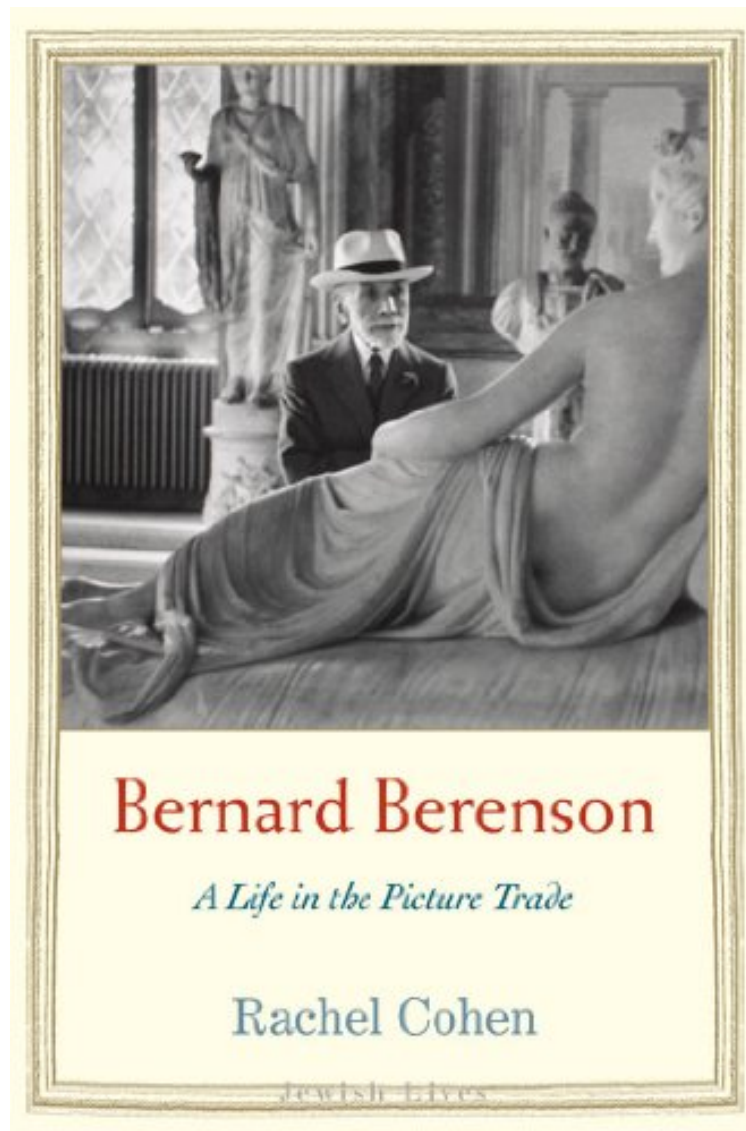


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## Bernard Berenson (Jewish Lives)

*Cohen Rachel*

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**Cohen Rachel : Bernard Berenson (Jewish Lives)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bernard Berenson (Jewish Lives):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent!By John McFaddenExcellent!6 of 8 people found the following review helpful. BB's Artful OrchestraBy Christian SchlectA smooth, intelligent, and sympathetic study of an interesting man of the high world of art. To fund his preferred style of life, Bernard Berenson came to know the wealthy of America and then catered to their insatiable need to acquire great European paintings.Professor Cohen's condensed book is of the type that will ignite the desire for further reading on the multitude of characters that touched on, or were central to, the life of her subject:a poor Jewish boy from Boston who studied at Harvard, then who, after

relocating to Italy, became a famed international expert on paintings from the Renaissance and a cultural sage. Above all he was a connoisseur. Over the course of a long life and against a backdrop of worry, he enjoyed beautiful vistas, fine art, friends (many of whom were women and beyond mere friends), intelligent conversations, writing, and libraries. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. He wasn't a nice man--he was given to fits of rage when unhappy ...By Philip Brantingham The figure of Bernard Berenson seems something out of another world--an art expert, an authenticator of Italian Renaissance art, an author, and a famous host to the elite at his estate north of Florence, Italy. He was a genius of sorts. He wrote several pioneering books on Italian art of the Renaissance, books that made him world famous. Rachel Cohen's short biography of him, subtitled, "A Life in the Picture Trade" serves very well as the shortest and most judicious life that has been published so far. (For a much longer bio see Ernest Samuels "Bernard Berenson." in 2 Vols.) Well written and expert this book provides all the details that one needs to understand this famous expert, his foibles and fancies. He wasn't a nice man--he was given to fits of rage when unhappy and he treated his wife Mary badly. Yet he was a brilliant and sophisticated man, best illustrated in the two books of his diaries that were published in the 1950s. His estate I Tatti was a magnet to all the celebrities of the world, who sat gladly at his table and listened to his witticisms. One can't praise this book enough for its readability and its learning.

When Gilded Age millionaires wanted to buy Italian Renaissance paintings, the expert whose opinion they sought was Bernard Berenson, with his vast erudition, incredible eye, and uncanny skill at attributing paintings. They visited Berenson at his beautiful Villa I Tatti, in the hills outside Florence, and walked with him through the immense private library—which he would eventually bequeath to Harvard—without ever suspecting that he had grown up in a poor Lithuanian Jewish immigrant family that had struggled to survive in Boston on the wages of the father's work as a tin peddler. Berenson's extraordinary self-transformation, financed by the explosion of the Gilded Age art market and his secret partnership with the great art dealer Joseph Duveen, came with painful costs: he hid his origins and felt that he had betrayed his gifts as an interpreter of paintings. Nevertheless his way of seeing, presented in his books, codified in his attributions, and institutionalized in the many important American collections he helped to build, goes on shaping the American understanding of art today. This finely drawn portrait of Berenson, the first biography devoted to him in a quarter century, draws on new archival materials that bring out the significance of his secret business dealings and the way his family and companions—including his patron Isabella Stewart Gardner, his lover Belle da Costa Greene, and his dear friend Edith Wharton—helped to form his ideas and his legacy. Rachel Cohen explores Berenson's inner world and exceptional visual capacity while also illuminating the historical forces—new capital, the developing art market, persistent anti-Semitism, and the two world wars—that profoundly affected his life.