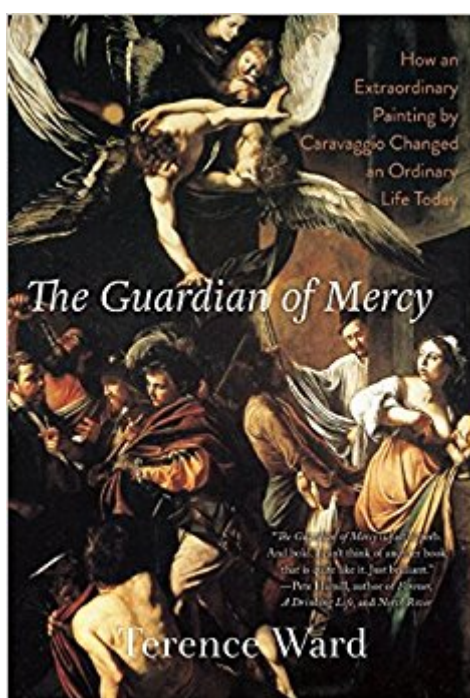


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# The Guardian Of Mercy: How An Extraordinary Painting By Caravaggio Changed An Ordinary Life Today



## Synopsis

Now celebrated as one of the great painters of the Renaissance, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio fled Rome in 1606 to escape retribution for killing a man in a brawl. Three years later he was in Naples, where he painted *The Seven Acts of Mercy*. A year later he died at the age of thirty-eight under mysterious circumstances. Exploring Caravaggio's singular masterwork, in *The Guardian of Mercy* Terence Ward offers an incredible narrative journey into the heart of his artistry and his metamorphosis from fugitive to visionary. Ward's guide in this journey is a contemporary artist whose own life was transformed by the painting, a simple man named Angelo who shows him where it still hangs in a small church in Naples and whose story helps him see its many layers. As Ward unfolds the structure of the painting, he explains each of the seven mercies and its influence on Caravaggio's troubled existence. Caravaggio encountered the whole range of Naples's vertical social layers, from the lowest ranks of poverty to lofty gilded aristocratic circles, and Ward reveals the old city behind today's metropolis. Fusing elements of history, biography, memoir, travelogue, and journalism, his narrative maps the movement from estrangement to grace, as we witness Caravaggio's bruised life gradually redeemed by art.

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## Customer Reviews

“The author provides a rich tapestry that intricately weaves the story of an iconic painter and his influence on the viewer.” • “San Francisco Chronicle” “The Guardian of Mercy is just superb. And bold. I can't think of a book quite like it. Just brilliant.” • “Pete Hamill, author

of *Forever, Snow in August, A Drinking Life, Tabloid City*"I was stunned by Ward's account. This book does everything art writing should do. I am pleased beyond envy." —David Carrier, author of *Proust/Warhol: Analytical Philosophy of Art and A World Art History* and its Objects —Ecstatic and soul-searching. Written with grace, with almost every sentence imparting an epiphany. An electrifying reading experience and a wondrous book on Caravaggio . . . Ward challenges us to undertake soul-work, even if one is a secular reader. Here, reading is an act of empathy and potential readers will read the book with passion and compassion, thereby becoming, in the words of Wallace Stevens, "necessary angels." —Pelligrino d'Acierno, Director of Italian Studies and Professor of Comparative Literature, Hofstra University "Ward's work offers a refreshing look at a once-forgotten but now much-celebrated artistic genius. The author also reveals the subtle and profound ways in which art and life interact. Fascinating reading about a significant artistic figure and his legacy." —Kirkus —Strangely compelling . . . a charming departure from the typical narrative of art history. . . . Ward weaves the story of Caravaggio, who was accused of several counts of murder and condemned to a death sentence by the pope, and who eventually died a mysterious, lonely death, with the contemporary story of a guard . . . stationed at Pio Monte della Misericordia. —Publishers Weekly "Anyone interested in art and its power to change lives will appreciate this thoughtful work." —Booklist —This is a story of grace! Terence Ward's powerful, moving narrative interweaves Caravaggio's life story with those of people in contemporary Naples whose lives are transformed by the power of art and mercy. —Elaine Pagels, Harrington Professor of Religion, Princeton University Praise for *Searching for Hassan*: Astonishing and deeply poignant. —The Washington Post —Quixotic, colorful and amusing. . . . An unexpected ode to Iran. —The New York Times Book Review —Informative and touching . . . provides a marvelously nuanced portrait of Iran. —Francine Prose, *Elle* —Ward describes a more intricate image of a nation caught in a tug of war with itself. . . . He shows the country in all its complexity. —Los Angeles Times —[A] nostalgic, sometimes harrowing pilgrimage. —The New Yorker —A wonderfully tactile, rich book . . . written from the right place (the heart), and with the right kind of search in mind (the search for grace). —Esquire —Ward's sympathetic and humane portrayals of everyday Iranians can help us transcend today's policy papers and State Department briefings in order to find commonalities. —USA Today —Searching for Hassan should be required reading for US foreign policy makers. —BookPage —Ward hooks the reader with his unique past and observant eye. —Detroit Free Press —A

powerful memoir that plumbs the depths of Iranian culture and tradition. . . . A memorable journey. • #150;Library Journal

Terence Ward was born in Boulder, Colorado, and spent his childhood in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Also the author of *Searching for Hassan* (Anchor 2003), he is a cross-cultural consultant who has advised corporations and governments in the Islamic world and the West.

Follow Terence Ward and his wise, adventurous wife, Idanna, on a time-bending, transcultural odyssey through realms both sacred and profane. Their guide is Angelo Esposito, the title character, who gives us access to the underbelly of contemporary Naples. This jack-of-many-trades recounts his hardscrabble childhood (‘‘By staying pregnant, my mother stayed out of jail,’’ an escape from reform school, and fleeting, menial jobs. Steady work with the city’s Department of Sanitation opens the path to salvation. The paycheck earned by drudgery in the ancient sewers of Naples provides for a colorful family with whom we grow more and more intimate, along with the cronies whose contempt for official authority is more than justified. When an enlightened mayor decides to revitalize the city’s cultural heritage, Angelo lands the job of caretaker of the dilapidated Pio Monte Della Misericordia, home to an obscure painting whose history and significance is a matter of indifference to its guardian. Until one fateful day, Angelo’s tale unfolds concurrently with a richly imagined portrayal of the painting’s creator, the mysterious genius known to civilization as ‘‘Caravaggio.’’ Ward depicts his arrival in Naples as a spiritually tormented fugitive and dramatizes his encounters with the common people who will personify the verses of St. Matthew he is commissioned to paint by a remarkable group of young, pious aristocrats. ‘‘You move hearts and bring the Gospels alive,’’ they tell him. Ward’s sensuous, exuberant prose brings life to an exhilarating spectrum of religious and philosophical concepts. The book features a treasure trove of quotes from sages of many eras and cultures. Whatever your faith or degree of spirituality, you will experience the power of art to bring heaven down to earth.

Randomly choosing this book to read was no accident. Usually a student of the Bible, apologetics, current events, and science, I rarely venture into the realm of storytelling, and even less so artistic expressions. Recently my spirit has been drawn to exploring artistic expression (others and my own) as a way to slow down and enhance my sensitivity to the real needs of people around me, and to express Truth in other ways besides a convincing argument. This book was perfect timing. The

description of the revolutionary painting and the lives touched and transformed by it , when applying the Truth to the subjects, inspires the reader to slow down and look a little closer at the ordinary people and situations needing the presence of Christ. The only thing missing was a good image of the centerpiece painting, looking it up online probably won't be sufficient, the travelogue description makes me want to include southern Italy on my bucket list for travel

The weaving of the story of Caravaggio with the life of the ordinary man who "guards" the painting of the seven mercies will captivate the reader. Many will see the divinity of each of us unfold as well.

Using 'sliding doors' to various times, Terence Ward gives the reader a glimpse into the extraordinary Carrivaggio painting, Seven Acts of Mercy, and its impact on the lives of several. Entwined in the narrative, are details of Naples, revelations on the Papacy, and fascinating concepts of Carrivaggio's choice of models. This is a brilliant companion read to complement Pope Francis's declaration of the Year of Mercy. So much packed into this compelling book.

I loved The Guardian of Mercy! I read it in one day, as I couldn't put it down once I started reading it. It is a beautiful book, filled with humanity and love. Any lover of Italy or art history will also enjoy this book. I would wholeheartedly recommend this book - a true story that is very moving and incandescent with the power of goodness in our lives.

Brings a masterpiece of art alive in the same way the art itself does. Ward writes with great fluency and weaves his intersecting narratives right down to the roots of our present day concerns illuminating as he does so the humanity that shines from Caravaggio's eternal masterwork. This is a book with real redemptive power and not to be missed. A worthy followup to Searching For Hassan.

Great descriptions of Naples and culture of the Napolitano Stories of Caravaggio and details of painting and moral implications of this painting. Personalities are developed so it keeps interest in development of story. Easy to read and enjoyable.

Masterfully told, with two stories delicately interwoven between past and present, using the sliding doors of Italo Calvino's 'Invisible Cities'. And prophetically released in 'The Year of Mercy'. Enough to say that it also speaks with illumination, showing the link between the theology of Pope Francis and Caravaggio who both share a deep love of the poor with humanity that enlightens dark times

and, in the end, Pope Francis and the fugitive painter are both 'The Guardian of Mercy'.

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