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

of

LAUREN TEE

BA (University of Victoria, 2011)

“Foedera Naturae in Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura”

Department of Greek and Roman Studies

Friday, August 26, 2016
10:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room 415

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Cedric Littlewood, Department of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Victoria
(Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Margaret Cameron, Department of Philosophy, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:
Dr. Allan Mitchell, Department of English, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Fraser Hoff, Department of Chemistry, UVic

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

Lucretius wrote his six-book philosophical epic poem *De Rerum Natura* a few decades before the fall of the Roman Republic and the start of the principate and the reign of Augustus in 27 BC, in a time of great social and political upheaval. This thesis examines Lucretius’ appropriation and correction of traditional Roman social and political rhetoric as part of his therapeutic philosophical programme, which aims to alleviate fear and anxiety through a rational understanding of nature. Specifically, this thesis examines Lucretius’ innovative use of *foedus*, a charged Roman word with many powerful connotations which is generally translated as “treaty”, “pact” or “covenant”. More than just an agreement, a *foedus* represented a divinely sanctioned ritualized contract between Rome and another polity, one which could not be broken without grave spiritual and political repercussions. They were an integral part of Roman life and culture and were strongly associated with imperialism, ambition, religion and sacrifice, and so Lucretius’ decision to adopt that word for the unthinking, unchanging, atheistic, necessary laws that limit and guide nature – despite his explicit condemnation of exactly those values *foedus* represents – is at first glance mystifying. As this thesis will show, however, *foedus* turns out to be an exceedingly apt choice, infusing almost every aspect of Lucretius’ Epicurean work with subtle complexity and meaning and contributing strongly to his polemical, therapeutic, ethical and didactic agendas.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines the social, political and philosophical contexts which influenced Lucretius to adopt Epicureanism. It then delves into some of the issues surrounding his innovative use of *foedus*. Chapter Two attempts to answer the research question of why *foedus*? by comparing and contrasting the essential characteristics of Roman *foedera* against those of Lucretius’ *foedera naturae*. This in turn provides a more detailed picture of Lucretius’ philosophical system both in terms of its physical and ethical doctrines, and suggests some possible motivations for Lucretius’ choice. Chapter Three looks at the deeper significance of Lucretius’ use of *foedus* and its role in his therapeutic programme of correction. Driving this chapter is Lucretius’ exploitation of the etymological connection between the noun *foedus* (‘treaty’, ‘covenant’) and the adjective *foedus*, ‘foul’. Chapter Three is divided into two sections, each focusing on Lucretius’ masterful manipulation of *foedus* and its etymological roots – as well as generic expectations and language in general – first for polemical purposes, then for therapeutic.