

Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto 22, lines 58-91 (Hollander translation)

Virgil and Dante are stunned to meet the 1st century Roman poet Statius in Purgatory, where those, and only those, who have cast themselves on the mercy and forgiveness of Christ complete the process of their sanctification.

Statius is equally surprised to meet the poet who was his inspiration and hero, Virgil – who then asks Statius:

“it does not seem, from what you wrote ...
that you had found as yet the faith,
that faith without which good works fail.

If that is so, what sun, what candles
dispelled your darkness so that afterwards
you hoisted sail, following the fisherman?”

And the other [Statius] answered him: “It was you who first
set me toward Parnassus to drink in its grottoes,
and you who first lit my way toward God.

You were as one who goes by night, carrying
the light behind him—it is no help to him,
but instructs all those who follow—

when you said [in the 4th Eclogue]: ‘The centuries turn new again.
Justice returns with the first age of man,
and new progeny descends from heaven.’

Through you I was a poet, through you a Christian.
But, that you may see better what I outline,
I will set my hand to fill the colors in.

Already all the world was pregnant
with the true faith, inseminated
by the messengers of the eternal kingdom,

and the words of yours I have just recited
did so accord with the new preachers
that I began to visit them.

More and more they seemed to me so holy
that when Domitian started with his persecutions
their weeping did not lack my tears.

While I remained on earth,
I gave them comfort. Their upright ways
made me despise all other sects.

I was baptized before, in my verses,
I had led the Greeks to the rivers of Thebes,
but, from fear, I stayed a secret Christian,

long pretending I was still a pagan.”

Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, chapter 13:

Speaking of his boyhood studies:

20. But what were the causes for my strong dislike of Greek literature, which I studied from my boyhood? Even to this day I have not fully understood them. For Latin I loved exceedingly--not just the rudiments, but what the grammarians teach. For those beginner's lessons in reading, writing, and reckoning, I considered no less a burden and pain than Greek. Yet whence came this, unless from the sin and vanity of this life? For I was "but flesh, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again." Those first lessons were better, assuredly, because they were more certain, and through them I acquired, and still retain, the power of reading what I find written and of writing for myself what I will. In the other subjects, however, I was compelled to learn about the wanderings of a certain Aeneas, oblivious of my own wanderings, and to weep for Dido dead, who slew herself for love. And all this while I bore with dry eyes my own wretched self dying to thee, O God, my life, in the midst of these things.

21. For what can be more wretched than the wretch who has no pity upon himself, who sheds tears over Dido, dead for the love of Aeneas, but who sheds no tears for his own death in not loving thee, O God, light of my heart, and bread of the inner mouth of my soul, O power that links together my mind with my inmost thoughts? I did not love thee, and thus committed fornication against thee. Those around me, also sinning, thus cried out: "Well done! Well done!" The friendship of this world is fornication against thee; and "Well done! Well done!" is cried until one feels ashamed not to show himself a man in this way. For my own condition I shed no tears, though I wept for Dido, who "sought death at the sword's point," while I myself was seeking the lowest rung of thy creation, having forsaken thee; earth sinking back to earth again. And, if I had been forbidden to read these poems, I would have grieved that I was not allowed to read what grieved me. This sort of madness is considered more honorable and more fruitful learning than the beginner's course in which I learned to read and write.