

Virgil reading the Aenied to Augustus.

Nothing better conveys the rapture of poetic ambition than this painting by Ingres. The painting itself does not look great to me but the idea of the picture is transcendent. It fulfils Shelley's axiom that poetry could be the divine legislator. That by analysis, intuition and revelation it can deliver the insight of a great poet into the tragedy and comedy of life. Not as a scientific proof only dependent on evidence but a fulfilment of our humanity through the ever-changing ever-prevailing truth. Such a dream seems far away but in recent memory great politicians eg Kennedy were influenced by for example Frost (he sent him to see Khrushchev in the cuban missile crisis). How difficult that task now seems in such a complex world. If only we had as Pasternak said a symbol of eternity which in his great poem Christmas Star has forced him back to a traditional image. Yet it is that opening which is offered and which down the centuries was so compelling. That irresistible figure "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me"

Galatians 2.20