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

of

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BA (University of Kurdistan, 2007)
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“The Fascination of What’s Difficult: The Adaptive Function of Difficulty in Ulysses”

Department of English

Monday, October 23, 2017
9:30 A.M.
Cornett Building
Room A128

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Stephen Ross, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Christopher Douglas, Department of English, U Vic (Member)
Dr. Emile Fromet de Rosnay, French Department, U Vic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Marc Lapprand, French Department, U Vic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Lucinda Leonard, School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, U Vic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
This thesis is based on the premise that questions about human affairs, including questions about art, need to be considered in the context of our deep history as a species. Darwinian theories of human existence have given scholars in evolutionary psychology the chance to analyze human cognition, emotions, and behaviour by considering the trajectory of our evolution and how that has shaped our current situation. Taking a Darwinian literary approach, this thesis tries to answer one of the main questions about James Joyce’s novel, *Ulysses*: What is the purpose behind a style that many find so difficult in this novel? In order to answer this question, I explore the adaptive purposes of literature (in general) and stylistic experimentation (in particular). I argue that art can be seen as a form of sexual display where stylistic difficulty and originality are ways of indicating fitness for survival. In this way, both the author and readers of *Ulysses* spend their time and energy to produce and consume the difficult style of *Ulysses* because they find pleasure in an activity that is adaptively useful. Furthermore, I suggest that earning social status could have been an evolutionary motive for both the authors and readers of difficult modernist texts, including *Ulysses*. To support this, I show how gaining social status is part of other sexual ornamentations that handicap the displayer by imposing excessive difficulty in terms of the time and energy needed to put on those displays of fitness.