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A German Classic: E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann' Essay Prize for Sixth-Formers Essay Questions and Guidelines

We are delighted to announce the launch of the third round of 'A German Classic' – our essay competition for sixth-form students. This year we would like to invite you to read with us E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann' (1816) – one of the most captivating short stories in German literature and a masterpiece of Gothic fiction. Hoffmann's eerie and mysterious tale centres on a young, impressionable student called Nathanael, who becomes convinced that he is pursued by a shadowy figure called Coppélius. Filled with Doppelgänger, mechanical dolls, alchemistic experiments, inexplicable fires, uncanny optical toys, and misaddressed letters, 'Der Sandmann' explores the power of the imagination as it erupts into a dark obsession. We have put together a free study pack, including a set of multimedia materials, that will help you delve into this fascinating text. We will guide you through topics ranging from the best party tricks around 1800 to Sigmund Freud's revolutionary theories about the human psyche to a cult film made in 1950s Britain which testifies to the enduring cultural appeal of Hoffmann's stories.

ELIGIBILITY

Entrants must fulfil the following requirements as of September 2019:

- 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;
- be resident in the United Kingdom.

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

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.



SET TEXT

All quotations must be taken from the following edition:

- E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Der Sandmann* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007; ISBN: 978-3150002308).

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

- E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman*, trans. by Peter Wortsman (London: Penguin, 2016; ISBN: 978-0241251508);
- E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Golden Pot and Other Tales*, trans. by Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; ISBN: 978-0199552474).

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Are Coppelius and Coppola the same person? Why (not) and how do we know?
2. Why does Nathanael choose Olimpia over Clara? Discuss the portrayal of femininity in 'Der Sandmann', taking account of the interactions between the characters.
3. The Sandman is a character in European folklore who puts children to sleep and brings them dreams by sprinkling magic sand into their eyes. What is the importance of eyes, gaze, looking, and seeing in Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann', and how are they evoked through language?
4. Hoffmann's stories have been exceptionally influential across Europe. What is their special appeal? Discuss with reference to Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's famous British film adaptation (1951) of Jacques Offenbach's renowned French opera *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1881), comparing its first part – 'The Tale of Olympia' – to Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann'.
5. What perspectives does the narrative voice give us on the characters and events in 'Der Sandmann', and do they help or hinder the reader's interpretation?

STUDY PACKS

Throughout May, we will be publishing ideas for further reading and free multimedia resources, including a series of podcast episodes we recorded especially for this competition, on our website: www.ogn.ox.ac.uk/content/german-classics-prize. We also encourage all students interested in entering the competition to email their UK correspondence address to the Prize Coordinator (karolina.watroba@merton.ox.ac.uk) by 12 noon on 10 June to receive a free study pack with:

- German text of 'Der Sandmann' (Reclam edition);
- English translation of 'Der Sandmann' (Penguin Little Black Classics edition);
- Powell's and Pressburger's *The Tales of Hoffmann* (£5 voucher for Amazon Video, where it is available to rent or buy);
- printout of the secondary literature reader.

After 10 June, study packs will be posted for free to those who request them by this date. If you get in touch after this date, we cannot guarantee to post you a full pack, but we will email you a copy of the secondary literature reader.



SUBMISSION

Entries must fulfil the following requirements:

- be submitted by 12 noon, Wednesday, 11 September 2019, via the online form at www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/mml_apps/community/public/form?id=ogn-classic-2019 – entries received by post, by email or after the deadline will not be considered;
- answer one of the five essay questions listed above in 2000-3000 words – the word count includes the footnotes, but excludes the bibliography;
- be written in English, with quotations from ‘Der Sandmann’ in the original language;
- have footnotes and a bibliography including all relevant works consulted;
- conform to the following formatting: Times New Roman or Calibri 12 pt, all margins 1 inch, numbered pages;
- be submitted in one of the following formats: Microsoft Word document, Open Office document, or PDF;
- be named in the following way: EntrantSurnameEntrantInitialGCP2019, e.g. BloggsJGCP2019;
- be the work of the entrant without any additional help from staff, which needs to be confirmed by the entrant’s teacher in an email sent to karolina.watroba@merton.ox.ac.uk with the subject line ‘German Classic Prize: Entrant name’ by the submission deadline – 12 noon, Wednesday, 11 September 2019; teachers are also asked to include a statement on 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.

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 may get lost.
- Use footnotes only for references, not for further information or observations. If these matter, 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 more guidelines on quotations, footnotes and bibliography, based on the MHRA Style Guide:

- When you quote from ‘Der Sandmann’ 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.

QUERIES

If you have any questions, please email the Prize Coordinator at karolina.watroba@merton.ox.ac.uk.