



Michelangelo (Romain Rolland Collection)

Romain Rolland

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Dodo Collections brings you another classic from Romain Rolland 'Michelangelo.'

The life of Michelangelo offers one of the most striking examples of the influence that a great man can have on his time. At the moment of his birth in the second half of the fifteenth century the serenity of Ghirlandajo and of Bramante illuminated Italian art. Florentine sculpture seemed about to languish away from an excess of grace in the delicate and meticulous art of Rossellino, Disiderio, Mino da Fiesole, Agostino di Duccio, Benedetto da Maiano and Andrea Sansovino. Michelangelo burst like a thunder-storm into the heavy, overcharged sky of Florence. This storm had undoubtedly been gathering for a long time in the extraordinary intellectual and emotional tension of Italy, which was to cause the Savonarolist upheaval. Nothing like Michelangelo had ever appeared before. He passed like a whirlwind, and after he had passed the brilliant and sensual Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici and Botticelli, of Verocchio and Lionardo, was ended forever. All that harmonious living and dreaming, that spirit of analysis, that aristocratic and courtly poetry, the whole elegant and subtle art of the "Quattrocento," was swept away at one blow. Even after he had been gone for a long time, the world of art was still whirled along in the eddies of his wild spirit. Not the most remote corner was sheltered from the tempest; it drew in its wake all the arts together. Michelangelo captured painting, sculpture, architecture and poetry, all at once; he breathed into them the frenzy of his vigour and of his overwhelming idealism. No one understood him, yet all imitated him. Every one of his great works, the David, the cartoon for the war against Pisa, the vault of the Sistine Chapel, the Last Judgment, St. Peter's, dominated generations of artists and enslaved them. From every one of these creations radiated despotic power, a power that came above all from Michelangelo's personality and from that tremendous life which covered almost a century.

Romain Rolland (29 January 1866 – 30 December 1944) was a French dramatist, novelist, essayist, art historian and mystic who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915 "as a tribute to the lofty idealism of his literary production and to the sympathy and love of truth with which he has described different types of human beings". He became a history teacher at Lycée Henri IV, then at the Lycée Louis le Grand, and member of the École française de Rome, then a professor of the History of Music at the Sorbonne, and History Professor at the École Normale Supérieure.

Rolland's most significant contribution to the theatre lies in his advocacy for a "popular theatre" in his essay *The People's Theatre* (*Le Théâtre du peuple*, 1902). "There is only one necessary condition for the emergence of a new theatre", he wrote, "that the stage and auditorium should be open to the masses, should be able to contain a people and the actions of a people". The book was not published until 1913, but most of its contents had appeared in the *Revue d'Art Dramatique* between 1900 and 1903. Rolland attempted to put his theory into practice with his melodramatic dramas about the French Revolution, *Danton* (1900) and *The Fourteenth of July* (1902), but it was his ideas that formed a major reference point for subsequent practitioners.

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