

According to Shelley, there are 'two classes of mental action...reason and imagination'. Literary study requires not only academic appreciation, but a creative sensitivity fundamental to understanding its full aesthetic. My gap year's focus is the freedom to absorb literature through deeper exploration of my own literary interests, previously defined by school syllabi. From July, I spent ten weeks completing two condensed undergraduate modules on Shakespeare and the Modern literature of Woolf, Joyce and Beckett, within UC Berkeley's 'Summer Sessions'. In the aftermath of a pressurised A Level summer, I found I had the energy and desire for a level of university teaching and discussion determined by older students that required much intellectual commitment, as well as the submission of two essays and mid-term and final exams. Having taken an open-minded approach and with no university experience, receiving two As confirmed and enhanced a thirst for further independent literary exploration. The varied approach of another culture emphasised the universal nature of literature not obvious within a small English High School, initiating a personal and more mature grasp of my own literary ideas and voice. This I hope to continue from January by spending seven months in France teaching English, expanding my understanding of French language and culture. To me, literature reflects not only context but a broader, intangible dimension inherent in all art, attainable through the imagination. Gaining a broader linguistic and cultural perspective on French literature such as *Candide* that I have read in translation, will enhance my understanding of its purpose in general, enabling me to take a broader perspective on the literature of other cultures. The work of Eliot, which I was able to explore through A2 English coursework and enjoyment of many of her novels and essays, embodies the purpose of literary study for me. The contextual, ideological, philosophical and subjective multiplicity within each meticulous character, demonstrates the role of creativity in constructing the human condition. Although reflecting context, literature's purpose is its configuration of our metaphysical whole, the creative processes of language producing work surpassing and outliving origin. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's goodness is an aesthetic dimension transcending Victorian ideology and society's impact upon plot, the emphasis on her simply 'being' evoking a human goodness existing beyond reality. In 'Mr Gilfil...', the vicar's lasting love for Tina accords sublime status within his contextual normality. The human condition is mirrored, whilst a sublime level of consciousness exists cogently alongside it. To me, the concept of the sublime, gauged through exposure to philosophical systems in A Level Philosophy and exploration of works such as the *Divine Comedy*, gives basis to truths encapsulated through literary form and content. Shelley states, a poem is 'the very image