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A German Classic 2022: Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, *Die Judenbuche*

Participation Guidelines for Sixth Formers

We are delighted to announce the launch of the 2022 edition of ‘A German Classic’ – Oxford’s essay competition for students in the Lower Sixth form or equivalent. This year we would like to invite you to read with us *Die Judenbuche* (1842) by Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, which is considered to be one of the first murder mysteries. The story is set in the village of B. in rural Westphalia, Germany, and follows the life of the protagonist Friedrich Mergel (1738-1788) and his descent into criminality, slavery and suicide.

The story was written at a time of societal disarray, after the Restoration following the Congress of Vienna (1815), when liberal and democratic tendencies were suppressed by the nobility, who wanted to re-establish their rule. *Die Judenbuche* is based on a real-life crime case, the murder of the Jewish merchant Soistmann Berendt, and it engages with the psychological consequences of societal decay. Droste-Hülshoff’s story portrays the disruption of society through heinous crimes and the blurring of right and wrong. It is not only the protagonists who are subject to being misled – the reader, too, continually has to negotiate conflicting appearances. The dangers of misinformation, prejudice and marginalisation, and questions around individual and collective guilt remain highly relevant to this day. Told in Droste-Hülshoff’s beautiful, poetically appealing style while grappling with dark sides of human nature, *Die Judenbuche* is an excellent introduction to German literature. We hope you will enjoy reading it with us!

ESSAY QUESTIONS

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

1. Examine how processes of marginalisation affect the main characters in *Die Judenbuche*, and consider to what extent marginalisation explains the outcome.
2. How does the narrator engage the reader in the process of distinguishing between truth and falsehood?
3. What is the role of the 'Judenbuche' and the curse in the development of the narrative?
4. How important are the 'Blaukittel' in Droste-Hülshoff's depiction of society in *Die Judenbuche*?

ELIGIBILITY

Entrants must fulfil the following requirements as of 14 September 2022:

- 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 expected to have prior experience of studying German literature.

STUDY PACKS

Sign up by **12 noon, Saturday, 25 June 2022** to receive free physical copies of the German original text and an English translation of Droste-Hülshoff's story, 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. The sign up for the study packs will open shortly.

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 2022.

SET TEXT

All quotations must be taken from the following edition:

- Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, *Die Judenbuche* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2021; ISBN: 978-3-15-016118-0).

You may wish to read the original text in parallel with a translation. If so, we recommend the following edition:

- Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, *The Jew's Beech*, trans. by Lionel and Doris Thomas (Surrey: Alma Classics, 2008; ISBN:978-1-84749-355-2)

SUBMISSION

Entries must fulfil the following requirements:

- be submitted by **12 noon, Wednesday, 14 September 2022**, via an online form available on the OGN website from **1 July 2022** – 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 Judenbuche* 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. Please make sure that your document follows this format. Before submission, make sure to check the spelling, grammar, style, and formal presentation of your essay. We do not accept further amendments and/or corrections;
- 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 2022 by the submission deadline (12 noon, Wednesday, 14 September 2022); teachers will also be asked to state how long the entrant has been learning or speaking German.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE ESSAYS

The Head Judge of the German Classic Prize in 2017 provided the following tips to help with essay writing:

- Use the opening paragraph to formulate the problem you are addressing. If the essay turns on a concept (e.g. ‘individualism’), try to define that concept at the beginning.
- Use paragraphs to present separate stages in your argument. Don’t make paragraphs too long, otherwise the reader might get lost.
- Use footnotes only for references, not for further information or observations. If these contain important information, work them into the text. If they don’t, leave them out altogether.
- Be very sparing with intensifying expressions, e.g. ‘hugely’, ‘greatly’, ‘incredibly’. ‘Very’ or ‘very much’ will usually do.

Here are some further guidelines on quotations, footnotes and bibliography, based on the MHRA Style Guide:

- When you quote from ‘Die Judenbuche’ or another work, you should always give the full details of the edition you are using in a footnote for the first reference or quotation. After that, give the page number in a footnote or in brackets after the quotation.
- When you quote from a work or refer to it, you should always give details of the work in a footnote as it needs to be clear that you are including research that has been done by someone other than yourself (using material by other people without acknowledging it is plagiarism).
- To check how to format your quotes, footnotes and bibliography correctly, see www.mhra.org.uk/style/quick.html.

If you want to learn more about how to write a literature essay, have a look at our interview with Prof. Ritchie Robertson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gTwjqaD13U>

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 German Classic Prize Coordinator, Natascha Domeisen, at germanclassic@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk.