



The Agony and the Ecstasy

Irving Stone , ?????? ?????? (Translator)

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Celebrating the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's David, New American Library releases a special edition of Irving Stone's classic biographical novel—in which both the artist and the man are brought to life in full. A masterpiece in its own right, this novel offers a compelling portrait of Michelangelo's dangerous, impassioned loves, and the God-driven fury from which he wrested the greatest art the world has ever known.

The Agony and the Ecstasy Details

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Author : Irving Stone , ?????? ?????? (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Agony and the Ecstasy for online ebook

Clif Hostetler says

This is a long classic (664 pages, 34 hours audio) historical novel about the life of Michaelangelo. It's been on my informal to-read list ever since it was first published in the late 50s. It's a relief to finally place it in the read category.

Michaelangelo is portrayed in this book as being very passionate about his art. He obviously was born with an abundance of talent, but he was also driven to always do his best. An example of his drive to perfection was his decision of paint the Sistine ceiling alone. It would have been acceptable for him to use a large staff of helpers and get the project done in a year. But in order to ensure the highest standards he did it alone over a four year period.

He is also portrayed as facing many obstacles, too many to list here. In each of the eleven books that this work is divided into he has to contend with a patron, a pope, a war, his family, or poverty. He was blessed with a long life (eighty-eight years) and was able to outlive many of his detractors.

He living style was mostly that of a mendicant, very spare and plane. His family, his father in particular, was always needing money. So most of what he earned he gave away. Actually, his spare living style may have contributed to his long life. Many of his contemporaries who indulged extravagantly didn't live so long.

The book goes out of its way to portray Lorenzo de' Medici "Il Magnifico" as a near perfect ruler (unofficially behind the scenes) of Florence. Lorenzo was very instrumental in giving the young Michaelangelo a start as a sculptor. The book portrays Michaelangelo often recalling Lorenzo's advice, and near the end of the book with death approaching he thinks the following. (The forces of destruction referred to are all the obstacles he faced in life.)

"Il Magnifico would be happy: for me, the forces of destruction never overcame creativity"

The following quotation is by the young Michaelangelo speaking to the other painting apprentices of his longing to be a sculptor instead of a painter. At this time sculpture is almost a lost art in Italy and has a low status.

"God was the first sculptor; He made the first figure: man. And when He wanted to give His laws, what material did He use? Stone."

The following quotation is by Michaelangelo after returning to a sculpture project that had been interrupted, realizing that time can also be helpful in letting the "emotional ideas solidify."

"Time was a yeast . . . form matured . . . a work of art meant growth from the particular to the universal. To a work of art, time brought timelessness"

Jeffrey Keeten says

4.5 stars out of 5

”To some people stone was dead; ‘hard as stone,’ ‘stone cold,’ they said. To him, as he once again ran his fingers along its contours, it was the most alive substance in the world, rhythmic, responsive, tractable: warm, resilient, colorful, vibrant. He was in love with stone.”

Michelangelo portrait by Volterra

Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni was born in Florence on March 6th, 1475. It was a fortuitous time to be born. He was coming of age just as the Renaissance was beginning to take full flight. His family was an ancient family, as old as the famous Medici family, but they have fallen on hard times by the time Michelangelo’s father became the patriarch. There had never been artists in the family, so the desire, nay the need, to create that existed in the young Michelangelo did not come from tradition, but from a new flame within him.

He wanted to become a sculptor in an age when sculpting was nearly extinct. He wanted a chisel in his hand, not a paintbrush. He wanted white chips beneath his feet. He wanted to be immortal. After all, fire, water, and the passage of time destroyed paint, but stone lasted forever.

Donatello died in 1466, but despite never meeting him or receiving the benefit of his teaching, the influence of Donatello was undeniable. Much later, when Michelangelo got the chance to carve a statue that was supposed to represent Florence, he knew that it must be David.

I was mesmerized by David’s hand when I took this picture in Florence back in 1992. You must see the statue in person to fully comprehend how amazing it is.

That statue grew beyond representing Florence. To many historians that statue symbolizes the whole Renaissance.

The title of this book *The Agony and the Ecstasy* makes me think of a daytime soap opera with overblown tragedy and illicit affairs driving the daily plot. The life of Michelangelo certainly reflects the title. There are so many twists and turns in the narrative of this artist’s life. There are so many critical moments where, if fate had intervened differently, the world might not have ever known the name **Michelangelo**.

Everyone wanted him to paint because that was what was in fashion. He could make a living painting. No one was interested in buying new marble statues. Buyers rich enough to afford sculptures were only interested in old Greek statues, freshly pulled from their earthy graves. Michelangelo tried; he really did try to do what everyone wanted him to do, but the only time he truly felt alive, truly felt he was fulfilling his mission in life, was when he was liberating a figure from stone.

The marble called to him, and once his hands were on the stone, he merely had to lean close enough to catch the whispers of who was in the stone. *”He had the impression that, no matter how honestly a sculptor designed, it would come to nothing if it did not agree with the basic nature of the block. In this sense a sculptor could never be completely master of his fate, as a painter could be. Paint was fluid, it could bend around corners. Marble was solidity itself. The marble sculptor had to accept the rigorous discipline of a partnership. The marble and he were one. They spoke to each other. And for him the feel of marble was the supreme sensation. No gratification of any other sense, taste, sight, sound, smell, could approach it.”*

Irving Stone waited six years to begin writing this novel. He arranged for Dr. Charles Speroni, an Italian professor at the University of California, to translate all four hundred and ninety-five surviving Michelangelo letters as well as the records and art contracts that he kept. Stone wanted to be sure that the portrait he carved of Michelangelo by writing this book was based on as much hard data as he could find. Irving also, to add more authenticity, lived in Italy for several years as he was working on this novel so that he could see, taste, and feel the world that made Michelangelo.

Irving Stone

Some would disagree with Stone's positive portrayal of Lorenzo de' Medici, but any man who collects ten thousand books and manuscripts to form the largest library since Alexandria is going to receive more veneration than cynicism from me. He held Florence together for his entire life, without holding any office, as did his father and his grandfather. He wasn't the last of the great de' Medici's, but let's just say that there was a long drought after his death. His successor, his oldest son, was known as Piero the Unfortunate if that gives you any indication of how well he followed the father known as **The Magnificent**.

Lorenzo, as he did for many artists of the era, took the young Michelangelo under his protection and allowed him the freedom to express himself in stone. He recognized the passion in the young man. Unlike many powerful people that Michelangelo was going to be forced to work with, Lorenzo understood that all that was required of him was to stay out of the young artist's way. It was quite the contrast with one of the later popes that Michelangelo worked for. Julius II insisted that he produce just about anything but stone sculptures. He forced him to be a bronze caster, an architect, an engineer, and most famously a *phewy*, let me get the paint off my tongue, the painter of the Sistine Chapel.

Michelangelo was also a poet, not just a dabbler, but a really accomplished poet.

**"Were it mine, that shaggy fleece that stays,
Woven and wrought into a vestment fair,
Around her beauteous bosom in such bliss!**

**AlI through the day she'd clasp me! Would I were
The shoes that bear her burden! When the ways
Were wet with rain, her feet I then would kiss!"**

Michelangelo liked women, but preferred males for sculpting. *"I find all beauty and structural power in the male. Take a man in any action, jumping, wrestling, throwing a spear, plowing, bend him into any position and the muscles, the distribution of weight and tension, have their symmetry. For me, a woman to be beautiful or exciting must be absolutely still."*

"Perhaps you just haven't put them in the proper positions."

Michelangelo was not immune to the allures of women. *"She makes my flesh crawl; I mean the flesh inside my flesh."* He had affairs with women, lifelong affairs that, even when they hadn't seen each other in decades, their desire for each other still burned with a soft flame. They were women impossible to be with

(crafty he was), either because of their station in life or in one case because she was the mistress of a powerful man. He had no interest in marriage. He would have made a poor husband after all. He could love them, but he would always cheat on them with the white marble flesh of his craft.

Michelangelo was feeling a bit lustful when he created this version of the fable of Leda and the Swan.

He was a contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael. Da Vinci is held up as the prime example of a Renaissance man, certainly deserved, but until I read this book, I'd forgotten just how much alike he and Michelangelo were in the breadth of their abilities. These three talented men knew each other, but had little to do with each other. Michelangelo was such a loner. He was always so focused on his current project and usually pining for other projects already bubbling in his mind. By the time Mich (after spending this much time with him I feel I can take a few liberties with a nickname) died, he had 80 years worth of projects designed and ready to be made.

"Man Passes. Only works of art are immortal."

You will feel like you know Michelangelo by the time you finish this book. Irving Stone casts his spells and puts flesh on the bones of a long dead artist and made me feel like I was walking the streets of Bologna, Florence, and Rome, with my hand on the shoulder of a genius. So much so that at one point I blew my nose and found only marble dust in the tissue. **"I'll put my hand in fire"** if it's not true. I was most impressed with Michelangelo's work ethic and perseverance. His ideas consumed him, but even when he had to leave his true calling because of the whims of more powerful men, whatever task they asked him to do, he did it to the very best of his abilities. Even unpleasant tasks he felt had to be done right. They had to be done with artistry and genius.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Solveig Wherrity Granath says

This is a book I got in Florence after having admired the works of Michelangelo. A wonderful reading experience - I found myself reading slower and slower towards the end, because I did not want to finish reading the book! Every time I opened it and started reading, it was like entering a secret gate to 16th century Italy.

To ?σχημο Ρ?ζι Καρολ?να says

Μου π?ρε σχεδ?ν τ?σσερις μ?νες να το τελει?σω. Και στο τ?λος των 776 σελ?δων ?πιασα τον εαυτ? μου να παραπονι?ται, επειδ? το ?ργο αυτ? δεν ?ταν μεγάλ?τερο σε ?κταση, ?θελα ακ?μα περισσ?τερες πληροφορ?ες, ακ?μα περισσ?τερες λεπτομ?ρειες – κατ? β?θος ε?χε γ?νει κομμ?τι της καθημεριν?τητ?ς μου σε σημείο που δεν ?θελα να τελει?σει.

Δεν αρκεί να βιβλίο για να χωρέσει το μέγεθος της καλλιτεχνικής ιδιοφυΐας του Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), την πολυπλοκότητα του χαρακτήρα του και την ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση του τερστίου έργου του. Ο Irving Stone κάνει μια εξάσσια δουλειά στη μυθιστορηματική αναπαράσταση της ζωής του σπουδαίου γλύπτη και ζωγράφου που μας χρίσε αριστουργήματα όπως η Pietà της Βασιλικής του Αγίου Πέτρου, τον γιγάντα Δαβίδ της Φλωρεντίας, τις τοιχογραφίες της Cappella Sistina, και σηματοδότησε με το έργο του την εποχή του Ουμανισμού και της Αναγέννησης με όλες τις αντιφάσεις, τις συγκρούσεις και τις πολιτικές και πολιτισμικές παραμέτρους που τη χαρακτηρίζουν.

Δεν είναι μόνο το βιβλίο αυτό καθαυτό αλλά το έργο του ίδιου του καλλιτέχνη που, ακολουθώντας τα γεγονότα της ζωής του, μπρέσα να γνωρίσω (χρησιμοποιώντας και άλλες πηγές προκειμένου να το κατανοήσω ακόμα καλύτερα). Ο Irving Stone καταφέρνει να αναπαραστήσει την εποχή και τα γεγονότα με τήρηση πιστότητας και τήρηση αληθοφάνειας, ώστε τελικά δημιουργεί τη ψευδοσθήση πως πρόκειται για αποτέλεσμα όχι απλώς εμβριθούς μελέτης και ρευνάς, αλλά για βιωμένη πραγματικότητα ενός αυθεντικού μέρτυρα. Πώς αναφέρει και ίδιος στο σημείωμα που παρατίθεται στο τέλος του μυθιστορήματος:

«Αυτό η μυθιστορηματική βιογραφία στηρίζεται σε πολυετή ρευνα των πηγών, ζώντας και μελετώντας, στη Φλωρεντία, τη Ρώμη, την Καρράρα και την Μπολόνια. Το έργο ξεκίνησε όχι χρόνια πριν από τη συγγραφή του, ήταν απρόκλητα πρόσβαση στις 495 επιστολές του καθώς και στα αρχεία και τα συμβόλαιά του [...]»

