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

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

# Contents

# Plot Summary

"The Hare with the Amber Eyes," is a personal story but one that is teemed with history. The author, Edmund de Waal, is a member of the large and prominent Jewish Ephrussi family. Edmund shares his story about discovering the history of his family while in search of the history of a Japanese netsuke collection that was first purchased by a family member in Paris in the late 19th century. The title of the book is a reference to his favorite piece of the collection of netsuke carvings of a hare with amber eyes.

The story of the family began in Odessa, Russia, where ancestors of Edmund launched their prosperous export business. The family patriarch was know as the King of Grain as his company had cornered the grain export market. The family eventually transferred its business expertise to the banking industry. The family wanted to expand its reach and younger members of the family were sent off to Paris and Vienna to set up banking operations that would ultimately prove a dominant force in Europe. The family became quite prosperous and accumulated great wealth and all its trappings.

Charles Ephrussi, who had settled in Paris, was unique in the Ephrussi family for his disinterest in business and his love for art. He became a celebrated art dealer and collector in fine art. During his lifetime, many of the grand French painters of the era were his contemporaries and friends. They included Renoir, Monet, Manet, and Pissaro among others. Charles became interested in Japanese art which had become the rage. He became intrigued with the intricately carved artwork known as netsuke. Charles purchased a set of the figures, 264 pieces in all, and showcased them in a large vitrine or a case with green velvet-lined shelves and glass doors for display.

When the fervor for Japanese art began to fade, Charles sent the vitrine and the netsuke to his cousin Viktor in Vienna as a wedding gift. Edmund learned that in later years, the vitrine with the netsuke were kept in Viktor's wife's dressing room where her children would play with the small figures. One of these children was Elisabeth, Edmund's grandmother. Viktor's world was turned upside down when Vienna was occupied by the Nazis in the late 1930s. A loyal maid smuggled the small pieces of the collection by hiding them in her apron pockets and thus saved the collection, one of a very few family possessions that stayed in tact through the occupation.

Later, Elisabeth passed the netsuke collection onto one of her children, Iggie, who eventually moved to Tokyo, and brought the collection back to the land of its original creation. After his passing, Edmund himself became the owner of the netsuke and as late as 2009, when this book was published, the netsuke collection was on display in Edmund's house in London in a new vitrine. He allows his children to play with them just as his grandmother did. But as history has demonstrated, it will not be the final place for the netsuke collection. But as Edmund learned, the history of this rare art will continue just as the history of the Ephrussi family continues.

# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: Le West End

Edmund de Waal recalls how he used to sketch the buildings on the Rue de Monceau in Paris. It was at the Hotel Ephrussi at Number 81 where the netsuke began their journey in the family and where Charles Ephrussi had a private suite of rooms on the second floor. There were horses and carriages in those days—their stables now replaced with houses. Edmund imagines the sounds of the trotting horses that Charles and his brothers, who also had suites in the building, heard in the house. The hotel was a family home then. The Ephrussi family had another opulent residence in Vienna, the Palais Ephrussi on the Ringstrasse.

In those days, it was the intent of the Ephrussi family to emulate the Rothschilds who had sent their sons out from Frankfurt at the beginning of the 19th century to spread their influence to European capitals. Charles Joachim Ephrussi was the mastermind behind the family's expansion from Odessa in the 1850s. Odessa was a Russian city that was located within the Pale of Settlement, an area where Jews were allowed to live. Odessa was a cultural and religious magnet for Jews and others who flocked to the city to take advantage of the export business offered by its important port. Grain was the main export out of Odessa and the Ephrussi family became the largest grain-exporters in the world. The family's goal was to ultimately transform its image from grain exporter to international financier, bankers who would provide funds for construction across all of Europe.

It was between the 1850s and 1870s that the family expanded its reach, establishing residences in Paris and Vienna. Family members moved into Paris soon after the siege of the Prussian army and the defeat of France which helped to establish the new Third Republic. The city was still in shock as uncertainty loomed. When the family moved to Paris, it was the only finished house on the street. Despite the opulence of the mansion and wealth of the family, when a young daughter died in childbirth, the family had to erect the tomb in a section of cemetery where Jews were allowed to bury their dead. The area where the family moved, eventually called Le West End, was first developed by Isaac and Emile Pereire, two Sephardic brothers in the 1850s. The Jewish brothers had made a fortune as financiers. Other famous mansions were located in this area including the most splendid of them all—the home of chocolate magnate Emile-Justin Menier.

Charles Ephrussi, who was born in Odessa, was twenty-one years old when he came to live at the family's Paris mansion. He lived in the mansion with his parents, siblings, aunt, uncle and cousins. Charles' nickname was "the waltzing boy." Before his move to Paris, his older brothers, Jules, Ignace and Stefan, were taken to Vienna to begin learning the business while Charles, who had a love of art, turned to sketching. He drew

renderings of everything from things he remembered from Odessa to his impressions of the servants. A short while after moving to Paris, Charles decided to travel to Italy.

Chapter 2: Un Lit de Parade

It was after Charles' move to Paris that he began collecting valuables. He bought paintings and drawings and medallions and tapestries. He accumulated rich fabrics and exquisite furnishings. He kept all his treasures in his second floor suite in the Paris mansion. Edmund imagines how impressed visitors must have been. Did his guests get a glimpse of the "lit de parade" engraving? Not only were Charles' items valuable in monetary terms, many were important historically. Charles saw himself as a young scholar-collector. To fully understand Charles, Edmund set out to read as much as he could about him—including Charles' own writings. It is a daunting undertaking which is exhausting and time-consuming. In the end, Edmund begins to appreciate the passion he had for his art. Charles attempted to write in a clear way about the objects he collected and loved.

# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3: 'A Mahout to Guide Her'

Charles traveled extensively in his twenties. There were notes and letters referencing his travels to many cities. Charles' brothers had made their own worlds. Jules was a successful businessman in Vienna and Ignace was a playboy who had many affairs. Charles has been accepted by Parisian society and was admired for his charm and the slight accent he could not lose. He was a visitor in the salon of Madame Strauss who hosted gatherings of the elite including artists, poets and playwrights. The novelist and collector Edmond de Goncourt, a contemporary of Charles, envied his friendship with Princess Mathilde, the niece of Bonaparte. The Princess found Charles to be 'a mahout to guide her through her life." Charles found his niche in the snobbish city—places where being Jewish was either accepted or ignored.

Edmund discovered that Charles was a regular contributor of articles in the Gazette, an art periodical. Edmund carefully tracked every art exhibition review written by Charles. He found mention of Charles in the society pages of Parisian newspapers. He learned that Charles had a Japanese mistress which influenced his interest in Japanese art. He did not begin his netsuke collection at this point; however, this interest would soon lead to its beginning.

Chapter 4: 'So Light, So Soft to the Touch'

Charles had an affair with a married woman, Louise Cahen d'Anvers. The two lovers had a common passion for Japanese art. Both purchased black and gold Japanese lacquer boxes for their collections. Japanese art introduced new textures and materials —ivory and silk, lacquer and porcelain. The art included items never seen before—small animal carvings that were called "netsuke." Before Charles began his netsuke collection, he amassed a collection of thirty-three black-and-gold lacquer boxes as well as pottery and stoneware objects. From his writings, it is apparent that Charles connected in a visceral way his passion for Japanese art with his passion for Louise. There are indications that the two displayed their art in the same showings.

# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5: A Box of Children's Sweets

The best place to buy Japanese art was in Japan. Short of that, there were a number of Parisian galleries that displayed the art. M. Sichel, a contemporary of Charles, traveled to Japan in 1874 where he discovered a group of lacquer writing-boxes in a remote bazaar. He paid only one dollar for each box which were later valued at over 1,000 francs apiece. However, he sold them to his clients—like Charles and Louise—for far more than 1,000 francs. Japan was a "box of sweets." It created addictions for its art. The Japanese would sell anything, even their most cherished possessions like heirlooms, samurai swords, and netsuke. Among collectors, an insatiable hunt for these treasures began.

