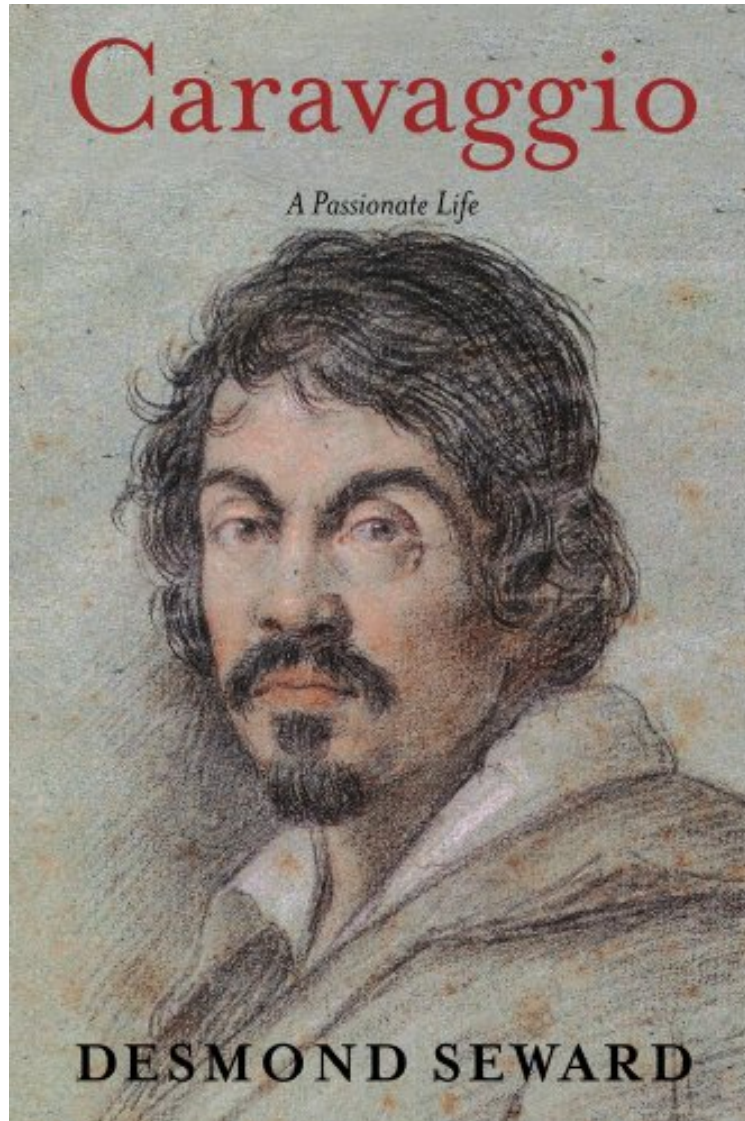


[Download pdf] Caravaggio: A Passionate Life (English Edition)

## Caravaggio: A Passionate Life (English Edition)

Von Desmond Seward

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**Von Desmond Seward : Caravaggio: A Passionate Life (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Caravaggio: A Passionate Life (English Edition):

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A shallow look at a complex painterVon Ein KundeDesmond Seward's look at the life of Caravaggio, a genius with a problematic personality, is well enough written as a string of facts, if far from passionate in its prose or its insights. But beyond the ABCs of the life, Seward offers virtually nothing. His major motivation seems to be "rescuing"

Caravaggio from his reputation as a homosexual, which reputation he attributes ludicrously to Derek Jarman's recent film rather than the stark sexuality of Caravaggio's male nudes. Mr. Seward is of the opinion that the painter could not have been homosexual, because he was devoutly religious, in fact a quotidian exemplar of counter-Reformation Catholicism. Apparently it has not occurred to Mr. Seward that Caravaggio could have been \*both\* homosexual and devoutly Christian, or that his difficulties as a person--his numerous duels, brawls, conflicts, assaults--may have arisen from the conflict between his sexuality and his faith, or between his sexuality and the dictates of his Inquisition-period church. But other than repeating his assertion endlessly, Seward offers no particular evidence one way or the other as to Caravaggio's sexuality, and no meaningful explanation of his own for the painter's repeated confrontations with his peers. In fact, the author's take on the pictures is as superficial as his understanding of human sexuality. He repeats fairly ludicrous proto-Christian interpretations of the paintings, then dismisses contrary interpretations out of hand. Seward pooh-poohs post-Freudian analysis of the pictures without, apparently, stopping to consider the psychosexuality of the paintings themselves. Of course, Seward is himself a post-Freudian, if not a psychological critic, and he seems himself to be obsessed with the notion that Caravaggio was obsessed with decapitation. (Could Caravaggio possibly have been obsessed with the idea that he himself could be decapitated if his homosexuality were known?) All in all, the book is useful only as a recitation of the facts of the painter's life. It absolutely fails the promise of its subtitle: "A Passionate Life."

