

Bernini

The writer of history must combine several different kinds of statements in his account. First of all, there will be some statement upon which all research scholars will pretty well agree. Second, there will be statements that not all historians accept, but which the writer himself/herself has reason to believe are true. Third, there will be some statements that are needed to fill out the account and make a smooth story, even though they deal with matters about which nobody knows very much. Conscientious writers will label these guesses with words such as "probably," or "perhaps"; but to the reader they are all part of the story. There is no way to get out of putting in some of this information if the story is to be smooth. That is why three completely honest historians may give a very different picture of the same period or set of events. A historian is a human being. He/she loves and hates, just as other men/women do. He/she has his/her own beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions, fears, hopes, just as others do. The greatest historians try and keep their own prejudices and attitudes away from their writing. Of three authors that describe Bernini's magnificent works, Franco Borsi, Michael Kitson, and Robert Wallace, only Kitson conveys his own opinionated writings to the reader. Although Borsi and Wallace have a few areas where they let their opinions be known, they put their beliefs aside and write the accounts of Bernini unprejudicely. Now, the analyzation of the writers shall begin. Franco Borsi's book entitled BERNINI, has the most in depth and detailed coverage of Bernini's life, background, and sculpture. Borsi's book praises Bernini as the god of all sculpture and architectural works. The majority of the historian's text is in regard to Bernini's work in Vatican City. Borsi's opinion is that the work Bernini did on restructuring the facade of St. Peter's Basilica had to have been the greatest of his works. He remarks that, "the immensity of the building is not at first apparent due to its balanced proportions and the monumental size of all the works of art it contains." Bernini designed a piazza in the form of an ellipse, bordered by a quadruple colonnade forming a portico wide enough to let carriages pass. The foci of the ellipse are indicated by marble disks on each side of the two fountains; standing on either of these disks you can see only one row of columns, instead of four. Two wings link the colonnades to the basilica: the one on the right ends at Scala Regia and the one on the left ends at the Arco delle Campane. Franco indicates that having this piazza allows the basilica to be even more ominous and capture all that enter through the gates into a state of total awe, before even entering the basilica. Borsi also remarks about the lavish decorations that Bernini provided within and the fact that the basilica owes much of its character to the contributions of Bernini. Here he provides concrete historical references to all the many sculptures Bernini created in the basilica, including the transept crossing, the ornate baldacchio above the site of St. Peter's tomb, Cathedra Petri, and many more. Franco Borsi wrote very factual non-opinionated view of Bernini's life and works. On the other hand, Wallace added a little more opinion to his writing, yet stayed within reasonable confines. In Wallace's *The World of Bernini*, the uses of the words "probably" and "perhaps" signify that the history that he does not know, he is filling in with his own educated opinion of what might have been so. Wallace uses background information about sculpture to help the reader understand just how complicated and advanced Bernini's techniques were. Wallace also devotes most of his book to one area of Bernini's time; his sculpture. His writing indicates that Wallace was deeply enthralled with the magnitude of Bernini's talent to portray emotion and movement. One example, as Wallace points out, is that of the sculpture of

David. Wallace writes that, "for his epic statue of the Biblical hero David, which he conceived and executed in just seven months, Bernini carved a youthful warrior, standing poised over his castoff harp and armor and grimacing with determination. David's every muscle is tensed at the instant before he flings the fatal stone at an unseen Goliath, whose presence Bernini effectively suggests somewhere behind and above the viewer." Wallace states that Bernini's total production of portrait busts is still not definitely known whereas Borsi stated that there were forty two that he had created. Just as this minor conflicting account occurred, so did many others throughout the two books. Although this may seem insignificant, it would make the reader unsure of the true historical past of Bernini. To add to this, Michael Kitson wrote *The Age of the Baroque*, where he most definitely divulges his opinion unto the reader. Kitson devoted most of his writing to his opinion that, "without a doubt the most versatile master of illusionism was Bernini." Kitson remarked about the fact that Bernini described all his most prize details of how to make a statue more realistic, passionate, in depth, or appearing to be moving, in his journal. Bernini described how in order to represent the darkness around one's eye, it is necessary to deepen the marble in that place where it is dark in order to represent the effect of that color, and therefore make up by skill, as it were, the imperfection of the art of sculpture, which is unable to give color to objects. This effect can be seen on Bernini's David and many of his other statues. Kitson points out that another way illusionism was used to enhance the vividness of a work of art was through the devices designed to associate it with the real world of the spectator. For example, Bernini's David was one of the first true baroque statues, for its whole stance and gaze suggest movement beyond the limits of the sculpture itself. Wallace and Borsi also seem to agree with this point, and state it in their books. The popular view of the Baroque is right in this respect: that surprise and spectacle play an important part in its total effect. Although some points throughout their stories may differ, Borsi, Wallace, and Kitson, all agree that Bernini's art was and is the most fantastical display of emotion and faith by means of sculpture, that exists in the world. Due to the fact that I have previously researched Bernini simply for enjoyment purposes, I feel that Robert Wallace wrote the most bona fide account (from a historical point of view) of Bernini's life. Although he did subtly incorporate some of his own conjectures towards Bernini's life, I believe that that is what made the story more interesting and realistic. If the story was straight facts and dates the reader would lose interest quickly. Wallace wrote the facts with a little extra, and that is what makes him a historian. He shows that he is a human being and rather than being mechanical, he has feelings and emotions about Bernini's sculpture. If I were to write an account of Bernini's life, I would do it exactly the same as Robert Wallace who wrote *The World of Bernini*. By correct definition, a historian is a writer of histories or an expert in history. But I tend to think there is more to the job. I think a historian has to be able to put feeling and emotion into the book to make the history come alive. Franco Borsi, Robert Wallace, and Michael Kitson, have all written detailed accounts of the life of the breath-taking Bernini. They all agree that Bernini was and is the true master of baroque art. To many historians, baroque marks a prolongation of Italian Renaissance realism and pictorialism, though classic calm and purity are not evident in Bernini's major works. Bernini's masterful way in being able to catch the moment just before his action definitely places him as the expert of the intense expression of what was the baroque period.