

October 15 Birthday of Lucretius and Virgil?

Post by “Elayne” of October 18, 2019 at 8:34 PM

JJ, my poet friend, here's a poem I wrote a few years back on the subject! I would have made a different ending ☐ than Virgil did.

Dido Comes to Pickens County

Arma virumque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris—

Yes, I'm the one who named her first car

Dido, who turned Queen of Carthage

in twelfth grade Latin

back when I thought a woman

translating herself into fire

into the hexameters of a dead language

seemed pretty much the most

romantic gesture possible. Arma

virumque. Arms and a man—my father

said your hometown wasn't in the World Book Atlas

so there, and maybe

you just wanted to drive off with Dido.

But your arms full of catfish and hoecake

your mouth full of whispered Dante

and Faulkner

cinched it anyway. Cano.

I sing to our children

who mostly love country—

the whippoorwill, any train at night

and sway in the backseat

Delia, Oh Delia

forgetting to argue.

Troiae qui primus

ab oris. Who exactly was it, who first

came from the shores of Troy? Not you

except in real life. No, it was

the Whirlibird King

Aragorn, Mr. Rochester, even Aeneas.

Arma virumque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris.

Dearest Be-mused Poet, you missed

an entire scene

in which it was only an effigy burning

only another effigy sailing away.

Dido and Aeneas. Listen and you'll hear them

unmanned, unarmed, to hell

with fate, to hell with exile

out in the back forty

frying catfish and singing Johnny Cash,

whooping it up and laughing 'til they cry.