what factors affect student engagement to exploit its key values of self-determination, egalitarianism, tolerance as well as the creative impulse at its core (Higgins and Ruston, 2010; Halpin, 2007), is imperative. In this chapter I identify key concepts generated through theoretical coding, 'develop[ing] a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data' (Martin and Turner 1986, p.141) that explore the influence staff attitudes, pedagogical practice and the curriculum have on students' attitudes towards Romantic poetry.

Shepherding students through the forests of educational policy and practice, teachers exert influence over their pupils. Freire criticised established educational methods that 'create passivity' and suppress original and critical thought (Hayes, 2011, p.224), describing students as:

> the depositories and the teacher… the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat...The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world

> (Freire, 2010, p.72-73).

A 'cultural heritage' view of English can alienate pupils from Romantic poetry and exacerbate the perception that the genre is impenetrable and an 'elite form of art' (*Booktrust*, 2010), which the 'common man' cannot access (Wordsworth, 1800). Like Leigh Hunt (a central member of the second generation of Romantic poets and part of the 'Cockney School') who, through his writing, endeavoured to break down conventional processes and advocated liberation and creative freedom in line with a 'personal growth' view of English (DES and WO, 1989), the concept of self-awareness through 'conscientization' (Freire, 2010) that can 'transform [the] reality' (Taylor, 1993, p.52) of how learning takes place, is of relevance. In Wordsworth's preface to 'Lyrical Ballads', he describes the ephemeral nature of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' underpinned by 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' (1798, p.xv), which elicit unique responses that make teaching the medium problematic. Although Romanticism was viewed as a vehicle by which 'individual emancipation' could be achieved (Clark and Suzuki in Higgins and Ruston 2010, p.188), Gioia would argue that the 'classroom' helps to 'divorce … poetry from the [non-specialist] educated reader' (1991, p.10) and thus validate hierarchical authority (Giddens, 1973; Gramsci, 2005). Initial codes indicated that students' experience of poetry was influenced by life experiences (Freire, 2010) and selective coding further revealed the

implicit authority wielded by societal agents, shaping attitudes towards Romantic poetry and how it is taught (Charmaz, 2014). Using an inductive methodology, the constant comparison of the generated data and abductive inference revealed pertinent theoretical codes that helped to explain the observed phenomena and address the issues and tensions of teaching Romantic poetry at A-level.

An exploration into the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level literature curriculum and the factors that affect student engagement, sought to find out what was distinctive about Romantic poetry and the role of the teacher. Freire believed that teachers, as part of the dominant group within a school, have tremendous power over their students and the 'habitus' (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986) of the classroom, which 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed' (Navarro, 2006, p.16). Although one could argue 'any educational practice based on standardization, on what is laid down in advance, on routines in which everything is predetermined, is bureaucratizing and anti-democratic' (Freire and Faundez, 1989, p.41), I would assert that a state employed teacher has a duty to adopt a pragmatic approach, that allows them to harness the essence of poetry providing the opportunity for students to foster their interest in and enjoyment of poetry to find symmetry as a whole person. By demystifying poetry, by which I mean giving students confidence to engage with poetry independently, teachers will be effecting change and creating a culture in the classroom that promotes good poetry engagement by both teacher and pupil; thus: '[n]ature produces culture which changes nature' (Eagleton, 2000, p.3), and the socially constructed culture of one's environment is constantly influenced and altered in a never-ending cycle of renewal.

1. If students are *'educated for dependence; that is, to act according to the will of another fallible being, and submit, right or wrong, to power, where are we to stop?'*

(Wollstonecraft, *'A Vindication of the Rights of Women'*, 1792).

Romanticism can illuminate education by fostering individuality, spontaneous expression and liberating 'powerful feeling' (Wordsworth, 1800). In discovering the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, a tentative research question about whether Romantic poetry played a part in helping students decide whether to study A level English literature was explored. Understanding the significance of Romantic poetry to respondents, so it can be taught well is pertinent to this study. However, whilst respondents spoke about parts of the course they were looking forward to studying, their reasons for choosing English had little to do with Romanticism. In vivo codes and memoing revealed seeking independence, obtaining status and gauging value were interrelated. In constructing an understanding of the data, 'nuances of meaning and action' (Charmaz, 2014, p.339) were analysed and codes refined, generating the theoretical code of dependency, which runs contrary to the underpinnings of Romantic poetry that promoted autonomous thought, which might explain the general disconnect voiced by students towards the genre.

Without exception the sample were pragmatic in their reasoning as to why they were learning about Romantic poetry. Tom, who joined the study in September as a year 12 who had just finished his GCSEs, was looking forward to reading novels but had given little thought to the poetry he would be studying. Unlike Shelley who referred to poets as 'the unacknowledged legislators of mankind' (1821): influential innovative thinkers, who have the power to transform society, the students failed to make compelling arguments as to why poetry was of value to either society in general, or indeed themselves as individuals. In contrast to the Romantic poets who were concerned with individuality, creativity and the

liberation of an individual's interior world (Chaplin and Faflak, 2011), the students had made practical choices based on what was judged valuable (Eagleton, 2008). Literature was an attractive subject as it afforded opportunity to develop as well as express diverse opinion on important universal themes related to the human condition (Blake, 1789), and, pragmatically, Romantic poetry was part of the syllabus. The political relevance of the Romantic revolt that might enable students to reflect on contemporary events fearlessly, and so powerfully (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1818), was not understood as useful, but the future value of transferable skills related to literature was of significance to the students (Stephanie, Jenny, Ellie). Talking in vague terms about exploring 'meanings and symbolisms' in poetry, like many others in the sample, Jenny did not articulate the power of Romantic poetry to 'awaken[s] and enlarge[s]' one's cognitive ability 'by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought' (Shelley, 1821), but recognized the many opportunities poetry afforded the individual to engage with language and meaning, and by implication knowledge in line with both ' adult needs' and 'cultural analysis' models of English (DES and WO, 1989). In the same class as Tom, Jenny keenly described how whilst reading *Lamia* they had discussed with their teacher the components of tragedy, which she had found useful as it was helping her make connections to *Othello*, which she was also studying. Initial responses to Romantic poetry exposed its fundamental value to the students as a component part of literature rather than a genre and the significance of the guidance students had received in choosing the A-level.

In addressing the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum, studying poetry was incidental for those taking literature (Tom) and not a motivating factor (Stephanie). Consideration of the data exposed importance was placed on teacher opinion, and the syllabus had not played a part in the decision (Sarah). Students revealed a readiness to accept

advice and 'faith' (Jenny) in teachers' opinions, demonstrating a lack of independent decision making by students. Paralleling the supportive and productive relationship between Hazlitt and Keats (Edgecombe, 2003), several asked their teachers which A-levels they should study (Sarah, Milly, Jenny, Stephanie), demonstrating an implicit respect for their judgement. Although Milly comes across as self-assured in lessons, often contributing pertinent observations, she, like many of the others, asked for reassurance about which courses she should take. Thus, future directions after A-level were influenced by deferential confidence in the 'apparatus' (Althusser, 1971) of hegemonic institutions, by which Gramsci meant believing in mechanisms put in place by a dominant group (1971). Stephanie and Jenny, who generally asked for guidance in their understanding of concepts in class, had spoken to their English teachers to canvas their opinion. Whilst seeking advice can demonstrate maturity (research has suggested that others 'perceive those who seek advice as more competent than those who do not' (Brooks *et al*., 2015)), it might equally signpost the inexperience of disenfranchised students 'spoon-fed' through their GCSEs in 'chopped up' modularised packages and 'lacking the independence' (Claxton in Paton, 2010) to make autonomous decisions. Adopting a functionalist approach that recognizes the relationship between success at GCSE and potential future success (Parsons, 1967), students, understandably, chose to take subjects that they performed well in that might be thought of as 'useful' (Hill, 2001). Nonetheless, a dependence on teacher opinion revealed more about these students' potential latent inability to engage with Romantic poetry independently and their need to have their opinions validated (Merton, 1968), than what qualities they valued. In this way, it became clear how important impartial advice was when deciding on direction at post-16, but also that students experienced quality poetry experiences up to this point. Romantic poetry as part of the literature curriculum did not influence whether these students studied A-level or not.

Consistent with research that found an interconnectedness between the implicit and explicit practices of teachers and students' attitudes towards reading (Applegate and Applegate, 2004; Cremin *et al*, 2008), a disquieting parallel emerged between teachers' lack of engagement with Romantic poetry and their students. The rich descriptions within the data (Hambrick, 2007) revealed under half the respondents were currently reading any book that was not directly connected to the curriculum that they were teaching or studying, and only one teacher (TB) said that they were reading any poetry ('Loop of Jade' by Sarah Howe), suggesting an asymmetry amongst most teachers. TB is an experienced key stage 4 teacher who has an infectious enthusiasm for literature and is passionate about reading. Commenting on her desire to communicate this to her students, she is pleased that she has managed to 'get a couple reading [texts that are not on the syllabus] who weren't [reading] before' simply by talking to them about books and lending them copies, although she observed that it 'wasn't easy'. Notwithstanding the rigors of A-level programmes and the subject specific material that students need to digest to satisfy the demands of their courses, a general decline in reading habits in the main (Common Sense Media Report, 2014) implies students are not 'reading widely' around their poetry texts to satisfy A-level requirements (DfE, 2014). Students' reluctance to participate in broader debate is explained by their limited exposure (TP: They don't read around the subject), vindicating the principles of Romanticism that champion independent thinking as an essential part of education. Just as teachers cannot 'help children learn things they themselves do not understand' or have no experience of (Ball, 1991 in Coe *et al*., 2014, p.18), other influential persons' attitudes towards Romantic poetry were also important.

Unlike Keats and Coleridge who were 'hungry' readers of high-status poetry (Motion, 2003, p.37), students revealed the reading habits of parental figures, none of whom were currently reading Romantic poetry, though one had read poetry in the past (Sarah). Much research has revealed the influence of formative environments on student engagement in the classroom (Heath, 1983; Teale and Sulzby, 1986), indeed the poet Keats told Clarke (his former school master) that in his poem 'The Eve of St Agnes', his experience of music at school had inspired his portrayal of his character 'Porphyro listen[ing] to the music in the castle' (1819, in Motion, 2003, p.34). Despite studies that report girls enjoy reading and are more proficient readers (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2011), research has found that gendered behaviour is dependent on environmental influences rather than biologically predetermined (Leman and Tenenbaum, 2011; Reay, 1990; Skelton et al, 2007). The students' descriptions of home behaviours reflected research into reading habits that found fewer males of all ages read compared to females (*Booktrust*, 2013). Consistent with traditional roles (in bygone years the male parent was 'burdened with the responsibility' of providing for their family (Ball, 2013, p.138) so nurturing activities would have been carried out by women), students reported reading was mediated by female role models, with only three of the eight students stating a paternal figure read regularly, but not poetry. In general terms students agreed reading 'is important' (Milly) to access information and communicate meaning; however, reading poetry was regarded as unimportant to the achievement of strategic goals (Foucault's, 1977). It was viewed as 'unnecessary' to everyday life (Stephanie) and 'less useful to [fathers] than reading a [factual] book' for 'work purposes' (Jenny). Milly, Stephanie and Jenny were all in the same year 12 class and about to move into year 13. Poetry was seen by Stephanie and Jenny to have a secondary importance to reading and as inconsequential for success in the work place, thus students' attitudes were influenced by their parents' attitudes. Consequently, students studied A-level literature for its future

'usefulness' (Stephanie).

In exploring the position of poetry outside of school to establish its place in the curriculum, Phoebe, in her final term as a year 12 student, defensively explained that her dad did 'not read anything' as he was 'really busy' and worked 'really hard', noting that 'he used to read novels' but would not 'see the point' in reading poetry. Phoebe, a hardworking student, was quite reserved in lessons about sharing her opinions but used to take copious notes about what was being said by the teacher and other students. Elaborating her view in the same interview, she paused before explaining 'poetry can be quite airy fairy I suppose – my dad is practical'. Similarly, Tom commented his dad did not 'read anything' although his mum did. He explained that he thought she did not read poetry because it is 'hard to get into'. Asked if his mother had voiced this opinion, Tom admitted he had not 'talked about it exactly' but he thought 'that's what she would say' because she liked stories that 'grabbed you'. Dismissive of poetry's 'world of imagination' (Frye, 1990, p.236), Tom does not see poetry as immersive. Poetry's absence from their parents' lives, has led Phoebe and Tom to question its practical purpose, which is important to these students. Tom, a well-read student, has not engaged with poetry outside of school despite an interest in reading.

Students answered questions about their parents' feelings about Romantic poetry haltingly. Stephanie, with bemused justification, explained that her parents did not 'have [the] time to read [the] books' they like, 'so are not going to read poetry'. Stephanie conceded 'time' was an 'excuse' as a 16-line poem like '*London*' (Blake, 1794) is infinitely more manageable than a several hundred-page novel; however, she explained her view that poetry 'is not the same [as other genres] – you've got to enjoy it haven't you?'. Revealingly most of the

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students defended their parents' perceived resistance to poetry and their lack of 'enjoy[ment]', suggesting they were sympathetic to these views which shaped their own relationship with poetry. Thus, the potential contribution Romantic poetry could make to these students was not recognised and perception of worth was informed by the perception of others. Deprived of a cultural influence in the home that might be advantageous and offer students' 'cultural capital' through familiarity with high culture practices (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986), most students were only exposed to Romantic poetry at school. Just as Blake felt inadequately supported by his family, withdrawing 'into himself… because he could not deal directly or painlessly' with them (Ackroyd, 1999, p.8), some modern family cultural practices offer inadequate support to these A-level students who look to their family and schools for guidance.

In ascertaining the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and the factors that affect engagement, understanding developmental experiences with poetry was important. Whilst not delivering poetry at A-level, non-specialist teachers who taught English (prefaced NS) delivered units at both key stage 3 and key stage 4 where appreciation of poetry is established and built on higher up the school. One could argue, because of non-specialist teaching lower down the school, by the time students get to Key Stage 4 the potential power and joy of the genre is unlikely to have been fostered if they have not had quality instruction and the 'development of pupils' language, sensibilities and dream-power' could be fruitless (Carter, 2001, p.1).

> TV: Non-specialists deliver very passive lessons on poetry. They have their revision guide clutched to their chests and perhaps don't have the confidence to allow their students to make up their own minds about what a poem is about.

TV, an experienced teacher who has taught A-level literature, has enjoyed teaching the new

GCSE curriculum to her classes. TV describes the delivery of lessons that she has observed given by non-specialist teachers as lacking verve, and although her comments suggest a latent dissatisfaction in the holistic vision of how poetry is sometimes delivered , there is an acceptance that an individual's 'confidence' in their own knowledge means that this is often 'a reality' (TV). Although English specialists 'are more likely to be deployed where subject complexity is highest' (DfE, 2016, p.28) poetry experiences lower down the school may affect how sixth form students approach poetry. An 'unconfident teacher' may inadvertently transfer their feelings of uncertainty and deficient understanding to their pupils (Dymoke *et al,* 2015), and not provide the meaningful, detailed feedback that has been linked to achievement (Hattie, 2008).

Interviewed in my classroom at the end of the school day, TV discussed an over-reliance on 'revision guide[s]' limiting the parameters of the teacher's understanding and marginalising the place of all poetry within the curriculum. Stretching in her chair, TV a committed teacher seemed to be trying to relieve an ache or tension in her back, which might suggest discomfort with the poetry experiences she portrays some students as having, or on reflection a reappraisal of her judgement. Thinking for a moment TV concedes that there are a couple of non-specialist teachers 'who do go further' and it would be 'unfair' if she 'didn't acknowledge that'. However, scripted dialogue mutes the potential of language play and the opportunity to discover the power of emotions to broaden our experience, therefore teaching approaches are significant (Cumming, 2007). It could be argued that invaluable opportunities for intellectual and personal growth to create a fully rounded person can be lost because of a failure to engage with poetry's potential. Thus, those teaching outside of subject face challenges that they must navigate if they are to support the 'rebellion against attempts to underplay the role of feeling in understanding and interpreting human

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experience' (Halpin, 2007, p.22) which is part of the process of engaging with poetry and significant to Romanticism.

NSTS a non-specialist, is a very experienced teacher who has a good rapport with his students, who like him. Coming in before school to take part in my interview, he has an easy going and accommodating approach to the process. Admitting that he is 'stuck in [his] ways', NSTS, who has been teaching English for some time, depends on particular delivery methods and exercises, which in turn become 'learning crutches' (NSTD) that student's come to depend on but helps them succeed.

> NSTS: What I don't like about the [new] poetry is I've got to keep checking, I'm not 100% sure, but once I've taught it I've got the default and I can find short cuts - I like being able to do that, I like to support the students.

NSTS, adopts a 'cross-curricular' view of English (DES and WO, 1989), explaining that teaching poetry is a challenge for him, but that he finds satisfaction in achieving an understanding of the material and being able to pass that on. Despite what would seem to be irrefutable and reasonable argument about the potential hazards of having non-specialists teach poetry, surprisingly, government research based on 'limited available' evidence found that 'being taught by a teacher with a degree in the subject they teach has minimal impact on pupil outcomes at GCSE' (DfE, 2016, p.32), which seem to be corroborated by NSTS's experiences, as he regularly gets good exam results. Further research found only 'a modest positive relationship' existed between the impact of a teacher's subject knowledge as quantified by formal qualifications, and pupil outcomes (Education Data Lab, 2015 in DfE, 2016, p.33); nonetheless, NSTS is dependent on filtered knowledge provided by his expert colleagues, although his edited understanding helps him give his students relevant information that helps them succeed. Professional pride and the characteristics of an

experienced successful teacher whose facilitating skills work across the curriculum are important (Hill, Charalambous & Chin, 2005 in DfE, 2016, p.37); however, their ability to go beyond curriculum content to foster engagement in the subject will be limited. A non-specialist's ability to 'support' their students is reliant on scaffolded support from specialists. Dependent on a formula, non-specialist teachers are unlikely to embrace the significance of Romantic poetry as part of the curriculum beyond formal qualifications, or inspire a love for it and symmetry within a student, the way that a specialist teacher who is passionate about their subject can.

Reliance on established study practices and an inflexible approach to learning, were identified as factors which affected student engagement. Students were uncomfortable being 'pushed out of [their] comfort zone' (Jenny) and had certain expectations of their lessons. Representative of the group, Stephanie 'like[d] writing essays and finding out what I need to do to improve' as it was 'how [she] learn[t] best'. Resistant to activities that 'waste[d] time', she needed her teachers to provide the opportunities that she felt were most useful. Despite, research that has shown observing 'learning styles intervention' has 'low impact' on achievement (The Educational Endowment Foundation, 2018), several students were steadfast in their beliefs that they learnt 'in particular ways' (Julia). It has long been a 'misconception' that a student's preferred 'learning style' should be catered for to help optimise an individual's learning, and eminent professionals in the field of neuroscience have found that students 'will improve if they think about how they learn but not because material is matched to their supposed learning style' (Letter, The Guardian, 12th March, 2017). Nonetheless, most of the students believed that certain learning experiences were 'not useful' (Stephanie) and their dependant 'mindset' impacted on their practices (Dweck and

Leggett, 1988). In the same way that Keats' was said to have 'live[d] in a vacuum and never described or responded to wider issues' (Motion, 2003, xxii), Stephanie developed certain beliefs about what helped her learn and was reluctant to diversify from a set of practices that have proven to pay dividends. Stephanie, keen to talk about her experiences, felt that sixth form students were expected to get involved 'with committees and stuff' that she felt were a waste of time and detracted from her purpose. Unlike the Romantics who were empowered holistically through poetry, Stephanie, who was characteristic of the group, was driven by results. In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, students' pragmatic reflections about the wider world, in line with an 'adult-needs' view of English, were relevant (DES and WO, 1989).

Failing to appreciate the journey A-level can take an individual on where they get to know themselves better deprives individuals of the understanding that '[u]nlike other language, … poetry is not simply and solely a vehicle for meaning' (Roberts, 2000, p.62) but offers personal growth opportunities that can 'develop[ing] children's imaginative and aesthetic lives' (Moss in Davison and Dowson, 2009, p.4).

> NSTS: I feel in a position of weakness if I'm not as knowledgeable as I'd like to be… Maybe I've narrowed them – it's my fault, too much of a safety net and [I] need to let them go..

NSTS feels responsible for delivering content to ensure students engage with the curriculum, acknowledging that there is a danger of being too didactic in an attempt to try to control his delivery of the content. However, as the leaseholder of the poem that students are not free to 'mess around in' (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988, p.7), he establishes for his students what is important about poetry. Reflecting on his practice NSTS is censorious of his teaching, aware that students are dependent on his interpretation. An area of English that 'presents specific

pedagogic challenges' (Dymoke et al., 2015b, p.2), his concern suggests his desire to do the best by his students, although he sees his duty as limited to the requirements of the GCSE syllabus.

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and factors that affect student engagement, teachers can influence the culture of the classroom.

> TP: We say 'We're going to have 6 weeks on these poems and each lesson we're going to look at a different one and try and make some links. It's a necessary way of teaching it at the moment, but perhaps in a couple of years when we see the curriculum through we'll start to be able to perhaps link up thematically some poems [sic].

TP is professional in his approach, working hard with his students to ensure that they get good results, he regularly reflects on his practice and engages in conversations with colleagues about changes that can be made to the curriculum. Speaking to me at the end of the day having just taught the A-level class that we both teach, he reflects about all the changes that have taken place over the last year. He makes the point that as both the GCSE and A-level courses are part of new curriculums, the dynamics of how the courses are taught are in the process of being finely tuned. He makes the point that the poems could be taught alongside other texts using a thematic approach that can facilitate learning through the holistic relationship of different genres (Dalton and Boyd, 1992). Many advantages of choosing this delivery method have been identified such as being able to relate learning from one literary genre to another through 'the integration of disciplinary knowledge' (Fry *et al*., 2015, p.174) and being able to synthesize a student's understanding of a particular literary structure with different texts, as well as engaging students' interest through diverse texts and contextualised learning. However, arguably, this would be a dilution of the analytic process necessary for A-level, as when one studies texts, close examination of 'certain organizational

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genre features' allow students to make generalizations about similarities between types of writing (Beach *et al.,* 2016), which might mean that students are better equipped to tackle other poems that they come across for the first time. In this way, a thematic approach may devalue the importance of poetry and result in superficial and inconsequential analysis of verse, and result in the trivialising of the very essence of what makes poetry special. Rather than developing skills of analysis and building on them and making connections between texts, poems may become entertaining interludes in amongst the seminal novel or ground-breaking play. Because literature in general is vital to 'enable[s] [students] to ask questions about [themselves] and about life…It encourages us to become conscious of being conscious. It's an explanation of what it means to be people' (Barlow, *The Guardian*, 2013), it is important that no aspect of it is diluted to ensure the attention spans of our pupils can be maintained (Bradbury and Robert-Holmes, 2016), whilst providing an opportunity to foster a respect for different values and opportunities for personal development to create symmetrical individuals (Macfarlane, 2004; Nixon, 2009).

In seeking to understand the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, many of the students were dependent on gaining access to the poetry through their teacher, which can limit interpretation (Xerri, 2013). Several of the pupils commented on Keats' use of ambiguous description. For example, in 'The Eve of St Agnes' details of the encounter between Porphyro and Madeline remain 'unsaid' (Roe, 2012, p.86) and Porphyro 'melts into Madeline's dream… leaving the reader wondering is it a real or imagined consummation?' (Snell, 2013, p.164), which allows 'space for his readers' imaginations to work' (Roe, 2012, p.86). Some students wanted a definitive explanation. By using a persona to narrate what is happening in the poem through 'negative capability' (Keats in Cook, 2008, p.370), the poet can explore places and ideas that are beyond the poet's personal experience or

understanding, thus freeing the imaginative process and a world of possibility. Despite the fact events and characters do not need to stand up to forensic analysis, the reader needs to 'buy into' (TP) the poet's 'self-sufficient imaginative universe[s]' (Motion, 1997, p.53), which some students struggled to do which I identified as a factor that affected student engagement.

2. 'O *for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts*,'

(Keats: *letter to Benjamin Bailey*, 22nd November 1817).

Successive attempts to unpick students' attitudes to poetry revealed a variety of complex feelings. A tentative research question about students' feelings about poetry in general and more specifically about whether they enjoyed Romantic poetry, with the aim of discovering the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, was explored with the respondents. Whilst respondents started off sharing their views about the poems they studied / taught, the coding of responses shifted the focus of my inquiry to sensations. Masking an insecurity with 'the magic of poetry' that has been elevated to the status of precious artefact because it has long been neglected in the classroom (Meek, 1990, p.31), students were ambivalent. Remembering their first experience of poetry indistinctly, foundational experiences had evoked little emotion in the students at the time. In 'weav[ing] the fractured story [of students' experiences] back together' (Glaser, 1978:72) theoretical coding gave integrative coherency to the power of emotional engagement, illuminating subjective feelings and contextual influence.

In considering the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, the Romantics believed that poetry 'was the key by which …feelings could be unlocked' (*The Examiner*, 1816, in Motion, 2003, p.58) and 'any discussion of poetry should be linked to an appreciation of painting, drama and music' (Hay, 2010, p.59). Since the 'way to human perfectibility…[lies] through education' (Reis Monteiro, 2014, p.317), I was keen to try and utilise innovative thinking to understand how teachers can better provide for all students' needs within a class and support integrated holistic development that inspires creativity (Xerri, 2013) and reflective thinkers (Pike, 2011). Emphasising the link between 'thinking, feeling and action', teaching has moral dimensions that must consider students' emotional health (Palmer, 2007; Palmer and Zajonc, 2010). My argument here is that Romantic poetry offers opportunity for 'personal growth (DES and WO, 1989) and prepares students not 'for their occupations, but…against their occupations' (Sampson in Marshall, 2000, p.23), and it is the duty of the teacher to facilitate the development of the whole, beyond the academic. The curriculum must be structured to allow opportunities for growth to be exploited within the lesson, to ensure students become confident well-rounded individuals as well as academically proficient.

As part of an English department initiative that challenged the perception of poetry throughout key stages, year 12 students were encouraged to become 'Sixth Form Literature Ambassadors'.

> TP: The poetry ambassadors [Milly and Sarah] really enjoyed taking those sessions, but when they came back to class, they just wanted to get on with it like normal. They see what we do in class as separate and don't really care whether they enjoy it or not.

With the aim of nurturing 'delight' and 'be[ing] a bit more involved in their own learning' (TV), students ran 'fun' (Sarah) workshop sessions with younger students. Sarah spoke

positively about the experience and explained she enjoyed the 'responsibility' of making something that could be 'remote' accessible. TP indicates that the students taking part spoke about it in class and made a distinction between what they did with Year 8 students in 'enjoyable' poetry sessions (Milly) and what A-level students wanted to do in their lessons. TP, responsive to his student's needs, prioritises exam type questions taking an 'adult needs' view of English but also adopts a 'cultural analysis' approach that acknowledges texts are influenced by a range of other factors. He emotively expressed the view that teachers 'kill… [poetry] a little bit' by looking at groups of poems in blocks over concentrated time periods. Making the point that creativity can make you feel emotion, TP was aware the students' analytical preference was counterproductive for holistic engagement with poetry, but was pragmatic in his approach to his students' needs. Unlike Keats who tirelessly pursued 'the principle of Beauty' investing 'his imaginative energy' into a 'shape' that 'could resist the flow of time' (Motion, 2003, p.xxii), TP is not necessarily teaching the poems in the way that he, or indeed Milly and Sarah, might think is the most inspiring. Sitting at right angles to my chair in my classroom at the end of the day, TP leans back on the blue plastic student chair, locks his fingers together and puts his hands on his head. Philosophical about his approach to his A-level lessons, he explains the need to constantly change the 'shape' of his lessons to meet the needs of his students. TP's pragmatism about his primary role in the classroom – a facilitator of the A-level literature curriculum, can be explained by his desire to 'see them do as well as they can'. TP comments on their self-awareness: these students are preoccupied with writing well because they 'know it is [their] weak area'. Thus, although most of the students have little interest in making emotional connections with the poems, they are percipient and cognizant of their failings and in this way demonstrate emotional development. Possibly reflecting protective impulses, single-minded in focus, these students wanted to pass their A-level using 'assimilated and reproduced' answers facilitated by 'static

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almost mechanical learning' (McRae, 1991, p.8), and did not want to be distracted from purpose by sentiment.

TP, aware that his students were 'reticent' to make links between events in the poems and their own lives, concludes they feel 'exposed' by their lack of knowledge, which is acknowledged by Fiona. Nonetheless, certain poems provoked reaction more readily. Jenny commented that she had enjoyed studying 'Little Black Boy' by William Blake:

> I'm not really sure why – it's the imagery and the subject matter. Umm, at first I didn't like the title – [it can be seen as] patronizing. But then we read it and it's about slavery being bad and what it was like being black at that time.

Having failed to engage with 'a complex paradigm of artistic treatments of language' (Eagleton, 2011, p.68), a superficial reading of the poem devoid of contextual understanding, left Jenny feeling alienated by the content of the poem.

> My mother bore me in the southern wild,
> And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
> White as an angel is the English child:
> But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

Jenny talks about her feelings and being moved by the poem, which resonates with Emily Dickinson's appraisal of how the power of verse can make you 'physically' feel 'as if the top of [your] head were taken off' – thus, Blake's poem would appear to have made an impression, resonating with this student because emotionally she engaged with it.

> Jenny: The line having a white soul really stands out – it helps you understand what it would have been like to be black – the prejudice, it would have been awful – being made to feel that what you are is bad because of the colour of your skin. I found it quite moving.

In trying to understand the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum, understanding

how students respond to emotion can help facilitate engagement. Sarah and Fiona also spoke of being emotionally affected because 'slavery was still around and … life was so awful [for black people]' (Fiona). Interestingly Fiona uses the same adjective as Jenny: 'awful'; further discussion revealed that some time had been spent as a class with their teacher discussing it. This repeated simplistic response by the students might suggest immaturity of emotions, as there is no development in their reaction from their initial exploration in class discussion, or an inability to find words that sufficiently express their profound emotion. Jenny's initial emotional reaction seemed to be shared by other members of the group, who may have been affected by each other's outrage as 'the title…sounded a bit racist to me' (Fiona). In this way, the respondents' emotions appear to have acted as an 'emotional contagion' (Schacter-Singer, 1962) as the students were influenced by each other's outrage. A gradual understanding that the poem was written as a piece of protest writing against the slave trade, unlocked content for the group. Sarah explained that 'it is the contrast between the English boy and the little black boy – [it's] so harsh and miserable', and thus one can understand why poetry might be called 'dangerous, especially beautiful poetry, because it gives the illusion of having had the experience without actually going through it,' (Rumi in Puohit and Saxena, 2015). Providing individuals with an opportunity to confront unpleasant aspects of life and consider their own feelings about important issues, these poems can be seen to be holistically enriching, helping individuals to feel empathy for each other. However, subject areas that had no personal resonance for the group, did not engage students in debate in the same way. Depersonalising emotion, students spoke in the third person about 'Blake's anger at the church' in 'Holy Thursday' which contrasted with first person responses about 'The Chimney Sweeper'. Having spent 'less time talking' about subjects that did not resonate, students did not have the same contextual knowledge and were more emotionally removed (TD).

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In identifying what factors affect student engagement, TP commented that he personally likes the Keats' poetry and that overall most of the sixth form students seemed to have been more engaged with it. Adopting a pragmatic philosophy ensuring students are equipped to understand material (Marshall, 2000), TP comments that several of the students liked 'the mythology and the characters' and were 'really linking in there' to their own knowledge of myths and legends in line with a 'cultural analysis' view of English that focuses on the way meaning is conveyed through value systems that the students understood (DES and WO, 1989). Those familiar with mythology were more confident and 'more vocal' (TP), potentially alienating those disconnected from identifiable cultural markers. TP observed 'a few' individuals 'warmed up' (TP) to Keats and were enticed by the narrative and the quality of expression, and as their knowledge grew so did their confidence in writing about it. Phoebe commented:

> I quite liked '*Lamia*' once we'd finished - whilst we were reading, it was quite hard going and I was like 'urrgh' – but once it was done I look back on it and I really enjoyed it. I like the story and I liked this bit [pointing to the text] it was really nicely worded.

In trying to understand the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English curriculum, being able to understand value systems and feel emotionally connected facilitated student engagement. Interestingly, Phoebe's reaction seems to have evolved from one of annoyance and possibly dislike (as indicated by the utterance 'urrgh'), to an appreciation. She starts off using the lukewarm adverb 'quite' with the phlegmatic verb 'like' to describe how she feels about the poem, but as she processes her feelings orally and reflects on them, she seems to transform her initially tepid judgement by using the intensifier 'really' to describe her enjoyment. In this way, the act of talking about the poem has allowed Phoebe to engage with the emotions that she feels about the poem and understand them better, which

would seem to support the idea that the development of concepts is embedded in language (Brockmeier, 2013), and one's emotions are directed by how the body responds. Thus, 'we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble' (Ellsworth, 1994, p.222) and Phoebe felt happy when talking about the poem, so realised that she no longer felt negatively about it. In this way, the students' emotional responses are not static but developed with their understanding showing 'personal growth' (DES and WO, 1989).

> TP: [In the] Blake [poems] - some of the actions of the priest – there's one where they brand a child, the two chimney sweeper poems – they really engage with that – so they have been positive. We've done a bit of the research and the contexts into the 4-7 year old naked boys who were pushed up chimneys and that was their livelihood [sic].

Exploring context was imperative to unlock meaning and understanding. In a group discussion about attitudes to poetry, all the students in the sample intimated that they understood the difference between an 'efferent' reading of a poem in which one tried to acquire information and an 'aesthetic' reading in which one attempted to engage with the events of a text (Rosenblatt, 1978), and that they used both to understand layers of meaning. The immeasurable value of English literature means that being able to access the meaning of a text is of fundamental importance, and axiomatically, context is significant when considering all interactions as 'ideas do not exist in a vacuum…nor do they exist in detachment from the lived experience of individuals' (Gilmour, 2013, p.xiv). Limited prior knowledge about the poets and a limited understanding about the turbulent times in which these poems were written, meant that students at times felt disconnected and were unable to draw pertinent parallels to the turbulent world in which they currently lived. Thus, Romantic poetry can be seen to be very relevant to these students' lives, although not all students were aware of it.

Exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, students saw the study of material outside of the examinable curriculum as less important (Snapper, 2006; Xerri, 2013), helping to reinforce the parameters of their own reality and strengthen the cultural power structures of summative assessment (Foucault, 1980). In contrast, the literature ambassadors, as well as fostering an enjoyment of the genre lower down the school, spoke with enhanced self-assurance about their roles as facilitators (Xerri, 2014). Milly, discussing her experiences of being a literature ambassador in a joint interview, spoke with confidence about her role. When students who had the literature ambassadors visit were informally polled at the commencement of each respective poetry experience ('Keats' A-level unit, 'Poetry Day Workshop', 'GCSE Literature Revision Workshop'), 37.5% of Year 12 and 13 students said that they enjoyed studying the genre, compared to 58% of Year 11 students and 83% of Year 8 students. Although only a snapshot of opinion that cannot be taken as representative of all students in these year groups, it would seem to show a shocking decline in enthusiasm for the subject over time. Ironically, considering the A-level students' examination focus in their own lesson, the ambassadors key objectives were enjoyment and fostering debate to support original thought (Freire, 2010). When the participating students were asked what they liked most about the sessions, overwhelmingly students stated that they had enjoyed interacting with older students who offered 'tips' about accessing meaning. Many commented that they thought it had been fun, and pleasingly 100% of the Year 8 and Year 11 pupils polled after their poetry workshop said that they had enjoyed the poetry. When asked what they enjoyed most about the activities a significant portion of both classes said that they enjoyed being creative and exploring the poems without having to write an extended response or essay. In line with the Romantic ideal, creativity and emotional engagement liberated this experience for these students, as well as peer mentors who made poetry accessible (Freire, 2010). Thus, the sixth form students were seen to imbue poetry

with innovation and vigour, as well as a new availability, signifying good poetry teaching in early schooling could foster sentience, benefiting A-level engagement, suggesting the engagement of sensation can affect student engagement.

At the outset of the course, insecure knowledge in various individuals manifested itself both as unquestioning compliance with any suggested insight (Jenny: 'Yes I agree'), as well as blustering aggrandisement of opinion that did not always stand up to scrutiny (Stephanie: 'Lorenzo is a ghost'). Many students feared 'saying something stupid' (Jenny) or voicing an opinion that 'didn't' make sense' (Stephanie), revealing self-awareness and a distinction in the students' thinking between academic and emotional engagement. In her second interview Jenny described her anxiety that she would 'say what [she] thought' and everyone would laugh. Making light of her feelings, Jenny dismissed her feelings with a shrug of her shoulders suggesting that there was little that could be done about her feelings or that there was little that could be done about people laughing at her. Previous experiences had left Jenny feeling vulnerable and voiceless. In this way, reticence about articulating an opinion that exposed intellectual naivety robbed some students of the confidence to explore transactional interpretations and voice their subjective feelings about poems (Rosenblatt, 1994). Responding to the question: 'Do you enjoy reading poetry?', Fiona's candid if passive response: 'I don't know', shows no sign of the 'observer effect' (where the subject alters their behaviour because they are being observed (Le Compte and Goetz, 1982; Guba, 1981; Forsythe, 1999)), or a desire to dissect the question for clarity. Failing to ask for elucidation suggests superficial engagement, an inability to discern value or an unwillingness to engage emotionally. On further questioning, Fiona qualified her response explaining she generally neither 'like[d] nor dislike[d]' poetry, and that she had enjoyed some of the poems that she has studied, but not all. Asked about her reaction to '*Lamia*'

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(1820), Fiona's emotional response was guarded saying it was 'ok'. Delving deeper, Fiona revealed that she was more interested in making sure that she understood what all the poems meant so that she could 'write a good answer' and that she did not think 'it mattered' whether she had enjoyed all the texts or not as long as she could write about them. Thus, Fiona is seen to re-legitimise the 'habitus' of the classroom by striving for 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) within the parameters of the A-level examination system, accepting that various institutions have made decisions about her education and what knowledge she should acquire, her response is pragmatic adopting a demeanour of 'docility, receptivity, and obedience' (Dewey in Marshall, 2000, p.27). To her, Romantic poetry needs to be understood to write about it academically, but emotional engagement is not necessary. Disadvantaged by a lack of aesthetic engagement (Rosenblatt, 1994), arguably Fiona is deprived holistic growth through 'a life of sensations' and as a result is asymmetrical (Keats (1817) in Cook, 2008).

Exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum Milly was more open to engaging emotionally, explaining that she 'like[d] the language and the layers of meaning', revealing that she chose to read poetry at home. Whilst all the students in the sample recognised that they encountered poetry in some guise daily (lyrics and songs; nursery rhymes and children's television; advertisements and slogans), only two students admitted reading poetry independently for pleasure recognising their subjective perspectives in accordance with reader response theory, both of whom spoke perceptively about the studied poetry. Milly expressed an awareness of wider contextual influences that make literature relevant as well as the advantages of reading around texts, to inform critical engagement. Making a distinction between personal selections and poetry on the syllabus, she commented that she 'enjoyed reading… Sylvia Plath and Andrew Motion', and that she

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'didn't like Keats'. Achieving one of the highest AS marks in Year 12, one could superficially surmise that the strategies that Milly is implementing pay dividends; however, as Fiona, who expressed some reluctance to engage with any activity that was not directly going to furnish her with academic success, also got a high mark, one could question the veracity of this point. Although enjoyment does not necessarily equate to success (both Milly and Fiona had a very good understanding of the poems technically but did not like all the poems), Milly's independent engagement with poetry gave her confidence to explore poetry on an emotional level allowing her to access a fuller understanding and articulate personal insight about how it made her feel.

In understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English curriculum, all students spoke of nuanced poetic language unlocking layers of meaning within 'a storm-center of … sounds and associations, radiating out indefinitely like the ripples of a pool' and influencing emotion (Frye, 1990, p.114). Adopting subjective critical positions 'entwined with… broader prejudices and beliefs' (Eagleton, 1996, p.13), Milly commented that Keats' poetry was self-indulgent and 'a bit whiny'. Expressing her irritation with Keats in her first interview, Milly smiled and looked amused as she expressed her view, seemingly enjoying the fact that she was expressing controversial opinions on the focus of my research. Keats' emotional power to elicit feeling opened holistic debate beyond structural analysis to contextual concerns of gender and identity (Sarah, Stephanie) and satisfied Keats' desire to illicit 'sensation of some sort' through his poetry (Keats in Cook, 1819, p.501). Complaining about depressing narratives running through Keats' poems, Milly acknowledged Sylvia Plath's poetry, that she chooses to read for pleasure, 'is fairly depressing too'. An interest in Plath's backstory: 'her dad was supposed to be pro-Nazi… it's that period during the Second World War, I find interesting', made her sympathetic to Plath's themes. Explaining

'contemporary poetry' is more 'relatable' and Plath's 'expressive' style communicates insight into her emotional struggles 'affect[ing] how you view' events in 'your own life', I asked her if feeling antipathy towards Keats' representations helped her define her views:

> Yeah, I suppose so. I mean we all get stuck in and have an opinion on *Lamia* and the knight – Stephanie calls Porphyro the rapist! I hadn't really thought about it, but in a way because I get so annoyed it helps me get passionate about it.

An intolerance of Keats' 'whinging' rejects Keatsian 'negative capability' (Rich, 1984, p.108) - the idea that he is negating the self and becoming part of something else in his poetry gave students something to rail against (Stephanie, Milly). Interestingly, although unnecessary for reader-response analysis, Milly maintains she is 'not interested' in Keats' biographical information even though it has allowed her to unlock layers of meaning in Plath's work. A cavalier disregard for times of momentous change can leave students contextually alienated, divesting them of cultural parallels that can help them make sense of their own lives and the society in which they live; however, robust emotional reactions to poetry engage the 'personal growth' view of English and can engage students with Romantic poetry.

Understanding the dynamics of Milly's teaching group was important in understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and the role of sensation. As an all-girl group, who had read feminist criticism as part of the course, Milly's views might be blinkered to other readings or interpretations. Despite an initial reluctance to commit to opinions about 'irritating little verbal puzzle[s]'(Snapper, 2006, p.32) by most students, there was some sympathy with Milly's intolerance of Keats within one of the classes. I wondered if Milly thought a more diverse group with diverse opinions might alter her perception?

> Milly: I don't think it would make a difference if there were boys in the group – I mean I know

we are all female, but sir isn't! He tries to get us to consider how we react. I know [Keats] had a hard time with his mother and Fanny Brawne, oh and there was another woman called Isabela or something? – And I can do it – I always try to include more than one reading, but I just don't like him [sic].

Milly is confident responding to Keats' poetry, making subjective self-assured critiques that do not require 'the same… [reaction] from others' (Kant, 1790, p.52). However, her well-articulated views were persuasive; other students acknowledged 'the more we look at the knight [in 'La Belle Dame sans merci'] the more I see him as weak' (Stephanie) and 'stupid' (Jenny). In comparison, Tom commented that his mixed class have been quite receptive to the Keats' poetry that they have studied:

Yeah I think … [we have enjoyed it]. Yeah '*Isabella*' – we've had long conversations about her brothers – it's engaging. Big class discussions. It's best to talk it through as a class … Because we are a small class we can all have input, and no one is [left] out of the conversation [sic].

Individuals' experiences within a group can influence how a text is received, but Tom talks with positivity about engaging with Keats within a class in which both genders were represented, and so arguably different points of view were more readily explored. He values being able to discuss ideas about the poems as a class, which exposes the individual to other points of view and interpretations. Whilst acknowledging different perspectives Milly is steadfast in assessment, which she assuredly justifies:

The point is, in his poem 'Lamia', he called it Lamia for a reason – a lamia is some kind of female blood-sucking monster. It's obvious he's being 'oh woe is me, aren't women horrible!' The women [in Keats' poetry] are portrayed as femme fatales and Lycius is wet and at [Lamia's] mercy.

This sweeping assessment of the role of women in Keats' poetry would seem to ignore Madeline in '*The Eve of St. Agnes*' and Isabella in the poem '*Isabella or the Pot of Basil*', neither of whom could be described as seductive or dangerous 'fatal women'. Modern portrayals of women in Carol Ann Duffy's '*The world's wife*' or Anne Sexton's confessional

poetry, would seem to offer a connection for Milly poetically and a foil on which Keats characters could be projected. Thus, students must not be limited by an 'economy of cultural goods' (Bourdieu, 2010) or the value judgements imposed on the A-level syllabus (Kant, 1790). It is not the fact that Milly finds Keats' poetry 'depressing' that puts her off Keats' poetry, but she feels antagonistic to his portrayal of women and emotion, which informs how Milly feels about the material. Fundamentally she would concur with Keats' appraisal about his complicated relationships: that he does not have 'a right feeling towards Women' (Keats writing to Benjamin Bailey, July 1818), whose poems have been read by some critics as misogynistic in attitude (Ross in Claridge and Langland, 1990; Watkins, 1995).

> Milly: There was Lamia, Pot of Basil, La Belle Dame sans Merci – argh! They are all about people falling in love and it messing up – they're just all about dying and being unfulfilled - [they are] miserable… they just exhaust me [sic].

Milly's response is not neutral and the process of talking about the poetry evokes quite strong emotion in her. Thus, it could be argued that these poems are shown to be powerful texts that have accomplished their intent as they have succeeded in eliciting emotion from the reader who is 'infected by the feelings which the author has felt', but has chosen to reject (Tolstoy, 1995). In the 'interactive role of the reader' (Iser, 1978), Milly exerts personal power by voicing her opinion about the narrative of the poem. Just because Milly does not like the sentiments expressed in the poem '*Lamia*', it does not negate the capacity of the poem to emotionally engage her any more than a poem that she had enjoyed, which can be identified as a factor relevant to the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum.

Building on Milly's response, I wondered if others felt disconnected from the emotion expressed in the poems that are written by a man, what emotions they felt when reading the poems, and if they felt they were hampered by studying two male poets and no female poets?

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Sarah: I don't think it matters [that we are studying two male poets] – because obviously our NEA we could write about whoever we want – you could look at feminism or Marxism. So it does give you that leeway. I think by looking at Keats - especially how the focal point of all his poems is the woman – like with the name of the poems and stuff - that it's quite interesting to see his point of view and how he sees women. I don't think it is important so long as you have choice in other areas.

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum, 'systemic' female 'subordination' (Cockburn, 1991, p6) identified by some feminist critics in the work of male writers, is not something that Sarah feels is relevant to the texts she is studying. The gender of the poet is unimportant, and Sarah rather sees it as an opportunity to look at a situation and process information differently, thus notionally facilitating more perceptive analysis and original thought in the reader. She explains students can make choices about who they study for the 'Non-Examined Assessment' and the lens that they use to explore those poems, consequently there is an opportunity to look at themes from a female perspective if the individual student should feel so inclined, thus engaging emotion to make decisions about direction.

Fiona: They're just texts and important texts I suppose – I don't really care who wrote them.

Interviewing Fiona after the lesson at the end of the school day, she pragmatically makes the point that it does not matter to her who wrote the texts if they are worth reading, acknowledging 'internal and external aspects of the educational experience' in line with 'how children learn… [and] what they learn' (Marshall, 2000, p.26). Indeed, the 'passionate and unstable' Keats who 'mingled love and anxiety' (Motion, 2003, p.21) was arguably no less so than Mary Shelley, who traumatised by losing several children in childhood like many women attached to the Romantic circle, was 'left behind to count the cost of youthful idealism: damaged reputations, limited earning capacity, and exclusion from polite society' after her husband drowned (Hay, 2010, p.283). Having made links between the poems

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'Lamia', 'Isabella' and *'La Belle Dame sans merci'* as part of a revision lesson in which she had confidently discussed similarities and differences with other members of the group, Fiona appreciates that as 'important texts', there is value in studying Keats' poetry in line with the 'cultural-heritage' view of English. Not getting drawn into emotive debate with other students during the lesson, she is objective in her appraisal and talks about features she has identified in the poems with detachment. In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, Fiona's phlegmatic response does not make an emotional connection to the poems that she has studied, although other students did recognise merit in a reflexive approach.

> Phoebe:. It can help to inform your identity. When you are analysing poetry you are analysing how they feel – it's an opportunity for self-reflection as well. I compare how Keats feels to how I feel about stuff – [but] I think he is a bit over the top or whatever.

There was some acknowledgement that engagement with poetry afforded an opportunity for development in accordance with the 'personal-growth' view of English. Phoebe tacitly acknowledges that as members of society, individuals '…cannot be outside of power relations' (Ball, 2013, p.30) as an understanding of different types of literature 'help to inform'(Phoebe) who you are, facilitating '…an opportunity to be successful' (Ball, 2013, p.30). Although Phoebe's terminology is not negative, the words: 'informative', 'necessary' and 'opportunity', create a semantic field of exerted influence, which would seem to suggest an implicit acceptance that reading poetry is a fundamental component of the course that it is important to engage with to do well. Whilst she is comfortable in theory with engaging with emotion, Phoebe would seem to have reservations about 'over the top' expressions of sentiment which she distances herself from. In this way, her discomfort would seem to reinforce her inability to express feelings in words that might reflect her limited experience of processing emotion. Contrastingly, another student saw engaging with emotion as liberating as it could 'help the individual' grow beyond the parameters of their own

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existence, to connect to 'sensitive subjects' and to 'work out' (Sarah) what one's views are, by helping to 'connect us to experiences that lie beyond our immediate experience' (Snell, 2013, p.3). In line with a reader-response approach, expressing emotion was openly acknowledged as important to many students, but there seemed to be an awkwardness about drawing parallels with many of the emotions explored that left individuals feeling 'a bit exposed' and vulnerable (Sarah).

Feeling sensations affected student engagement and was relevant to understanding the place of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum. My argument here is that some students who seemed compliant with societal norms and educational parameters by engaging with texts, tacitly exercised some resistance. By distancing themselves emotionally so that they did not feel vulnerable, students exerted some power over their education. In contrast, others saw power in the possibilities for personal growth. Reading poetry that 'expos[ed] [individuals] to certain experiences' (Julia) that were alien to them, required students to 'think about how [they] would react in that situation' (Phoebe), and was powerful as it helped them understand others better. Individuals empathised with the experiences of others, developing emotional intelligence and personal-growth (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). It could be argued that many of the students were exerting power through their relationships with the poems. Borne out of an 'awaken[ed] perception of the rotten nature' of society (Hay, 2010, p.22), Romantic poetry expresses powerful feelings in carefully considered verse, but the changing nature of society impacts on how those ideas are communicated and how individuals respond.

3. '*Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change*': mediating poetry through technology to cope with the modern world

(Mary Shelley, '*Frankenstein',* 1818).

