

Call for a worldwide reading in memory of Heinrich von Kleist on 21 November 2011

The international literature festival berlin (ilb) and the German Heinrich von Kleist Society are calling for cultural institutions, schools, radio stations and anyone who is interested to organise a worldwide reading of the works of the German author Heinrich von Kleist on 21 November 2011, the 200th anniversary of his death.

Heinrich von Kleist was a crisis expert and project maker at the turn of the 19th century who regarded Germany to be a waiting room lacking movement. He attempted to shake his contemporaries back to life with futuristic experiments, not only in literature, but in all areas of society. He developed ideas for a military and financial reform of the Prussian state, came up with the notion of a "school of vice" based on a programme of "oppositional" pedagogical concepts, designed a submarine and "bomb post" and set up a daily newspaper in the capital to act as a front for political activities. As a character, playwright and storyteller with extreme positions, misunderstood by his contemporaries, Kleist is nowadays seen as a modern figure who got caught up in political and societal upheavals of his times and whose life was marked continuously by instability, despite the fact that he belonged to an aristocratic family from the Margraviate Brandenburg. He developed his ideas and changing life concepts out of a permanent state of crisis. After leaving the military, he changed his life constantly, re-inventing himself again and again as a learned man, a public official, father of a family, farmer, book dealer or theatre director and ultimately as a successful author, something that escaped him in his lifetime.

The 200th anniversary of Kleist's death on 21 November 2011 is an occasion to discuss the relationship between crisis, critique and reform ideas then and today. However, the 21st of November is also the day on which tribute should be paid to Kleist's life, how he died and his works. In his honour, excerpts from the letters and works of Heinrich von Kleist should be read on the anniversary of his death.

The worldwide reading already has tradition. It emerged on the third anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. The international literature festival berlin and the Peter Weiss Foundation for Art and Politics first called for a worldwide reading of Eliot Weinberger's *What I Hear About Iraq* on 20 March 2006, the anniversary of the political lie. Further worldwide readings followed after the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, in the runup to the Olympic Games in China, against the rule of Robert Mugabe, in memory of Mahmud Darwish and to support the democratic opposition in Iran. As many as one hundred institutions, including radio and television stations, have been involved every year in the worldwide reading on all continents or have reported on it.

The texts to be read at the worldwide reading are available in German, English and French. Any institutions or individuals who want to take part in the reading are asked to contact us. The great number of texts selected will then be sent to the partners per email. The email address is: worldwidereading@heinrich-von-kleist.org



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