Στα δεκατρία του ο Michelangelo, μαθητεύει στο εργαστήρι του ζωγράφου Ghirlandaio και εκπαιδεύεται στην τεχνική της νωπογραφίας (fresco). Γιος ενός στριφνού και ξεπεσμένου αστού με ευγενική καταγωγή, ορφανός από μητέρα, γοητεύεται από πολλούς νέους από την υφή του μαρμάρου, μέσα από το οποίο θύλει να απελευθερώσει, τις παγιδευμένες μορφές, που σύμφωνα με την νεοπλατωνική κοσμοθεωρία του, ήδη προπύρχουν κρυμμένες εντός της ακατέργαστης πρώτης γλής. Τα δύο κύρια ρεύματα στη Φλωρεντία της εποχής ασκούν επάνω του τερστία επιρροή:

Από τη μία ο Lorenzo dei Medici, ένας σπουδαίος πολιτικός και πνευματικός ηγέτης συγκεντρώνει στην αυλή του νεοπλατωνιστές φιλοσόφους, με το ραβμά να μετατρέψει τη Φλωρεντία σε μια δεύτερη Αθήνα, χοντάς στη διθεσία του πνευματικούς ανθρώπους όπως ο Marsilio Ficino, ο Cristoforo Landino, ο Angelo Poliziano, ο Picco della Mirandola, ο Δημήτριος Χαλκοκονδύλης κ.α. Από την άλλη πλευρά δεσπίζει ένας φανατισμένος, παρόφρωνας Δομινικανός μοναχός από τη Φερράρα, ο Girolamo Savonarola που κρυπτε την απύλυτη αποχή από τα εγκόσμια, την απήχθεια του για την τέχνη και τη πνευματική ζωή της εποχής της. Και οι δύο πλευρές παρ' τις θεμελιώδεις αντιθέσεις τους, επιθυμούσαν τη μεταρρύθμιση της εκκλησίας της Ρώμης ή οποιαδήποτε από μια σειρά διεφθαρμένων παπών είχε αποκλίνει από τον πνευματικό της ρόλο (γεγονός που οδήγησε μετέπειτα στη διαμαρτυρία του Λουθήρου και τη δημιουργία της Ισπανικής Ιερής Εξέτασης).

Ο Lorenzo dei Medici αποφασισμένος να αποκτήσει τη δική του σχολή γλυπτικής φέρνει ως δόσκαλο τον υπέργηρο Bertoldo di Giovanni, μαθητή του σπουδαίου φλωρεντινού γλύπτη Donatello και τον εγκαθιστά στον κήπο του παλατιού του. Στο πλάνο του, ο νεαρός Michelangelo, μέσα σε αυτόν την μαρμαρινή Εδέμ, θα πρέπει να πράττει τα μαθήματα, ξεκινώντας από το σχέδιο στην επεξεργασία επιφάνειας του χαρτί και τα προσχέδια από κέρ και πηλ, για να περάσει στη δημιουργία των πρώτων ανγλυφών έργων του καθώς και στα πρώτα πλάρως τρισδιάστατα γλυπτά του.

Δύο παρόγοντες παίζουν σπουδαίο ρόλο στην τεχνική του καλλιτέχνη. Από τη μία η μελέτη των αρχαίων ρωμαϊκών γλυπτών, που συχνά ανασκρόνταν από την γόνιμη ιταλική γη και κοσμούσαν

τις αυλές των ευγενών και πλουσίων, και η μέλη της ανθρωπίνης ανατομίας – την οποία σποδίασε στα κρυφά, στο μοναστήρι του Santo Spirito, το οποίο λειτουργούσε και ως νοσοκομείο, με τη βοήθεια του ηγούμενου Bichiellini. Τα γλυπτά του σφύζαν απ' ζωή και αναπαριστούσαν το ανδρικό σίμα στην παραμικρή του λεπτομέρεια.

Το ανδρικό σίμα αποτέλεσε για τον καλλιτέχνη ένα αντικείμενο λατρείας. Ο Irving Stone δεν εστιάζει σχεδόν καθόλου στους ομοφυλοφιλικούς πρώτες του καλλιτέχνη, στην ουσία τους παραβλέπει σε βάθος που να στερείται ένα σημαντικότατο ερμηνευτικό κλειδί για την κατανόηση του έργου του. Για να λάβουμε τα πράγματα με το νόμο τους. Ο Michelangelo έκανε πρώτα με νεαρούς άνδρες, το ομολογεί. Άλλωστε και στα ποιήματά του (το γνωρίζουν άλλωστε και οι σύγχρονοί του – βλέπε λ'βελο του Pietro Aretino):

*La carne terra, e qui l'ossa mia, prive
de' lor begli occhi, e del leggiadro aspetto
fan fede a quel ch'è fu grazia nel letto,
che abbracciava, e' n che l'anima vive.*

Τώρα η σάρκα έγινε χίμα, κι εδώ τα κ'καλά μου,
στερημένα απ' τα χ'μορφά του μ'τια και την ώρα αμορφά του
παραμ'νουν πιστά σε αυτόν που απολ'μβανό μάζ' του να πλαγιζώ
σε εκείνον που αγκ'λιαζό και μ'σα στον οποίο τ'ώρα ζει η ψυχή μου.

(ποίημα του Michelangelo για τον θάνατο του αγαπημένου εραστή του, Cecchino dei Bracci).

Σε μια εποχή που το φέσμα της ανθρωπίνης σεξουαλικότητας περιοριζόταν ασφυκτικά απ' τον πατριαρχικό ετεροσεξουαλικό προσανατολισμό και τις περ' σοδομιάς εκκλησιαστικές διδασκαλίες είναι λογικό? Άλλοι οι π'θοι του καλλιτέχνη να διοχετεύονται μέσα στην απεικόνιση του ιδέ'δους ανδρικού κορμίου, το οποίο χρησίμευε ως μοντέλο για όλες τις μορφές, είτε είναι ανδρικές είτε είναι γυναικείες. Ότσι στο Doni Tondo (π'νάκας που εικονίζει την Αγία Οικογένεια) η Παναγία εικονίζεται ως ένα γεροδεμένο αγ'ρι με στιβαρά μπρ'τσα, στην Sagrestia Nuova οι μαστο' των γυναικείων γλυπτ'ν μοιζούν στην κυριολεξία κολλημ'νοι επ'νω σε ανδρικό σίματα, εν' διακοσμού την οροφή της Cappella Sistina με ένα πλ'θος ανδρικών γυμν'ν γνωστ'ν ως Ignudi.

Π'ρα απ' τη γλυπτική, τη ζωγραφική και την ποίηση ο Michelangelo ασχολήθηκε επ'σης με 'ργα οδοποιιάς, οχυρώσεων και αρχιτεκτονικής. Παρ'μεινε υπερδραστήριος και δημιουργικός ως το τέλος της ζωής του, άλλ' ακριβ'ς αυτό η υπεραπασχ'ληση και η εμμονή του να εργάζεται πρωτ'στος ο 'διος επ'νω στα 'ργα του, αφ'νοντας ελ'χιστα στην επιμ'λεια των βοηθ'ν του, 'ταν εξαιρετικό χρονοβ'ρα και είχε ως αποτέλεσμα να αφήσει π'σω του πολλ' ημιτελή 'ργα, τα οποία ωστ'σο, ακ'μα κι 'τσι 'χουν κ'τι το μεγαλεί'δες (πχ βλέπε Pietà Rondanini το τελευταίο 'ργο που δο'λεψε μ'χρι 'ξι ημ'ρες πριν τον θ'νατό του). 'θελε να ολοκληρώσει το 'ργο του πριν επιτ'ψει στους υπ'λοιπούς να το μελετήσουν γι' αυτό? 'ταν ιδιαίτερα μυστικοπαθ'ς και απεχθάν'ταν την ιδέα να διαρρεύσει κ'τι χώρ'ς την 'γκρίσ' του.