The items were alluring and exotic and fit right in with his many other unique collections and art pieces. Myths were attached to Japanese art such as Japanese were small and therefore created small artwork. This idea permeated throughout the art world and was given as the reason for the Japanese's inability to produce grand masters like Rembrandt or architectural triumphs like the Parthenon. The Japanese also stood apart because of their ease in creating erotica which were popular and flirtatious and were passed around in the salons of Paris in the 1870s.

Chapter 6: A Fox with Inlaid Eyes, In Wood

Charles bought a collection of 264 netsuke from Sichel. They included ivory rats; a fox with inlaid eyes, in wood; an octopus; a priest on a horse; and, many more miniatures mainly of animals but also of people and objects as well. There was also a figure he fell in love with. It was a pale hare with amber eyes. Edmund has many questions about the collection. Had Sichel amassed it over time? Did he abscond pieces from the poor for next to nothing? Did Charles buy the collection to please Louise? And how much did Charles pay for it? Charles and his family were doing well and cost probably wasn't a huge concern. The best estimate is that most of the figures were around 100 years old when Charles bought the collection. Some are signed by noted artists.

Charles bought a tall vitrine with small glass doors to display the collection in. The shelves in the vitrine were lined with green velvet. It was essential that Charles store the tiny pieces of art in a case. They were all small and, unprotected, could easily be lost or broken. Vitrines were popular in the elite salons at the time. Edmund had always disliked the glass cases that museums displayed his pottery in. He thought of them as air-locked coffins. The art was dead inside them. But after studying Charles and the vitrines of his era, he realized the stark difference between glass museum cases and vitrines and how essential vitrines were for netsuke collections.

Edmund can envision Charles and Louise opening up the glass doors and taking out the small figures. Netsuke was a unique form of art. Unlike most other objects d'arte, netsuke were made to be touched and they were fun and entertaining.

# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7: The Yellow Armchair

The first book that Charles wrote was about the artist, Albert Durer. A young poet, twenty-one-year-old Jules Laforgue, was hired as his assistant. As Edmund scans Charles' room, he can envision Charles in a black Chinese dressing gown sitting in his yellow armchair, dictating to his young helper. Jules was hired in July 1881 and worked with Charles on the book throughout the summer. Edmund learned that the young man was not paid very well even though he put in long hours, often working through the night.

But Jules admired Charles and felt he was being given a great opportunity. Later, Jules wrote a poem about Monet's impressionism which he dedicated to Charles. Charles was fond of young Jules and secured a job for him in Berlin after that summer. Charles paid tribute to Jules by publishing many of his letters in a journal following his premature death from tuberculosis.

Chapter 8: Monsieur Elstir's Asparagus

Edmund read about Charles' search for Durer's lost drawings. He followed down many leads which took him from grand museums to small private collections. Charles referred to himself as "diligent" in his hunt. Edmund compares Charles' dedication to finding Durer's drawings to his own in tracking down the netsuke collection. In fact, the more Edmund read about Charles, the more he came to admire him. Charles felt that he could establish true intimacy with the artist if he was familiar with his every work. Charles was a great admirer of Durer and was bent on introducing him to France as the greatest of all German artists.

Charles was also an advocate of contemporary artists and featured them in his Gazette reviews. Being a wealthy lover of art, Charles purchased a large number of originals for his own collection. Charles was particularly a fan and supporter of the impressionists which some critics viewed as charlatans. His advocacy of this genre of art brought fresh and positive critiques of the style. He convinced a close friend to purchase Monet's "Nympheas."

But Charles was more than an advocate of these artists. He had friendships, relationships with them. Edmund ran across a letter to Charles from Manet. Charles bought Manet's "Une botte d'asperges" for 200 francs more than Manet asked for it. It was a painting of a stack of asparagus stalks tied together. In turn, Manet gifted Charles with a small oil painting of one simple stalk of asparagus. The note accompanying the painting said that one stalk had fallen out of the bunch. An image of Charles can be seen in the street scene depicted in Renoir's "Luncheon of the Boating Party."

Also in Charles large collection were paintings of friends; Paris life; and, the countryside. One of Charles' paintings, Monet's famous painting of bathers, "Les bains de la Grenouillere," now hangs in the National Gallery in London. Charles' interest in Japanese art apparently rubbed off on Monet, Renoir and Degas who were his friends. They too became collectors of Japanese prints. The influence of the Japanese artisans' simple elegance can be seen in some of the works of these masters.

# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9: Even Ephrussi Fell for It

Edmund is in his studio in London. It is equipped with pottery wheels and kilns and it is where he creates is art. Also in his studio are his notes on the impressionists and his notes on the first owner of her netsuke. Thinking about Charles and his now-famous French impressionist friends, Edmund realizes how young Charles was compared to them. He was just thirty-one when Manet painted the asparagus painting while Manet was almost fifty. Yet Charles was their champion and, in many cases, furthered their careers. When Renoir was broke, Charles convinced first his aunt and then Louise to commission him to paint their portraits. Renoir also did renderings of two of Louise's daughters which were later exhibited at the Salon in 1881.

Some of his other artist friends were envious of the work that Charles drummed up for Renoir, especially Degas who accused Renoir of "painting to order." Renoir became furious when Charles purchased two dream-like works by Gustave Moreau. Renoir did not consider Moreau a serious artist. Renoir inferred that because Charles was a Jew he was drawn to the gaudy colors that Moreau was known to use in his paintings. Renoir termed Moreau's works as "Jew art" and was upset at the through of his own works hanging on the wall nearby those of Moreau. Charles' best friend was artist Paul Baudry who was famous for the decorated ceiling of the Paris Opera. Charles was Baudry's biographer and executor of his estate.

Edmund has become so entrenched in the study of Charles and his art that he let his own obligations and career lag. But Charles was a fascinating individual and his love of art was limitless. Charles was friendly with artists who were not famous and whose careers never took off. He would spend time with these men at the Louvre, taking in the art and engaging in stimulating discourse. By 1885, Charles had gained a degree of fame himself. He became the proprietor of the Gazette and was known as a fund raiser for the Louvre. He was honored for his contribution to the art world. He and Louise were still involved although there were indications that she had other lovers. Charles hired a series of young men to assist him causing rumors to fly that he was bisexual.

Chapter 10: My Small Profits

Renior was not the only artist who disliked the Jews. Jews were blamed for financial scandals occurring in the 1880s. Michel Ephrussi was named in particular as one of the culprits. Degas painting, "At the Bourse" depicted plotting "hook-nosed, red-bearded financiers," in secret negotiations. Making money out of money was seen as a "Jewish sin." It was true that Michel did have great power and was very rich and well-known.

Drumont, the editor of a daily anti-Semitic newspaper, told the French how to spot a Jew - one hand was larger than the other. He also warned that they were a threat to France. He portrayed them as nomads without loyalties or moral compasses and with only one goal—making money. Drumont's paper was popular and widely-read. While the Ephurussi family felt they belonged to France, Drumont did not. Due to their high-profile, the family was a natural target of Drumont's fury.

Although Charles was not in business, he was accused by anti-Semite critics of only being interested in art he could make money from. Other relatives were publicly excoriated and ridiculed. Some critics openly called for their removal from Paris. Bias permeated into governmental policy—most Jews were not allowed to own land. Edmund can't help but wonder how Charles and his brother withstood the blatant bias and unfair treatment by the anti-Semites. There are references to several men in the family engaging in duels. Apparently, however, it was a difficult task to defend your family as a Jew in Paris during this period.

# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11: A 'Very Brilliant Five O'Clock"

Charles moved the netsuke collection with him to his new home in 1891. It was located on the avenue d'Iena and was larger than his suite at the Hotel Ephrussi but not as opulent. When Edmund tried to visit the home, he was told by the proprietor that no one by the name of Charles Ephrussi had ever lived there. Edmund found out later that the original house had been torn down in the 1920s. The area was upscale and exclusive. When he purchases the house, it was near the newly constructed Eiffel Tower. Japanese artwork had so flooded Paris that it was looked down upon as bric-a-brac.

Edmund found indications that Charles had moved on from Japanese art to a focus on French XVIIIth century furnishings and décor for his new home. In a second-hand bookshop in Paris, Edmund found receipts for the sale of artwork belonging to members of the Ephrussi family. Edmund wondered how the netsuke collection looked among Charles' new décor and how he felt about them given his change in taste to the grander and more opulent.

Charles and his brothers gave a dinner party in February of 1893. It was mentioned in the society page and referred to as a "very brilliant five o'clock last evening at Messrs Charles and Ignace Ephrussi, in honor of the princess Mathilde." The party was a great success but it would have been difficult to replicate the party the next year due to the Dreyfus Affair. Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish officer with the French Army who was accused of being a spy. He was convicted although many thought he was railroaded. He was sent to solitary confinement at Devil's Island. There was a vicious anti-Semite backlash caused by the incident. All Jew were suspect, including Charles and his family. Although evidence was later produced to exonerate Dreyfus, it was ignored. Although Dreyfus was eventually cleared in 1906, the incident caused irrevocable splits in families and friendships. Degas stopped speaking to Charles and the Jewish Pissaro. Renoir who already had demonstrated his anti-Semite leanings became hostile to Charles and his "Jew art."

It was common for family members to hear bigoted slurs hurled against them—even by children. It didn't help that the defense counsel was an in-law of the family. A long-time patron of the arts, Charles was ostracized by some in that very world. Due to some similarities, Edmund suspects that Marcel Proust may have been inspired by Charles when he developed the protagonist Charles Swann in "Swann's Way," who he referred to as an ugly Polish Jew.

Charles had a bad heart like his father. He was almost fifty when Dreyfus was cleared. Perhaps it was the commotion around the Dreyfus affair that took some of the spirit from Charles. He stopped buying art except for infrequent pieces and wrote only

occasionally. Louise replaced Charles with another lover, Crown Prince Alfonso of Spain. When his younger cousin Viktor married, Charles sent the new couple a very special gift of the vitrine with the green velvet shelves and the 264 netsuke.

Chapter 12: Die Potemkinsche Stadt

When Edmund learned where the netsuke collection was sent, he booked a flight to Vienna and was soon standing at the mansion where the gift was sent at the turn of the century. The palatial estate made the Paris residence small in comparison. The mansion was located in an area of the city known as the Ring, or the Ringstrasse. The Emperor Franz Josef had ordered the Ring to be built around the old city center. The Ring was a modern civic and cultural center. It contained museums, universities, cathedrals and opulent homes. Many of the building had facades that made them appear more substantial than they actually were, a point of contention among many architects. To the young painter and architectural student, Adolph Hitler, "the whole Ringstrasse seemed to me like an enchantment out of 'The Thousand-and-One-Nights.'" What probably didn't impress Hitler was that most of the wealthy residents of the Ring were Jewish. But the Jews in Vienna, unlike those in Paris, seemed to blend in and for many years were treated basically like everyone else. When Viktor first arrived in Vienna at three years of age, there were under 10,000 Jews. By the time he was thirty, there were over 118,000. The Emperor had given them full rights and allowed them to own land. Jews were accepted in all circles and were the dominant force in Vienna's business world. Edmund was hopeful that he could find traces the netsuke in the large, diverse place.

# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13: Zionstrasse

The Palais in Vienna was almost thirty years old when the netsuke collection was sent as a wedding gift for Viktor and Emmy. A cousin named Ignace von Ephrussi lived in Vienna at the time. He was a baron and a war hero and the second richest banker in all of Vienna. He also had many other holdings in other locations. Edmund uncovered a drawing of this relative when the man was about fifty years old. This Ignace was apparently quite the rogue. He had affairs with both of his wife's sisters as well as other mistresses. Edmund found a contract between he and the main architect for the Palais which went under construction in 1869. The house is now a tourist attraction. Edmund enters and is taken on a tour. Everything is huge and splendid. All the floors are marble or wood parquet. The ceilings are coffered and gilded. Each room has its own classical theme inspired by Greek mythology. The only evidence that this was a Jewish home a single Jewish painting is in the grand ballroom.

Chapter 14: History as It Happens

Edmund uncovers photos of Ignace's three children. The youngest is Viktor who is Edmund's great-grandfather. Viktor was tutored in the Palais by a German tutor, the Prussian Herr Wessel. Herr Wessel was hard on the young Viktor, requiring him study Ovid and German writers like Goethe and Humboldt. Herr Wessel's theory was that while history was the most important subject, a student had to have a liberal background in order to better understand it and grasp its import. Viktor was considered the brightest child in the family and, as the youngest, was not yet being groomed to be a banker.

When Viktor was a twenty-two year-old scholar, he frequented the Griensteidl Cafe close to Hofburg. This cafe was a meeting place for young writers. The sons of other wealthy Jewish bankers were often seen with Viktor in the cafe. Although money wasn't a concern, these young men had their own set of worries. They were expected to be successful, marry well, attend endless dances and a long life in the Ringstrasse. Although the anti-Semitism in Vienna during this time was not as blatant as that in Paris, it still existed. When it did rear its ugly head in Vienna, it sometimes devolved into physical attacks. There were publications that had anti-Semitic themes. Artisans and students were especially resentful of the success and wealth of Jews.

Vienna University was a hotbed of anti-Semitic feelings, compelling some of the Jewish male students to take of fencing. Dr. Karl Lueger was the founder of the Christian Social Party, an anti-Semite organization. It was Lueger's contention that the Jews were set on establishing a Jewish Empire. Lueger hated only the rich Jews and accepted those who were poor. Lueger was elected mayor of Vienna in 1897, riding to office on his

propaganda about the Jews. In 1899, a law was passed that allowed Jews to be shot for bounty. The Emperor defended the Jews and proclaimed that the "Israelites" were loyal citizens and he would protect them. Still, the young Jews who frequented the cafes felt the need to be careful not to bring unfavorable attention to themselves.

Eventually, Viktor was groomed for the family business and told he had to marry and have children, preferably sons. He married Baroness Emmy Schey von Koromla. She was seventeen and he was thirty-nine. Then weeks after Viktor was married, Ignace died suddenly with his wife and one of his mistresses at his bedside. Viktor and his young wife inherited the Ephrussi Bank and the responsibilities that went along with it.

# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 15: 'A Large Square Box Such as Children Draw"

After Viktor's father died, his mother moved to a hotel in Vichy and Viktor and Emmy had a whole floor of the mansion to themselves. Their living quarters were stuffed with valuables from decades of over-spending by other relatives. The rooms were loaded with valuable art. Apparently, the glass vitrine with the netsuke posed a logistics problem to Viktor. He didn't know where to have it placed. Other gifts were practical like clocks and globes and there were obvious places for them. Although Viktor appreciated the gift and the little figures were interesting, they couldn't settle on a place for the large case that held them. Viktor left the décor and furnishings up to his wife who was a beautiful woman and dressed fabulously.

Edmund's father found an old book that he thought his son should add to his research. The white-bound cover bears the years 1878 through 1903. Inside are twelve beautiful ink images of members of the family. One is of Emmy in a ballgown. The cards were the work of artist Josef Olbrich who was a well-known Viennese artist. .

