



## Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

### Research Report

*The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.*

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#### **Three Generations of Czech Women Writing**

##### **Topic of research:**

My work, which has as its ultimate goal a book-length study, examines the writing of three generations of Czech women writers: three born between 1930 and 1940 (Eva Kanturkova, Zdena Salivarova, Eda Kriseova), four born in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s (Daniela Hodrova, Daniela Fischerova, Alexandra Berkova, and Lenka Prochazkova), and four born in the mid-1950s to early 1960s (Eva Hauserova, Tereza Bouckova, Zuzana Brabcova, Iva Pekarkova). The literary texts under consideration consist primarily of prose fiction written over a period a just over thirty years--from the mid-1960s to the turn of the 21st century.

##### **Relevance and contribution to field:**

In the context of Anglophone scholarship on Czech literature (a rather underdeveloped field in itself), the attention given to women writers has been almost negligible. A few of the primary texts have been published in English translation, an occasional book review has appeared, and, to my knowledge, one article (besides my own) only very recently has addressed the work of Czech women writers to date. Especially for those of us who teach courses in comparative literature, greater access to and understanding of Czech women's writing would be welcome (as would be similar studies on the work of Polish and Hungarian women writers).

**Approach and research methodology:**

In my study of the work of contemporary Czech women writers, I am pursuing a broadly based analysis of individual primary texts viewed in a larger cultural context. My approach not only makes use of published reviews and critical studies, but also relies on the special insight that I have gained from my personal meetings with the writers and the "conversations" (usually taped interviews) that I have had with them. To my analysis I am also applying some of the fundamental concepts of feminist literary theory and criticism. The major themes I have isolated for analysis include childhood/memory, home/exile, and sexuality/maternity.

Most of my work was carried out in Prague, using the research facilities of the Academy of Sciences Institute for Czech Literature (where my primary contact was Dr. Blanka Svadbova), the National Library (in connection with Charles University), and the Prague Center for Gender Studies. A significant portion of my time was devoted to the reading of primary and secondary texts. In the fall semester I audited a gender studies course, Feminism, Language, and Literature in Translation, taught by a colleague, Dr. Eva Kalivodova, at Charles University. I also made short trips to meet with university colleagues in other cities. At Palacky University in Olomouc I met with Dr. Lubomir Machala (a pioneer Czech scholar who included a chapter on contemporary Czech women writers in his latest book on Czech literature). I also used the archival holdings of the university library there. In Plzen at the University of West Bohemia I met with Dr. Stepanka Korytova-Magstadt, who specializes in history and gender studies. And at the University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice I consulted with Dr. Jana Valdrova, who is a specialist in gender linguistics.

**Summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions:**

The basic results of the research I conducted in Prague were wide-ranging (as is my overall project). The extensive reading in feminist literary theory I did partly in connection with the course on Feminism, Language, and Literature in Translation led me to reevaluate my overall approach to the project and place more emphasis on issues of gender in my analysis of individual writers. I made significant progress in the formidable task I have set myself: the analytic reading of more novels and stories by the writers I am considering, as well as an examination of the latest relevant reviews and other critical materials. I was also able to conduct follow-up interviews with most of my writers, including Kriseova, Hodrova, Fischerova, Berkova, Prochazkova, Hauserova, and Pekarkova. In particular, I was able to spend extensive time with the latter two writers. I wrote and presented a paper on Pekarkova at the annual BASEES conference at Fitzwilliam College in Cambridge, England, which I am now revising as an article. I also have articles under revision on Hauserova and Prochazkova. Additionally, I made substantial progress toward articles on Kriseova and Hodrova. (All of these materials will be incorporated into the eventual book.) And putting a kind of capstone on my work in the Czech Republic, I succeeded in gathering together a group of Czech feminists (though

they do not all identify themselves as such) to participate in a panel at the 21st SUV convention, held in Plzen in late June.

**Suggestions for future research agendas:**

I would encourage American scholars who are interested in Czech literature (and necessarily fluent in the language) to consider studying the work of the latest generation of Czech writers, women and men alike. I would also suggest that there appear to be good opportunities for collaborative projects in the broader area of gender studies, with English as the language of communication. The Prague Center for Gender Studies is developing an excellent library and promotes contacts with colleagues from other countries.