Πεισματ'ρης και επ'μονος συγκρο'στηκε με άλλες σπουδαίες καλλιτεχνικές μορφές την εποχή του, 'πως με τον Leonardo da Vinci (οι δυο θρυλικές, πλ'ον χαμ'νες, τοιχογραφίες στο Palazzo Vecchio της Φλωρεντίας είναι το αποκορ'φωμα του ανταγωνισμού τους) και τον Raphael. Π'τρων'ς του και χρηματοδ'τες του 'ταν πρωτ'στος η πολιτεία της Φλωρεντίας και οι π'πες της Ρ'μης με τους οποίους επ'σης συγκρο'στηκε στην προσπάθειά του να επιβληθεί ως δημιουργός

διεκδικώντας σεβασμό και ικανοποιητικές αμοιβές. Δεν παντρεύτηκε ποτέ, ώστε να παραμείνει αφοσιωμένος στον πατέρα και τα αδέρφια του παρά τις πολλές διαφωνίες και προστριβές που είχε μαζί τους. Στην ηλικία των εξήντα ετών συνδέθηκε με βαθιά φίλη με την διανοούμενη ποιήτρια Vittoria Colonna, η οποία αποτόλυνε γι' αυτόν την πηγή της μπνευσης.

Ο Michelangelo Buonarroti συνβάλλει στην αφύπνιση του δυτικού πολιτισμού. Πείτα απ' έναν λθαργο αίνων. Ήταν ένας απ' εκείνους που συνδεδεσαν τα ξεχασμένα επιτεύγματα της αρχαιότητας με το παρόν της εποχής του. Ο σύγχρονος κόσμος, η εποχή μας πώς τη ζούμε σήμερα, δεν θα ήταν ίδια αν δεν φέραν την υπογραφή ανθρώπων του δικού του μεγέθους:

Michaelangelus Bonarotus Florent(inus) Faciebat.

Αν σας ενδιαφέρει να δείτε τα κυριότερα έργα του καλλιτέχνη:

<https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/bio...>

Ακολουθώντας τους υπερσυνδέσμους και πατώντας επάνω στην εκστοτε φωτογραφία ανοίγει νόο παρήθυρο με διάφορες επιλογές ανάλυσής απ' 25 έως 200%).

Emily says

Even with Art History 101 under my belt, I was shocked to learn of his monumental contributions to sculpture, paint, architecture and even politics. But I was even more inspired by the incredible challenges he overcame throughout all of his 90 years of life. Nothing came easy. What an inspiration! Here is a quote from his death bed:

"Life has been good. God did not create me to abandon me. I have loved marble, yes, and paint too. I have loved architecture, and poetry too. I have loved my family and my friends. I have loved God, the forms of the earth and the heavens, and people too. I have loved life to the full, and now I love death as its natural termination. Il Magnifico would be happy: for me, the forces of destruction never overcame creativity."

It took me 13 months to read this book, and I will miss it (him).

PS: If you are going to read it, make a chart with four columns-Family, Medici, Friends, Enemies. There are many people with long Italian names, and they all remain relevant throughout his life

Alicja says

rating: 4.5/5

I have conflicted feelings regarding this novel. There is just so much to love, so much that has made a profound emotional and intellectual impact on me. And yet in some aspects it seems incomplete, the presentation of Michelangelo Buonarroti's character is lacking a dimension.

I must clarify something before I go on, even though reading this book required research into Michelangelo's

artwork and the politics during the period of Renaissance during which he lived, I am by no means qualified to speak on behalf of the accuracy of the biographical information. All my thoughts below refer to Michelangelo as presented by Irving Stone and discuss his presentation of the character, they are not meant to say anything meaningful regarding the real Michelangelo (especially since I am shamefully quite ignorant of much of the historical specifics of the time period or Michelangelo's life, nor am I one to do more than only make assumptions about a person who lived 500 years ago). Now that I've gotten my little disclaimer out of the way, on to the review...

First, the wonderful... This novel transported me straight into the mind of an amazing artist, drawing vividly emotional passages of a relationship between a sculptor and his marble, an artist and his art. It was beautiful and agonizing (the title fits this novel brilliantly!), it let me experience as close to creating a striking sculpture as my un-artistic self possibly ever could. Stone has a beautiful way with words and he made art alive in his prose, a living, breathing creature of creation. It was breathtaking...

I appreciate a variety of art forms, but have always seemed to be stumped by visual art such as paintings and sculpture. I just can't seem to "see" what others do and that may be tied to my ability of barely being able to draw stick figures. However, I found myself pulling up images of Michelangelo's works of art and staring at them while reading about the process of their creation and the emotional impact on the artist as well as the emotional depth he reached into to create them. I found myself looking at art in a different way, started "seeing" things I've never "seen" before. It helped me open my eyes to art, and not just Michelangelo's. I started looking at other artists' works and found myself having a different set of eyes. I'll never forget this experience and the effect it's had on my appreciation of art.

But beware, unless you are familiar with Italian Renaissance history during that time period, you will need to do research to fully understand what's occurring. Despite this, I enjoyed researching the time period and getting immersed fully into this world. Stone presents a region torn between the old and new. The Catholic Church is being split with the protestant reformation movement, corruption at the highest levels, wars, inquisitions, tensions between conservatives and reformers, freedom of expression/art and modesty/tradition, etc. Michelangelo stumbles through this hectic world with a vision straddling between the Church he was raised with and art inspired by the sculptures and writings of the ancient Greeks; a constant struggle between getting paid commissions and freedom of art. As the powers of the Church push and pull against the old and new, art is being commissioned and burned, appreciated and scorned. Powerful families, like the Medici family, grapple for power bringing wars and discord to Florence, Rome. Stone does an amazing job bringing us right into the fray (although some supplemental information needs to be obtained from additional research).

However, the characterization of Michelangelo seemed incomplete. The most glaring lapse was the confusion surrounding Michelangelo's sexuality. I understand the novel was published in 1961, that the times were different. Honestly, for the purposes of reading a novel such as this I really don't care what Michelangelo's sexuality really was. But it seemed like Stone wasn't even sure how he wanted to present Michelangelo's sexuality so he gave him a confused mix of everything.

(view spoiler)

I get it, homosexuality wasn't as acceptable when Stone wrote the book, especially when writing about someone as famous and admired as Michelangelo (someone who by now is more legend than man). But forcing random acts of heterosexuality in such a half-assed way while the rest of the novel vibrates with homoerotic undertones is frustrating and leaves a scattered and incomplete picture of Michelangelo. It left me exasperated and detracted from the rest of this magnificent novel. Despite my extended rant, I really did love this book and it has made a significant impact on the way I look at art and the Renaissance. I still highly recommend it, warts and all.