Chapter 16: 'Liberty Hall'

Emmy's first child was Elisabeth who was Edmund's grandmother. Emmy had another daughter, Gisela, and then a son who was named Ignace Leon. Edmund discovered writings indicating that Emmy and Viktor had a full staff of maids and servants and that they held many extravagant dinner parties. Emmy had afternoon teas where she received many guests. In winter, Emmy and Viktor would travel to warmer climates like Monte Carlo. The children were left with nannies. In April, the couple would often go to Paris, again without the children. In August, Viktor and Emmy would travel with the children to Switzerland to visit friends.

Edmund found Charles' obituary. He had died on September 30, 1905. The article noted that he was a patron of the arts and owner of the Gazette. Another obituary indicated that Charles' brother, Ignace, died of a poor heart at age sixty. Viktor, Emmy and their children were named in their wills.

Edmund's uncle in London had given him a stack of letters written by his grandmother, Elisabeth, about growing up in the Palais. For background material, Edmund had also been reading the seventeen novels of Joseph Roth who was an Austrian Jew. The stories were set in Vienna during the Hapsburg Empire. Some of the characters were based on family members, including Ignace who was portrayed as a rich jeweler in "The Spider's Web." Edmund spent the last morning of his visit reviewing records in the Vienna Jewish community near a synagogue. After reviewing birth, marriage and death records and finding none bearing the family name, Edmund realized that the Ephrussi

family was so thorough;y assimilated into the non-Jewish society of Vienna that they had not been categorized as Jewish.

# Chapters 17, 18 and 19

## Chapters 17, 18 and 19 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17: The Sweet Young Thing

In some letters to her sons, Elisabeth described the Palais where she grew up, providing them with details about where art objects were located or stored. She described paintings and other art objects in various rooms and when describing her mother's dressing room, she mentioned a tall black lacquer cabinet with green velvet-lined shelves. Why would Emmy have placed the vitrine in her dressing room where no visitors would see it? Perhaps it wasn't that interesting to her. Or perhaps she admired them and wanted to keep them as her private treasure. There were indicationss that Emmy had her share of lovers over the years. Edmund can envision that the much older Viktor may have been remote and somewhat distant with his young wife. Perhaps she longed for intimacy that he could not give her.

Chapter 18: Once Upon A Time

Although Emmy had a busy social life, she would have at-homes with the children on regular occasions. She would read stories to the children from big picture books. They enjoyed hearing Sleeping Beauty and Beauty and the Beast and read-aloud stories from fairy books. Elisabeth, Gisela and Iggie also spent time with their mother in her dressing room when she was preparing to go out. During these occasions, Emmy opened the vitrine and allowed the children to play with the netsuke.

Chapter 19: Types of the Old City

The children sat on the yellow carpet of the dressing room and selected their favorite figures. Gisela liked the Japanese dancer; Iggie loved the wolf; and, Elisabeth chose the small masks. The children probably made up stories about the figures as they played with them. As the netsuke were being treated like playthings by the children, other netsuke figures were being collected all across Europe. The netsuke were being auctioned for substantial amounts. The first German history of netsuke was published in 1905. It contained advice on how to care for the pieces. The publication cautioned that the figures should be kept behind glass to avoid gathering dust and that they should not be handled too much because they were small and delicate and could be easily be lost or stolen.

Emmy did not protect the netsuke. They merely became toys for her children. She undoubtedly did not understand their monetary or artistic value. But, since Elisabeth's letters confirmed that Emmy liked to read stories to the children, perhaps she did like the netsuke because each one was a story in itself. There were so many things that the children were not allowed to touch—the silver in the dining room; their father's glass in

its silver holder; their father's books; sharp knives. But the children had the freedom to touch the netsuke and make up fairy tales about them.

# Chapters 20, 21 and 22

## Chapters 20, 21 and 22 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 20: Heil Wien! Heil Berlin!

In 1914, Elisabeth was fourteen years old and Gisela was ten. Elisabeth was a serious young girl who was allowed to eat dinner with the grownups. Gisela was a pretty little girl who, like her mother, loved clothes. Iggie was nine and a little chubby. On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg Empire, was assassinated in Sarajevo by a Serbian national. The murder led to Austria's declaration of war against Serbia a month later. Soon after, Germany declared war on Russia and conflicts broke out all over Europe. It was the beginning of World War I. Emmy sought the support of one of her lovers, the Austrian Consul General, to help her get her children and servants back to Vienna from their summer retreat. There was support for the War in Vienna because of the assassination.

As the war escalated, Viktor had ominous feelings about the security of his family. Many Jews thought that the anti-Semite feelings would disappear after the war that the Germans would free the Jews. Students could be heard shouting their war slogans in the streets. The Ephrussi family made sacrifices during the war. Most of the man servants disappeared—gone off to fight. There were only a few maids, a cook and their long-time nanny, Anna. There were no parties and outings were less frequent. There were thousands of refugee Jews on the street, driven out from their homes by the Russian Army. The more assimilated Jews like Viktor and Emmy worried about the new Jews who they feared might be vulgar and bring attention to them. The entire city of Vienna changed drastically. There were marching soldiers everywhere, hoarding was taking place among the wealthy, the streets and parks were dirty and neglected.

Viktor did his part to support the war, buying up lots of government war bonds. On November 21, 1916, Franz Josef I died. He had been on the throne since 1848. A massive funeral procession was organized for him. Emmy began to be missing for lunches and dinners, indicating that she may have been ill or going through a depression. Having an adequate amount of food for the family was beginning to become a problem. Without help, the mansion continued to deteriorate—rats were seen in the courtyard. Demonstrations against Jews were on the rise. Army desertions were on the increase and over two million Hapsburg army soldiers were taken prisoner by the enemy. By November 1981, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved. Emmy has a new baby, Rudolf, and struggled with caring for his. Viktor was uncomfortable being a father again. Rumors spread that the baby was really Elisabeth's child—which infuriated her. She was happy to register at the university and leave home.

Chapter 21: Literally Zero

Vienna went through a major transformation. The once glittering capital had been reduced in size and status. All imperial titles were removed from officials. The economy collapsed and inflation had become a huge problem. A large amount of Viktor's wealth had disappeared - he had stacks of worthless stocks and bonds. Most of his $400 million dollar fortune pre-war had disappeared. The family still lived in the mansion and had enough to eat. They had not yet had to sell their possessions for food or fuel. But the world outside was terrifying. Fights were breaking out on the streets. Anti-Semitism was on the rise as was the Nazi Party.

Chapter 22: You Must Change Your Life

Elisabeth's first year at the university was chaotic. The University was on the verge of closing its doors due to lack of funding. Elisabeth elected to study law, philosophy and economics but she had a passion for poetry. She loved the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke. Rilke was considered a radical poet of the time. In one poem he declared that "you must change your life." Only after his grandmother died at age 92 did Edmund realize how much Rilke's poetry meant to her. He was a guest at the family's summer home in 1921, after which the two corresponded regularly. She was twenty and he was fifty. Edmund discovered twelve long letters from Rilke to Elisabeth. In most of his letters he offered advice for her studies and discussed various aspects of writing. When Elisabeth died, Edmund inherited her collection of poetry books, including the works of Rilke. Although his grandmother loved the art of poetry, she seemed to have little interest in art collections or the netsuke figures.

# Chapters 23, 24 and 25

## Chapters 23, 24 and 25 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 23: Eldorado 5-0050

Elisabeth received a doctorate in law in 1924. Gisela married a Spanish banker named Alfred Bauer from a rich Jewish family. Elisabeth married a young Dutchman, Hendrik de Waal. He was well-traveled and sophisticated and was the only child of a wealthy merchant family. De Waal was a Christian and the couple married in an Anglican church in Paris where the young couple settled. Henk was not a competent businessman and lost a lot of his and other people's money. Iggie went on to the University to study economics although he had shown no talent for business. After college, Iggie was given a position at a German bank but years later commented that being a Jewish banker in Germany in the Depression was unwise. Iggie became frightened for his safety and fled to Paris where he worked at a third-rate fashion house. He inherited his love of fashion from his mother. But after nine months and somewhat establishing himself, he fled again, this time to New York.

