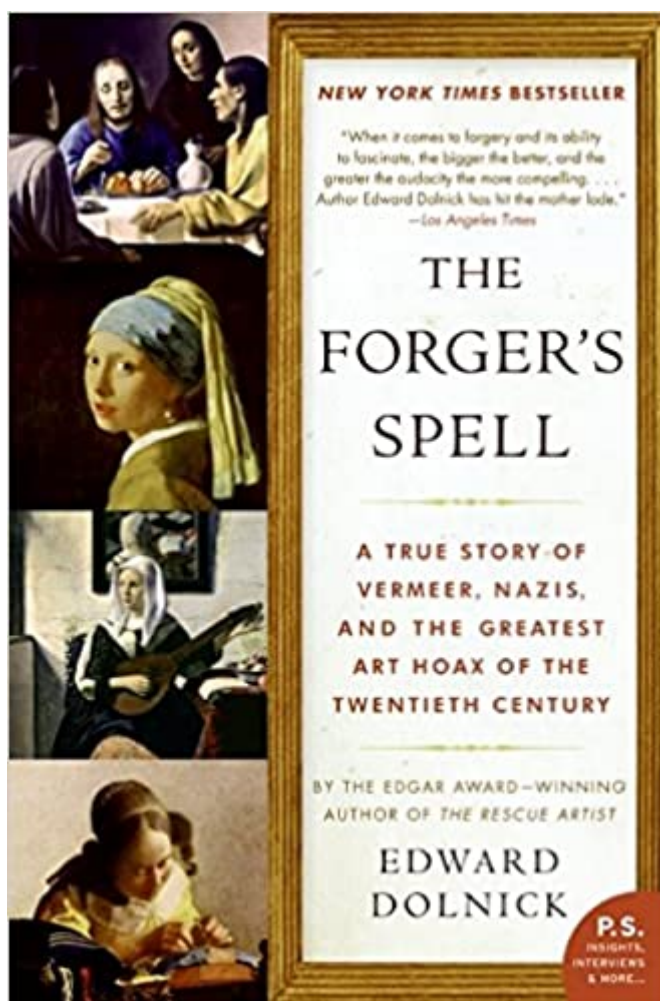


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# The Forger's Spell: A True Story Of Vermeer, Nazis, And The Greatest Art Hoax Of The Twentieth Century (P.S.)



## Synopsis

As riveting as a World War II thriller, *The Forger's Spell* is the true story of three men and an extraordinary deception: the revered artist Johannes Vermeer; the small-time Dutch painter who dared to impersonate him years later; and the con man's mark, Hermann Goering, the fanatical art collector and one of Nazi Germany's most reviled leaders.

## Book Information

Series: P.S.

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial; Softcover Ed edition (June 16, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060825421

ISBN-13: 978-0060825423

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 107 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #201,227 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #123 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Hoaxes & Deceptions](#) #629 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Crime & Criminals](#) #766 in [Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > Criticism](#)

## Customer Reviews

"Idiots!" he yelled. "You think I sold a Vermeer to that fat Goering. But it's not a Vermeer. I painted it myself!" With lines like that, it's clear Dolnick has found the nonfiction equivalent of a Vermeer, buried under other (and more hackneyed) tales of World War II. Critics had nothing but praise for this book, noting that Van Meegeren raised a number of questions about the value of art, especially when the same art critics who had clasped the fake Vermeers to their chests later mocked them as obvious, ugly fakes. At a time when art museums are taking in record crowds, *The Forger's Spell* will undoubtedly cause many a viewer to squint a bit closer at the "masterpiece" hanging on the wall. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

How we love stories of audacious con artists, and doesn't Dolnick love to tell the tales. His

art-theft chronicle, *The Rescue Artist* (2005), won an Edgar Award, and now he vividly portrays a staggeringly successful Dutch art forger. Han van Meegeren was a “dreadful” painter, and yet he managed to fake Vermeer, the most sublime of artists. Between 1938 and 1945, when Van Meegeren was caught, his *Christ at Emmaus* was “the most famous and the most admired Vermeer in the world.” Van Meegeren’s “Vermeers” are actually hideous and trite, yet this dapper, cunning, and patient man bamboozled top critics and museum directors and swindled the world’s most monstrous collector, the Nazi Hermann Göring. How to explain this mass delusion, the “forger’s spell”? Dolnick covers it all, from Van Meegeren’s technical brilliance to his shrewd choice of subject matter to his extraordinary manipulation of egos and perceptions. Dolnick’s zesty, incisive, and entertaining inquiry illuminates the hidden dimensions and explicates the far-reaching implications of this fascinating and provocative collision of art and ambition, deception and war.

--Donna Seaman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I love stories like this: once-well known news events, made obscure by the passing of decades, but brought back to life by a talented researcher and writer. This is one of the most fascinating stories I have ever read, with lessons for all – but particularly for people claiming to be art experts. In 1938, a mildly popular Dutch artist named Han van Meegeren, frustrated by the lack of acclaim that his own art should have generated, decided to show that he was the equivalent of the great Dutch masters of the past. After long research and testing of paints, styles, and aging techniques he produced a painting that appeared to be a previously unseen work of one of the very greatest painters: Johannes Vermeer, who lived more than 200 years earlier.