1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Disappointing biography

Von looksandwords I decided to write a review of this book because I was mistakenly encouraged to acquire it from the above positive reviews. I found this volume entirely lacking. In terms of discussions of Caravaggio's paintings, you can find more erudite reading elsewhere, including from the hand of Sister Wendy (I'm not kidding!). Regarding the artist's life, in this account Caravaggio is but a pale specter lost in the obscurity of what little information Desmond Seward could accumulate. Where there was no information, the author was bereft of anything to say. This was also the case in describing the colorful world of the Italian baroque, a larger subject that should have resulted in better evocation. What was particularly lamentable about this book was that Seward had taken upon himself to prove that Caravaggio was heterosexual. It is a leitmotif that hammers through the entire text with a persistent, numbing thud. Instead of taking on over two decades worth of scholarly debate on the epistemology of the closet and why so many people think Caravaggio was gay, Seward only draws upon Derek Jarman's fantasy movie about Caravaggio. When analyzing the preponderance of anecdotal evidence that Caravaggio was probably gay, or at least bisexual (which is in itself illuminating as there is already so little information about his life), Seward summarily dismisses the stories as mere hearsay. Because he gives so little information on Caravaggio's life, we are left with the paintings, which speak volumes. However, when the author is faced by the image of St. Francis in ecstasy while laying in the lap of a beautiful, male angel, or when examining the multitude of fair boy beauties, Seward declares that these images are a result of Caravaggio's bowing to his patrons' neo-Platonist tastes. Strangely, Seward later discusses Caravaggio's naturalistic realism, which is the complete antithesis of neo-Platonism. Seward tries to have it all ways and ends up looking like a fool. The last straw is when confronted with the handsome male youth holding a bowl of fruit, his shirt saucily pulled down revealing a naked shoulder and sensual neck, Seward says only that the meaning of this image is unknowable. That may very well be so... for a short-sighted, heterosexual male. Given the remarkably vibrant hero of the story, as well as the fascinating times, this book's greatest crime is its cold, graceless prose. Seward has said that he was inspired by the Count of Monte Cristo in writing this biography, but Seward's book has none of the sweep, beauty, nor heart-pounding sense of life that you find in Dumas' work. The only redeeming virtue in Caravaggio: A Passionate Life is its brevity. If you want the Cliff Notes version of Caravaggio's life and times, this can be an adequate place to start, as long as you're prepared for the author's shortcomings. For more insightful writing on Caravaggio's life and works, I suggest you search elsewhere.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A compelling and colorful look at Caravaggio's life

Von Ein Kunde As a longtime fan of Caravaggio's works, I found Desmond Seward's biography to be fascinating and informative. Seward fills his book with wonderful details that help flesh out the social milieu of the artist's lifetime, a picture of a world as violent and yet fervently religious as Caravaggio himself. The writing is crisp and colorful, never failing to evoke the various settings in which Caravaggio lived. I thought perhaps Seward was a bit too fastidious about the possibility of Caravaggio's homosexual side, but on the other hand I appreciate the way Seward rescues Caravaggio from the PC types who would try to claim Caravaggio as a gay icon when he was certainly not exclusively so; nor did the artist live in an era when such personality distinctions were made. I also like the emphasis Seward placed on Caravaggio's faith and his struggles with his temperamental personality, giving us a more rounded picture of a man with many contradictory elements in his character.

