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

of

DENAE DYCK

MA (Dalhousie University, 2015)
BA (Ambrose University, 2014)

“Forming Wisdom: Biblical Criticism, Creative Interpretation, and the Poetics of the Victorian Sage”

Department of English

Tuesday, August 11, 2020
9:30 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Lisa Surridge, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Mary Elizabeth Leighton, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Adrienne Williams Boyarin, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Lynne Marks, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Joshua King, Department of English, Baylor University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Jeremy Wulff, Department of Chemistry, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Although the Bible retained substantial cultural currency throughout the Victorian period (1837–1901), new approaches in biblical criticism challenged accepted ideas about its divine inspiration and theological unity. This dissertation shows that the pressures exerted by this biblical criticism prompted Victorian writers to undertake an imaginative recovery of wisdom literature. Adapting wisdom literature’s characteristic forms in their own works of poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose, these writers constructed dynamic frameworks of revelation and authority. My study analyzes a series of strategically chosen case studies from the 1840s to the 1880s: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *A Drama of Exile* (1844), George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* (1858), George Eliot’s *Romola* (1862–63), John Ruskin’s *The Queen of the Air* (1869), and Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). This selection brings together writers who self-identified as Christian but whose eclectic ideas set them apart from their contemporaries, as well as those who rejected Christianity but nonetheless engaged thoughtfully with biblical texts in their own writing. By demonstrating that these writers used wisdom literature to productively re-imagine the experiences of questioning and doubt, this dissertation contributes to the interdisciplinary project of reassessing religion and secularization in the nineteenth century. More specifically, my focus on biblical wisdom literature aims to revise and supplement the critical paradigm of the Victorian sage, which has come to define scholarly understanding of biblical allusion and literary authority in this period. Where previous studies have focused on the sage’s prophetic rhetoric, this dissertation argues that adaptations of wisdom literature generated an alternative mode of writing, one characterized by an artistic and heuristic poetics.