With the aim of discovering the place of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, a tentative research question about whether teachers' attitudes towards poetry affected students' perception of poetry was explored. Revealingly, although teaching styles and the enthusiasm of teachers was discussed, the coding of responses shifted the focus of my inquiry to the significance of technology. Technologically literate and reliant teenagers, who research information on the internet (92% of American teenagers were reported to go online daily according to a study from the Pew Research Center) using a virtual presence (Street, 2011, p.261), reflect a cultural shift. Communicating through digital personas, making meaning using multimodal texts (Kress, 2003) and sharing knowledge in virtual learning environments, the significance of the relationship between mass media technologies and poetry, emerged as significant. In a progressively mechanised world, the destructive power of 'cold philosophy' separated from feeling (*Lamia* Part II, 1820), generated anxiety for the Romantics but it was seen to have both advantages and disadvantages for the respondents.

Growing up with the social media revolution and celebrity culture that encourages the need for external validation (Marshall, 2014), communication through narcissistic social media platforms, that promote superficial interests and instant messages, challenges Romantic ideals allied with the natural world that pursue 'absolute inwardness' (Hegel in Blanning, 2011, p.21). Trying to establish what factors affect engagement with Romantic poetry, six of the eight students in the sample made an overt link between the properties of various media

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platforms and poetry. Several students drew parallels between the internet giving them 'a voice' and poetry 'speaking' to them (Sarah). Twitter and internet forums were described as tools (Tom, Julia) that helped formulate and give validity to opinions by breeding 'self-assur[ance]' (Jenny) and, like poetry, technology was a vehicle through which one could communicate 'feelings'(Julia). Further questioning revealed students felt superficially confident because they could 'google' poems and find out about them (Julia). However, the instantaneous global reach of mass media technologies was acknowledged to be hazardous, leaving students wary of expressing genuine thoughts.

> Julia: I am careful about what I tweet - if I had a really strong emotion to something I would never post it. If it was a really happy life event like someone's getting married or something - I had a cousin born the other week –but if I fall out with someone or I'm really sad about something, I don't see the point in putting it out there.

Discussing the internet's contemporary relevance for some young people that previous generations might have fulfilled by keeping a diary, Julia makes the distinction between private and public events. Meeting at lunchtime at Julia's request as she was signing out of school afterwards as she had no more lessons, she places her bag on the back of her chair and her phone on the desk in front of her. She explains she is aware of the need to exercise caution about what life experiences she shares and the emotions she documents online. In between talking Julia intermittently picks up her phone and checks the screen. Although Julia uses the internet in a similar way to a diary, it does not allow her to be candid because of concerns about privacy. In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English curriculum, poetry would appear to offer students a safe outlet to explore emotion. Unlike the Romantic poets who harnessed raw emotion through their 'confessional writing and interiority' that gave them 'liberation and emancipation… [of] expression' (Chaplin and Faflak, 2011, p.xv), Julia acknowledges, arguably quite sensibly, that her exchanges on the internet are self-conscious and she expurgates content that might leave her vulnerable or

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exposed. The adverb of frequency, 'never', suggests the acute caution that she feels sharing information that could leave her defenceless to unknown threats. Thus, it could be reasoned that although the internet might provide a platform on which the individual can express their emotions, self-censorship and guarded communication struggle to replace poetry crafted by 'the mind in creation' that can breathe life into a 'fading coal' that can 'awaken[s] to transitory brightness' (Shelley, 2017) and act as a source of inspiration. Although Wordsworth and Coleridge made self-conscious revisions of their work (Stillinger, 2008), Keats has been described as having 'no idea what the experience is which demands expression until he has expressed it' (Collingwood, 1958, p29) using 'artistry without prior intention' (Stillinger, 2008, p. 87). Whilst injudicious self-expression has always been dangerous, the Romantic poets drew on raw emotion as a source of inspiration, illuminating the latent power of poetry as an egress; however, in a world where global reach can be achieved without effort, students were more cautious about exposing themselves to others.

In identifying factors that affect student engagement with Romantic poetry, the internet has the potential to create an invested virtual community, who can share ideas and inspire each other in the pursuit of an engaging learning experience; however, students did not utilize technology in this way. Several students spoke of adopting a persona and 'mask[ing]' their opinions (Tom), which could result in indiscriminating echo chambers, promoting 'pseudo-individualism' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2011) and little elucidation. Research has shown technology can motivate engagement (Formby, 2014), thus, facilitating the democratising medium of Romantic poetry that broadens students' 'knowledge of literature and enhance[s] their critical and comparative understanding' (DfE, 2013), but students reported few teachers used it as part of their lessons although they all admitted to using their phones on occasion in class. Teachers agreed that 'it is important' to give ownership of poetry to the students

through research (TM) and welcomed a 'cross-curricular' approach (DES and WO, 1989) that developed English in 'other learning forums' (NSTS). However, resourcing research tasks at school was difficult because of limited computer access and so usually students were asked to carry out research for homework. Although technology was seen as a 'useful tool' (TB), it was not being used to harness Romanticism's spirit of creativity to inspire (Xerri, 2013). To be relevant and accessible, connectivity needed to be modeled, thereby promoting critical engagement that 'stretch [es] existing curriculum boundaries' (TP) to foster holistic development of the individual and facilitates 'critical understanding and… [introduce] new possibilities' (Bernstein, 2000, p.xx).

> TM: I try to read or act [poems] out rather than them seeing it flat on a piece of paper… Bring it to life - initially by the teacher. Sometimes they struggle to bring it to life initially, but once they see it in action they can grasp it better. I haven't used computers creatively (sic).

TM, a new teacher, was enthusiastic about English and teaching, and NSTD was a well-respected non-specialist teacher, with many years of English teaching experience. Representative of other teachers, TM imposes a model on students endeavouring to unpick 'the opaqueness of the language in 19th century poetry' and tackle students 'lack of vocabulary' (NSTD). Having recently graduated she is aware that she is not exploiting the 'multimodal' possibilities of poetry (Kress, 2003), which is 'written on paper, but … doesn't live there' (Hoyles and Hoyles, 2002, p.128), TM tries to bring the poetry to life through her voice. Her repetition of the adverb 'initially' suggests her desire to stress the need for a benchmarking activity to ensure students have a scaffolded understanding of how to bring a reading of a poem to life themselves, but she does not explain active strategies that are used to develop students' understanding. In this way, students' voices are stifled, and the teacher's voice remains dominant (Freire in Bartholomae and Petrosky, 2008). Unlike the Romantics who wanted to harness the individual's creativity, inadvertently TM has imposed a correct

reading on the poem which many of the students may struggle to dislodge.

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Teachers understood that to keep poetry relevant practices in the classroom needed to be continually renewed (Eagleton, 2011) as symbolised by Ouroboros (the symbol of a snake with its tail in its mouth). However, many teachers made reference to 'constraints' (NSTD) being imposed on the classroom at GCSE which made the challenge of engaging students in poetry more troublesome (NSTD, TB, NSTS, TV, TP). Using the verb 'forced' to describe the taught poems that are specified as part of the key stage 4 syllabus, NSTD suggests that teachers are being made to do something against their will and thus, there is a danger that negative associations with the study of poetry might be transferred to students. An awareness that tastes vary (Eagleton, 2008) and a sense of frustration that teaching has become a political football that bears the brunt of sweeping policy change (Carr, 1998; Greening, 2018), were sentiments expressed by many of the teachers. Addressing student engagement, TB comments that teaching practices 'squeez[ing]out every last drop of joy' from the poetry experience in the classroom eloquently expressing frustration felt by many in the sample who felt teaching poetry had become a mechanical act (Gramsci, 1971). Teaching pupils to work through a list of features and commenting on each in turn, students are schooled to fulfil the needs of assessment objectives as part of educational policy and the symmetry of a holistic approach is not prioritised. With the aim of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum, innovating practices that could engage students are not being used. My point here is that teaching poetry has become a process devoid of creativity for many teachers, who fail to excite innovation in their students (Halpin, 2007). Ultimately , teachers 'going thought the motions' (TV) of 'teaching' poetry at key stage 3 are 'putting off' (Tom) the A-level Romantic poetry students of tomorrow and so teaching practices are key if Romantic poetry is going to remain relevant to the A-level curriculum.

The A-level students in the sample acknowledged poetry's life enhancing qualities to inspire the individual to 'sing like the birds sing, not worrying about who hears or what they think' (Rumi in Harvey, 1994), and the internet offered a similarly democratic platform to articulate emotion. The students saw technology as an 'important' vehicle (Tom) to transmit information just as poetry expressed the Romantics' views on contextual issues (see Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey,* 1798); however, technology was seen mainly in functional terms and the creative use of it was mostly linked to out of school activities.

> Fiona: I like using images on my Instagram page – I select them carefully to reflect something about me. I use the internet to look up things. I will find out what a poem means if I don't get it. I don't talk to people I don't know about poetry online…We're all in a 'WhatsApp' group, so occasionally we message each other to ask what we're supposed to do for homework, but that's it.

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within A-level English literature, technology was identified as engaging students but was underused as a tool through which poetry could be explored. Students reported being aware of how they presented themselves electronically and Fiona spoke of curating her on-line presence, signifying an understanding of how important a creative approach is for self-expression. All bar one of the students stated that they did not talk about poetry to anyone outside their English class. Although the internet was not a resource used in lessons, students researched poems on-line, giving the most easily accessed interpretations legitimacy over others, thus stimulating faux confidence in particular interpretations (Jenny). Whilst 'rarely [meeting] up [in person] to talk about work' (Tom), students did message each other. Regularly checking with each other what they needed to do in class tasks, the students ensured standardization of understanding that might be responsible for devaluing critical engagement rather than promoting individual thinking (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2011).

In understanding the role of mass media technology as a factor that affects student engagement, I asked students about the resurgence of poetry within our cultural consciousness as exemplified by the advertising campaign for the 'Nationwide Building Society' that utilizes verse (2017). Many of the students acknowledged that they had 'stopped and listened to them' (Tom), and that the adverts were quite 'clever' (Sarah). Most agreed the 'Nationwide' advertising campaign was effective as it 'grabs your attention' (Phoebe) and 'gets you to think'(Milly), although several students made comment about poetry not being a 'practical way' (Tom) of communicating feeling in the twenty-first century and that technology fulfilled many of the roles that poetry might once have.

> Tom: You're not going to say 'Can you just wait a minute, I really like you, but I just need to run off and write a sonnet before I ask you out' – you're just gonna ask them out.

Asked if he would ask someone out by text or email, Tom shrugged his shoulders and candidly replied that he 'might' although he would prefer to 'ask in person'. Several students made comment that poetry provided a powerful platform to respond to atrocity and politics amongst other issues (Kate Tempest's performance of 'Tunnel vison' on 'Newsnight' on the announcement of the General Election, May 2017; Jane Hirshfield's performance of poetry at 'March for Science' in protest of the Trump administration's views of science, April, 2017; Glastonbury organisers comment on the result of the Brexit vote in the form of a poem, June 2016), but technology 'offer[ed] ease' and efficacy that was important for everyday existence (Tom). Considering his own usage, Tom commented that he had been trying to get his screen time down as he had been using his phone a lot recently. Rationalising his increased usage, he noted that it had been the summer holidays. Students seemed to make a distinction between routine activities and noteworthy events, representing a shift in thinking away from the ideal of poetry being accessible to all (Wordsworth, 1800). Acting as an emotional contagion (Hatfield et al, 1993) that encourages us to respond to world events:

'Shake your chains to earth like dew/ Which in sleep had fallen on you-/Ye are many – they are few' (Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy*, 1819), pricking our social conscience, Tom opined that reading poetry could help create rounded individuals who think a little more deeply about what is going on around them, consequently helping to make the world a better place. Asked whether he 'trust[ed]… [his] own sense and judgements' (Snell, 2013, p.7), he admitted he checked his understanding of poems with on-line sources and friends, thus generating an enclosed community that reinforce opinions, and potentially deny holistic growth. For time poor millennials, used to instant gratification, social media offered immediacy, validated views and offered social currency by distilling complicated materials down to the essential elements.

> Tom: I can see why people wrote poetry but it's not for me. I text, it's quicker. Umm there is obviously [crafting] in '*Isabella*' – like a tweet really… [It is crafted using] religious imagery and the repetition – it's used to show Lorenzo's unwavering dedication to her.

Crafted to communicate ideas, the students recognised powerful poetry is unlikely to be spontaneous expression but was still viewed as a sincere expression of emotion. Consistent with students' responses, Tom talks about writing poetry in the past tense (only one student reported writing poetry), suggesting its significance has waned. He considers how the poem '*Isabella*' was crafted by Keats and compares it to a one hundred and forty character 'tweet' on 'Twitter', thus reiterating the link between the process of writing poetry and 'tweeting', which for him has contemporary relevance. In the same way that Keats professed that a poet was 'the most unpoetical of anything in existence' (1818 in Motion, 1997, p.318) because of the transitory nature of a poet's focus and the ongoing laboured pursuit of a poet to express ideas in words, a single tweet must be crafted precisely and succinctly for maximum dramatic effect. Tom expresses no reservations about the veracity of the poet's voice and unlike Keats, he is not critical of the poet's shifting identity in the name of art which parallels manufactured on-line personas. Recognising that sentiment and image are often mediated

on-line, for students living through a period of *'great and sudden change'* (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1818), Romanticism is more important than ever to help address holistic lessons about identity and independence, through relevant technological platforms.

I would argue that opportunities must be made for students who are 'interactive' in their 'orientation and experience, [who] like to experiment with technology and with electronic gadgets' (Behrendt in Higgins and Ruston, 2010, p.122), as arguably 'students-as–producers-of-technologies' are more meaningful participants of learning than 'students as receivers-from-instructional–technologies' (Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson, 1999), thus opening up opportunities for 'personal-growth'. Running contrary to innovative liberal ideals (Rousseau in Archer , 1964), students did not challenge how English was taught, suggesting students were content to conform but also its wider insignificance as 'you don't really see much poetry on-line' (Tom). Students' belief that it did not 'matter[s]' how the curriculum was delivered (Stephanie) implied apathetic attitudes and that students did not see a connection between Romanticism and the modern world. In contrast, teachers commented on the inadequate cross-curricula links between subjects and technology (NSTD). One teacher recalled a younger student's observation that primary school is 'like there is a fish swimming through a river' and 'you're looking at all the different things the fish does' but secondary school is 'like a dead fish that has been cut up into lots of different pieces and you look at each piece' (TE), suggesting incomplete knowledge and a lack of coherency. Identifying a lack of cohesion within the curriculum, teachers were aware of missed opportunities to 'foster the skills and talents that are needed' in life (Hutchings, 2015, p.7). Acknowledging poetry's position as an art form and its marginalized position in the English curriculum, teachers 'fear[ed]' (NSTS) that subjects will be 'squeezed out' of the curriculum and are endangered unless they are 'seen to be relevant' (TB). Pragmatically teachers spoke

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of the challenges of changing curriculums and the reality of the 'everyday treadmill of teaching' (NSTD) not providing the 'breathing space' (TV) necessary for innovation across subjects. Whilst teachers spoke of discontent with the existing system, students were happy to comply but immersion was not fully realised by all (Jenny: I listen in class… [but] I have to go home and type up my notes and look things up afterwards; Mary: There are always words and things [that I look up online]).

Unlike the Romantics who embraced emotional impulses but were suspicious of mechanisation, student respondents engaged with technology but were perceptive in understanding their vulnerability by exposing feelings online. In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, recognising 'interaction, learner involvement, [and] inductive learning' can contribute 'to mak[e] the [teaching] process dynamic' (McRae, 1991, p.8), technology was seen to be an underused resource that could affect student engagement positively in the twenty-first century.

4. How youth culture '*sees, thinks and feels*' about Romantic poetry

(Rousseau, 1762).

With the aim of discovering the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, additional coding that emerged out of the tentative research question about whether teachers' attitudes towards poetry affected students' perception of poetry, revealed the relevance of youth culture. The Romantics' adventurous spirit has resonance for millennial students living through a period of enormous change domestically, internationally and globally. Maverick attitudes surfaced as significant to students' curriculum choices, but so too did conformity, suggesting students' struggle to find direction through a 'Pathless wood' (Byron,

1812). To be able to understand what factors affect student engagement with Romantic poetry, it was important to understand the relationship between youth culture and compliance.

Speaking enthusiastically about her decision to study English ('…let's try [to study the subject]'), Mary saw it as an opportunity to express herself. A year 12 student going into year 13, Mary was quite vocal in class and was happy to share her thinking if asked for her thoughts. Positive about the English course, like others, studying poetry had not been Mary's motivation. Mary thought studying English was worth a 'try', suggesting an implicit value in the subject that is worth having and also a lack of consequence, which might indicate some immaturity. Other reasons for studying English could be judged as reckless and naïve ('I quite like it' (Stephanie); 'I'll have a go' (Jenny)); however, the relative nature of interpretation (Charmaz, 2014) means responses can be understood as courageous as 'it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained' (Hegel, in Freire, 2010, p.36). Data collected from the sample suggested that English students could be characterized as risk takers with seemingly carefree attitudes ('I just go with it' (Tom); 'I generally don't mind [what we study]' (Sarah)) and could even be considered 'cool' and non-conformist. To this end, pupils were asked about whether they would describe poetry as 'cool'?

> Sarah: I don't know – it depends in which context. [At school] I think it flies under the radar a bit…cos it's a core subject - so people don't– it's not an option at GCSE. So it's not regarded as one thing or another. It just is [one of those things you have to do].

Discussing poetry in a joint interview with Milly, Sarah seemed relaxed pondering her response before speaking, noting that context is important. Good friends, Milly was equally comfortable in Sarah's company and did not appear to be put off by the presence of another person. Both Blake (advocating radical politics (Ackroyd, 1999)) and Keats (relinquishing

the security of medicine to write poetry (Motion, 2003)) had non-conformist attitudes; accordingly, their pursuit of poetry can be thought of as avant-garde and progressive. In support of this argument, as sixth form literature ambassadors (visiting year 8 and year 11 students to 'spread the joy' (Sarah) of poetry), Milly commented that younger students 'say hello every time' they see Milly and Sarah around the school. In this way, the younger students were obviously keen to be associated with the A-level students, who seemed to enjoy their 'new celebrity status' (Milly), joking that 'I'm going to start bringing signed photos of myself to distribute' (Milly). Coming back to Sarah's point, she makes a distinction between compulsory GCSEs 'embodied in the state apparatus' (Ball, 2013, p.30) and choosing A-levels. Recognising poems may not 'become[s] …experience[s] that change[s] the person who experience[s]' them (Gadamer, 1993, p.102) if contextual circumstances restrict freewill to choose 'intellectual and aesthetic' subjects that resonate (Behrendt in Hoeveler, 2003, p.71), the students were practical in their approach. Sarah accepted that 'what we do in lessons has to be done to pass' but outside of that arena poetry had potential to 'be many things'. Nodding in agreement, Milly added 'it can carry powerful messages, like protest poetry in the 60s'. In this way, the girls acknowledge poetry's nonconformist and rebellious potential, although they do not immediately link it to the context of the Romantics who used much of their poetry as political comment. Unlike Coleridge who sought 'negative belief' to suspend reality and embolden the imagination (Holmes, 1998, p.130), or Keats' 'Negative Capability' (by which an individual is 'capable of [existing in an ambiguous state] … without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats, in Rollins, 1958, p.193), thus allowing oneself to operate beyond personal experiences, Sarah did not seek 'imaginative experience[s]' that foster curiosity in her A-level lessons (Halpin, 2007, p.1). Sarah saw the study of poetry as a required component of literature that empowered her to enjoy culture, be economically secure and be prepared for

life after A-levels (Gibb, 2015). Despite speaking enthusiastically about formative experiences of poetry and her role as literature ambassador, she did not consider her own writing or reading of poetry as 'cool' or as signposting her own non-conformity, commenting that it is probably a 'bit nerdy'. Conversely, both Julia and Tom, who admit they neither write nor read poetry in their own time, agreed that poetry could be thought of as 'cool'.

> Tom: Yeah, it's a lot cooler than sciences, maths and geography – things like that. It sort of cultures you, doesn't it? - as a person. Whereas science you're just sort of learning facts. I think it's on the same level as history or sociology. Helps you learn about people. When you have a conversation with someone it actually makes you a more interesting person.

Tom makes a comparative point about where English sits against other subjects. Commenting that English can be beneficial for the individual, helping to develop personal qualities that go beyond the academic, he upholds Arnold's assessment that 'good and sterling poetry' can help 'the soul and imagination' to grow (1910, p.191-2). Discussing poetry's changing profile within popular culture, Tom acknowledged various poetry platforms (rap, spoken word, free form, slam poetry and readings), were becoming 'trendy'. Explaining that he saw 'some slam poetry' as being of the moment and breaking ground, Tom recognised poetry's innovation. In keeping with the Romantics' endeavours to popularise poetry, Tom recognised that poetry could facilitate nonconformity. Separate from the implicit power of educational institutions, poetry within youth culture was not seen as 'a mode of subjugation, or a general system of domination' (Ball, 2013, p.30), but an opportunity to develop holistically.

> Julia: I think English is cool. It's a good A-level to have, it can open a lot of doors, it can lead to so many careers and it's really looked out for. [It] possibly attracts more creative students? – Yeah, I think it does attract a particular type.

Julia, like Tom, responds to the suggestion rather than choosing the word 'cool' herself although she is happy to explore her thoughts about the term and any nuanced connotations.

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Julia comments on the qualities of poetry's umbrella subject to influence outlook and aspiration (Robinson, 2010; Della and Gaier, 1970). These responses would appear to have created an 'hermeneutic circle' of anticipated significance that is altered to fit when the individual's expectations are not met (Gadamer 1993); arguably each student interprets or caveats the question to allow them to positively endorse the statement. This might suggest a desire to agree with the teacher-researcher, who inadvertently wields authority in the eyes of the student. Because individuals respond 'differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions' (Denscombe, 2010, p.169) as part of the interview effect and Giles' accommodation theory (individuals accommodate others by altering their speech, intonation and gesture (Turner and West, 2010)), the reliability of respondent's answers may have been influenced. However, data produced by other students provided 'theoretical sufficiency' (Dey, 1999, p.257) verifying conceptual development.

Another student was slightly more guarded about using the term 'cool', hesitantly commenting that poetry 'can be' cool (Phoebe). Her response is important because although her use of a modal verb suggests possibility, her stilted reply indicates that she would not have chosen this description. Although not denouncing poetry's 'cool' credentials outright, her response belies any implied link to street credibility. When pressed further about whether studying poetry at A-level was 'trendy' or 'lit' (millennial speak for cool), her answer was far more direct.

> Phoebe: It's not cool – I think it could be – if it's taken in the right way. Needs to be related to people… [and] get more young people writing poetry. We study poetry because it is part of English really.

Smiling as she corrects herself, she seems to be acknowledging that she was insincere in her original answer and possibly saying what she thought I wanted her to say. Phoebe is clear

that she does not consider the poetry of the 'dead people' that she is studying as cool, which is ironic as the Romantic poets were considered the ubiquitous celebrities of their day 'with a distinct kind of public profile' amplified yet further when they died (Mole, 2007, p.xii). Her response goes beyond her A-level studies, an experience that has been described as 'more utilitarian than imaginative; more managerial than collegial; and more competitive than cooperative' (Halpin, 2007, p.2). Referencing poetry as part of the modern vernacular, she talks about being able to relate to material by understanding the context of the day and 'getting' more young people to engage directly, a point made by others. Thus, she would seem to agree with Freire and Habermas that texts are mediated 'by participants who construct their own collective learning process' building 'their relationship [with] the social world' (Morrow and Torres, 2002, p.16). In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, students must be encouraged to negotiate their own experience of poetry by engaging beyond the obligatory pedagogic philosophies of the curriculum which can 'systemically alienate pupils from their own experience, and repress[es], ignore[s] or reinterpret[s]' in line with society's' conventions (Friedenberg Willinsky in , 1990, p.177).

When asked what she meant about poetry being 'taken in the right way', Phoebe explained that she meant the circumstances the poetry is read and listened to, for example 'a poetry reading at Glastonbury would be cool'. Thus, context was directly linked to perception. As her thoughts developed she stated that she had plans to study Psychology at university, but that she had 'recently' thought more seriously about English, specifically 'music journalism' although she had reservations because 'it's quite specific and probably difficult to get into, but if I can manage that, it would be really cool.' Possibly more revealing than her comments about feeling disconnected from poetry that represents an unfamiliar time and place, this unprompted exchange makes a direct link to a university course that is English based and

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explicitly linked to poetry (Bob Dylan was awarded the Noble Prize for literature in 2016 for his poetic verse) that she describes as 'cool'. Phoebe is unaware that she has suggested the application of English is cutting edge and avant-garde, endorsing the idea that sensory stimulus can 'sharpen students' response(s)' (Behrendt in Hoeveler, 2003); thus, Phoebe's answer might be taken to be less affected than Julia's and Tom's.

Other students went on to consider the urbane credentials of English.

> Sarah: I think it depends on what you want to do – like further on – like if you want to do humanities, then you will probably take English – that will help with communication or whatever. Whereas, if you like take other nerdy subjects – things like maths or physics – people are completely different obviously… [the subjects] oppose each other.

