

IRSCL Congress Frankfurt: Opening address

I feel very privileged to be part of this ceremony in honour of the 40th anniversary of the founding of IRSCL. I want to begin by reflecting on the Frankfurt Colloquium of 1969, which was organised by members of the Institute for Children's Literature Research here at the Goethe University. The 'short history of IRSCL' on our website notes that in 1969 participants from five countries elected a committee which led to the founding of IRSCL in the following year. This rather bland statement does not capture the context of the 1969 Colloquium. Deep in the Cold War, in a divided Europe and a divided Germany, participants came together from Austria, Czechoslovakia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Spain and Switzerland, crossing political divides in a meeting of scholars motivated by their determination that children's literature research should grow and prosper.

1969 was a momentous year in many parts of the world. Golda Meir became the first woman Prime Minister of Israel; Georges Pompidou was elected President of France; Willy Brandt became Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany; and Richard Nixon became President of the United States, where demonstrations against the Vietnam War raged even as peace negotiations began their faltering progress. In January 1969 the death of the young student Jan Palach in Prague gave rise to continuing protests against the invasion of Czechoslovakia which had occurred in the previous year.

It is I think significant that IRSCL formed in this context of political and social change. By the end of the 1960s many old hierarchies were losing their potency –the feminist movement was changing the way women and men thought of themselves as gendered subjects; and people of colour in many countries were refusing to accept that their worth was determined by ethnicity or skin colour. The 1969 Colloquium claimed a place for children's literature research, asserting its importance as a distinctive and important field of research. IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People, had already begun its work of promoting children's literature internationally, beginning in 1953, but IRSCL was the first international organisation focusing on research in children's literature; the Children's Literature Association was to hold its inaugural meeting four years later, in 1973. As it began, so IRSCL has developed: as an organisation shaped by internationalist principles and informed by a belief in the value of cross-cultural collaboration. There

have been times of controversy and dissension over these forty years – many of them over questions of linguistic and cultural difference. This is part of being an international organisation; what is important is that we continue to strive to understand different ways of thinking and of doing research, within a climate of friendship and mutual respect.

To look at the list of countries where IRSCCL has held its Congresses in the last forty years is to see how it has expanded its international reach: the first Congress in Germany, followed by Switzerland, Sweden, UK, Moscow in then USSR, France, Canada, back to Germany in 1987, then Spain, France, Australia, Sweden, UK, Canada (in conjunction with the Children's Literature Association in 1999), South Africa, Norway, Ireland, and Japan in 2007. This year we return to the birthplace of IRSCCL; in two years time, our Congress is in Australia. Our new logo, adopted in 2008, suggests the many cultures, approaches and experiences which inform the research of IRSCCL members and our identity as an international organisation embracing difference and plurality.

Children's literature research in 2009 is in a far stronger position than in 1969. We have only to look at the large number of young scholars undertaking graduate studies in children's literature – Masters and PhD programmes -- to be reassured that the future for our discipline is promising. But there is still much to be done: especially in straitened economic times, studies in children's literature can be vulnerable as universities and other institutions seek to cut costs by restructuring organisations and programmes (and restructuring almost always means a decrease of staffing and subjects). It's all the more important, then, that IRSCCL continues to support and advocate for our discipline, especially because many of our members work in isolation as the only children's literature scholars in their departments and faculties, or as members of small groups.

It's customary at the opening of our Congresses to announce the winner of the Research Award and the IRSCCL Book Award. This year the Research Award has been won by Mercedeh Makoui from Iran, for her project 'Gender Roles in Reversions of Classic Persian Folktales', which examines gender relations in contemporary picture book retellings from the Iranian national epic *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*. Mercedeh is unable to be present at the Congress, but we congratulate her in her absence. She is undertaking a PhD at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia.

This year the Board has made two Honour Book awards. It's fitting that in our anniversary year we honour two longstanding and respected members. Honor Book Awards go to Jean Perrot, for *Mondialisation et Littérature de Jeunesse* (*Globalization and Youth Literature*) and to Perry Nodelman, for *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*. We will celebrate these awards and others further at the IRSCL banquet on Tuesday evening.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the Presidents and IRSCL Boards who have represented the interests of members since 1969. Four of our past Presidents are present at this Congress, and I would like us to pay tribute to their work heading up the organisation: Kimberley Reynolds, 2003-7, Sandra Beckett, 1999-2003, John Stephens, 1997-9, Maria Nikolajeva, 1993-7.

I would now like to welcome Klaus Doderer, one of the founding members who met here at the Institute for Children's Literature Research in 1969. Klaus was also the first President of IRSCL, serving the organisation from 1970 to 1974. I now invite Klaus Doderer to present his commemorative address.