**Kurzbeschreibung** The greatest painter of the Italian Baroque, Caravaggio was also a quicktempered, murderous swordsman. Few artists have had a police record like his. When painting, however, he became a mystic. The models for his Virgins and his saints were prostitutes, but his pictures are deeply spiritual. At the height of his fame, just after

painting the Pope's portrait, Caravaggio killed a man in a duel and had to hide for his life in the wild hills outside Rome. Outlawed, he became a Knight of Malta but, for half-killing a fellow knight in another duel, was thrown into a dungeon from which he escaped, leaping over the prison walls with a rope. After fleeing along the coast of Sicily on small boats, pursued by a nameless enemy, he was caught in a Neapolitan brothel by his enemy's assassins and left for dead, so disfigured by sword cuts that he was unrecognisable. Trying to return to Rome, he was shipwrecked, mistaken for a notorious bandit and arrested, before dying on a Tuscan beach in mysterious circumstances when he was still only thirty-eight. All this time he had been painting furiously, in cellars by lamp light, pictures that are masterpieces. Some must still await rediscovery. Was Caravaggio a homosexual, whose religious scenes are secretly suffused with homoeroticism? What were the causes of his self-destructive binges and endless brawling? Did the Knights of Malta murder him? Just where did he die and where was he buried? Making use of very recent discoveries in Italy and elsewhere, Desmond Seward answers these questions. His book is at the same time a gripping adventure story and a study of a moody, violent genius, playing dramatically on the contrast between wonderfully creative art and a vicious private life. It uses both the pictures and contemporary crime reports to peer into Caravaggio's mind. "Seward does a fine job of piercing together circumstantial evidence of the painter's turbulent life, while skilful juxtaposition of Caravaggio's personal narrative and art illuminates the origin of his dramatic style." Kirkus "Seward does a good job of bringing together recent scholarship and background material on Caravaggio's milieu." Michael Ybarra, Boston Book "Seward ... seeks to clarify the facts and establish a context for the shaping of Caravaggio's notoriously tormented sensibility. He spares no gruesome details in his staggering descriptions of the plague years, during which young Caravaggio lost most of his family, or of the treacherous streets of Rome where nightly knifings and daily public executions made for a macabre world ... Seward's emphasis on Caravaggio's religious convictions goes much further in explicating the power of his art and the nature of his soul than speculation about his sexuality." Donna Seaman, Booklist "he has written a well researched biography of Caravaggio which, in his own words, "Uses the pictures to peer into his mind." Aimed at the general reader, rather than the specialist, it certainly succeeds ... In many ways his treatment is reminiscent, as he admits, of Peter Schaffer's treatment of Mozart in 'Amadeus'." Donald Lee, The Art Newspaper "Seward's scholarship is pointed, unpretentious, often amusing ... He does his "modest best" to get inside Caravaggio's head through the use of original sources and an adventurous exploration of the world that Caravaggio inhabited ... Caravaggio is a lively read, and a rewarding one. Seward's "modest best" is very good indeed." Lynn Roberson, Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel. deHistorian Desmond Seward has written an indispensable book on Caravaggio--equally balanced and historically double-checked. But even with all its references, dates, names, quotes, and careful scholarship, this biography reads like a novel that is impossible to put down. Caravaggio, of course, with his "wild, wild spirit" and "very strange temper," according to contemporary accounts, is a natural subject for a galloping narrative. Caravaggio's religious and social status as a Knight of Malta, his protection by a famous cardinal, his street fighting, his fine silk clothes worn until they rotted away, his prostitute models and lowlife friends, his repeated failure to win a commission for St. Peter's, and his bitterness at the rise of mediocre rivals are just some of the ingredients of this good read. What Seward does, to riveting perfection, is convey 16th-century life to the reader. He takes Caravaggio's renowned naturalism and shows us where it came from. He transports readers to Rome in the 1590s, where they explore the old stones of the ancient empire, step over the human excrement in the streets, and witness the pageantry of luxurious horse-drawn carriages promenading through the mud. Readers lurk with Seward in the darkness, light lamps and candles, and feel the damp as the Tiber rises, leaving behind more than a thousand corpses when it finally recedes after a terrible flood. They stand in the crowd and watch as the heads and bodies of decapitated criminals are quartered and hoisted on spears and ramparts for display. Gradually readers get the feeling that Caravaggio's predilection for severed heads was less the product of a tormented imagination than it was simply all in a day's observation for an unwavering realist. --Peggy Moorman

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