Debbie Zapata says

I discovered this Irving Stone title in high school many many years ago, but I had not read the book again since then so it was fresh, new, and incredibly stunning for me. We meet Michelangelo when he is thirteen, and follow him through his almost tortured life until he dies at age 88. In between we see him become an Artist like no other before or since. We learn Art History, Italian History, Vatican History, and meet an incredible number of Popes, all of whom keep Michelangelo on a short leash. I can only imagine what he could have created if he had been allowed to concentrate on the marble the way he so intensely desired to do.

But every Pope, from Julius II to Pius IV, expected Michelangelo to create specific projects just for them. For example, he never wanted to paint the Sistine Chapel, he was ordered to do that job, with the promise that when he was done he could return to his sculpture. He could easily have given less than 100% of himself to the work, but Michelangelo was a true artist. Plus he also knew that *He was a victim of his own integrity, which forced him to do his best, even when he would have preferred to do nothing at all.* So he created a treasure for the ages. And did so every time he was forced away from his one true passion: working the marble.

My reading of the book this time was enriched by keeping my laptop nearby and referring to it frequently. I researched artists whose work influenced Michelangelo such as Donatello, whose bronze David left our young artist speechless when he first saw it. I would stop reading many times just to examine the pictures of Michelangelo's works. Stone has frequent passages describing the thought process as Michelangelo developed his ideas for each piece, then the physical act of creation, where man and stone seemed to merge. (Although I have to admit that the author's descriptions of the actual sculpting did seem a bit over the top. I can understand the creation metaphors, but Stone's intensely sexual language in these sections felt more than a little creepy.) But the point is that to go from the printed page to a computer image of the piece was amazing, and helped me appreciate the details of the artwork, Michelangelo's genius, and even my computer better than ever.

Here is a link to see a full-sized 1910 replica of David placed in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, where the original statue stood until 1873 when it was moved inside the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, where it remains today.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_\(...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_(...)

It wasn't until I saw this picture that I truly realized just how gigantic the David is. Look at the people next to it! They look so tiny! And just think, Michelangelo was not a big burly man, the kind I have always imagined a sculptor to be. He wasn't even a tall, thin man like Charlton Heston, who played the role in the movie of this book.

Michelangelo was only five feet four inches tall, and when working obsessively (the only way he knew how)

he weighed less than 100 pounds of pure muscle and will power by the time he was finished. And yet, he was a true giant of his era and for all time.

Book Concierge says

Audiobook read by Arthur Morey.

Stone's epic historical novel tells the life story of Michelangelo. Stone did extensive research, living in Italy for several years, and using many of Michelangelo's letters and documents found in various archives. He really brings the artist (and his works) to life. While most of us are familiar with his *Pieta* and *David* sculptures, and the *Sistine Chapel* paintings / frescoes, Michelangelo was also an accomplished poet and architect. Stone brings all these elements into the novelized biography.

Additionally, the novel includes much of the politics of the times, from the Medicis in Florence to the various Popes in Rome, it's a fascinating history of the era.

This man was a giant among giants, whose influence on art and architecture is almost without measure. His life requires an epic story. That being said, the novel is incredibly long in order to cover all of Michelangelo's eighty-eight years, and his life's opus. I found his efforts to study anatomy in an era when dissection was absolutely forbidden fascinating, but grew tired of the repetitive references to his search for "peasant models" or insistence on the male nude form.

I may have noticed the repetition more because this was a second reading. I first read the novel sometime in the mid- to late-1960s; I'm fairly certain I read it before the movie, starring Charlton Heston, was released, but maybe it was shortly after that. My rating reflects my recalled reaction at that time.

I do wish there was an "illustrated" edition of the novel, to show some of his works alongside those chapters describing their creation. But I suppose that is what Google is for!

Arthur Morey does a fine job narrating the audio version. At 34 hours in length, it's a significant commitment, but worth it (and you don't have to carry that huge tome around).

Debbie Lazar says

Goodreads crashed on me - I didn't realize the five stars were posted but not my review. You may be wondering why I rated this book so highly.

The book made Michelangelo and his times really come alive for me. I feel like I personally know, like and respect Michelangelo as a person. He was so recognizably human with family issues, rivalries, loyal friends, treacherous friends and, above all this fierce driving passion for his art, especially sculpture. He was born with a gift and a genius that he acted on. He was passionate, cranky, demanding, willful, opinionated, determined, driven, and unwilling to accept anything short of perfection. Yet he did what he needed to do to pay the bills - sometimes setting his pet projects aside for years. For the first time in my life I am interested in visiting the Sistine Chapel to see his painstakingly and brilliantly executed ceiling fresco and to view his

famous marble sculpture of David (with the broken arm).

Plus on occasion I'm a sucker for epic historical novels. Michelangelo lived from 1475 - 1565 which was a fascinating period of history - Christopher Columbus gets mentioned in passing (some guy who recently set sail in three tiny ships westbound to find India), Raphael and so many other famous names from the Renaissance. Michelangelo had no use for Leonardo da Vinci whom he considered to be a society-seeking dandy and snob. I think most of this information is probably true as the book was extremely well researched with lots of primary sources, such as Michelangelo's 400+ letters.

The book also gets inside his head as an artist as he designs and executes all of his work, especially his most beloved marble sculptures. I had no idea there are so many grades of marble and never thought about how arduous it was to extract the right marble out of the Roman hills. Or to move the finished sculptures to their designated locations.

The dense writing and length (760 pages) made it a slog for me to get through - but an exciting slog and I find myself thinking a lot about it. That's why I gave it five stars.

Negin says

This is a thoroughly well-researched historical novel about the life of Michelangelo. What an incredible time in history! Michelangelo was definitely passionate and driven when it came to his art. He finished the Pietà when he was just twenty-five years old! This depicts the body of Christ on the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion.

Detail of Pietà

He finished the statue of David before he was thirty.

Sculpting marble was what he loved most and most of his works were sculptures. He painted the Sistine ceiling alone over a four-year period. He felt driven by God to create.

He also had to face many challenges – and I assume that's what “The Agony” part of the title is referring to. His obstacles included: his money-grubbing family members and all their demands, pettiness, and drama; his own financial troubles; various corrupt popes; as well as wars. I was amazed that he managed to get much done with all the craziness around him.

I can't recommend this book unless if you're eager to learn about Michelangelo, that period of time in history, or if you just love art history. It got excessively long (more than 700 pages long) and I felt bogged down by way too many repetitive details. However, for me it's not the length that bothered me. When it comes to loving books, length is never an issue. In fact, if I love a book, I don't want it to end. This book just didn't draw me in the way that I had hoped. Am I happy that I read it? Yes. Did I love it? Not necessarily.

