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

of

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“World Unmaking in the Fiction of Delany, VanderMeer, and Jemisin”

Department of English

Monday, April 19, 2021
10:30 A.M.
Virtual Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jentery Sayers, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Nicole Shukin, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. James Rowe, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Sherryl Vint, Department of English, University of California, Riverside

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross, Department of History, UVic

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

This dissertation examines end-of-world and posthumanist themes in speculative fiction and theory through the concept of “world unmaking.” Reading for world unmaking in three popular U.S. works of speculative fiction — Samuel R. Delany’s *Dhalgren* (1974), Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation* (2014) and N. K. Jemisin’s the *Broken Earth Trilogy* (2015-17) — it explores how varying representations of “the end” are deployed to destabilize normative ideals of the human and the world that undergird conventional notions of the subject under late liberal humanism. While much attention has been paid to world building and how inherent logics cohere within fictional worlds, world unmaking asks how representations of world disorder, instability, and breakdown might hold important insights for narrating and navigating disordered worlds. Contemporary posthumanist critical theorists increasingly vie for speculative practices that disrupt the inherited onto-epistemologies of liberal humanisms and settler colonialisms. In particular, new materialists and speculative realists argue urgent work must be done to expand thought beyond naturalized and neutralized discourses that subtend conventional versions of reality, especially as the pressures of multiple ecological and geopolitical crises bear down unequally upon the lives of both humans and nonhumans on a shared planet Earth. The rise in popularity of post-apocalyptic, ecocatastrophe and survival narratives in recent decades suggests a growing appetite for speculative imaginings of the end. While some representations of the end of the world serve as an escape from the intersecting crises of the environment, the resurgence of right-wing politics and white supremacy, and the ongoing violence of settler colonialism, this dissertation illustrates the importance of attending to speculative imaginings that use the end-of-the-world conceit to destabilize dominant culture and pose more expansive questions about what it means to be human.