

TO VITTORIA COLONNA

by: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

When the prime mover of many sighs
Heaven took through death from out her
earthly place,
Nature, that never made so fair a face,
Remained ashamed, and tears were in all
eyes.
O fate, unheeding my impassioned cries!
O hopes fallacious! O thou spirit of grace,
Where art thou now? Earth holds in its
embrace
Thy lovely limbs, thy holy thoughts the skies.
Vainly did cruel death attempt to stay
The rumor of thy virtuous renown,
That Lethe's waters could not wash away!
A thousand leaves, since he hath stricken
thee down,
Speak of thee, not to thee could Heaven
convey,
Except through death, a refuge and a crown.
*Translated into English by H.W. Longfellow
(1807-1882).*

LOVE'S JUSTIFICATION

by: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

Yes! hope may with my strong desire keep
pace,
And I be undeluded, unbetrayed:
For if of our affections none find grace
In sight of Heaven, then wherefore hath God
made
The world which we inhabit? Better plea
Love cannot have, than that in loving thee
Glory to that eternal peace is paid,
Who such divinity to thee imparts
As hallows and makes pure all gentle hearts.
His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
With beauty, which is varying every hour;
But, in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the
power
Of outward change, there blooms a
deathless flower,
That breathes on earth the air of paradise.
*Translation of "Love's Justification" was
composed by William Wordsworth (1770-
1850).*

When the Author Was Painting the Vault of
the Sistine Chapel"

—1509

I've already grown a goitre from this torture,
hunched up here like a cat in Lombardy
(or anywhere else where the stagnant water's
poison).

My stomach's squashed under my chin, my
beard's
pointing at heaven, my brain's crushed in a
casket,
my breast twists like a harpy's. My brush,
above me all the time, dribbles paint
so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!

My haunches are grinding into my guts,
my poor ass strains to work as a
counterweight,
every gesture I make is blind and aimless.
My skin hangs loose below me, my spine's
all knotted from folding over itself.
I'm bent taut as a Syrian bow.

Because I'm stuck like this, my thoughts
are crazy, perfidious tripe:
anyone shoots badly through a crooked
blowpipe.

My painting is dead.

Defend it for me, Giovanni, protect my
honour.

I am not in the right place—I am not a painter.

For further reading of Michelangelo's sonnets see
www.publicdomainreviews.org/collections/the-sonnets-of-michelangelo