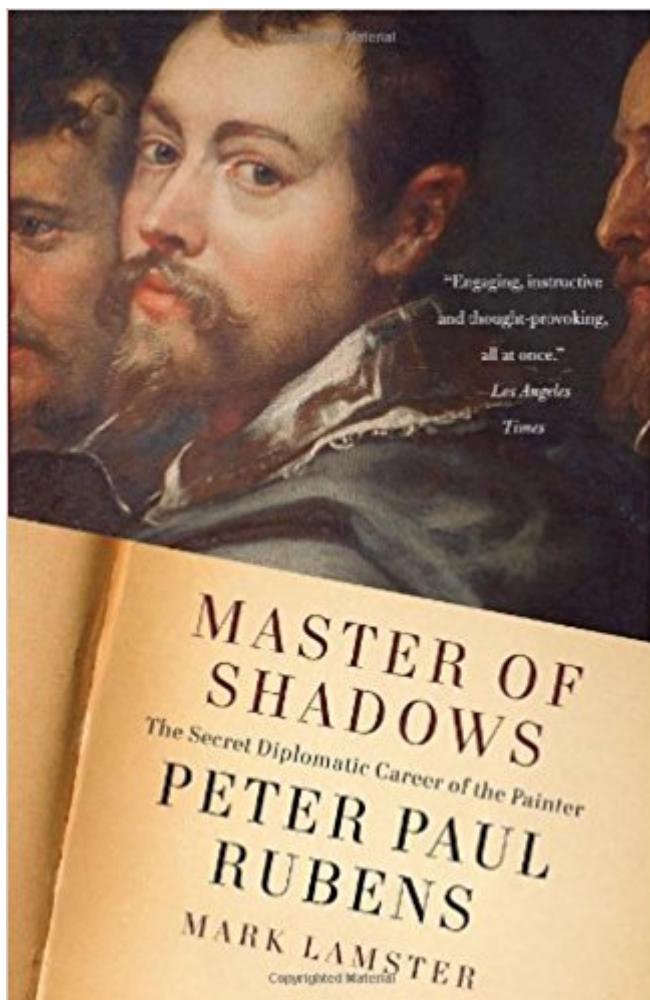


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# Master Of Shadows: The Secret Diplomatic Career Of The Painter Peter Paul Rubens



## Synopsis

Although his popularity is eclipsed by Rembrandt today, Peter Paul Rubens was revered by his contemporaries as the greatest painter of his era, if not of all history. His undeniable artistic genius, bolstered by a modest disposition and a reputation as a man of tact and discretion, made him a favorite among monarchs and political leaders across Europe—and gave him the perfect cover for the clandestine activities that shaped the landscape of seventeenth-century politics. In *Master of Shadows*, Mark Lamster brilliantly recreates the culture, religious conflicts, and political intrigues of Rubens's time, following the painter from Antwerp to London, Madrid, Paris, and Rome and providing an insightful exploration of Rubens's art as well as the private passions that influenced it.

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## Customer Reviews

**Mark Lamster on Master of Shadows** Peter Paul Rubens gives us a lot to think about in his canvasses of rushing color, action, and puckered flesh, so it's not surprising that his work as a diplomat and spy has been neglected. One of my goals in writing *Master of Shadows* was to fill that gap in the record. Here, after all, is an actual Old Master using actual secret codes, dodging assassination, plotting the overthrow of foreign governments, and secretly negotiating for world peace. Certainly, a biographer could not ask for a more compelling subject. Rubens was a charismatic man of extraordinary learning, fluent in six languages, who made a fortune from his art. He never fit the paradigm of the artist as a self-destructive figure at odds with convention. More than

one of his contemporaries actually thought his skill as a statesman surpassed his unmatched talent before an easel. Though it is set four centuries ago, I believe readers will find the Rubens story deeply resonant with contemporary experience. Rubens was a moderate man in a dogmatic time, a pragmatist who spent much of his life working to end a seemingly intractable conflict driven by ideologues. In writing the book, I was routinely astonished by the eerie parallels between his time and our own. The political battles he fought naturally inform his paintings, many of which serve as meditations on the costs and ravages of war. In illuminating this history, I hope *Master of Shadows* will help modern audiences recapture some of the urgency and grandeur of his work--and his riveting life. --Mark Lamster (Photo © Blip Studio) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A Providence Journal Best Read of 2009“Engaging, instructive and thought-provoking, all at once. . . . Mark Lamster is a brave writer. . . . His affection for his subject is so complete—and completely convincing—his style is so gracefully unpretentious and his research is so thorough.” The Los Angeles Times“*A different kind of artist*,”<sup>1</sup> biography. . . . Gripping reading. St. Louis Post-Dispatch“Highbrow and brilliant.” New York magazine“An illuminating look at a side of the great painter usually kept in the shadows.” The Daily Beast“An exhilarating portrait of an age as dramatic and richly toned as one of Rubens’<sup>2</sup> gigantic canvases.” Ross King, author of *Michelangelo and the Pope’s Ceiling*“Imagine that Pablo Picasso, in addition to painting the most famous masterpieces of the twentieth century, had also devoted decades of his life to secret diplomacy aimed at preventing another world war. That is exactly what Peter Paul Rubens, the most revered painter of his era, did in seventeenth-century Europe. Mark Lamster tells this little-known story with a combination of brio and historical erudition bound to appeal to anyone who cares about beauty, passion, war and peace. I couldn’t put it down.” Susan Jacoby, author, *The Age of American Unreason*“In elegant brushstrokes Mark Lamster gives us here a vivid portrait of 17th century Europe and the political intrigue that led to the modern world.” Russell Shorto, author, *The Island at the Center of the World*“A fascinating study.” The Telegraph (London)“When people think of Peter Paul Rubens . . . they probably conjure up images of rosy-cheeked, buxom women, proud courtiers, and grand historical scenes. . . . Mark Lamster does nothing to dispel that familiar impression but a great deal to modify it.” The Providence Journal“Rubens’<sup>3</sup> story

