



‘A German Classic’ 2018-2019: Prize-Giving Ceremony

On 25th June, we celebrated the winners of the second edition of ‘A German Classic’ at a vibrant ceremony in Blackwell Hall at the Weston Library, one of Oxford’s finest venues.

‘A German Classic’ is an essay competition for sixth-formers generously funded by **Jonathan Gaisman, QC** with the aim of stimulating interest in great German writers and encouraging students to encounter their most influential works in the original language. In 2018-2019, the set text for the competition was *María Stuart* – Friedrich Schiller’s timeless tragedy about the struggle for power, royal legitimacy, and strong women. The judges decided to award the main prizes to the following students:

First Prize (£500): **Sam Newton** (Colchester Royal Grammar School)

Second Prize (£300): **Tom Leslie** (Fortrose Academy)

Third Prize (£100): **Charles Carr** (Bennett Memorial Diocesan School)

In addition, the essay by **Max Bamford** (Billborough Sixth Form College) was highly commended, and the essays by **Akshat Pranesh** (Manchester Grammar School) and **Phoebe Clark** (Lady Eleanor Holles School) were commended by the judges.

We would like to congratulate all the winners and all the entrants from schools across the UK, who spent part of their summer writing ambitious and stimulating essays on various aspects of *María Stuart*. The judges were impressed with the high quality of all the entries, and with the level of intellectual engagement and independent thought displayed by the entrants. Head judge **Professor Ritchie Robertson**, who presented the prizes at the ceremony, commented:

Once again a classic work, this time Schiller’s María Stuart, has inspired some essays of high quality, with many impressive signs of independent thought and work, especially about the concept of tragedy and about the play’s leading personalities.

We would like to thank the judges, as well as students and academics who enriched the resources that helped to bring Schiller’s *María Stuart* alive. This year’s resources, created for the competition by Joanna Raisbeck, included an in-depth discussion of the pivotal scene in the play and a podcast featuring two undergraduate students at Oxford who commented on the recent production of *Mary Stuart* that toured the UK in early 2018. Also provided on the Oxford German Network YouTube Channel are links to existing recorded material on *María Stuart*, and other resources include links to written material. All these resources will remain available on our website to encourage students to engage further with *María Stuart*: <http://www.ogn.ox.ac.uk/content/german-classics-prize>.



Sam, Tom, Charles, Max and Akshat attended the prize-giving ceremony. We asked them what the competition meant to them, how they prepared for it, what new skills they acquired, and what they enjoyed about it the most. Here are some of their comments:

Not only did the Classics Prize introduce me to some very important German literature, Maria Stuart being the first play by Schiller that I have studied, but it also encouraged me to think about it in a way which provoked arguments which I could then use to further my study of literature more generally. I found the question about tragic characters particularly interesting, having recently studied works such as Webster's The Duchess of Malfi and Shakespeare's Hamlet. I would recommend the prize to anyone who wants to widen their study of literature and of course since the OGN provides certain material on the text to help with the study of it, it is a particularly good way in which to get to know a new text in German.

– Sam Newton



Sam Newton (left) and Tom Leslie (right) with Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson

I thought that the competition provided a great introduction to academic writing. I learned a lot of techniques that will be vital for university writing, such as referencing using the Harvard system. Studying Maria Stuart was challenging (particularly the archaic language) but with the help of the English translation, understanding the text was manageable. Leaving my comfort zone to study a foreign language text has opened doors for me and sparked my interest in potentially exploring other classic German plays of the same era. Despite the linguistic challenge, I enjoyed reading the play and found the plot and characters engaging. Living in Scotland, it was of particular interest to see my country's history written from the perspective of a German playwright. Coincidentally, a few months after writing this essay I studied a separate play named Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off for my Advanced Higher English studies, which allowed me to make comparisons with Schiller's play and the similarities and differences in how the playwrights portrayed Mary and Elizabeth. I also really enjoyed attending the award ceremony and meeting some other winners of the Classic Prize. As one of only two people in my school who has studied German at Higher and Advanced Higher, it was great to get the chance to talk to other language enthusiasts and discuss our choices in essay topics.

– Tom Leslie



I prepared for and wrote my entry on a cycling holiday in France. I read the text and critical analysis first, considered elements of the text on bike rides, and then wrote them down at the campsite. Whilst writing my entry, I realised how interconnected languages and literature really are: far more than is evident in my A-Level courses. Studying Maria Stuart allowed me to note the importance of linguistic choices and how they affect the telling of the story. Furthermore, being pushed to write at length and in a university-like format about a text in a foreign language was challenging but increased my confidence in expressing complex ideas in a detailed way. I am very glad to have taken part and grateful for the opportunity!

– Max Bamford



Max Bamford (left) and Akshat Pranesh (right) with Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson

I found the prize an interesting opportunity to really engage with a text I might otherwise never have read, and answer a question on it that was unlike most literature questions I've ever had to write about. Besides, it made approaching some intimidating classical German literature far more approachable through the wonderful resources provided. I prepared for the competition by going through the play and picking out scenes that I thought might support my arguments, and then decided to read some literary criticism on some of the more obscure philosophical ideas in the play. Furthermore, I was intending to apply to Oxford for German, so it was also a nice experience to write an essay that's not dissimilar to what I might be writing during University Study! It was also really nice to be able to spend some time in Oxford on the day of the prize-giving ceremony as well as attend such a nice event.

– Akshat Pranesh



Charles Carr
with Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson