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A German Classic: Rainer Maria Rilke's *New Poems (Neue Gedichte)* Essay Prize for Sixth-Formers Essay Questions and Guidelines

We are delighted to announce the launch of this year's 'A German Classic'- our annual essay competition for sixth-form students. This year we would like to invite you to read with us a selection of poems by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926), widely regarded as one of the most important German-language poets.

In addition to our essay competition, we introduce a **Discovery Section** designed especially for those with no prior knowledge of German, making the competition more accessible than ever.

We have put together a free study pack, including a set of multimedia materials, that will help you delve into Rilke's compelling poems, even if it's the first time you read a poem.

Selected poems:

Der Panther (The Panther)

Das Einhorn (The Unicorn)

Jugend-Bildnis meines Vaters (Portrait of My Father as a Young Man)

Römische Fontäne (Roman Fountain)

Das Karussell (The Merry-Go-Round)

Spanische Tänzerin (Spanish Dancer)

Archaischer Torso Apollos (Archaic Torso of Apollo)

Papageien-Park (The Parrot House)

Die Flamingos (The Flamingos)

Der Ball (The Ball)



ELIGIBILITY

Entrants must fulfil the following requirements as of September 2025:

- 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 for the essay) 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 for each section:

- for the essay competition, we will award a first prize of £500, a second prize of £300, and a third prize of £100
- for the discovery section, we will award a first prize of £200, a second prize of £100, and a third prize of £50.

Prizes will only be awarded if work is of sufficient merit. All entrants will receive a Prize Certificate or a Certificate of Participation.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1) Rilke dedicated the second part of his *Neue Gedichte* to the sculptor Auguste Rodin. Is it helpful to view the *Neue Gedichte* as equivalent to sculptures? Discuss with reference to examples from the selection.
- 2) The *Neue Gedichte* are often referred to as 'Dinggedichte'. To what extent are they poems about things?
- 3) How does Rilke suggest movement in the *Neue Gedichte*?
- 4) How does Rilke use language, imagery and other poetic techniques to enable the reader to imagine the subjects of his *Neue Gedichte*? Discuss with reference to three poems from the selection.
- 5) Create translations in poetic form of two poems from the selection of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* and write a commentary explaining your translation choices.
- 6) Find TWO existing translations of ONE of the poems from the selection and compare them critically.

Notes:



You must refer to poems in the selection above but need not restrict your discussion to them.

Your essay must include a bibliography that lists all published sources you have used in writing your essay or translation and commentary, including any existing translations (please provide URL's for internet sources).

DISCOVER A GERMAN CLASSIC – ESSAY PRIZE FOR BEGINNERS IN GERMAN

(This competition is restricted to participants who do not have a GCSE in German or equivalent qualification, or an equivalent knowledge of the German language.)

- 1) How does Rilke use metaphors to enable the reader to imagine the subject given in the poem's title? Discuss with reference to TWO or THREE poems from the selection.
- 2) Choose TWO or THREE poems about real or imaginary animals from the selection. Examine the poetic techniques Rilke uses to depict them and consider what aspects of the animals they draw to the reader's attention.
- 3) To what extent do the individual poems depict a development – and what is it that changes in the course of the poem? Discuss with reference to TWO or THREE poems from the selection.

Notes:

You must refer to poems in the **selection above** but need not restrict your discussion to them.

You may, but need not, include reference to the German text. Correctness of any references to German will not be taken into account in judging the quality of your essay.

Your essay must include a **bibliography** that lists all published sources including all translations you have used in writing your essay (with URL's for internet sources).

STUDY PACKS

Throughout July, 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-classic-prize/Rilke. We also encourage all students interested in entering the competition to email their UK correspondence address to the Prize Coordinator Santhia Velasco Kittlaus (germanclassic@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk) by 12 noon on 10 July to receive a free study pack.

After 10 July, 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, Monday, 8 September 2025, via the online forms at https://public.mml.ox.ac.uk/mml_apps/community/public/en/form?id=ogn-classic-2025-signup and https://public.mml.ox.ac.uk/mml_apps/community/public/en/form?id=ogn-classic-2025 – 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 Rilke's poems in the original language; for the discovery section, we accept quotations from Rilke's poems in English
- 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: EntrantSurnameEntrantInitialGCP2025, e.g. BloggsJGCP2025;
- be the work of the entrant without any additional help from staff, which needs to be confirmed by the entrant's teacher via the online form https://public.mml.ox.ac.uk/mml_apps/community/public/en/form?id=ogn-classic-2025-teacher by the submission deadline – 12 noon, Monday, 8 September 2025; 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 former Head Judge of the German Classic Prize 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 Rilke’s poems 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 Santhia Velasco Kittlaus at germanclassic@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk