

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

### Masaryk University

**Applicant**

Mgr. Martina Horáková, Ph.D.

**Habilitation thesis**

Pursuits of Settler Belonging in Contemporary Australian Memoirs

**Reviewer**

Assoc. Prof. Iva Polak

**Reviewer's home unit, institution**

Department of English, University of Zagreb, Croatia

### [Review text]

Martina Horáková's habilitation thesis titled *Pursuits of Settler Belonging in Contemporary Australian Memoirs* represents a timely and much-needed revitalization of the genre of the "memoir of settler belonging" and the various ways in which it unpacks problematic belonging in settler-colonial contexts, especially in Australia as the only settler colony that has not signed a state-wide treaty with its Indigenous peoples. The author's handling of the material is confident, thorough, and demonstrates a high level of critical engagement with, at times, fraught concepts of settler belonging in relation to the legacy of the colonial era and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Australia.

While the habilitation thesis is mostly aligned with two influential contemporary studies of settler belonging, namely Lisa Slater's *Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism: Australia, Race and Place* (2019) and Emily Potter's *Writing Belonging at the Millennium* (2019), it moves beyond them by introducing a renewed theoretical paradigm which befits the 21st-century moment, and by engaging with a broader selection of texts, including some of the most recent publications. The thesis' internal structure is very clear and the discussions that ensue are well and evenly paced, which will no doubt broaden the audience of this text. Chapter 1 offers a detailed theoretical survey of the concept of settler belonging and settler anxiety by contextualising Australia's key sociohistorical moments that led to shifts in the paradigm of settler belonging, from crisis to specific accommodation, as the author argues. I would not be surprised to see this chapter subsequently anthologised in postcolonial readers owing to the author's rigorous scholarship and well-balanced discussion.

All subsequent chapters are well organised and move from more straightforward settler memoirs to more complex, hybrid ones. Chapter 2 focuses on memoirs of settler belonging by prominent Australian historians stemming from the historians' autobiographical tradition, with emphasis on settlers' spatial anxiety. Chapter 3 introduces the concept of gender through the distinctive position of white settler women in Australia's history, who often represented a bridge between Anglo-settlers and Indigenous Australians. As the author demonstrates, their eco-cartography based on engagement with space and Indigenous women cannot be found in the earlier selected corpus. Chapter 4 explicates more experimental, fictocritical and poetic "place writing", which is often metatextual and ambiguous in order to

fathom new, more ethical ways of settler belonging. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the most recent settler memoirs, which are based on intimate knowledge of the land. Unlike the previously discussed works, these memoirs contain strong environmental concerns owing to the settlers' intimate relation with the land and pave the way towards settlers' "emplacement" and "homemaking" without the concept of entitlement, as something that needs to be earned, which brings their intimate nexus with the land closer to the Indigenous concept of "Country".

In conclusion, Dr Horáková habilitation thesis will undoubtedly attract the attention of Australian studies and postcolonial scholars in Europe and abroad since it represents a substantial and original contribution to contemporary settler colonial studies.

**Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence** (number of questions up to the reviewer)

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1. Is the memoir still an appropriate genre for negotiating settler identity, or are newer hybrid forms becoming more important? In other words, do hybrid forms such as fictocriticism and place-writing allow for more ethical representations of settler presence?
2. Do you see contemporary settler memoirs moving towards fragmentation, uncertainty, and ambiguity rather than coherent identity narratives?
3. How do you see the concept of settler belonging evolving in the context of climate change and environmental crisis?
4. Do you think ecological attachment to land can produce a more ethical form of settler presence, or does it risk reproducing older forms of appropriation?
5. Do contemporary Australian settler memoirs still seek belonging, or are they increasingly learning how to live with the impossibility of belonging?

**Conclusion**

The habilitation thesis entitled *Pursuits of Settler Belonging in Australian Post-Millennial Memoirs* Mgr. Martina Horáková, Ph.D., **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Germanic Languages and Literature.

Date: April 7, 2026

Signature: