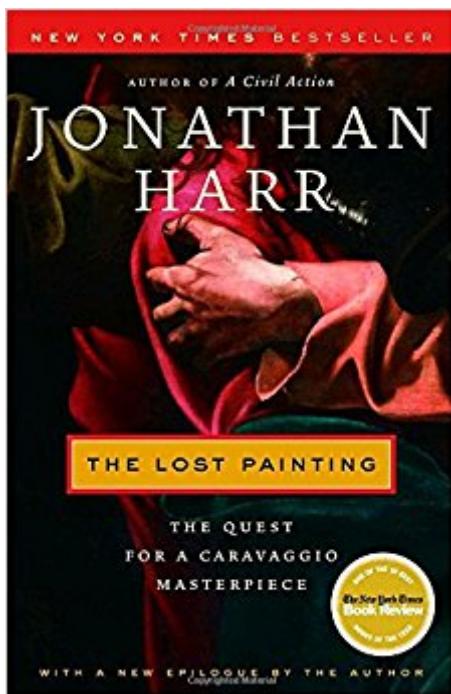


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# The Lost Painting: The Quest For A Caravaggio Masterpiece



## Synopsis

An Italian village on a hilltop near the Adriatic coast, a decaying palazzo facing the sea, and in the basement, cobwebbed and dusty, lit by a single bulb, an archive unknown to scholars. Here, a young graduate student from Rome, Francesca Cappelletti, makes a discovery that inspires a search for a work of art of incalculable value, a painting lost for almost two centuries. The artist was Caravaggio, a master of the Italian Baroque. He was a genius, a revolutionary painter, and a man beset by personal demons. Four hundred years ago, he drank and brawled in the taverns and streets of Rome, moving from one rooming house to another, constantly in and out of jail, all the while painting works of transcendent emotional and visual power. He rose from obscurity to fame and wealth, but success didn't alter his violent temperament. His rage finally led him to commit murder, forcing him to flee Rome a hunted man. He died young, alone, and under strange circumstances. Caravaggio scholars estimate that between sixty and eighty of his works are in existence today. Many others—no one knows the precise number—have been lost to time. Somewhere, surely, a masterpiece lies forgotten in a storeroom, or in a small parish church, or hanging above a fireplace, mistaken for a mere copy. Prizewinning author Jonathan Harr embarks on an spellbinding journey to discover the long-lost painting known as *The Taking of Christ*. Its mysterious fate and the circumstances of its disappearance have captivated Caravaggio devotees for years. After Francesca Cappelletti stumbles across a clue in that dusty archive, she tracks the painting across a continent and hundreds of years of history. But it is not until she meets Sergio Benedetti, an art restorer working in Ireland, that she finally manages to assemble all the pieces of the puzzle. Told with consummate skill by the writer of the bestselling, award-winning *A Civil Action*, *The Lost Painting* is a remarkable synthesis of history and detective story. The fascinating details of Caravaggio's strange, turbulent career and the astonishing beauty of his work come to life in these pages. Harr's account is not unlike a Caravaggio painting: vivid, deftly wrought, and entralling. ". . . Jonathan Harr has gone to the trouble of writing what will probably be a bestseller . . . rich and wonderful. . . in truth, the book reads better than a thriller because, unlike a lot of best-selling nonfiction authors who write in a more or less novelistic vein (Harr's previous book, *A Civil Action*, was made into a John Travolta movie), Harr doesn't plump up his tale. He almost never foreshadows, doesn't implausibly reconstruct entire conversations and rarely throws in litanies of clearly conjectured or imagined details just for color's sake. . . if you're a sucker for Rome, and for dusk. . . [you'll] enjoy Harr's more clearly reported details about life in the city, as when--one of my favorite moments in the whole book--Francesca and another young colleague try to calm their nerves before a crucial meeting with a forbidding professor by eating

gelato. And who wouldn't in Italy? The pleasures of travelogue here are incidental but not inconsiderable." --The New York Times Book Review"Jonathan Harr has taken the story of the lost painting, and woven from it a deeply moving narrative about history, art and taste--and about the greed, envy, covetousness and professional jealousy of people who fall prey to obsession. It is as perfect a work of narrative nonfiction as you could ever hope to read." --The EconomistFrom the Hardcover edition.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In 1992 a young art student uncovered a clue in an obscure Italian archive that led to the discovery of Caravaggio's original The Taking of the Christ, a painting that had been presumed lost for over 200 years. How this clue--a single entry in an old listing of family possessions--led to a residence in Ireland and the subsequent restoration of this Italian Baroque masterpiece is the subject of this brisk and enthralling detective story. The Lost Painting reads more like a historical novel than art history, as Harr smoothly weaves several narratives together to bring the story alive. Though he does not provide an in-depth examination of the painting itself--the book is not aimed specifically at art experts--Harr does include many details for lay readers about restoration, the various methods used to track artwork through history, how originals are distinguished from copies, and an inside view of the art world, past and present. He also discusses various forensic approaches, including X ray, infrared reflectography, chemical analysis of the paints and canvas, and other modern techniques. But most of the book is focused on more primitive methods, including dogged research through

dusty archives and meticulous attention to detail. This entertaining book boasts an engaging cast of characters, all of whom are inflicted with the "Caravaggio disease," including some of the foremost Caravaggio scholars in the world, persistent students, obsessive restorers, and most of all, the artist himself. Mercurial, supremely gifted, and prone to violence, Caravaggio lived like an outlaw and a pauper most of his troubled life. Yet even when he attained wealth and fame--and briefly, respectability--he was still hounded by the law (for murder) and numerous vengeful enemies. Harr does an admirable job of bringing the man alive in these pages while keeping his long-lost painting at the center of the action. --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Given the relative obscurity of 16th-century the Italian baroque master and all-around creative bad boy Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, who after a flare of fame remained relatively unknown from his death until the 1950s, the 1992 discovery of the artist's missing painting *The Taking of Christ* understandably stirred up a frenzy in academic circles. Harr's skillful and long-awaited follow-up to 1997's *A Civil Action* provides a finely detailed account of the fuss. While contoured brush strokes and pentimenti repaints have little to do with the toxic waters and legalese Harr dissected in his debut, the author writes comfortably about complex artistic processes and enlivens the potentially tedious details of artistic restoration with his lively and articulate prose. Broken into short, succinct chapters, the narrative unfolds at a brisk pace, skipping quickly from the perspective of 91-year-old Caravaggio scholar Sir Denis Mahon to that of young, enterprising Francesca Cappelletti, a graduate student at the University of Rome researching the disappearance of *The Taking of Christ*. The mystery ends with Sergio Benedetti, a restorer at the National Gallery of Ireland, who ultimately discovers the lost, grime-covered masterpiece in a house owned by Jesuit priests. But while adept at coordinating dates and analyzing hairline fractures in aged paint, Harr often seems overly concerned with the step-by-step process of tracking down *The Taking of the Christ*, as if the specific artist who created it were irrelevant. Granted, Harr is not an art historian, but his lack of artistic analysis of Caravaggio's paintings may frustrate readers who wish to know more about the naturalistic Italian's works. (Nov. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Jonathan Harr wrote a very intriguing book about the discovery of a long-lost Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*. If you are an art lover who also loves Italian art, this book will entertain you. I qualify. I was fascinated to learn more about Caravaggio's rather rakish life as well as the way lost art is discovered. Harr put the reader in the role of detective. We explored the documents along with

his two young art historians, Francesca and Laura. I felt as if I was there plowing through the old letters and ledgers. I sneezed from the dust and shivered from the cold. That's how intimate the writing was. We also learned how hard it is to restore a piece of work painted in the early 17th Century. Four hundred years of dirt, grime, and much more had to be carefully removed. The professional hands of Benedetti delicately guided us through this process. Even after he, a compulsively careful restorer, made a near-fatal error, the painting survived. But, was it really the lost *Taking of Christ* or simply a well-done copy? That's the question that both the reader and those who discovered it pondered. Many of Caravaggio's disciples copied his work. They did it on commission and their skill level was almost as good as the Master's. So, how to determine if this one was a genuine Caravaggio? Read the book to find out.

For it being a used book it was in great shape, had a couple of bent corners of the book, but other than that it looks new. This is a good interesting story. I actually know the priest (Father Barber) who was instrumental in finding this painting and mentioned several times throughout this book. I had previously read this book a few years ago, but it was a borrowed book and I wanted my own hard bound copy as I wanted Father Barber to sign it; but, hard bound is not being printed any longer so I decided to purchase this through . I'm glad I did. My volunteer helper, also knows Fr. Barber and wanted a book too so I ordered another one for her. Her book was a little more used looking but still in good shape; however, she received a First Edition book. She was pleased with her book also.

This is a real life detective mystery, at its best. Taking place in 3 countries and spanning centuries, personal dramas and age old rivalries culminate in searches through dusty castles and modern science labs to hopefully, possibly give the world back a masterpiece lost for centuries.

Well worth your time to read this book. Kept my interest and kept me reading until I finished the entire story. Introduced me to a world I only vaguely knew about. Wonderful information about how provenance of the art we enjoy so much in museums is verified.

Caravaggio's history is so full of intrigue - and the author weaves great historical research into a tale of competing paintings - each claiming the prime spot on the wall of art.

As art history goes and art mystery hopes to go...this book is a fascinating insiders look at the rarified air of art scholarship and the competitive nature of discovery fueled by chance and passion.

The characters are international, eccentric and well fleshed out. The art itself stays center stage, as it should, and saving images of these paintings by googling them first really helps to cross reference the story with the actual paintings if you are reading the e-book or kindle versions.

When I selected this book I didn't realize that it was factual. It is the story of years of research and , despite this, is told in a light prose which is easy to read. I thoroughly enjoyed the mystery and academia, and can think of nothing better than spending hours in the basement of an Italian provincial villa reading through ancient accounts...(really). If you love art history, have an interest in restoration, or even just fall upon this book by chance while looking for a "good read" you won't be disappointed.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. While reading it, I did not know if was fact or fiction. It was a real thrill to discover at the end, the book is actually non-fiction and based on extensive research and interviews. The author even went to the trouble of learning to speak Italian to better converse with most of the characters appearing in this book. It is written so well with such vivid descriptions of people and places, the reader is brought right into the scene. Personally, I had a hard time putting it down.

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