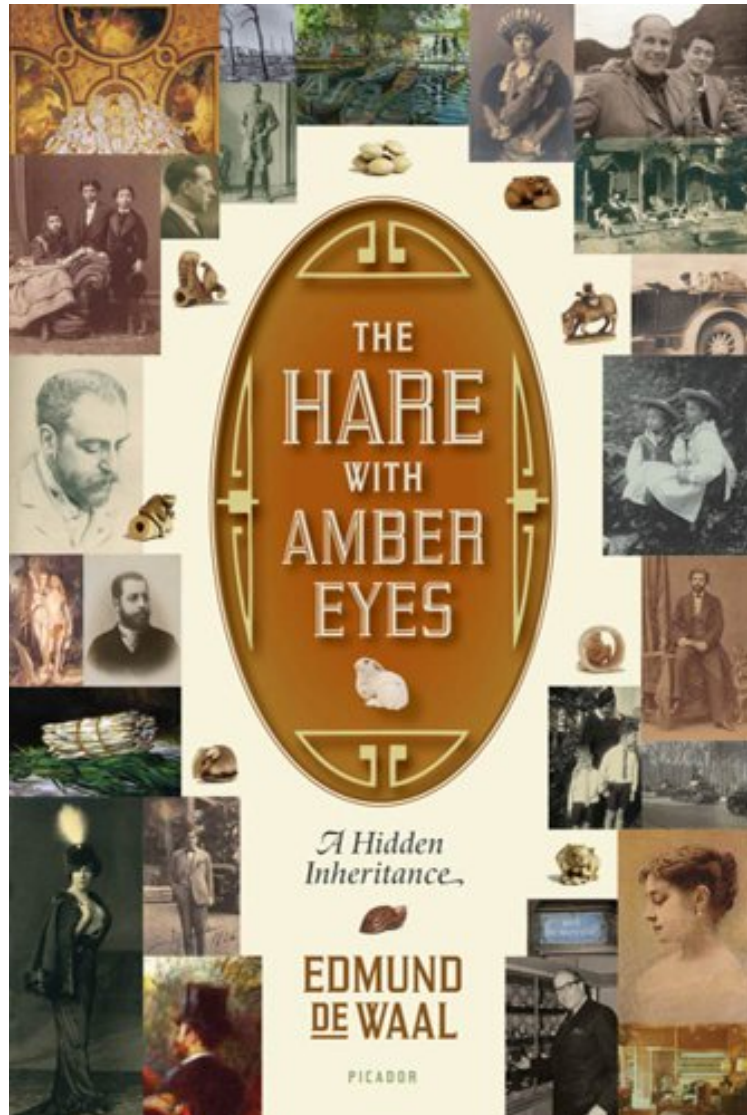


# The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family's Century of Art and Loss

Edmund de Waal

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**Edmund de Waal : The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family's Century of Art and Loss** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family's Century of Art and Loss:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating history of a large family in turbulent times By Ans Koolen Edmund de Waal, a well-known potter, inherited a collection of 264 netsuke, small delicately carved Japanese objects, originally intended as a counterweight with a small bag on one side and the netsuke on the other, worn around the sash of a man's kimono. At the end of the 19th century they became all the rage in Europe as collectors' items. The author describes how the collection got into his family and what happened to it over the years. By doing so, he traces

back his family's fascinating history. He conjures up the atmosphere in Paris and Vienna, describes in great detail homes and daily life of a super rich family, from their beginnings as bankers in Odessa to their dispersal into various countries. Especially the period around the second world war, in which everything is taken away from this Jewish family, is very moving. I found the beginning a little slow reading, but after a while I really got sucked into this story and often felt like a fly on the wall.<sup>1</sup> of 1 people found the following review helpful. **A FAMILY WORTHY OF BEING REMEMBERED** By Gatas Largas More than any account I have come across, this book depicts the horror a prominent, wealthy Jewish family experienced during the Nazi takeover of Eastern Europe. It also, on a very personal level, depicts the anti-semitism that existed long before the arrival of Hitler's army. Many of us grew up thinking that Hitler was some kind of aberration with his desire to obliterate the Jewish population when he was actually just fulfilling the fantasy of many people in many different parts of the world. I especially liked de Waal's way of exploring Paris, Vienna, Japan, England and Russia in order to physically stand in the places where events occurred. When he visited Odessa at the end of the book and realized that it wasn't the ghetto so often depicted, he turned the whole "Jewish question" on its head. Coincidentally I watched the film "The Woman in Gold", another true story of loss in the Ringstrasse of Vienna, and it served to further fill in the history we are never taught in schools. By focusing on the netsukes his ancestor collected rather than one particular family member, he managed to avoid an over-sentimentalized look at the time period. His clear-eyed recounting of events revealed a family of resilience, hope and strength--a family that survived through adaptation as well as assimilation.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. The objects got lost... but the family tale is captivating By yoni This book reminded me of the movie The Red Violin, which traced an instrument throughout its life of 4 centuries. The netsuke collection in this book is harder to connect with, as it contains >250 pieces, each possibly with its own story and so the tale can only begin logically with a collection rather than at the source of each piece. Which is why that part of the tale is weak or nonexistent, rather intangible, and ultimately makes the story fall flat at the end as there is very little to connect the objects between the then and now. Also the violin was intimately interwoven with its owners' lives as it is not just a tactile piece of art but an instrument of music-making, a livelihood. That being said, the Euro-centric journeys of the objects and their owners are compelling on their own, and, if he were willing to let go a bit, the author might have been able to make a more cohesive framework around just that storyline. The history and drama make for some very satisfying moments. I don't understand the need to possess objects or the joy it brings people, and I didn't dig all the French jargon. At times, especially in the climax of the story, I felt the netsuke and objects in general were more important to this family than the people around them. I'm not sure that was a point the author was trying to make about himself or his ancestors. Which depressed me.

The Ephrussi were a grand banking family, as rich and respected as the Rothschilds, who "burned like a comet" in nineteenth-century Paris and Vienna society. Yet by the end of World War II, almost the only thing remaining of their vast empire was a collection of 264 wood and ivory carvings, none of them larger than a matchbox. The renowned ceramicist Edmund de Waal became the fifth generation to inherit this small and exquisite collection of netsuke. Entranced by their beauty and mystery, he determined to trace the story of his family through the story of the collection. The netsuke—drunken monks, almost-ripe plums, snarling tigers—were gathered by Charles Ephrussi at the height of the Parisian rage for all things Japanese. Charles had shunned the place set aside for him in the family business to make a study of art, and of beautiful living. An early supporter of the Impressionists, he appears, oddly formal in a top hat, in Renoir's Luncheon of the Boating Party. Marcel Proust studied Charles closely enough to use him as a model for the aesthete and lover Swann in Remembrance of Things Past. Charles gave the carvings as a wedding gift to his cousin Viktor in Vienna; his children were allowed to play with one netsuke each while they watched their mother, the Baroness Emmy, dress for ball after ball. Her older daughter grew up to disdain fashionable society. Longing to write, she struck up a correspondence with Rilke, who encouraged her in her poetry. The Anschluss changed their world beyond recognition. Ephrussi and his cosmopolitan family were imprisoned or scattered, and Hitler's theorist on the "Jewish question" appropriated their magnificent palace on the Ringstrasse. A library of priceless books and a collection of Old Master paintings were confiscated by the Nazis. But the netsuke were smuggled away by a loyal maid, Anna, and hidden in her straw mattress. Years after the war, she would find a way to return them to the family she'd served even in their exile. In *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, Edmund de Waal unfolds the story of a remarkable family and a tumultuous century. Sweeping yet intimate, it is a highly original meditation on art, history, and family, as elegant and precise as the netsuke themselves.