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A German Classic 2021:

Heinrich von Kleist, *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*

Participation Guidelines for Sixth Formers

We are delighted to announce the launch of the 2021 edition of ‘A German Classic’ – Oxford’s essay competition for sixth-form students. This year we would like to invite you to read with us one of the most influential German novellas of all time, Heinrich von Kleist’s *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811). The story is set in the Caribbean, in what is today the Republic of Haiti, at the time of the insurrection of self-liberated slaves against French colonial rule that led to the country’s independence in 1804. Against this dramatic historical background develops an ill-fated love story between Toni, a mixed-race teenage girl, and Gustav, a white traveller from Europe. Kleist’s take on race relations, civil unrest, and the power imbalance inherent in both colonial structures and gender dynamics has clear resonances in the twenty-first century. Told in Kleist’s signature narrative style, which has influenced countless writers since the nineteenth century, *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* is an excellent introduction to German literature. We hope you will want to study it with us!

ELIGIBILITY

Entrants must fulfil the following requirements as of 15 September 2021:

- be beginning their final year of full-time study at a secondary school in the UK (upper-sixth form, Year 13 or S6 in Scotland);
- be between the ages of 16 and 18;
- hold a GCSE, IGCSE or equivalent qualification in German offered in the UK, or have at least an equivalent knowledge of German, as confirmed by their teacher;
- be resident in the United Kingdom.

Entrants are not, however, expected to have prior experience of studying German literature.

STUDY PACKS

Sign up at https://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/mml_apps/community/public/form?id=ogn-classic-2021-signup by **12 noon, Friday, 25 June 2021** to receive free physical copies of the German original and an English translation of Kleist’s novella, as well as access to a set of free multimedia resources and essay writing guidelines created and curated by us especially for this competition. All study materials will be dispatched in early July.

PRIZES

Up to three prizes will be awarded: a first prize of £500, a second prize of £300, and a third prize of £100. Prizes will only be awarded if work is of sufficient merit. All entrants will receive a Prize Certificate or a Certificate of Participation. Results will be announced in early October 2021.



ESSAY QUESTIONS

Students can enter the competition by writing an essay of c. 1500 words answering one of the following questions:

1. Why did Gustav not trust Toni? Discuss the breakdown of communication in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*.
2. To what extent does *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* offer a critique of European colonialism?
3. How is the portrayal of race connected to the portrayal of gender in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*?
4. Discuss *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* as an 'existential test case, designed to make the reader share in the protagonists' anguish and question the explicability of human experience' (Martin Swales).

SUBMISSION

Entries must fulfil the following requirements:

- be submitted by **12 noon, Wednesday, 15 September 2021**, via an online form available on the OGN website from 1 July 2021 – entries received by post, by email or after the deadline will not be considered;
- answer one of the four essay questions listed above in c. 1500 words – the word count includes the footnotes, but excludes the bibliography;
- be written in English, with quotations from *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* in German;
- have footnotes and a bibliography including all relevant works consulted;
- use Times New Roman or Calibri 12 pt, margins of 1 inch, and numbered pages;
- be submitted in one of the following formats: Microsoft Word document, Open Office document, or PDF;
- be named in the following way: EntrantSurnameEntrantInitialGCP2021, e.g. BloggsJGCP2021;
- be the work of the entrant without any additional help from staff, which needs to be confirmed by the entrant's teacher via an online form available on the OGN website from 1 July 2021 by the submission deadline (12 noon, Wednesday, 15 September 2021); teachers will also be asked to state how long the entrant has been learning or speaking German.

JUDGING CRITERIA

The judges will consider the quality of intellectual and imaginative engagement with the work evident in the essay while taking account of the quality of understanding, analysis and argument, and – where appropriate – linguistic accuracy of the submission. They will also take account of prior opportunity to study German language and literature. The decision of the judges will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

QUERIES

If you have any questions, please email the Prize Coordinator, Dr Karolina Watroba, at germanclassic@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk.