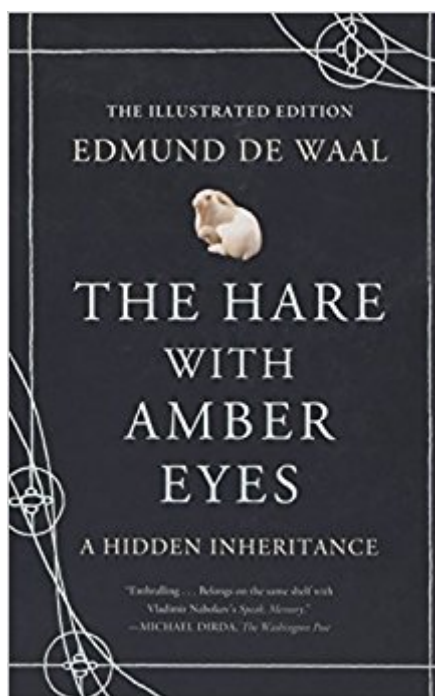


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# The Hare With Amber Eyes (Illustrated Edition): A Hidden Inheritance



## Synopsis

The definitive illustrated edition of the international bestseller Two hundred and sixty-four Japanese wood and ivory carvings, none of them larger than a matchbox: Edmund de Waal was entranced when he first encountered the collection in his great-uncle Iggie's Tokyo apartment. When he later inherited the netsuke, they unlocked a far more dramatic story than he could ever have imagined. From a burgeoning empire in Odessa to fin de siècle Paris, from occupied Vienna to postwar Tokyo, de Waal traces the netsuke's journey through generations of his remarkable family against the backdrop of a tumultuous century. With sumptuous photographs of the netsuke collection and full-color images from de Waal's family archive, the illustrated edition of *The Hare with Amber Eyes* transforms a deeply intimate saga into a work of visual art.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Edmund de Waal is one of the world's leading ceramic artists, and his porcelain is held in many major international collections. His bestselling memoir, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, was shortlisted for numerous prizes and won the Costa Biography Award and the RSL Ondaatje Prize.

• Enthralling . . . Belongs on the same shelf with Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation of a Spring*. •

• Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post* • Absorbing . . . In this book about people who defined themselves by the objects they owned, de Waal demonstrates that human stories are more powerful than even the greatest works of art. • Adam Kirsch, *The New Republic* • At one level [Edmund de Waal] writes in vivid detail of how the fortunes were used to establish the Ephrussi'

lavish lives and high positions . . . And, as Jews, of their vulnerability: the Paris family shaken by turn-of-the-century anti-Semitism surging out of the Dreyfus affair; the Vienna branch utterly destroyed in Hitler's 1937 Anschluss . . . At a deeper level, though, Hare is about something more, just as Marcel Proust's masterpiece was about something more than the trappings of high society. As with *Remembrance of Things Past*, it uses the grandeur to light up interior matters: aspirations, passions, their passing; all in a duel, and a duet, of elegy and irony.

• Richard Eder, *The Boston Sunday Globe* "To be handed a story as durable and exquisitely crafted as this is a rare pleasure . . . You have in your hands a masterpiece."

• Frances Wilson, *The Sunday Times (London)* "A family memoir written with a grace and modesty that almost belie the sweep of its contents: Proust, Rilke, Japanese art, the rue de Monceau, Vienna during the Second World War. The most enchanting history lesson imaginable."

• Claudia Roth Pierpont, *The New Yorker* "The book not only of the year, but of the decade."

• Michael Howard, *The Times Literary Supplement* "Elegant. Modest. Tragic. Homeric."

• Stephen Frears, *The Guardian* "As full of beauty and whimsy as a netsuke from the hands of a master carver. Buy two copies of his book; keep one and give the other to your closest bookish friend."

• The Economist "Wise, strange, and gripping."

• A.S. Byatt, *The Guardian*

This is a mesmerising many-layered book. The fascinating narrative of the fabulously wealthy Jewish Ephrussi family moves through the decades from commercial Odessa to the Paris of the Impressionists and artistic salons to the brutal destruction of the Anschluss of 1938 in Vienna and a familial diaspora over three continents. Parallel to this, we follow with the author his own emotive journey to reclaim the lives lived in the vanished rooms of his forbears. This he does sensitively and successfully, imagining his way there through archives, letters and contemporary fiction. He visits all the great houses and, in Odessa, tasting the dust of the demolished palace rooms, he rejoices in the survival of the Ephrussi family emblem on a last remaining banister. Such evocative writing and small discovered detail make this a story we want to follow with him and we find that this is not, after all, a tale of acquisition but of loss. The 264 tiny Japanese carvings (netsuke) bought in the 1870s in Paris are all that now remain of the family possessions. We also come to understand another loss: the Ephrussis no longer felt defined by their Jewish origins: artists and socialites passed through their grand salons. It is shocking to discover that even those who enjoyed their patronage were casually anti-Semitic. It is hard to read the vivid account of the abrupt violence of the Nazis as they took (almost) every precious possession from them, leaving them, in the end, only their Jewishness. The netsuke are the beginning and happy ending of the story. Their exquisite detail is

emblematic of this beautifully crafted book and its touching story of the individuals through whose hands they passed. One or other of them seems, like a rosary, to accompany the writer in his travels: a constant reminder to keep faith with his past.

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.

This was an extraordinary read to be savored. Not only is the Proustian manner in which the author's hidden family history is uncovered intriguing - the netsuke being the catalyst in de Waal's account, reminiscent of the opening of the ornamental party favor shell in Proust's Combray revealing a hidden world -- but the elegance of his writing, his virtuoso way with words, were a delight and, I admit, refreshing in these days of such mediocrity in the written word. Of course, central to the book's appeal was the galvanizing nature of the story. It is one we have heard before -- the unspeakable criminal acts of terrorism and brutality perpetuated by the Nazi regime. But it's the author's unfolding of the devastating travails endured by his courtly family, all the intricate and painstaking details so beautifully rendered (a process perhaps akin for a master ceramist to forming a magnificent vessel), in short, the wrenchingly personal nature of the book that makes it so exceptional. Finally, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* represents yet another testimony to the flawed nature of humankind that compels those in power the world over to commit brutal acts toward others. This gem of a book is an important reminder of our darker sides. May it also serve to inspire commitment, even if only in a small way, to do better as we proceed forward.

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.

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