Vermeer’s most famous painting to most of us today is *\*The Girl with the Pearl Earring.\** Van Meegeren’s forgery was entitled *\*Christ at Emmaus.\** Even though today we might say the picture looks nothing like a real Vermeer, many art experts of the time fell all over themselves praising it. The painting sold for the equivalent of several million dollars in today’s money. Van Meegeren painted and sold several more fakes and made millions more. He might have gotten away with it and we might still have these lower-quality paintings hanging in major museums today, labeled as the works of a master, if he hadn’t run into some misfortune. He sold one of the fakes to Adolph Hitler and one to Hitler’s second-in-command, Hermann Goering. It wasn’t the Nazis who got him in trouble. No, Hitler and Goering were happily taken in by the forgeries. But when the war ended and American, English, and French art experts began going through all of

thousands of pieces of museum art bought or stolen by the Nazis, they found these supposedly priceless Vermeers. And the one in Goering's collection listed Han van Meegeren as the seller. Van Meegeren was facing charges of treason and possible execution for collaboration with the Nazis. His only way out was to confess to the forgeries. But now no one would believe him. Even after Van Meegeren showed all of his techniques to the police and art investigators looking into the case, the art critics and the people who had come to love the forgeries would not believe they were anything but real. Van Meegeren was forced to paint another fake in front of witnesses in order to save his life. This is really several books in one. It includes discussion of the real Vermeer and why he is so popular today and a biography of the forger van Meegeren. But it also includes a history of the Nazis' looting of Europe and a brief biography of Goering. It is also a history of art forgery and a discussion of the inventive techniques used by van Meegeren, including using Bakelite (the world's first synthetic plastic) to artificially age the paintings. Finally it is a study of how easy it is to fool all of us and why it is often easier to fool "experts" than people with little knowledge of the subject.

I was not familiar with the story of the Dutch forger, Han Van Meegeren who made millions before and during WWII from his forged paintings, primarily Vermeers. These were not copies of existing paintings, but creations of his own. His undoing after the war came as a result of a forgery he sold to Goering, which led to his being investigated as a collaborator. He decided it would be better to confess to his forgeries than to be tried as a collaborator. However, he had a hard time getting anyone to believe that he had produced paintings that had been hailed by important experts as real Vermeers. This is a terrific book, which is well-written and brings together many different strands. There is, of course, simply the story of Van Meegeren, which includes the very interesting technical aspects of how he was able to produce paintings that would pass scientific tests to determine if the works were in fact centuries old. The book describes at length the situation in Holland under the Nazis, as well as Goering's and Hitler's obsession with acquiring all of the great art in Europe, either purchasing it with confiscated money or confiscating the art itself. The scale of their plundering was astounding. At times, Goering's seems to have focused more on these acquisitions than on the conduct of the war, to the possible detriment of the Nazi war effort. Dolnick also goes into the psychology of the forger, as well as of the experts who were duped. Altogether, a wonderful book. Jon

This enjoyable, discursive, informative book is a great read. Author Edward Dolnick is a journalist and like all good journalists he has a wide range of interests and is a quick study. The book's topic is nominally Han van Meegeren, a Dutch painter who worked from just after the First World War until just after the Second World War. Although he was competent and made a decent living from his work, the art critics of the day panned his work for being simpering and shallow. So, to make a long story short, he took to forgery, with his main focus being the 17th Century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. This was a bold choice, because only around three dozen Vermeers are known, and were known in the 1930s when van Meegeren started his forgeries. The book discusses van Meegeren's techniques and choices, but also discusses the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and especially Hermann Goering, the Reichsmarschall, second in command to Hitler. In fact, both collected immense amounts of art and sometimes Hitler took what Goering had wanted. It turns out that Goering ended up with one of van Meegeren's "Vermeers," which leads the story into many interesting twists and turns. There are many other sidelights, including the Getty Museum's purchase of a famous, extremely expensive, and fake kouros, a supposedly a Greek statue, as well as stories about other fakes, forgeries, and copies. It is a terrific book and I recommend it highly.

An interesting tale when the author sticks to the chain of events but he gets into the weeds too often. Pages and pages of analysis of how hoax are perpetrated, why people fall for them, etc. Tedious! Also, for some utterly up fathomable reason, the word Decade is always capitalized. Unimportant really but ridiculous and pretentious....much some of the aforementioned parts of the book.

It is a first rate book, well writtenn researched. Due to the unusual circumstances that the forger was caught and confessed, the facts are very authentic. Even with this knowledge, it is very difficult for me to believe that art connoseuir could hail the forgeries as vermeers. Before reading this book, I was amazed with how critics explain the beauty of a picture. I thought they may be talking rubbish. Now my suspicion is confirmed.

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