New York was overrun with newly arriving Russians, Austrians and Germans who had escaped Europe. Iggie was almost broke but felt free and happy and met his first love there. Elisabeth and her husband were having financial problems. They had children who she was teaching herself at home. Emmy had developed a heart condition and looked older than her years. Viktor was a banker in name only, going to the bank everyday but doing little. Conditions were worsening in Austria. Hitler was gaining power and making demands for members of the Nazi party to be released from prison and allowed to participate in the government.

Chapter 24: 'An Ideal Spot for Mass Marches'

There were demonstrations for liberty and for voting rights in the streets of Vienna in March 1938. The government was appealing to other European countries for support against the increasing demands by pro-Hitler allies for the resignation of the Chancellor. The radio blasted the news that the German Reich had given an ultimatum to the government—either nominate a candidate from the Reich or German troops would immediately invade the country. The Austrian government had no choice but to bend to the demands. Later, Nazi soldiers occupied Vienna and were heard shouting "Death to the Jews." Jewish shops were stoned.

Flags of the Third Reich were hung everywhere. Soon soldiers invaded the house and ransacked through the family's belongings. They destroyed furniture and screamed and cursed at Viktor, Emmy and Rudolf, calling them dirty and robbers of the poor. They stole the jewelry that Emmy was wearing. Such scenes were going on all across Vienna. Men and boys are beaten and taken away. Old men and women were made to scrub the streets on their hands and knees. Hitler arrived in Vienna on March 14th. He

was welcomed with a massive display of marching soldiers and 400 planes flying overhead. The people of Vienna were terrorized. Property was being confiscated and people were disappearing. A boycott of all Jewish shops was announced on April 23rd the same day the Gestapo arrived at the Palais Ephrussi.

Chapter 25: 'A Never-to-Be-Repeated' Opportunity

Six members of the Gestapo entered the Palais without announcement. They were investigating the Jew Ephrussi who was accused of supporting the opposition. They searched every drawer, cabinet and closet. They demanded keys to locked doors. Every Jewish family was undergoing the same humiliation. The Gestapo accused Viktor of contributing to the enemy. He and Rudolf were arrested and taken away. Emmy was ordered to stay in just two rooms. Viktor and Rudolf were beaten and imprisoned for three days. They were allowed to return only after Viktor signed the Palais and all his property over to the Reich. The house was overrun with people who were making inventory lists of all the family's possessions and assessing their value. Most of the art objects would be sold to raise money for the Reich. Photos of the most valuable items were taken and sent to Hitler in Berlin. Many of the rooms in the Palais were taken over by government and army officials. The Ephrussi and Co. Bank was taken off the records and renamed by the Germans. Every Jewish man was officially renamed "Israel" and every Jewish woman "Sarah."

# Chapters 26, 27 and 28

## Chapters 26, 27 and 28 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 26: 'Good for a Single Journey'

England was unable to take any more refugees. The family feared that any day they would be arrested and taken to Dachau. They needed money to pay taxes and punitive fines in order to emigrate. By this time, Viktor was 78 years old. He was forced to visit office after office and official after official but was turned away repeatedly. Fortunately, Rudolf was allowed to emigrate to the US where a friend had secured a job for him. Emmy, Viktor and Anna were the only ones left in the old mansion. There was no place for them to go—most places are off limits to them.

In a dangerous move, Elisabeth returned to help her parents flee. She carried a Dutch passport and was not identified as a Jew. She posed as an official to cut through the red tape in getting the permits her parents needed to leave. Anna could no longer work for the family. Jews were not allowed to have Gentile servants. Finally, on May 20th, Emmy and Viktor were given their final clearance. They were detained at the Czech border for further scrutiny. Finally, they were able to cross the border. They left Vienna with only one suitcase each. They traveled to their summer home in Koveces. Although an accord was reached at Evian at the end of September to avoid war, Hitler failed to keep his word. Emmy died on October 12th. Although neither Elisabeth or Iggie would breathe the word "suicide," she reportedly took "too many" of her heart pills that night.

Letters detailed efforts to get Viktor out of Slovakia. His Austrian passport was invalid since there was no longer any such country. In November an important German diplomat was assassinated by a Jew leading to much harsher rules being levied against Jews. Elisabeth wrote to the British authorities, pleading for help in getting Viktor out. Finally, in March 1939, he received a visa that was "good for a single journey." On March 4, Viktor arrived south of London. He was carrying one suitcase and wearing the same suit he was wearing when he and Emmy left Vienna.

Chapter 27: The Tears of Things

Viktor lived with Edmund's grandparents, father and uncles in a rented house in St. David's. Elisabeth cooked for the family—something she had never done before. She tutored neighborhood children and did translations to earn money for food. Gisela and her family were in Mexico. Rudolf by then was in Arkansas. Viktor usually sat in the kitchen by the stove, the only warm place in the house. By 1944, Iggie and Rudolf both enlisted in the US Army. Iggie was valued for his linguistic abilities. Viktor died in March of 1945, just a month before Vienna was liberated and a month before Germany's surrender. Elisabeth's aunt and uncle on her mother's side both died in labor camps. Elisabeth returned to Vienna to see what was left of her family's property. She wrote a book about her journey but it was never published. It was too raw and too emotional.

Their apartment in the house had been converted to offices for the Allied Forces. Some furniture was still in place. She found family photos which she took with her. The vitrine that held the netsuke was there but empty. To her surprise, Anna was still living in the house.

Chapter 28: Anna's Pocket

Elisabeth and Anna had not seen each other in eight years. Anna was old and Elisabeth was middle-aged. Anna told Elisabeth how she had been forbidden to work for her parents and was forced to work at menial jobs for the Germans. She was forced to pack up all the small possessions and valuables of the family. The Germans watched her so she couldn't take any large items but she was able to slip a few of the small figures the children played with in Emmy's dressing room each time she was there. She had hidden them in her mattress. In December 1945, Anna gave Elisabeth the 264 Japanese netsuke collection. Anna had, in her own quiet way, disobeyed the orders of the occupiers. Elisabeth put the collection in a leather case and took it back to England.

On another visit to Vienna, Edmund found the Gestapo inventory lists of his family's possessions along with diaries and journals. He found shipping manifests and notes from interviews with bankers. And though he searched, Edmund was unable to find any trace of Anna of what happened to her, where she wound up. He discovered that, sadly, Louise's daughter who had had posed for a portrait by Renoir had died in Auschwitz. He found references to other friends who had died in concentration camps.

# Chapters 29, 30 and 31

## Chapters 29, 30 and 31 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 29: 'All Quite Openly, Publicly and Legally'

Although 65,459 Austrian Jews had been killed during the war, no one was held to account—the government granted amnesty to the majority of the Nazis. The property of the families was taken "openly, publicly and legally." Austria could do nothing about the loss of property and about those who took it. Austria itself was a victim of the Third Reich. A law to recover property was passed in 1945 but it was virtually unenforceable. In 1948, 191 books were returned to the heirs of Viktor Ephrussi. Records for the art work were sketchy and the pieces were untraceable. Elisabeth continued to work at retrieving the family's possessions for many years. She sold what was recovered and split the money between family members. Finally in the early 1950s the family agreed to renounce any further claims and received the equivalent of around $5,000. Iggie visited Elisabeth in London in 1947. After dinner, she opened the leather case and showed him the netsuke. Iggie said that he would take them back with him to Japan where he had a job and where they belonged.

