

Es gibt vielerlei Lärme,

aber es gibt nur eine Stille.

Kurt Tucholsky



Centre for Anglo-German  
Cultural Relations

in the Department of German at Queen Mary, University of London

# Theodor Lessing: Leben im Lärm / Life in Noise

with readings from the works of Keun, Kästner and Tucholsky

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Guest lecture and reading by

Professor Peter Gorny (University of Oldenburg, Grandson of Theodor Lessing)

John Goodyear (Queen Mary, University of London)

Marie Dettmer (Literary Composer)

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011, 17:00-19:00**

**Steiner Room, Lockkeeper's Cottage, Queen Mary, University of London**

**N.B. This lecture will be in both German and English!**

## Theodor Lessing (1872-1933)

### Leben im Lärm / Life in Noise

As a teacher, translator, author, essayist, theatre critic, poet, publisher, philosopher, social and political activist as well as an early advocator of both women's rights and animal rights, Theodor Lessing's life work offers crucial and critical snapshots of the *Kaiserreich*, the First World War, the Weimar Republic and the early days of the Nazi era. Theodor Lessing was not only an eyewitness to these historical eras, but his body of works demonstrates that he was also a perceptive and highly critical *earwitness*, interpreting the soundscapes and sonic developments of the time.

Alarmed by the debilitating effects of the increasingly noisy environment in Germany, Lessing set out on a mission to curb noise. He published a *Kampfschrift* entitled *Der Lärm* in 1908 and established, in the same year, the first German nationwide *Antilärmverein* in Hanover. His anti-noise project was, in part, informed by the quintessential quiet of the English gentleman, the anti-noise measures of English academic figures of the time and an anti-noise society that existed in the British capital from the start of the 1900s. In 1909, Theodor Lessing attended the first international noise conference in London. Here, in places like Whitechapel and the Docks of the East End, he came to hear for himself the quiet that he so often associated with the English.

This event, hosted by the Centre for Anglo-German Cultural Relations, takes a look at Theodor Lessing's life, homes in on his anti-noise activities and his time in London, and concludes with readings from German literature on the theme of noise.

## Biographies of Speakers

**Peter Gorny** (Oldenburg) is the grandson of Theodor Lessing

He studied Civil Engineering at Hanover Technical University and specialised in IT in Engineering. In 1974, he was appointed Professor for Applied Computer Science at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, particularly in Software Ergonomics and Human Computer Interaction. He was Dean of the Informatics Department and Vice President of the University of Oldenburg. Besides his academic interests, he administers the Theodor and Ada Lessing family archive.

**Marie Dettmer** (Hanover) is a literary composer

Playing an active role in the cultural life of the city, she regularly gives literary readings in fitting locations right across Hanover. From the *Herrenhausen* gardens to the *Küchengartenpavillon* in Hanover, from the Lower Saxony State Museum to the City Library, she has delighted audiences with her readings of German authors' works, including Wilhelm Busch, Erich Kästner, Irmgard Keun, Eugen Roth, Kurt Tucholsky and Theodor Lessing. Just as wide ranging as the authors are the themes on which Marie speaks: seasons, nature and gardens, life and death, even football, planets, fossils, wine and noise!

**John Goodyear** (Oldenburg) is a soundscapes specialist and former QM student

John studied German at Aston University and Queen Mary, University of London. His PhD focused on German-speaking cities as soundscapes in the twentieth century. During the course of his doctoral studies, John undertook significant research into Theodor Lessing's fight against noise and his *Antilärmverein* (1908-11). John has since given talks on Lessing in the UK, Germany, Austria and the United States. Two chapters analysing the German philosopher's crusade against noise are currently being published in the volume *German in the Loud Twentieth Century* (OUP) and *Angermion* (Peter Lang).