A bold, fresh biography of the worlds first modern painter As presented with blood and bone and sinew (Times Literary Supplement) by Peter Robb, Caravaggios wild and tempestuous life was a provocation to a culture in a state of siege. The sixteenth century was marked by the Inquisition and Counter-Reformation, a background of ideological cold war against which, despite all odds and at great cost to their creators, brilliant feats of art and science were achieved. No artist captured the dark, violent spirit of the time better than Caravaggio, variously known as Marisi, Moriggia, Merigi, and sometimes, simply M. As art critic Robert Hughes has said, There was art before him and art after him, and they were not the same. Caravaggio threw out Renaissance dogma to paint with dazzling originality and fierce vitality, qualities that are echoed in Robbs prose. As with Caravaggios art, M arrests and suspends time to reveal what the author calls the theater of the partly seen. Caravaggios wild persona leaps through these pages like quicksilver; in Robbs skilled hands, he is an immensely attractive character with an astonishing connection to the glories and brutalities of life.

My Personal Review:
I would have given this book 5 stars without a moment's hesitation but for one issue. The Author goes into very detailed analysis on 83 paintings. The color plates are limited to 8, and then there are 20 black and white faces equally divided between, Caravaggio, and 4 of his models, Mario, Cecco, Fillide, and Lena. If you are very well schooled in this mans work this may not be an issue. However I, like one other reviewer went out and bought a book so that I could see what the Author was talking about. This is a great read, but as a major work, or definitive work, it is incomplete. I also have read Helen Langdons book, Caravaggio A Life, which was wonderful, and Desmond Sowards, Carravaggio A Passionate Life, which is third amongst these three.
For so famous an individual, it is amazing what an enigma he has remained to history. Without his passion that kept him in touch, and in trouble with the police and a variety of individuals, including, Cardinals, Popes, The Knights Of Malta, to name a few, his already vague personal history would be a stretch to document. There has been some criticism of the Authors extensive expansion upon what some consider very limited evidence. I really feel this is a matter of degree. His entire life history is still being revised, as are the paintings that are attributed to him. According to this Author he signed one painting in his career.

In fairness to the Author he goes on at length at the beginning that this is his hypothesis, he never presents his opinions as being beyond reproach. He also rightfully acknowledges that what we know of this man continues to expand and to change. The Authors ending of Caravaggios life is also called, pure hypothesis. I found it intriguing, but I have read other possibilities that are also not without merit. Based upon his conduct throughout his life, and the extremely powerful enemies he made, the Authors hypothesis is a reasonable one. This does not mean it is the definitive one, and we probably never will know, as the last 500 years has not solved the issue.

Overall this is a solid work, and while the Author does interpret he makes it clear when he is making a hypothesis, and I found them intriguing. A recommended book, that also comes with a strong recommendation to have a visual collection of his work as a reference aid, as it will add immeasurably to your reading enjoyment.

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M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio by Peter Robb - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!