Chapter 30: Takenoko

Iggie arrived in the occupied city of Tokyo on December 1, 1947. Mount Fuji was the backdrop for the incinerated, flattened city. Iggie stayed at the Teito Hotel which was opposite from the Imperial Palace. Conditions in the city were the worst than could be imagined. Food was scarce and fear and uncertainty loomed over the city. Japanese war veterans begged on the street, removing their artificial legs and arms publicly to evoke sympathy and stimulate donations. The streets was filled with a wide range of regulars including monks, crippled elderly women, blind masseuses and storytellers. Food and snacks of every description were sold by street vendors. Foreigners were advised not to associate with the Japanese but it was difficult given the close quarters of the crowded street. Iggie brought with him the leather case that Elisabeth had given him with him.

Chapter 31: Kodachrome

Iggie's first office was in the business district of Marunouchi. He lived in the hotel only a short time before he moved to his first home in Senzoku. Iggie was 42 by now and had traveled most of his adult life. He was happy to settle down for a while. On a visit to Tokyo, Iggie gave Edmund some Kodachrome snapshots of the house. He was proud of it. Edmund was surprised and joyful to find the netsuke collection displayed in a glass case in the center of his uncle's house. All 264 figures were there. To Edmund, they seemed at peace—back where they belonged. Many of Iggie's young Japanese friends had never seen a netsuke collection before. Iggie met the young Jiro Sugiyama in 1952.

They would be together for the next forty-one years. Uncle Jiro had been a part of Edmund's life as long as Uncle Iggie had.

# Chapters 32, 33 and 34

## Chapters 32, 33 and 34 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 32: Where Did You Get Them?

With the arrival of the Americans during the Japanese occupation, the country was once again poised to be the victim to the plundering of its unique art and cultural objects. Cheap souvenirs were produced to satisfy the hunger for Japanese items—everything had either a geisha, Mt. Fuji or cherry blossoms on it. The ware was sold by street vendors and in the many tiny shops that lined the streets. Netsuke were popular with Americans although critics looked down on them as passe and over-done.

Chapter 33: The Real Japan

By the early 1960s, Iggie was a long-term Tokyo resident and spoke fluent Japanese. He compared the rebuilding of Tokyo after the war to Vienna in 1919. Many friends wondered how he could stand the Japanese culture for so many years. But beneath the geisha parties, kabuki theater and the usual tourist stops, was the real Japan. To find it —the real and untouched Japan—one had to get outside of Tokyo to Kyoto and Kyushu. Iggie lived longer in Tokyo than he had in Vienna. He knew both sides of Japan including the side that wanted to please the west and the real Japan that, for many, was yet to be discovered. Iggie had become a successful business, something Viktor would have been proud of.

Chapter 34: On Polish

In the 1970s, Iggie inventoried and had the netsuke appraised. They were surprisingly valuable. Edmund learned the criteria used by appraisers to set a value on netsuke collections.

# Chapters 35, 36 and 37

## Chapters 35, 36 and 37 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 35: Jiro

Edmund visited Tokyo and stayed with Jiro. Iggie had died in 1994. Edmund looked through albums of family photos that had been salvaged from the Palais. He and Jiro discussed Edmund efforts in discovering his family's history and the history of the netsuke collection owned by his family.

Chapter 36: An Astrolabe, A Menzula, A Globe

Edmund and his youngest brother, Thomas, traveled to Odessa where the Ephrussi family had its beginnings. Together they explored the old neighborhoods that were their familial roots. They walked along the Primorsky Boulevard that stretches on either side of the famous Potemkin Steps. There are 192 steps with ten landings. By design, when a visitor looks up he sees only steps and looking down, only landings. They located the Ephrussi bank and the family home next door. It was where Viktor was born. The house was dilapidated but they found the family's emblem, a double "E," hanging over one of the upper windows. They discovered that the house was under renovation. As they toured the interior, Edmund and Thomas recalled the stories they had heard about their ancestors who lived there. Edmund was astonished to glimpse Charles' yellow armchair still sitting in one of the rooms.

Chapter 37: Yellow/Gold/Red

Edmund returned from Odessa and from a two-year journey into his family's history. But his work was not over. His father had just recently found a journal written in German that needed to be translated. Edmund had inherited the netsuke collection and purchased a vitrine from the Victoria and Albert Museum that was selling some of its display cases. The netsuke now has a new home, located next to the piano in Edmund's study. Edmund makes sure that the case is always unlocked so that his children can open it and take out the figures so they can touch and feel them.

# Characters

## Charles Ephrussi

Charles Ephrussi was the youngest son of Charles Joachim Ephrussi and Belle Levensohn. He was born in Odessa in 1849. Unlike the rest of the male members of his prominent Jewish family, Charles was a lover of art and had very little interest in the business world. While his brothers became prominent bankers and export magnates, Charles was happy to live in Paris in his opulent private suite in the resplendent family mansion in the elite West End of Paris.

He became a lover of art and a collector of objects d'arte of all description. He collected the paintings of the grand masters and in fact was a supporter and friend of many of France's budding artists of the day including Renoir, Degas, Manet, Monet and Pissaro to name a few. He also collected fine furnishings, rich brocades and precious silks and tapestries.

Charles became fascinated with Japanese art which had become the rage in Paris. In the late 1880s, he purchased a netsuke collection. It was a set of 264 fine carvings of small figures of animals, people and other objects. Charles eventually gave the collection to his cousin Viktor in Vienna as a wedding gift.

Charles never married but had a long love affair with the wife of another affluent Jewish businessman. Charles and his paramour, Louise, shared a common love of art. And it was with Louise that Charles first became interested in Japanese art which led to his purchase of the netsuke collection. The netsuke is one of only a few family treasures to make it through the German occupation of Vienna.

## Viktor Ephrussi

Viktor was the younger cousin of Charles Ephrussi. Like Charles, Viktor was the youngest son in his family. Although he showed little interest in business and was not particularly adept at math, Viktor was eventually groomed to carry on the tradition of his family and become a banker. He relocated to Vienna from Odessa because his father wanted to expand the reach and influence of his family's banking operations. When Viktor was nearly forty, he married a much younger woman, Emmy. They had four children, one of whom was Elisabeth, Edmund de Waal's grandmother.

Viktor was a retiring man who turned the other way when his younger wife entered into love affairs with men closer to her own age. Viktor dutifully performed carried out his responsibilities at the Ephrussi Bank in Vienna until late in the 1930s when the Nazi Party began gaining power in Austria. Eventually, the Third Reich took over the country and the Jewish residents of Vienna, including Viktor and his family, were the target of the occupying forces.

Viktor and his family lived in a grand and opulent mansion in the Ringstrasse area of Vienna. After the occupation by the Germans, the fabulous residence was taken over by the Nazis who stole all the art and precious possessions of the family, except for the netsuke collection. When Viktor and Emmy left their home for the last time, they were each carrying one suitcase apiece. Their suitcases and the clothes on their backs were the only property the formerly prominent and affluent couple had to their names. Viktor was soon widowed after leaving Austria and lived out his years in London with his daughter and her family.

## Edmund de Waal

Edmund de Waal was the great grandson of Viktor Ephrussi and a distant cousin of Charles Ephrussi. Edmund is the author of "The Hare with Amber Eyes."

## Emmy Ephrussi

Emmy was only seventeen years old when she married the thirty-eight year-old Viktor Ephrussi. They had four children. Emmy was a glamorous figure and loved expensive clothes. There were rumors that she had multiple affairs with men closer to her own age. She committed suicide after she and Viktor lost all their property when the Germans occupied Vienna.

