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

of

CAROLINE WINTER

MA (University of Toronto, 2005)
BA (University of Toronto, 2004)

“Gothic Economics:
Gothic Literature and Commercial Society in Britain, 1750–1850”

Department of English

Thursday, December 17, 2020
10:00 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Robert Miles, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. G. Kim Blank, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Simon Devereaux, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Deidre Shauna Lynch, Department of English, Harvard University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, Department of History, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract
Although the sensational world of Gothic literature may seem to have little to do with the “dismal science” of economics, readers and critics have long recognized connections between Romantic-era political economic discourse and Gothic novels, from the trope of the haunted castle on contested property to Adam Smith's metaphor of the spectral “invisible hand.” This study, the first sustained investigation of economics and the Gothic, reads Romantic Gothic literature as an important voice in public debates about the economic ideas that shaped the emerging phenomenon of commercial society. Drawing on Charles Taylor’s notion of the modern social imaginary, it argues that the ways in which Gothic literature interrogated these ideas continues to inform our understanding of the economy and our place within it today. Each chapter focuses on an economic idea, including property, coverture, credit, debt, and consumption, in relation to a selection of representative Gothic texts, from Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764) to Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1848). It analyzes these texts—primarily novels, but also short fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—in the context of political economic writings by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and others. Through this analysis, this study argues that economic ideas are foundational to the Gothic, a mode of literature deeply engaged with the political, cultural, social, and economic upheavals that characterize the Romantic Age.