Sarah's response is a little unclear; she is pragmatic underlining the importance of making sensible choices to help fulfil future university ambitions as part of the 'knowledge economy' (Gove in Ball, 2013b, p.23). She makes the point that different subjects attract and require different attributes from their students, who all need to 'learn how to learn' effectively, as success at key stage 5 'is the culmination of character and not intellect (Oaks and Griffin, 2016). She uses the word 'nerdy' again, (previously to describe her own habit of writing poetry, which could be read as modesty and self-effacing, or indeed an expression of the activities' lack of kudos amongst her peer group). Here she describes science students who she sees as different to herself. Her use of the word in discussion about English and the genre poetry suggest that she makes a synonymous link between the two when discussing impact. Interestingly, on the one hand she seems to conflate the word 'cool' with 'nerdy', which is its antonym. This might imply that Sarah's interpretation is informed by her 'fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception' of anticipated questions and her beliefs (Couzens in Guigon, 1999, p.144), thus suggesting that she does not think of English literature or poetry as being thought of as cool by others. However, she is defensive in her justification of how

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humanities subjects can help one understand people better, and by implication become more humane, something she identifies with. Sarah continues:

> I went to a talk from some historian once and he said all humanities make you more human by the end – [they] change the way you question things. I think English obviously does that, because you get to question and read subtext. So as opposed to being nerdy its people who are human.

In this way, Sarah implies that she is happy to stand away from the crowd and be considered 'nerdy' in line with other people's preconceptions, emphasising her individuality in line with the 'personal-growth' model of English (DES and WO, 1989). As the group's strongest proponent of the genre, understanding exactly what qualities she attached to the term 'nerdy' needed to be understood. She explained that she considered herself 'nerdy' but that she did not think it was 'a bad thing' and it simply meant that she 'work[s] quite hard and…care[s]'. In this manner it becomes clear that Sarah is not being critical of 'nerds', but consistent with Romanticism's individualism (Chaplin and Faflak, 2011) she exploits the stereotype to challenge negative perceptions supporting growth opportunities (Oakes and Griffin, 2016). Sarah implies that poetry is scholarly and a serious subject that needs to be worked at to be appreciated. Aligned with research that has shown that fostering certain behaviours and approaches nurtures academic success (Oakes and Griffin, 2016), Sarah is seen to be less concerned about being 'cool' and is more interested in securing good results at A-level. Her response indicates pragmatism about poetry being studied as part of English, but also acknowledges poetry's influence as a counterculture, that is considered avantgarde and can enhance an individual's kudos. Like progressive Romantics who rebelled against society and 'challenge[d] received orthodoxies' (Marshall, 2000, p.25), Sarah is not afraid to assert her views, although her satirical description demonstrates she knows not everyone agrees.

In understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature

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curriculum, I was interested to find out what plans the respondents had after they had taken them. Educated with 'civilising' liberal ideals (Marshall, 2000, p.22), students made sensible decisions within the boundaries of society and planned to go to university. Conforming to societal expectations (increased numbers of students go to university, although since the 2012 fees increase to £9,000, English has received approximately 10% fewer applications), higher education was the next 'natural step' (Sarah). The secondary relevance of English as a subject choice, as identified by the responses of the sample group, would seem to be broadly in line with the national picture (see UCAS.com). Highlighting the priorities of living in the United Kingdom in the twenty-first century, financial considerations have made profession specific subjects more popular. Notably History, another humanity subject that in the main does not offer a direct career path but offers context in an uncertain world, has been one of the top ten subjects over the last couple of years but English has not. Thus, students seem accepting of their reality and are not fighting against it. I would argue that in part English's dwindling fortunes are a result of failing to communicate the relevance of the Romantics, whose moral and spiritual guidance offer insightful perspective to our confused world (Arnold, 1880; Leavis, 1930).

Generated data about aspirations after A-levels revealed all students intended to go to university and study at degree level (see appendix A). Paralleling the liberating impulse of Romanticism, the 'Further and Higher Education Act' of 1992 made university education, once unattainable to the proletariat, a conventional aspiration for most young people. Although in most cases students had a clear idea of the area they wanted to study, two students used the word 'toying' to describe a possibility of studying English (Tom and Sarah); the verb choice here was interesting as it suggested a frivolity, but also had connotations of fun and enjoyment, suggesting its value is holistic rather than strategic.

Answers given in the present continuous tense indicated that choices had not yet been finalised, but had begun to be considered, and could still be influenced by the learning experiences and the importance of identifying factors that affect student engagement. The fact that neither of these students was definite about studying English may indicate that they had reservations about its value, suggesting a conformity that stands at odds with maverick attitudes displayed by some of the respondents.

Establishing the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, a child-centred approach (Rousseau, 1762) that responds to change and allows students to grow (DES and WO, 1989), are significant factors that affect student engagement. A teacher must be mindful to 'nurture, engage and motivate' students not only academically (Ari, 2008, p.5-6) or Romantic poetry is at risk of 'becoming a packaged commodity' (Hennessy & McNamara, 2011, p.217). An equilibrium between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' engagement (Rosenblatt, 1978) is needed, for the full understanding of a text to be achieved as well as symmetrical gains for the individual.

5. Recompensing '*the industrious and lowly Child of Toil'*: poetry as a commodity

(Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850).

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, the theoretical code of commodification emerged as relevant to understand students' motivations for studying poetry. Although Horkheimer and Adorno would argue 'what is new is not that [poetry] is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one' (1987, p.157), Romantic poets were troubled by consumer culture. Concerned about the fragility of society and the rapid pace of temporal change that resulted in ominous satanic mills, it has been

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suggested that the poets effectively 'commodif[ied]' values within their poems to 'preserv[e]' them in our imagination (Kitzman, 2004, p.141). To be able to engage students' interest in Romantic poetry it was important to understand poetry's value as a product.

In discussions about advice given to students about A-level courses, Julia explained that literature 'didn't need' to be 'sold' to her as she enjoyed it. Similarly, Phoebe emotively commented that Romantic poetry had not been 'peddl[ed]' to her; thus, students were overtly aware that post-16 teachers were selling a product. Tom clarified that his GCSE class had been spoken to about taking A-level literature, but Romantic poetry had not been discussed explicitly, suggesting that it was considered of least interest to the students and the teachers. The verb 'sell' objectifies English, commodifying its perceived value; equally, the verb 'peddle' is understood to mean sell but has connotations of underhand or covert practices that might in some way be thought of as dishonourable and sit uncomfortably with the integrity of Romantic ideals. Julia, uninterested in the curriculum, saw the subject English as valuable because it was 'useful' irrespective of studied texts. Phoebe's response suggests a cynical acceptance that subjects are commodities that should create advantage. The suggestion that Romantic poetry, alongside other literary genres, needs to compete with other disciplines to be attractive to students, is vaguely undignified and at odds with Romanticism's liberal principles of freedom of expression and emotional engagement. If students were only studying English because of what it represented, conflicting ideologies might explain disengagement in the classroom. I was interested in what teachers felt about 'selling' their subject.

Several A-level teachers commented that a failure to expose students to the 'enchantments'

of Romantic poetry (TB) earlier in students' schooling, kept it elitist, thus forcing students to make choices about their future from a position of ignorance (TP). Accordingly, TP commented it was teachers' 'duty' to 'let [students] know what A-level entails'. He acknowledged that the subject was 'advertised' to students on sixth form recruitment evenings and that he did 'promote it' to students in his class who he knew enjoyed English. He explained that he told them about 'the novels' and 'details that [would] spark interest', admitting that he did not say much about poetry.

> TP: I find that although they get into the poetry on the course, probably because of their limited experience up to A-level, it's not the area that they're interested in – they want to know about the plays and the authors and that's fine. I want them to join the course excited. We can build an appreciation of Keats once they are in the classroom.

Hearteningly, TP believes students can develop meaningful relationships with poetry despite neglectful historical encounters. He confirms that English literature is marketed to potential A-level students, although those already interested in English appear unconcerned about teacher endorsement of the subject. However, the many benefits of Romanticism were not promoted. English teachers, who expressed enthusiasm for poetry, were less enthusiastic about the new GCSE and did not imagine the changes would generate an enjoyment of poetry. Many expressed frustration and concern that the syllabus required poems to be 'covered' expediently (TV), because of increased time pressures on the curriculum (NSTS). Poetry was referred to like a product that needed to be 'promote[d]' lower down the school (TV) using 'target[ed]' material (NSTD). The sardonic tone of much criticism exemplified the irony that an inherently liberating medium was felt to be compromised by government legislation transforming it into a commercial product (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011). To deliver fifteen poems as part of the new GCSE, 'poetry need[ed] to be marketed right' (TD) to ensure the product is accessible (TM). TD, innovative in her approach to A-level teaching, having been known to encourage her sixth form students to write their essays in white board

marker pen on their desks, reluctantly acknowledges that English literature needs to be presented as an attractive option if students are going to take it. If students do not sign up to it, the reality is the subject will not run and 'important lessons from literature and mankind' will not be passed on (TD). Experiences lower down the school inform students' decisions. If students are put off poetry because poems are badly taught, not only are academic opportunities limited (it represents 40% of students' GCSE), but individual's 'cultural capital' will be hampered (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986). The prioritisation of examinations (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011) motivated by future value propagates a culture which marginalises the importance of pupil enjoyment.

The imposed disregard of students' response to poetry: they 'can't just enjoy reading [poetry] and [say] it speaks to me, that's something I enjoy' (TB), was lamented by teachers. TB speaking with heightened emotion, passionately decried the lack of symmetry in the curriculum that does not prioritise the 'inordinate good' that could help students' mental health and self-confidence if we were more holistic in our approach, in line with a 'personal-growth' model of English (DES and WO, 1989). Recognising that poetry is 'fractured and pinned like butterflies to a board' (TB), there was acknowledgment that within English, poetry was a commodity and although reader-response theory had its place 'we want them to do well, so we make sure they know what is happening' (TM). Most teachers did not see individual poems as standalone literature eliciting discoveries in the reader, but as products on conveyer belts that need to be taught quickly (NSTD, TV, NSTS). If teachers are left uninspired by curriculum requirements, it is hard to imagine that they are nurturing a love of poetry in our future A-level literature pupils. Poetry's inspirational qualities that can 'seize' the imagination, rousing pupils to consider the concept of 'Beauty … [as] truth' (Motion, 2003, p.208), was not being engaged with explicitly during GCSEs. Arguably an

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important opportunity to privilege what Coleridge termed 'the primary imagination' (1817) as the 'prime agent of human perception' (Kitson and Corns, 2016, p.15) through Romantic poetry, is lost. Divorced from 'sensations' (Keats in Cook, 2008), enjoyment is more 'whimsical and subjective' than evaluative (Eagleton, 2008, p.13), decisions that impact future directions are made ratiocinatively based on future functionality. TB's response indicates dissatisfaction with foundational poetry experiences, which is supported by TP's admission information is effectively censored, to encourage students to take literature. These responses indicate teacher misgivings about how poetry is presented within the curriculum, but fail to recognise the holistic potential of Romanticism for A-level students. TB is concerned that freedom of expression is restricted, and TP believes poetry needs to be made accessible by stealth. Most teachers' viewed poetry as another component of English, that needed to be made comprehensible to safeguard student success but did not consider its wider value to the individual.

In understanding Romantic poetry's place in the curriculum, its value as a commodity for personal growth, initially went unacknowledged by most students in the sample. Representatively, at the start of the Keats' unit, Tom 'did not imagine' that he would 'read poetry' in the future and did not see it as useful as he could not relate to it:

> If you can make a parallel to real life or experiences, it makes you care more – [it's] hard to connect to Othello and some of the poems– 'La Belle dans wotsit' is mad! They're from a different time and I don't really understand the circumstances.

Consistent with Tom's reflections, critics have argued that poetry can be opaque, solipsistic and removed from everyday life (Frye, 1990; Bloom, 1971). A need to interpret 'the dynamic interactions between texts and their contexts, [as well as] the cultural practices and habits that determine the nature and directions' of denotations and connotations (Peim, 1993,

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p.2) made poetry abstract for Tom. His response is important because he has chosen to study literature despite Romantic poetry and not because of it, as he sees English as valuable. Although several students commented that they had found the poetry units 'enlightening' (Julia) and 'worthwhile' (Tom) at the end of the course, in early interviews the genre was dismissed as a unit of work that contributed to their A-level.

> Tom: Um, [English] is probably my main subject. It's the one I'm most interested in. It's my favourite A-level. I'd say they were all kind of equal - I wouldn't say that one was more important than the other.

Although many students recognised they were 'enjoying' English, Tom tentatively suggests its primary importance to him, although he modifies this judgement and backtracks on its significance. He appears uncomfortable drawing a conclusion based on gratification alone. Acknowledging that the subject is helping to develop his analytic abilities, he recognises his critical thinking and consideration of alternative 'points of view' have been nurtured. However, Tom's reticence to identify one subject as more important than the others suggests all subjects have equal usefulness in different contexts suggesting an 'adult-needs' emphasis (DES and WO, 1989). In this way, his response would appear to be socially constructed, weighing up practical use against personal fulfilment. Whilst illustrating the value of skills learnt through 'response pedagogy' that facilitate autonomous thinking, Tom (like others), appeared 'powerless… to develop or interrogate' his opinion (McCormick, 1994, p.40), which may manifest in a reluctance to voice subjective views that may make the individual feel vulnerable. English was a product like his other subjects and its value depended on the circumstances.

Literary critics aim to transcend subjective verdicts in 'the common pursuit of true judgment' (Eliot, 1948), thus, individual's feelings about the potentially emancipating power of poetry

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as 'a friend / to soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man' (Keats in White, 1996, p.85), must be interrogated. Accessibility and relevance of poetry as a product was mentioned by several students ('Keats' poems were quite elongated' (Tom); 'I think some of it just goes on' (Phoebe)). In this way, context and penetrability influenced these students' attitudes towards poets as producers. Contrary to the Romantics' desire to be more accessible and to be easily understood, Phoebe judged Keats' poetry to be overly dramatic and hyperbolic in style. Typical of responses, Mary found Keats' poetry 'quite self- indulgent', commenting that he should 'get over himself' because his poems are 'not just for him – he's written it to be consumed and I just think there is too much of him in it'. Mary makes the point that his poetry is a commodity, remarking that Keats needs to consider his audience. Identifying '[t]ension, contradiction and permanent crisis [which] were constitutive of Romanticism' (Snell, 2013, p.34) in Keats' poetry, most students found his narrative poems melodramatic and perplexing.

> Phoebe: Poetry is an insight into how someone feels. But I think that Keats' stuff is an over exaggerated version of that – he makes things out to be much worse than it is, and he is very cynical - he's weird as he's a bit of a contradiction – he's very cynical but at the same time very naïve I think.

Phoebe struggles to 'buy it'. She does not think Keats' poetry is 'the best poetry' and has 'power [to] form[ing], sustain[ing], and delight[ing] us, as nothing else can' (Arnold, 1880, p.4). Whilst recognising 'the fundamentals of life and of romance' can 'reach the heart' of the reader (Leavis, 1932, p.68), helping us to empathise, Keats' constructs are not believable to her. She interprets extreme emotion as insincerity and is critical of his naivety. She is unspecific about exactly what she has taken exception to, and so was asked to give more detail about what she meant.

> Phoebe: In 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'- the knight is taken in so easily by a beautiful woman, and in 'The Eve of St. Agnes', again Madeline is so gullible believing he is like an apparition or whatever, a part of her dream -it's all a bit lovey dovey…[its] unrealistic.

Although great literature is not always immediately accessible (Leavis, 1932), Phoebe is emotionally uninvested asserting her right 'to trust …her own senses and judgements' (Snell, 2013, p.7). Unlike the Romantics who found comfort in privileging the imagination and celebrating the creative process, Phoebe struggles to engage with Keats' poems as creative concepts and scrutinizes the actions of his constructs, seeing them as extensions of himself. Keats' poetry, criticised by some of his contemporaries for being 'commodified and packaged for public consumption' (Jones, 1995, p343), needs to be made relevant for contemporary consumers, some of whom saw Keats' gendered roles as outdated (Phoebe). Poetry was understood to be of value to students because it was part of a subject that was useful to achieve future goals, but unless teachers help students draw parallels to their own lives, holistic lessons will remain irrelevant.

Exploring the factors that affect student engagement with Romantic poetry, teacher feedback was important (Oakes and Griffin, 2016). Focused on outcome, students were not interested in 'joyful moments of discovery' (TP). Specified as key objectives of the A-level specification that 'encourage[s] students to develop their interest in and enjoyment of literature and literary studies' through independent study and wide reading (DfE, 2014), 'the negative impact of tests and examinations' could be seen in the students' priorities (Ofsted, 2012, p.44). A desire to be equipped to respond to questions by having 'examin[ed] as many aspects [of a poem with their teacher] as would explain its inner workings' (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988, p.5) rather than independently assembling and 'conceiv[ing] of meaning as something that happens' (Iser, 1978, p.21), informs these students' expectation of poetry as a commodity.

Considering his role as an educator who is trying to nurture the whole person past 'essential knowledge' about a poem (DfE, 2015) to offer a 'fleeting glimpse' of the potential of humanity (Heaney in Collins 2003, p.16), TP commented on the poetry experience A-level students have had overall:

> TP: They're engaged, and they want to succeed. I feel that an A-level teacher's job is to adapt – I don't think you can be 'this is the way I do it' – you have to listen to them and adapt it. That's the nature of A-level teaching.

Pragmatically, TP recognises that he is in a position of instrumental power and influence and that it is his job to ensure that his students understand the texts and can write about them. Like the 'chameleon poet', who alters his perspective as necessary (Keats, *Letter to Woodhouse* [1818], in Rollins, 1958), seeking to meet the needs of his students TP complies with curriculum change and responds to the changing needs of classes (Marshall, 2000, p.62). He understands that he must be flexible to ensure that students can reveal what they do not understand and feel comfortable expressing their views openly without resorting to a 'smoke-screen of vagueness over the possibility of truth or error' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.114), to mask their lack of knowledge. Because 'access to powerful knowledge is a right for all not just the few' (Young and Muller, 2010, p.24), TP realises that the lessons he teaches year after year must constantly evolve to ensure that the needs of all students are met (Gramsci, 1971). Expressing his opinion that students have become more exam focused (Snapper, 2006) and 'aware' of exam criteria and mark schemes, TP comments that his teaching has become more mechanical and orientated towards helping students understand what the examiners want from students' answers. Practically speaking English literature and the Romantic poetry that students' study, can be seen to have an important, if subsidiary, role in most of these individuals' lives - it has facilitated developing analytical skill, terms of expression, as well as opinions about the literature that they read. In the same way that Keats 'forged' a link between 'literature and healing', which 'taught him that the

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contemplation of suffering contained the possibility of greater knowledge – not just of the self, but of the whole human condition' (Motion, 2003, p.37), understanding the relevance and potential role poetry might have in the respondents' future lives is important to enable vital connections between 'word' and 'world' (Freire, 2010) , thus ensuring the individual's world engages with the text to foster a symmetry between academic and personal gains. Meeting the needs of the students is a process that needs continual review by the class teacher, as the more we learn about education, the more 'we [realise that we] are in a state of ignorance' (Shelley, P.B., 1818).

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum, an emphasis on measurable outcomes rather than the holistic experience of pupils, were factors that affected student engagement. Thus, teachers manufacture products in the shape of students (Hutchings, 2015), who are equipped to tackle the 'written literary analysis of poetry under exam conditions, which dominates from GCSE onwards, but are unprepared for holistic engagement. This is in part responsible for alienating students from poetry (Snapper, 2009, p.2), cutting them off from the values of Romanticism that can enrich and nurture the individual and help them navigate life (Halpin, 2007).

6. '*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard, are sweeter*': patterns in poetry

(Keats, '*Ode to a Grecian Urn',* 1819).

With the aim of exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum, coding revealed the significance of pattern as a factor that affected student engagement. Data about the precision of language and its power to evoke emotion, revealed the significance

of systems that can structure future experiences and observations (Dewey, 2011, p.60). Students admitted that they looked for patterns on which to 'hang' their observations (Jenny) and teachers used structures to 'unlock meaning' (TP). Exploring nuance and ambiguity of language, individuals spoke of expectations informing interpretations (Milly, Sarah), 'effect[ing] … [one's] whole…conception' (Peirce, 1878, p258). Whilst acknowledging grammar rules ensure meaning is understood (Crystal, 2006), learnt significance can limit perception and freedom of imagination can liberate thought (Keats in Watkins, 1995).

Approaching poems through mechanical systems was advocated by most specialist and non-specialist teachers as a useful way of 'making links at GCSE' (TP). The use of 'writing frames' (TM) and the 'repetition of tasks with different poems' (TV) was seen to reinforce 'strategies' (TM) that could be used to achieve success in summative assessments (TP). Seeming to support research that found '(s)pecialist primary teachers are 6 per cent less effective than their non-specialist colleagues' (Bloom, 2016), a structured response that eliminates superfluous content might be the 'Holy Grail'(TP) and all that is needed to write well about poetry. However, this misunderstands what is special and unique about poetry that 'draws from all areas of human intelligence' (Robinson, 2001, p.138) helping 'form the soul and character' of an individual (Arnold, 1880, p.200-201), and running contrary to Romantic ideals. To teach Romanticism well, it is important to establish what the significance of pattern is, so it can be harnessed without compromising good poetry teaching (Pike, 2011).

Research into the features of good teaching concluded that when 'a teacher's knowledge falls below a certain level' it significantly impedes learning, as the 'quality of instruction'

will be inadequate (Coe *et al*., 2014). Because the 'interpretation of texts is an active process – the reader is of equal importance in the creation of meaning as the work itself' (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.15), it is important to get students to understand 'that, while they don't have the author in the classroom, they [are all] readers, and readers are central to the process' (Wright, 2005, p.44). A non-specialist teacher commented 'there are areas that I am more comfortable with – and poetry isn't one of them' (NSTH). He went on to explain that his 'pupils don't give a lot and I struggle to drag it out of them'. Relying on 'mnemonics' to analyse content, pupils were not encouraged to deviate outsides his scaffolded systems. He reported that pupils did not readily express opinion or find meaning independently within the words and images, and an 'adult-needs' approach prepared his students for life beyond the classroom (DES and WO, 1989). Discussing a lack of training on how to make poetry accessible at any point in their teaching careers, several teachers reported feeling unprepared to teach poetry despite having resources available to them. NSTH's 'struggle' to 'drag' opinion out of students suggests that dynamic teaching and learning are not happening in the classroom, and established patterns of instruction might help scaffold analysis.

The Sutton Trust reported that good teaching needs 'a sound pedagogical framework' (Coe *et al*, 2014), that allows an individual to attain both 'academic' and 'personal enlightenment'; thus, a skilled practitioner 'present[ing] texts – many of them repeated year after year … [is] able to discover continuities and differences in response' with different student populations 'to analyse the processes and patterns that manifest[ed] themselves in the actual movement towards interpretation' (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.x), adapting their teaching in accordance with their audience's needs. Representative of responses by non-specialist staff, NSTS admitted that he was 'not overly confident about poetry most of the time' and that he 'like[d] to stick to stuff' he knew. Students were encouraged to use carefully managed writing frames, rather

than guided to discovery using modelled strategies (Bennett, 1993). A reluctance to embrace change can make teaching formulaic at the expense of spontaneity and an engagement with students, and although a 'useful' (Jenny) pattern emerges for the teacher, it can stifle student originality and engagement.

In understanding factors that affect student engagement, the pattern of continued professional development is imperative at all stages of the teaching process (Alexander, Rose & Woodhead, 1992) to ensure teachers are well equipped to engage a 'personal-growth' view of English. Significantly, research into high calibre teaching identified that innovation and reflection, as well as a teacher's pedagogical knowledge and quality of instruction, could help to promote ambition (Shulman, 1987; Coe *et al*., 2014). Nevertheless, because of the structured expectations of the final exams on Keats and Blake, poetry teaching can be problematic, as potentially fearful students may discard teacher advice and attempt to learn their poetry notes verbatim 'only to reproduce them in examinations to get more marks' (Camilleri, 2005, p.51). Consequently, although the student may do well academically, the creative essence so fundamental to the text and the symmetrical self, will be lost. Thus, it is imperative that pattern is used to awaken creativity, 'positive[ly] impact[ing] on…students' by helping to empower them through active teaching strategies that breed confidence as well as fostering 'resilience to failure' (Coe *et a*l., 2014).

As a reaction against Enlightenment, the Romantics approached composition with more looseness of structure, identified patterns, nonetheless, informed students' analysis. Knowing little about Keats 'before we started studying him' (Mary), students brought few preconceptions with them which is advantageous for a reader-response approach. However,

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given some contextual information to help make sense of poems, several students acknowledged Keats' complicated relationship with women who he described as being like '…children to whom I would rather give a Sugar Plum than my time' (1818 in Motion, 2003), shaped their interpretations. Looking for meaning, Mary expressed the view that she would 'probably' have read his poetry differently if she had not known biographical detail. Exploring 'pattern[s] of verbal symbols' which channel one's 'thoughts and feelings' (Rosenblatt, 1970, p.25), helped develop students' understanding, which the Romantics believed could 'improve mankind' by harnessing perception (Hay, 2010, p.137).

Aware of patterns within syntax, Milly reflected on the importance of structural devices in other genres to help 'set …tone and atmosphere'. Exemplifying her point, Milly commented that Shakespeare's 'soliloquies…use rhyme' creating a 'sense of poetry' which influences 'how…[it's] read'. Similarly, others in the group appreciated that 'rhythm' opened up dimensions within   a character or a narrative (Sarah). Milly commented that Blake used 'structure to rebel' by taking 'the [reader's] expectation' and subverting it. Appreciating that the poem's construction reflects meaning that acts like 'an independent melody or frugal counter-point to the words' (Fairchild, 1980, p.39), Milly understood there was a relationship between structure and purpose. Representative of the group, she asserted that 'technical devices are significant' to detect nuance of meaning and 'structural patterns'; however, several students struggled to link structural features and exam focus.

