

ACLA Charles Bernheimer Prize 2022

Mrinalini Chakravorty (University of Virginia), Hala Halim (NYU), and Anthony Alessandrini (Kingsborough Community College & City University of New York)

Honorable Mention: Františka Zezuláková-Schormová for the dissertation, “African American Poets Abroad: Black and Red Allegiances in Early Cold War Czechoslovakia” (Charles University)

Františka Zezuláková-Schormová’s dissertation “African American Poets Abroad: Black and Red Allegiances in Early Cold War Czechoslovakia” tells a fascinating and original story about African-American writers in Prague during the Cold War. The astonishing story of correspondence and interaction between Black writers and poets and Czech intellectuals that emerges sheds new light on how active poets, translators, editors, and party workers were in forging socialist solidarities despite singularly myopic national confines. This thesis is commendable for several reasons: it gives us an important new view of the racial, literary, and cultural orbits of socialist internationalism; it discovers and translates archival material that places Czech writers and language in conversation with Black American writers in a novel way; and it charts a genre-bending method for comparative studies that moves fluidly between memoirs, diaries, letters, and anthologies. The dialogue between figures such as W.E.B. Dubois, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Abraham Chapman and Czech artists and writers such as Josef Škvorecký, Jan Zábřana, and Lubomír Dorůžka at a time of espionage and suspicion between the West and the socialist block is revelatory. This is historically attentive comparative work of the highest caliber that uncovers a new node in the world republic of letters that will be of interest to many.