Some of my favorite quotes:

“God was the first sculptor; He made the first figure: man. And when He wanted to give His laws, what material did He use? Stone.”

“The Tuscan treats stone with the tenderness that a lover reserves for his sweetheart.”

“He had always loved God. In his darkest hours he cried out, ‘God did not create us to abandon us.’ His faith in God sustained him; and now he must make manifest to the world who God was, what he looked and felt like, wherein lay His divine power and grace. His God must not be special or peculiar or particular, but God the Father to all men, one whom they could accept, honor, adore.”

Candy says

A fascinating read! My only regret? That I didn't read it before I visited Rome.... However, it now gives me a reason to revisit Rome, and definitely head to Florence before I forget everything!

This book was written in the 1960's, so I have no idea what has taken me so long to read it. It was recently recommended to me by a friend of mine while we were touring a museum. She mentioned it was one of her favorites, so I put it on my "must-read" list.

Irving Stone brings the characters and those times to life so vividly that I almost felt like I was there. Thanks to the wonders of the internet (and Wikipedia!!), after each chapter I would look up the photos of each one of Michelangelo's creations to help me picture them, as each one of them is painstakingly described in this novel. It helped me to bring this wonderful novel even more to life.

If a plan to visit Italy is in the works (even if it's not...) I highly recommend this biographical novel about a genius that may never be seen again!

Jen says

It took me a while to get through this huge tome (just over a year!)...but once I got into it, I sped through it pretty quickly. The first third took me a year and the last 2/3 took me a couple weeks. Ha. I loved Michelangelo's character. He was so devoted to his art, so passionate, so driven. Witnessing his love for his work was a delight.

It was a bit difficult to keep track of so many names, especially since many were similar over the course of his life...(which Lorenzo are we talking about here?)...But the book is based on fact, so the names are what they are. That didn't bother me so much as all the historical/political/religious background. I just don't find those topics interesting. But they were an integral part of the story, as they dictated so many of Michelangelo's decisions and the entire course of his life.

I have a much deeper appreciation for Michelangelo and his work now. I feel like I understand him. It was a thrill to spend some time inside Michelangelo's mind. I had no idea that his decisions were so often not his own—that he was forced to abide by the demands of various domineering figures, from royalty to several Popes. I feel so badly for him. As an artist myself, I know how unpleasant it is to do work you don't want to

do. They were constantly in conflict with his desires. Also interesting was the fact that he lived such a long life despite quite consistently not taking good care of himself. Spending hours working nonstop in the studio, unwilling to take the time to eat, for example. Yet he prevailed. I suspect it is his tremendous drive to create that kept him going.

Bonus: some other exciting artists appear in the book too, namely Leonardo Da Vinci and Raphael.

Despite some parts of the book that were slow for me (perhaps not slow for you, if you enjoy religion and politics), I deeply enjoyed this book and I know it's one that will stay with me for a very long time. I'm giving it 4 stars. It really deserves 5, but the fact that it took me a year indicates to me that it could've been a bit better yet, from my personal perspective. It's a brilliant book, and definitely a must-read for any art lover. If you can listen on audio, so much the better. The narrator was phenomenal and imbued Michelangelo's character with such life and charm, you won't want to miss it.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Agony and the Ecstasy, Irving Stone

The Agony and the Ecstasy (1961) is a biographical novel of Michelangelo Buonarroti written by American author Irving Stone. Stone lived in Italy for years visiting many of the locations in Rome and Florence, worked in marble quarries, and apprenticed himself to a marble sculptor. A primary source for the novel is Michelangelo's correspondence, all 495 letters of which Stone had translated from Italian by Charles Speroni and published in 1962 as I, Michelangelo, Sculptor. Stone also collaborated with Canadian sculptor Stanley Lewis, who researched Michelangelo's carving technique and tools. The Italian government lauded Stone with several honorary awards for his cultural achievements highlighting Italian history.

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Ericka Lutz says

Oh good lord. No wonder I'm reading this book so slowly. I have to keep putting it down and fanning myself. Here's the young Michelangelo carving marble for the first time:

"He had removed the outer shell. Now he dug into the mass, entered in the biblical sense."

Really? He's fucking the marble? Apparently, yes...

"In this act of creation there was needed the thrust, the penetration, the beating and pulsating upward to a mighty climax, the total possession. It was not merely an act of love, it was the act of love: the mating of his own inner patterns to the inherent forms of the marble; an insemination in which he planted seed, created the living work of art."

Does anybody have a cigarette?

Two weeks later: Finally finished. Four stars -- as promised, it's full of agony, it's full of ecstasy. It's very full of history! Very enjoyable, and I learned a huge amount! But the writing is just so overwrought that I removed a star.

Mihaella says

I took delight in the legend, I cherished just as much the reality. A remarkable, wonderful and true story-telling about Agony and Ecstasy. And, to the same extent, I liked the constant striving to split up from the existence of this demiurge the exact detail from the legend itself.

And yet, however impressive is in its proportions the list of titles of books dedicated to the life and creation work of the great Florentine artist, despite researches and although numerous papers have been brought out to light in the nearly five centuries that separate us from his death, we cannot help looking with astonishment at the personality of the one who is gloriously identified with the era of passion and of striving to the truth, which is the Renaissance.

The legend perhaps took birth on that day of September 19, 1510, when Pope Julius II commanded to take down the scaffolding from the Sistine Chapel. To the frightful eyes of those present it was revealed a real struggle of the man and the universe. His creation, the unravelling of the elements from the primordial chaos, the first encounter of shadow and light, the first gesture of man, worn and pained, a whole tragic epopee: this is what brought Michelangelo from the biblical legend and the gift of his time. Not only the bodies of men were tailored down to new canons, healthy and powerful bodies, dominating in a glorious strain the whole scene of Genesis. The inner dimensions of this new god - the man, the creator of the world, were of greatness that surpassed that of ancient or biblical divinities.

A supreme homage to the human personality, the fresco on the Sistine vault was a moment full of significance in the history of the Renaissance. It elevates a passionate hymn of pure, magnificent human beauty ... The artist was confused, even by his contemporaries, with his work, thus becoming a mythical hero. His creation is overwhelming, so the rather short and frail man began to resemble his characters, and crossed the time being represented in the posterity consciousness with a healthy and high athlete, with large shoulders, resembling his Moses and David, and not as Nicodim the short and with crooked nose, the self-portrait of Pieta from Florence. This is undoubtedly a side aspect: the legend of Michelangelo encompassed not only life, but also part of his work.

