

# sammlung druckwerk

---

## **Klaus Doderer \* January 20, 1925 † June 16, 2023 : Work and oeuvre**

After studying German, philosophy and art history in Marburg and earning his doctorate on the subject of the short story in Germany in 1952, Klaus Doderer completed a second course of study in pedagogy, language and literature didactics at the Pedagogical Institute in Darmstadt. He later became a lecturer there, and his interest in children's and young people's literature was awakened, encouraged by the already existing Arbeitstelle für Jugendliteratur (Department for young people's literature). In 1963 he took up a professorship at the Hochschule für Erziehung, which was initially affiliated with the University of Frankfurt and later merged with it. At the same time, Klaus Doderer was appointed as founding director of the Institut für Jugendbuchforschung (Institute for Youth Literature Research), which he then headed until 1990.

That the founding of this institute would later prove to be a great success could hardly have been expected at first. As Klaus Doderer describes it in his autobiographical reflections\*, the situation was tricky, characterized by wrangling over goals and by the peculiarities of the scientific establishment. Those involved had different expectations of the institute's future work, for example as a refuge for the fight against substandard literature and literature harmful to young people, as an evaluation and examination center for youth literature, or as a bastion for the defense of books and their reading against new media such as audio cassettes, films and television.

Klaus Doderer did not see this as a constraint. He recognized the opportunities offered by the unity of teaching, research and collecting. As a result, the range of courses was expanded and research was broadly based. The massive expansion of the library's capacity for primary and secondary literature at his instigation made it possible for the first time to carry out reliable source-based work. Scientific conferences were held on his initiative, such as the Frankfurt colloquium of 1969, in which Horst Kunze, the protagonist of children's and youth literature in the former German Democratic Republic also took part, not a matter of course in times of the Cold War. Many projects can be traced back to his impetus and initiative, among them as probably most important the Encyclopedia of Children's and Youth Literature, whose four volumes, compiled by more than 250 experts from 33 countries, were published from 1975 to 1982 and whose contributions are indispensable for the basic work. This also applies to his own extensive work, which is highly topical.

In the sense best understood by, Klaus Doderer was an inquisitive and active person. His profession was to sift and describe, to mediate and motivate, to create connections and to bundle activities. On his initiative, the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSL) was founded in Frankfurt a. M. in 1970,

and he became its first president. In cooperation with his wife Ingrid Doderer he succeeded in acquiring the children's book collection of Walter Benjamin, which had been brought to England in the early 1930s and in securing its existence.

At the time of his retirement in 1990, the Institut für Jugendbuchforschung had earned the highest reputation; it was also recognized internationally as an institution with exemplary character. Subsequently, the shine faded, and his successors were unable to maintain the Doderer's impact across the board, despite some notable achievements. It was not possible to continue the former work and to set new impulses, for example, to adapt to the changes in the landscape of youth literature, to analyze the massively advancing shifts in the media and, in particular, to further elaborate the significance of youth literature as an independent cultural asset. Today, the institute is living off the glow that Klaus Doderer once established.

Together with Horst Kunze, Theodor Brüggemann and Walter Scherf, the long-time director of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek München (International Youth Library in Munich) - with whom he sometimes shared a certain rivalry - Klaus Doderer is one of the people of the postwar period who made children's and youth literature, which had long been disregarded valued, and helped it to achieve an undisputed status as a subject of research today. They have prepared the ground for the researchers - including many who 'apprenticed' with Klaus Doderer - who are their successors today. Klaus Doderer played a decisive role in creating the ground on which the research that rests on many shoulders today is based in its self-understanding.

In his autobiographical reflections there is a text at the end that describes the destiny of its author similar to an obituary:

#### *THE FATE OF DISCOVERIES*

*An old man - eighty or more - sat by the path. He had succeeded in some things, but not in others. He was still searching. Young people came by, determined, critical, self-confident. They asked the old man for the way up the mountain. He knew several routes, showed them his best one. The young people walked a bit. Then the signs were blurred. Nevertheless, the hikers made progress, discovered new things, including the futility of many an effort. And also the weathering of knowledge.*

\* Klaus Doderer. The Discovery of Children's and Youth Literature Research. Autobiographical reflections. Weinheim, Basel 2005

See also the web contribution of the German Academy for Children's and Youth Literature on [Klaus Doderer](#)