Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of

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MA (University of Victoria, 2015)
BA (International Studies University, 2013)

“The Feeling of Form: Experiencing Histories in Twentieth-Century
British Novel Series”

Department of English

Tuesday, June 23, 2020
9:00 A.M.
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Stephen Ross, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Nicole Shukin, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Allana Lindgren, Department of Theatre, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. David James, Department of English Literature, University of Birmingham

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Sara Ellision, Department of Physics and Astronomy, UVic

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

How do we understand our encounter with ambivalent or visceral aesthetic feelings—textual environments, moods, and atmospheres—if they do not solely belong to the *representation* of individual or collective emotions? This dissertation proposes a concept of “the feeling of form” to approach these aesthetic feelings as *formal dynamics*, such as restless orientations and rhythmic intensities. How can literary forms *have* feelings, and where—or is it necessary—to locate the textual body and the subject of these feelings? The goal of my dissertation is not to show what specific neurological procedures are involved in the emotive-cognitive entanglement between the text and the reader, but to understand “form” as a verb—*forming, shaping, mediating, transmitting*—whose dynamics and actions manifest the narrative form’s visceral aesthetic feelings, and to examine how such feelings bear significant cultural and political currency. Reading formal dynamics as aesthetic feelings also invites us to adjust our usual gaze at “form” away from categories coined by various formalisms, such as “genre,” “structure,” “focalization,” or “style.” In doing so, we are able to reimagine these categories as part of the dynamics of formal reorientations, rhythms, and syntactic intensities, and to open ourselves up to the impersonal agency and criticality of literary forms.

Based on these convictions, my dissertation argues that reading for the feeling of form allows us to experience how literary forms transmit and regenerate volatile experiences of history in ways that complicate, supplement, or subvert the explicit representation of historical events and temporality in a literary text. In this dissertation, I focus on the relationship between the feeling of form and the experience of various histories in Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* (1924–1928), Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *A Scots Quair* (1932–1934), Lawrence Durrell’s *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957–60), and Kazuo Ishiguro’s single-volume novel *The Unconsoled* (1995). Chapter One traces how nauseous form in *Parade’s End* allows us to experience wartime and postwar anxiety through Christopher Tietjens’s self-revolting and incoherent consciousness. Chapter Two examines how the deterioration of rhythm in *A Scot’s Quair* transmits a historical
experience of gradual suffocation intricately linked with Scotland’s political and ecological disasters. In a brief Coda, I conclude my project by looking at how *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Unconsoled* manifest weakened and depleted feelings of form, and how these feelings prompt us to rethink the relationship of the feeling of form to European heteronormative ideology and the ethics of community formation. *The Unconsoled* (1995), in particular, serves as a twofold limit case of the feeling of form: first, as a limit case of the futile feeling of form, and second, as a limit case of the distinction between the novel form and the novel series form. This twofold limit case speaks to its own historical experience of futility at the end of history, and responds to the aesthetic and ideological legacies of early twentieth-century experimental novel series.