Heinrich von Kleist: Das gescheiterte Genie (Paper VIII, Paper X)
Tue 2-3 (wks: 5-8), Taylor Institution Rm 2
This four-week lecture will cover the life and selected writings of Heinrich von Kleist. Besides the prescribed text for paper X, the play ‘Prinz Friedrich von Homburg’, the course will focus on the modernity and openness of Kleist’s work, making him up until the present day one of the most eminent authors in German language. His reputation becomes apparent in the continuous presence of his plays on German stages. While none of his works is autobiographic in a narrow sense, his narrative prose and his plays in many ways reflect the author’s personal struggle with emotions, sexuality and his failure ever to pursue a satisfactory career. To a certain extent, Kleist can be regarded as the contemporary counterpart to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the omnipotent embodiment of artistic genius. Finally, the lecture will address Kleist’s unabated relevance, exploring the ambiguities of justice and violence in texts like ‘Michael Kohlhaas’ and ‘die Hermannsschlacht’.
This course will be held in German, which makes it particularly suitable for 2nd year students intending to spend their year abroad at a German university and for finalists who would like to improve their German language skills, in particular with relation to literature. To support language learning alongside the lecture’s literary subject matter, specific vocabulary will be addressed and the content will be recapitulated regularly throughout the lecture.

Lecture plan:
Week 5: Kleist: Leben – Themen – Rezeption
Week 6: Widersprüche der Lektüre: Das Erdbeben in Chili
Week 7: Die Geburt des Partisanen aus dem Geist der Poesie: Michael Kohlhaas / Die Hermannsschlacht
Week 8: Traum und Wirklichkeit: Prinz Friedrich von Homburg

Letters in German Literature: From Goethe’s ’Werther’ to Kafka’s ’Brief an den Vater’ (Paper VIII, Paper X)
Tue 9-10 (wks:1-8), 47 Wellington Square, Grnd Flr Lec Rm 1
This seminar will address the role of the letter in the history of German literature through selected examples. Beginning with Luther’s ‘Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen’, we will discuss the changing character of letters, both as a medium for communication and as an art form. Specifically, we will be looking at the eighteenth century and the significance of the epistolary novel in the development of a literary mode of introspection, laying the foundation for future developments, particularly in German Romanticism. In Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s ‘Chandos-Brief’ and Franz Kafka’s ‘Brief an den Vater’, we will consider the role of the letter in times of crisis. The recently published correspondence of the 20th century poets Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan will serve as an example for the poetics of the love letter in the context of an artistic dialogue. This will ultimately lead to our final topic, the Austrian author Daniel Glattauer’s email novel ‘Gut gegen Nordwind’. We will be discussing the relevant texts on the basis of excerpts that will be provided during the course of the seminar.

Seminar plan:
Week 1: What is a letter? – Introduction
Week 2: Baroque: letter manuals, ’Empfindsamkeit’ (Sensibility): Gellert, La Roche
Week 3: Goethe: Werther
Week 4: Hofmannsthal: Chandos
Week 5: Kafka: Brief an den Vater
Week 6: Bachmann - Celan
Week 7: Glattauer: Gut gegen Nordwind
Week 8: Review – Final Discussion