> Tom: We've looked at the types of verses and Spenserian - to see the effect that has. I think it adds to the knowledge and a kind of understanding of the poem, but questions about the poem [in the exam] are to do with tragedy, and I don't know how you would say about the type of verse and relate it to tragedy. Sometimes I feel like teachers feel they need to tell us things that we don't need to know. I don't think it is especially clear how to make it relevant [sic].

Tom's motivation for learning about poetry is outcome driven (Xerri, 2013). The use of the

plural first person pronoun 'we' implies students have analysed poems collectively and may have become reliant on the expert readings of the teacher. Tom's use of the modifying adverb 'sometimes' to describe his reflection, suggests uncertainty and lack of confidence. Where the teacher has acted as the depositor of information that has been 'receive[d], memorize[d], and repeat[d]' (Freire, 2010, p.58), 'inadequate and superficial' understanding (DES, 1987, p.4) results in underdeveloped 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 2010, p. 60), which would explain why Tom struggles to make connections on his own. Talking about the process of finding patterns, he looks down at his anthology which is on the desk in front of him that I asked him to bring to the interview. Flicking though to '*The Eve of St. Agnes*' he points to the first stanza and explains they had been looking at the light and dark imagery as a recurring pattern in their last lesson, in this way he accesses information that will be useful to him. However, his depth of understanding is dependent on what has been covered in lessons and is less keen to look independently for examples of pattern, thus his assuredness, necessary to achieve the highest mark in Band 5 (AQA, 2015), is limited. Rousseau would argue that an important opportunity to enthuse and motivate as well as 'discover for themselves' cerebral enlightenment, '[i]nstead of … imprint[ing] on the mind of the child particular habits of thinking and acting compatible with becoming an adult' (Halpin, 2007, p.37), is lost if students do not explore beyond teaching instruction.

In understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level curriculum and what factors affect student engagement, students spoke of struggling to identify recognisable patterns within some poems. Sarah explained that several of Blake's 'shorter poems' were in her mind 'irrelevant'; she elaborated:

> The 'Little Girl Lost' poem and 'Blossom'– umm they just seem to have no meaning - though that could be through the lens that we're looking at it… we're looking at them through the

lens of 'Social and Political Writing' - some of them don't have that basis. So, I think if we were looking at it … (from) a different angle I think it would interest me more. However, because we are looking at it through that, it's just dismissed.

Although I would argue that the 'Little Girl Lost' poem can be linked to social and political change as a symbolic search for innocence in a changing industrial landscape, and 'Blossom' can be seen to represent the discontent of different classes, it could be argued that these poems perhaps do not have quite the same millage, for this particular lens, as some of the more 'meaty' poems in the anthology (for example 'London', which shows more than one example of social and political protest). Notably, despite Sarah's implicit appreciation of poetry, she is first and foremost 'prioritis[ing]… [her] exam performance' (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011) and is more interested in having the resources she needs to answer the exam question than exploring the text for its own sake (Xerri, 2013). Sarah readily spoke of looking for patterns in other poems but guided by the teacher that these are 'not relevant', she does not engage independently on her own. She explains that they 'picked out five or six poems [to analyse more closely and] that we could write about', which is quite understandable as there are forty-six poems in the 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' anthology; thus, the teacher can be seen to have mediated the text and the reader (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988). By negotiating the student's choices (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011) so that their chosen texts are more easily applicable to the exam focus, potentially perceptive comment might be silenced, and autonomy deterred (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988). Even though Sarah has been equipped with systems to analyse poetry, she follows her teacher's guidance rather than exercising her independence.

In the same way that Keats was considered 'an outsider who want[ed] to be an insider – on his own terms' (Motion, 2003, p.112), Blake felt unable to express his ideas adequately

because he could not 'empty words of other people's intentions and meanings' (Bruder in Ankarsjö, 2006, p.23). Getting 'inside' poetry and accessing meaning (Sarah), was understood to be important. Several individuals described writing detailed stanza summaries to keep track of what was happening in 'the story' (Tom), commenting that Keats' poems were 'like …long stories that use rhyme' (Stephanie). Students located familiar patterns to navigate the 'exposition', 'rising action' and 'climax' (Tom). Making the point that it was a struggle to 'get inside' some poems because comprehension was hampered by archaic language and ambiguity, Tom, like several others, felt alienated by the content. 'Understanding [poems] as stories' made them accessible (Stephanie) and countered some of the associated 'otherness' (Bauman, 1995). Incongruously, the Cockney poets' lack of higher education, modest backgrounds and belief system 'set them at odds with the establishment' (Motion, 2003, p.112) which ironically now includes them on their syllabi as examples of the English literary canon. In the same way that some of the sample struggled to engage with poetry representative of high culture, these poets felt alienated from values and principles in the time in which they lived, and strove to be understood by 'liberat[ing] the limitations of adult consciousness' (Halpin, 2007, p.38). Like the revolutionary poets who are now tamed, overtly drawing attention to the shape of poems gave students confidence to talk about them meaningfully. The rhythmic musicality of language and multisyllabic words helped link parts of the 'story' using cohesive systems. I was interested in how patterns on a sensory level helped students' access meaning.

Sarah explained that 'to some extent…you can … tell the theme of the poem based on the rhythm'. As one of only a couple of respondents who admitted to ever writing poetry, she was aware cadence can create feeling, explaining 'if it's consistent, then that portrays a positive rhythm, and half rhyme can show discord…it's all sub textual'. Before students

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read words for meaning, they used rhythm to identify the atmosphere.

> Sarah: '*Isabella*' has octava rhyme/ structure– I said about it in an essay once because it has ababcc - the couplets at the end give it a sense of difference / change in direction in the last two lines, which gives you a sense of it doesn't matter what you talk about in the first lines, it's the last two where you make your opinion and may be completely contradictory to what it is. It's because of the rhyme structure that those last two lines stand out [sic].

Speaking confidently about structure, Sarah explained that after an initial reading, closer analysis revealed poetry's mechanical organisation. Because 'English has been structured by various beliefs embedded in practice throughout its history' (Peim, 1993, p.30), Sarah looked for recognizable structures. Students spoke of 'listening for mood' (Tom) created by 'individual words' (Sarah) and 'any beat' (Milly) that could be identified. Stressing the importance of hearing it aloud, most of the students preferred the teacher's 'fluent' reading' (Sarah), positioning themselves as 'observers rather than participants…to find out what the poet is saying or what they think their teacher understands the poet is saying' (Burdan in Schaff *et al*., 2017, p.212). Delivery was important to 'spot rhythmic sounds' (Tom) but patterns within images, like the 'conflict of opposites in Eve of St. Agnes – the dark and the light' were identified from reading the text (Milly). The students were aware of aesthetic features and the importance of experiencing sound to bring a poem to life (Snapper in Dymoke *et al,* 2013). Interesting, a lot of students repeated the same points, suggesting little original response. Focusing on the outcome of analytical processing to ensure poetry can be taught well, students were asked if exam questions prompted them to look at poems anew or if they relied on the patterns already identified in learnt analysis.

> Sarah: It depends really – Keats is a closed book exam, so I have to remember quotes and yeah I remember the language and structural points that relate to the quote. Blake is open book – I still have my 4 or 5 poems that I am going to write about, but I try to pick out things that work well with the question.

Characteristic of student replies, key information was applied to all questions and only limited experimental argument was used in the exam. Relying on learnt analysis to break

'the code' (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988, p.53), students applied general patterns rather than scrutinizing with sharp focus. Asked whether there was a difference in the quality of analysis between closed book (Keats) and open book (Blake) answers, Sarah explained:

> I suppose I do rely on points that we have talked about in class or that I have written before when I'm writing about Keats. I write about [the] particular question on Blake – so yeah, I do leave things out that I've written before.

Students explored 'patterns, intertextuality, symbols [and] motifs' within poems (Stephanie). Investigating pattern (Barry, 2013) and the concept of 'Poetry Rorschach' which accepts the premise that we all see different things in poems and have different priorities based on our 'underlying disposition, attitudes, and concerns' (Dressman, 2010, p.2), supports the 'case for the pleasures, intellectual and aesthetic, of attending to the complex charges of form in poetic writing', encouraging engagement with language (Wolfson, 1997, p.1). Despite the fact all interpretations should 'exist equally' (Hay, 2010, p.136), almost all the students felt most confident using tried and tested arguments that they had passively received within the teaching classroom (Adorno, 1991).

Students agreed 'sharing ideas' with each other (Jenny) helped them write more 'perceptive[ly], assured[ly] and [facilitated more] sophisticated argument' (AQA, 2015), but reluctance to 'put [themselves] on the spot' (Sarah) and voice opinion (Goffman, 1967), made it difficult to move students' thinking forward (TP). A couple of students (who had declared an enjoyment of poetry independent of the classroom) made the point that it was 'useful' (Milly) to find out what other people thought, suggesting an implemented strategy that could inform original discourse. Reinforcing the notion of competition, Sarah admitted that she preferred to keep her thoughts to herself as she did not want 'anyone else to use

[her] ideas'.

> When you read through a poem and you've got to be original with interpretations and so you can't teach an interpretation of it you have to open it up. You have to zone in on certain parts and then pick it apart in different ways as opposed to just teaching it one way. So, like yeah, diversity and interpretation.

Like Tom Moore who complained about the 'lowering of standards that must necessarily arise from the extending of the circle of judges' (Moore, 2013, p.46) and Shelley who counselled that one should accept no advice 'from the simple-minded; time reverses the judgement of the foolish crowd' (Williams in Gleckner and Enscoe, 1974, p.272), aware of the competitive nature of A-level, Sarah guards her opinions from others to maintain her advantage. Revealing her sense of competition in her first interview with me, we revisited this theme in her final interview. Smiling as she spoke, Sarah appeared to be more comfortable with this revelation than she had been the first time she spoke about not sharing her ideas in class. Having off-loaded any sense of guilt she may have had bottled inside her, discussing her tactic had convinced her that her approach was justified. Students established patterns of behaviour to support success impacted their collegiality, but with the ultimate goal of achieving the highest mark through original interpretation, it was unavoidable. Although students' understanding of poetry was enhanced by their ability to identify pattern, a reluctance to move beyond class discussions curtailed its ability to generate 'genius, talent and distinction' (Leavis, 1932, p.31) and develop their analysis outside 'a kind of detective work, a cracking of codes and solving of mysteries, [and potentially] having little or no relevance to life as they live it beyond school' (Stratta *et al.,* 1973, p.42). To empower these students and be relevant to their lives, teachers must illuminate the importance of patterns within literature and their wider significance, that enable us to draw parallels between the lives of the Romantics and our own, making sense of the world. However, it is equally important that patterns are broken, and students are taught to adopt the Romantics'

rebelliousness, to nurture independent thinking and achieve 'personal growth' (DES and WO, 1989).

In exploring the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum, pattern was seen as an important factor which affected student engagement. Because a 'poem is worth reading for its own sake not simply in order to teach something about poetry' (Martin, 2003, p.16) exploring verse can help to 'make sense of the world' (Egan, 1990, p. 302) to access authentic feelings as a symmetrical whole, the experience that A-level students have of poetry is significant. Both teachers and students could be said to be: 'Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems' (The character Los in the poem '*Jerusalem*' by William Blake, 1804 in Erdman, 2008). Unless there is a sustained investment in poetry throughout the key stages that embraces all the facets of the creative genre, and teachers are given the time within the curriculum as well as the resources to explore its transformative qualities, A-level Romantic poetry is destined to remain a token genre that fails to deliver on its immense promise to unlock meaning both within the classroom and beyond.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The infinite transformative potential of poetry that is central to our culture (Burnside, 2012) as 'the universal language which the heart holds with nature itself' that can bind together the fabric of existence (Wu, 1998, p.165) and fan 'the fading coal' of 'the mind in creation' (Shelley in Kneale, 1992), makes the implications of this study profound. As an expression of the liberal canon, this study is concerned with the very relationship that poetry has with literature as its primary facilitating construction of engagement within our schools, and the ongoing necessity to develop student's breadth of imagination, which raises urgent questions about the nature of progressive education and cultural illiteracy. This is not just a thesis about teaching standards or a thesis about overcoming 'the particularities of social and historical circumstances' (Madhok, 2013, pp. 106-107) of a selection of Romantic poems; this thesis is fundamentally about the place of Romantic poetry within the curriculum and the future of English literature within our schools and as part of higher education (DfE, 2018).

The aim of this thesis

This research set out to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors had an impact on student engagement. It could be argued that the Romantics' pedagogical philosophies reflect a particular interpretation of education, young people and what students should experience. Addressing the 'Symmetrical Tyger', as part of understanding the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum, I wanted to explore whether, to benefit most from studying Romanticism, young people accessed experiences linked to the Romantics' core principles.

The process

Through a series of semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes, the attitudes of

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students and teachers toward their learning and teaching experiences were explored, to try to discover what influences student engagement with the subject. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, data was analysed as part of an iterative process and theory was co-constructed by both respondents and researcher. Attempting to create critical distance between myself and the gathering of data, allowing interviewees to direct the focus of interviews grew respondents' voices and helped make the familiar strange (Sikes, 2006). Whilst acknowledging my subjectivity as a teacher-researcher who struggled to remain neutral about what I deeply believe should be achieved for the study of poetry, a constructed grounded theory study allowed me to give students an authentic voice to express their feelings, even if that voice was at times negative about the material under scrutiny. The methodology chosen resonated with the innovative ideals of Romanticism and created a connection between the subject of the study and the process undertaken. In this way, poetry was used to help students express complex emotions and reciprocity between my understanding of the significance of poetry for the young people in my study and the students' growing appreciation of the universality of poetry, was established.

Claims for originality

The way I have structured my thesis would appear to be unique as I have woven a thread of Romanticism throughout my thesis by using the Romantics to exemplify my points. This is significant because the construction of my research reflects the holistic relationship between Romantic poets and their messages, and the needs of young people studying A-level poetry today. In this way, I make an explicit link between the values associated with the material that is being taught and the values that are applied to teaching and learning. I make connections between how the Romantics thought and how A-level students might best be taught, which to the best of my knowledge are original. By making direct connections

between what is being taught and how we go about teaching it, as an insider constructivist grounded theorist I believe I make an original contribution to CGT methodology that allowed me to observe change in the young people's attitudes towards poetry.

Key findings and the research questions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement. I conclude that the position of Romantic poetry within the curriculum is still hazardous because its value is not fully recognised. The symmetrical 'tyger' is still an aspiration in A-level teaching, which can be nurtured by mediating teachers who can positively influence students' relationship with poetry, but can equally put it at risk through poor teaching. In line with child centred 'personal growth' views of English (DES and WO, 1989) the Romantics were progressive educationalists, who used their poetry to mirror values they privileged (for example Wordsworth's representation of nature in *Home at Grasmere*), and believed education could illuminate understanding by exposing students to experiences that are rich and engaging. In exploring my thesis question, the significance of several factors had a bearing on student engagement which have implications for teaching and learning Romantic poetry.

Because all literature is 'news that stays news' (Ezra Pound, 1934), it is the carrier of vital information that helps to define who we are as individuals and as a society, understanding what factors affect students' engagement with Romantic poetry has potentially significant implications for all teachers. Whilst the data gave insight into all supplementary research focus areas, a credible interpretation of the data places greater emphasis on the significance of the question 'Do teachers' attitudes affect how students perceive the genre?'. As executors of policy and curriculum change, teachers were seen to play a part in influencing

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the students' feelings about poetry (Dymoke *et al*., 2015) and revealed friction between progressive child-centred models of English and Cultural Heritage models (DES and WO, 1989). This piece of research shows that an educator's pedagogy has a definite impact on the way that young people engage with Romantic poetry, and a teacher's understanding of the texts themselves, also helps to shape their impact. Ensuring that students receive quality education requires teachers to be well qualified (Pike, 2011), and in accordance with research that found teachers who 'exude true passion for their subjects are the ones that fire students' appetite for learning' (*My Education Report*, 2013), the students and teachers in the sample recognised that an asymmetrical focus on A-levels as a commodity that did not cut to the essence of the Romantic ideal and help to nurture the complete person, meant that students' holistic experience was side-lined, and an interest in engaging with Romantic poetry beyond the classroom was not cultivated. As schools 'reflect the purposes and pressures of contemporary society' educational edifices were seen to operate a 'hidden' curriculum that indoctrinate individuals into 'moral, social and political values' (Carr, 1998, p.57) in which poetry is a product that is quantified in terms of its commercial usefulness (Ball, 2013). Whilst a poem should not be understood as 'a finished statement, but an insight into a dynamically expanding range of possibilities' (Hughes, 1979, p.56), policies of hyper-accountability restrict learning opportunities (Hazlitt, 1967 [1807], p12). Thus, the results of a recent governmental review into university education funding for over 18s in England that proposed social science and humanity subjects should be made more affordable than science and technology courses (DfE, 2018), would seem to be pertinent to this research and can be seen as a value judgement on an engagement with literature in economic terms.

This commodification of poetry as part of literature, echoes the erstwhile controversy about the 'two cultures' of science and humanities (Snow, 2012 [1959]; Leavis, 2013 [1959]),

which threatens to create a 'two-tier system' that judges the value of education depending on future earning power (Sarup, 2013). Despite protestations by the Education secretary Damian Hinds that there is 'great value to both arts… and science degrees' (2018), the implication of a policy that suggests certain study areas are more valuable to society and the individual (because of potential lucrative work opportunities), is that the 'economic purpose of education' is more important than its 'social [and moral] purposes' (Ball, 2013, p.14). However, not only does this raise concerns about social inequality, the possible stultifying control of 'the working class' and social mobility (Eagleton, 1996, p.21), as well as the disquieting prospect that individuals might end up studying for an English literature degree because it is cheaper (Greening and Rayner, in Cowburn, 2018), it undermines the foundation of progressive education. By relegating the vitality of the 'rhetorical power [of poetry] to use words in new ways, to study the often-condensed language … and to discover what language can do' (Certo in Dymoke et al, 2013, p.106), as well as threaten the holistic discovery of 'fragments of the continuing dialogue with [oneself]' (Novalis in Hughes, 1979, p.64), is particularly short sighted, as a 'society whose intellectual leaders lose the skill to shape, appreciate, and understand the power of language will become the slaves of those who retain it - be they politicians, preachers, copywriters, or newscasters,' (Gioia, 1998, cited Benton, 1999, p.525).

Romanticism would seem to offer emancipation, freedom and voice to both students and teachers in increasingly de-professionalized results driven hierarchical contexts (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011) with inflexible curriculums controlled by rigid and punitive systems (Carr and Kemmis, 2002, p2; DfE, 2010). Appreciating the empowering creative potential of 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' (Keats, 2008) of dialogic and exploratory thought that resist institutional constraints through negative capability, can reinvigorate A-level

classrooms. Prescriptive and limiting instrumental influences that impose targets and manage examination requirements (Ball, 2013), have influenced the pedagogical practices of teachers, who are, by in large, pragmatic in their assessment of the need to mediate the terrain of educational policy and deliver curriculum requirements (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011) rather than fostering creative approaches to material as part of a squeezed syllabus. Arguably educational policy has been seen to impoverish academia and the value of creativity, by turning education into a product of the 'knowledge economy' (Slee and Allan, 2008, p.45) that needs to represent value for money amongst the miasma of potential economic reward (Ball, 2013) at the expense of individual growth and the 'search for truth' (Robbins, 1963).

In considering the supplementary research question 'What part does the study of Romantic poetry play in helping a student decide whether to study A level English literature?', the philosophy of the Romantics was not considered by students and the genre of poetry was neither engaging nor off-putting to respondents. Valuing analytical engagement and cultural influences, many students understood the worth of a 'cultural analysis' view of A-level literature which nurtured skills to interpret and reflect on literature (DES and WO, 1989), although pragmatic decision-making saw expert opinions were influential. Many teachers at key stage 4 taking an 'adult needs' view of English, did not use the Romantics to engage students or theorize about their practice, resulting in many practitioners espousing a received narrative (Austin, 2011) and relying on teaching students what they need to know for examination purposes rather than fostering an appreciation of the poetry or skills that could be applied more widely. Many well intentioned teachers failed to view the changes to the curriculum as an opportunity to nurture a 'life of sensations' (Keats in Sperry, 1994, p.6) on an exciting voyage of discovery with their students as 'good poems are the best teachers'

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(Oliver in Certo, 1994, p.10), or as an opportunity to exploit the possibilities of language (Crystal, 2011). Instead many viewed the recent syllabus changes as a '[b]ureaucratic' burden divorced from 'artistic' opportunity (Freire, 1985, p.79), maintaining that their role at GCSE was to 'deal in knowledge rather than in meaning-making' and to 'deliver' the 'goods' to ensure academic success to facilitate future achievement at a higher level (Dymoke, 2009). In this way, English literature was merely a stepping stone rather than a complete experience that could help nurture the individual and engage and excite them about beauty, wonder and the possibilities of the world and their lives (Burnside, 2012). Just as the Romantics had to fight for the imagination and intellectual freedom, as educationalists we must fight to safeguard the opportunity to engage with 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' (Keats, 2008).

The final supplementary research question 'Do students enjoy Romantic poetry and why do they study it?', revealed that before changes to the poetry curriculum at GCSE, students had little knowledge of the Romantic school of poetry and did not consciously appreciate or dislike it. The mediating role of teachers influenced students' relationship with poetry, and as a teacher-researcher I observed positive changes in attitudes towards Romantic poetry. In this way, Romanticism was seen to have the power to give voice to new generations, who were to an extent, disconnected. Specialist A-level teachers spoke of tailoring their practice to accommodate the needs of their students and a desire to create symmetry between the requirements of the course and the individual's personal growth, whilst less confident practitioners who were often teaching out of subject, were more mechanical (Gramsci, 1971) in their approach and as a result were less likely to independently 'inject life into inert symbols' (Egan, 1990, p.252), feel comfortable exploring alternative meanings or venture into an exploration of sound and structure (Bleiman, 2017) that they were uncertain of (TV).

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The Romantics influence upon education as a 'grand national concern' (Wollstonecraft, 1792) and their preoccupation with independent learning (Godwin, 1797) should resonate with educational ideals today.

Recommendations for action and policy change

Although well-meaning ideologically driven anti-elitist arguments (Davison and Moss, 2003) have questioned the composition of the revamped key stage 4 and 5 curriculum (DfE, 2015) because a progressive education should provoke excitement and curiosity (Hazlitt, 1969), teaching should facilitate the opportunities Romantic poetry provides to make 'personal and social… discoveries' (Dixon, 2009, p.244) and find personal resonances (Cremin in Fletcher *et al,* 2010) in highly esteemed literature (Cox, 1995, p.33). Disengagement from Romantic poetry is less about the texts and more about indoctrinated teaching pedagogies that need to liberate schools and teachers to implement effective tried and tested methodology (DfE, 2015). I maintain that the curriculum is not at fault, although some fundamental changes in approach are needed to ensure it is widely accessible.

Championing the spirit of freedom, equality, tolerance and respect, as central pivots on which our liberal culture is founded, Romantic poetry as valuable poetic inheritances that should be prized over others (Bate in Borklund, 1977) because of their intrinsic connection to the natural world and civilisation, deserve to be at the centre of curriculum design (Egan, 1994) and should be embedded into a child's earliest formative schooling experiences. The implicit connections between the ideals expounded at the time of the Romantics who were 'ambitious of doing the world some good' (Keats: letter to Richard Woodhouse, 1818, p. 412), and the many pressing shared concerns about the environment, education, liberty as well as creativity that is an end in itself , echo important liberal values that resonate with

students today (Halpin, 2007), and mean that Romantic poetry is not only relevant but its survival is vital to grow the 'relationship between education and society' (Carr and Kemmis, 2002, p.160), to teach individual scrutiny and help face issues like the contemporary global crisis.

To break the dominant culture's tightly dictated parameters (Gramsci, 1971) of culturally signifying judgements (Eagleton, 2014) that are established in developmental poetry experiences and have an indelible influence on many A-level students (Louise, Fiona, Stephanie) who failed to engage with poetry creatively or find internal symmetry of the self (Robinson, 2001), it is just as important that subject specialists teach foundational poetry experiences as well as A-levels. There was an acknowledgement by most of the teachers and students that a lack of 'deep learning' (Dymoke, 2011 in Davison *et al*, p.145) before GCSE hampered their ability to perceive the 'sanity of the genius and the madness of the commonplace mind' (Frye, 1990, p.13); performing well in exams was viewed as the primary outcome for studying poetry across the key stages, which often resulted in students becoming reliant on being spoon-fed (McRae, 1991), to realise this goal. Whilst pragmatic decisions have informed the timetable priorities of specialist teachers in many schools, practical measures (although not ideal as poetry should not be elitist), which carousel expertise across a range of classes, could in the short term ensure that enthusiasm for poetry is fostered in foundational key stages.

Accepting that the new A-level attempts to foster independent learning, a focus on summative assessment rather than stretching the understanding of students and stoking their curiosity through social interactions because 'reason cannot develop in a social vacuum' (Peters, 1981), means capacity for 'rational autonomous thought' (Carr, 1998, p.55) and

ownership needs to be developed through modelled activities that build confidence and equip students with the skills that they need to succeed in life as well as in the classroom. Many teachers thought that Romantic poetry was 'difficult' and as part of the British canon was imbued with a sense of 'otherness' (Bauman, 1995) that they felt made it inaccessible to students, which would appear to belie their own familiarity with the material and a recalcitrance to venture outside of comfort zones (Dymoke *et al*., 2013, p.24). Inadequate poetry engagement means that many teachers do not read poetry in their own time and so have a restricted understanding of the genre, which needs to be enhanced both professionally and personally to break down limiting preconceptions about habitus (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986).

Whilst it can be reasonably argued that it is desirable that all teachers stimulate their students' interest about their taught subject, a fed-up and unimaginative English literature teacher endeavouring to illuminate the great potential of poetry's 'social and aesthetic function' (Snapper, 2015, p.39), whilst navigating challenging 'obstructions to development' (Rousseau, 1762) to ensure teaching the genre does not turn into 'a reductive process, solely geared towards preparing examination responses' (Dymoke, 2003, p.11), is counterintuitive and profoundly unsettling. The English literature teacher's craft knowledge, creativity and ability to inspire (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007) is of fundamental importance because of the very nature of the art form as 'axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses' (Keats*, Letter to Reynolds* [1818], in Mee, 2002). To achieve a stable learning environment (Piaget in Jardine, 2006), students must be inspired and rise to the challenge of critical thinking to find a voice to express their views (Reid, 2002) as arguably 'all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it' (Wu, 1998, p.165).

Rather than nurturing original analysis that is 'implicit in good teaching at A-Level' (Jacobs, 2017), a perceived absence of autonomy within the profession (Carr, 2007) has led to an overreliance on shared perceptions of poetry by teaching practitioners at both key stage 3 and 4, which in turn , has fed into the expectations of many key stage 5 students who want to be told 'the right answer'(Jenny) and expect 'deposits' of knowledge to be made within the lesson (Freire, 1985). Thus, the legacy of teachers who did not inspire their students through poetry in foundational key stages and propagated passivity (Fiona, Jenny, Tom), must be addressed. As a long term measure, regular in-service training for teachers led by poet-educators (experienced and enthusiastic teachers of poetry who can inspire others as well as professional poets who have teaching experience), as well as initial training teachers, must be established, who should be supported by practical techniques that take the poem off the page and breathe life into it, to help improve knowledge and cultivate confidence, so that educationalists approach this creative artform with innovation and imagination.

In support of the liberal foundation of progressive education and the principles of Romanticism that cannot be distilled into a succinct list of 'deliverable commodities' (Jones, 1995), 'well-rounded, grounded' young people (DfE, 2017) who can be described as symmetrical as a result of an enriching A-level experience that value creative engagement alongside academic accomplishment, need to be supported to consider different perspectives as well as to see the many possibilities of the world around them. Exponents of liberal reform like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake believed pursuing the Romantic values of freedom, tolerance, equality and independence of thought (Halpin, 2007) should not be confined by inflexible assessment criteria (Xerri, 2013), but scaffolded through the exploratory application of knowledge as doers (Alexander, 2008), in pursuit of a well-formed individual.

<u>Limitations of research</u>

The findings of my study are restricted to a single cohort of Year 12 and 13 students who go to one school in Somerset, so cannot be taken as representative of a wider population. The following is a summary of key limitations to the research which are explored in more detail in the methodology.

☐ Within this cohort only one boy took English literature and the study does not consider the attitudes of other A-level students who did not take English literature as an option, who may have made their choices because of their feelings about Romantic poetry.

☐ Although students were exposed to a range of other Romantic poetry and literature from other writers, they only studied the poems as specified in the AQA B syllabus in any detail, and so their feelings about other Romantic poets have not been explored and are not represented here.

☐ The interview with Milly and Sarah as 'Literature Ambassadors', took place a week after they had taken the Year 11 poetry workshop, which could impact on their recollection of events.

☐ As a piece of CGT research, every endeavour has been taken to follow protocols, but as a teacher-researcher who has a vested interest in the findings of this subject, inevitably some bias may be present in how I present and interpret information.

☐ Some interviews generated insufficient detail so certain subjects were revisited overtly, however this may have generated a particular line of discussion that would not have been brought up by the interviewee and so may have less significance than I have attributed to it in my conclusions.

☐ As part of this study, large amounts of data were generated which make identifying and managing categories difficult and I acknowledge my findings are subjective (Creswell,

2007).

Problems arising during research

To explore the enduring relevance and immense possibilities offered by the 'multi-layered' nature of Romantic poetry (Bushell, 2002, p.111), the potential sample from which respondents were drawn was from both Year 12 and Year 13; however, the sample dwindled after the first term of my research, as fewer students took A-level literature in the incoming Year 12 cohort and fewer Year 13s converted their AS level literature into the full A-level. Similarly, some of the teachers who I had interviewed in the summer term did not come back to the school in the September, which meant it was not possible to explore some points further that had been raised in initial interviews. In accordance with conditions stipulated by the research ethics committee, I was keen to ensure all interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for the respondent; however, this meant it was not always easy to find time that was convenient for busy students and teachers mindful of curriculum pressures and upcoming exams. Part of my research design meant that I made audio recordings which was imperative to ensure I had an accurate record of what was said; however, to create a non-threatening naturalistic environment I did not take any notes whilst interviewing individuals, which meant I did not have a record of non-verbal behaviour which may have given me another layer of data to explore.

Implications of findings

The concept that education in twenty-first century Britain is concerned with 'dealing with children in whom one has to inculcate certain habits of diligence, precision, poise…[and an] ability to concentrate on specific subjects' (Gramsci, 2000, p.315) whilst navigating the 'forests' (Blake, 1794) of educational policy and practice, is undeniably true; however,

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'compliance [can] close[s] down debate' (Alexander, 2008, p.2) as 'counterspeech' (Frost in Harding, 2006) can inspire critical thought, thus facilitating a student to cleanse 'the doors of perception' so that they can 'soar with …[their] own wings' (Blake, 1794) within the A-level literature classroom, and achieve symmetric alignment. Romantic poetry is of fundamental importance for the individual and society, because it stirs up the potential of the imagination as 'poetry… is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind' (Shelley), and it helps us reflect on some of the 'struggles, anxieties and possibilities [of the period that] remain profoundly reminiscent' of contemporary struggles (Faflak and Wright, 2012 p.138).

The 'epistemic assumptions' of Romanticism (Reid, 2002, p.21) that uphold 'the importance of a child-centred pedagogy, placing a high value on self-expression, experimental learning, creative imagination, moral growth' (Reid, 2002, p.19) and the importance of student voice (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007) utilising the 'real language of men' (Wordsworth,1800), are essential to this piece of research, not only as the subject of this investigation but as the vehicle through which the research and learning are expedited. Sadly, much evidence suggests that many progressive Romantic values (Halpin, 2007, p.145), superficially at least, have taken on a secondary importance and have been supplanted by the desire to profit from transferable knowledge within a global economy 'rather than ideals' and the intrinsic worth of Romantic poetry (Willinsky, 1990) which requires cerebral engagement and champions an individual's imaginative powers (Bruner, 1996). Because poetry's cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) remains on the fringes of counterculture and the mainstream consciousness, it is 'not a mass-market "product"' (Rich, 2007, p.26) and poetry's lack of employability in its own right makes the future of this important component part of English literature, precarious.

Speculatively one could surmise that because educational institutions 'have to prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created, technologies that have not yet been invented and problems that we don't know will arise' (Schleicher in Zhao, 2010), like the traditional library, the teaching of poetry, as part of literature, could become obsolete within a generation if its intrinsic value is not recognised and preserved within our schools by all stakeholders, and simply expunged from the curriculum. Teachers, as advocates of learning, like the Romantic poets before them, must act as a mediating presence to enlighten the powerbrokers of education about knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978) and embark on a mission to harness the very real power of poetry within the classroom and the world beyond (Shelley, 1821).

Just as the Romantics lived through a period of tumultuous change, in our increasingly chaotic world there is much twenty-first century A-level students and educationalists can learn about finding perspective, so we can be 'excited by the attractions of the journey' to greater understanding, personally, nationally and globally (Coleridge quoted by Rosenblatt, 1978, p.28). As an important constituent part of the liberal arts, the future survival of poetry is central to Western liberal culture which nurtures a greater capacity for tolerance and respect so 'one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees' to be able to 'go on looking and reflecting' (Foucault in Heyes, 2007). Although there was more holistic focus within the A-level classroom than at other key stages which considered the relationship of the poem to the student in the world (Dymoke *et al*., 2013) and the power of poetry as a vehicle for self-expression (Peters, 1981), a dichotomy was seen to exist amongst the students where some enjoyed the security of sharing and discussing ideas as a whole class, whilst others staunchly guarded their individual insights, recognising that knowledge is power (Foucault, 1982).

In this way, the 'neo-liberal dream of competitive individualism…[that] guides our educational consciousness and sensibilities' (Slee, 2011 p.151) could be accused of promoting selfish endeavour to garner advantage, as the more able A-level students were keen to block collaborative thinking to maintain their educational and cultural advantage (Freire, 2010). Here the educative process would seem to have significant flaws, as all education should help humanity to progress and improve (Kant, 1790), and the potential transformative power of poetry uses reason and creativity to enlighten (Chaplin and Faflak, 2011) would seem to be impoverished by contemporary principles (Vance, 2016) that fails to value 'interaction' with others (Barthes, 1967) or nurture moral growth (Reid, 2002) as part of the progressive education championed by the Romantics.

As we continue to 'liv[e] in the comet's tail' of crucial change (Perkins, 1959, p.3), our A-level students must 'reflect on their own responses' (Benton *et al.,* 1988, p.206) unfettered by distracting economic limitations that gauge the value of knowledge depending on whether it has a fiscal value, prioritising economic impact and over an academic endeavour to 'contribut[e] to the development of the student as a person, as a citizen or at least as a depository and carrier of culturally valued knowledge' (Willmott, 1995, p1002). Because teachers have the power to 'illuminate or cast a shadow' over an individual's education (Dymoke *et al.*, b p18), clear ideological intentions and justifications that are not mired by prescribed teaching methods that dictate how knowledge must be communicated, are needed to help to ensure that each learning act is 'an educative process rather than a merely technical one' (Alexander, 2008, p.1) and that we go back to the Romantic source itself to advertise its appeal and do not underestimate the persuasiveness of what these poets are saying.

Autobiographical reflection

Although books may be 'the carriers of civilization… [and] humanity in print' (Tuchman, 1980), poetry is 'the most valuable object of all writing' because it expresses 'the great universal passions of men… and the entire world of nature' (Wu, 1998, p.66), and I believe this important genre is still being neglected. Currently working as an English teacher in Somerset, my career of over twenty years has taken me to many countries around the world, where I have had the opportunity to teach poetry. Working in Africa and Arabia where poetry is revered, I have been struck by missed opportunities within the A-level curriculum to tap into poetry's power to enrich and define the individual. Although the prevailing zeitgeist in British education is progress and accessibility, which echo the concerns of the Romantics, an emphasis on exam performance have limited poetry's transformative possibilities within the classroom. Although the reforms to the GCSE in 2015 have improved Romanticism's profile within schools, I would argue poetry is still impoverished within the curriculum. Because 'schools are being encouraged and required to become more like and act more like businesses' (Ball, 2013, p.15), poetry is only taught to be examined.

As a teacher who wants the best for my students, it is imperative to me that I give my students every opportunity to grow in their lessons both academically and holistically. As an English specialist, who knows the enormous potential of Romanticism to inspire and stimulate, I want to be able to engage a student's imagination and open them up to all the benefits of the genre. As we are living 'longer, healthier lives' in which individuals now need to 'think differently about working as we get older' (Department for work and pension, 2007), by accepting our position as 'lifelong learners' (Collins, 2004), it is imperative that our students are given every opportunity to discover the power of poetry for self-expression as well as explore their innate 'negative capability' (Keats), to foster their confidence and creativity to

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realise their full potential.

My objective in carrying out this research has been to explore the position of Romantic poetry within the A-level English literature curriculum and what factors affect student engagement so that practical steps can be taken to improve my practice in the A-level literature classroom, as well as that of others. The iterative process of interviewing individuals has been invaluable to my own teaching practice, as it has elucidated the tension that exists between enjoying poetry in line with a 'personal growth' view of English and studying to be examined primarily fulfilling an 'adult needs' view (DES and WO, 1989). I have been made acutely aware of the need to inject creativity into all activities and the need to foster enquiry and self-reliance within individuals in lower key stages. Accepting that 'education is itself a moral practice' (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. XIV p.12) means that it is the duty of every teacher to seek strategies to improve each child's educational experience and stretch their focus beyond quantifiable goals.

Suggestions for future work

The importance of the imaginative process to shape innovative thinking over reason and illuminate creative approaches, cannot be overstated. Romanticism helps the individual to make 'sense of the world' (Egan, 1990, p.36), and so developing the genre across school curriculums could illuminate pedagogic practice and transform schooling. It has been argued that the enormity of expectation on sixth form pupils in the twenty-first century is unwieldy and the need to develop resilience is vital to achieve 'academic outcomes and enhanced well-being' (Clough and Strycharczyk,, 2012). In our increasingly chaotic world, I think a study into mental health that looked at the benefits of engaging with Romantic poetry would be enlightening and instructive. Romanticism offers an opportunity to consider the state of

wider society and on the eve of Brexit and climate catastrophes I think it would be interesting to see if an inward focus inspires a return to nature and simple pleasures, or rebellious protest – both of which the Romantics were familiar with. Romantic poetry would offer a pertinent medium to reflect on and facilitate an opportunity to consider the parallels.

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<u>Appendix A: Waning popularity of English at University.</u>

The relationship that students have with Romantic poetry as a result of their experiences at A-level, can influence what they choose to do next. In spite of the historical elitist image of university, over recent years UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) reported that the number of successful applicants going to university increased 3.4% on 2013 to 500,000 in 2014. However, since the 2012 fees increase to £9,000, worryingly the subject English has received approximately 10% fewer applications, which has been replicated year on year since. In 2007, 54,000 students studied English: one of the top ten most popular subjects studied at University; however, in 2017 it was no longer in the top ten and slipped down the rankings. Thought-provokingly the subjects listed in the top ten of the most popular university courses in 2012 were: History (42,540); Biosciences (45,795); nursing (53,440); Education (56,200); Psychology (61,055); IT and computer science (62,670); Art and design (65,505); Sociology and social studies (66,020); Law (66,035); Business and management studies (124,375). When, arguably, financial considerations were at the forefront of decision making for individual students in 2012, this list perhaps exemplifies some of the priorities of living in the United Kingdom in the twenty-first century, as many of the subjects are profession specific (data available at UCAS.com). However, it is notable that History, another humanity subject that in the main does not offer a direct career path, but which, arguably furnishes the student with valuable analytical skills and communicative ability, made the list and English did not. Reflecting negative attitudes expressed historically about poetry (Andrews, 1991), literature's dwindling fortunes have implications for society, and threaten to preserve 'glittering prizes' for 'gilded hands' (Gove, 2012).

Dismissed by many as elitist, in part because of poetry's association with the dominant

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'habitus', by which Bourdieu means entrenched habits (Richardson, 1986), of 'high' culture (Gramsci, 1971) and what has been described as the 'fossilised [British] canon' (Andrews, 1991), the potential causal relationship between the popularity of poetry and the popularity of literature, makes the future of the A-level subject vulnerable. The 'privileg[ing] [of] particular social goals and human qualities... giv[ing] overwhelming emphasis to the economic role of education' (Ball, 2013, p.16), threatens the integrity of A-level literature and the essence of liberal culture, by which I mean guiding principles that are tolerant of diverse views and experiences. Teachers have long been the 'gatekeepers' of poetry (Tweddle et al, 1997, p.50), but as many have themselves been products of schooling where poetry has been 'frequently neglected and poorly provided for,' poetry continues to face 'inadequate and superficial' treatment within schools (HMI, 1987, p.4). 'Overwhelmed by too many earnest endeavours to earn its keep' the 'magic of poetry' (Meek, 1990, p.31) has been marginalised and commodified, at the 'expense of playful exploration, thoughtful contemplation and pleasure' (Grainger et al., 2005, p.138). Although poetry has remained powerfully influential in many parts of the world (for example Al-Gormezi a Bahraini poet was imprisoned for reading a poem at a pro-democracy rally in 2011 (Independent, 2011)), its perfunctory significance for many of the students in my study, may have a devastating effect on wider cultural practices.

Appendix B. Poetry Questionnaire in amended format.

Please respond to the following questions and statements by reflecting on your own experiences with poetry.

For the following questions circle –

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

1. I enjoy reading poetry.

2. Everyone can write poetry.

3. Poetry is more difficult to understand than other types of writing.

4. The best poems rhyme.

5. There is no right way to write a poem.

6. Poems are songs.

7. There is no right reading of a poem.

8. I am comfortable sharing my ideas with my peers.

Write your answer in the space provided

9. What three words best describe your feelings about poetry?

10. Does poetry excite or scare you? Please explain why.

11. Can you name a poem that you enjoyed? What did you like about it?

12. Have you written your own poetry at any time that was not assigned by a teacher? What was it about?

13. Do you enjoy poetry lessons? Please explain why.

14. How do you go about understanding a poem?

15. Are technical devices important to you? Please explain why.

16. Do you prefer to read poetry or listen to it?

Appendix C

 Initial interview questions

1) You said that you were excited/ scared by poetry – can you explain that to me?

2) You named the poem/ poet____ as a poem/ poet that you have enjoyed. What was it about it that you enjoyed?'

3) You said you liked reading/ don't like reading – what was the last thing you read?

4) Do you/ have you ever read poetry out of school?

5) You said that you preferred poetry read aloud/ on the page – why is that?

6) What kind of poetry do you enjoy the most?

Appendix D

Table of interviews: teachers

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Teacher 1	Tuesday April 5th 2016	Tuesday May 24th 2016	
Teacher 2	Thursday April 7th 2016		
Teacher 3	Tuesday April 12th 2016	Tuesday May 24th 2016	Monday September 12th 2016
Teacher 4	Tuesday April 19th 2016		
Teacher 5	Friday April 22nd 2016		
Teacher 6	Wednesday May 25th 2016		
Teacher 7	Wednesday June 8th 2016		
Teacher 8	Wednesday June 15th 2016		

Table of interviews: students

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4
Student 1	Wednesday April 20th 2016	Thursday May 26th 2016	*Joint interview* Tuesday July 12th 2016	Tuesday September 13th 2016
Student 2	Monday April 18th 2016	Thursday June 9th 2016	*Joint interview* Tuesday July 12th 2016	Tuesday September 20th 2016
Student 3	Tuesday April 19th 2016	Tuesday June 14th 2016		
Student 4	Friday May 27th 2016	Thursday June 15th 2016		
Student 5	Wednesday June 8th 2016	Tuesday July 5th 2016		
Student 6	Monday June 13th 2016	Wednesday July 6th 2016		
Student 7	Wednesday September 7th 2016	Wednesday September 14th 2016	Tuesday September 20th 2016	
Student 8	Thursday September 8th 2016	Thursday September 15th 2016	Wednesday September 21st 2016	

Theoretical memo – writing and refining of concepts throughout

Initial/ open coding

Focused coding and refining categories using further data collection

Theoretical Sampling

Further memoing

Data collection for initial coding

Theory development and refinement

Final report once theory effectively captures development of participants' socially constructed reality

Research problem and opening research questions

Writing drafts of report

Theoretical memoing and sorting for integration into theory and related abstractions

Modified from Charmaz, 2006.

Nodes — Search Project

Name	Files	References
Being needy	8	21
Being part of a community	3	5
Believing there is a right answer	5	15
Caring about own needs	4	5
Comparing teaching groups	2	4
Considering the needs of the group	2	3
Constructing a relationship between poems	8	17
Criticising teaching	3	3
Delivering material in the classroom	2	5
Displaying selfishness	5	6
Engaging students with texts	2	6
Engaging creativity	3	5
Engaging with reading	2	5
Engaging with technology	4	15
engaging with the canon	4	6
Enjoying literature	1	3
Enjoying poetry	6	18
Enjoying villany	2	4
Exploring group dynamics	3	4
Feeling confidence in subject matter	5	7
Feeling emotion	7	16
Feeling empathy	7	13
Feeling indignation	4	5
Feeling insecure	8	16
Feeling nostalga for old syllabus	3	7
Finding cultural relevance	5	11
Finding others views helpful	4	8
Finding personal relevance	5	9
Finding some resonance in poetry	4	7
Fulfiling the needs of the course	3	6
Getting something out of studying poetry	8	18
Guarding own thoughts	4	6
Guiding students	3	5
Having a clear goal	5	7

Tabs: Paul interview | Emily inter | Finding cultural relevance | Teacher 3 ✕

Teacher 3: interview 2

Tuesday May 24th 2016 3.30pm C12

I-Really interesting seeing them yesterday. Was that normal example of interaction?

T -They're often quiet - they are very – it's a difficult group to get things out of. The other group are much more vocal - much more engaged in offering their opinions.

I -why do you think that is?

T-They are very worried about getting it wrong, and they are – holding back.

Emily – very quiet and she loves poetry – she was one of the quietest.

She is very conscious that she hasn't done the work – she was away for the assessment and hadn't caught up on it - I also think that she thinks so much, and she doesn't actually want to share. She doesn't see the necessity of sharing, she wants to keep it to herself – and she's like 'I know what it is about, I'm not going to share that.' So it's a bit selfish in some ways and not how a group at A-level normally works.

I –I noticed that Ella was your main contributor which again, was nice to see. And Louisa as well.

T- Louisa had written the best essay of the 3 of them – it was simple but she didn't lose the thread and the others got in a tangle and lost the argument.

I- How do they find [the poetry unit] in general?

T- The poetry as a whole – they've enjoyed the majority – especially the experience poems. They umm, Lauren is the least enamoured with Blake but even she will admit that there are some key experience poems that she really likes. She gets those messages, she gets frustrated with some of the innocence poems. The others have been genuinely enthusiastic about all of the poems – um and some of the ones where - there's one where the wild animals come off and look after the lost child and things like that – they're like ' yeah ok, we quite like that'. So they've been very enthusiastic with a lot of the poems we now have a difficult job, as I said in the lesson, of trying to get the politics out of it – um and its different to how we taught Blake in the past, because 8-10 years ago Blake was on the syllabus – umm and it was about looking at one poem and analysing how one idea came about in that poem. And now it's about trying to take a holistic approach to the ideas of politics and I think that's hard. 'Cos I don't think it is about [that], Blake isn't always that political. But they have got to grips with the poems – they know what they are about, and they do find an interest in some of the language used and some of the symbolism, um but I don't think they want to necessarily work on the different levels that Blake wants to work at - they're ' um no I'm not going down that root' - they still

Printed from Nvivo – nodes identified are on the left hand side and the transcript is on the right. A tally of how many times nodes have been used can be seen under references and the amount of interviews this relates to at this stage can be seen under files.

Nodes

Search Project

Name	Files	References
Adapting teaching to needs of group	3	8
Becoming independent	6	17
Being needy	8	21
Being part of a community	3	5
Believing there is a right answer	5	15
Caring about own needs	4	5
Comparing teaching groups	2	4
Considering the needs of the group	2	3
Constructing a relationship between poems	8	17
Criticising teaching	3	3
Delivering material in the classroom	2	5
Displaying selfishness	5	6
Engaging students with texts	2	6
Engaging creativity	3	5
Engaging with reading	2	5
Engaging with technology	4	15
engaging with the canon	4	6
Enjoying literature	1	3
Enjoying poetry	6	17
Enjoying villany	2	4
Exploring group dynamics	3	4
Feeling confidence in subject matter	5	7
Feeling emotion	7	16
Feeling empathy	7	13
Feeling indignation	4	5
Feeling insecure	8	16
Feeling nostalga for old syllabus	3	7
Finding cultural relevance	5	11
Finding others views helpful	4	8
Finding personal relevance	5	9
Finding some resonance in poetry	4	7
Fulfiling the needs of the course	3	6
Getting something out of studying poetry	8	18
Guarding own thoughts	4	6

3rd interview Student 1 and Stud

Interview Student 1

T – What has been your experience poetry teaching?

Student 1– I wouldn't say I am concerned about it - but I felt when we were doing it I wouldn't know how to answer a question. I'm not confident at all – like about being able to write about it. Like I have no idea about...Like I have brief idea about analogy but we've never gone into it- especially in the format of this exam where we could get one or two topic based questions – I have no idea.

T – describe the process that you have gone through in class – how do you arrive at an understanding of a poem?

Student 1- Well sir goes through and explains to us what different parts mean. I 'm not too worried.

Student 1 – I think it needs to be done because there are so many of them – obviously we can't go in depth to all of them. Um because we read such a wide range some of them are completely useless for the questions we are going to be asked – so we could've completely disregarded them to begin with, but we didn't. We spent almost exactly the same amount of time on each poem despite the fact that some of them 1 were completely useless.

T: we talked about different interpretations – coming back to the poems do you think it is going to help you see different things and keep it fresh?

Student 1 – maybe, but the few things we have done so far like religion, that's going to be at the back of my mind. Although I'm going to get new ideas about it, the old ideas are going to come back – like they are going to over shadow my [interpretations].

T – with reference to how Keats and Blake were taught?

Student 1 -err yeah I think that Keats was a much better way of going about it.

T - Its almost a year ago that you did Keats– which do you know better?

Student 1 - Keats.

Student 1: Going in-depth in the first instance has stayed with me.

T- what are you doing next?

Student 1- Should be ongoing independent learning in the background as we're looking at Handmaid's tale and Kite runner. But we've kinda just dropped Blake in the middle of no-where. We briefly went over it and it just seems logical to go over it in more depth now – but it haven't, we've just moved on – left it hanging.

T- do you read poetry on your own?

Student 1 – I'd see it. I'm not really bothered what other people like.