## Elisabeth de Waal

Elisabeth was the grandmother of Edmund de Waal. She and her siblings and their parents, Viktor and Emmy Ephrussi, lived in Vienna during the German occupation. Elisabeth was an attorney and was relentless in getting the proper permits to allow her father to leave Austria and flee to England.

## Iggy Ephrussi

Iggy Ephrussi was one of Viktor's four children. He was a gay man who had a life-long relationship with Jiro Sugiyama. They made a life together in Tokyo. Edmund inherited the netsuke collection from Iggy when he passed away.

## Louise Cahen d'Anvers

Charles Ephrussi never married but he had a long-term affair with the wife of a wealthy and influential French businessman. Charles and Louise shared a love for art and together became interested in Japanese artwork.

## Anna

Anna was a long-term servant of Viktor Ephrussi's household. When the Germans occupied Vienna, she was no longer permitted to work for the family. Although the Germans confiscated all the family's valuables, Anna hid the tiny netsuke figures in the pocket of her apron and later returned them to the family.

## Charles Joachim Ephrussi

Charles Joachim Ephrussi founded the highly successful import business in Odessa. He was known as the King of Grain because he had cornered the grain export business.

## Jiro Sugiyama

Iggy Ephrussi met Jiro Sugiyama after he moved to Tokyo following the conclusion of World War II. The two lived together as a couple until Iggy died in 1994.

# Objects/Places

## Netsuke

Charles Ephrussi purchased a collection of 264 netsuke in the late nineteenth century. The author traced the history of this collection to different family members and to different locations.

## Vitrine

The netsuke collection purchased by Charles Ephrussi was displayed in a vitrine. It had shelves lined in green velvet and was enclosed in glass in order to showcase the small figures.

## Hotel Ephrussi

Charles Ephrussi lived in a private suite in the Hotel Ephrussi in the exclusive West End of Paris. He amassed a fabulous art collection while living there.

## Palais Ephrussi

Viktor Ephrussi and his family lived in a huge and opulent mansion known as Palais Ephrussi on the Ringstrasse in Vienna, Austria. The family lost the house and most of their property when the Nazis occupied the city.

## Odessa

Viktor and Charles Ephrussi were cousins and both born in Odessa. When the family patriarch decided he wanted to expand the influence and power of the family, Viktor moved to Vienna and Charles to Paris.

## Vienna

Viktor and Emmy Ephrussi raised their four children in Vienna. They lived all their married life there until in 1938 the Germany's Third Reich gained power and occupied Vienna. The family lost their home and all their wealth during the War.

## Paris

Charles Ephrussi left Odessa for Paris. He lived in the elite West End of the city. He was an art lover and befriended and supported many emerging French artists who later became master impressionists.

## Tokyo

One of Viktor's sons, Iggy, lived in Tokyo after World War II ended. He came to love the city and the Japanese culture. After he passed away, he left the netsuke collection which he had inherited to Edmund de Waal.

## London

Soon after Viktor and Emmy fled from the occupied Vienna, Emmy committed suicide. Viktor who was in his late seventies lived out the remainder of his life in London with his daughter and her family. The netsuke collection is now located in London in the home of the author.

## Germany

German soldiers invaded Vienna in the late 1930s, one of the events that led to World War II. Austria was "erased" as a country and became part of German's Third Reich until after the war when the country was re-established.

# Themes

## Family History

In "The Hare with Amber Eyes," Edmund de Waal is ostensibly in search of a collection of Japanese art but in reality he is in search of his family's history. While tracing the journey of the netsuke collection through various family owners and locations through the years, Edmund uncovers the lives and fates of distant ancestors starting with Charles Ephrussi who was the original owner of the netsuke collection. The reader experiences the unfolding history of this large and prominent family as Edmund discovers letters, journals and newspaper clippings about his family.

As Edmund's story progresses, what was the original object of his hunt began to fade in importance in comparison to the family history that he was discovering at the same time. He imagines the opulent surroundings that the netsuke collection found itself in Charles' suite of rooms in his family's large mansion in Paris. The large collection of tiny carved figures were displayed in a case in a room where the paintings of the masters hung and where priceless objects d'arte resided. Life in Paris was generally good for this family member but ultimately was not for its next proprietor.

As Charles' taste for Japanese art began to fade in favor of works of a grander nature, he decided to send the netsuke collection on to his cousin Viktor in Vienna as a wedding gift. Edmund learns that Viktor's children played with the netsuke figures when they were small. The vitrine in which they were encased was kept in their mother's dressing room. He imagines the intimacy of the children touching and feeling and experiencing these pieces of art in close proximity of their loving mother. The collection was one of only a few family possessions that made it safely through the occupation of Vienna by the Third Reich. The collection was saved by a family servant who smuggled the small pieces to safety. One of the children who played with the figures was Edmund's grandmother.

After being saved from the Nazis, the collection was given by Edmund's grandmother, Elisabeth, to one of her children, Iggie, who brought the collection back to its original roots when he moved to Tokyo, Japan. Upon the death of his uncle, Edmund became the owner of the collection—at least the temporary owner—and it now resides in London. But it is no doubt not its last resting place. The history of the netsuke collection in the Ephrussi family goes on as does that of the family.

## Love of Art

One dominant theme that runs through the happiness of "The Hare with Amber Eyes" as well as its sadness, is art and the love of art. Edmund de Waal first set out to discover the history of the netsuke collection that had belonged to his family since the late 1800s. Although most of the male members of the prominent Jewish Ephrussi

family usually wound up in the business world, Charles Ephrussi [1849-1905] a distant cousin of Edmund's, was an art lover and high-profile Paris art dealer.

Charles was a collector of fine paintings and other objects d'arte. He lived in Paris and was a friend and supporter of French painters who were just starting their careers and who later were known to be great impressionists including Manet, Monet, Degas and Renoir. When Japanese art became the rage in Paris, Charles became intrigued with its austere beauty. He began collecting Japanese prints and then became aware of netsuke figures—miniature carvings of animals, people and objects. Edmund purchased a collection of 264 of the small carvings. The collection was one of the few family treasures that remains in the family to this day. It was almost lost during the German occupation of Vienna but a loyal servant smuggled it out of the confiscated Ephrussi home for safekeeping and later returned it to the family.

Many years after Charles had passed away, a descendent of his, Edmund de Waal, became intrigued with the netsuke collection. He decided to trace its history and in doing so, he began to uncover many aspects of the history of his family that were unknown or had been lost to history. Edmund, like his distant relative before him, was more interested in the world of art than business. Edmund is a pottery maker and artisan. It was only fitting then that he took up the mantle left by Charles who had no children. Edmund traced the transfer of the netsuke collection from Charles in Paris, to Viktor in Vienna, to Iggy in Tokyo and finally to London where the collection is displayed today in a glass showcase in Edmund's home.

## Prejudice and Bias

Despite the fact that the Ephrussi family was affluent, hugely successful and influential, they lived under the constant strain and torment of of anti-Semitism. Charles Ephrussi who lived in Paris was a lover of art and a loyal supporter of some emerging artists who later became world-renowned impressionists. Some of these men were Renoir, Degas, Manet and Monet. Although Charles went out of his way to secure commissions for Renoir, the young artist did not return the loyalty. He became furious when Charles purchased several paintings from Gustav Moreau. Renoir did not consider Moreau talented or a serious artist. In his anger, Renoir inferred that Charles liked Moreau's paintings because they had gaudy colors and, of course, Jews liked gaudy colors. He referred to Moreau's art as "Jew art." Renoir was outraged that Charles would hang Moreau's work on the wall anywhere near his paintings.

Although Charles lived an elite lifestyle in Paris, he was often the target of anti-Semites who falsely accused the art lover of cynicism and greed and that he only bought art that he could make a profit on. When Alfred Dreyfus who was a Jew was wrongly convicted of being a spy, the anti-Semitism increased in Paris. Charles and other Jews were suspected of being spies. Degas, an artist who Charles championed, stopped speaking to him and Renoir became even more hostile toward him.

Viktor and his family struggled with anti-Semitism in Vienna which only increased as German's Third Reich gained power. When the Germans occupied Vienna, Viktor and his youngest son were beaten and arrested. To get out of prison, Viktor had to give up his home and property. The Germans changed all the given names of the Jews in Vienna. Viktor and all other male Jews were all known as "Israel" and Emmy and all other female Jews were henceforth all officially named "Sarah." Nothing saddened Edmund more when he discovered this humiliating and demoralizing incident.

# Style

## Perspective

"The Hare with Amber Eyes," is written in the first person. The author, Edmund de Waal, is a member of the once prominent Ephrussi family which had its roots in Odessa, Russia. As he relates the history of his family as it was revealed to him, the genuineness of his emotions is without question. The family was Jewish and enjoyed soaring successes in first the export business in Odessa and then later as the proprietors of hugely successful banking operations in the capitals of Europe. Despite their success, they suffered from the pain of anti-Semitism throughout the many decades covered in the book. As de Waal ventures on a hunt for the history behind a family treasure, a Japanese netsuke collection, he finds much more than he bargained for.

De Waal learns the story of distant relatives such as Charles who first purchased the collection in Paris. Charles was an art lover and although he lived the privileged life in the elite circles of Paris, he still encountered angry hate of bias against his ethnicity. As de Waal imagines the treasures and elite society that Charles lived among, it is also apparent that he suffered the cruelty of hate and bias that he could not escape even in his aristocratic existence.

The anguish of the anti-Semitism his family suffered and, by extension, de Waal himself, was no more apparent than when he relates the suffering that his great-grandfather, Viktor, and his family were forced to undergo in the period leading up to and during the occupation of Vienna by the German Third Reich.

What began as de Waal's attempt to chronicle the history of a family treasure transformed into a poignant and rich history of a family that knew the heights of prosperity and success and suffered the anguish of losing everything. It is only with a voice belonging to the family that this story could be told with such passion and honesty.

## Tone

"The Hare with Amber Eyes" is written with a gentle sincerity. It is obvious that the author, Edmund de Waal, had a genuine love of art, being an artist and craftsman himself. On his trek to discover the history of the netsuke collection that a distant cousin purchased in the late 19th century, Edmund begins to uncover a history of his family and events that had either been unknown or forgotten long ago. The emotion that the revelations engender within Edmund are poignant and real.

Appreciating art, his pleasure and astonishment in discovering that his cousin Charles was a close friend and supporter of such emerging impressionists as Degas, Manet, Monet and Renoir is without question. When he reads about the precious art that decorated Charles' apartment in Paris, he imagines what it was like to live in such

surroundings and his pleasure is virtually palpable. Conversely, when he uncovers the inventory lists of Viktor's artwork prepared by the Gestapo when they prepared to steal it, his devastation and pain comes off the page.

As Edmund uncovers details about the occupation of Vienna and the suffering that his great-grandparents and their children—one of whom was his grandmother—endured, the sadness in tone and word is unmistakable.

"The Hare with Amber Eyes" is written with great detail and descriptions but more importantly it is written with passion and a sense of family loyalty. Edmund's goal in writing the book initially was to trace the history of the netsuke collection in his family. But as he got deeper into his research, what emerged as of utmost importance was the story of his family.

## Structure

"The Hare with Amber Eyes" is a historic account about a prominent European family. The story is organized by year and location. It begins in Paris in 1871 and ends in current day London. The story is separated into five main parts. Part One - Paris 1871-1899, is comprised of eleven chapters. Part Two - Vienna 1899-1938, is comprised of twelve chapters. Part Three - Vienna, Kovecses, Tungridge Wells, Vienna 1938-1947, contains six chapters. Part Four - Tokyo 1947-2001, is made up of five chapters. The fifth part - Coda - Tokyo, Odessa, London 2001-2009, has four chapters. There is a prologue that precedes the first chapter in which the author provides some background about his reasons for writing this book. Following the last chapter, there is an acknowledgments section. The Ephrussi dynasty began in the mid-1840s in Odessa, Russia, and that era is referenced within some of the later time periods.

The story is told in a straightforward and chronological manner. The history of the Ephrussi family and the history of its netsuke collection are interwoven throughout the story. The rich detail of some of the family's artwork, their homes and architecture of the cities is sometimes given in great detail and in a scholarly manner.

Since there are many family members that are referred to in the account and some with the same names, the family tree located at the beginning of the book is helpful and brings clarity as to the identity of the various individuals and incidents referred to.

# Quotes

"The Ephrussi were . . . the Kinds of Grain. They were Jews with their own coat of arms: an ear of corn and a heraldic boat with three masts and full sails. . .their motto: We are above reproach. You can trust us" (Chapter 1, pg. 24.)

"What was it like to have something so alien in your hands for the first time, to pick up a box or a cup - or a netsuke - in a material that you had never encountered before and shit it around, finding its weight and balance, running a fingertip along the raised decoration?" (Chapter 4, pg. 46.)

"Charles knows that it is intimacy that matters. Picking up a drawing enables us to 'catch the thought of the artist in all its freshness, at the very moment of manifestation, with perhaps even more truth and sincerity than in the works that require arduous hours of labor, with the defiant patience of the genius'" (Chapter 8, pg. 73.)

"Retribution against the injustices of the Jews - successful and affluent - was especially popular with artisans and students" (Chapter 14, pg. 130.)

"After this war, with all its horrors, there cannot be any more anti-Semitic agitation. . .we will be able to claim full equality. Germany would free the Jews" (Chapter 20, pg. 182.)

"You children are the jewels of all the peoples of mine, the blessing of their future conferred a thousand times" (Chapter 20, pg. 183.)

"All art is the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, where no one can go any further" (Chapter 22, pg. 214.)

"This was a trinity so wonderful in its cadence that in very old age he [Iggie] couldn't help smilingly describing the voyage to New York as a sort of baptismal crossing from one life to another, a voyage in some way into himself" (Chapter 23, pg. 229.)

"And someone turns out the lights in the library, as if being in the dark will make them invisible, but the noise reaches into the house, into the room, into their lungs. Someone is being beaten in the street below. What are they going to do? How long can you pretend this is not happening?" (Chapter 24, pg. 239.)

"On Monday 14th March Hitler arrives: 'before the shadows of the evening sank over Vienna, when the wind died down and the many flags fell silent in festive rigidity, the great hour became reality and the Fuhrer of the united German people entered the capital" (Chapter 24, pg. 243.)

"These laws, in existence for three years in Germany classify Jewishness. If three out of four of your grandparents are Jewish, then you are a Jew. You are not allowed to marry

a Gentile, have sex with a Gentile or display the flag of the Reich" (Chapter 25, pg. 263.)

"Getting to the real Japan, I must try to see something in the country that was whole and untouched means getting out of Tokyo. Japan starts where the sounds of the city end" (Chapter 33, pg. 321.)

# Topics for Discussion

What art objects were the focus of "The Hare with Amber Eyes"? How can these objects best be described? From what culture did they originate?

From what country did the Ephrussi family originate? In what cities did the family build grand residences?

What businesses were the Ephrussi involved in? How did they begin to make their fortunes and in what cities?

What was the ethnic background of the Ephrussi family? Where does the author fit into the family tree?

What bias and prejudice did the Ephrussi family suffer from? When was the bias most pronounced?

What was the fate of Viktor and Emmy Ephrussi? What event turned their world upside down?

Who in the family first owned the netsuke collection? How did it get to Vienna? Who owned it in Tokyo? As the book ends, what member of the family winds up with the netsuke and in what city does it finally reside?