

October 15 Birthday of Lucretius and Virgil?

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2019 at 9:32 AM

These two posts crossed my desk today, indicating that both Virgil and Lucretius were born on October 15th. The poster (Trimontium Trust) is a reputable British museum. Anyone know a source for documenting that this either Lucretius or Virgil's birthday? If so then October 15 deserves a special place on the Epicurean



Post by “Joshua” of October 15, 2019 at 9:42 AM

Your Loeb copy of Lucretius discusses the possibility in the introduction, if I remember correctly. We don't have very firm dates for Lucretius on either end; actually, we know almost nothing about him.

Post by “Joshua” of October 15, 2019 at 9:56 AM

Alright, upon review I see that the Loeb edition mentions the possibility that Lucretius *died* on October 15th, on Virgil's 17th birthday (the very day he assumed the *toga virilis*). The editor cites "4th century grammarian Donatus, probably following Seutonius", while remaining himself skeptical of the connection. There's no mention of the birth date.

There's certainly no harm in picking a date to honor him, and we don't have any other candidates! The rediscovery of the manuscript by Poggio was in January of 1417, but no day is

known.

Post by “Joshua” of October 15, 2019 at 10:11 AM

I'll add for those curious, just as I was, that this is not the same Donatus who St. Augustine polemicizes in *Ad Donatum*. This Aelius Donatus was a teacher of Rhetoric, although he happens to have been the tutor of St. Jerome.

And strange coincidences with birth and death dates do happen all the time, of course. There are only 365 days in the calendar. It's well known that both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died in their beds on Independence Day, July 4th, 1826, a few hours and several hundred miles apart. And Mark Twain was born just after Halley's comet, and wryly predicted that he would die when it came back around. He was right!

Post by “Joshua” of October 15, 2019 at 10:43 AM

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman...is/Vergil*.html

I've found the relevant passage in Seutonius.

Quote

Vergil spent his early life at Cremona until he assumed the gown of manhood, upon his fifteenth birthday, in the consulship of the same two men who had been consuls the year he was born; and it chanced that the poet Lucretius died that very same day.

Most of Seutonius' *De Poetis* is lost, or else we might have quite a lot more to go on with Lucretius.

Post by “Cassius” of October 15, 2019 at 1:18 PM

BINGO THANK YOU JOSHUA!!!

Post by “Elayne” of October 18, 2019 at 5:35 PM

Interesting! In my 3rd year of high school Latin, we translated The Aeneid, and I always got the part of Dido. I named my first car Dido. Fortunately my car did not ever burst into flames on a pyre!

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2019 at 7:55 PM

You named your car Dido after one of the most tragic love affairs of all time??? 😊

Or do I recall my Aeneid incorrectly!? 😊

Post by “Elayne” of October 18, 2019 at 8:14 PM

Oh yes! For a teenage girl, that was the pinnacle of romance, lol! I grew out of it though ☐

Post by “Joshua” of October 18, 2019 at 8:20 PM

Quote

Oh yes! For a teenage girl, that was the pinnacle of romance, lol! I grew out of it though ☐

I certainly hope you haven't replaced it with the *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus 😊

Post by “Elayne” of October 18, 2019 at 8:27 PM

☐☐ nope!

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 Whirlbird 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.

Post by “Cassius” of October 18, 2019 at 8:41 PM

if you two start encouraging each other poetically we are really going to have to show some discipline that the poetry be enlisted in the support of Epicurean philosophy! ☐☐

Post by “Elayne” of October 18, 2019 at 8:44 PM

In my poem, Dido and Aeneas chose the pleasure of friendship, very Epicurean! And anti-fate to boot!

Post by “Joshua” of October 18, 2019 at 9:01 PM

That's EXCELLENT, Elayne! You've handled the subtleties of free verse where I've always struggled.

Quote

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.

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Calls to mind the second ending that Tolkien gave to the tragic story of Beren and Luthien, because he could—and he wanted to.