T- do you find it useful to share ideas and find out what other people think or do you prefer to be

Appendix G Generated Codes

1. Adapting teaching to needs of group
2. Becoming independent
3. Being needy
4. Being part of a community
5. Believing there is a right answer
6. Caring about own needs
7. Caring about how other view you
8. Comparing teaching groups
9. Considering the needs of the group
10. Constructing a relationship between poems
11. Communicating with friends
12. Criticising teaching
13. Delivering material in the classroom
14. Displaying selfishness
15. Engaging students with texts
16. Engaging creativity
17. Engaging with reading
18. Engaging with technology
19. engaging with the canon
20. Enjoying literature
21. Enjoying poetry
22. Enjoying villainy
23. Exploring group dynamics
24. Feeling confidence in subject matter
25. Feeling emotion
26. Feeling empathy
27. Feeling indignation
28. Feeling insecure
29. Feeling nostalgia for old syllabus
30. Finding cultural relevance
31. Finding others views helpful
32. Finding patterns
33. Finding personal relevance
34. Finding some resonance in poetry
35. Fulfilling the needs of the course
36. Getting something out of studying poetry
37. Guarding own thoughts
38. Guiding students
39. Having a clear goal
40. Limiting expectations
41. Measuring engagement
42. Measuring success by results
43. Missing opportunities
44. Needing a system
45. Not engaging in poetry
46. Nurturing a way of looking at poems
47. Overwhelming quantity and length of poems
48. Preparing to put self on the line.

49. Reacting to the portrayal of women
50. Reluctance to engage with extra reading
51. Reminiscing about own experiences
52. Scaffolding ideas
53. Silencing voice
54. Simplifying poems
55. Stretching students
56. Understanding context
57. Understanding how to succeed
58. understanding need for preparation
59. Understanding poems influencing engagement
60. Understanding youth culture
61. Understanding how to answer a question
62. Using a diary/ journal to express yourself
63. Using technology
64. Utilising multimodal forms
65. Valuing freedom of expression
66. Taking risks
67. Talking to 'expert' adults about decisions made
68. Tolerating others views

The initial categories were identified through interview and observation. These codes were rationalised   and many codes were collapsed into larger linked codes. The constant comparison of data allowed pertinent codes to be identified which were checked with additional data, to check veracity before they were further pursued as part of the of the theoretical sampling process.

Appendix H

Initial interviews uncovered many nodes that loosely radiated around topics, which were interrogated further with respondents to understand their significance for the group.

Lacking confidence

Expressing reticence to speak out loud

Expressing feelings openly/ feeling obligated

Central node: **Engaging with emotions**

- Exploring emotion (16)
- Enjoying villany (7)
- Opportunity to explore other ways of seeing (9)
- Feeling nostalgia for old syllabus (6)
- Feeling empathy (10)
- Resenting having to answer questions (8)
- Valuing freedom of expression (7)
- Needing to contribute (6)

Continuing family traditions

Central node: **Family influence**

- Guiding advice from parents (3)
- Engaging with reading/ poetry (6)
- Making parents' proud (3)
- Going to university (4)
- Justifying choices (5)
- Having a clear goal (5)
- Being part of a community (3)
- Finding cultural relevance (11)

Wanting to fulfil expectations/ wanting to rebel against expectations

Scaffolding ideas (4)

Constructing a relationship between poems to meet needs of exam (17)

Measuring success by results (6)

Engaging with creativity (5)

Expectations

Caring about own needs (5)

Engaging with technology (15)

Displaying selfishness (6)

Finding personal relevance ((9)

Fitting in with friends

Finding some resonance in poetry (7)

Feeling indignation (5)

Understanding youth culture (6)

Comparing teaching groups (4)

Friends

Sharing ideas on-line in study communities (6)

Criticising teaching (3)

Seeing others' points of view (6)

Considering the needs of the group (5)

Seeing A-levels as a steppingstone/ having no direction

Enjoying poetry
(18)

Enjoying literature
(3)

Fulfilling the needs
of the course
(6)

Delivering material
in the classroom
(5)

Future goals

Needing
qualificaitons for
university
(6)

Studying English
because they want
to
(5)

Understanding need
for preparation
(7)

Understanding
poems influencing
engagement
(8)

Lacking interest/ disliking poetry

Needing a system
to access content
(6)

Measuring
importance
(5)

Contextually
unaware
(5)

Interest in
poetry

Historically not
engaged in poetry
(7)

Reluctance to
engage with extra
reading
(6)

Simplifying poems
(9)

Overwhelming
quantity and length
of poems
(12)

Lacking confidence

Reticence to speak out

Expressing views

Family tradition

Meeting/ rebelling against expectation

Fitting in with friends

A-levels as stepping stone

Interest in poetry

Striving for independence

Finding a voice

Conformity/ maverick values

Valuable

Achievement

Dependence

Emotional engagement

Technology

Youth culture

Commodification

Pattern

Initial code   Memo   Focused code   Refining/ theoretical sampling

'Speaking first! - no way.'

Lacking autonomous views

Negative – feeling vulnerable

Lacking confidence.

Believing there's a right answer

Insecurity in ability

Satisfying Family expectations.

Lack of agency – influenced by others

Feeling connected/ disconnected

Taking instruction from the more knowledgeable

Meeting expectation

Rebelling against others expectations

Motivated by others

Feeling obligated/ suppressed

Student motivation as a result of indoctrination

Wanting to know what others think.

Lack of independent thinking

Wanting to voice opinions.

Wanting to be like others

Finding resonance in language/ motivating behaviour

Striving for independence

Fulfilling the requirements of course

Bridging worlds: A-levels as stepping stone

Advantages of taking A-levels

Finding a voice

Asking for advice

Taking advice from others

Asking teacher/ using internet before attempting own analysis

Expressing views openly

Ascertaining what is valuable

Seeking reassurance

Needy

Gaining life skills

Seeing A-levels as an opportunity

Seeking growth

Achieving status/ ascertaining value

Dependence

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Initial codes (in blue box) were reflected on in memos to help find connections between categories which helped refine them into more focused codes (green box). Theoretical sampling and further data analysis helped to uncover theoretical codes.

```
                    Dependency

              Striving for
              indpendence

   Valuing  what
   studying poetry            Finding a voice
   represents

       Motivating              feeling
       behaviour/              suppressed/
                               Feeling
       achieving status        obligatedFeeling
                               connected

  Expressing views      Finding           Feeling
  openly/               resonance in      connected/
                        language           feeling
  ascertaing value                        disconnected
```

Codes that related to each other were memoed about to help understand the relationship between categories and construct theory. Links were identified in memos which connected 'expressing views openly' and 'ascertaining value' that could be refined into the code 'finding a voice'. Memoing about 'feeling obligated', 'feeling suppressed', 'motivating behaviour' and 'achieving success' linked to the focused code 'striving for independence'. 'Feeling connected', 'feeling disconnected', and 'finding resonance in language', all had links to 'valuing what studying poetry represents.

A selection of the poems studied by the students in the study (AQA (B) A-level) that are referred to in the thesis.

Poems by John Keats

Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil.

A Story from Boccaccio

I.

FAIR Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
  Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
  Without some stir of heart, some malady;
They could not sit at meals but feel how well   5
  It soothed each to be the other by;
They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep
But to each other dream, and nightly weep.

II.

With every morn their love grew tenderer,
  With every eve deeper and tenderer still;   10
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
  But her full shape would all his seeing fill;
And his continual voice was pleasanter
  To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;
Her lute-string gave an echo of his name,   15
She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same.

III.

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch,
  Before the door had given her to his eyes;
And from her chamber-window he would catch
  Her beauty farther than the falcon spies;   20
And constant as her vespers would he watch,
  Because her face was turn'd to the same skies;
And with sick longing all the night outwear,
To hear her morning-step upon the stair.

IV.   25

A whole long month of May in this sad plight
  Made their cheeks paler by the break of June:
"To morrow will I bow to my delight,
  "To-morrow will I ask my lady's boon."—
"O may I never see another night,
  "Lorenzo, if thy lips breathe not love's tune."—   30
So spake they to their pillows; but, alas,
Honeyless days and days did he let pass;

V.

Until sweet Isabella's untouch'd cheek
  Fell sick within the rose's just domain,
Fell thin as a young mother's, who doth seek   35
  By every lull to cool her infant's pain:
"How ill she is," said he, "I may not speak,
  "And yet I will, and tell my love all plain:
"If looks speak love-laws, I will drink her tears,
"And at the least 'twill startle off her cares."   40

VI.

So said he one fair morning, and all day
  His heart beat awfully against his side;
And to his heart he inwardly did pray

For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice, and puls'd resolve away— 45
  Fever'd his high conceit of such a bride,
Yet brought him to the meekness of a child:
Alas! when passion is both meek and wild!

VII.
So once more he had wak'd and anguished
  A dreary night of love and misery, 50
If Isabel's quick eye had not been wed
  To every symbol on his forehead high;
She saw it waxing very pale and dead,
  And straight all flush'd; so, lisped tenderly,
"Lorenzo!"—here she ceas'd her timid quest, 55
But in her tone and look he read the rest.

VIII.
"O Isabella, I can half perceive
  "That I may speak my grief into thine ear;
"If thou didst ever any thing believe,
  "Believe how I love thee, believe how near 60
"My soul is to its doom: I would not grieve
  "Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear
"Thine eyes by gazing; but I cannot live
"Another night, and not my passion shrive.

IX. 65
"Love! thou art leading me from wintry cold,
  "Lady! thou leadest me to summer clime,
"And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
  "In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time."
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold,
  And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme: 70
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness

Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress.

X.

Parting they seem'd to tread upon the air,
  Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
Only to meet again more close, and share   75
  The inward fragrance of each other's heart.
She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair
  Sang, of delicious love and honey'd dart;
He with light steps went up a western hill,
And bade the sun farewell, and joy'd his fill.   80

XI.

All close they met again, before the dusk
  Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
All close they met, all eves, before the dusk
  Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk,   85
  Unknown of any, free from whispering tale.
Ah! better had it been for ever so,
Than idle ears should pleasure in their woe.

XII.

Were they unhappy then?—It cannot be—
  Too many tears for lovers have been shed,   90
Too many sighs give we to them in fee,
  Too much of pity after they are dead,
Too many doleful stories do we see,
  Whose matter in bright gold were best be read;
Except in such a page where Theseus' spouse   95
Over the pathless waves towards him bows.

XIII.

But, for the general award of love,
  The little sweet doth kill much bitterness;
Though Dido silent is in under-grove,
  And Isabella's was a great distress,   100
Though young Lorenzo in warm Indian clove
  Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less—
Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
Know there is richest juice in poison-flowers.

XIV.   105

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
  Enriched from ancestral merchandize,
And for them many a weary hand did swelt
  In torched mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt
  In blood from stinging whip;—with hollow eyes   110
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.

XV.

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
  And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death   115
  The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
  A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.   120

XVI.

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
  Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?—
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts

Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?—
Why were they proud? Because red-lin'd accounts 125
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?—
Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?

XVII.
Yet were these Florentines as self-retired
In hungry pride and gainful cowardice, 130
As two close Hebrews in that land inspired,
Paled in and vineyarded from beggar-spies,
The hawks of ship-mast forests—the untired
And pannier'd mules for ducats and old lies—
Quick cat's-paws on the generous stray-away,— 135
Great wits in Spanish, Tuscan, and Malay.

XVIII.
How was it these same ledger-men could spy
Fair Isabella in her downy nest?
How could they find out in Lorenzo's eye
A straying from his toil? Hot Egypt's pest 140
Into their vision covetous and sly!
How could these money-bags see east and west?—
Yet so they did—and every dealer fair
Must see behind, as doth the hunted hare.

XIX. 145
O eloquent and famed Boccaccio!
Of thee we now should ask forgiving boon,
And of thy spicy myrtles as they blow,
And of thy roses amorous of the moon,
And of thy lilies, that do paler grow
Now they can no more hear thy ghittern's tune, 150
For venturing syllables that ill beseem

The quiet glooms of such a piteous theme.

XX.

Grant thou a pardon here, and then the tale
  Shall move on soberly, as it is meet;
There is no other crime, no mad assail   155
  To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet:
But it is done—succeed the verse or fail—
  To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;
To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,
An echo of thee in the north-wind sung.   160

XXI.

These brethren having found by many signs
  What love Lorenzo for their sister had,
And how she lov'd him too, each unconfines
  His bitter thoughts to other, well nigh mad
That he, the servant of their trade designs,   165
  Should in their sister's love be blithe and glad,
When 'twas their plan to coax her by degrees
To some high noble and his olive-trees.

XXII.

And many a jealous conference had they,
  And many times they bit their lips alone,   170
Before they fix'd upon a surest way
  To make the youngster for his crime atone;
And at the last, these men of cruel clay
  Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone;
For they resolved in some forest dim   175
To kill Lorenzo, and there bury him.

XXIII.

So on a pleasant morning, as he leant
　Into the sun-rise, o'er the balustrade
Of the garden-terrace, towards him they bent
　Their footing through the dews; and to him said,　　180
"You seem there in the quiet of content,
　"Lorenzo, and we are most loth to invade
"Calm speculation; but if you are wise,
"Bestride your steed while cold is in the skies.

XXIV.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　185

"To-day we purpose, ay, this hour we mount
　"To spur three leagues towards the Apennine;
"Come down, we pray thee, ere the hot sun count
　"His dewy rosary on the eglantine."
Lorenzo, courteously as he was wont,
　Bow'd a fair greeting to these serpents' whine;　　190
And went in haste, to get in readiness,
With belt, and spur, and bracing huntsman's dress.

XXV.

And as he to the court-yard pass'd along,
　Each third step did he pause, and listen'd oft
If he could hear his lady's matin-song,　　195
　Or the light whisper of her footstep soft;
And as he thus over his passion hung,
　He heard a laugh full musical aloft;
When, looking up, he saw her features bright
Smile through an in-door lattice, all delight.　　200

XXVI.

"Love, Isabel!" said he, "I was in pain
　"Lest I should miss to bid thee a good morrow:
"Ah! what if I should lose thee, when so fain

"I am to stifle all the heavy sorrow

"Of a poor three hours' absence? but we'll gain 205

  "Out of the amorous dark what day doth borrow.

"Good bye! I'll soon be back."—"Good bye!" said she:—

And as he went she chanted merrily.

XXVII.

So the two brothers and their murder'd man

  Rode past fair Florence, to where Arno's stream 210

Gurgles through straiten'd banks, and still doth fan

  Itself with dancing bulrush, and the bream

Keeps head against the freshets. Sick and wan

  The brothers' faces in the ford did seem,

Lorenzo's flush with love.—They pass'd the water 215

Into a forest quiet for the slaughter.

XXVIII.

There was Lorenzo slain and buried in,

  There in that forest did his great love cease;

Ah! when a soul doth thus its freedom win,

  It aches in loneliness—is ill at peace 220

As the break-covert blood-hounds of such sin:

  They dipp'd their swords in the water, and did tease

Their horses homeward, with convulsed spur,

Each richer by his being a murderer.

XXIX. 225

They told their sister how, with sudden speed,

  Lorenzo had ta'en ship for foreign lands,

Because of some great urgency and need

  In their affairs, requiring trusty hands.

Poor Girl! put on thy stifling widow's weed,

  And 'scape at once from Hope's accursed bands; 230

To-day thou wilt not see him, nor to-morrow,

And the next day will be a day of sorrow.

XXX.
She weeps alone for pleasures not to be;
  Sorely she wept until the night came on,
And then, instead of love, O misery!   235
  She brooded o'er the luxury alone:
His image in the dusk she seem'd to see,
  And to the silence made a gentle moan,
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
And on her couch low murmuring, "Where? O where?"   240

XXXI.
But Selfishness, Love's cousin, held not long
  Its fiery vigil in her single breast;
She fretted for the golden hour, and hung
  Upon the time with feverish unrest—
Not long—for soon into her heart a throng   245
  Of higher occupants, a richer zest,
Came tragic; passion not to be subdued,
And sorrow for her love in travels rude.

XXXII.
In the mid days of autumn, on their eves
  The breath of Winter comes from far away,   250
And the sick west continually bereaves
  Of some gold tinge, and plays a roundelay
Of death among the bushes and the leaves,
  To make all bare before he dares to stray
From his north cavern. So sweet Isabel   255
By gradual decay from beauty fell,

XXXIII.

Because Lorenzo came not. Oftentimes
　She ask'd her brothers, with an eye all pale,
Striving to be itself, what dungeon climes
　Could keep him off so long? They spake a tale　260
Time after time, to quiet her. Their crimes
　Came on them, like a smoke from Hinnom's vale;
And every night in dreams they groan'd aloud,
To see their sister in her snowy shroud.

XXXIV.　265

And she had died in drowsy ignorance,
　But for a thing more deadly dark than all;
It came like a fierce potion, drunk by chance,
　Which saves a sick man from the feather'd pall
For some few gasping moments; like a lance,
　Waking an Indian from his cloudy hall　270
With cruel pierce, and bringing him again
Sense of the gnawing fire at heart and brain.

XXXV.

It was a vision.—In the drowsy gloom,
　The dull of midnight, at her couch's foot
Lorenzo stood, and wept: the forest tomb　275
　Had marr'd his glossy hair which once could shoot
Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom
　Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute
From his lorn voice, and past his loamed ears
Had made a miry channel for his tears.　280

XXXVI.

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake;
　For there was striving, in its piteous tongue,
To speak as when on earth it was awake,

And Isabella on its music hung:
Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake, 285
  As in a palsied Druid's harp unstrung;
And through it moan'd a ghostly under-song,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.

XXXVII.
Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy bright
  With love, and kept all phantom fear aloof 290
From the poor girl by magic of their light,
  The while it did unthread the horrid woof
Of the late darken'd time,—the murderous spite
  Of pride and avarice,—the dark pine roof
In the forest,—and the sodden turfed dell, 295
Where, without any word, from stabs he fell.

XXXVIII.
Saying moreover, "Isabel, my sweet!
  "Red whortle-berries droop above my head,
"And a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet;
  "Around me beeches and high chestnuts shed 300
"Their leaves and prickly nuts; a sheep-fold bleat
  "Comes from beyond the river to my bed:
"Go, shed one tear upon my heather-bloom,
"And it shall comfort me within the tomb.

XXXIX. 305
"I am a shadow now, alas! alas!
  "Upon the skirts of human-nature dwelling
"Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,
  "While little sounds of life are round me knelling,
"And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,
  "And many a chapel bell the hour is telling, 310
"Paining me through: those sounds grow strange to me,

"And thou art distant in Humanity.

XL.

"I know what was, I feel full well what is,
  "And I should rage, if spirits could go mad;
"Though I forget the taste of earthly bliss,   315
  "That paleness warms my grave, as though I had
"A Seraph chosen from the bright abyss
  "To be my spouse: thy paleness makes me glad;
"Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel
"A greater love through all my essence steal."   320

XLI.

The Spirit mourn'd "Adieu!"—dissolv'd, and left
  The atom darkness in a slow turmoil;
As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,
  Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,
We put our eyes into a pillowy cleft,   325
  And see the spangly gloom froth up and boil:
It made sad Isabella's eyelids ache,
And in the dawn she started up awake;

XLII.

"Ha! ha!" said she, "I knew not this hard life,
  "I thought the worst was simple misery;   330
"I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife
  "Portion'd us—happy days, or else to die;
"But there is crime—a brother's bloody knife!
  "Sweet Spirit, thou hast school'd my infancy:
"I'll visit thee for this, and kiss thine eyes,   335
"And greet thee morn and even in the skies."

XLIII.

When the full morning came, she had devised
  How she might secret to the forest hie;
How she might find the clay, so dearly prized,
  And sing to it one latest lullaby;   340
How her short absence might be unsurmised,
  While she the inmost of the dream would try.
Resolv'd, she took with her an aged nurse,
And went into that dismal forest-hearse.

XLIV.   345

See, as they creep along the river side,
  How she doth whisper to that aged Dame,
And, after looking round the champaign wide,
  Shows her a knife.—"What feverous hectic flame
"Burns in thee, child?—What good can thee betide,
  "That thou should'st smile again?"—The evening came, 350
And they had found Lorenzo's earthy bed;
The flint was there, the berries at his head.

XLV.

Who hath not loiter'd in a green church-yard,
  And let his spirit, like a demon-mole,
Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,   355
  To see skull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
  And filling it once more with human soul?
Ah! this is holiday to what was felt
When Isabella by Lorenzo knelt.   360

XLVI.

She gaz'd into the fresh-thrown mould, as though
  One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know

Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;

Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow, 365

  Like to a native lily of the dell:

Then with her knife, all sudden, she began

To dig more fervently than misers can.

XLVII.

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon

  Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies, 370

She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,

  And put it in her bosom, where it dries

And freezes utterly unto the bone

  Those dainties made to still an infant's cries:

Then 'gan she work again; nor stay'd her care, 375

But to throw back at times her veiling hair.

XLVIII.

That old nurse stood beside her wondering,

  Until her heart felt pity to the core

At sight of such a dismal labouring,

  And so she kneeled, with her locks all hoar, 380

And put her lean hands to the horrid thing:

  Three hours they labour'd at this travail sore;

At last they felt the kernel of the grave,

And Isabella did not stamp and rave.

XLIX. 385

Ah! wherefore all this wormy circumstance?

  Why linger at the yawning tomb so long?

O for the gentleness of old Romance,

  The simple plaining of a minstrel's song!

Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,

  For here, in truth, it doth not well belong 390

To speak:—O turn thee to the very tale,

276

And taste the music of that vision pale.

L.

With duller steel than the Persean sword
  They cut away no formless monster's head,
But one, whose gentleness did well accord   395
  With death, as life. The ancient harps have said,
Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord:
  If Love impersonate was ever dead,
Pale Isabella kiss'd it, and low moan'd.
'Twas love; cold,—dead indeed, but not dethroned.   400

LI.

In anxious secrecy they took it home,
  And then the prize was all for Isabel:
She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
  And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
Pointed each fringed lash; the smeared loam   405
  With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
She drench'd away:—and still she comb'd, and kept
Sighing all day—and still she kiss'd, and wept.

LII.

Then in a silken scarf,—sweet with the dews
  Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,   410
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
  Through the cold serpent pipe refreshfully,—
She wrapp'd it up; and for its tomb did choose
  A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set   415
Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet.

LIII.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
  And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
  And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;   420
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
  And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

LIV.   425

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
  Whence thick, and green, and beautiful it grew,
So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
  Of Basil-tufts in Florence; for it drew
Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
  From the fast mouldering head there shut from view: 430
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread.

LV.

O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
  O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,   435
  Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits in grief, lift up your heads, and smile;
  Lift up your heads, sweet Spirits, heavily,
And make a pale light in your cypress glooms,
Tinting with silver wan your marble tombs.   440

LVI.

Moan hither, all ye syllables of woe,
  From the deep throat of sad Melpomene!
Through bronzed lyre in tragic order go,

And touch the strings into a mystery;
Sound mournfully upon the winds and low;   445
  For simple Isabel is soon to be
Among the dead: She withers, like a palm
Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm.

LVII.
O leave the palm to wither by itself;
  Let not quick Winter chill its dying hour!—   450
It may not be—those Baalites of pelf,
  Her brethren, noted the continual shower
From her dead eyes; and many a curious elf,
  Among her kindred, wonder'd that such dower
Of youth and beauty should be thrown aside   455
By one mark'd out to be a Noble's bride.

LVIII.
And, furthermore, her brethren wonder'd much
  Why she sat drooping by the Basil green,
And why it flourish'd, as by magic touch;
  Greatly they wonder'd what the thing might mean: 460
They could not surely give belief, that such
  A very nothing would have power to wean
Her from her own fair youth, and pleasures gay,
And even remembrance of her love's delay.

LIX.   465
Therefore they watch'd a time when they might sift
  This hidden whim; and long they watch'd in vain;
For seldom did she go to chapel-shrift,
  And seldom felt she any hunger-pain;
And when she left, she hurried back, as swift
  As bird on wing to breast its eggs again;   470
And, patient as a hen-bird, sat her there

Beside her Basil, weeping through her hair.

LX.

Yet they contriv'd to steal the Basil-pot,
  And to examine it in secret place:
The thing was vile with green and livid spot, 475
  And yet they knew it was Lorenzo's face:
The guerdon of their murder they had got,
  And so left Florence in a moment's space,
Never to turn again.—Away they went,
With blood upon their heads, to banishment. 480

LXI.

O Melancholy, turn thine eyes away!
  O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, on some other day,
  From isles Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits of grief, sing not your "Well-a-way!" 485
  For Isabel, sweet Isabel, will die;
Will die a death too lone and incomplete,
Now they have ta'en away her Basil sweet.

LXII.

Piteous she look'd on dead and senseless things,
  Asking for her lost Basil amorously: 490
And with melodious chuckle in the strings
  Of her lorn voice, she oftentimes would cry
After the Pilgrim in his wanderings,
  To ask him where her Basil was; and why
'Twas hid from her: "For cruel 'tis," said she, 495
"To steal my Basil-pot away from me."

LXIII.

And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,
  Imploring for her Basil to the last.
No heart was there in Florence but did mourn
  In pity of her love, so overcast.   500
And a sad ditty of this story born
  From mouth to mouth through all the country pass'd:
Still is the burthen sung—"O cruelty,
  "To steal my Basil-pot away from me!"

Appendix K

Lamia

Part I

UPON a time, before the faery broods
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
Before King Oberon's bright diadem,
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns   *5*
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns,
The ever-smitten Hermes empty left
His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft:
From high Olympus had he stolen light,
On this side of Jove's clouds, to escape the sight   *10*
Of his great summoner, and made retreat
Into a forest on the shores of Crete.
For somewhere in that sacred island dwelt
A nymph, to whom all hoofed Satyrs knelt;
At whose white feet the languid Tritons poured   *15*
Pearls, while on land they wither'd and adored.
Fast by the springs where she to bathe was wont,
And in those meads where sometime she might haunt,
Were strewn rich gifts, unknown to any Muse,
Though Fancy's casket were unlock'd to choose.   *20*
Ah, what a world of love was at her feet!
So Hermes thought, and a celestial heat
Burnt from his winged heels to either ear,
That from a whiteness, as the lily clear,
Blush'd into roses 'mid his golden hair,   *25*
Fallen in jealous curls about his shoulders bare.
From vale to vale, from wood to wood, he flew,

Breathing upon the flowers his passion new,

And wound with many a river to its head,

To find where this sweet nymph prepar'd her secret bed: 30

In vain; the sweet nymph might nowhere be found,

And so he rested, on the lonely ground,

Pensive, and full of painful jealousies

Of the Wood-Gods, and even the very trees.

There as he stood, he heard a mournful voice, 35

Such as once heard, in gentle heart, destroys

All pain but pity: thus the lone voice spake:

"When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!

"When move in a sweet body fit for life,

"And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife 40

"Of hearts and lips! Ah, miserable me!"

The God, dove-footed, glided silently

Round bush and tree, soft-brushing, in his speed,

The taller grasses and full-flowering weed,

Until he found a palpitating snake, 45

Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

  She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,

Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;

Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,

Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd; 50

And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,

Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed

Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—

So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,

She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, 55

Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.

Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire

Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:

Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!

She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete: *60*

And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there

But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?

As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.

Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake

Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake,   *65*

And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,

Like a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey.

  "Fair Hermes, crown'd with feathers, fluttering light,

"I had a splendid dream of thee last night:

"I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,   *70*

"Among the Gods, upon Olympus old,

"The only sad one; for thou didst not hear

"The soft, lute-finger'd Muses chaunting clear,

"Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,

"Deaf to his throbbing throat's long, long melodious moan.   *75*

"I dreamt I saw thee, robed in purple flakes,

"Break amorous through the clouds, as morning breaks,

"And, swiftly as a bright Phoebean dart,

"Strike for the Cretan isle; and here thou art!

"Too gentle Hermes, hast thou found the maid?"   *80*

Whereat the star of Lethe not delay'd

His rosy eloquence, and thus inquired:

"Thou smooth-lipp'd serpent, surely high inspired!

"Thou beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,

"Possess whatever bliss thou canst devise,   *85*

"Telling me only where my nymph is fled,—

"Where she doth breathe!" "Bright planet, thou hast said,"

Return'd the snake, "but seal with oaths, fair God!"

"I swear," said Hermes, "by my serpent rod,

"And by thine eyes, and by thy starry crown!"   *90*

Light flew his earnest words, among the blossoms blown.

Then thus again the brilliance feminine:

"Too frail of heart! for this lost nymph of thine,

"Free as the air, invisibly, she strays

"About these thornless wilds; her pleasant days 95

"She tastes unseen; unseen her nimble feet

"Leave traces in the grass and flowers sweet;

"From weary tendrils, and bow'd branches green,

"She plucks the fruit unseen, she bathes unseen:

"And by my power is her beauty veil'd 100

"To keep it unaffronted, unassail'd

"By the love-glances of unlovely eyes,

"Of Satyrs, Fauns, and blear'd Silenus' sighs.

"Pale grew her immortality, for woe

"Of all these lovers, and she grieved so 105

"I took compassion on her, bade her steep

"Her hair in weird syrops, that would keep

"Her loveliness invisible, yet free

"To wander as she loves, in liberty.

"Thou shalt behold her, Hermes, thou alone, 110

"If thou wilt, as thou swearest, grant my boon!"

Then, once again, the charmed God began

An oath, and through the serpent's ears it ran

Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian.

Ravish'd, she lifted her Circean head, 115

Blush'd a live damask, and swift-lisping said,

"I was a woman, let me have once more

"A woman's shape, and charming as before.

"I love a youth of Corinth—O the bliss!

"Give me my woman's form, and place me where he is. 120

"Stoop, Hermes, let me breathe upon thy brow,

"And thou shalt see thy sweet nymph even now."

The God on half-shut feathers sank serene,

She breath'd upon his eyes, and swift was seen

285

Of both the guarded nymph near-smiling on the green. ₁₂₅

It was no dream; or say a dream it was,

Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass

Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.

One warm, flush'd moment, hovering, it might seem

Dash'd by the wood-nymph's beauty, so he burn'd; ₁₃₀

Then, lighting on the printless verdure, turn'd

To the swoon'd serpent, and with languid arm,

Delicate, put to proof the lythe Caducean charm.

So done, upon the nymph his eyes he bent,

Full of adoring tears and blandishment, ₁₃₅

And towards her stept: she, like a moon in wane,

Faded before him, cower'd, nor could restrain

Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower

That faints into itself at evening hour:

But the God fostering her chilled hand, ₁₄₀

She felt the warmth, her eyelids open'd bland,

And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,

Bloom'd, and gave up her honey to the lees.

Into the green-recessed woods they flew;

Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do. ₁₄₅

  Left to herself, the serpent now began

To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,

Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,

Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;

Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear, ₁₅₀

Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,

Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.

The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,

She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:

A deep volcanian yellow took the place ₁₅₅

Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;

Of both the guarded nymph near-smiling on the green. [125]

It was no dream; or say a dream it was,

Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass

Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.

One warm, flush'd moment, hovering, it might seem

Dash'd by the wood-nymph's beauty, so he burn'd; [130]

Then, lighting on the printless verdure, turn'd

To the swoon'd serpent, and with languid arm,

Delicate, put to proof the lythe Caducean charm.

So done, upon the nymph his eyes he bent,

Full of adoring tears and blandishment, [135]

And towards her stept: she, like a moon in wane,

Faded before him, cower'd, nor could restrain

Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower

That faints into itself at evening hour:

But the God fostering her chilled hand, [140]

She felt the warmth, her eyelids open'd bland,

And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,

Bloom'd, and gave up her honey to the lees.

Into the green-recessed woods they flew;

Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do. [145]

  Left to herself, the serpent now began

To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,

Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,

Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;

Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear, [150]

Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,

Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.

The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,

She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:

A deep volcanian yellow took the place [155]

Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;

And, as the lava ravishes the mead,

Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;

Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,

Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars: *160*

So that, in moments few, she was undrest

Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,

And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,

Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.

Still shone her crown; that vanish'd, also she *165*

Melted and disappear'd as suddenly;

And in the air, her new voice luting soft,

Cried, "Lycius! gentle Lycius!"—Borne aloft

With the bright mists about the mountains hoar

These words dissolv'd: Crete's forests heard no more. *170*

  Whither fled Lamia, now a lady bright,

A full-born beauty new and exquisite?

She fled into that valley they pass o'er

Who go to Corinth from Cenchreas' shore;

And rested at the foot of those wild hills, *175*

The rugged founts of the Peraean rills,

And of that other ridge whose barren back

Stretches, with all its mist and cloudy rack,

South-westward to Cleone. There she stood

About a young bird's flutter from a wood, *180*

Fair, on a sloping green of mossy tread,

By a clear pool, wherein she passioned

To see herself escap'd from so sore ills,

While her robes flaunted with the daffodils.

  Ah, happy Lycius!—for she was a maid *185*

More beautiful than ever twisted braid,

Or sigh'd, or blush'd, or on spring-flowered lea

Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy:
A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core: *190*
Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
Define their pettish limits, and estrange
Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart   *195*
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art;
As though in Cupid's college she had spent
Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.

  Why this fair creature chose so fairily   *200*
By the wayside to linger, we shall see;
But first 'tis fit to tell how she could muse
And dream, when in the serpent prison-house,
Of all she list, strange or magnificent:
How, ever, where she will'd, her spirit went;   *205*
Whether to faint Elysium, or where
Down through tress-lifting waves the Nereids fair
Wind into Thetis' bower by many a pearly stair;
Or where God Bacchus drains his cups divine,
Stretch'd out, at ease, beneath a glutinous pine;   *210*
Or where in Pluto's gardens palatine
Mulciber's columns gleam in far piazzian line.
And sometimes into cities she would send
Her dream, with feast and rioting to blend;
And once, while among mortals dreaming thus,   *215*
She saw the young Corinthian Lycius
Charioting foremost in the envious race,
Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,
And fell into a swooning love of him.

Now on the moth-time of that evening dim 220

He would return that way, as well she knew,

To Corinth from the shore; for freshly blew

The eastern soft wind, and his galley now

Grated the quaystones with her brazen prow

In port Cenchreas, from Egina isle 225

Fresh anchor'd; whither he had been awhile

To sacrifice to Jove, whose temple there

Waits with high marble doors for blood and incense rare.

Jove heard his vows, and better'd his desire;

For by some freakful chance he made retire 230

From his companions, and set forth to walk,

Perhaps grown wearied of their Corinth talk:

Over the solitary hills he fared,

Thoughtless at first, but ere eve's star appeared

His phantasy was lost, where reason fades, 235

In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades.

Lamia beheld him coming, near, more near—

Close to her passing, in indifference drear,

His silent sandals swept the mossy green;

So neighbour'd to him, and yet so unseen 240

She stood: he pass'd, shut up in mysteries,

His mind wrapp'd like his mantle, while her eyes

Follow'd his steps, and her neck regal white

Turn'd—syllabling thus, "Ah, Lycius bright,

"And will you leave me on the hills alone? 245

"Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown."

He did; not with cold wonder fearingly,

But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice;

For so delicious were the words she sung,

It seem'd he had lov'd them a whole summer long: 250

And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,

Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,

And still the cup was full,—while he afraid

Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid

Due adoration, thus began to adore;   *255*

Her soft look growing coy, she saw his chain so sure:

"Leave thee alone! Look back! Ah, Goddess, see

"Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!

"For pity do not this sad heart belie—

"Even as thou vanishest so I shall die.   *260*

"Stay! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay!

"To thy far wishes will thy streams obey:

"Stay! though the greenest woods be thy domain,

"Alone they can drink up the morning rain:

"Though a descended Pleiad, will not one   *265*

"Of thine harmonious sisters keep in tune

"Thy spheres, and as thy silver proxy shine?

"So sweetly to these ravish'd ears of mine

"Came thy sweet greeting, that if thou shouldst fade

"Thy memory will waste me to a shade:—   *270*

"For pity do not melt!"—"If I should stay,"

Said Lamia, "here, upon this floor of clay,

"And pain my steps upon these flowers too rough,

"What canst thou say or do of charm enough

"To dull the nice remembrance of my home?   *275*

"Thou canst not ask me with thee here to roam

"Over these hills and vales, where no joy is,—

"Empty of immortality and bliss!

"Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know

"That finer spirits cannot breathe below   *280*

"In human climes, and live: Alas! poor youth,

"What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe

"My essence? What serener palaces,

"Where I may all my many senses please,

"And by mysterious sleights a hundred thirsts appease? *285*

"It cannot be—Adieu!" So said, she rose

Tiptoe with white arms spread. He, sick to lose

The amorous promise of her lone complain,

Swoon'd, murmuring of love, and pale with pain.

The cruel lady, without any show 290

Of sorrow for her tender favourite's woe,

But rather, if her eyes could brighter be,

With brighter eyes and slow amenity,

Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh

The life she had so tangled in her mesh: 295

And as he from one trance was wakening

Into another, she began to sing,

Happy in beauty, life, and love, and every thing,

A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres,

While, like held breath, the stars drew in their panting fires 300

And then she whisper'd in such trembling tone,

As those who, safe together met alone

For the first time through many anguish'd days,

Use other speech than looks; bidding him raise

His drooping head, and clear his soul of doubt, 305

For that she was a woman, and without

Any more subtle fluid in her veins

Than throbbing blood, and that the self-same pains

Inhabited her frail-strung heart as his.

And next she wonder'd how his eyes could miss 310

Her face so long in Corinth, where, she said,

She dwelt but half retir'd, and there had led

Days happy as the gold coin could invent

Without the aid of love; yet in content

Till she saw him, as once she pass'd him by, 315

Where 'gainst a column he leant thoughtfully

At Venus' temple porch, 'mid baskets heap'd

Of amorous herbs and flowers, newly reap'd

Late on that eve, as 'twas the night before

The Adonian feast; whereof she saw no more, *320*

But wept alone those days, for why should she adore?

Lycius from death awoke into amaze,

To see her still, and singing so sweet lays;

Then from amaze into delight he fell

To hear her whisper woman's lore so well; *325*

And every word she spake entic'd him on

To unperplex'd delight and pleasure known.

Let the mad poets say whate'er they please

Of the sweets of Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,

There is not such a treat among them all, *330*

Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,

As a real woman, lineal indeed

From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.

Thus gentle Lamia judg'd, and judg'd aright,

That Lycius could not love in half a fright, *335*

So threw the goddess off, and won his heart

More pleasantly by playing woman's part,

With no more awe than what her beauty gave,

That, while it smote, still guaranteed to save.

Lycius to all made eloquent reply, *340*

Marrying to every word a twinborn sigh;

And last, pointing to Corinth, ask'd her sweet,

If 'twas too far that night for her soft feet.

The way was short, for Lamia's eagerness

Made, by a spell, the triple league decrease *345*

To a few paces; not at all surmised

By blinded Lycius, so in her comprized.

They pass'd the city gates, he knew not how

So noiseless, and he never thought to know.

  As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all, *350*

Throughout her palaces imperial,
And all her populous streets and temples lewd,
Mutter'd, like tempest in the distance brew'd,
To the wide-spreaded night above her towers.
Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours, 355
Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,
Companion'd or alone; while many a light
Flared, here and there, from wealthy festivals,
And threw their moving shadows on the walls,
Or found them cluster'd in the corniced shade 360
Of some arch'd temple door, or dusky colonnade.

  Muffling his face, of greeting friends in fear,
Her fingers he press'd hard, as one came near
With curl'd gray beard, sharp eyes, and smooth bald crown,
Slow-stepp'd, and robed in philosophic gown: 365
Lycius shrank closer, as they met and past,
Into his mantle, adding wings to haste,
While hurried Lamia trembled: "Ah," said he,
"Why do you shudder, love, so ruefully?
"Why does your tender palm dissolve in dew?"— 370
"I'm wearied," said fair Lamia: "tell me who
"Is that old man? I cannot bring to mind
"His features:—Lycius! wherefore did you blind
"Yourself from his quick eyes?" Lycius replied,
"'Tis Apollonius sage, my trusty guide 375
"And good instructor; but to-night he seems
"The ghost of folly haunting my sweet dreams.

  While yet he spake they had arrived before
A pillar'd porch, with lofty portal door,
Where hung a silver lamp, whose phosphor glow 380
Reflected in the slabbed steps below,

Mild as a star in water; for so new,

And so unsullied was the marble hue,

So through the crystal polish, liquid fine,

Ran the dark veins, that none but feet divine *385*

Could e'er have touch'd there. Sounds Aeolian

Breath'd from the hinges, as the ample span

Of the wide doors disclos'd a place unknown

Some time to any, but those two alone,

And a few Persian mutes, who that same year *390*

Were seen about the markets: none knew where

They could inhabit; the most curious

Were foil'd, who watch'd to trace them to their house:

And but the flitter-winged verse must tell,

For truth's sake, what woe afterwards befel, *395*

'Twould humour many a heart to leave them thus,

The Eve of St. Agnes

I.

ST. AGNES' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;

The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,

And silent was the flock in woolly fold:

Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told   *5*

His rosary, and while his frosted breath,

Like pious incense from a censer old,

Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,

Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

II.   *10*

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man;

Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,

And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,

Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:

The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,

Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails: *15*

Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,

He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails

To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

III.

Northward he turneth through a little door,

And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue   *20*

Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor;

But no—already had his deathbell rung;

The joys of all his life were said and sung:

His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve:

Another way he went, and soon among

  Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,

And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

IV.

  That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft;

  And so it chanc'd, for many a door was wide,

  From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft,

  The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide:

  The level chambers, ready with their pride,

  Were glowing to receive a thousand guests:

  The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,

  Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,

With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their breasts.

V.

  At length burst in the argent revelry,

  With plume, tiara, and all rich array,

  Numerous as shadows haunting fairily

  The brain, new stuff d, in youth, with triumphs gay

  Of old romance. These let us wish away,

  And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,

  Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,

  On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,

As she had heard old dames full many times declare.

VI.

  They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,

  Young virgins might have visions of delight,

  And soft adorings from their loves receive

  Upon the honey'd middle of the night,

If ceremonies due they did aright; *50*

As, supperless to bed they must retire,

And couch supine their beauties, lily white;

Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require

Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

VII. *55*

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline:

The music, yearning like a God in pain,

She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,

Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train

Pass by—she heeded not at all: in vain

Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier, *60*

And back retir'd; not cool'd by high disdain,

But she saw not: her heart was otherwhere:

She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

VIII.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,

Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short: *65*

The hallow'd hour was near at hand: she sighs

Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort

Of whisperers in anger, or in sport;

'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,

Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amort, *70*

Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,

And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

IX.

So, purposing each moment to retire,

She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,

297

Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire   *75*

For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,

Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores

All saints to give him sight of Madeline,

But for one moment in the tedious hours,

That he might gaze and worship all unseen;   *80*

Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things have been.

X.

He ventures in: let no buzz'd whisper tell:

All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords

Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel:

For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,   *85*

Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,

Whose very dogs would execrations howl

Against his lineage: not one breast affords

Him any mercy, in that mansion foul,

Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul.   *90*

XI.

Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came,

Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,

To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,

Behind a broad hail-pillar, far beyond

The sound of merriment and chorus bland: *95*

He startled her; but soon she knew his face,

And grasp'd his fingers in her palsied hand,

Saying, "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place;

"They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!

XII.   *100*

"Get hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand;

"He had a fever late, and in the fit

"He cursed thee and thine, both house and land:

"Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit

"More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me! flit!

"Flit like a ghost away."—"Ah, Gossip dear,   *105*

"We're safe enough; here in this arm-chair sit,

"And tell me how"—"Good Saints! not here, not here;

"Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier."

XIII.

He follow'd through a lowly arched way,

Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume;   *110*

And as she mutter'd "Well-a—well-a-day!"

He found him in a little moonlight room,

Pale, lattic'd, chill, and silent as a tomb.

"Now tell me where is Madeline," said he,

"O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom   *115*

"Which none but secret sisterhood may see,

"When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously."

XIV.

"St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve—

"Yet men will murder upon holy days:

"Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve,   *120*

"And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,

"To venture so: it fills me with amaze

"To see thee, Porphyro!—St. Agnes' Eve!

"God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays

"This very night: good angels her deceive!   *125*

"But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve."

XV.

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,
While Porphyro upon her face doth look,
Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone
Who keepeth clos'd a wond'rous riddle-book,   *130*
As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.
But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook
Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.   *135*

XVI.

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
Made purple riot: then doth he propose
A stratagem, that makes the beldame start:
"A cruel man and impious thou art: *140*
"Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
"Alone with her good angels, far apart
"From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem
"Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem.

XVII.   *145*

"I will not harm her, by all saints I swear,"
Quoth Porphyro: "O may I ne'er find grace
"When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
"If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
"Or look with ruffian passion in her face:
"Good Angela, believe me by these tears;   *150*
"Or I will, even in a moment's space,

"Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears,

"And beard them, though they be more fang'd than wolves and bears."

XVIII.

"Ah! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul?

"A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,   *155*

"Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll;

"Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,

"Were never miss'd."—Thus plaining, doth she bring

A gentler speech from burning Porphyro;

So woful, and of such deep sorrowing,   *160*

That Angela gives promise she will do

Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

XIX.

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,

Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide

Him in a closet, of such privacy   *165*

That he might see her beauty unespied,

And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,

While legion'd fairies pac'd the coverlet,

And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed.

Never on such a night have lovers met,   *170*

Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

XX.

"It shall be as thou wishest," said the Dame:

"All cates and dainties shall be stored there

"Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame

"Her own lute thou wilt see: no time to spare,   *175*

"For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare

"On such a catering trust my dizzy head.
"Wait here, my child, with patience; kneel in prayer
"The while: Ah! thou must needs the lady wed,
"Or may I never leave my grave among the dead." *180*

XXI.

So saying, she hobbled off with busy fear.
The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd;
The dame return'd, and whisper'd in his ear
To follow her; with aged eyes aghast
From fright of dim espial. Safe at last, *185*
Through many a dusky gallery, they gain
The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd, and chaste;
Where Porphyro took covert, pleas'd amain.
His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

XXII. *190*

Her falt'ring hand upon the balustrade,
Old Angela was feeling for the stair,
When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware:
With silver taper's light, and pious care,
She turn'd, and down the aged gossip led *195*
To a safe level matting. Now prepare,
Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed;
She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled.

XXIII.

Out went the taper as she hurried in;
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died: *200*
She clos'd the door, she panted, all akin

To spirits of the air, and visions wide:
No uttered syllable, or, woe betide!
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;   *205*
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

XXIV.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,   *210*
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,   *215*
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

XXV.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,   *220*
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.   *225*

XXVI.

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,

Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees: *230*
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

XXVII. *235*

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain; *240*
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

XXVIII.

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,
Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress, *245*
And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced
To wake into a slumberous tenderness;
Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
And breath'd himself: then from the closet crept,
Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness, *250*
And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,
And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo!—how fast she slept.

XXIX.

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon   *255*
A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet:—
O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!
The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,
The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarionet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone:—   *260*
The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

XXX.

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;   *265*
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.   *270*

XXXI.

These delicates he heap'd with glowing hand
On golden dishes and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver: sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light.—   *275*
"And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
"Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite:
"Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
"Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache."

XXXII.

Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm
Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream
By the dusk curtains:—'twas a midnight charm
Impossible to melt as iced stream:
The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam;
Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies:
It seem'd he never, never could redeem
From such a stedfast spell his lady's eyes;
So mus'd awhile, entoil'd in woofed phantasies.

XXXIII.

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—
Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be,
He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,
In Provence call'd, "La belle dame sans mercy:"
Close to her ear touching the melody;—
Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan:
He ceased—she panted quick—and suddenly
Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:
Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

XXXIV.

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:
There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep
At which fair Madeline began to weep,
And moan forth witless words with many a sigh;
While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;

Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,

Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

XXXV.

"Ah, Porphyro!" said she, "but even now

"Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,

"Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;

"And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:

"How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!

"Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,

"Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!

"Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,

"For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go."

XXXVI.

Beyond a mortal man impass'd far

At these voluptuous accents, he arose,

Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star

Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;

Into her dream he melted, as the rose

Blendeth its odour with the violet,—

Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows

Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet

Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

XXXVII.

'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:

"This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!"

'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat:

"No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!

"Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.—

"Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring? 330

"I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,

"Though thou forsakest a deceived thing;—

"A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing."

XXXVIII.

"My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride!

"Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest?   335

"Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and vermeil dyed?

"Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest

"After so many hours of toil and quest,

"A famish'd pilgrim,—saved by miracle.

"Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest   340

"Saving of thy sweet self; if thou think'st well

"To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel."

XXXIX.

'Hark! 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land,

"Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:

"Arise—arise! the morning is at hand;—   345

"The bloated wassaillers will never heed:—

"Let us away, my love, with happy speed;

"There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,—

"Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead:

"Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,   350

"For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee."

XL.

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,

For there were sleeping dragons all around,

At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears—

Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.— *355*

In all the house was heard no human sound.

A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door;

The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,

Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar;

And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor. *360*

XLI.

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;

Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;

Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,

With a huge empty flaggon by his side;

The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide, *365*

But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:

By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—

The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;—

The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groan.

XLII. *370*

And they are gone: ay, ages long ago

These lovers fled away into the storm.

That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,

And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form

Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,

Were long be-nightmar'd. Angela the old *375*

Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;

The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,

For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad

what can ail thee, knight at arms,
Alone and palely loitering;
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

what can ail thee, knight at arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

e a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

et a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful - a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

ade a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone,
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

t her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long;
For sideways would she lean, and sing
A faery's song.

e found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild and manna dew;

And sure in language strange she said -
I love thee true.

e took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gazed and sighed full sore:
And there I shut her wild, wild eyes
With kisses four.

d there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dreamed, ah woe betide,
The latest dream I ever dreamed
On the cold hill side.

ıw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all:
They cry'd - "La belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"

ıw their starved lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.

d this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Poems studied by William Blake

The Tyger

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Holy Thursday: Is this a holy thing to see

Is this a holy thing to see,

In a rich and fruitful land,

Babes reducd to misery,

Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?

Can it be a song of joy?

And so many children poor?

It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.

And their fields are bleak & bare.

And their ways are fill'd with thorns.

It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,

And where-e'er the rain does fall:

Babe can never hunger there,

Nor poverty the mind appall.

Holy Thursday: 'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey-headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,

Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.

And mark in every face I meet

Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,

In every Infants cry of fear,

In every voice: in every ban,

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry

Every blackning Church appalls,

And the hapless Soldiers sigh

Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

How the youthful Harlots curse

Blasts the new-born Infants tear

And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

The Little Black Boy

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child:
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree
And sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And pointing to the east began to say.

Look on the rising sun: there God does live
And gives his light, and gives his heat away.
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
Comfort in morning joy in the noonday.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear
The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice.
Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.

Thus did my mother say and kissed me,
And thus I say to little English boy.
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

Ill shade him from the heat till he can bear,
To lean in joy upon our fathers knee.
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him and he will then love me.

The Chimney Sweeper: When my mother died I was very young

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

September 3rd. 2019

Rebecca Udowiczenko

Dear Rebecca

This is to confirm that the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee considered your application for ethical approval for your research project during my period as the Committee Chair.

The Committee accepted the additional information you supplied, to ensure that all conditions were met.

Your research project was therefore approved

Yours sincerely,

Dr Viv Wilson

 (former Chair of Faculty Research Ethics committee)