surprises and dazzles.â• Kirkusâ• “This adroitly crafted biography of Rubens brings to life an artist so busy wheeling and dealing with the crowned heads of Europe that itâ•’s amazing he found the time to put brush to canvas. Lamsterâ•’s account engages the student of history as much as it opens the eyes of those who love Rubensâ•’s art.â• Kirkusâ• “Timothy Brook, author, *Vermeerâ•’s Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*” “An exceptional book.â• Kirkusâ• “Library Journalâ• “Master of Shadows is a fascinating account, as lively as it is informed. This utterly intriguing narrative has the knowledge and verve that infuse Rubensâ•’s brushstrokes; Lamster writes with the panache and enthusiastic engagement, as well as the capability, warranted by his marvelous subject.â• Kirkusâ• “Nicholas Fox Weber, author, *Le Corbusier: A Life*” “Art, war, diplomatic intrigue, secret spy missionsâ• all rendered with the erudition of a scholar and the deft touch of a gifted writer. This is exactly what popular history should be. I was utterly transfixed by this book.â• Kirkusâ• “Jonathan Mahler, author, *The Challenge: Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*” “Piercing the darkened, secret world of agents, operatives, and diplomats is a difficult task at the best of timesâ• and in Rubensâ•’s case, one thought impossibleâ•’s but Mark Lamster brilliantly succeeds at shedding light on this most enigmatic, and aptly dubbed, Master of Shadows.â• Kirkusâ• “Alexander Rose, author, *Washingtonâ•’s Spies: The Story of Americaâ•’s First Spy Ring*” “Mark Lamster, a master of vivid writing, provides a highly readable account of the national rivalries and endemic warfare that fostered secret diplomacy in seventeenth-century Europe. Master of Shadows is a page-turner not to be missed.â• Kirkusâ• “Lita-Rose Betcherman, author, *Court Lady and Country Wife: Two Noble Sisters in Seventeenth-Century England*

If I described this book as a detailed biography of the great Baroque painter, you might wonder whether it could sustain your interest for a book-length read. But then you might miss this highly entertaining and skillfully written book---not only a master painter, serious scholar, and astute businessman, Rubens was also a diplomat and spy who traveled in the upper echelons of European society and royalty. Against the backdrop of the Spanish Inquisition, the Eighty Years’ War, and other historical events filled with intrigue, war, big personalities, and, yes, sex, the author tells a great tale of an extraordinary man in extraordinary times. Deftly written with great humor and care, Master of Shadows is a hard-to-put-down page-turner once you start. If only all “art history” was this much fun; hopefully Lamster will move on to other artists, assuming their stories are as fascinating as this.

Presumably, scholarly readers will find little here to stimulate their interest; the general reader will find this footnote to art and diplomatic history, enlightening and entertaining. The author devotes sufficient space to the political-military conflicts of the various monarchies influential in the fate of the part of the Netherlands to allow us to understand the rationale for Rubens diplomatic endeavors. He provides sufficient art historical knowledge of Rubens Art to allow us to understand the reputation which gave him access to the leading Western European Courts which welcomed him even when his goals were understood by them to be contrary to their own. Shining above the particulars of Art and Diplomacy is the character of a man who, equal to any, typified the values of wise commitment to a Europe, free of the Religious, Political, Economic and Status hostilities which impeded creation of conditions for greater wealth and well-being for all. Well-written and a good story. Easily accessible to the average reader.

My Book Club just read "Master of Shadows" so it was interesting to see the video which was superficially accurate but lacked the depth of the book. Detail was missing but seeing the actual pictures was delightful.

I did not know that Rubens was a diplomat as well as a talented artist. This book shows this other side of Rubens, as it details a very interesting political scene in Europe.

Was a gift. A hard read, but interesting.

good

Bought several copies and gave as presents. All loved it.

This book is filled with fascinating information about the relationships among Italy, Germany, France, and Holland in the 1500's and 1600's, and how Rubens was deeply involved in the politics of these countries. The book is very well written. I am reading it on a Kindle and would like to have a map which I could access easily while reading the book to keep track of the countries he visits on his diplomatic and other journeys. I would also like more discussion of his artwork and some photos of the artwork (also easily accessible on the Kindle) would be nice.

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