Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA Honours, (University of Victoria, 2015)

“Seduced and Dying: The Sympathetic Trope of the Fallen Woman in
Early and Mid-Victorian Britain, c. 1820-1870”

Department of History

Friday, August 24, 2018
10:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B215

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Simon Devereaux, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Andrea McKenzie, Department of History, University of Victoria (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Rosalind Crone, Open University, UK

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Helen Raptis, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

In early and mid-Victorian Britain, men and women from all classes demonstrated a strong fascination with, and sympathy for, seduced and dying women. Though such women were unchaste or “fallen” women, they did not excite the same anxiety and condemnation as did other sexually transgressive women like prostitutes and adulteresses. This thesis demonstrates that the sympathetic trope of the seduced and dying woman in British culture from 1820 to 1870 was a combination of (and an interplay between) fiction and reality. Through a study of melodrama – a largely working-class genre – and “expert” literature – a predominantly middle-class genre, comprised of medical, social, religious and prescriptive writings – this thesis shows how the seduced and dying woman inspired sympathy both across and along class lines. Finally, an analysis of nineteenth-century newspaper accounts of “Seduction and Suicide” illustrates that, while this popular trope inspired sympathy for a certain kind of fallen woman – the sexually innocent, passive and (most importantly) suffering and dying victim of seduction – it also distorted the reality of sexual fall, reinforced patriarchal understandings, created an exclusive and unattainable standard of sympathy, one which threatened to normalize suicide for fallen women.