Irving Stone sought to restore the truth in the most eloquent circumstances of a life of agony and ecstasy. Agony in the original sense of the word, that is of battle, that Milton once used to portray another titan, Samson Agonistes.

As for the sources of Michelangelo's creation, interpretations of its meanings, the writer sometimes inclines (which, after all, is normal within the genre chosen by Stone) to more spectacular solutions. It is tempting, for example, to speak for such a tumultuous, passionate personality about the breaking of any bridge between his creation work and the older traditions. And, since most of the artist's work famous researchers have contributed to the prolongation of the legend, to the preservation of this myth of Michelangelo's existence, or even to some imprecision in the appreciation of his work, it is equally understood that an author of romantic biographies, such is Irving Stone, could not afford to give up the charming pages that such an occasion could have provided him with.

The ideal of the artist approaches that of Donatello, rejecting the picturesque and gentle in the art of his first master Ghirlandaio. It has Giovanni Bertoldo as master of the art of sculpture, who was Donatello's apprentice. Along with the modest Bertoldo, his 15th-century masters will be the sculptors of the Greek and Roman antiquities, whose works will have the opportunity to contemplate them in the gardens of Lorenzo de' Medici. From this happy meeting, led by the scholars gathered around Magnifico, the first works of Michelangelo appeared.

Angelo Poliziano, the Florentine humanist, urged him to carve a "Fight of the Centaurs", a subject detached from the friezes of the ancient Greek temples. There was the meeting of the young artist with Plato's ideas, a meeting where, in the footsteps of famous celebrities of Michelangelo, Irving Stone was referring. The remark is old, it was made by Vasari and Condivi, sculptor's contemporary biographers.

At Michelangelo, tragic comes from the very condition of man, wrapped in a hostile destiny, while his thirst is heading for liberation from the chains in which he is locked by stronger powers than himself. The theme of human suffering as a pained whirlwind crossed the entire work of the Titan. The "dying slave" is a symbol of this Renaissance period illustrated by Michelangelo. The resignation of the saint Sebastian, pierced by the arrows, is otherwise interpreted in the sculpture of 1512. Even though he is not trying to free himself from the chains, a tragic impulse is revealed in the attitude of the one who is destined to death.

Michelangelo has not lived, like Rafael, the serenity of his creation. For him, the ultimate act of releasing the idea from the cover of the stone, the bold flight of thought, often means suffering and sadness. His artistic ideal planted in direct participation in the people's aspirations of his time, was too high for his works, which we are seeing today with silent tinges, have meant something other than steps cut into a hard stone, in the dazzling way to the supreme majesty. He had once dreamed of sculpting an entire mountain, and so even the dome of St. Peter's Cathedral was just a small work of what Michelangelo's genius knew. His despair, embodied in the allegorical statues from Giuliano and Lorenzo's graves, Lorenzo Magnifico's son and nephew, is dominated by the statue of the Thinker, that symbol of victorious reason, which, like the ancient Minerva, carries the fighter helmet.

In Michelangelo's youthful sculpture - David - who defended the freedom of his people, looks stoutly, with an incomparable dignity to his enemy, same as often has seen his enemies throughout whole life Michelangelo himself.

Often, his art has caused him unimaginable physical pain. Followed by the obsession of his own physical ugliness, with his nose deformed by that barbarian blow that made Torrigiani's colleague more famous than his few sculptures in Spain, Michelangelo suffered horribly on the scaffolding of Sistine.

Irving Stone sometimes talks about Michelangelo's creation - as did, especially in the last decades, other commentaries - as an expression of mystic ecstasy. A personalist mystique that would raise to the surface from the turbulent depths of the subconscious images in which the artist recognizes, shattering, a sign that he is chosen to speak in the name of supreme forces. That's what Freud and Merejkovski thought about da Vinci.

Michelangelo is, like all the great creators of his time, a rationalist. Human thinking is, in his opinion, the only force able to uncover nature and man.

Michelangelo's personality is Faustian. Not only in the sense of the untiring search for the truth, the supreme truth, the cosmic, and the human truth; but also in the sense of love for human activity, carried out on multiple plans.

Perhaps, at the time of his death, on that February 1564, Michelangelo, looking at the amazing work he produced during his long life, could have whispered, "Stop, moment, you are so beautiful!"

Mary Kathryn says

In the wake of The Da Vinci Code, the field of art history has had a curious relationship with pop culture, especially mainstream literature. These books remain infinitely more accessible to readers than scholarly writings, and are marketed as if they carry the same amount of factual evidence, but with an enticing story so no one gets bored (overlooking the fact that the subjects were real people, and even as geniuses, were inherently boring).

The result is a public that feels informed, but in fact has a sensationalized understanding of artists as heroes and their work as divine manifestations, which serves no purpose except to sell books.

The Agony and the Ecstasy is no different, except that it predates The Da Vinci Code by about forty years. It discusses the life of Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti, and its depiction of Michelangelo as a divine figure among us, like Giorgio Vasari's, is largely responsible for Michelangelo's popularity today.

So why did I pick up this book in the first place? Simply to make an abstract moral point on a literature-based networking site made up of people with relatively the same intellectual and financial status as myself?

No. I can postulate about the publishing industry's negative effects on our culture's self-perception until the cows come home, but the reason I picked this book up is because I cannot remove myself from pop culture. I read it on the recommendation of art history professors who told me it was upwards towards fabulous. I read it based on comments from family members and friends who talked about the enjoyable experience of artist biography.

What a mistake. The book was published in 1961, a time when our understanding of Michelangelo was

completely different. Part of this was a result of scholars' refusal to accept the homosexual undertones of his work and life due to contemporary morality. Even so, Stone's bibliography is primarily made up of books published in the nineteenth century, which seems to me to be a direct refusal of any real understanding of Michelangelo, ignoring important biographical information revealed about Michelangelo during the first half of the twentieth century (such as the location of his childhood home) and instead selecting certain outdated facts which create a more easily understood narrative.

Yet the purposeful ignorance behind this book is more of a disservice to Michelangelo than other contemporary pop-art history books. A deeper understanding of Michelangelo is neither boring nor confusing but instead gives a more precise explanation for his interest in the human body, muscle and flesh, passion, death, intense joy, melancholy, stone, resurrection, and other ideas left untouched by his contemporaries. This picture of Michelangelo is more human, more relatable than that portrayed by Stone's novel, which inherently blocks the reader from truly understanding Michelangelo and instead forces them on their knees at the altar of a cultural genius.

Alex says

I liked the book. I found 3/4 of this book really great and captivating. the last fourth was still ok, but in comparison to the first part, which was more detailed, was a bit dissapointing. It is of course very complicated to cover almost 90 years in only 800 pages (this old romanian edition) but Irving Stone still did a good job. With this book in mind, i am sure next time when I visit Florence and Rom I will look at all these marvels with a different eye.

So I liked it, but I found the book about Van Gogh way more emotional. This and the last 1/4 explain the four stars.

Judy says

My reading list for 1961 started with this fictional biography of Michelangelo. It was the #1 bestseller that year, demonstrating that readers found a huge fat book about a renaissance artist worthy of their time and dollars in the early part of such a momentous decade.

The whole novel is a moving testament to art, artists, and the creative life. Michelangelo was never as famous or wealthy as other artists during his lifetime. For one thing, he was not a good businessman and cared not a whit for money or comforts. Even so, he was the sole support of his father and brothers. He lived only to carve marble and later to paint.

He was fortunate to have the backing of the Medici family in Florence while still a young man just starting out. However the Renaissance was a turbulent time subject to fanatics like Savonarola and rather rapidly changing Popes. In fact, those Popes were his nemesis throughout his life.

Despite all, he broke new ground in sculpture and created those lasting works we still revere today: the David statue, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the dome of St Peter's Cathedral, and many more. His drive to

create art was more enduring than any political insanity. He simply could not be stopped or contained.

This is not to say he didn't suffer. Bouts of despair and depression could paralyze him for months at a time but he rose again and again from the emotional ashes only to create something even more wondrous.

Naturally I found his agony and his ecstasy inspiring. I have believed for a long time that no amount of oppression can kill the urge to create, but it is always an uplift to read about real examples of that belief.

I recommend this book to anyone who walks a creative path in life.

Gul says

It's a brilliant & thoroughly researched account of a multi-talented artist who suffered and worked till extremities. Michelangelo's life and his artwork is truly inspiring. He did everything what he believed he could not or should I say he was made to do it by pontiffs. Nonetheless, he excelled in everything. Too many Italian names while reading becomes a little annoying but then I got used to it gradually. Highly recommended.

Chrissie says

Finished: I am giving this 4 out of 5 stars. I learned a lot and this book will push me on to reading more about Italy in the 1500s, more about the Medici, more about the Borgia family, more about the Popes, more about Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. History was made VERY interesting. It was not difficult to keep track of the numerous people. It isn't necessary to keep a list of friends, foes, family and Medicis. The reader learns a lot about the internecine religious battles of the times. And of course you learn about Michelangelo. He became very real to me. I really did come to care for him. I admire his passion for sculpture, his determination to do any job, whether he liked it or not, to his best ability. I admire his loyalty to his friends and family. Why not 5 stars? Well that is because the writing style had no magic. It didn't sparkle. You get a history text book, albeit engagingly told.

Through page 551: Previously I said that I was not really drawn into caring about the main characters. That is no longer true. I totally love Michelangelo. Wow, what a guy. My heart bleeds for him.

Through page 501: If the Pope wants you to make a bronze statue, well then you make a bronze statue. If the Pope wants you to paint, what choice do you have but to paint! I admire Michelangelo's attempts to oppose Pope Julius II. And now I finally understand what pushed Michelangelo from marble to painting..... I actually feel sorry for Michelangelo. Also the competition between, Michelangelo and da Vinci was illuminating. The competition and how it was resolved says a lot about both artists.

Through page 392: I am just wondering, how does Stone know so much about Michelangelo's thoughts behind each sculpture. For Michelangelo's David it is said:

"For him(Michelangelo), then, it was David's decision (to kill Goliath) that made him a giant, not the (actual) killing of Goliath."

How does Stone know Michelangelo's inner thoughts? Maybe notes at the end will clarify. Probably they are simply plausible conjectures, but I am not so sure I am convinced of their veracity. This is nothing new. An art critic's in-depth analysis often drives me crazy.

Even though I have a critical mind, it doesn't mean I am not enjoying the book.

Through page 336: I love the following quote. Michelangelo has just shown his brother, Buonarroto, his Bacchus statue. His brother's sole reply was to ask if people liked it.

"That was all. Michelangelo observed to himself, 'He doesn't have the faintest notion of what sculpture is about. His only interest is that people approve of what I have done, so that I can be happy, and get more work.....none of which he will ever understand. He is a true Buonarroto, blind to the meaning of art. But he loves me.'"

A good definition of familial love and relationships.

This book is a delightful learning experience, but one does not fall in love with any of the characters. That is OK. What you get from the learning is enough. You respect Michelangelo and admire his dedication.

Through page 293: It is well-known that Michelangelo was a homosexual. It is a bit disturbing that this side of his character is not clearly revealed. If this isn't discussed, what else is missing? THAT is what has been bothering me! His homosexuality is only subtly revealed in the following quote:

"One afternoon Leo asked, 'Wouldn't you like to sketch some women? There are several baths for both sexes in the city walls (Rome), run by prostitutes, but with quite respectable clientele.'"

Michelangelo replies: "I have no interest in the female form."

"You're summarily dismissing half the figures in the world," answers Leo.

And Michelangelo counters: "Roughly, yes.But I find all beauty and structural power in the male. Take a man in any action, jumping, wrestling, throwing a spear, plowing, bend him into any position and the muscles, the distribution of weight and tension, have their symmetry. For me, a woman to be beautiful or exciting must be absolutely still."

Leo jokes, "Perhaps you haven't put them into the proper position."

"Michelangelo smiled. 'Yes, I have. I find it a sight for love but not for sculpture.'"

So far that is as close as one gets to the question of Michelangelo's true sexual appetite. Hmmph! I also find Michelangelo's view irritating!

Another thing I should mention is that the Italian names aren't the easiest to keep straight. Someone recommended making a chart with people, categorizing them as family, Medici, friend or enemy. This does help, but also add columns for artists, religious and political figures.

Through page 246 of 776: This book does an excellent job of teaching me history about Florence at the end of the 1400s, about the Medici family and about the religious conflicts taking place. This is another book that makes me happy about not being religious. Most importantly it teaches about the strivings of Michelangelo. I

am so terribly impressed by his dedication. Sculpture is ALL he can possibly think about. You stand back in awe reading about what he does to learn how to sculpture. Utterly amazing. I am so glad I have seen the Pietà in

St. Peter's Cathedral in the Vatican City and the Sistine Chapel's ceiling.... I also really have enjoyed reading about Lorenzo Medici, who was his patron, who took him in as a family member. Lorenzo, perhaps not as outstanding as Cosimo Medici, but still a wonderful leader of Florence. Wonderful b/c he truly loved Florence and did his utmost to promote art and beauty and thinking in the city. I wouldn't say the language is particularly exceptional, but the information is excellent. I really don't like Michelangelo's father - a money grubbing individual who couldn't care less about art! And he sired Michelangelo. They couldn't be more opposites in character! Laura, how far have you come in the book.
